

All Signs Point to Jesus

Session 2

March 9, 2025

The Sign of His Grace

The Point: Jesus works on behalf of all who come to Him.

Session Passage: John 4:46-54

John 4:46-47

Connection to the Point. In desperation, a Gentile leader came to Jesus for help.

The Setting for John 4:46-54. Jesus's second miracle at Cana is not as well-known as His first. Much, though, happened between the two. Jesus went to Capernaum, then to Jerusalem for Passover (2:12-13). He was keeping the tradition established in His youth (Luke 2:41). This trip was different, though. This year Jesus overturned the money changers' tables (John 2:13-16). He also had a conversation one night with a seeker named Nicodemus (3:1-21). Leaving Jerusalem and the territory of Judea, He traveled north to the region of one of John the Baptist's baptismal sites, Aenon near Salim, which was in the Judean countryside (vv. 22-36). He also encountered a Samaritan woman at Jacob's well near Sychar (4:1-42). Jesus continued north and received an enthusiastic welcome when He reached Galilee. Once there, He returned to Cana (vv. 43-46).

The Purpose of John 4:46-54. Part of the purpose of the "signs" or miracles John highlighted in his Gospel is to show that Jesus was operating and ministering with the power and authority of God, showing His mastery over nature, including sickness and disease. This sign demonstrated He was not limited by factors that limit us, such as distance. This story's purpose is also to show that Jesus was not performing some deceptive sleight of hand; what Nicodemus had said to Him was true: "no one could perform these signs you do unless God were with him/no one could perform the signs you are doing if God were not with him/no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him" (3:2).

The Theme of John 4:45-54. This account's theme is that Jesus came to minister to all people. He had been in Cana for the wedding of a Jewish couple, likely family members or friends. His next personal interaction was with a Pharisee named Nicodemus. For a Jewish man, these types of interactions were perfectly acceptable and expected. His next encounter, however, was with a Samaritan woman, unheard of in the day. Next, again at Cana, He healed the son of a member of the Roman government. Jews and Samaritans hated each other for religious reasons; Jews and Romans, for political reasons. The lesson from these encounters is clear, Jesus came to minister to all, regardless of the person's status, even those others consider unacceptable and off limits. He had come, because, as the converted Samaritans declared, Jesus "really is the Savior of the world/is indeed the Christ, the Saviour of the world" (4:42).

Cana of/in Galilee (v. 46). In the previous scene Jesus had spoken to a Samaritan woman at Jacob's well at Sychar. Traveling from there to Cana was a trek of about forty miles and would have taken two to three days.

A certain royal official/nobelman (v. 46). Being a *nobelman* or royal official meant he was likely a Gentile, maybe part of the Roman military or a tax collector. The Greek term translated *royal official* means he served or may have been related to the king, meaning Herod Antipas, who was the youngest son of Herod the Great. Antipas ruled Galilee from 4 BC to AD 39, thus throughout all of Jesus's ministry. The royal official/nobelman had heard about Jesus and His miracles. Considering Acts 1:8, the progression of Jesus's encounters comes to a climax in this story; Jesus had carried His message to Jerusalem (Nicodemus), Judea (John's baptismal site), Samaria (woman at the well), and the ends of the earth (a nobleman's son).

This man/He heard . . . went . . . and pleaded/begged/besought (v. 47). The three verbs show a progression of action. Hearing is passive; if someone is genuinely pleading/begging, though, they are "all in." One has to wonder what the man was thinking in the gaps between the verbs. The word translated *pleaded/begged/besought* is in a Greek verb tense that conveys repeated or continual action. Thus, the man persistently and repeatedly asked Jesus for help. Both his words and behavior exposed the man's feelings of urgent desperation.

Come down, and heal (v. 47). This term was used geographically. Cana (Khirbet Qana) is located on a hilltop at 709 feet above sea level. Capernaum, located on the Sea of Galilee in the Jordan Valley, is 682 feet below sea level. Traveling from Cana to Capernaum involved a drop of almost 1,400 feet. Jesus healed others who were in Capernaum. He healed a centurion's servant, Simon Peter's mother-in-law, a paralyzed man, and a woman with an issue of blood (Matt. 8:5-13,14-17; 9:2-8,20-22). Jairus's daughter may have also been in Capernaum (9:18-19,23-26).

