

HEARTBEATS Staying Connected 9/22/2023

Dear Friends in CHRIST,

Reading the Bible and especially studying it is like the metaphorical onion: spending time in the Bible is like peeling back layer after layer. I'm always amazed and never disappointed at what I discover when I spend time in a text that I think I know so well. And there are also surprises that are so easy to miss, yet simply add so much to the depth of the Bible.

One that I learned about recently was revealed when I was reading Love Wins by Rob Bell. Bell points out a fascinating detail from John's Gospel. In chapter 2, John shares that JESUS attended a wedding in Cana and, at the request of HIS mother, Mary, turns seven large jars of water into wine. (And it's always worth noting the numbers that are part of these stories, like seven (7) jars—seven being the number of perfection or completeness. This isn't necessarily what I'm talking about in this writing, but I couldn't help but peel back that layer.) John then tells us that this water-into-wine was "the first of the signs through which HE revealed HIS glory." The first sign.

Then, two chapters later, JESUS heals the son of a royal official and this was "the second sign JESUS performed." John has numbered these miracles, one and two. And that gets me thinking about the rest of JESUS miracles in John's Gospel. In the next chapter, JESUS heals a lame man by the Pool of Bethesda. This one isn't numbered, but I'm counting now, so this is number three. Then, in chapter 6, JESUS feeds the multitude and walks on water—miracles four and five. In chapter 9, JESUS heals a blind man as HIS sixth miracle. In chapter 11, HE raises Lazarus from the dead which is miracle number seven.

Seven (7) miracles. That seems to be all. John doesn't include as many miracles as the other gospel writers do. I always thought this was because John was focusing on other things in his Gospel. But, again, the fact that he numbered the first two got me looking. And there are seven (7)—the number, again, of perfection and completeness. John seems to be telling us something here. If you think about the number seven in the Bible, you jump back to Genesis and the very first story—the story of creation—which Genesis chapter 1 tells us happened, was completed, was perfectly done in seven (7) days, including the last day as a day of rest—Sabbath. Seven days to complete creation. Seven miracles as the complete list of JESUS miracles. Hmm.

But wait. There actually is one more miracle in John's Gospel. In chapter 20, JESUS rises from the dead. That's some miracle, isn't it? And it's number eight (8). After seven miracles, one more. This miracle happens on Sunday—Easter Sunday—the first day of a new week. One week completed. Seven days. And then a new week begins—day number eight. Creation completed in seven days, and then a new day. A new creation. One in which death is no longer the final word and life is bursting forth. In JESUS. In the midst of the old creation. Something new. Something more. A promise of greater miracles and the beginning of a new story. A new day. A new creation. Another layer peeled back.

Isn't that cool?

In CHRIST'S love,
Pastor Jeffrey