

Jesus Heals the Officials Son
John 4:43-54

This miracle is John's second sign. In the prologue he wrote that God has entered the world for the sake of sinful humanity. (1:12) Christ is the one anticipated by the prophets and he is the Jewish messiah but the work he does is for the sake of **all** of humanity. Because he is the universal messiah, all who believe, both Jew and **Gentile**, can benefit from his work equally if they trust in his redeeming work alone. (1:12) The healing of the official's son tells of the universal nature of Christ's work because it involves a **Gentile** pleading for the life of his mortally ill son.

John related the first sign in order to show that Christ's work on the cross will transcend humanity's desire to seek personal merit through religion. That is to say, the notion that religious piety and tradition are able to purify a person and render them sinless before God is denied. (Actually this notion is a distortion of the real faith of Israel according to Paul but it is what their faith had become.) The meaning of the first sign is directed primarily towards Israel and it is intended to offer a corrective to the distortion that had occurred around the issue of how a person is made pure in the sight of God. The new wine of Christ's shed blood as the means by which we are purified and guaranteed an invitation to the messianic banquet is the main point of the miracle.

The second sign is a logical extension of the first because it shows that a **Gentile** is able to enter into a relationship with God and share with Israel the benefits of a new relationship with God on the basis of faith in Christ.

4:43-45

John says tells his readers that Jesus was on his way to Galilee because of the hostility of the Pharisees (4:1-3) and the Galileans welcomed him because they had witnessed what he had done at the wedding feast. (1:45) While the religious authorities in Jerusalem had rejected him, the Galileans honoured him. Interestingly, those steeped in religion rejected Jesus for the same reason many Galileans accepted him.

The second sign is preceded by an encounter with Nicodemus, (3:1-21) a representative from Judaism and a Samaritan woman. (4:1-26) Now he relates an encounter with a Gentile official because he wants to recognize the universal relevance of Jesus as the Messiah of God.

NOTE: The film presents Nicodemus in a favourable light I think and this treatment gives the perception to the viewer that he eventually came to faith.

Note the progression in these encounters! Nicodemus is unaware of his own need and the great gift that Jesus offers whereas the Samaritan woman becomes increasingly aware of her need as well as who Jesus is as she continues to converse with him. Now John brings forward a man who is deeply aware of his need as well as Jesus' ability to act on his behalf even though his faith is only dim version of what eventually develops in him and his entire family. (4:53b) This incident foreshadows the acceptance of Christ amongst the Gentiles as a whole.

NOTE: The Acts of the Apostles makes it clear what a struggle it was for first century Jewish believers to finally comprehend and accept the fact that Gentiles as well as Jews were included in the promise that God had first given them.

4:46-47

John explains that this miracle took place in Cana and that is why the official came to Jesus asking for his help. Since the man is a Gentile he would not have been at the wedding feast so he must have been told what Jesus had previously done and that he had returned.

There is an important lesson here. Those in need of Jesus healing power need to be told of him by someone. Personal faith in Jesus must be shared because the Gospel reaches the world primarily through the testimony of those who have already witnessed and experienced Christ's healing power in their own lives.

From the official's encounter with Jesus we cannot tell what he believed about Jesus other than the fact that he could heal his mortally ill son. His "begging" suggests that he was not about to leave until Jesus came with him because he realized that only Jesus could bring his son back to health.

1:48-54

Jesus' initial response seems to come "out of left field" because there seems to be no self-evident reason for him to make a statement about the inadequacy of faith based on miraculous events.

There are two possibilities. Either he is probing the nature and depth of the official's faith or else he is creating a situation where the man can come to an understanding of the limitations of his own faith. It is possible that Jesus' first response made the official realize that there was something incomplete about his faith. If this is the reason for Jesus' response then the conclusion of the story is explained; the official finally came to realize that Jesus had something that he and his entire family needed as well as his son.

The other possibility is that Jesus is probing the nature and strength of the official's faith. His son is dying and nothing Jesus can say will divert him from his determination to convince him that he ought to come to where his

son is and heal him. At first he begged Jesus to heal his son but with a growing confidence he demands, “Sir, come down before my child dies.” (48) With this second request Jesus tells him to return to his home where he will find his son healed. The official did what was requested of him thus demonstrating an authentic belief that Jesus could do as he had asked without the need for another sign. He returned to his home expecting to find his son well again.

Even before the official arrives at his home he is met by his servants and he discovered that his son was healed at the precise moment that Jesus spoke.

In the first sign Jesus had turned water into wine and now he had changed death to life. The result of all of this was that a Gentile official and his entire household came to a resolute faith in Jesus as the one sent by God to heal the world.

Insights into the Nature of Faith that Come from this Sign!

1. The boy was never in physical contact with Jesus but Jesus was able to heal him. However, the son’s illness required his father to seek Jesus on his behalf. This fact establishes an important aspect of Christian life that compels us to seek the power of Christ for those who are in desperate need of his healing love and power. Real faith creates in the heart of the believer a desire for others to be included in the saving work that God does in Christ.
2. Faith may be awakened by a sign from God but ultimately a person must say yes to the Christ whose nature and purpose is disclosed by his miraculous acts.
3. Faith has a development. At first the official’s faith is defined by his belief that Jesus can heal his son but by the end of the story he has come to a deeper knowledge of who Jesus is. He realizes that it is not only his son who is in desperate need of Jesus’ healing power, but his whole family as well. We cannot tell from the story the entire content

of his faith or that of his family but it must have involved a simple trust that what Jesus did for the son must be repeated in them. They came to see that they, no less than the son, needed healing.

The Theological Meaning of the Sign:

1. Even a Gentile may share in the divine marriage that Jesus offered to his own people.
2. Real faith is not a response to signs and wonders but to Jesus himself.
3. Faith is trust in the healing work that Jesus does.
4. Faith is more than accepting Jesus words as true. Confident response is a necessary aspect of faith.
5. The issue of life over death depends upon the response of those who meet him.
6. The healing of the official's son foreshadows the effect of the cross. Those who trust in Jesus' substitutionary death are made whole.

Completed Friday January 21, 2005