

CHAPTER 25: The Gospels Part 3

During the course of His ministry Jesus will perform many miracles. His first recorded miracle takes place in Cana, not far from His home town. **There was a wedding at Cana in Galilee. Jesus' mother [Mary] was there, and Jesus and His disciples were also invited to the wedding. When the wine ran out, Jesus' mother said to Him, "They have no wine left."** (John 2:1-3) Mary then tells the servants to follow her son's instructions – **"Whatever He tells you, do it."** (John 2:5)

Jesus has the servants fill six stone jars that are sitting nearby with water. Each one of these jars holds 20-30 gallons of water. Jesus then instructs the servants to fill the jars to the brim with plain old well water.

Then [Jesus] told them, "Now draw some out and take it to the head steward," and they did. When the head steward tasted the water that had been turned to wine, not knowing where it came from (though the servants who had drawn the water knew), he called the bridegroom... (John 2:8-9) He commends the bridegroom on how good this wine is. But he wonders why they are serving the good wine now at the end of the wedding feast. Normally the best wine is served first. Jesus has just turned ordinary well water into wine. And it isn't just any old wine, but really GOOD wine!

This is Jesus' first recorded miracle. It draws no public attention at all to Jesus. It goes completely unnoticed by everyone at the wedding except for a few people. Only the servants, Jesus' mother and His disciples realize what Jesus has just done. **Jesus did this as the first of His miraculous signs, in Cana of Galilee. In this way He revealed His glory, and His disciples believed in Him.** (John 2:11) This "miraculous sign" is for the benefit of Jesus' disciples. If they had any doubt before about who Jesus is, this miracle cleared it up for them.

I want us to consider for a moment the significance of this miracle. Just think about it – in order to achieve good tasting wine what do you need? TIME. Wine gets its unique flavor from the ingredients mixed together and then fermented at a controlled temperature over many YEARS. You cannot achieve the taste of really good wine like the wine Jesus made at Cana by merely adding some sort of mixture to the water. It doesn't work that way. What Jesus has effectively done is He created something in a brief amount of time (less than an hour) that had some age to it (years). Only God can do that! God did it when He created the first man and woman. Both Adam and Eve were

full grown adults when God created them. We know this because they carried on intelligent grown-up conversations in the garden. God also did this when He created the earth. Scientists date the earth's age at millions of years based on its geology. However, based on the biblical genealogies, the earth is no more than 10,000 years old. So Jesus' miracle of turning ordinary well water into fine aged wine demonstrates that He IS God because He does something that only God can do.

Jesus and His disciples travel to Jerusalem for their first Passover together as a group. Arriving at the temple, Jesus sees something going on that really upsets Him. He sees opportunistic merchants and money changers profiting from the sale of animals to be used in the temple sacrifices. This commercial activity going on in the temple is a far cry from the true worship of God. **So He [Jesus] made a whip of cords and drove them all out of the temple courts, with the sheep and the oxen. He scattered the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables. To those who sold the doves He said, "Take these things away from here! Do not make My Father's house a market place!"** (John 2:15-16)

Well, this certainly grabs the attention of the temple authorities. They go to Jesus and say, "Show us a sign to prove You had the right to do what You just did." This is evidence of their unbelief because unbelief always demands a sign. But Jesus had just showed them a sign. What He did in the temple was indeed miraculous. Think about it. One guy single-handedly drives out a whole crowd of merchants and their merchandise from the temple complex without even a fight. What further sign do they need to see?

Jesus replied, "Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up again." Then the Jewish leaders said to Him, "This temple has been under construction for forty-six years, and are You going to raise it up in three days?" But Jesus was speaking about the temple of His body. (John 2:19, 21) Here Jesus predicts something as it relates to His own body. But the religious authorities fail to comprehend the meaning of what Jesus is saying.

Now while Jesus was in Jerusalem at the feast of the Passover, many believed in His name because they saw the miraculous signs He was doing. But Jesus would not entrust Himself to them, because He knew all people ...He knew what was in man. (John 2:23-25) Jesus knows who genuinely believes and He knows who does not. He did not come in order to be popular or to attract a big following. Jesus is not looking for crowds of people to cheer on His miracles. No. Jesus is looking for a faithful followers who will commit their whole lives to Him.

Now a certain man, a Pharisees named Nicodemus, who was a member of the Jewish ruling council, came to Jesus at night and said to Him, "Rabbi, we know that You are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform

the miraculous signs that You do unless God is with him.” Jesus replied, “I tell you the solemn truth, unless a person is born from above, he cannot see the kingdom of God.” (John 3:1-3) Jesus goes on to explain how Nicodemus can be saved, how he can see the kingdom of God. It requires being “born again,” a second birth, a new birth, this one “of the Spirit,” the Holy Spirit.

