

Lessons 11–13

The Lord’s Method with Disciples

Introduction

From all indications, the disciples of the first century came very close to accomplishing their ambition of spreading the gospel to all the world—but not until after they had spent time in the Lord’s presence. They had to come to a conviction about who Jesus really is. The miracles that John records in his Gospel, the focus of Lessons 11–13, were intended to bring the disciples to that conviction. John not only demonstrates that Jesus Christ is fully worthy of our complete faith but also sheds light on the quality of the faith God desires from His disciples.

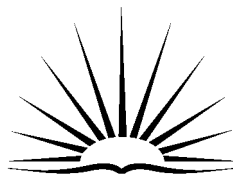
John’s signs also emphasize Christ’s total mastery over men and material. The miracles on behalf of men deal with increasingly severe maladies, and they cover the spectrum of disease categories. The miracles related to the material world manifest Christ’s sovereignty over nature, time, and space.

Christ also reveals His character by the titles He gives Himself in the seven “I am” sayings of John. Each title relates to His life-giving essence, and each provides an understanding of Jesus that is essential to effective discipleship.

Overview

- I. Being in His Presence: Companying
 - A. To reveal His identity
 - B. To reveal His character

- II. Being Sent Forth: Commissioning



The Seven Miracles (Signs) in the Gospel of John

The following chart will help you identify the key features of the seven signs recorded in John's Gospel. Fill in the blanks as you view Lessons 11–13.

Sign	Action of Christ	Human Need Met
1. Turning water into wine (2:1-11)	<i>Transformation of quality</i>	<i>Absence of resources</i>
2. Nobleman's sick son (4:46-54)	<i>Removal of the destructive element</i>	<i>Human weakness</i>
3. Impotent man (5:1-18)	<i>Instant reversal of the process of years</i>	<i>Powerlessness</i>
4. Feeding of the multitude (6:5-14)	<i>Multiplication of quantity</i>	<i>Limitation of resources</i>
5. Bringing of the boat to land (6:15-21)	<i>Transcending of many natural laws</i>	<i>Exhaustion of resources</i>
6. Man born blind (9:1-41)	<i>Release from the limitation of birth</i>	<i>Incompleteness</i>
7. Raising Lazarus (11:1-54)	<i>Release from the last enemy, death</i>	<i>Lifelessness</i>

Lesson Eleven

11

Assignments

Read:

John 2:1-11; chapter 19
Bruce, chapter 8, section I
(optional)

Memorize:

Mark 3:14

Objectives

Knowledge: You should be able to—

1. identify the three New Testament words for “miracle.”
2. explain why the apostle John selected the signs he did.
3. identify the action and need met in the turning of water to wine.

Application: You should respond by—

1. submitting to the Lord’s method in training you as a disciple.
2. coming to a greater conviction in Jesus Christ as God.

I. Being in His Presence: Companying

- ❖ Why does the Lord want people in a close companionship with Himself?

A. To reveal His identity

- Christ confirmed His deity by employing signs.

1. The emphasis of these signs

- Three Greek words for “miracle”

a. *Dunamis* (“power”): Emphasizes the experience of the recipient

b. *Teras* (“wonder”): Emphasizes the viewer who was filled with wonder

c. *Sameion* (“sign”): Emphasizes the identity of the doer

2. The selection of these signs

- The Gospels record about thirty-five specific miracles; John records seven miracles.

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3. The revelation of these signs
 - Refer to the chart on page 46.
 - In every miracle the action justifies the statement that Christ is God.
- a. Turning water to wine (John 2:1-11)
 - Mary was concerned that Jesus reveal His Messiahship because she wanted Him to vindicate her purity.
 - By saying “mine hour,” Christ was referring to His death.
 - John 2:5 contains the last recorded words of Mary in the Bible: “Whatsoever he saith unto you, do it.”
 - A firkin is equivalent to eight to twelve gallons.

Reading Questions for Bruce, Chapter 8, Section I (optional)

1. What was the “direct design” of the disciples’ first mission (p. 99)? to meet the spiritual necessities of the people, whose neglected condition lay heavy on Christ’s heart

2. The disciples’ ministry seems to have been restricted to what geographical area (p. 100)? to their native province of Galilee

3. According to Bruce, what was the “principal reason” for the prohibition to preach to the Gentiles and the Samaritans (p. 101)? The disciples’ present spiritual condition; they were still too prejudiced for a universal mission.

4. Why was it necessary for Jesus to restrict the disciples’ preaching to a simple proclamation of the nearness of the kingdom and a call to repentance (p. 102)? This was all they knew. They did not understand the doctrine of the cross nor the nature of the kingdom.

5. What were the “two religious movements going on in the days of the Lord Jesus” (p. 107)? the rousing of the mass out of the stupor of indifference; the careful, exact training of men already in earnest, in the principles and truths of the divine kingdom

4. In what ways may the evangelists’ spiritual health be injured by their zeal (p. 108)? Success may make them vain, and they may begin to sacrifice unto their own net. They may fall under the dominion of the devil although he is subject unto them. They may despise those who have been less successful or denounce them as deficient in zeal. They may fall into carnal security respecting their own spiritual state, deeming it impossible that anything can go wrong with those who are so devoted and whom God has so greatly owned.

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Concluding the Lesson

Christ's first method in training the apostles was to keep them in His constant presence in order to reveal to them His identity: God in human flesh. Stress with your group the practical importance of maintaining the deity of Christ as a central doctrine of the Christian faith. Begin by asking, "Why is it so important to have a deep conviction about Christ's deity?" Direct the discussion to the following points:

- ❖ Christ's deity assures us that our faith is true and not in vain. If He is *not* God, any other system of belief would be just as legitimate as Christianity. We would have no authority to evangelize in the world, for a human Christ would not possess universal authority (Matt. 28:18-20).
- ❖ Christ's deity is what makes His work on the cross of infinite value. The death of a mere (sinful) man could never atone for the human race (2 Cor. 5:21; Heb. 7:23-28).
- ❖ Christ's deity gives confidence that He has the power to save people from their sins in regeneration and the daily battle of sanctification. Only God can provide salvation from and victory over sin. One man cannot transform another man's heart (Rom. 6:1-11; 2 Cor. 5:17).
- ❖ Christ's deity gives confidence that He will keep all His promises. Humanly speaking, many promises made by Christ seem quite outlandish (e.g., Matt. 7:7-8; 21:22). However, as promises coming from a divine Being, they are bona fide and can be trusted.

Now ask, "How does Christ develop our conviction in His deity?" The apostles needed to know that Jesus Himself was deity, and John's Gospel demonstrates the method He used to inculcate this vital truth. By placing His disciples in humanly impossible life-situations (i.e., John's record of miracles), Jesus displayed power and authority known only to God to overcome each circumstance.

Similarly, Christ works to develop our faith by taking us through seemingly impossible life-situations. Memorizing proof texts on His deity is an important exercise, but the Lord wants us to learn His identity experientially. Ask your group members to share personal examples of difficult experiences in which God was seeking to develop their faith.

Conclude by sharing the experiences of Paul the Apostle. He testified that the trials he was enduring were for the purpose of increasing His faith in God. Second Corinthians 4:7-14 indicates that he was experiencing trials and persecutions for the goal of producing faith not only in the Corinthians but also in himself (v. 13). Likewise, 12:7-11 specifies a "thorn in the flesh" (v. 7), apparently a physical affliction, through which Paul was learning in a greater way that He must have faith in Christ, the only One who, as God, could strengthen him in the midst of weakness.