

## COMMENTARY ON JOHN

### LESSON NUMBER 54

**John 4:46** *“So Jesus came again into Cana of Galilee, where He made the water wine. And there was a certain nobleman, whose son was sick at Capernaum. <sup>47</sup> When he heard that Jesus was come out of Judaea into Galilee, he went unto Him, and besought Him that He would come down, and heal his son: for he was at the point of death. <sup>48</sup> Then said Jesus unto him, Except ye see signs and wonders, ye will not believe.”* ... (John 4:46-48)

## **JESUS COMES TO CANA OF GALILEE**

### INTRODUCTION

When we are told that during Jesus’ prodigious ministry He *“went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil; for God was with Him.”* (Acts 10:38). In this, we are introduced to the manner of Divine life. It is active – never reverting to useless idleness. It is productive, never maintaining a neutral stance. It is purposeful, always doing the will of God and advancing to an appointed destination. In order to do this, the Lord Jesus maintained constant communication with His Father, always being sensitive to His will. His was not a life of happenstance and mere coincidence. Nor, indeed, was activity an end of itself. There was a purpose served by what Jesus did, and it was the result of hearing and obeying the Father which is in heaven. His stance in life called for both alertness and sensitivity. It required discernment and understanding. All of these are wrapped up in *“doing good,”* as well as His unique ministry of healing *“all that were possessed of the devil”* – that is, those He confronted, or was made aware of. Knowing these things is relevant to the way in which the disciples of Jesus live. Our engagement in *“doing the will of God from the heart”* (Eph 6:6), and doing whatever we do *“to the glory of God”* (1 Cor 10:31) requires the same kind of focus Jesus exhibited. To be sure, it is proportionate to our position in Christ’s body (1 Cor 12:18), and our spiritual capacity – but what was required of Jesus is also, in our measure, required of us. This is what we have in the place of manuals of conduct, and methodologies that attempt to do the work of God. Jesus did not learn how to serve God in the rabbinical schools. There are books in heaven, books that will be opened on the day of judgment (Rev 20:12). At that time what we have done will be formally evaluated, which will include what we did, how we did it, and for what reason it was done. For this reason, it is good for us to be students of Jesus – how He worked, what He did, and why He did it.

### **AND THERE WAS A CERTAIN MAN**

**John 4:46** *“So Jesus came again into Cana of Galilee, where He made the water wine. <sup>44</sup> And there was a certain nobleman, whose son was sick at Capernaum.”*

Having completed His work there, Jesus had left Samaria. The harvest that was ready to be reaped was reaped – a harvest that ripened in a remarkably short period of time,

and apparently without a lot of input from other resources. So far as the record is concerned, the people were brought to the point of readiness by the testimony of one woman, and being in the presence of Jesus. The reason for the success was the presence of Divine power – just as it was later on the day of Pentecost, in the city of Samaria, in Ephesus, and other places. The people of God must never grow accustomed to working for the Lord without power. A powerless church is an apostate church who has denied, or rejected the power, as declared by Paul (2 Tim 3:1-5).

**CANA OF GALILEE.** This city is only mentioned four times, representing three occasions in Scripture. First, it is where Jesus did His first miracle, turning water into wine (John 2:1-11). Second, as our text states, it is where Jesus went after leaving Samaria (John 4:46). Third, it is declared to be the hometown of Nathanael (John 21:2). It apparently was not a famous town, but some God-inspired and empowered things took place there.

**WHERE HE MADE THE WATER WINE.** Of old time it is written, *"He hath made His wonderful works to be remembered"* (Psa 111:4). That is why we have a record of the works of the Lord – not only in order that we might know them, but that we may **remember** them. When Israel was delivered from Egypt, Moses told them, *"Remember this day"* (Ex 13:3). On the border of the promised land Moses said, *"Remember that thou wast a servant in Egypt, and that the Lord thy God brought thee thence through a mighty hand"* (Deut 5:15). Later, Israel was admonished, *"Remember His marvelous works that He hath done, His wonders, and the judgments of His mouth"* (1 Chron 16:12; Psa 105:5). Holy men have stated, *"I Remembered"* (Psa 77:3; 119:52; Jonah 2:7). The disciples are frequently set forth as remembering what Jesus had said and done (Lk 22:61; 24:8; John 2:17,22; 12:16; Acts 11:16). If God made His works to be *"remembered,"* then it ought to be obvious that there is benefit in remembering them. This also assists men to redefine what it meant by the somewhat ambiguous term "relevant."