About to die/Close to death/At the point of death (v. 47). This is essentially everything we know about the son and his condition. We do get a hint later about the son's age (v. 49). We don't know how long he had been sick; the only detail we have about his illness is that he had a fever (v. 52). For John, who was telling the story, most of the details did not matter. His focus was not on the man's son or the illness but on Jesus.

John 4:48-50

Connection to the Point. Belief is taking God at His word.

Jesus told him/Said Jesus unto him (v. 48). With His earlier sign of turning water into wine, Jesus remained low key. He did not address the headwaiter or the groom; He spoke only to the servants. He did nothing to draw attention to Himself. This was no longer an option. Word had spread about what He had been doing. He had received a public welcome when He again entered Galilee (v. 45). Jesus could no longer move inconspicuously. The man's pleading certainly drew additional attention to what was happening. Thus, when Jesus spoke directly to the man, anyone within earshot heard.

Unless you people/Except ye (v. 48). The pronoun here is plural. Jesus's words, therefore, were not intended solely for the Roman official; He had a message for all who could hear Him.

Signs and wonders (v. 48). In referring to Jesus's miracles, John used the word *signs*. It typically referred to supernatural acts that revealed Jesus's divinity. This is the only time John coupled "signs and wonders." Linking the two words changed the dynamic. No longer was the emphasis on Jesus's divine nature; *wonders* added a mystical element. Jesus knew that the crowds ("you people") were increasingly seeing Him as a healer who used some magic to achieve incredible results. This misunderstanding persisted.

Celsus, a second-century Greek philosopher, was a strong critic of Jesus and His followers. He claimed Jesus had gained incredible powers, meaning He had learned magic, while He was in Egypt, and that He used those abilities to deceive others. Simon Peter, one of Jesus's earliest disciples, knew Jesus was not performing sleight-of-hand magic tricks. Jesus had healed his mother-in-law. Peter explained Jesus was able to heal and perform other miracles because the Father was with Him (Acts 10:38).

You/Ye will not/never believe (v. 48). Elsewhere in the Gospels, people challenged Jesus, demanding He perform some sign. Religious leaders did it to test Him (Matt. 16:1; Mark 8:11; Luke 11:16). Crowds asked for a sign because they wanted more food. They linked the sign with their believing (John 6:22-30). Paul also knew the Jews wanted a sign before they would believe (1 Cor. 1:22). This was quite the contrast to the Samaritans who initially believed simply because of what the woman at the well had told them (John 4:39).

Jesus's words here were emphatic. Some translations emphasize this by rendering the phrase "you will never believe." Jesus knew the crowd would never believe unless they saw some miracle that in their minds would validate His power and by extension, His connection with the Father. This would not be the case, though, with the government official, as the story unfolds.

Come down before/ere my boychild dies (v. 49). This was the cry of a desperate father. He had nothing to lose by revealing his despair. He saw Jesus as his son's only hope. Only Jesus could stand between the boy and death. The father's attitude foreshadowed what we see later with Mary and Martha who each proclaimed to Jesus that their brother wouldn't have died had He been there (11:21,32). Here the father spoke of *my boychild*, which was different from "his son" in verse 47. He now used a term that often conveyed an emotional closeness. The Greek word refers to a small child, at times even to an infant. Jesus used the word when He spoke of a woman who had just given birth to a child (16:21). Speaking to the wise men, Herod used the term when he said he wanted to find Jesus, who was a toddler by then (Matt. 2:8).

Go (v. 50). When the desperate man told Jesus what he wanted, he used an imperative verb, "come down" (v. 49). A man of his position and authority was accustomed to people doing what he said. He was the one who normally issued commands. Jesus responded, though, with an imperative verb as well, *Go*.

Your son will liveThy son liveth (v. 50). The man would not be in the same mental state leaving Cana as he had been when he arrived. Jesus's promise changed his thinking. What an amazing precursor those words were for the full and glorious gospel message! Death does not win; the Son lives.

The man believed/took Jesus at his word (v. 50). Unlike other Galileans who demanded to see a sign, the boy's father took Jesus at His word/*took Jesus at his word*. Without proof or validation, he believed. He demonstrated faith as the book of Hebrews defines it (Heb. 11:1).

