

John 13 – Show Us A Sign!

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Scripture 1: (Jn. 2:13-25 ESV)

The Passover of the Jews was at hand, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. In the temple he found those who were selling oxen and sheep and pigeons, and the money-changers sitting there. And making a whip of cords, he drove them all out of the temple, with the sheep and oxen. And he poured out the coins of the money-changers and overturned their tables. And he told those who sold the pigeons, "Take these things away; do not make my Father's house a house of trade."

His disciples remembered that it was written, "Zeal for your house will consume me."

So the Jews said to him, "What sign do you show us for doing these things?"

Jesus answered them, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up."

The Jews then said, "It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and will you raise it up in three days?"

But he was speaking about the temple of his body. When therefore he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this, and they believed the Scripture and the word that Jesus had spoken.

Now when he was in Jerusalem at the Passover Feast, many believed in his name when they saw the signs that he was doing. But Jesus on his part did not entrust himself to them, because he knew all people and needed no one to bear witness about man, for he himself knew what was in man.

Sermon:

The Gospel of John is sometimes called “the 'Signs' Gospel” {enough so that some critical theorists have suggested that this Gospel is an amalgamation of two texts: one of which focuses upon the signs and the other which deals more with the teaching and sayings of Jesus; but the harmony and unity of the Gospel as a whole, do not seem to support that thesis nor is there any substantive textual evidence in favor of it.} because it is replete with signs: miraculous signs and prophetic signs. All of Jesus' works and words pointed beyond Himself: the man whom they could see, the simple carpenter from Galilee; all pointing towards His divinity. Those who had the eyes and ears to see and hear it, saw it but during His life they were few and no one saw it naturally; they all needed their hearts and minds to be opened and illuminated by the Holy Spirit. But they should have been able to see, understand, and recognize Jesus for Who He is because they had the right tools and training, taught through the Law and the Prophets, but their sin kept them blind and in darkness, just as it does us, until we are “born again”, regenerated, and indwelt by His Spirit.

Yet because of how reality is and Who our God is: the God who reveals Himself and the God who relates to people through covenant; it is a natural and reasonable thing for us to want and expect signs from the LORD and John gives us **three** in this second chapter of his Gospel.

- Jesus' first sign was the transformation of water into wine during the wedding in Cana.
- Jesus' second sign was shown by His zeal for the LORD's Temple when He drove out of the money-changers and sacrifice sellers.

Still, it was not enough to convince them. They wanted more and even greater signs, asking “*“What sign do you show us for doing these things?”*”. It was less that these were not enough and more that they did not (**yet**) have the eyes to see these signs for what they are or the mind to understand them. They did not see them because they were not looking for them, but now, when they were, they asked Jesus for a sign to prove His authority: Who He is and Why He did what He was doing.

This was not as unusual as we might think. It was common for a prophet in the Old Testament to say or make a pronouncement in the LORD's Name: telling the people something which would happen in the future; and then offer his audience a sign as evidence to prove that his prophesy would come true.

- An unnamed Judean prophet prophesied against king Jeroboam and his reign {prophesying about the coming of Josiah and his religious reforms and revival} and then proclaimed the altar's impending collapse, spilling out its ashes, as a sign proving his prophecy's reliability (1 Kings 13); then it did.
- Isaiah prophesied to king Hezekiah that the LORD would relent of His divine judgment and heal him by proclaiming the sign of the sun's shadow moving back ten steps upon the “dial of Ahaz” (Isaiah 38:8).
- And, of course, most famously, “*Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.*” (Isa. 7:14 ESV)

So, Jesus replied to their question, with “*Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.*”. He gave them a sign to expect, except that they completely misunderstood and misinterpreted what He meant by it because, “*The Jews then said, “It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and will you raise it up in three days?”*”.

