



INTERPRETING THE SIGNS

READING JOHN'S GOSPEL

**SESSION 12:
JESUS RELIEVES
A HELPLESS POLITICIAN**

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JESUS RELIEVES A HELPLESS POLITICIAN SESSION 12

SERMON DISCUSSION GUIDE

1. If Jesus' hometown is Nazareth, how do you explain John's "clarifying" explanation in v.44?
2. What assumptions do you think we are to have about the politician when we read that he is central to this story?
3. What is wrong with signs and wonders? How does that conflict with or complement John's purposes (John 20:30-31)?
4. Why do you think Jesus prefers that we build our faith on testimony concerning him rather than signs and wonders

PERSONAL STUDY GUIDE

The Beloved Disciple continues to draw us into the lives of people that represent all walks and situations of life. Jesus brought celebration life and joy to an unknowing (and unprepared) bride and groom at their wedding party by providing wine—wine that symbolized Jesus’ purifying blood and the celebration his death brings us into as children of God. Jesus’ abrupt confrontation with the “victorious” Nicodemus brought this learned and powerful religious and civic leader to face the reality that he needed to start all over and be born again—born of repentance and faith towards the Son of God. Jesus brought hope and life to an outcast racial minority group through a caring but direct conversation with a sexually promiscuous woman who needed the love and acceptance of Jesus to bring her life.

John moves away from the religious metaphors seen in these earlier encounters and brings us face-to-face with a politician—a politician in need of help. In this brief story, Jesus will teach us much about ourselves and our weaknesses. Through this story, John will show us how we need the same help Jesus provided this politician.

STUDY THE SCRIPTURES

Read the Passage:

John 4:43-54

Think Through the Questions:

1. Why did the Galileans welcome Jesus?
2. Why did the official seek Jesus? How did Jesus respond to the initial motivations of the official?
3. Why do you think Jesus did not go with the official, but told the official to go and that his son would live?
4. What changed in regards to faith of the official?

Respond to the Questions Below:

COMMENTARY

This story begins with Jesus leaving after two days of fruitful ministry in Samaria. The reason for Jesus' leaving seems somewhat strange, for John says that "Jesus himself had testified that a prophet has no honor in his own hometown" (v.44). Samaria wasn't Jesus' hometown. Additionally, he was honored there because they believed in his words and understood that he was Savior of the world (v.42). Nazareth is Jesus' hometown (1:45), but Nazareth appears nowhere in this story. So what did John mean by Jesus' hometown in this passage? Jesus' own people were the Jews, and he was leaving Jerusalem (the capital of the Jews) because his hour had not yet come and didn't want to prematurely stir up the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem (4:1-3). It appears that John wants us to recall that Jesus is on his way from Jerusalem, where he is not honored. Of all places, Jesus should be honored in the city of the temple, which was his Father's house. However, he was not. Instead, he found honor in the most unlikely of places—in Samaria, and continues his journey away from Jerusalem.

Jesus goes from Samaria to Cana of Galilee, where he had turned water to wine. The Galileans welcome Jesus, having seen all that he had done in Jerusalem at the feast. As the gospel unfolds, the Beloved Disciple contrasts those who are drawn to Jesus because of what he does and those that are drawn to Jesus because of what he says or what others say about him. While being drawn to Jesus for what he does through miracles and signs is not wrong and indeed is part of the purpose of John's gospel, belief in Jesus because of his signs must mature to belief because of the truth of the testimony about him...primarily that He is the Christ, the Son of God. This story develops this idea more fully.

Jesus comes upon a royal official from Capernaum, which is a town in Galilee. As the woman at the well, the author does not reveal the name of the person, just his station in life. From this, we are to assume the general qualities and characteristics of royal officials. Some of these characteristics would be: influential, powerful, relatively wealthy, independent, shrewd, and possibly compromised or duplicitous. So, here we have a person stationed in the highest class in society seeking help from a carpenter's son from the small, hick-town of Nazareth.

The official's son was sick—to the point of death. Hearing that Jesus had returned to Galilee, the official goes to see Jesus and asks Jesus to come and heal his son. Jesus' response was again strange and mysterious, just as with his mom at the wedding feast, the Jews at the temple, Nicodemus, and the woman at the well. Hearing the official's request to heal his son, Jesus rebukes the official for his superficial faith—a faith based upon signs and wonders. Jesus could peer into the heart and mind of the official and know his motives, just as Jesus knew the sexual history of the Samaritan woman. The official's efforts were the last-ditch efforts of a desperate dad that loved his son. Did he really believe in Jesus as the Son of God, the Savior of the world? No. He had heard Jesus could perform miracles, and as any dad would do, he went to Jesus to find a cure for his son.

Even after Jesus' statement, the official does not divert from his goal and again asks Jesus to "come...before my child dies." The official wants Jesus to make a special trip—a full two-day journey—to heal his son. John twice mentioned the fact that the official wanted Jesus to come home with him (vv.47, 49). Why did he expect Jesus to stop what he was doing and take two days, which would have been two days away from other people and other needs? Was the official being presumptuous? Was his son more important than others' sons and daughters? Was he putting too much weight in his identity and position as a royal official, just as Nicodemus had done? Did he think he could wield his power and position over Jesus?

