



Seven signs from the Gospel of John

Jesus heals the son of an Official JOHN 4:43-54



Preacher: Pastor Roy Summers

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The Story of the Healing

We've begun the "last lap" of online church life, with just a few months to go. And to encourage us across the finishing line, we're looking at the seven miraculous signs John records. Jesus performed many more miracles, but John has picked out these seven to highlight the character and glory of Jesus Christ, to stir up, to provoke faith in his readers; a faith that will give them new life in this world and eternal life in the world to come.

Last Sunday we considered the first sign, when Jesus turned water into wine, and today we consider John's second miraculous sign, recorded in John chapter four.

After Jesus turned water into wine he travelled south. In Jerusalem he cleared the temple of money-changers and performed many miracles, and then on his way back north he had a successful mission in Samaria—many Samaritans believed. So now Jesus is back in Galilee, the area he grew up in.

The Galileans welcomed him because the local boy had become a celebrity! Many of them had been in Jerusalem for the Jewish Feast of Passover and had seen him turf the greedy money makers out of the temple and perform miracles — and they were suitably impressed! Everyone welcomes a local celebrity, right?

But Jesus knew that the welcome was skin deep. To most of the Galileans he was nothing more than a David Blaine kind of figure (you know the guy who entertains people with spectacular tricks – freezes himself in block of ice, catches a bullet in his mouth, that sort trick). The people did not look past the miracles to the glory of the person who was performing them. And so Jesus was not enthusiastic about their welcome. He also knew that crowds were flighty; he knew that "Hosannas" today could easily turn into "Crucify him" tomorrow! So although everyone in Galilee was welcoming him, it meant nothing to Jesus. I am sure there is a lesson somewhere here for us living in a celebrity obsessed culture! Jesus shunned it and so should we.

Anyway, Jesus arrived at Cana where he had performed his first miracle. And among all the people who heard of his arrival was a dad whose son was close to death. The man actually hailed from Capernaum some 20 miles away and he was probably on business in Cana because we learn that he was a royal official, working, most probably, for the puppet-king Herod. Would it be wrong to imagine that as he went about his work in Cana his mind and heart was distracted by the serious condition of his son?

Someone once said that a parent is only ever as happy as his unhappiest child, and if that is true, we

might imagine a despondent & troubled father at work in Cana that day! No doubt as a wealthy man with contacts he would have tried all the doctors without success. So when he heard Jesus had arrived in Cana, he went to see him and begged him to heal his son.

We should pause here, and remind ourselves that status and wealth cannot prevent tragedy or death. “Silks and satins often cover heavy hearts (writes our old friend JC Ryle). Dwellers in palaces often sleep more uneasily than the dwellers in cottages. Gold and silver can lift no man beyond the reach of trouble. They may shut out debt and rags and hunger but they cannot shut out disease and death. The higher the tree, the more it is shaken by storms. Let us pray for the rich but not envy them, and let us learn to be content, for he who has heaven, has true riches!”

Just a few days ago, as if to provide us with a tragic illustration for today’s sermon, Sir Richard Sutton, one of the wealthiest men in the UK, was stabbed to death in his own home.) Let no-one envy the wealthy!

And is there not a lesson here for young people too? “Sickness and death come to the young as well as the old. The first grave ever dug was of a young man, the first person to die was a son, not his father. David lived long enough to see three children buried and Job was deprived of all his children in one day. The only true wisdom is to prepare to die at any day, to always be prepared to meet our Maker. Living in this way, it matters little whether we die young or die old. Joined to the Lord, we are safe in either case!” (JC Ryle)

Since the best doctors of the day could not cure this man’s son he turned in desperation to Jesus the Miracle Maker. His faith at this point, is not yet true faith, it is “crisis faith” or “emergency faith.” How does Jesus respond? To those who have no understanding of God’s higher ways, Jesus’ reply seems harsh. “Unless you people see miraculous signs and wonders you will never believe.”

The rebuke is plural so Jesus is speaking not only to the official, but to the whole crowd. “Unless you people see miraculous signs and wonders you will never believe.”

By these words Jesus is first reprimanding everyone whose “faith” is based on sight. Everyone who needs to shore up their faith with a constant supply of miracles. There is something deficient about a “faith” that needs a constant supply of miracles to prop it up!

But more importantly, by this rebuke which was also aimed at this official, Jesus was placing an obstacle in the way of this man’s faith, in order to test it. This is what the Lord sometimes does: he puts a hurdle across the path of faith, not to harm faith but to test it.

Will this man overcome the hurdle? Will he come back to Jesus, or will he just give up and go home? We sometimes hear folks say “I used to have faith but then my father became ill, or my cousin lost her job” or some other trouble came along, “and it made me lose my faith.”

But it is impossible to lose true faith! Why? Because true faith is supernatural, it is a gift from God!

Difficulties may test and refine true faith but they can never ever extinguish it. Someone who says that they lost their faith in a crisis, never had true faith in the first place. For true faith perseveres, true faith keeps going, true faith never gives up. Did this man give up when Jesus rebuked him or did he persevere and ask again? He asked again!

“Sir, come down before my child dies.” (“Come to Capernaum, come to my home, please heal my son.”) By pressing on and through the rebuke, this man shows he’s got real faith!

