

THE HEALING OF THE NOBLEMAN'S SON
(John 4:43-54)

Jesus has now opened up his public ministry. You might remember that he performed his first miracle in Cana of Galilee where he turned water into wine at the marriage feast. But that was a very quiet miracle. The only ones who witnessed that miracle were the servants who fetched the water and then dipped out wine, and the disciples.

Then, after a short rest in Capernaum, Jesus and the disciples headed to Jerusalem for the Passover Feast. When Jesus entered the outer gates of the temple, he was appalled at the commercial enterprise that was going on inside and he made him a scourge and he drove the money changers out. And he said, "Make not my Father's house a house of merchandise."

And Jesus then began to heal people of all manner of diseases and infirmities there in Jerusalem. And all of a sudden, Jesus was a famous man. Thousands of people began to follow him wherever he went. And the Jewish authorities also began to keep an eye on him.

And it says,

Many believed in his name, when they saw the miracles which he did.
John 2:23

And this seemed to be the nature of faith in Jerusalem. They believed in Jesus as a miracle worker. And, how could they deny such miracles? Blind people went home seeing and others were cured of leprosy. And they brought all their lame and their sick and Jesus healed them.

This was a very unique moment in history when God was confirming the ministry of His Son by great miracles. These kind of miracles in these numbers were never seen before. We have instances of a miracle here and a miracle there in the Old Testament, but never like this. Jesus stood at the gates of the city healing all manner of sickness. This was a new age being ushered in and it would be an age of unspeakable grace. And just as many things in the Old Testament were pictures and types, the physical healings which Jesus performed served as a prelude and a type of great spiritual healing which would soon be ushered in.

But if the people were only looking for physical healing, they would miss out on the greater healing. And this seemed to be the general consensus in Jerusalem. It says that,

Many believed on his name when they saw the miracles which he did, but Jesus did not commit himself unto them, because he knew what was in man.
John 2:23, 24

So, there were lots of miracles in Jerusalem, but relatively little saving faith.

Now, before Jesus left Jerusalem he had a conversation with Nicodemus. And Jesus taught Nicodemus about the necessity of the new birth. This is the doctrine of regeneration. And Jesus told Nicodemus that except a man be born again, or regenerated, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.

After this conversation with Nicodemus, and after the Passover Feast was over, Jesus left the city and went out into the countryside of Judea and it says that he tarried with his disciples there and baptized. (John 3:22) And so both John the Baptist and Jesus were baptizing in the same general area. (John 3:23) And some of John's disciples were becoming jealous when they saw that Jesus was baptizing more disciples than John. (John 3:26; John 4:1) And so Jesus determined to return to Galilee.

But in order to go to Galilee, it was necessary to pass through Samaria. And this is where Jesus had an appointment with a sinner at a famous well. And he taught this woman at the well about the gift of the Holy Spirit and he told her,

Whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life.

John 4:14

Now this woman left her waterpot and went back into the city and told others about her meeting with Jesus. And many believed on Jesus for the saying of the woman. (John 4:39) And then, others in the city came out to the well to meet Jesus for themselves. And many others believed in Jesus because of the words of Jesus himself. (John 4:41, 32) And these Samaritans believed on Jesus as the Christ and as the Saviour of the world. (John 4:42)

I want you to notice something interesting here. There is no record of any miracle being performed in Samaria. He didn't heal the woman of some physical illness. He didn't go into the city and perform healing miracles. But they believed on him based on his testimony that he was the Christ and the Saviour of the world. And you will notice quite a difference between the limited faith of the Jews in Jerusalem who believed only in the miracles, and the faith of the Samaritans who believed in the person and work of Christ.

How many people today pray with earnest desire for God to take away some affliction? And they say, "God, if you will just heal my son, or if you will get me out of this mess that I am in, I will serve you for the rest of my life." And when they are delivered, they forget all about their pledge. And this is the nature of the faith of those in Jerusalem. They were in it for the miracles only. But the Samaritans believed unto salvation without the need of miracles.

Now Jesus stayed with the Samaritans for two days (John 4:40). And many more believed because of the words of Jesus. (John 4:40)

After these two days in Samaria, Jesus departed and went into Galilee.

Now after two days he departed thence, and went into Galilee. For Jesus himself testified, that a prophet hath no honour in his own country.

The Proverb

A prophet hath no honour in his own country.

