

Miracle # 2
A Nobleman's Son Healed.
John 4:46-54

A lot has happened in John's gospel between last week's sermon and our text today. Jesus has cleansed the temple, running out the money changers (John 2:13-22). Jesus has performed miracles in Jerusalem during Passover Week (John 2:23) which have convinced the religious leadership that God must be with him (John 3:2) He has met with Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews who felt his first birth was sufficient to get him into heaven. Jesus told him he had to be born again to even see the Kingdom (John 3:1-15).

John the Baptist declares that he must decrease and Jesus must increase (John 3:22-36). Traveling through Samaria, Jesus encounters an immoral woman and offers her eternal life. She accepts his offer and goes back to the city and tells everyone what happened (John 4:1-42).

Now He's back in Galilee talking to a nobleman whose son is ill.

Let's pick up with the story in John 4 and verse forty six, *"So Jesus came again to Cana of Galilee where He had made the water wine. And there was a certain nobleman whose son was sick at Capernaum. (47) When he heard that Jesus had come out of Judea into Galilee, he went to Him and implored Him to come down and heal his son, for he was at the point of death. (48) Then Jesus said to him, "Unless you people see signs and wonders, you will by no means believe." (49) The nobleman said to Him, "Sir, come down before my child dies!" (50) Jesus said to him, "Go your way; your son lives." So the man believed the word that Jesus spoke to him, and he went his way. (51) And as he was now going down, his servants met him and told him, saying, "Your son lives!" (52) Then he inquired of them the hour when he got better. And they said to him, "Yesterday at the seventh hour the fever left him." (53) So the father knew that it was at the same hour in which Jesus said to him, "Your son lives." And he himself believed, and his whole household. (54) This again is the second sign Jesus did when He had come out of Judea into Galilee."*

Before we deal with this miracle this is one area that I would like to clear up. Some people say this story is just another version of the healing of the Centurion's servant (Matthew 8:5-13; Luke 7:2-10). Although there are some similarities there are more differences. I just want to point out a few of these differences:

- The Centurion was a Gentile; the Nobleman appears to be **Jewish**.

- The Centurion's slave suffered from a paralysis; the Nobleman's son was ill with a **fever**.
- The Centurion is in Capernaum; the Nobleman is in **Cana**.
- The Centurion's faith wins Jesus' praise; the Nobleman and others are rebuked for a **deficient** faith.
- The Centurion urges Jesus not to come, but only to speak the word; the Nobleman urges Jesus to **come**.
- The Centurion has Jewish elders to plead his case; the Nobleman pleads with Jesus **personally**.

When John says that this is the "*second miracle* (sign)" (v. 54) he means that it was the second miracle that Jesus did in the Galilee area.

The first miracle was associated with a wedding and is a time of festivity and joy, the second miracle is associated with sickness and is a time of anxiety and sorrow. In comparing the two occasions we have to see that life has as much of one as it does the other and that Jesus is needed in both circumstances.

When Jesus turned the water into wine it was a miracle of **time**, he simply did in a moment what He usually does in a growing season. The healing of the nobleman's son was a miracle of **space**; Jesus healed the boy from twenty miles away.

1. The Nobleman's Plea (v. 47)

"When he heard that Jesus had come out of Judea into Galilee, he went to Him and implored Him to come down and heal his son, for he was at the point of death."

In the story we are introduced to a man that John calls a nobleman (**basilikos**) which is derived from (**basileus**) which means king. Although it can mean a member of the royal family (Herod's) it probably indicates someone in the **service** of the king. The fact that he lived in Capernaum indicates that he was an official in the service of Herod Antipas, tetrarch of Galilee and Perea.

The twenty miles from Capernaum to Cana was not the only distance the nobleman had to cross, he had to cross an even greater distance **socially**. He a nobleman had to lower himself to seek help from a humble villager carpenter and itinerant preacher.

It is important to note that even his rank and his wealth do not exempt him from common sorrows of all mankind. There is no home into which sickness and sorrow can not enter. The author, C.S. Lewis, has said that God speaks to us in our health but he "*shouts to us in our pain*." It was a crisis in this man's life (the sickness of his son) that led him into direct contact with Jesus.

When the nobleman finds Jesus, he pleads with him to return immediately with him to Capernaum and to heal his son who is about to die.

2. The Lord's Response (v. 48)

On the surface the response of Jesus is surprising. *"Then Jesus said to him, "Unless you people see signs and wonders, you will by no means believe."* But we need to realize that the "you" in verse forty-eight is **plural** (in fact the word 'people' is added by the translators to convey this idea) Therefore, Jesus is speaking to more than just the nobleman. Jesus is rebuking the attitude of the crowd who had followed along with the nobleman with the expectation that they would be able to see a miracle. They are interested only in the spectacular and not at all interested in what the miracles were a sign of. John again tells the reader that this miracle was a sign. Each of Jesus' miracle was significant that is each of the miracles had a **purpose**.

"How important (it is) to distinguish the curious from the needy today. God has not called us to debate theology or pander to the interests of those who love to speculate about religion. There are men and women all around us who hurt and for whom only a relationship with Jesus can heal. These are the people to whom we are to give our time and show Christ's compassion. These are the people whose hearts God is preparing to open." [Larry Richards. *"Every Miracle of the Bible."* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1998) p. 170]

3. The Persistence of the Nobleman (v. 49)

"The nobleman said to Him, "Sir, come down before my child dies!"