According to John, this dialog occurred during the same context and circumstances as Jesus' encounter with the money-changers; immediately after His whip-cracking “cattle drive”. That was why they were asking Him for a sign, to prove that He had a God-given right and authority to do what He just did, but the sign He gave was not

clear to anyone before the cross. {Furthermore, John's inclusion of this conversational detail is also meant as a helpful apologetic for us, offering specific context grounding the narrative in recorded history. Herod's renovations of the Temple and Temple complex began in 19 BC (approximately), the eighteenth year of his reign (Josephus, Antiquities of the Jews 15.380). While the construction of the Temple itself was completed within eighteen months, and its outer buildings (the cloisters and storehouses) were completed after another 8 eight years, work on the extension of the retaining wall and the rest of the complex continued into the reign of King Agrippa II . This conversational detail places the occasion during the Passover festival of 27-28 AD and supporting Jesus' death in 30 AD, two Passover's later.}

Now, to be fair to His audience, their incorrect assumption was actually quite reasonable. Considering the time and place {and having myself seen the scale of construction, at least the retaining wall and “platform” upon which Herod's temple once stood}, their incredulity at the natural impossibility of His apparent suggestion is unsurprising. It is certain that even His disciples did not understand it at this point, but after the cross: after the Resurrection; they did and now, so may we.

- This third sign of Jesus', where He was “... *speaking about the temple of his body.*”, foreshadowed His horrific, gruesome death and His resurrection upon the third day, something which no human person living then could understand or predict; but, as with most prophetic fore-tellings, they are recognized and understood only in hindsight, after the fact. Yet this prophetic sign would have the greatest effect of confirming Jesus' word and authority as a prophet of the LORD and it would prove that He is God the Son, the LORD of Life, and the Sovereign Creator of the *Kosmos*.

Now:

- We must concede that all four of the Gospel writers chose: under the Holy Spirit's influence, guidance, and wisdom; the stories about Jesus they told (2 Tim 3:16-17).
- We must also concede that not only did all four of the Gospel writers write with a broad but unified agenda: to share the Good News of Jesus Christ; sharing about our redemption from Satan's dominion, the forgiveness of our sin through Jesus' work, our justification by faith in Him, and our adoption as God's children but that they also wrote with different emphases and for different {primary} intended audiences:
 - Matthew wrote for Jews about the Jewish Messiah;
 - Mark wrote for common Gentiles about the divine Son of God, as opposed to the Roman Emperor;
 - Luke wrote for educated Gentiles, perhaps even politically influential Gentiles, offering an evidentiary case for Jesus as being both our Savior and the only living God; and,
 - John wrote for Christian believers: not new converts, but maturing followers of Christ; in order to encourage them in their hope and faith as they looked forward to the day of Jesus' return in glory.

John recorded many “signs” performed by Jesus. Each one builds us up and strengthens us so that we can endure the evil days remaining. John presents these three signs together for that purpose, as an apologetic, as a convincing case to prove Who and What Jesus of Nazareth is: the *Logos* who is *Theos* and also *Andros* (also Man).

So, what case does John make with these three signs?

John seeks to convince us through them, why they: the Apostles and the early Church; “...*believed the Scripture and the word that Jesus had spoken.*” and why we should as well.

According to the Jewish Torah, charges against a person could only be levied upon the testimony of two or three witnesses (Deut 19:15), a principle affirmed repeatedly and preserved by the New Testament Church (Matt 18:6; 2 Cor 13:1; 1 Tim 5:19; Heb 10:28) and throughout the first chapter of his Gospel, John charges that Jesus is the eternal LORD made flesh (1:14), the light of life (1:4), and the means of our adoption as the children of God (1:12-13). This was a charge of blasphemy, if untrue, and one of the excuses used to murder Christ. Therefore, John makes his case to demonstrate that Jesus is true.

Each sign given is a witness that testifies against Jesus being some mere, mortal man.

Each sign testifies to the fact that Jesus is God.

