

# *Signs of Glory*

Studies in John's Gospel

Brian Arthur

Study 3

The Second Sign (John 4:46-54)

## *The Nobleman's Son Healed*

After the first sign Jesus worked at the wedding in Cana of Galilee conflict arose. The leaders, glad to see John the Baptist's disciples on the wane were now alarmed that the followers of Jesus were increasing (4:1). Our Lord had made a strong prophetic announcement with regard to obeying the word of the Son.

*"He who comes from above is above all, he who is of the earth is from the earth and speaks of the earth He who comes from heaven is above all. "What He has seen and heard, of that He testifies; and no one receives His testimony. "He who has received His testimony has set his seal to this, that God is true. "For He whom God has sent speaks the words of God; for He gives the Spirit without measure. "The Father loves the Son and has given all things into His hand. "He who believes in the Son has eternal life; but he who does not obey the Son will not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him." (John 3:31-36).*

To obey the Son was to see and trust in the Father who sent Him. There had been a deficient obedience to Him in Jerusalem. Many 'believed', but He was doubtful about what that really meant (2:23-25). Wishing to move away from the growing pressure Jesus went through Samaria to Galilee where He would minister for over twelve months.

Christ's ministry to the woman at the well at Sychar was not simply inserted by John as a parenthesis, a little cameo as Jesus moved away from Jerusalem. The confession of the Samaritans, *"..We have heard for ourselves and know that this One is indeed the Saviour of the world."* (4:42) was clear demonstration that those outside of Israel were more open to Christ than Israel itself (see 4:48). On one hand the hostility of the Jewish leaders was escalating whilst on the other the readiness of strangers and aliens to hear and obey the word was growing.

The second sign, also done in Cana, continued to bring this crisis of obedience for Israel into clearer focus. We are confronted in this story by the Word, the Logos of the Father (1:1) speaking the healing word of the Father to the nobleman's son. Two miracles, perhaps three appear: The healing of the son, the healing (bringing to faith) of the nobleman and the conversion of his whole family. Unlike Israel, the Household of God, the nobleman's home readily received the testimony of Jesus.

### **Jesus returned to Galilee**

Despite the hostility of the Leaders, Jesus ministry was attracting great crowds in Jerusalem and Judea. Had Jesus bowed to the temptations of the evil one then He would have stayed there and not gone to Cana. Growing popularity with the masses would appeal to the flesh of many ministers of the word. Any thought of leaving that behind would appear nonsensical. Surely if the crowds were gathering, that would be a sign that you were where God wanted you. Not so for Jesus.

## The Nobleman

Capernaum was just over thirty kilometres from Jerusalem. The nobleman was most likely one of Herod's courtiers in that city. We assume he was a Jew but some contest that. Jesus identified him with the rest of the Jews in Cana (Vs 48). His son was near to death. The word about Jesus doing miracles had gone out from Jerusalem (Vs 47). It was also likely that the previous sign in Cana was also well publicised. The nobleman came with single minded concern for his son. His appeal to Jesus was a strong, prolonged entreaty ('asked' is in the imperfect tense indicating a continual or repeated action of asking). This man was at the 'end of his tether'. His petition had no element of self serving about it. Here was a member of Herod's court seeking out a carpenter from Nazareth. All pride of office had given way to the need of his son.

***He was asking Jesus to come down and heal his son*** (Vs 47). In the mind of the nobleman it was essential for Jesus to be present to his son for healing to take place. This was a popular belief. Jairus appealed for Jesus to come and heal his daughter (Mark 5:23). The woman with a twelve year haemorrhage felt she must touch Jesus robe for healing (Mark 5:28). Martha insisted that had Jesus come when summonsed Lazarus would not have died (John 11:21). In all these cases Jesus healed. He was God's free Son, not bound by theological prescriptions about how to do things.

An interesting comparison can be drawn between the healing of the Centurion's servant and this nobleman's boy. The Centurion (also from Capernaum) came to Jesus making no stipulation that Jesus had to be present to heal, "*Lord, I am not worthy for You to come under my roof, but just say the word, and my servant will be healed*" (Matthew 8:8). Jesus commended him for faith not seen in Israel, and proceeded to prophecy strongly against Israel's lack of faith, *Now when Jesus heard this, He marvelled and said to those who were following, "Truly I say to you, I have not found such great faith with anyone in Israel. "I say to you that many will come from east and west, and recline at the table with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven; but the sons of the kingdom will be cast out into the outer darkness; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth."* (Matthew 8:10-12).

So the Lord's reply to the nobleman and his company was a mild rebuke, ***So Jesus said to him, "Unless you people see signs and wonders, you simply will not believe."*** John 4:48). Recall a similar rebuke given to Mary at the wedding. Jesus was not simply walking to man's drum beat but the Father's. He would teach this man, in the middle of his crisis of fear for his son what true faith was about. At that stage the nobleman was quite oblivious to the Lord's agenda for him or his son. Without attempting to moderate his request or justify it the nobleman continues his entreaty. Then Jesus presented him with the gift of faith. He said, ***"Go; your son lives."*** (Vs 50a). There were two aspects of the faith that Jesus presented as gift to the nobleman. The assurance that his son lived (not will get better but is full of life now), and secondly the opportunity to go from Jesus resting in that healing truth The nobleman was now became aware of what Jesus said later, *the words that I have spoken to you are spirit and are life* (John 6:63). He was in the presence of God who commanded that the world be made and it was. He was in the presence of that same God now in the flesh and His word was as sure as it had ever been. These were the ways that the Holy Spirit energised his heart to believe. Now he had come to life as had his son. This Jesus who could command death to stay away wherever He was must be God's Son/King. Healing was not magic power stored in Him, only to become real if He were present to the dying one, but it was the work He saw His Father doing, *If I do not do the works of My Father, do not believe Me; but if I do them, though you do not believe Me, believe the works, so that you may know and understand that the Father*

*is in Me, and I in the Father* (John 10:37, 38). Here was the Father saying to the world that He would not have death and sickness in His creation as a lasting curse. Where His Son extends His hand in signs and wonders we see Father's desire, plan and purpose for the whole of creation, to Israel first and then the nations. The drama opening before Jesus was that Israel more and more rejected this revelation.