It might surprise you how very little modern day professing Christians can *"remember"* about Jesus – what He did and what He said, why He came into the world, and what He is doing now. That would be an interesting project, to ask people what they know about Jesus, and to record it for personal perusal.

**A CERTAIN NOBLEMAN.** Although there are several people blessed by Jesus that are not named, no person was anonymous. If their name was not known, they were known for what they experienced from the Lord – like the woman at the well. Now we read of *"a certain nobleman."* We also read of *"a certain scribe"* (Matt 8:19), *"a certain ruler"* (Matt 9:18), *"a certain man"* (Matt 7:14), *"a certain woman"* (Mk 5:25), *"a certain poor widow"* (Mk 12:42), *"a certain young man"* (Mk 14:51), *"a certain centurion"* (Lk 7:2), *"a certain lawyer"* (Lk 10:25), *"a certain Pharisee"* (Lk 11:37), *"a certain blind man"* (Lk 18:35), and *"a certain maid"* (Lk 22:56). Behold, out of groups of people – scribes, rulers, men, women, poor widows, young men, centurions, lawyers, Pharisees, blind men, and maidens – yet attention is given to one of the group, and not to the group itself. **We must never allow ourselves to become so absorbed by group identity that the fact that Jesus deals with us an individuals escapes our attention.** There will be times in your life when the group with which you are associated will not be sufficient.

**WHOSE SON WAS SICK IN CAPERNAUM.** Other versions read, *"a certain royal official,"* <sup>NASB</sup> *official,* <sup>RSV</sup> *"of high position,"* <sup>BBE</sup> *"officer in the royal service"* <sup>CJB</sup> *"Certain courtier,"* <sup>DARBY</sup> *and "government official."* <sup>GWN</sup>

**Notice that in the presence of Jesus, earthly rank is of no consequence. All earthly**

distinctions are reduced to nothing at the feet of Jesus. Whether of royalty or from peasantry, genuine need strips you of all distinction. That is why it is folly to seek such distinction. "Need" humbles a person – a posture that is required when coming to the Lord (James 4:10).

Capernaum is estimated to have been sixteen miles from Cana – no doubt an inconvenient distance for many. Notice that word concerning the presence of Jesus was carried by someone from Cana to Capernaum. Also consider that the Nobleman was alert enough to what was happening in the next city. **Seen correctly, the lack of alertness is like a robber.** There are people who will be condemned because they were not aware of opportunities that has been given them to actually minister to Jesus Himself by giving aid to His brethren (Matt 25:45-46).

The son was "sick." In Scripture, "sick" does not mean not feeling well, although that is involved. The word from which "sick" is translated means "BE WEAK, FEEBLE; UNIVERSALLY, TO BE WITHOUT STRENGTH, POWERLESS," <sup>THAYER</sup> AND "OF INCAPABILITY OF ANY KIND, BE WEAK, BE INCAPABLE." <sup>FRIBERG</sup> This is speaking of being in some way incapacitated, disabled, or impaired. Disease itself is a commentary on man's dependence on the Lord. The nobleman saw this, and came to Jesus.

### **HE WENT AND BESOUGHT JESUS**

*"<sup>47</sup> When he heard that Jesus was come out of Judaea into Galilee, he went unto Him, and besought Him that He would come down, and heal his son: for he was at the point of death."*

**WHEN HE HEARD.** Again, I want to emphasize the alertness of this nobleman. Probably surrounded by servants, there were probably only certain things that demanded alertness on his part. But he was apparently keeping track of Jesus, and knew when He was close enough to get to Him quickly.

This also highlights the value of testimony – declaring what the Lord has done. David once resolved, *"I will meditate also of all thy work, and talk of Thy doings"* (Psa 77:12). In his case, taking was the result of meditating on what the Lord had done. If the Lord has worked among us, talk about it! Your words may very well fall on the ears of a person that is longing to experience the very thing God has done among us.

**HE WENT UNTO HIM.** Whatever this nobleman had heard was sufficient for him to go to Jesus with hope in his heart, that Jesus would do for him what he needed to have done. Reporting things like attendance, special provisions for the young or the old, etc., is not sufficient to induce a real seeker to come for a solution. Note, the nobleman did not come to investigate the claims, but to ask the Lord to do something that no one else could do.

Note also that He was not asked to come – as Jesus did when He said, *"Come unto Me"* (Matt 11:28), or *"Come, follow Me"* (Lk 18:22). In this case, He was drawn, as Jesus said (John 6:44,65), without any perception that this is what was happening. He came to Jesus because he had heard, just as the Samaritans came to Jesus because they heard the woman to whom Jesus had witnessed. God works through means.