Nicodemus admits he does not fully understand what Jesus is talking about. So Jesus explains the whole concept of God’s salvation further. Jesus says, **“For this is the way God loved the world: He gave His one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in Him will not perish, but have eternal life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world should be saved through Him.”** (John 3:16-17)

Jesus clearly lays out His mission – to save sinful humanity from their sins and to bring them eternal life – a life with God that extends beyond physical death. This comes about only one way and that is through belief in God’s Son. This is the Gospel, the “good news” that Jesus presents to Nicodemus and to all who will listen.

As Jesus starts His ministry, John the Baptist continues his ministry of baptizing people in the Jordan River. But John’s primary purpose of pointing people to the Messiah, to Jesus, has already been accomplished. So John says, **“He [Jesus] must increase, but I must decrease.”** (John 3:30) John then reinforces Jesus’ message (the same good news that Jesus had just given to Nicodemus): **“Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on Him.”** (John 3:36)

And in this way, with many other exhortations, John proclaimed good news to the people. (Luke 3:18) But it isn’t long before John the Baptist’s ministry comes to an abrupt halt. **But when John rebuked Herod the tetrarch [Herod Antipas] because of Herodias, his brother’s wife, and because of all the evil deeds that he had done, Herod added this to them all: He locked up John in prison.** (Luke 3:19-20) Herod was having an affair with his brother’s (Philip’s) wife Herodias and he didn’t like John publicly criticizing him for it. So to keep him quiet he locks John up.

Upon hearing of John’s arrest, Jesus and His disciples return to Galilee. Jesus’ preaches a simple message: **“Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near!”** (Matthew 4:17). Ironically this is the same message we heard John the Baptist preach earlier in Matthew 3. Jesus’ fame spreads and people from all over the region come to hear Him teach. The Pharisees begin to pay very close attention to Jesus.

As stated earlier, Jesus is operating in Galilee. Whenever the people in Galilee wanted to go to Jerusalem the most direct route for them would be due south through Samaria. But due to religious and racial prejudice, Jews and Samaritans hated and

shunned each other. The Jews would go out of their way and head east to the Jordan River valley, then south completely bypassing Samaria, then head west to Jerusalem. But Jesus does not do this. In fact on one occasion He actually feels compelled to travel from Galilee straight to Samaria. Just outside the Samaritan town of Sychar, Jesus sits down at Jacob's well to get refreshed with some cool well water.

While at the well He meets a local woman and requests that she give Him a drink of water. The woman is shocked that this Jewish rabbi would even dare to speak to her, a Samaritan woman! Jesus tells her that He can provide "living water" that will quench her deepest thirst. He then reveals that He knows all about her, including her sinful past. Perceiving Jesus to be a prophet she turns the conversation into a theological discussion. At this point Jesus reveals His identity to her – He is the Messiah that both Jews and Samaritans have long been waiting for!

The woman excitedly leaves her water jar and rushes off into the town. She calls out to her fellow villagers... **"Come, see a man who told me everything I ever did. Surely, He can't be the Messiah, can He?" So they left the town and began coming to Him.** (John 4:29-30)

As the people are approaching, Jesus turns to His disciples and says, **"Look up and see that the fields are already white for harvest!"** (John 4:35). The townspeople express their belief in Jesus. **They said to the woman, "No longer do we believe because of your words, for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this one really is the Savior of the world."** (John 4:42)

Jesus returns to Galilee and revisits Cana where He had performed His first miracle. He is approached by a royal official who is deeply upset. His son is dying. He begs Jesus to come to Capernaum with him (about 16 miles away) and heal his son. Jesus told him, **"Go home; your son will live."** **The man believed the word that Jesus spoke to him, and set off for home.** (John 4:50)

When the royal official arrives home early the next morning in Capernaum his servants inform him that his son is alive and well. **So he asked [his servants] the time when his [son's] condition began to improve, and so they told him, "Yesterday at one o'clock in the afternoon the fever left him."** **Then the father realized that it was the very time Jesus had said to him, "Your son will live," and he himself believed along with his entire household.** (John 4:52-53)

The amazing part of this miracle is that Jesus healed someone over long distance. He did not have to be present with the child. In the first miracle in Cana, turning water into wine, Jesus transcended time. In this second miracle Jesus transcends space. Only God can do these things.

