

Marvel: What Did Jesus Do?

The Second Sign: Healing an Official's Son

John 4:43-54

Mark Vroegop

"After the two days he departed for Galilee. (For Jesus himself had testified that a prophet has no honor in his own hometown.) So when he came to Galilee, the Galileans welcomed him, having seen all that he had done in Jerusalem at the feast. For they too had gone to the feast. So he came again to Cana in Galilee, where he had made the water wine. And at Capernaum there was an official whose son was ill. When this man heard that Jesus had come from Judea to Galilee, he went to him and asked him to come down and heal his son, for he was at the point of death. So Jesus said to him, "Unless you see signs and wonders you will not believe." The official said to him, "Sir, come down before my child dies." Jesus said to him, "Go; your son will live." The man believed the word that Jesus spoke to him and went on his way. As he was going down, his servants met him and told him that his son was recovering. So he asked them the hour when he began to get better, and they said to him, "Yesterday at the seventh hour the fever left him." The father knew that was the hour when Jesus had said to him, "Your son will live." And he himself believed, and all his household. This was now the second sign that Jesus did when he had come from Judea to Galilee" (John 4:43–54).

Good Friday and Easter weekend were incredible celebrations and opportunities for us to talk about the power of the cross and the hope of the resurrection. I want to thank you for using this important weekend to be hospitable and welcoming to our community.

Numbers aren't everything, but they help us see a few things. That's why the book of Acts tells us that 3,000 people came to Christ at Pentecost (Acts 2:41). Let me give you a few numbers that should make you rejoice:

- We had over 7,500 people attend services over Good Friday and Easter weekend
- Our Easter weekend attendance was 12 percent higher than last year
- We doubled the number of gift bags and connections that we made with guests

But I also want to remind you that our vision is to reach the city of Indianapolis. We love the gospel, and we love our neighbors. Planting churches is vital to our strategy to reach the city and for our church to say healthy and vibrant.

- One Fellowship, our newest church plant in the OrthoIndy Foundation YMCA, had 330 people at its first Easter service
- When you include all the churches in our College Park Family of Churches (Fishers, Castleton, Greenwood, and One Fellowship), our total attendance for the weekend was 9,800 people

I share this with you so that you'll have a mindset that Jesus talked about with his disciples in John 4, as he engaged the woman at the well. Remember what he said?

"Do you not say, 'There are yet four months, then comes the harvest'? Look, I tell you, lift up your eyes, and see that the fields are white for harvest" (John 4:35).

I want to remind you that our mission of igniting a passion to follow Jesus not only extends to unreached peoples on the other side of the world and to Brookside in our urban core, but also to the neighborhoods in which we live. I want to remind you that our city needs more healthy, gospel-centered churches. And we need to keep growing so that we keep sending people.

Marveling at Jesus

Today we start our third series of messages in the Gospel of John. We started our journey in September of last year. We spent two months looking at what it means to believe in Jesus from the first eighteen verses. "Believe" is the theme of John's gospel, which is why he starts with that core message.

From there we looked at what it means to "behold." John paints a picture in the first four chapters regarding who Jesus is. He calls disciples, turns water to wine, cleanses the temple, and engages with both a religious leader (Nicodemus) and a cultural outsider (the woman at the well).

I've entitled this next section "Marvel," and it encompasses the second half of chapter four through chapter 12. We'll walk through these chapters through October—along with a four-week series on marriage and family in August.

These chapters are designed to show us the things that Jesus did in order to demonstrate that he really is the Son of God. John highlights what Jesus does, along with some teaching, so you would be convinced that he really is worthy of your faith and trust. John wants you to marvel at Jesus so that you'll call him Master and Lord.

Second Sign

John highlights this miracle of Jesus as the second sign. Look at the last verse in our text, verse 54:

"This was now the second sign that Jesus did when he had come from Judea to Galilee" (John 4:54).

It is important for you to know that this was the second sign that he performed in Galilee, an area north of the city of Jerusalem. As a reminder, Jesus was born in Bethlehem, but Joseph and Mary lived in Nazareth. At some point, Jesus moved to the city of Capernaum, a city in Galilee on the Sea of Galilee. It became his home base.

His first miracle was the turning of the water into wine. That happened in Cana, which is seventeen miles from Capernaum. Our text records his second miracle in Galilee, the area where Jesus lived. However, this was not the second miracle in his ministry.

According to John 2:23-25, Jesus performed miracles in Jerusalem while he attended the Passover Feast. Take note of what John says in these verses because they are important for our text in John 4:

“Now when he was in Jerusalem at the Passover Feast, many believed in his name when they saw the signs that he was doing. But Jesus on his part did not entrust himself to them, because he knew all people and needed no one to bear witness about man, for he himself knew what was in man.” (John 2:23–25).

Jesus performed the miracles, but he did not entrust himself to them, because he knew what was in man. He was concerned that people were not believing in him because of what they knew about him but merely because of the miracles they were seeing him do.

In other words, people were marveling at him for the wrong reasons. They were overly focused on what Jesus did, not on who he was.