***The man believed the word that Jesus spoke to him and started off*** (Vs 50). If faith had not germinated through the gracious word of Christ the nobleman would not have left Jesus presence. His previous insistence that Jesus accompany Him had gone. He was now free to do as Jesus said and go back to his son rejoicing. There is something of a puzzle about the nobleman's return home. It is clear that he didn't return till the next day (Vs 52). It would have been possible for him to return the day of the healing for it happened at 1.00 pm. Some suggest that because he trusted in the Lord's word he did not have to rush home and see if it was true. What we know for sure is that when he arrived home the servants confirmed that the lad was made well at the exact time Jesus spoke the word.

Faith means taking God at His word, signs or no signs (Romans 10:17). No doubt when the nobleman saw that his son was fighting fit his faith was encouraged. The words of the servants, ***Your son lives***, were the identical words spoke by Jesus the day before to his father. John obviously felt that was significant. The impact of the complete healing deeply affected them as well. They too were being encouraged to trust the Father's Son. Faith is not like smoke wafting up from us to God like incense, subject to every wind of opposition to disperse it into nothingness. Rather, the word of Christ is like wind that lifts the wings of a bird free of the gravitational pull of fear and death (John Searle). Faith itself is empty. It is not an energy found deep within the human heart waiting to be released. The whole issue is the object of faith. That is where the energy and substance is found. So the 'hearing' of Romans 10:17 is the reception of a whole new revelation as to how things are because of what the Father is saying showing and doing in His Son.

***So the father knew that it was at that hour in which Jesus said to him, "Your son lives"; and he himself believed and his whole household*** (Vs 53). This is the first believing household mentioned in the New Testament. The grace of Christ had broken through, not just in the healing of the boy but with a whole new revelation of Christ and the Father. This grace was significant for all in the family. Here was the father's plan for His people; to be united with Him in one household, His household of faith and prayer (Isaiah 56:7; Ephesians 2:19). The household didn't just toe the line of the nobleman and become Christian by association. They believed for themselves as the Samaritans had done at Sychar following the testimony of the woman (4:42).

### **The son is Healed – a Sign to be read**

No doubt the sign in this story relates to faith.

- The significance of the sign is that in the process of the healing word given by Christ the nobleman and his family believed that He was the Son of God, God's King who ruled over all things, and they came alive to Him and His Father.
- It is the word Christ speaks that creates faith, not simply the wonder performed.
- We will see in a linked sign (the raising of Lazarus), that Israel was being confronted with a clear revelation of its lack of trust in God's Messiah and therefore the life of God. Later when their rejection of Jesus became entrenched they were like what Ezekiel saw in the valley of dry bones. Israel was in need of healing and eventually resurrection (Ezekiel 37; Hosea 13:14).

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Questions for discussion and further reflection

1. When it comes to looking for signs we may all be tempted. We may not look for miraculous signs or wonders but we may still operate by 'sight' not faith. We may want to see our obedience rewarded. We may want God to bless our plans so that we can be assured they are in accord with His will etc. Discuss the continual battle of living by faith.
2. Faith can indeed grow and be strengthened. However, why is it sometimes unhelpful to speak about certain peoples great faith?
3. Think about the freedom of Jesus in doing the works of His Father. He was not bound by a formulaic method of dealing with people. Why is it that we like God to always do things according to a neat formula? How can our education and culture press us into such thinking? Why is the freedom of God in all His actions such a great encouragement to true faith?
4. We said that the nobleman was at the end of his tether. Why is it true that the most significant ministry of the Lord to us happens at that point? In what ways do we resist that truth?
5. The Gospel impact upon families is deeply contested by the evil one. When our families don't seem to enter swiftly and cleanly into Christianity we can feel guilty, discouraged and fearful. How may we rest upon the covenant love of the Father who maintains that "the promise is to you and your children"?
6. Israel needed to come to see that she was like Ezekiel saw in the valley of dry bones. We too must agree that to be dead in sin is to be like that. Why did Israel fight the Lord so strongly as He held up God's mirror to them and showed them this truth? Why do we struggle to confess that to be dead in sin is to be utterly dependent upon the mercy of God?
7. Think about the discussion that must have happened when the Nobleman returned home and the servants and family engaged him in discussion. The both realized that what Jesus said later was true, "*My Father is working until now and I Myself am working*" (John 5:17), and, *All that the Father gives Me shall come to me; and the one who comes to Me I will not cast out* (John 6:37). How do these words of Jesus encourage our everyday ministry and witness?

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Order

**Welcome**

**Hymn**

**Explanation of evening**

Study/Supper discussion

Theme of Studies (Signs of Glory)

Previous studies (Notes Sermonaudio.com Rob's sheet)

No costs

Follow-up privately

**Scripture**     John 4:39-54

**Hymn**

**Study** *The Healing of the Nobleman's Son*

**Prayer**

**Supper/Discussion**