Jesus has now completed about one full year of public ministry. He and His disciples travel back to Jerusalem for one of the religious feasts. It's the Sabbath and Jesus walks to the large pool of Bethesda. Gathered around this pool there are many sick, lame, blind and paralyzed people. They believe in a local legend that an angel will come and stir the waters of this pool. When this happens the first one in the water will be healed. Jesus picks one man out of this mass of humanity and goes up to him. The man has been disabled, unable to walk for the last 38 years.

Jesus asks the man, **“Do you want to become well?”** (John 5:6). The man responds but he never really answers Jesus' question. **Jesus said to him, “Stand up! Pick up your mat and walk.” Immediately the man was healed, and he picked up his mat and started walking. (Now that day was a Sabbath.)** (John 5:8-9) What a miracle! Despite the life-changing thing that has just happened to him, the man walks away without thanking Jesus. He does not express belief in Him or praise God. And yet this man is the beneficiary of divine grace.

So, while this miracle is truly amazing and something to give God glory for, the Jewish religious leaders don't do that. They see the man walking around carrying his mat. They know who he is, but they don't praise God for his healing. Instead they lecture the man for breaking the Sabbath. The man tells them the story about how a stranger just walked up to him at the pool of Bethesda and healed him. He doesn't know that this stranger was Jesus. He doesn't know who it was.

Later Jesus meets up with this same man. **After this Jesus found him at the temple and said to him, “Look, you have become well. Don't sin any more, lest anything worse happen to you.” The man went away and informed the Jewish leaders that Jesus was the one who had made him well.** (John 5:14-15) Apparently Jesus had revealed to the man who He is. There is no record of this man's response to Jesus. We don't know if the man ever believed in Jesus or not. What we do know is that Jesus chose to heal this particular man whether he had faith or not.

The Pharisees confront Jesus about healing on the Sabbath. Jesus does not deny their claim but He DOES respond. **So He [Jesus] told them [the Jewish leaders], “My Father is working until now, and I too am working.” For this reason the Jewish leaders were trying even harder to kill Him, because not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but He was also calling God His own Father, thus making Himself equal with God.** (John 5:17-18)

Jesus then goes into a lengthy discourse where He reasserts and defends His claim that God is His Father. And not only that, but Jesus claims that He is the source of eternal life. His miracles validate His claim as do the Old Testament Scriptures. He says, **“Do not suppose that I will accuse you before the Father. The one who**

accuses you is Moses, in whom you have placed your hope. If you believed Moses, you would believe Me, because he wrote about Me. But if you do not believe what Moses wrote, how will you believe My words?" (John 5:45-47)

Needless to say, with statements like this Jesus is not very well received by the Jewish religious establishment!

Jesus and the disciples head back to Galilee after the feast. For the first time since beginning His public ministry Jesus returns to His hometown of Nazareth. Jesus' popularity at this time is sky high. So while He is attending the local synagogue He is given the honor of reading from the scroll of the prophet Isaiah. Jesus finds the place where it is written: **"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release of the captives and the regaining of sight from the blind, to set free those who are oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."** (Luke 4:18-19) Jesus quotes here from the first two verses of Isaiah 61. But He stops midway through verse 2.

Then He began to tell them, "Today this scripture has been fulfilled even as you heard it being read." (Luke 4:21) Everyone in that synagogue listening to Jesus knows that this prophecy by Isaiah is about the Messiah. They realize that Jesus is claiming to be the Messiah! The people of Nazareth refuse to believe that one of their own could possibly be the Messiah. They ask, **"Isn't this Joseph's son?"** (Luke 4:22). "We know who He is. We saw Him grow up here!" Jesus scolds them for their lack of faith: "The Gentiles in Elijah's and Elisha's day exercised more faith than you do."

When they heard this, all the people in the synagogue were filled with rage. (Luke 4:28) The people in the synagogue become so angry with Jesus that they wanted to kill Him. **They got up, forced Him out of the town, and brought Him to the brow of a hill on which their town was built, so that they could throw Him down the cliff.** (Luke 4:29) But Jesus manages to escape by passing through the crowd. Here we see yet another miracle.

Having been rejected by his own hometown, Jesus settles in Capernaum down on the coast of the Sea of Galilee. It becomes the home base for His Galilean ministry. There Jesus begins teaching the people. **And they were astonished at His teaching, for He taught them as one who had authority, and not as the scribes.** (Mark 1:22)

In Capernaum Jesus enters the local synagogue. **Now in the synagogue there was a man who had the spirit of an unclean demon, and he cried out with a loud voice, "Ha! Leave us alone, Jesus the Nazarene! Have You come to destroy us? I know who You are – the Holy One of God."** (Luke 4:33-34) It is interesting that even the demons know who Jesus is! Jesus rebukes and then casts out the demon. The people are astounded that Jesus has the power over demonic spirits.