- Transforming water into wine demonstrated His supernatural power over the natural elements. This evidence signified that He was a prophet of the LORD; that He is imbued and empowered with the power of God, like Elijah when he commanded the widow's flour and oil to not run out for the whole duration of a famine (1 Kings 17:9-16). It demonstrated that God was working through Him. Furthermore, this sign suggests that Jesus is something more than just a prophet because of what the transformation itself signified: transforming the “waters of requirement” into the “wine of gladness”; symbolizing a transition from the old covenant of works to the new covenant of grace.
 - This miraculous sign can also be compared with Moses' transformation of the Nile and other Egyptian waters into blood. However, Jesus' superiority to Moses is proven by His transforming the water into something that is “life-giving” and joyful, whereas Moses transformed the waters into something that was “life-taking” and deadly (Ex 7:20-21). Jesus' changing of something from one thing to another: redefining the substance and being of something; proves that He is the Creator and that He is also able to bring about re-Creation.
- Driving the money-changers and sellers from the Temple courts demonstrated His divine, judicial authority over worshipers and their worship. Jesus functioned as a prophet by this action; acting out God's Word, similar to Jeremiah after he visited the “potter's house” (Jeremiah 18) and then “broke” a clay vessel to symbolize the forth coming destruction of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar (Jeremiah 19), a prophetic action that resulted in him being placed in “the stocks” by the priestly establishment (Jer 20:1-2). This prophetic sign happened within the Temple complex in Jerusalem: where the LORD caused His Name to dwell (Ezra 6:12); where the authority of God's representatives: His ordained kings, priests, and prophets; was considered absolute and inviolable. Yet Jesus acted and spoke as with authority in the Temple, contravening the “permissions and allowances” of its human “caretakers”. But, because He did not suffer sanction, whether legal or divine, for His “impertinence” or for unrighteously usurping a priest's divinely appointed position (a role which a simple Gallilean carpenter from the tribe of Judah would possess no reasonable right to); it proves that He possesses an authority within God His Father's house that is different and greater than the Levites and priests; proving that His Word carried divine authority, that He had permission to speak for the LORD, and that they knew it!
 - Not only was Jesus' sign a call to purify the Temple courts and to worship the LORD rightly, but it also upset the religious establishment because it eventually led to their response of conspiracy and murder. They were offended because through this sign, Jesus in His role as a prophet, publicly claimed to be something more and greater: God's Son; by commanding them, “...*do not make my Father's house a house of trade.*” (Jn. 2:16 ESV).

- But it was the third and final sign that caused the most confusion because, from the perspective of His hearers, what Jesus claimed was absurd and impossible and not in the expected realm of miracles. It also claimed earthly power and authority, claiming the kingship of Herod who constructed that Temple, through His comparison; yet, because the Temple He meant was that of His body, He was declaring His Kingship over the entire universe since:
 - He is the one Who created Man in the beginning, he must also be the one Who can restore his body; and since,
 - He is the one Who authored life in the beginning, then He must also be the one Who can restore life to the body of a man and give him eternal life.

Now why should we believe John's testimony concerning these signs? Why should we believe them? Why are they trustworthy and reliable? What if they are just stories that John “made up” to support his case?

Although there can be some debate and discussion regarding all that the signs themselves mean, there was never any historical dispute that they actually occurred. There were so many witnesses to the signs themselves, that the truth of them happening must stand.

- The servants who drew the water in Cana knew the truth about what happened.
- The driven out money-changers and sellers knew the truth about what happened.
- The people in the Temple courts who challenged and interrogated Jesus about His authority knew that they did so. They even remembered His response, since they used a corrupted and twisted form of this conversation as false testimony against Him in Matthew's Gospel, “*Now the chief priests and the whole council were seeking false testimony against Jesus that they might put him to death, but they found none, though many false witnesses came forward. At last two came forward and said, "This man said, 'I am able to destroy the temple of God, and to rebuild it in three days.'"*” (Matt. 26:59-61 ESV).
- There is also no doubt that Jesus died a very public death. His Roman executioners were very good at their job; they were known to be exceedingly efficient. There were too many unimpeachable witnesses to the fact that Jesus was dead to suggest that it was faked, or that He merely “fainted”. Roman officers saw Jesus die (Mark 15:39). Roman soldiers pierced His side to verify that He was dead (John 19:34). The Pharisee Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea, a member of the Jewish Sanhedrin (Mark 15:43; Luke 23:50), buried Jesus in a tomb (John 19:38-42) while Roman soldiers were sent by the chief priests and Pharisees to guard the tomb (Matt 27:62-66).
- Yet, the Apostle Paul also recounts an extensive list of eyewitnesses to Jesus' resurrection, “*For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, and that he appeared to **Cephas [Peter]**, then to **the twelve**. Then he appeared to **more than five hundred brothers at one time**, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to **James [Jesus' brother]**, then to **all the apostles** {this is a challenging remark because some understand it to suggest that the number of Apostles was greater than twelve [perhaps including Junia (Rom 16:7)]; or most simply this remark is listed last, it refers to all the apostles because they were gathered together upon Jesus' ascension}. *Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to **me**. For I am the least of the apostles, unworthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of**

God.” (1 Cor. 15:3-9 ESV). All of these people were able and willing to testify to the truth: that this third sign was fulfilled by Jesus' rising from the dead.