The implication here is that a prophet has honor in other places, but not in his own country. Now a prophet is rightfully entitled to honor: not of his own doing, but because God has put honor upon him. The prophets of the Old Testament were commissioned by God and as such they were bestowed with honor. And men everywhere should have honored them as men of God. But the general rule was that men did not honor the prophets. Rather, they treated God's spokesmen with scorn and contempt. But there was one place where prophets were more ill-received than others – in their own country. (Luke 4:24)

When the prophet grew up with his play mates and he sat next to them in the school classroom and he played with them in the schoolyard, they were not likely to honor him later when God bestowed honor upon him and made him a prophet. They would say, "Why he is nothing special. We know him, he is little Jeremiah. He's no better than us." And so you see that when God later made him a prophet, they would not give him the honor of that office. It is a matter of pride. Men don't want to be instructed by their own classmate, by someone they consider their peer. And so they are never prone to submit to his authority, even if God has given him that authority.

This principle also applies in our churches. If a boy grows up in the church and we teach him in Sunday School, and we spank him when he misbehaves, and we watch him grow up and we see him make mistakes along the way and we see his humanity, then it is hard for us to respect his call when God calls him into the ministry. "Oh, that's just little Johnny."

Many churches call a man from a far country to come be their pastor. And they barely know this man. And I think in some respects they like it that way. They like to call pastors that they don't know because they don't like to know about their weaknesses and their failures. They prefer to have someone they don't know very well and then they can fantasize that they have some superhuman, godlike man to be their pastor.

Now the question is, "How does this proverb apply to Christ in this passage?" It says, Jesus went into Galilee, for a prophet has no honor in his own country. Now at first glance, you are thinking he avoided his own country because they would not honor him. Since a prophet has no honor in his own country, he did not go to his own country.

And some commentators interpret it just that way. And they say that Nazareth was his hometown and Jesus did not go to Nazareth because he would not have been honored there. Rather, he went into the other regions of Galilee where he would be honored.

However, Nazareth is never mentioned in this passage. Only the region of Galilee is mentioned. If we are saying that his country was limited to Nazareth rather than the region of Galilee, then we are merely speculating. Furthermore, we are speculating that Jesus desired to go where he was honored. Prophets are not honored in their own country, so Jesus did not go to his own country. And that is the way that many read this passage.

I believe the evidence is that John is teaching just the opposite. The region that is in view here is Galilee. The city of Nazareth specifically is not mentioned. And it says, Jesus went into Galilee, which of course contains the city of Nazareth. And he went there because a prophet has no honor in his own country. And the idea is that Jesus purposely went into Galilee knowing that he was not honored there.

Now Jesus had spent a considerable amount of time in Jerusalem performing miracles and he was not savingly received there by the masses. Then he went into Samaria which was not Jewish territory and there he was richly received as the Savior of the world, though he performed no miracles there. Now he leaves Samaria and goes back into Jewish territory, into Galilee. He is entering the region where he was born. He is entering Galilee where he grew up. Virtually everywhere in Galilee was within about 20 miles of Nazareth. And Jesus was known here as any local resident would have been known. It appears that Jesus mother had family in Cana of Galilee where Jesus attended the wedding.

And so, Jesus determined to leave Samaria where he was richly received and where the fields were white unto harvest and enter his own country of Galilee where he would not be so honored.

This invites us to consider Jesus' own words when he said,

I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel.
Matthew 15:24

Jesus' ministry was first and foremost to the Jews. The wall of partition was not yet broken down. The veil was not yet rent in two. The gospel was to start in Jerusalem and then spread to the world. And so, Jesus did not spend much time in Samaria. But he moved on to his principle ministry to the Jews, even though he had no honor in his own country.

When it refers to his own country, it has a primary physical reference to Galilee, the land of his birth. But in the grander sense, his country was the land of the Jews. It was the nation itself. It was the Jews who would give him no honor. "He came unto his own and his own received him not." (John 1:11)

And so, it says that Jesus went into Galilee for that very reason. He went there because he was sent to minister to those who dishonored him. He could have stayed longer in Samaria where it was pleasant and where the gospel was in season. But instead, he left Samaria and travelled north into Galilee where once again he would be met by the unbelieving masses of Jews.

The Reception He Received in Galilee

Then when he was come into Galilee, the Galileans received him, having seen all the things that he did at Jerusalem at the feast: for they also went unto the feast.

John 4:45

Now even though Jesus came into Galilee where proverbially he would not have honor, you will notice that he was received. That is, they gave him the glad hand. And if you stopped with that first clause only, you would think that this was an exception to the proverb, wouldn't you. Prophets usually do not receive honor in their own country and yet, they received him. But let's not be so hasty to praise the Galileans here!