So the news about Him spread into all areas of the region. (Luke 4:37)

Now as soon as they left the synagogue, they entered Simon and Andrew's house, with James and John. Simon's mother-in-law was lying down, sick with a fever, so they spoke to Jesus at once about her. He came and raised her up by gently taking her hand. Then the fever left her and she began to serve them. (Mark 1:29-31) She is back to her normal self.

News about Jesus travels fast. People from all over the area flock to where Jesus is to be healed of various diseases. Jesus also drives out many demons. However, it is still early in Jesus' ministry. It is not yet time for His identity to be revealed, so He refuses to allow the demons who are being exorcised to speak.

One day a man with leprosy approaches Jesus. **Now a leper came to Him and fell to his knees, asking for help. "If You are willing, You can make me clean," he said. Moved with compassion, Jesus stretched out His hand and touched him, saying, "I am willing. Be clean!" (Mark 1:40-41)** He physically touches the man. This is something that people did not normally do because leprosy was so contagious. But Jesus did! **The leprosy left him at once, and he was clean. (Mark 1:42)**

Jesus tells the man not to say anything about this to anyone. But the man is so excited he cannot help but share the news. He tells everyone what Jesus did for him. Jesus' fame becomes so widespread that He cannot go into any of the towns without drawing a crowd. So for a while Jesus and His disciples remain in remote areas. But somehow, some way the people find Jesus and they come to Him.

Jesus went throughout all of Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing all kinds of diseases and sickness among the people. So a report about Him spread throughout Syria. People brought to Him all who suffered with various illnesses and afflictions, those who had seizures, paralytics, and those possessed by demons, and He healed them. And large crowds followed Him from Galilee, the Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judea, and beyond the Jordan River. (Matthew 4:23-25)

Sometimes the large crowds around Jesus make it almost impossible to get to Him. So then, desperate people devise creative ways to reach Him. Here is one example: Jesus is teaching and healing in a house. Many people including some Pharisees are there. Some men arrive carrying their paralyzed friend on a stretcher. Unable to get to Jesus they climb up on the roof and lower their friend down on the stretcher through a hole they make by removing some of the roof tiles.

When Jesus saw their faith, He said, "Friend, your sins are forgiven." (Luke 5:20)

The Pharisees object to this because only God can forgive sins. They think to themselves “Who is this man uttering blasphemies? Who does He think He is?”

When Jesus perceived their [the Pharisees’] hostile thoughts, He said to them, “Why are you raising objections within yourselves? Which is easier, to say, ‘Your sins are forgiven,’ or to say, ‘Stand up and walk’?” (Luke 5:22-23) Jesus’ point is this – anyone can say they have the power to forgive sins because there is no visible proof as to whether or not the sins have been forgiven. But the results of a person’s physical healing (or not) are outwardly obvious.

To show that Jesus can do the easier of the two, forgive sins, He does the harder. Jesus physically heals the man. He says, **“But so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins” – He said to the paralyzed man – “I tell you, stand up, take your stretcher and go home.”** Immediately he stood up before them, picked up the stretcher he had been lying on, and went home, glorifying God. (Luke 5:24-25) The people who witness this miracle are completely in awe.

Jesus constantly drives the Pharisees and Jewish religious leaders crazy by challenging their Sabbath rules. On one such occasion Jesus is in the synagogue on the Sabbath. A man with a withered hand is also there. The Pharisees try and trap Jesus with a question. Pointing to the man with the withered hand they ask Jesus **“Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?”** (Matthew 12:9) You need to keep in mind that there are no Old Testament laws that forbid healing or showing acts of mercy on the Sabbath. Later Jewish traditions, man-made rules, were added that forbid such actions. The Pharisees of Jesus’ day are so legalistic that they combine their own rules and traditions with the Law of Moses. Jesus challenges their false notions. He tells them whatever day of the week it is, God desires for His people to do good to others, whatever that might be. This is God’s heart. **Then [Jesus] said to the man, “Stretch out your hand.” He stretched it out and it was restored, as healthy as the other.** (Matthew 12:13)

So how do the Pharisees react to Jesus doing this? Not very well! **But the Pharisees went out and plotted against Him, as to how they could assassinate Him.** (Matthew 12:14) They said, “We gotta get rid of this guy!”

