

JOHN AND THE BOOK OF SIGNS
(3) THE HEALING OF THE OFFICIAL'S SON

John 4:46-54
Jeffrey S. Carlson
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SCRIPTURE

⁴⁶As he traveled through Galilee, he came to Cana, where he had turned the water into wine. There was a government official in nearby Capernaum whose son was very sick. ⁴⁷When he heard that Jesus had come from Judea to Galilee, he went and begged Jesus to come to Capernaum to heal his son, who was about to die. ⁴⁸Jesus asked, “Will you never believe in me unless you see miraculous signs and wonders?”

⁴⁹The official pleaded, “Lord, please come now before my little boy dies.”
⁵⁰Then Jesus told him, “Go back home. Your son will live!” And the man believed what Jesus said and started home. ⁵¹While the man was on his way, some of his servants met him with the news that his son was alive and well.

⁵²He asked them when the boy had begun to get better, and they replied, “Yesterday afternoon at one o’clock his fever suddenly disappeared!”

⁵³Then the father realized that that was the very time Jesus had told him, “Your son will live.” And he and his entire household believed in Jesus.

⁵⁴This was the second miraculous sign Jesus did in Galilee after coming from Judea (John 4:46-54 NLT).

MESSAGE

There are seven signs that make up the Book of Signs contained within the Gospel of John. We have already examined the first one which was when Jesus turned water into wine at the Wedding in Cana. The second one also takes place in Cana but more time has passed than what the text may suggest. In the interim, Jesus has traveled to Jerusalem and, according to John, performed many miraculous signs there. But John does not delineate them. Jesus then returns to Galilee by way of Samaria.

While back in Cana, an official from Capernaum comes to Jesus and begs him to heal his son who is close to death. The official is not named but he is described as being connected to the government. You might think this refers to the Roman Empire but the term that is used indicates that the official is part of the royal court of Herod Antipas.

Who was Herod Antipas? To answer that question we need to know something about the line of Herod. The family of Herod started with King Herod, also known as Herod the

Great. The Roman Emperor appointed Herod to be governor over the Jews in Palestine and later allowed him the title of King. Most people who know the Christmas story have at least heard of King Herod. Herod was alive when Jesus was born. It was Herod who met with the Wise Men. It was Herod who ordered the slaughter of the children of Bethlehem.

This Herod had five wives, most of whom he murdered. He had several children, many of which he murdered. Things got so bad that after a while Caesar Augustus quipped, "It is safer to be Herod's pig than to be his son." If you know anything about Jewish dietary laws then perhaps you can appreciate the darkly humorous irony of Caesar's statement.

One of Herod's sons managed to live just long enough to father a daughter named Herodias. Herodias was the granddaughter of Herod the Great. You would think she would have resented the wickedness of her grandfather in killing her father. But, instead, she adopted her grandfather's ways. At one point she married her uncle Philip who was a wealthy man. They had a daughter named Salome. Salome means "peace." If ever a child was misnamed it was Salome. She brought anything but peace. In time she would cause John the Baptist to be beheaded.

Later, Philip's brother, Herod Antipas (also known as King Herod, and son of Herod the Great), visited his brother and was smitten by his beautiful but evil wife Herodias. So Antipas seduced her away from his brother and they went back to Galilee. But in order to do that, Antipas had to get rid of his previous wife who was the daughter of the King of the Nabateans. This in turn got the King of the Nabateans so upset that the next time he met up with Antipas he beat the stuffing out of him.

Are you following this?! I think you will agree that the line of Herod is complicated and filled with intrigue and wickedness. And I am only telling you a small part of the story. Anyway, Antipas and Herodias tried to settle down in Galilee as a respectable king and his consort. And it was an official from their court who came to Jesus with an urgent request: "Heal my son."

If the man was Jewish he may have been to Jerusalem and heard of or maybe even seen some of the miraculous signs Jesus did there. Since he was from Capernaum, he would have at least been familiar with the miracle at the wedding feast. At some point he learned that Jesus had returned to Galilee and was in Cana. So the man made the twenty mile journey from Capernaum to Cana to implore Jesus to come to come back with him and heal his son.

But Jesus almost seems to brush him aside. He says, "Will you never believe in me unless

you see miraculous signs and wonders?” This could easily be taken for a bleak rebuke. But the question is in the plural. Meaning that Jesus was speaking to the crowd as much as he was to the official.

This story helps to clarify the nature of faith. Jesus exposes the limits of a “faith” based merely on miracles. He will not commit himself to those who respond only on that level.

Faith based on signs and miracles must not be confused for true faith, which is why Jesus does not encourage it. Such “faith” fails to honor God because it insists that God’s role is to serve us and not the other way around. Signs and wonders may have a certain value as a starting point, making us aware of God's reality, but they remain empty unless they lead us to the Christ to whom they point. Beyond the miraculous signs we seek the Lord who works them.

We need also note that Jesus had a way of making sure a person was sincere (cf. Mt 15:21-28). If the official had turned away irritated or was too proud to receive the rebuke then Jesus would have known that he was not in earnest, that his faith was not real.

Is your faith real?

The official is not daunted by the apparent rebuke from Jesus. He repeats his plea for Jesus to come back to Capernaum with him to heal his son. Jesus replies, “Go back home. Your son will live!”

A second essential ingredient to faith is demonstrated by the fact that the boy, whose desperate need Jesus met, is never at any point physically with Jesus. At this point the miracle is similar to our own situation. Like the boy, we have never physically met Jesus but that does not limit his ability to meet our needs. Rather, it creates the context for us to engage our faith.

To have faith is to act on the belief that what Jesus says is true. It must have been hard for that official to turn away and go home with only Jesus’ assurance that his little boy would live. Yet that is precisely what he did.

Do you believe that what Jesus says is true?

The official was making his way home and while he was still on the way, his servants met him with the news that his boy was alive and well. I am sure he was overjoyed by the news, but there was something else he wanted to know. When? When did his son get better? They told him, “Yesterday afternoon at one o’clock.” The father realized that this

was the exact time at which Jesus had said to him, “Your son will live.” The faith he had placed in Jesus without seeing a miraculous sign was now confirmed by hearing of the outcome of one.

This leads to the third essential ingredient of faith: surrender. There is a significant progression in the official’s response to Jesus, from humbly but earnestly seeking help from Jesus (vss 47,49), to taking Jesus at his word (vs 50), to embracing faith in Jesus as a lifestyle (vs 53b). Our journey of faith needs to follow a similar path. We need to humbly but sincerely bring our need to Jesus, recognizing that it is not God’s role to do what we want but for us to do what God wants. Secondly, we need to take Jesus at his word – not with a vague notion that what Jesus says *should* be true but that it *must* be true. Thirdly, we need to surrender to Jesus on a daily basis with a willingness to be used by him for his glory.

I find it encouraging that Jesus was willing to struggle with the official as his faith grew even though it meant that for a time Jesus appeared to be refusing the man’s heartfelt plea. You may have also noticed that there was something greater at stake here than the healing of a little boy. There was also the healing of the father – the healing of his spirit – which led to the blessing of his entire family.

The official was not one who got out of Christ what he wanted and then went away to forget. He and his entire household came to believe in Jesus. This would not have been easy. The Messiah whom God had sent was not the Messiah of popular expectation. Nor would it have been easy to be a Christ-follower in Herod’s court. There would have been insult and mockery and perhaps even worse. But this official had experienced what Jesus could do and there was nothing left for it but to surrender.

Have you surrendered to Jesus?