And that is what this second sign is all about. John uses this story in order to raise a really important question: **What will it take for you to believe in Jesus?**

This text highlights the second miracle in Cana, near Jesus’s new home town, in order to show us something really critical about the nature of belief. John highlights unbelief through a story about belief. Let’s follow the story as we see a progression from desperation to belief to trust.

Desperation

Verses 44-45 set the context for this story. They identify the location: Cana in Galilee. And then John adds some commentary about Jesus saying that a prophet is not honored in his own hometown. The ministry slope can be pretty steep when people are familiar with you. And yet, verse 45 says that Galileans welcomed him, “having seen all that he had done in Jerusalem at the feast.”

John is setting the scene for us. Jesus is convinced that people are not really interested in who he is. They are interested and welcoming because of the miraculous signs that he did in the capital city.

Jesus arrives in Cana, and John makes the point about the previous miracle with the water being turned to wine. This gospel is completing the circle in order to make a point about belief.

In verse 46, we learn about an official in Capernaum whose son is ill. We learn that he is an “official.” At that time, Capernaum was an important city in the region of Galilee that was ruled by one of Herod the Great’s sons—Antipas. He was the ruler who ordered the beheading of John the Baptist (Matt. 14:3-12). And he was given the opportunity by Pilate to interview Jesus just before his crucifixion (Luke 23:6-12). This official was likely a man who served in Antipas’s court.

Word spread that Jesus had returned to Galilee. But the word was more than just that Jesus was back in Galilee. Therefore, the official “went to him and asked him to come down and heal his son for he was at the point of death” (v. 47). Why did he do that?

The physical condition of the official's son must have been dire. This man of influence, power, and authority reached a point where he was willing to seek Jesus's help. He was desperate. His son was "at the point of death."

I think it's noteworthy to consider how this man's desperation led him to Jesus. This is often how people come to Jesus in the gospels. This is how people still come to Jesus. Can I remind you about that? Often the road to believing in Jesus is chosen because the other paths have proven to be disastrous. You may be at church today with that kind of story. Many of us have a story like that. But can I also remind you to be the kind of person that desperate people turn to when hardship or difficulties come. With that in mind, we have a staff team that is researching what kind of ministry or ministry partnership we could create to help people struggling with addictions, especially opioid addiction.

I also want you to notice that the official heard from people about the miracles that Jesus performed. The word had gotten out about what Jesus did in Jerusalem. People talked about Jesus, and it paved the way for this official to seek out Jesus. I want to encourage you to consider the kind of conversations you have about Jesus that might, one day, lead people in their desperation to seek him. Don't let the first time you talk about Jesus be the moment of desperation. Talk about him often so that people know where to look when they are ready.

Notice, however, Jesus's response. It reminds us of what he said to his mother when she told him the wedding had run out of wine. Jesus is not immediately favorable toward the official's request: "Unless you see signs and wonders you will not believe" (v. 48).

Jesus is not only speaking to this man but also to the rest of the people who were there. And his point is that this man and others were interested in him because of the miraculous, spectacular, and sensational things that he did. They were not interested in him as the sin-bearing Son of God. They were fascinated by what Jesus could do. The official was desperate for help. He wasn't desperate for Jesus. Therefore, Jesus issues this rebuke.

This official's desperation begs another question: What are you truly desperate for? Many people who sought after Jesus were seeking signs instead of seeking the Savior. They are a lover of Jesus's power but not his person.¹

Do you know those kind of people still exist today? Maybe you are one of them. Perhaps you say that you'd believe if you saw a miracle happen or some message in the sky. But the point of John's gospel is that human beings are capable of finding any reason not to believe. In other words, if you don't believe the inspired Word of God, why do you think you'd believe a miracle as if the miracle is better?

That should also encourage you when you talk about Jesus. You may think that your friend would be better converted if something miraculous happened or if an angel appeared. And yet faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God (Rom. 10:17).

¹ <https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/go-your-son-will-live>

Let's be sure that we are not missing the person of Jesus for the miracles of Jesus. Let's be sure that we are not missing Jesus for what Jesus can do. Let's be desperate for Jesus, not just for the relief Jesus can bring. Let's be desperate for the grace of Jesus, not the gifts from Jesus.

"Belief"

I'm putting the word belief in quotes because we see this official take some steps toward belief. But Jesus seems to test him. Remember, there's more going on here than a sick son. However, the official doesn't argue with Jesus. Instead, he presses Jesus again. His son's life hangs in the balance. "Sir, come down before my child dies" (v. 49). There's clearly a degree of urgency.

Notice Jesus's response: "Go; your son will live." It is interesting that Jesus takes action to heal the man's son despite what he just said about people seeking signs and wonders. You will find this contrast in other places in Jesus's life and ministry. He tells his mother that his time has not come and then turns the water into wine (John 2:1-11). After initially rejecting a Canaanite woman's appeal for healing for her daughter, he gives the order based upon the woman's faith (Matt. 15:21-28).