They received him not as the Messiah or as the Savior of the world (John 4:42) as did the Samaritans. Rather, they received him because they had seen all the things he did at Jerusalem. This reminds us of the reception that Christ got from the Jews at Jerusalem when they believed in him because of the miracles which he did. And this was not a saving belief. And the Jews in Galilee are just like the Jews in Jerusalem. They would have their sick healed. They would have the masses fed. But would they have their hearts cleansed? Would they give that ultimate respect to Jesus and call him the Messiah and the Savior of their soul? And the answer is apparently, "No."

Then said Jesus unto him, Except ye see signs and wonders, ye will not believe.

John 4:48

So this is the state of affairs in Galilee when Jesus came up from Samaria. The people there were unbelieving Jews, willing to receive Jesus because he had proven to be a miracle worker in Jerusalem. And Jesus went into Cana of Galilee. (John 4:46)

The Circumstances of the Nobleman

And there was a certain nobleman, whose son was sick at Capernaum.

We are not sure about the identity of this man whose son was sick. He is described only as a certain nobleman in our translation. The Greek word implies some relation to a king. So, at the very least this man was high society. He was probably well to do. And, he was probably some relation or some officer in the staff of Herod Antipas in Galilee.

We see that this nobleman was from Capernaum. Capernaum was on the northwest seacoast of the Sea of Galilee and it was about 12 to 15 miles from Cana where Jesus was. This would have been about full day's journey by foot.

Now this man from Capernaum had a son who was sick. In fact, he was a little more than sick. was at the point of death. (John 4:47) Now the nobleman probably had access to the best physicians of the time and it is clear that they could not do anything for this son. Their efforts were exhausted and now the nobleman could only turn to prayer. At this point, the nobleman looked for a miracle. And while the nobleman sat at the bedside of his dying son, he heard that Jesus had come to Galilee. (John 4:47)

Now this shows us how quickly the fame of Jesus had spread throughout the land. Jesus had only recently opened his public ministry in Jerusalem and already his itinerary is being published across the countryside. And this nobleman down in Capernaum heard that Jesus was in Cana of Galilee.

This nobleman could have sent servants to find Jesus, but instead, he went personally. This was too important to send servants. This was a matter of life and death. His son was about to die, and in desperation this man set out in search of his only hope – the great Physician.

Notice that the nobleman went to Jesus. (John 4:47) It is amazing how findable Jesus was. Amazingly, there was no internet in those days; no cell phones; no radio or television; no daily mail service. And yet, this man had no trouble finding Jesus. Jesus could always be found by the throngs of people around him. And this nobleman came to Jesus.

The Request of the Nobleman

And he besought him to come down, and heal his son.
John 4:47

There is a measure of respect to be found in this request. You notice that it says, "he besought him." That is, he begged him. I am sure this nobleman begged as any man would beg whose son is about to die. We are not told about his body language but I am sure he besought Jesus with a good bit of passion and desperation.

This nobleman was of a higher social strata than Jesus. He was rich and Jesus was poor. He had station in life and Jesus had no station. The nobleman had connections to the king and Jesus had no connections. I suppose that the nobleman could have commanded Jesus to come down. He could have obtained court orders. Perhaps he could have sent soldiers to bring Jesus down. But this man laid aside his station in life and came to Jesus as a mere beggar. "Please sir, come down."

This teaches us that the greatest men in this world must come to Christ as beggars. Presidents and kings must come to Christ on their knees. They have no more influence with Christ than a pauper.

Example: I watched a special on the assassination attempt of Ronald Reagan the other day. Of course, he was shot in the chest by John Hinkley. And the President of the United States was rushed into surgery with a bullet lodged in his chest and with internal bleeding. And they didn't know whether he would live or die. And he didn't know. And when they put him to sleep to perform the operation, he didn't know if he would wake up or not. As it turned out, after an extended surgery they were finally able to extract the bullet and President Reagan did recover. Shortly after his surgery, while in recovery, he wrote in his journal that for the rest of his life he would dedicate himself to doing the will of God.

You see paupers and presidents eventually come face to face with the reality of death and the reality of a face to face encounter with Christ. And both of them come as beggars and servants. And this nobleman, faced with the death of his son, came begging of Jesus.

Not only was there a measure of beggarly respect in the way the nobleman approached Jesus, but there was also a measure of faith in his approach. I want you to note first that this man's faith was sincere. He didn't say, "Can you come down and heal my son?" But he said, Will you come down and heal him. He besought him to come down. This man had at least heard of the healing power of Jesus and probably had seen it first hand in Jerusalem. And he believed that Jesus could heal his son. And he said, "Will you come down and heal my son?"

