

## **John: Another Sign**

**John 4:43-54**

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If you'll open your Bible to John 4:43. This is the healing of the Nobleman's son. Hear the word of God.

After the two days he left for Galilee. (Now Jesus himself had pointed out that a prophet has no honor in his own country.) When he arrived in Galilee, the Galileans welcomed him. They had seen all that he had done in Jerusalem at the Passover Feast, for they also had been there. Once more he visited Cana in Galilee, where he had turned the water into wine. And there was a certain royal official whose son lay sick at Capernaum. When this man heard that Jesus had arrived in Galilee from Judea, he went to him and begged him to come and heal his son, who was close to death. "Unless you people see miraculous signs and wonders," Jesus told him, "you will never believe." The royal official said, "Sir, come down before my child dies." Jesus replied, "You may go. Your son will live." The man took Jesus at his word and departed. While he was still on the way, his servants met him with the news that his boy was living. When he inquired as to the time when his son got better, they said to him, "The fever left him yesterday at the seventh hour." Then the father realized that this was the exact time at which Jesus had said to him, "Your son will live." So he and all his household believed. This was the second miraculous sign that Jesus performed, having come from Judea to Galilee.

Let us pray together.

Our Father in heaven, come now and bless us we pray. Give us a sense of Your presence. Open up your word to us we pray, and hide it within our hearts that we might not sin against you, for Jesus' sake. Amen.

George Mueller once said, "Faith does not operate in the realm of the possible. There is no glory for God in that which is humanly possible. Faith begins where man's power ends." John has brought us full circle. The narrative began in the first verse of chapter two in Cana of Galilee, and now we are back once again in Cana of Galilee. The first sign of the glory of Jesus was performed in Cana of

Galilee, transforming water into wine at the wedding feast. Now, in Cana of Galilee a second sign is to be performed.

The whole message of John's gospel was the world was full of light and life, but is now full of darkness and death. And for John, the original Creator of the universe has come into the world to bring life and light once again. John has told us about various encounters of Jesus with different people: Nicodemus in Jerusalem, and the woman at Jacob's well in Samaria in the first part of the fourth chapter of John's gospel. Both of those stories, in different ways, give us pictorial representations of what the Book of Ecclesiastes means when it says, "God hath set eternity in our hearts." You remember how Blaise Pascal put it? "There is a God-shaped void at the center of our lives, and that void can only be filled by Jesus Christ." What Augustine says so beautifully and so often cited in the first paragraph of his confessions, "Thou hast made us for Thyself, and our hearts are restless until they find their rest in Thee."

Now a question arises. If we are to receive this new life, how is it that we receive it? And Jesus has been giving to us word pictures in order to answer that question. You get it by being born again, or born from above. You get it by coming to Jesus and asking for the living water. And now, here we receive new life by coming to Jesus Christ by faith and trusting in Him. What we have here is a beautiful example of the pilgrimage of one man, one individual, the progress of faith in the soul of a particular individual; and I want to trace that in four stages that I think that we can perceive.

### **I. Faith is needed.**

First of all, the stage in which faith is required. This man's son is dying. He lives in Capernaum and it's about twenty miles or so from Capernaum to Cana of Galilee. Not far in your SUVs, but on foot it was a considerable distance to travel. And this man, as soon as he hears that Jesus is in Cana of Galilee, makes haste to get there. He wants to be where Jesus is. What is striking is that the circumstances in this man's life have radically changed the priorities of his life. He's a nobleman. It's not hard to imagine that he's made all sorts of provisions for his son for the welfare of his son. He's an official of Herod Antipas. But now, like the people at the wedding, like Nicodemus, like the woman at the well, he's come to appreciate that no earthly provision is adequate for his son's actual needs. Extremes will do that for you. This is an urgent situation; his son is dying, and this nobleman has been reduced, he who no doubt, was in the habit of giving orders, this man was reduced to a beggar.

