



The Greatest Sign by Ron Julian

This article and the one that follows are from talks given to Reformation Fellowship Church on Easter Sunday, April 5, 2015.

Today is Easter Sunday, the day we celebrate the resurrection of Jesus. We could say many, many things about the importance of the resurrection. Jesus' resurrection *means* many things and accomplishes many things. It is perhaps the central event in all of human history. But today I want to look at one little enigmatic statement about the resurrection. This is something Jesus Himself said, and I think it is safe to say that, when He said it, not one person understood what He meant. His statement is found in the Gospel of John.

In John chapter two, we see Jesus going to the temple at Jerusalem. There He finds merchants in the outer courts of the temple selling oxen and sheep and doves. People would buy them and then take them into the temple to offer as sacrifices. Jesus says, "Stop making My Father's house a place of business." And then he causes a violent ruckus. He overturns tables. He drives the animals out of the temple. This is the sort of thing that could get Jesus in a lot of trouble.

Naturally, the Jews in the temple were astounded: *Just who does this guy think he is?* And so we read in John 2:18:

The Jews then said to Him, "What sign do You show us as your authority for doing these things?"

Now let's talk about signs for a minute. Jesus did many miracles as recorded in the New Testament. Sometimes these miracles are called "signs." They are signs from heaven: they "signify" something; they mean something.

That is, they are a message from God saying, "I sent this man Jesus; listen to Him." Jesus, after all, is claiming to be the Messiah sent from God. Why should anyone believe Him? Well, Jesus does miracles demonstrating the power of God. He heals the sick. He turns water to wine. He feeds five thousand people from a few pieces of bread and fish. He raises the dead. These are "signs," messages from God that Jesus has come with God's blessing.

Well, that is what the Jews in the temple are asking for. They want Jesus to perform a sign. Jesus is acting as if he has some sort of authority—as if he had some sort of calling from God to cleanse the temple. And so they are saying to him: *Prove it. If you are some sort of prophet from God, prove that you act with His authority.* Perhaps they have heard rumors that Jesus has performed miracles elsewhere. So they are saying, *Put up or shut up. Show us that God is with you. Do something miraculous.*

Now, we know that Jesus is often willing to do miraculous signs. He often tells people that they should believe in him *because* of the miraculous signs he performs. But occasionally someone will demand a miracle. On several occasions, the Jewish leadership will demand that Jesus perform for them: *Jesus, prove that you are from God. Do a miracle.* And on those occasions, Jesus responds very differently. We see His response in John 2:19-22:

Jesus answered them, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." The Jews then said, "It took forty-six years to build this temple, and will You raise it



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up in three days?" But He was speaking of the temple of His body. So when He was raised from the dead, His disciples remembered that He said this; and they believed the Scripture and the word which Jesus had spoken.

The Jews in the temple have asked for a sign: *Prove to us that you have the authority from God to act as you have.* And Jesus says, *OK, here's a sign for you: Destroy this temple, and I will raise it up again in three days.*

We can see how this would sound to the Jewish leadership: **That** is your sign? Nice try. *First of all, that's impossible. You are going to rebuild in three days what it took forty-six years to build? And secondly, you are bluffing. You know perfectly well we are not going to destroy the temple. It is easy to make an empty boast about something you know perfectly well will never happen.*

They have totally misunderstood what Jesus said. But it is hard to blame them for that. Jesus has said something incredibly cryptic. Even Jesus' disciples didn't understand what Jesus said. Not one person there understood



The Greatest Sign, cont.

what He was talking about. And notice that Jesus did not explain His words, not even to His disciples. Not until after the resurrection did they think back and figure out what Jesus was talking about.

So what was Jesus talking about?

First of all, we can see that Jesus was not making an empty boast. He was talking about a truly miraculous sign, the greatest sign He ever did. But it was not the kind of sign the Jews were asking for. They wanted proof right there and then, and Jesus didn't give it to them. They were mad at Him for casting the merchants out of the temple. And they would stay mad at Him.

Next, we see that Jesus refers to "this temple." He is in the temple complex in Jerusalem, so when they ask for a sign, He in essence says to them: *You want a sign? I will perform a miracle with this temple.* But the disciples only figure out years later that Jesus meant the temple of His body. Why would Jesus call His body "this temple"? The temple is the place where God dwells; the temple is the place where man can come to meet God. From that perspective, Jesus is indeed the true temple. In Jesus, God has made Himself known on earth. In Jesus, we meet God face-to-face. Jesus is the true temple because Jesus is the Messiah of God.

