

Notes for the Ones Called-Out to Meet

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A Second Sign – Healing From A Distance

by Dan Trygg

“And there was a royal official whose son was sick at Capernaum. ⁴⁷ When he heard that Jesus had come out of Judea into Galilee, he went to Him and was imploring Him to come down and heal his son; for he was at the point of death. ⁴⁸ So Jesus said to him, ‘Unless you people see signs and wonders, you simply will not believe.’ ⁴⁹ The royal official said to Him, ‘Sir, come down before my child dies.’ ⁵⁰ Jesus said to him, ‘Go; your son lives.’ The man believed the word that Jesus spoke to him and started off.”

John 4:46-50

John offers a second sign for our consideration (vs. 54). We have been plainly told that Jesus had been doing *numerous* signs (2:23; 3:1; 4:41). Thus, John’s reference to this being a second sign cannot refer to this incident being the second miracle that Jesus *ever* did, ...nor even the second miracle performed on His return to Galilee. It means that of all the *many miracles* that Jesus did (20:30,31), this is a second example that John offers for our consideration.

In our previous study, Jesus had been asked to stay for a few days with the Samaritans (cf. vs. 40). After remaining with them for two days, He and His disciples once again took up their journey to Galilee (cf. vs. 43).

Almost as an aside, John recalls a statement that Jesus had spoken, “A prophet is without honor in His own fatherland” (vs. 44). The Greek indicates it was something He said at a point in time in the past. Occasions where Jesus said these words are recorded for us in Matthew 13:53-58; Mark 6:1-6; and in Luke 4:24. In these passages, the people of Jesus’ home town took offense at His words and miracles, saying, in effect, “Who does He think He is? This is just the carpenter’s son!” **They remembered Him as the boy who had grown up in their streets, ...and would not accept words of correction or challenge from Him.** Instead, they saw His bold statements as impertinent. **Offended and angry, their hearts were closed to Him and His message.** As a result, “He could do no miracle there except that He laid His hands upon a few sick people and healed them. And He wondered at their unbelief” (Mk. 6:5,6).

Incidentally, we are not told directly the sequence of events, though there are some interesting parallels to note. In all four gospels, these incidents precede the feeding of the 5,000. Matthew, Mark, & Luke record this statement as occurring *after* John the Baptist had been arrested, and *shortly before* his death (Matt. 14; Mk. 6:14-29; Lk. 9:7-9). In John’s record the Baptist was still quite active even as recently as the beginning of this chapter. Matthew and Mark *begin* their record of Jesus’ ministry after John’s arrest (Matt. 4:12; Mk. 1:14). Putting all of this together, it would seem that John the Baptist either recently had been, or will very soon be, arrested by Herod. Therefore, *we are about at the starting point that the other gospels begin their records of Jesus’ ministry.* If this is accurate, then **the examples from the synoptic gospels had not as yet occurred.** Therefore, Jesus’ statement that “a prophet is without honor in his own country” must have been based upon *other* past experiences with His family, friends, and neighbors.

This is an important principle, which many of us will face in our own experience. Often the ones who are most difficult to convince are family members and friends from our childhood. People who *knew us* in our past often tend to *continue to think of us in whatever role we had at that time in our lives.* Not only do they tend to disbelieve and minimize the significance of our heart change, **they often do what Jesus’ acquaintances from His early life did, ...they become offended at us.** They may think we are phony, or that we are judging them, or that we are suddenly thinking we are better than them, ...*when those are not at all our thoughts, attitudes or motives.* This can be very confusing and frustrating for us, as we try to share what God has been doing in our lives. **When God chooses to repeat a teaching or event in the scriptures, it is usually especially important.** This principle is repeated in all four gospels, *...and it was Jesus’ own experience!* We should not be surprised, then, when it may happen to us.

It is interesting that this was apparently upon Jesus’ heart as He prepares to return to Galilee, ...even more curious that John would have mentioned this utterance *here*, since there really is nothing in the context which he provides which would indicate that Jesus was not being received with honor. As we put the facts together, **we find a common experience that Jesus had throughout His ministry: On the one hand, people were very excited and curious about the signs which He did, many even going out of their way to see and hear Him. On the other hand, there were also many who were offended by Him,** often because of jealousy or because His teachings and actions confronted their own shallowness or shook up their preconceived notions. **The signs, while definitely getting people’s attention, did not necessarily cure the ills or break down the prejudices of the hearts of those who witnessed them,** or heard of them.