Jesus does not go with the official, but instead simply states, "Go, your son will live." At this point, the official believes the word that Jesus spoke to him and went on his way (v.50). Maybe Jesus's statement about the official's lack of faith stirred something in the official, for he no longer insists that Jesus come with him, but simply believes Jesus' words, "Your son will live." Acting upon his faith, he leaves without Jesus for his two-day journey home. The royal official, responding to Jesus' correction and response, believes and obeys. On the second day of his journey home, the official's servants meet him and tell him that his son is recovering. Inquiring further, the official asks his servants when his son started to recover. The servants' reply confirmed to the official that his son started to recover the same hour Jesus had said, "Your son will live." The testimony of the servants regarding the work of Jesus in the official's son led to the official and his household believing in Jesus. The official didn't believe when he got home and

saw his son recovered from his illness. The official believed in the work Jesus had done as witnessed and testified to by his servants. The official began his journey with a heart and mind looking for signs and wonders. He completed his journey by believing in the testimony of others regarding the work and power of Jesus—the true sign of a mature faith.

John includes this brief story of the official and his son to show us the immaturity of believing in Jesus because of what he does rather than who he is. While Jesus does often work to meet the immediate needs that we have, followers of Jesus must develop the maturity to consistently follow Christ because of their faith in God's word. Often times, signs and wonders and the meeting of felt needs come at the beginning of a person's walk in Christ, as in the case of the royal official. Jesus does this in order to demonstrate that he is the man of whom the scriptures testify. However, it is common for Christians to expect Jesus to do the same thing throughout their entire Christian lives. They expect Jesus to accommodate them in the emotional and material spheres of their lives. People that expect Jesus to always make them happy, excited, and emotionally satisfied will never develop the sustaining faith in the word of God that will truly bring emotional stability. In the lack of Jesus' continued emotional stimulation, they will turn to, or turn back to, other means of emotional stimuli such as drugs, alcohol, sex, partying, sports, etc....anything that they believe will provide enduring emotional satisfaction. Those that always expect Jesus to keep them in perfect health and abundant wealth will turn to other sources of these things when their expectations aren't met. They will miss out on the blessings and steadfastness of learning the discipline to wait upon the Lord.

Churches and other Christian organizations often enable this immaturity because of persistent emphasis in the following emotional stimulants:

- healings and miracles
- emotionally uplifting but spiritually empty worship
- need-driven sermons and books void of substantive, life-changing teaching
- other rituals and practices that provide sensual stimulation but are of little content or substance

In regards to material prosperity, one doesn't have to spend too much time flipping through the cable channels or browsing a Christian book store to find preachers and authors telling how increased faith in Jesus leads to increased material blessings.

It is important to be clear on a couple points. First, Jesus meets our needs—all of them, whether they are emotional, spiritual, material, or any other type. The point is that our faith must increasingly rest upon the teachings of Jesus as taught in the Scriptures, and not on a steady stream of signs, wonders, and miracles that meet our needs. Second, deeply emotional experiences are valuable and necessary in the Christian life. Our faith should exist and express itself emotionally in the pits of dark sadness and in the glory of exuberance and joy. Not only this, we should create music reflecting these experiences. However, we must not make emotional experiences the substance of our walk in Christ. A walk in Christ is built upon a solid faith in Jesus' identity, what he has done and is doing in the world, and what he has called us to be and do. From this, we will live experiences resulting in the outpouring of emotion and sentiment. If we remove truth, faith, calling, and obedience and leave emotion and sentiment, we have rituals that are but shadows of what it means to walk in spirit and in truth.

THINK THROUGH THE ISSUES

It is interesting that the story with lessons concerning signs, wonders, and faith would consist of a politician—our modern term for “royal official.” As in our day, royal officials had people continually coming to them to meet needs. In a moment of need, the politician turned to Jesus the way people turned to him—to meet an immediate need.

People today seek earnestly for people to meet their needs. We hold up politicians and officials, promising them power through our vote and in return, we expect them to enact policies and law that make our lives better. We seek doctors to heal our bodies and cure our ailments. We pursue lovers and companions to end our loneliness and give us a sense of self-respect, love, and purpose. But why do we come to Jesus? Is he simply one more person we pursue in order to keep our lives in balance and to meet our needs?

DINNER TABLE DISCUSSION GUIDE

MEAL #1: A SICK LITTLE BOY

Read John 4:46-54 and discuss.

1. Imagine that the “royal official” was Governor Pawlenty or even President Obama. What would you think about one of these officials going to see Jesus to ask him to heal his son?
2. What would that say about these officials? What would that say about Jesus?
3. How would people that new these officials respond to that?

MEAL #2: A LOVING DAD

Read John 4:46-54 and review.

1. Cana was about 15 miles from Capernaum. The official probably walked. What does that say about how much he loved his son?
2. What do your parents do that shows you their love?
3. How did the royal official affect his family in regards to faith in Jesus?

MEAL #3: SIGNS AND WONDERS

Read John 4:46-54 and review.

Definition: *Signs and Wonders* – miracles performed by Jesus that proved he was God.

1. Why do you think Jesus corrects the official for believing only after seeing signs and wonders?
2. How do you think Jesus wants us to believe?

MEAL #4: FAITH

Read John 4:46-54 and review.

1. When does the official believe in Jesus’ words?
2. What did he believe in at this point?
3. What do you think the official and his family believed? When was that point of belief?

FAMILY PRAYERS

SERMON NOTES



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