But like the faith of all of us, his faith was not pure and perfect. Rather, it was faint and feeble. He thought that Jesus could heal his son, but he never anticipated that Jesus could do it from 15 miles away. He thought at least that Jesus must come to Capernaum to heal his son. Perhaps Jesus would come down and put his hand on the boy's forehead and draw out the fever. Perhaps Jesus would come down and first assess the situation and then proscribe the cure like other physicians. But his weak faith never anticipated the greatness of Jesus. He never once considered that Jesus could heal his son immediately and from a distance.

And I am afraid that you and I also are apt to limit the power of Christ by our lack of faith. We fail to comprehend his vast power. He is capable of curing any disease. He is capable of overcoming any circumstance. His power is limited only by his sovereign purposes. He does whatever he chooses to do. And if you are in distress, then ask him to deliver you. The nobleman was right to ask Jesus to heal his son. That was a request born out of faith. But he erred in trying to prescribe the method.

Example: When we have a cancer, we ask the doctor to operate. But we don't dictate to him how to perform the operation.

Likewise, we ask God to help us, but the time and the method of the operation are in his hands.

The Rebuke of Christ

Then said Jesus unto him, Except ye see signs and wonders, ye will not believe.
John 4:48

I want you to recall that in both previous discourses, with Nicodemus and with the woman of Samaria, Jesus was careful to point out their spiritual deficiency. Remember that he told Nicodemus that he could not enter the kingdom without a new birth. (John 3:3) Also, he rebuked Nicodemus for not knowing these things even though he was the premier teacher in Israel. (John 3:10) And to the woman Jesus said, "Go, call thy husband, and come hither." (John 4:16)

It seems that Christ first shows a man his sins before he extends mercy. Before Christ honors a man, he humbles a man. Before the Holy Spirit converts a man he convicts a man.

Don't think it mean spirited that Jesus would rebuke this man whose son was dying. Rather, it was an act of love and compassion. A man must be shown his thirst before he will drink. A man must be shown that he is a sinner before he will seek a Savior. And Jesus is looking beyond this physical sickness of the son toward the healing of this man's soul.

Now the rebuke of Jesus toward this man, goes a little deeper than what is apparent from a casual reading.

Except ye see signs and wonders, ye will not believe.
John 4:48

Jesus is speaking of a whole group of people. The "ye" here is plural. So Jesus is saying, "All of you." This is the general condition of all of you Jews here in Galilee. It is a general principle. You will not believe unless you see miracles. This shows a very fragile and dangerous kind of faith. They would only believe if they saw miracles. This was the condition of this man's heart and it was the condition of the heart of the nation. They would have God only on their terms. They would not believe his word alone, but they must have a sign. God must honor them with a sign, and then they would believe.

The Response of the Nobleman

The nobleman sayeth unto him, Sir, come down ere my child die.
John 4:49

Now there is something commendable about the reply of this nobleman and it shows a humble heart. A self-righteous Pharisee or an ill-tempered man may have walked away in anger when Jesus rebuked him. This is the way of human nature. Most of us don't take criticism too well. But the Scriptures say,

Give instruction to a wise man, and he will be yet wiser: teach a just man, and he will increase in learning.

Proverbs 9:9

The fool despiseth his father's instruction, but he that regardeth reproof is prudent.

Proverbs 15:5

And so, there is something commendable about this nobleman in that he did not act the fool and walk away. He was not so prideful that he could not take a rebuke. But there is also something blameworthy about his reply. This man is not yet a saved man. And he ignores the rebuke of Jesus. This man should be concerned about his own faith. It is a carnal faith that only believes in miracles. But this man is so overcome with concern over his son that he does not have time to consider his own spiritual condition. I am sure that he stored this rebuke in his heart and later he was duly convicted of his sin.

The answer of Christ

Go thy way, thy son liveth.

John 4:50

There are two things that I would have you see about this answer.

I. The great power of Christ.

Here Christ showed that he could not only heal, but could heal with a great deal of ease. There was no need for a visit. Notice here that Christ didn't say anything, he didn't do anything and he never issued an order to be healed. He simply told the nobleman, "Go thy way, thy son liveth." With Jesus there is no need for incantations or rituals or declarations. His mere thought is power enough.