**HE BESOUGHT HIM THAT HE WOULD COME DOWN.** Other versions read, *"implored,"* <sup>KJV</sup> *"requesting,"* <sup>NASB</sup> *"begged,"* <sup>NIV</sup> *"made a request,"* <sup>BBE</sup> *"asked,"* <sup>CEB</sup> *"pleaded,"* <sup>CSB</sup> *"prayed,"* <sup>DARBY</sup> *"asked him repeatedly,"* <sup>ISV</sup> and *"began to beg."* <sup>AMPLIFIED</sup>

The word translated "besought" [erotao] means "TO REQUEST, ENTREAT, BEG, BESEECH," <sup>THAYER</sup> "MAKING A REQUEST ASK, DEMAND, AND BEG." <sup>FRIBERG</sup> It appears to me there is a certain fervency in

*"beseeking"* that is not necessarily in *"asking"* or *"requesting."* I understand this to be anything but a casual request. I do not see how asking or requesting can be logically blended with urgency and emergency. In English, the word *"ask"* has to do with interrogation, asking a question. "TO CALL ON FOR AN ANSWER; MAKE A REQUEST." Whereas, *"beseech"* means "TO BEG FOR URGENTLY OR ANXIOUSLY; REQUEST EARNESTLY." MERRIAM-WEBSTER

The effect of toning down Scriptural words seems to me to be counterproductive. Aside from academics, the people of the East are not noted for western casualness, and such a frame of mind should not be imposed on a Scriptural text.

**HIS SON WAS AT THE POINT OF DEATH.** Other versions read, *"close to death,"* NIV *"was about to die,"* CEB *"even ready to die,"* GENEVA *"near dying,"* MRD and *"was lying at the point of death."* AMPLIFIED

The man unquestionably had faith, but it was not perfected. He knew Jesus could heal His son, but thought He had to come to his house to do so. The text suggests he also thought if the son died, it would be too late to do anything about it. However, the Lord will put the best face on this man's faith.

It is *"appointed unto man once to die"* (Heb 9:27), and it appeared as though that time had been reached for this man's son. Yet, like Hezekiah, the nobleman seeks for an extension of life. Incidentally, the Lord answered Hezekiah, *"And I will add unto thy days fifteen years"* (2 Kgs 20:6).

Valid pleadings with the Lord are, for the one beseeching, always subject to the will of God. That is stated succinctly for those in Christ Jesus: *"And this is the confidence that we have in Him, that, if we ask any thing according to His will, He heareth us: And if we know that He hear us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of Him."* (1 John 5:14-15). True faith knows this intuitively, and is always willing for God to act as He wills. Even Nebuchadnezzar, having confronted the Living God, knew *"He doeth according to His will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth"* (Dan 4:35).

Because faith comes from God (Eph 6:23), is authored and finished by Jesus (Heb 12:2), and is substantive and evidential (Heb 11:1), it shapes the way those possessing it think. It moves them to ask for things that are not otherwise possible. It awakens hope within so that the individual acquires a certain boldness to approach the Lord (Heb 10:22). Unbelief causes a person to be fearful and timorous, so that they sink beneath the wave of circumstance. It is no wonder that Abraham is said to have been *"strong in faith,"* fully persuaded that with the Lord the impossible was possible, and that *"what He had promised, He was able also to perform"* (Rom 4:21). However, faith is always tested, and it is no different with this nobleman.

### **EXCEPT YE SEE SIGNS AND WONDERS**

*"<sup>48</sup> Then said Jesus unto him, Except ye see signs and wonders, ye will not believe."*

Now, the Lord will test the faith of this nobleman. Jesus does not do this because He is not sure about the faith of this man. It was ever true, *"He knew what was in man"* (John 2:25). The purpose for this test is to confirm to the nobleman the strength of his faith. He will cause him reach deeper, and look higher. Jesus is glorified when men pursue their petitions in the vigor of faith. What the Lord says will not promote unbelief in those who receive it.

**THEN SAID JESUS UNTO HIM.** This was probably said publicly. I assume his

disciples were still traveling with Him, having accompanied Him from Judaea to Galilee (John 4:7-8,27,31-33). Jesus did not ignore the man for a while, as He did the Syrophenician woman (Matt 15:33). He tested her by appearing to ignore her pleas. Here He employs a different manner.