To believe is a major theme in John's writings; he used the verb nearly one hundred times in his Gospel. In Greek, "faith" and "believe" are the noun and verb forms of the same word. Thus, the sentence could read, "The man faithed." That faith is what allowed him to do what he had been unable to do before; he departed.

John 4:51-54

Connection to the Point. By His word, Jesus healed from a distance.

Still going down/Still on the way/Now going down (v. 51). Interestingly, John concluded the previous sentence by saying the man departed, meaning he left Cana where he had talked with Jesus. This verse begins with the father traveling toward Capernaum. There's no gap between the two. John's account highlights the father's sense of urgency.

His servants met him (v. 51). These servants had departed from Capernaum, located about twenty miles away on the northwestern shore of the Sea of Galilee. The distance between the two is a full day's journey.

His boy was alive/living/Thy son liveth (v. 51). Jesus had earlier told the father his son would live (v. 50). Wrapped in His words was the promise the boy would recover, not that he would barely survive in some physically compromised or diminished state. The servants' report served as proof Jesus had healed someone from a distance, something Scripture rarely records He did. The Gospels tell of only two other occurrences, once when Jesus healed a soldier's servant and later the young daughter of a Canaanite woman (Matt. 8:5-13; 15:21-28). These miracles affirm Jesus's supernatural abilities and show that He was not limited by the things that limit us, not even time and space.

Yesterday, at one in the afternoon/Yesterday at the seventh hour (v. 52). Neither the father nor the servants completed the journey between Capernaum and Cana on the day the boy was healed. They met the next day somewhere between the two towns. The Greek is literally "the seventh hour." This *The seventh hour* reflects the Jewish reckoning of time. For them, the tracking of time began at sunrise, meaning about 6:00 a.m. Sunrise to sundown would have given about twelve hours of daylight (11:9). Thus the seventh hour would have been one in the afternoon. Hearing the time validated what the father had believed when he left Jesus. For the servants, the time was merely a detail with no significant meaning. For the father, though, the timing was vitally important.

The fever left him (v. 52). The servants came to report the facts—the fever was gone. Certainly, emotions were involved; the servants were doubtless excited to share the good news. The wording does not indicate faith was involved in the servants' report or that they realized Jesus was involved in what had happened. The father knew, though, what the servants did not; Jesus was responsible for his son's condition improving so dramatically.

He himself believed, along with his whole household/He and his whole household believed/The father . . . himself believed, and his whole house (v. 53). This phrase spotlights the climax of the governmental official's faith. He had originally been part of the group that would not believe unless they saw signs and miracles (v. 48). He heard, though, Jesus's authoritative words and believed (v. 50). In this verse, though, it's almost as if the reader can hear the inquiry, "HE believed?" and the response, "Yes, even him—and the rest of his family!" It was unexpected and out of character. Yet, the father had come to full faith, recognizing what Jesus could do and had done for his boy.

For the household to believe, the father had to have communicated what had happened. The *whole household* had to include the man's wife, any other children they had, and the servants. Until they heard the full report, they likely thought the fever had merely run its course. This, though, was not the case. They believed because the father had told them about his encounter and conversation with Jesus. He had reported the timing of his conversation and how Jesus simply proclaimed his son would live. The father had to have pointed out that Jesus alone was the source of his son's healing. In the same way, that happens with Christ's followers today, who believe because of what they hear about Jesus.

The second sign Jesus performed/The second miracle that Jesus did (v. 54). Earlier in Cana, Jesus had turned water into wine. Those in charge, the groom and the headwaiter, did not know Jesus was involved. This sign was exactly the opposite. The person of high rank, the royal official, knew who had performed the miracle; the rest of his household did not—at least not initially.

As with a roadside sign that points to something beyond itself, this sign pointed to Jesus's power over sickness and death—a power that would have been available only to the long-awaited Messiah. This sign affirmed what John had said about Jesus in his prologue, "In him was life" (1:4).

After he came/coming from Judea to Galilee (v. 54). This trek began when Jesus "left Judea and went again/back once more to Galilee/left Judaea, and departed again into Galilee" (v. 3). The trip took longer than usual because He had stayed two days with the Samaritans living near Sychar (v. 40). Although Jesus did minister in and around Jerusalem, most of His messianic ministry was in Galilee. Later, Jews in Jerusalem would be astonished by the possibility that the Christ, meaning the Messiah, would come from Galilee (7:41).