And this is a great comfort to the church. It is a great comfort to our church. Though Christ is now in heaven, he can send deliverance in the twinkling of an eye. Though heaven be in some far place beyond the parameters of this universe, his power is not limited by distance at all. We can expect an answer to our prayers in an instant according to his will.

This man asked Jesus to come down, because he never suspected that Jesus could heal instantaneously and from a distance. You will notice how Christ's healing above and beyond even what the man asked for. The man asked Jesus to come down. This would have taken at least a day and the son would have suffered longer. But God's answers to our prayers are even better answers than what we request. We request a little grace and he gives overwhelming grace. We ask according to our feeble faith and he grants according to his massive power.

The man said, "Come down and heal my son." Jesus said, "Go thy way, thy son liveth."

But also notice,

II. The great mercy of Christ.

Though this man came to him with weak faith, though he came seeking a miracle, though he came out of desperation, though he came with a selfish motive, though he came with little concern for his own spiritual condition, notice the great mercy of Christ. He healed the man's son.

I would have you know that Jesus is full of compassion for us in our human condition. Though we are utterly unworthy, he cares for us. Jesus had what the Scriptures call, "bowels of compassion." His insides hurt when he saw human suffering. And when this suffering sinner begged him to heal his son, Jesus was full of pity and compassion and he said, "Thy son liveth."

The Confirmation of the Nobleman's Faith

Though the nobleman's faith was at first weak faith, he is being brought to saving faith.

And the man believed the word that Jesus had spoken unto him, and he went his way.

John 4:50

When Christ said, "Thy son liveth, go thy way." The man believed. There was something about Christ. No other man on earth could have made such a statement with any credibility. The nobleman would not have believed any other man. But never a man spake like this man. And it seems that the man's fears were immediately relieved. He didn't beg Jesus to come down. He didn't ask Jesus, "Are you sure?" But he believed and went his way.

How wonderful it is to have assurance and confidence in the promises of God. How wonderful to trust Christ with all things in our lives. How wonderful to lay our souls in his hands and at his disposal. And we when do so with utter faith, we walk away in peace with our fears relieved. And there is every indication here that this man left rejoicing and fully expecting his son to live.

Now we learn later that it was about the seventh hour when Jesus said, "Thy son liveth." That is, it was about one o'clock in the afternoon by Jewish time.

It appears that the nobleman did not rush home as you might expect of an anxious man. Rather, he did not go home until the next day. And it says,

And as he was now going down, his servants met him, and told him, saying, Thy son liveth. Then inquired he of them the hour when he began to amend, And they said unto him, Yesterday at the seventh hour the fever left him. So the father knew that it was at the same hour, in the which Jesus said unto him, Thy son liveth: and himself believed, and his whole house.

John 4:51-53

Note the full and progressive confirmation of this man's faith. He evidently had some peace of mind because he did not rush home as though all depended on an expeditious return. Rather, it seems that he waited until the next day to make the trip home. When he came near he asked the servants when the fever left the son and they said, "Yesterday."

How this man's faith must have been perfected when he heard the servants say, "Thy son liveth." They must have shouted these words from afar as they saw him coming, such was their excitement. And his heart must have leapt for joy.

But one last thing he wanted to know.

What time did he begin to amend?

And they said, *Yesterday at the seventh hour the fever left him.*

John 4:52

Look how the man's faith became sure.

And now the father knew . . .

What wondrous words these are. When they told him it was the seventh hour, chill bumps must have crawled up the father's back and down his arms and it says he knew that it was the same hour, in the which Jesus said unto him, Thy son liveth.

There are two things that we should learn from this.

1. The child's recovery was sudden and not gradual.

It appears that the nobleman's faith was still less than perfect. He asked, "What hour did he begin to amend," (John 4:52) as though Christ was incapable of a complete and sudden healing. Perhaps he thought the great Physician was like all other physicians and it would take days for the child to fully recover.

Not so with the great Physician! His healing is sudden and complete. The fever simply left at the seventh hour. False healers claim that the sick will be restored by and by. But Christ says he shall be healed now!

2. The child's recovery was at the very hour that Christ spoke to the father the day before.

When the man heard these irrefutable proofs, he bowed his heart and believed with a saving faith. And he went and he told his household these things and they also believed.

Conclusion

There was a time in each of our lives when God made us alive. There was a moment when our heart began to beat. We were dead and then we were made alive. There was a moment when our spiritual fever left us and we got up off of our death bed in good spiritual health.

One of these days we are going to appear before Christ in heaven and we are going to ask what hour it was when we were made alive. And we will discover that it was the very moment that Christ said, "Go thy way, thou livest."