The nobleman is expressing a limited faith. It is limited to the belief **"that while there is life, there is hope."** He thinks that Jesus can only help as long as the boy is alive. It was also limited in that the nobleman thought that Jesus had to be **present** with the boy to heal him. He had the faith to believe that Jesus could heal him if he were at his side but not from 20 miles away.

4. The Healing of the Young Boy (v. 50)

The words of Jesus are not intended to turn him away but to turn him to Jesus in faith. *"Jesus said to him, "Go your way; your son lives."*

The words of this verse use the imperfect tense to help us see that the nobleman believed Jesus so implicitly that he simply picked up his work where he had left it and went on about his business. *"... So the man believed the word that Jesus spoke to him, and he went his way."*

We don't want to fail to notice the difference in the nobleman's rush to get to Jesus and his leisurely pace in returning home. Since the miracle took place at the seventh hour (v.52) (one o'clock in the afternoon) he could have made it home the same day but he arrived the next day, spending the night somewhere along the route.

5. A Miracle and It's effects (vv. 51-54)

There are two things I want us to notice about this miracle and its effects.

First, He got even more than he had asked for. (vv. 51-53a)
"And as he was now going down, his servants met him and told him, saying, 'Your son lives!' (52) Then he inquired of them the hour when he got better. And they said to him, 'Yesterday at the seventh hour the fever left him.' (53) So the father knew that it was at the same hour in which Jesus said to him, 'Your son lives...'"

Apparently the father had expected a **gradual** recovery, for the exact wording of verse 51 is, **"He asked them the hour that he began to get better."** The servant's answer revealed that at very moment Jesus had spoken *"Your son lives"* the boy had recovered instantly and completely. He is wrong in his first supposing that God can only accomplish what we ask by doing it in the way we prescribe.

We must learn to trust Jesus enough to allow him to operate in whatever way he chooses. True faith is not merely accepting from God that which we have asked for, but it is the ability to accept whatever He gives us.

Some Christians become bitter have prayed yet they were not healed or helped in the way that they sought. They thought they had a promise of God and that God was obligated to heal them or bless them financially.

We need to keep in mind that there are three different kinds of promises in the Bible.

- There are **general** promises. (john 3:16) These are promises that invite all to believe and they apply to all without distinction.
- There are promises that apply only to **believers**.

This includes such promises as Hebrews 13:5-6 *"Let your conduct be without covetousness be content with such things as you have. For He Himself has said, 'I will never leave you nor forsake you.'"*

And of course perhaps the most misquoted of all, Romans 8:28, *"And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose."*

- There are **specific** promises that apply only to the individuals to whom they were given.
Abraham (Genesis 12:2)
David (2 Samuel 12:11-12)

In today's story (John 4) the father is promised that his son would be healed. There is no **universal** promise of divine healing to all. We will study more about that in subsequent studies.

Secondly, notice that Faith is Contagious. (vv. 53b-54) *"... And he himself believed, and his whole household. (54) This again is the second sign Jesus did when He had come out of Judea into Galilee."*

"In the face of death, a hopeful faith drove the anxious father to Jesus. Christ gave him a command and a promise. In faith the father obeyed and claimed the promise. And the result was life. The son recovered, and new faith was born in the hearts of all in that household who witnessed the healing." [Larry Richards. "Every Miracle of the Bible." (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1998) p. 171]

The nobleman came seeking a physical healing yet God gave him a spiritual healing as well. Today, looking into the Scriptures, we also place our trust and faith in Jesus. As we do, we are given eternal life in his name.

Eventually this young man died anyway; even faith healers die. The best that a miracle of healing can do is to postpone the inevitable. The saving of a soul is the only **eternal** miracle.

Application for Today

What about the Signs and Wonders Movement of Today?

In the late 1970's John Wimber founded the "Vineyard Fellowship" out of which came the Vineyard Movement. This movement which is sometimes called the "Signs and Wonders" Movement teaches the churches of today should be characterized by healing, words of knowledge and speaking in tongues. They believe that unbelievers today would believe more readily if the gospel message were accompanied by miraculous signs and wonders. This seems to be in direct contrast to what Jesus taught about those who sought after signs and wonders in his day. In the telling of this miracle we see how He rebuked the crowd for being interested in miracles and taking to heart what these miracles signify. The cry of the crowd "show us a miracle" was not an indication of faith but of unbelief.

Some say **"But there are plenty of signs and wonders in the Bible!"** And that is true. But we need to remember a couple of things

First, it needs to be remembered that not **every** miracle in the Bible is attributed to God. When Moses came up against the Pharaoh's magicians they matched him miracle-for-miracle; turning the Nile into blood, producing frogs and the like. It was not until the magicians were expected to bring forth gnats that they failed. Secondly, the evidence reveals that the purpose of the miraculous gifts was to authenticate the message of Jesus and subsequently of the Apostles. By the end of the first century, with the death of the Apostles and the complete of the New Testament, the purpose of the miracle signs had been **fulfilled** and they therefore **ceased** to occur. Hebrews 2:3-4 says, that which *"first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed to us by those who heard Him, (4) God also bearing witness both with signs and wonders, with various miracles..."* The grammar of this verse suggests that the signs and wonders and miracles had ceased by the time this letter was written.