Next, Jesus says, "Destroy this temple..." As it happens, that is exactly what the Jewish leadership is going to do. Because of the many ways that Jesus deeply offends them, they will decide to have Him executed. So although the Jews don't know it, Jesus is not just making a hypothetical statement; He is making a prediction: *You are going to destroy this temple.*

And finally, Jesus says, "in three days I will raise it up." And we know what He is talking about. On the third day after the Jewish leadership has Him executed, Jesus rises from the dead.

So in essence, this is what Jesus is saying to them: *You want me to perform a sign, to demonstrate that I act with an authority from God? I don't perform on demand, so I am not going to do anything for you now. I am, however, going to perform a great sign. I am the Messiah, the man in whom God has manifested Himself on earth, the very temple of God. You are going to kill me,*

and when you do, I am going to rise from the dead on the third day. That is the sign that will demonstrate my authority as the Messiah.

Jesus is speaking in riddles, to those who actually care what He means. Ultimately the disciples figure out what He meant. Jesus is hinting to them that the resurrection is the *greatest* of all the signs. How can we know that Jesus is indeed the Messiah sent from God? Well, there are many miracles along the way, many signs. There is the feeding of the five thousand. There are many healings. There is walking on water. And so on. But most of all, there is the sign above all signs. Jesus rose again. Alone among men, Jesus has conquered death. Can we know that God is with Jesus? Yes, because God did not leave Him in the grave.

Now I know that there is another question we must ask: how can we *know* that Jesus

rose from the dead? You and I are relying on the testimony of a man like John, one of Jesus' disciples. John swears that he saw Jesus dead on the cross. He saw a soldier stab him in the side, and blood and water came out, indicating Jesus was dead. John saw the empty tomb. John spoke to Jesus numerous times after the resurrection. Again and again, John swears that he is an eyewitness and that he is telling the truth.

At another time, we could discuss why we should believe John's testimony. But in chapter two, John is telling us something important about how Jesus looked at the resurrection. From Jesus' perspective, the resurrection is the greatest sign of all. Jesus came into the world saying, *I am the Messiah sent from God. There are many reasons why you should believe me. But the sign I would point to above all is my resurrection from the dead.* Ω

Communion Metaphor by Ron Julian

Communion is a ceremony based around food and drink. This makes a lot of sense to me. In the Lord's Supper, it is as if we are enacting a physical metaphor. The *physical* act of eating and drinking is very much like the *spiritual* realities it represents.

Food and drink—hunger and thirst—are incredibly powerful and important parts of human experience. Food and drink are life-giving. If we do not eat—if we do not drink—we will die. Our bodies are designed to tell us that we need food, we need drink. The longer we go without eating, the hungrier we get. The longer we go without drinking, the thirstier we get. And so the experience of eating and drinking is a very big deal.

When we start eating and drinking, we usually experience pleasure. We respond to the taste of what we are eating and drinking. And then, as we continue to eat and drink, we feel the satisfaction of our need. Our hunger and thirst diminish and disappear. And the result is: we don't die. Without food and drink, we die. With it, we live. Our physical existence is sustained for a while longer. Every day, when we eat and drink, it is like we enact a little parable. We experience pleasure, we achieve satisfaction, and we receive life.

No wonder, then, that the Bible often speaks of the larger spiritual realities with metaphors of eating and drinking. The Bible portrays the things of God as pleasurable, like food and drink: "Taste and see that the Lord is good" (Psalm 34:8); "The judgments of the Lord...are sweeter also than honey" (Psalm 19:9-10). The Bible portrays the things of God as satisfying our longings, just as food and drink satisfy our hunger and thirst: "For [God] has satisfied the thirsty soul, And the hungry soul He has filled with what is good" (Psalm 107:9); "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied" (Matthew 5:6).

And of course, the Bible portrays the things of God as giving us life, just as food and drink do. Jesus said, "I am the bread of life. Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died. This is the bread which comes down out of heaven, so that one may eat of it and not die" (John 6:48-50). Jesus is telling us that He came to be the true bread, the bread that gives true life, eternal life: *Eat this bread—that is, believe in me—and you will live. You will never die.* Jesus also tells us *how* He gives life to the world: through His death on the cross, through His broken body. As He says, "The bread which I will give for the

life of the world is My flesh” (John 6:51). He says, “My flesh is true food” (John 6:55). *It is my death on the cross that will give you life, eternal life.*

And so in communion we have a ceremony where we eat the bread and remember Christ’s death. His broken body, his death for our sins, is like our food. We receive his salvation with pleasure. The salvation He brings us satisfies our deepest hungers. And in the end, His salvation will give us life, eternal life. And so that is what we celebrate and remember with the bread. Just as bread satisfies us and gives us life, so Christ’s death brings us a salvation that truly satisfies and truly gives us life.