**EXCEPT YE SEE SIGNS AND WONDERS.** Other versions read, "*Unless you people see signs and wonders,*"<sup>NKJV</sup> "*If people don't see miracles and amazing things,*"<sup>GWN</sup> "*unless I do more and more miracles?*"<sup>LIVING</sup> "*You people must see proofs from God and miracles,*"<sup>IE</sup> "*Unless you see signs and miracles happen,*"<sup>AMPLIFIED</sup>

Jesus is speaking to everyone present, not just the nobleman: "*you people.*"<sup>NKJV/IE</sup> Was this nobleman any different than the rest of the people? Would he be swallowed up by the society of the doubters, or will he prove that he has faith? Jesus will not allow people with faith to remain identified with those who do not possess faith. He will cause them to stand out, separating themselves from those who do not believe. He will test them so this will take place.

In history, Job excelled his peers, and God allowed him to be tested in such a way as to confirm that was the case. Abraham was above those in his area, so God tested him in a way that caused that difference to become evident. Joseph's faith was greater than that of his brothers, and when it was tested, that was clearly shown to be the case. Divine tests confirm the presence of faith – and it is not only something men can see, but angels as well, as in the testing of Abraham's faith (Gen 22:11-12). Those who desire a trouble-free life in this world must think higher, and within the scope of God's will.

**YE WILL NOT BELIEVE.** "*you will by no means believe,*"<sup>NKJV</sup> "*you simply will not believe,*"<sup>NASB</sup> "*you will never believe,*"<sup>NIV</sup> "*ye will in no wise believe,*"<sup>ASV</sup> "*You will not have faith,*"<sup>BBE</sup> "*simply will not trust!*"<sup>CJB</sup> "*they won't believe,*"<sup>GWN</sup> "*Won't any of you believe in Me,*"<sup>LIVING</sup> "*or you will never believe,*"<sup>IE</sup> "*you [people] never will believe (trust, have faith) at all.*"<sup>AMPLIFIED</sup>

If this was not Jesus speaking, some might be prone to question what he said. After all, multitudes of people had followed Him and seen Him (Matt 4:25; 8:18; 9:8,36), and many of them had believed (John 2:23; 4:41; 7:31; 8:30; 10:42). However, these were all the minority of the people. Jesus had addressed this saying to the people, as some versions highlight: "*You people.*"<sup>NKJV/NASB/NIV/CJB/IE</sup> Paul alluded to this Jewish propensity when he wrote to the Corinthians, "*For the Jews require a sign.*" (1 Cor 1:22). The Jews said to Jesus, "*What sign showest Thou unto us, seeing that Thou doest these things?*" (John 2:18). Once, "*certain of the scribes and Pharisees*" said to Jesus, "*Master, we would see a sign from Thee*" (Matt 12:38; 16:1; Mk 8:11). Luke writes, "*And others, tempting Him, sought of Him a sign from heaven*" (Luke 11:16). Rather than being honest inquirers, these sayings were nothing more than the eruption of unbelief.

One might point to Gideon, who sought a twofold sign from God (Judges 6:36-40). But this was not requested to confirm whether or not God had spoken to him. Rather, it was to confirm that the God, who had not revealed Himself to Israel for many years, was now going to deliver them from the Midianites by the hand of Gideon. It was during a time of sparse revelation. But this was certainly not the kind of time in our text. The Son of God had come, and was going about doing good and healing all who were possessed of the devil. John the Baptist had introduced Him with powerful preaching, and reports of Jesus were circulating throughout Judaea and Galilee, and now Samaria. Still, unbelief was reigning among the Jews.

In our day, the chief method of impressing men that Jesus is who God says He is,

is the Gospel. Pointedly we are told that it is *"the power of God unto salvation"* (Rom 1:16). For example, the people in Samaria were confronted with Philip, who *"preached Christ unto them."* It is then written, *"And the people with one accord gave heed **unto those things which Philip spake**, hearing and seeing the miracles which he did"* (Acts 8:5-6). **The miracles were seen within the context of what Philip preached!** They did not give heed to the miracles, but unto *"the things which Philip spoke."*

If the Gospel of Christ is not believed, no sign or wonder will be able to induce faith in the people. The ministry of John the Baptist confirmed this is true. Multitudes of people heard and were baptized by John the Baptist, yet *"John did no miracle"* (John 10:41). This being true, there is no church program, provision, entertainment, or methodology that can bring men to believe on Christ Jesus. No charitable ministry can do so, nor can any deed of kindness. It is certainly not that any of these things are of themselves wrong. However, if people are going to believe and be saved, they will have to hear the Gospel, not see a sign.