There was no indication that the Galilean Jews were rejecting Him in John’s account, ...at least not *yet*. On the contrary, they seemed to welcome Him. **While in Jerusalem for the feast, many had heard Jesus preach, and had seen the miracles He did. Therefore, they were excited that He was returning to Galilee.**

“He came to Cana of Galilee where He had made the water wine” (vs. 46; Cf. 2:1-11). As we had mentioned before, the fact that both He and His mother had been at the wedding feast there probably meant that He had relatives in this town, and it was also the home town of Nathanael (21:2). **“There was a certain royal official, whose son was sick at Capernaum.”** The word for “royal official” basically means “of the king”, and could refer to an official of the king or possibly someone of royal blood, or even one of the king’s close friends. Here it is probably someone connected to Herod the tetrarch of Galilee. Chuza (Lk. 8:3) or Manaen (Acts 13:1) are two examples.

News traveled abroad quickly concerning Jesus’ whereabouts, a testimony to the impact He was already having. **When the royal official heard where He was, he went to Him.** Cana is located due north of Nazareth. It is about 18 miles from Capernaum, but it is about 3,450 feet higher in elevation. It would have been a strenuous hike to try to cover in one day. **He must have been quite desperate to leave his son at this time, knowing that he would be gone at least two days.** He obviously had a hope in Jesus’ ability to heal that went beyond mere curiosity. **When he found Jesus, the text says that “he was asking Him to come down and heal his son”** (vs. 47). The Greek verb indicates continual action. **He did not get an immediate positive response from Jesus.** He was urging or begging Him to come down and to heal his son. The Greek word structure places the emphasis on the asking or begging by using a purpose clause: **“he was imploring Him in order that He might come down and He might heal his son”.** The reason for the father’s urgency? His ailing son was “at the point of death”!

Jesus addressed His response to the man, but seemed to be lumping him together with the entire unbelieving populace (vs. 48). The statement in Greek is very strong, “If ever y’all might not see signs and wonders, not never (for emphasis) might y’all believe.” **On first blush, this seems to be a rejection of the man’s request, or at least an impatient response of resistance.** Looking a little closer, however, there are some important observations to make. **First, this statement could be simply a statement of truth.** The signs were given to direct people to faith in Messiah Jesus. **Secondly, Jesus is looking for a different kind of faith than just the belief that He could do miracles.** From His comment, it is quite clear that doing miracles was not enough. **The miracles were not ends in themselves.** It was not enough to dazzle people with a floor show of supernatural wonderments. **The issue was about believing in, trusting in, or giving allegiance to Jesus as Messiah-king sent from God.** **Thirdly, isn’t it interesting that in this very countryside where He would soon be facing their rejection and unbelief, ...where He would even soon be marveling at their unbelief and would be unable to do miracles there (Mk. 6:5,6)...**, that **He chose not to come blazing in with a dramatic show of miraculous power to awe and impress His relatives and countrymen?** Finally, it seems evident from the following context that **He is setting the royal official up for a challenge to his own faith.** By making His statement generic, Jesus points out a flaw or weakness in the faith of the multitude, but He is not making a judgment on the man *himself*. **The official is free to choose to be different than what has been the normal reaction of the crowds.**

When the father renews his plea again, restating the urgency of the situation, **Jesus said to him, “Go your way; your son lives.”** Jesus grants him *the purpose* for which he came, but *refuses his request*, which was to come with him. Of course, **the official had no visible evidence to suggest that anything had occurred at all.** Jesus’ words, “Unless you see..., you will not believe...”, take on a new meaning. If he insists that Jesus comes with him, he is admitting that he doesn’t trust or believe Him. *The man believed the word that Jesus spoke to him, and he started off.* As is often the case, **faith is evidenced by action** (cf. Hebrews 11).

When the man met his servants on the way, they reported that his son was doing better (vss. 51-53). Upon comparing times, **the official realized that his son’s improvement coincided with Jesus’ pronouncement to him. As a result, he and his household believed.** It is interesting to note that John’s recording of the man’s faith implies that this level or kind of faith was *different* than that which the official had possessed when he trusted Jesus’ word and started on his way back home. **Before, he believed Jesus could do something, then, after his interchange with Jesus, he trusted that Jesus would do something. Now, he trusts in Jesus Himself,** and evidently became a committed follower of His. **His loyalty and allegiance were committed to Jesus.** One evidence of this fact is that we even have this incident recorded for us. How would these events be known unless the man himself had later reported them? Evidently he began publicly promoting Him by recounting his testimony. To the people in Cana, or in Nazareth, this was not evident at the time. Jesus’ involvement was for all practical purposes out of their sight.

Other observations from this episode: First, we do not always have to be present, or lay hands on someone, for God to be able to heal or cast out a demon. This is a second incident recorded in the NT where the Lord purposely healed someone *in absentia*, the other being the case where He cast out the demon from the Canaanite woman’s daughter (Matt. 15:21-28). That doesn’t mean we should disregard these other means, but let God be God and do things however *He* wants us to do them. **God is not limited by particular methods. The other lesson which both these incidents exemplify is the value of perseverance in prayer.** In both of these examples, the petitioners were confronted with apparent rejection. As they persevered, however, Jesus granted their desire. Cf. Lk. 11:1-13; 18:1-8.