And when Jesus had taken some bread and given thanks, He broke it and gave it to them, saying, “This is My body which is given for you; do this in remembrance of Me.” (Luke 22:19)

Jesus also asked us to remember His death by drinking from a cup that represents His blood—that is, the blood that He shed when He died for us. Just as with the bread, we are remembering the salvation that Jesus brought us by dying on the cross. And this time, we celebrate it through drinking.

Thirst is just as powerful an experience as hunger. We must satisfy our thirst, or we will die. And so, just as Jesus tells us that His body is true food, so He also tells us that His blood is true drink.

Are we supposed to be imagining that we are drinking literal blood? Not at all. Rather, as we experience the pleasure and thirst-quenching satisfaction and life-giving properties of physical drink, we remember that it is the death of Christ that will truly quench our thirst and truly give us life. Jesus poured out His life’s blood so that we might live.

In the same way Jesus took the cup after supper, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in My blood; do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me.” (I Corinthians 11:25)

Ron Julian is a tutor at Gutenberg College, a teacher at McKenzie Study Center, the author of *Righteous Sinners*, and a co-author of *The Language of God: A Commonsense Approach to Understanding and Applying the Bible*.



Summer Institute 2015 REUNION: Tanakh and the Gospel of Matthew August 3-7 • 9AM to 4PM

Christian culture tends to look at the New Testament in isolation, but it was written in a time and culture saturated with the thought forms forged in the Old Testament writings (*Tanakh*). REUNION is intended to reunite Matthew with its Old Testament roots. Join Gutenberg tutors and **Rabbi Dr. Carl Kinbar** at Gutenberg College to explore how Matthew, an Apostle and a Jew, used passages from the *Tanakh* to convey the truth about the Messiah Jesus.

Each morning, short lectures will provide background on passages from the *Tanakh* and the passages in which Matthew uses them. Participants will then discuss each passage in small-group workshops led by the speakers below and other Gutenberg tutors. Each afternoon, two lectures (“reunions”) and a question-and-answer session will help clarify Matthew’s use of the *Tanakh*.

“Reunion” & Background Speakers



Rabbi Dr. Carl Kinbar, the director of the New School for Jewish Studies, a teacher at the Messianic Jewish Theological Institute, and a member of the Messianic Jewish Rabbinical Council. He has three decades of teaching experience in congregational, conference, seminar, and online settings.



Gutenberg tutors **Dr. David Crabtree**, **Dr. Jack Crabtree**, **Dr. Charley Dewberry**, and **Ron Julian**. Dr. David Crabtree, Dr. Jack Crabtree, and Ron Julian are co-authors of *The Language of God: A Commonsense Approach to Understanding and Applying the Bible*.



Earle Craig, a Bible teacher in Southern California and a member of Gutenberg’s board of governors.

Where: Gutenberg College, 1883 University Street, Eugene, OR

Cost: \$70 per person (includes lunch and morning and afternoon snacks)

Housing: Inquire at the Gutenberg office.

Registration: Call the Gutenberg office, 541-683-5141, or email office@gutenberg.edu. Institute limited to 50 participants.

Schedule & Information: www.gutenberg.edu



Please be praying... (from Provost Peter Wierenga)

This last week I spent the day with some dear friends who are big supporters of Gutenberg. In response to their questions, I told them that giving this year was quite erratic. One month it looks like Gutenberg is in relatively good shape, and the next month (like right now) the trend looks like Gutenberg won't have enough money to stay afloat through the summer. They asked why we hadn't put out a direct appeal for

more giving because, as they observed, they *want* to give to Gutenberg and see the school thrive, but they sometimes forget to give.

At Gutenberg, we want people to give if they want to give, but we don't want to pressure people to give even though they don't really want to. It is difficult to know how to act in a way that is thoroughly consistent with this desire. If you want to give to Gutenberg, your contributions would be very much appreciated. Please pray for God to give us wisdom and guidance.

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Gutenberg College
McKenzie Study Center • Art Project
1883 University Street
Eugene, OR 97403

TELEPHONE: 541-683-5141
541-485-4801 (MSC/AP)
FAX: 541-683-6997
EMAIL: office@gutenberg.edu
INTERNET: www.gutenberg.edu

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Gutenberg College Commencement June 12 at 7:00 PM

Gutenberg College cordially invites you to the Commencement Ceremony for the class of 2015. The ceremony will take place at Central Lutheran Church (1857 Potter Street in Eugene) at 7:00 PM. Speaking this year will be Ron Julian. A reception at Gutenberg College will follow the ceremony.

2015 Gutenberg Seniors:

Luke Woolston, Thomas Clauson,
Larissa Weisse, and Toby Swanson.