You know, that's what prayer is. Prayer reduces each one of us to be beggars; to come with empty hands and to plead at the feet of Jesus Christ, and it is partly because of the urgency of the man's need and partly because of the way this man begs Jesus, that Jesus' response is so astonishing. Get this! It is so

astonishing. Here's this man who is begging Jesus to come before it is too late, but Jesus holds him at arm's length. Do you notice that? Jesus says to him, and to others who are listening. You people come to Me because I am able to give you certain signs and wonders, but it isn't enough, because that's not what I am here for. I'm not here, Jesus is saying, to satisfy your spectator interest. I'm here as your Savior so that you may recognize what you need most is a Savior. They were interested in spectating. They wanted to see signs and wonders. That's why they received Him gladly back into Cana of Galilee, because no doubt, they had heard of the things that Jesus had done. But Jesus was burdened to make sure that those to whom He gave Himself weren't merely spectators, but those who were trusting in Him. Do you remember that story in Matthew 9, of the woman whose daughter had just died? She's begging Jesus to come down and touch her and revive her; and Jesus is on His way down, but He stops because He perceives that someone has touched the hem of His garment. In a great throng of people, of course, somebody had touched Him. And you want to say, "Jesus, this woman desperately wants you to go down there." But He stops, He delays just as He does here. Before He answers this man's request there's a delay.

You understand, of course, what's happening because you've experienced, as I have experienced it, in our relationship with Jesus, that He makes us wait, that He tests us. That sometimes before He gives the answer that we desire, He puts us on hold. Don't you *hate* that? Don't you hate it when you are calling up somebody, and finally you've got through, and they say, "Well, I'll just put you on hold." And you're screaming, "Don't put me on hold!" Jesus sometimes puts us on hold—with jingly music playing. And you can feel the heckles. He's testing. A loved one is in need and you fly to Jesus and pray and He says, "Wait a minute, I've got something you need to learn first. I've got a sermon for you." There's a stage in which faith is required. Jesus wanted to make absolutely sure that this man was asking for the right thing.

## **II. Faith emerges.**

Secondly, there's a stage in which faith emerges. Notice what happens. The royal official won't be put off even though he knows that it's God who is putting him off; he won't be put off. You know, later in Matthew 11 at verse 12 or so, Jesus alludes to this again and He says something like this, "The days are coming, and have now come, when violent men will take the kingdom by force." What He means is, just like this man, there's an aggression, a determination about him. There's a sense in which he will not be put off. There's a stickability to his faith; there's perseverance to his faith.

Doesn't Jesus teach us this in Luke 18 in the parable of the unfortunate widow? She will not be put off and, because of her importunity and persistence, the judge, at midnight, grants her request. There's an ancient church father who said that there's a sense in which we ought to make God ashamed if He does not

grant our requests. That kind of dogged, stubborn persistence—and that's what you have here.

Can I put it like this? True faith is prepared to embarrass itself in order to have Jesus. This nobleman had begun to discover that God has used his experience of adversity in order to bring him to see that only one thing matters.

Do you notice the change in the language of this nobleman between the first appeal and the second appeal? His first appeal goes like this: “Jesus, come and heal my son because he's close to death.” Look at the second appeal in verse 49. “Come before he dies.” Now, there may be nothing in it, but I rather think that John is hinting to us that something has sharpened in the sense of priority in this nobleman so that the one thing needful is for Jesus to come, regardless of whether Jesus will heal him or not. Before he dies he must have Jesus. I rather think that John is drawing that out as he alludes to the emergence of this nobleman's faith. It is focused not on the signs and wonders, but on Jesus and his child's need to have Jesus. That's what faith is. Faith is saying at its most basic and simple, “I need Jesus Christ.” And one of the clearest expressions of that is this. The greatest evidence that I really believe that is what do I most want for my children? What do I most want for my children? It is that they might have a saving relationship and communion and fellowship with Jesus Christ. And don't you see this man's faith emerging? Not Jesus *plus*, but Jesus *only*. I rather think that we see that here.