No one in ancient history denied these facts. Instead, countless people died because they believed them to be true, becoming the first Christian martyrs.

This sign of confirmation: Jesus' bodily resurrection on the third day; proves the trustworthiness and reliability of everything that Jesus taught and said. It is because Jesus rose from the dead, and **only** because the resurrection is true, that we can/should/must trust or believe what Jesus said.

Therefore, these two and three witnesses convict Jesus as being God. The life of Jesus proved the reliability and trustworthiness of the Hebrew Scriptures, especially the Messianic prophecies {different counts exist but minimally we find that Jesus satisfied over three hundred Old Testament prophecies}, confirming the many covenant promises of God. But, it is the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ which is the final proof for us to know that He is Himself God and that we have eternal life through our faith in Him. It is the evidence that we must cling to, to be strengthened and encouraged in life; believing that someday things will be better, far better than we can even imagine, because He is making all things new and that Jesus will comfort us and wipe away every tear (Rev 21:4-5).

So:

- If we believe that Scripture points to Jesus and we believe that Jesus fulfilled everything that Scripture said concerning Him; and,
- If through His life, death, and by His resurrection Jesus proved Himself to be the most trustworthy, reliable, and dependable person ever like CS Lewis said, {Jesus is either a liar, a lunatic, or the LORD.} (Lewis, “Mere Christianity”);
- Then, we should trust Him. We must trust Him. We must trust **in** Him because Jesus is God.
- Then, we must believe the Bible and everything it says and commands; not only about Jesus, but we must also believe it concerning what it says about our lives, our relationships with one another and with God. We must believe what it says about Creation and the New Creation, and about Heaven and Hell.
- Then we must believe and trust that Jesus is the LORD; believing that one day He will return and set everything right; that although everyone will be judged, His chosen people {the Elect}, His adopted brothers and sisters, all those who place their whole and only hope for salvation in Him by His grace alone, will stand justified before the divine throne because we are covered by His righteous robes, because we have been washed by His blood.

However, before we can believe it, first we must know what Scripture says and means. We must know God's Word. We must read it. We must study it. We must ingest and digest it, because it has been given for us, *“...breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.”* (2 Tim. 3:16-4:1 ESV). The psalmist says of Scripture, *“How sweet are your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth! Through your precepts I get understanding; therefore I hate every false way. Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.”* (Ps. 119:103-105 ESV). Yet “knowing” it is not then end because if we know it and if we believe it, then we must obey it and live according to it.

If we believe that the laws of our country carry weight and are true, that they are authoritative; if we believe that we will suffer consequences for transgressing human laws or for going against the popular social norms and customs, then how much greater will the consequences be if we go against God's Word?

If knowing it and believing it teaches us to live by it, then by living it we will come to love it. We must love it if we live it, because we believe it and know it. But we can only believe it if the Holy Spirit helps us first: only if He gives us the faith to believe first, by renewing our heart and mind through conforming us to the image of Jesus; otherwise, it all seems like lunacy or utter nonsense, *“For Jews [some] demand signs and Greeks [others] seek wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews [some] and folly to Gentiles [others], but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.”* (1 Cor. 1:22-24 ESV).

All of the evidence we need to believe is contained here, within the text of Scripture; everything we need to believe and every reason for us to believe once the lock of our heart is opened by the Holy Spirit's key. Therefore, if we want to know God: to know Jesus better; and to grow in faith for action, then we need to pick it up and read *{Tolle Lege; "The Confessions of St Augustine" (Book 8, Chapter 12)}*, to share our thoughts and understandings with each other in Bible studies, and come to church to listen and hear because this Scripture is the only “Sign” we now need and the only “Sign” we should be wanting. The LORD God has given it to us, it has been confirmed and affirmed as His Holy Word throughout history and has been given to us.

So, *“...[believe] the Scripture and the word that Jesus [has] spoken.”*. Believe it and believe Jesus. Trust Him. Call upon His Name and be saved.

AMEN