How does Jesus respond? “You may go. Your son will live.”

Jesus has compassion on the man and assures him that his son will live. Though Jesus never had children of his own, for he remained a single man, he understood the deep love of a parent for their child and Jesus had compassion on the dad and healed his son! “You may go. Your son will live.”

And then the official demonstrated yet another mark of true faith—he acted on the word of Jesus and went home, “The man took Jesus at his word and departed.”

His faith which started off as emergency-faith had grown by the obstacle placed across its path to become true faith in the bare words of Christ. “The man took Jesus at his word and departed.”

Perhaps the most concise definition of true faith is that it believes what God says and acts upon it. That’s it! God told Abraham that he would bless him and give him and his descendant a promised land – all he had to do was to leave Ur of the Chaldeans and travel west. He believed God’s bare word and left Ur. Do you have true faith? Do you believe what God says in his Word? Have you acted upon it? God says that we are sinners who deserve his righteous judgement. God tells us he sent his Son to take away our sins. God says that we must believe in his Son and repent of our sins. If we believe this message today God will give us the gift of eternal life.

Real faith believes God’s Word and then acts upon it! “You may go. Your son will live.. The man took Jesus at his word and departed.”

On his way home, he meets some of his servants who had come from Capernaum to tell him the good news that his son was alive and well! The instant Jesus had said “your son will live” the boy was healed and the recovery was so dramatic that the servants wanted to tell their master! They didn’t wait till he got home, they ran to tell him!

And when the official heard this wonderful news he asked what hour the recovery took place. He wanted to confirm his faith. He wanted to know if the boy just recovered spontaneously – sometimes that sort of thing just happens – or if the boy’s recovery coincided with the moment Jesus said “Your son will live.” He wanted his faith confirmed.

There’s nothing wrong with this—in fact it another sign of genuine faith. True faith does not bypass

the mind or ignore the evidence.

And when he discovered that the boy's recovery had taken place exactly at the time Jesus said "your son will live" his faith was confirmed and we read; "He and all his household believed." He already believed, but his faith was confirmed.

There is nothing wrong with wanting our faith to be confirmed. Faith and reason go together. Let me give you a common example today. Christians believe that God created this beautiful universe. Suppose a Christian wanted to confirm this. Where is the proof that God created the universe? Well there is lots of evidence. (If you are a believer wanting confirmation, I would encourage you read Stephen Meyer's "The return of the God Hypothesis" where he outlines three fantastic scientific discoveries which show beyond reasonable doubt that there must be a great mind, a great Creator behind the universe. If you are struggling with that question or know someone struggling with that question, this book will help.) True faith seeks confirmation!

What a wonderful account of genuine faith! It starts out as CRISIS faith, it proves itself as TRUE faith when it overcomes the rebuke and when the official believes the word of healing and goes home. And then it is CONFIRMED by the timing of the recovery to the very moment of Jesus' words! And there is more! His faith became contagious faith, for not only he but his whole household, servants and family and all, believed! "He and all his household believed." (verse 53)

We should pause here to note how God overrules tragedies to bring about good. If this lad had not become ill, this household would have never come to faith in Jesus Christ!

If JC Ryle was alive today he may be asking me for royalties! But the mark of a great Bible commentator is that his simple words can be quoted by a preacher a hundred years after he's gone!

"Affliction" he writes, "is one of God's medicines. Health is a great blessing, but sanctified disease is a greater blessing. Prosperity and worldly comfort are what all naturally desire; but losses and crosses are far better for us, if they lead us to Christ." When troubles come our way we so quickly complain because we so easily forget that the Lord who is in sovereign control of our lives will bring good out of evil. Let us learn to trust him in everything.

What rejoicing there must have been in the official's household that day! Not just because a lad was restored to health, not even mainly because the boy was healed, but because these people saw beyond the miraculous sign to the Person who performed it, and they believed in Jesus Christ, the Messiah, the life giver, the Son of God!

The Glory of Jesus not the Sign

And as we close that is what we must do also. We must go beyond the miracle and ask what this sign teaches us about Jesus so that we too can enjoy new life.

This miracle shows us that Jesus is compassionate—he understands the sorrow of a parent's

whose children are suffering, and he sympathises with all our heartaches.

This miraculous sign reveals that Jesus is merciful. This man belonged to a generation who loved the miracles of Jesus but not his Gospel; he did not deserve this healing, and yet Jesus helped him. Jesus is merciful. Perhaps someone listening thinks God could never accept them because of the wrong they have done. Perhaps they think they are too bad to be welcomed by Jesus. That's not true! The love of God reaches the darkest places and rescues the worst of sinners. If you sincerely say to God "have mercy on me a sinner" Jesus will welcome you too.

But what struck me more than anything this week, was the power of Jesus to heal at a distance. Jesus did not need to be in Capernaum; he could heal from Cana, 20 miles away. Just a word, and the boy was healed!

Let us remember this! Is there someone you cannot reach who needs your help? Someone in a different country, or a different city? Or even in your own city or even in your own home, but you can't seem to reach them or help them. You can't but Jesus can! Like this official, let us bring their case before the throne of God in prayer and ask him to speak a powerful word, and let us believe that he will do so.