### **III. Faith expressed.**

But there's a third stage. Not only the need of faith, and not only faith emerging, but faith expressed—the stage in which faith is expressed. The man says, “Come down before my child dies.” And Jesus replies to such faith. “Your son will live.” Or as the Greek has it, “Your son lives!” The word of promise, you see, is a word of power. And the words that follow are of such interest because the man took Jesus at His Word. That is the clearest expression of faith anywhere in the New Testament. What is faith? Taking Jesus at His words, that is faith. It trusts Jesus. Isn't it interesting that this is in Cana of Galilee, and do you remember Mary's word in Cana of Galilee back in chapter two? Do you remember what Mary said to the servants? “Whatever He tells you to do; do it.” That is faith! This has nothing to do with the personality of this nobleman. This has nothing to do with the fact that this nobleman might have had a ‘Type A’ personality. It's taking Jesus at His word. And I think this sheds light on what otherwise is a fairly strange statement in verse 44, when Jesus pointed out that “a prophet has no honor in his own country,” and in the next verse it says that when He arrived in Galilee they welcomed Him because of what He was *doing*. The test is not the reaction to the signs and wonders; the real test is our reaction to what Jesus says. And that was a very different thing. What does it mean tonight for us as the body of Christ, as parents, as Christians, to have faith in Jesus Christ? It is to

take Him at His *word*. To believe the promises that He has might that are yea and amen—that's what faith is.

#### **IV. Faith is rewarded.**

And there's a fourth stage. Not only the stage at which faith is required, and not only the stage at which faith emerges, and not only the stage at which faith is expressed, but a stage at which faith is *rewarded*. He's on his way home, this nobleman, and the servants are coming out to greet him. You can imagine the scene. He's making the journey twenty miles home and maybe the servants are a few miles from home; they've heard he's coming, and they've gone out to greet him, and they exchange stories and, of course, the one thing that this nobleman wants to know, and the one thing that these servants want to tell him, is that the boy is alive and that the boy is well. And he inquires, "At what time?" At what time was this young boy restored to health? And it was the seventh hour and he does the math, he does the calculation and he discovers that it was at the very hour that Jesus had spoken the word—from a distance. No "hail Marys," no incantations, no handkerchiefs blessed for five shekels and mailed through the posts—just a word. Just a sovereign word from the Creator King; that's all it took! For the creation to come into being, God spoke and it came to pass and that's all that it ever takes to form one new creature in Jesus Christ—for Christ to speak the word, and it is done. At the same hour, from a distance of twenty miles; it might as well have been 200 light years, it would have made no difference. For Jesus to speak the word from the throne of God, and it is done! Here's a beautiful and touching example of how Jesus comes into the life of a family, how Jesus brings His saving presence, how Jesus causes faith to emerge and grow and become visible and become strong and become persistent in one family.

Didn't we sing a few minutes ago "Have we trials and temptations; is there trouble anywhere? You should never be discouraged" It's very easy to sing, especially if we know it so well. "You should never be discouraged. Take it to the Lord in prayer," this Lord, this Jesus of Nazareth, this Jesus who spoke a word and it was done.

Faith means, "I want Jesus as my Lord and Savior and Jesus only." Faith is, "I want Jesus as my Lord and Savior for me and mine, and Jesus only." Do you believe Jesus like that? Do you? Do I? What a wonderfully encouraging passage this is. Nothing in my hands I bring; simply to the cross or Jesus Christ I cling. Let's pray together.

*Our Father in heaven, we thank You from the depths of our hearts for Your words that holy men spoke as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit, that what we have here in the closing chapter of John's gospel are Your words—living and true, sharper than any two-edged sword diving asunder the joints and the marrow, the soul and the spirit. Father, we pray that You would write it upon our hearts. Oh,*

*that we might see Jesus and Him only. Bless us as we bring to you our particular burdens and trials, and help us, we pray, to lay them at Your sovereign feet. We ask it in Jesus name, Amen.*

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