

Water in the Gospel of John

Pop culture has almost become obsessed with Easter Eggs. An Easter Egg is a hidden treat, and it is the consumer's job to find it. There really is no inherent benefit—it's just fun. We cannot simply watch a Disney or Pixar cartoon anymore without looking for some hidden reference to other movies and characters from the past. Google is in on it too. Just type in "do a barrel roll" in the Google search box from a desktop computer.

The Gospel of John reminds me of Easter Eggs. There are treats hidden throughout the book that demonstrate the author's genius. One of my favorite John Easter Eggs is the placement of Jewish festivals in the Gospel. The feasts of Passover, Pentecost and Tabernacles are conveniently situated around circumstances that redefine the Jewish festivals in the light of Jesus Christ. Another personal favorite is baptism in the Gospel of John. Wait! You thought John's Gospel didn't mention baptism? Let's take a look.

There is so much water in the Fourth Gospel that Raymond Brown said it gurgles.

- John the Baptist,
- Jesus' first miracle was turning water into wine (Jn. 2:1-22),
- Jesus' conversation with Nicodemus involves much water in key places (Jn. 3:1-21; esp. v.5),
- Jesus' disciples baptizing people (Jn. 3:22; 4:1-2),
- The Samaritan woman at the well (Jn. 4:7ff.; esp. vs. 7, 10),
- The man who had been sick for 38 years was healed at the Bethesda (Jn. 5:2-4),
- Jesus and the sea a couple of times in John,
- Crossing the sea of Galilee (Jn. 6:1) before the miraculous feeding the five thousand,
- Peter miraculously drew out many fish from the sea (Jn. 21:11),
- Whenever we read about blessings in the Gospel of John (in these cases food) water is normally not too far away from the story,
- Jesus walking on water (Jn. 6:16-21),
- The man born blind healed by washing in the pool of Siloam (Jn. 9:6-7),
- Jesus washing His disciples' feet (Jn. 13:5),
- See especially Jn. 7:37-39, and Jn. 19:34.

Consider that in the part of the world where Jesus lived there are two seasons: dry and rainy. Readers today who have the luxury of walking to the kitchen sink and turning on the facet to get a drink of water, or stopping at a water fountain in the hallways at school will scarcely appreciate how life before our modern circumstances literally centered around water. Have you ever noticed how many times wells and springs are mentioned in the Old Testament? Just think about how many major cities in the United States were founded next to major water sources. Water means life, and where there is no water there is no life.

This theme runs throughout the Gospel of John. In Jn. 4:7-14 Jesus speaks to the Samaritan woman at the well. The climax of the conversation is when Jesus tells her that he is living water. In Jn. 5:2-8 Jesus is the water that heals infirmities. In Jn. 9:6-7 Jesus' water fixes blindness. My favorite Easter Egg is Jn. 19:34 when the soldier at Jesus' crucifixion speared him in the side and out came blood...and water! I have read, and taught about medical theories and reasoning why water would have poured forth from Jesus' body. Is that really the point, especially considering the water theme in John's Gospel? What if we saw the water as something like this—out of Jesus' dead body hanging on the cross comes the water that all humanity needs to live—to truly live!

The living water of Jesus has many of the same characteristics of actual water. It is life-giving, saving, refreshing, flowing, filling, sustaining, nourishing and without it there is death. And to think that I thought the concept of baptism into the death of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins was absent from John's Gospel simply because the word, baptism, is.

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