Despite getting cross ways with the religious leaders, Jesus’ popularity with the people continues to soar. **Then Jesus went away with His disciples to the sea, and a great multitude from Galilee followed Him. And from Judea, Jerusalem, Idumea (Edom), beyond the Jordan River, and around Tyre and Sidon a great multitude came to Him when they heard about the things He had done.** (Mark 3:7-8)

It is during this period, at the height of His popularity that Jesus delivers His most famous sermon, the Sermon on the Mount. It is a rather long discourse covering three chapters in Matthew’s Gospel. Jesus rejects the charge by His critics that His teachings

run contrary to their Jewish scriptures. **“Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets. I have not come to abolish these things but to fulfill them.”** (Matthew 5:17) How does Jesus fulfill the Law? He does so by displaying the very character of God in what He says and by what He does.

The Sermon on the Mount starts out with what are referred to as “The Beatitudes.” Jesus says, **“Blessed are... the poor in spirit, those who mourn, the meek, those who hunger for what is right, the merciful, the pure in heart, the peace makers, and those who are persecuted for righteousness sake...”** (Matthew 5:3-10)

Jesus teaches that righteousness is not merely acting right, but possessing and imitating the very character of God. One’s moral behavior should be patterned after God’s sacrificial love for Israel and God’s love for His enemies. Clearly a right relationship with God impacts human relationships as well. To be truly righteous before a holy God requires perfect love for God and others. It is not about being religious.

In addressing a right relationship with God, Jesus offers a basic pattern for prayer, often referred to as the “Lord’s Prayer.” **“Pray then like this: ‘Our Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come, Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.’”** (Matthew 6:9-13)

Jesus teaches not to be anxious about your life, what you will eat, drink and wear. Don’t worry. Instead, trust God. **“Look at the birds of the air; they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them.”** (Matthew 6:26). **“Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin, yet not even Solomon in all his glory was arrayed as one of these.”** (Matthew 6:28). Jesus says, **“But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things [your physical needs] will be added to you.”** (Matthew 6:33).

Jesus gives the so-called “Golden Rule,” which is often misquoted. Here it is: **“So whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets.”** (Matthew 7:12) In other words, “treat others the way you want to be treated.”

At the end of the Sermon on the Mount Jesus gives the famous illustration contrasting the wise man that builds his house upon the rock with the foolish man who builds his house upon the sand. His point is that those who hear His words and do them are like the wise man with a solid foundation. But those who hear His words and do not do them are like the foolish man who built his house on the sand, the shifting sand of the times. Clearly obedience to the Lord matters and it will affect all areas of your life.

After finishing this sermon Jesus and His disciples head down the mountain and back to Capernaum. There Jesus has a unique encounter with a Gentile. He is summoned to the home of a Roman centurion, a military officer. His servant is very sick, near death, and he requests that Jesus heal him. He knows from the reports about Jesus that all He has to do is just speak and the servant will be healed. The centurion tells Jesus... **“I do not presume to come to You. But say the word, and let my servant be healed. For I too am a man set under authority, with soldiers under me: and I say to one, ‘Go,’ and he goes; and to another ‘Come,’ and he comes; and to my servant, ‘Do this,’ and he does it.”** When Jesus heard these things he marveled at him, and turning to the crowd that followed Him said, **“I tell you, not even in Israel have I found such faith.”** (Luke 7:7-10). And with that, the centurion’s servant is healed.

Jesus next travels to the village of Nain. His disciples and a large crowd of people follow him there. As they approach the village they meet a funeral procession coming toward them. A young man who has died is being carried out. He is the only son of a widow. She is crying and many of her friends are grieving alongside her. Jesus observes this scene and feels compassion for the woman. He tells her not to weep.

He then touches the funeral bier and the funeral procession stops. Jesus says, **“Young man, I say to you, arise”** (Luke 7:14). The dead man sits up and begins to speak. Jesus takes him to his mother. Fear grips the crowd. They proclaim Jesus as a great prophet and say **“God has visited His people!”** (Luke 7:16). This is the first time that Jesus raises anyone from the dead. The report of this great miracle spreads throughout the entire region.

News about Jesus and all that He has been saying and doing eventually reaches John the Baptist who is still in prison. John sends two of his disciples to Jesus to confirm that Jesus is, in fact, the long-awaited Messiah. **When the men came to Jesus, they said, “John the Baptist has sent us to You to ask, ‘Are You the one who is to come, or should we look for another?’”** (Luke 7:20)

So He answered them, “Go tell John what you have seen and heard: The blind see, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, the poor have good news proclaimed to them. Blessed is anyone who takes no offense at Me.” (Luke 7:22-23). Jesus quotes messianic prophecies from Isaiah 35 and 61. He basically tells John, “I am doing exactly what the Scriptures said the Messiah would do!”

This is all the confirmation that John the Baptist needs. As he sits alone in his prison cell he can rest assured that, yes, Jesus IS most certainly the Messiah!