Jesus has compassion on those who are in need, but he's looking for those who have real belief. He's testing the man here to see if he will believe or if he's attempting to use Jesus's power for his own benefit. Jesus is trying to discern if this man is just like all the rest in his hearing—wanting Jesus to fix their problems without acknowledging who he is.

You should find this comforting and perplexing. It is comforting because Jesus doesn't completely reject him. He doesn't rebuke him for his repeated request. He heals his son. The question will be what is the official's response. But it is also perplexing because we see the value of tested belief. Some people look like they "believe" but only because of the payback that they think is there. They want the solution, not the Savior. And Jesus shows us that some level of testing is sometimes necessary. Or this: Sometimes people come to Jesus to meet a need and their faith grows as they encounter Jesus.

In verse 50 we see the official's response: "he believed the word that Jesus spoke to him and went on his way." Jesus refused to physically come down to the man's house. He merely spoke the miracle. And the official had to decide if he was going to take Jesus at his word. Jesus didn't fit into his plan. He had to decide, however, if he was going to believe what Jesus said.

The official didn't argue. He didn't plead his case. He didn't insist that Jesus come with him. He didn't use his authority. He simply believed what Jesus said.

Given what John says in the following verses I'm inclined to think of this as the first steps of belief. I don't see him with the same level of belief as we'll see in a moment. What I think we have here is a man who has relinquished his rights to his own plan, and he's taking the risk of believing what Jesus says.

Some of you resonate with this official. You had a plan for how your need was going to be met. Somewhere along the way, you started to take some steps in the right direction. You've relinquished

your rights to your plan, and you are looking to Jesus but you have no idea what that means. It's a start—a good one. But it's just that—a start.

That should encourage some of you who have dear friends or loved ones who are taking steps and you'd like to know where it's headed. Maybe there's just a need to wait and pray. Encourage them as they are searching.

Maybe you're listening to this message and you think, "I'm not like the official. I'm arguing with God—" "What are you doing?" "Why won't you fix this?" "Come down and heal my son, now!" Maybe this message is about you taking some first steps by first dropping your plans for God to fix your life your way.

Trust

Our story concludes as we see the result of Jesus's miracle and this official's faith. We learn that he is not like the crowd that Jesus was rebuking. He came because of his desperation, but our story ends with him trusting in Jesus.

In verse 51, the official is met on the road by his servants, and they recounted to him the good news: His son was recovering. Rather than simply saying, "Good! Let's hurry home." He asks about when the boy began to get better. Why did he ask that? Again, I think it's because his faith is developing here. He's connecting his son's health to the word spoken by Jesus.

They told him the hour of his son's healing in verse 52. And this only confirmed what had happened the day before. The father (notice the shift from "official") knew it was the hour where Jesus gave the word.

And then we find this critical statement in verse 53—"And he himself believed, and all his household." The official gives clear evidence that he is not like the crowds in Galilee. He may have come looking for help. He may have come merely seeking the health of his son. But he left the presence of Jesus on a path toward belief. And he really believed in verse 53. And his household believed along with him.

What started as a desperate physical need became a moment of trusting belief. While the crowds were interested in Jesus because of what he could do for them, this official came to believe in Jesus because of who he was—the Son of God.

Barriers to Belief

John's purpose in recording this story at this point in his book is to highlight the unusual nature of this official's faith. As we consider this text in John, let me give you a few summary thoughts regarding barriers to belief in Jesus.

Familiarity – Some people struggle believing because they've known the facts of the gospel message all their lives. Their parents or grandparents took them to church. So, there's nothing new about the message. And this person confuses "new" with "true." Instead of believing in Jesus for who he is, they look for something new to convince them.

Consumer Mindset – Other people pursue Christianity because they need something from Jesus. They don't want to go to hell. They need their marriage or kids to change. They feel alone and listless. Or they're stuck in an addiction. While a felt need can lead you to Jesus, and while he can help you, the question is whether you'll fall in love with Jesus as your Savior, not just your fixer—or your butler.

Expectations – Still others have a self-conceived plan for what receiving Jesus or following Jesus should look like. Their plan or their desires are so primary in their lives that they simply ask Jesus to fill in the gaps instead of asking him to take over. They would have argued with Jesus about coming to Capernaum because that's how they thought it was going to happen. They are not willing to let go of "their plan."

Pride – Oh, here's a major problem. Instead of simply obeying what Jesus calls them to do, these people push back against the demands of the gospel because they think they know what is best. They want Jesus to bless their plans or fulfill their life. They want change with their kids or spouse or friend because life is so hard. But they don't realize that the first step toward belief is dying to yourself.

Guarantees – While there are more, I'll end with the problem of people want to be 100 percent sure before they take the first step. They either think that belief means "no doubts." Or it means that believing is going to be worth it. To be clear: It surely will. But some people wait until they can see every implication before they start on the path of belief.

So the question we must ask ourselves is this: What will it take for you to believe in Jesus? What will it take for you to believe in Jesus for the first time? What will it take for you, Christian, to live out your belief in the same way that you first came to Christ? Where do you need to say, "Jesus, I trust you."

Or maybe I should I ask it this way: "What stands in your way in believing in Jesus today?"

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