



Truth Applications

A Healing That Led to Trouble

Son □ Signs □ Sabbath — John 5.1-18

John 5 at a Glance

- An invalid for 38 years: "... take up your bed and walk..." (vv. 1-9a)
- Controversy: "Now that day was the Sabbath..." (vv. 9b-15)
- Audacious: "... not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was ... making himself equal with God" (vv. 16-18).
- Authority: the Son does what the Father does (vv. 19-29).
- Evidence: "...the works the Father has given me to accomplish ... bear witness ... that the Father has sent me...." (vv. 30-47).

New Testament Miracle Language

"Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with **mighty works** and **wonders** and **signs** that God did through him in your midst, as you yourselves know—..." (Acts 2.22; cf. Heb 2.4).

- The three words ["mighty works" is one Greek word; I'll use "powers"] are all used in the same verse just six times; only two other times as in Acts 2.22.
- One of them is 2 Thessalonians 2.9—Satan's "power and false signs and wonders." Not all signs and wonders were of God (cf. Deut 13.1-3).
- "Wonders" — only three times in the Gospels; always plural; *never* without one or both of the other words (powers, signs). Might that be significant?
- John never used "powers" and used "wonders" only once (4.48).
- John used "signs" nearly half as often as Matt, Mark, & Luke *combined*.
- John used "works" instead of "powers."
- John used "signs" and "works" in the same way they are used in the OT.

"Signs" and "Works" in John

- **Signs** — 2.11, 18, 23; 3.2; 4.48, 54; 6.2, 14, 26, 30; 7.31; 9.16; 10.41; 11.47; 12.18, 37; 20.30.
- **Works** (referring to the special works of the Father or Son) — 4.34; 5.20, 36; 7.3, 21; 8.41; 9.3; 10.25, 32-33, 37-38; 14.10-12; 15.24; 17.4.

John's Statement of Purpose

³⁰ Now Jesus did many other **signs** in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; ³¹ but these are written so that you may believe that **Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God**, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

- "That you may believe..." — to produce belief or strengthen belief?
 - ▶ Apparently an ancient question—two manuscript traditions for "believe."
 - ▶ Significance of "in the presence of the *disciples*"?
 - ▶ Do 1, 2 John give us a clue? (cf. 1 John 4.2; 2 John 7-9)
 - ▶ Various passages in the Gospel support that it is "both-and."
- For any passage in John: how does this passage show or confirm that "Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God"? (This was John's conviction beginning in 1.1-18.)
- Or, how do the **signs** point to Jesus as "the Christ, the Son of God"?

Miracle Words: Use in the Gospels

	Matthew	Mark	Luke	Matt-Luke	John
Powers	12	10	15	37	0
Wonders	1	1	0	2	1
Signs	13	7	11	31	17
Works	6	2	2	10	27*
**"Works" - for the works of the Father or Son (cf. 5.36)—18x					



A sign points to or represents something besides itself and is secondary to that object or idea.



“Episode” Signs in John

Commentaries typically note that John (at least chap. 1-11) is built around “seven signs.” I’ll call them “episode signs” since the word “signs” appears in several verses that are not included in any of the episodes (3.2; 6.2; etc.).

As with many issues, scholars are not in complete agreement about which episodes should be included, although there is a general consensus about six of them. Except for two (2.11; 4.54), John does not designate them by number. He also does not say that he was highlighting seven.

Most important: the episodes show that the signs of Jesus are “[action] parables of the nature of his work” (Edwyn Hoskyns, via Leon Morris). Each shows something about “the Christ, the Son of God” (20.30).

This is especially important to help us refrain from viewing and talking about Jesus’ signs (and powers and wonders) like they are only amazing things done in a “cosmic carnival.”

The focus is not on the “wonders” (the “Wow!” factor), but on what they show us about the nature of Jesus. In this way, the signs deepen our belief.

Here are the episode signs, with brief descriptors of what each shows about Jesus’ nature as Son of God (adapted from Leon Morris). [In each case, I’ve added the verse[s] where “sign” is used to refer to the episode.]

1. **Water to wine (2.1-11)** - authority over common events in life [2.11].
2. **Healing nobleman’s son (4.46-54)** - vs. human helplessness against disease [4.54].
3. **Healing the lame man (5.1-9)** - vs. human helplessness against disability [7.21, 23].
4. **Feeding the 5,000 (6.1-14)** - vs. empty resources to supply life’s necessities [6.14].
5. **Healing the man born blind (9.1-7 [41])** - vs. failure to cope with handicaps (Jesus = the world’s light) [9.16].
6. **Raising of Lazarus (11.1-44)** - vs. human defeat in death (“I am the resurrection and the life”) [11.47; 12.18].

Some disagreement exists about the seventh sign.

1. **Walking on water (6.16-21)** - control over nature’s forces.
2. **The cleansing of the temple (2.18-22)** - control over death, and also authority over Judaism (cf. 2.13-17) [2.18].

“Take up your bed, and walk” (5.1-18)

Some observations

1. Picture the scene: not construction, but “a **multitude*** of invalids” by the pool (* a relatively large number; the origin of our word *plethora*)
2. More recent translations omit 3b-4 from the text, but v. 7 includes the detail.
3. One man had been an invalid for 38 years. Thirty-eight years ago, Ronald Reagan had been President for two weeks.
4. Was he the only one Jesus healed? Why is he singled out—for his story, if not as the only one healed that day? See vv. 6, 9b-10, 16-18.
5. In contrast with “the precarious chance of healing in the pool” (F. F. Bruce), Jesus spoke and the man was healed—right then.
6. Note the force of v. 8: “Pick up your bed [command, single action], get yourself up and start walking [command, continuous action]” (Gary Burge).
7. Jesus left him on his own, revealing his identity only after the man’s initial meeting with “the Jews.” And the man protected himself (vv. 10-15).

Some things to ponder

1. Did Jesus provoke the ensuing controversy? Why might he have done so?
2. The *Mishnah* (late 2nd cent. AD) devoted a section to the Sabbath, and included 39 classes of forbidden work; last was carrying one’s bed.
 - Context: Both pre- and post-exile Israelites had relaxed and secularized the Sabbath (Jer 17.21-25; Neh 13.15).
 - Is it wise to “build fences” to lessen a risk? Do we ever build fences?
3. The problem with this fence: “If on the Sabbath a man receives circumcision, so that the law of Moses may not be broken, are you angry with me because on the Sabbath I made a man’s whole body well?” (John 7.23)
 - Mark 2.27-28—“The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath...the Son of Man is lord even of the Sabbath.”
4. How does 5.1-18 help confirm Jesus as the Son of God? Strengthen faith?

Food for faith: “Not everyone wants to get well. When something changes in our lives, it generally ripples through our world and alters everything else. Was the lame man willing to make those changes? Was he willing to take responsibility for himself? Did he want to get a regular job and go to work every day? Could he survive the loss of his identity as a victim? Whether it is a physical, emotional, or spiritual affliction from which we are suffering, Jesus’ question, ‘Do you wish to get well?’ is really a very good question.” ~ Bruce McLarty, Journey of Faith, 106.