

## The Healing of the Royal Official's Son, John 4. 46-54. Bethesda Coffee Morning. 24 July 2013.

This is the second in our studies of the sign-miracles of John's gospel. The key verse of the gospel is found towards its close, and states clearly the purpose which John had in writing ... 'truly Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name'. We know therefore that to encourage his readers' faith in Jesus, the apostle John selected several miracles from the many which Jesus performed during His lifetime here on earth. He (John) described these miracles as 'signs' because they 'signified' something ... they pointed to something beyond themselves; namely, to Jesus as the Messiah and as God's Son.

When recording his chosen signs, John drew attention various details which stressed the greatness of the miracles and thereby the glory of the One who performed them. So that, for instance, as Len pointed out two weeks ago, when relating the first of Jesus' signs – that of turning water to wine at Cana of Galilee – John drew attention to the size of the six water pots which stood at the wedding-feast ... telling us that, taken together, these pots held in the region of 150 gallons of water ... then noting that they were each filled 'up to the brim'. There was therefore, John wants us to know, no shortage of water available to be changed into wine if drawn out for the use of the guests ... and not only so, but, the apostle reports, according to the verdict of the host at the feast, the water which was drawn out was turned into the very finest wine.

With this in mind, let me read John's record of the second sign which the Lord performed when He left Judea and entered Galilee – a miracle-sign performed, as had been the first, in the village of Cana – a miracle-sign suggested, not, as the first, by the request of a mother (His mother), but by the request of a father.<sup>1</sup> I am reading the closing section of John chapter 4 ...

Jesus came again to Cana of Galilee where He had made the water wine. And there was a certain royal official<sup>2</sup> whose son was sick at Capernaum. When he heard that Jesus had come out of Judea into Galilee, he went to Him and implored Him to come down and heal his son, for he was at the point of death ... "Sir, come down before my child dies!"

Jesus said to him, "Go your way; your son lives". The man believed the word that Jesus spoke to him and went his way. And as he was going down, his servants met him and told him, "Your son lives!"<sup>3</sup>

Then he asked them the hour when he began to get better. And they said to him, "Yesterday at the seventh hour the fever left him".

The father knew that was the same hour when Jesus had said to him, "Your son lives". And he himself believed, and his whole household.

This is the second sign Jesus did when He had come out of Judea into Galilee.<sup>4</sup>

John wants us to know that it was not only that the Lord successfully cured the lad's fever, but that He did it even though He was well over 15 miles away ... this being the distance from Cana (where Jesus was) to Capernaum (where the official's 'child', as his father tenderly described him to Jesus) was – which distance explains, in part at least,<sup>5</sup> why the official did not arrive back home until the following day – and, John also wants us to know, that He (our Lord) did it instantly ... which was just as well for the lad in that his case was not only severe but very urgent, for he was, we are told, 'at the point of death'.

So that, although the father questioned his servants about the time when his son 'began to get better', they were careful to put the record straight ... that his boy's recovery was not, as he (their master) supposed, a gradual process, but that it had been both sudden and complete, 'Yesterday at the seventh hour the fever left him' – which was, of course, at the precise moment when Jesus had assured the man that his son, who had been about to die ... that his son 'lived'.

In other words, although the Lord spoke in Cana, His word was immediately effective in Capernaum. As a result of which, as we read, the official's faith came to rest, not only, as it had earlier, first in Jesus' power and then in His word, but now in His person as God's Messiah and Son. Following our Lord's first sign-miracle at Cana (that of the water turned to wine) we read that His disciples 'put their faith in Him'. Now, following His second sign-miracle at Cana (that of the healing of the royal official's son) we read that both the official and all his household 'put their faith in Him'.<sup>6</sup>

And I note that the official's earlier faith rested, not in the extent of our Lord's knowledge – that somehow He knew that his (the official's) child had recovered, but in the extent of His (our Lord's) power ... so much so that the man was prepared to set out on a two-day journey without taking the Saviour with him – when he had earlier travelled that very road to do just that, to bring the Saviour back with him to heal his boy ... that he was prepared to set out with nothing but his confidence that our Lord's word had shot faster than lightning those fifteen plus miles to heal his dying son, so that everything was now alright.

Here then we read of a man voicing a request to the Lord ... to the Lord who met the man's deep need at that very moment ... and over many miles ... in so doing proving that He was Lord of both time and space –

demonstrating both that distance presented no obstacle to the power of His word, and that He (Jesus) could – if He willed it – grant the man’s request immediately.

On Monday Linda drew my attention to an incident which provides a far more recent example of the Lord, in response to a request – this time from a lady – meeting a deep need at just the right moment ... and over many miles.

Many of you will know of Colleen Redit’s remarkable work among the poor of Chennai in India – if from no other source then from Judith Lane – who is not only a member of the local church here but is also Colleen’s close friend and co-worker. The relevant incident – as told by Colleen in her recently published autobiography – runs as follows ...

Some of our cross-stitch pictures have a Bible verse or lines from a hymn worked into them ... I received an inspiring letter from a friend in the United States who had ordered one of our products ... This is an excerpt of the letter she wrote me:

"... My youngest son went home to be with the Lord. He was 19 years old. We know he is in a better place and is no longer suffering. He had a congenital heart defect and many other illnesses. But there are times I really miss him. June 11, 1999 was one of those times. But that was when I received the cross-stitch picture in the mail. I had been praying that day for peace and comfort and God used the cross-stitch. You see, (the words) "Blessed Assurance" (on the picture) were the hymn that was sung ... at his funeral so it has a special meaning to me. When I opened the package and saw it, I just cried. It was God’s way of comforting me".<sup>7</sup>

The point I want to make is not that the Lord promises always to grant our requests with such dramatic timing – or even that He always grants our requests – for He doesn’t ... but that He *can* do it, if, in His all-wise love, He knows it to be for the best.

For we have the assurance that, though our prayer requests are not always granted, they are always heard. Many years ago, I came across a quote attributed to a former Archbishop of Canterbury, William Temple. The quote runs, "People tell me that answers to prayer are merely coincidences. I can only reply that when I pray coincidences happen, and when I stop praying they stop happening".<sup>8</sup> And there are very many of God’s people today who can add their hearty ‘Amen’ to that!

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## Footnotes

<sup>1</sup> John identified this miracle as the second sign that Jesus did, even though He did other miracles in both Galilee and Judea after He changed the water to wine, John 2. 23; 3. 2. Also, although this is one of several miracles which John labelled in his Gospel as signs, he numbered only the first two. This points to his regarding the first and second signs as related to each other.

<sup>2</sup> The royal official (Gr. basilikos) was by his title a man who served a king. This was probably Herod Antipas, who was not properly a king, but was popularly regarded as one, Mark 6. 14.

<sup>3</sup> Jesus used the most dignified title, ‘son’; the father employs the tender diminutive, ‘child’; the servants use the domestic term.

<sup>4</sup> Twice Jesus moved into Galilee, and both times He performed ‘significant’ miracles.

<sup>5</sup> Much of the journey was across the Galilean hills.

<sup>6</sup> ‘In both cases the verb in the original is an inceptive aorist “they put their faith in Him”’, R. V. G. Tasker, Tyndale Commentary on John, page 83.

<sup>7</sup> Compare ... ‘A pastor in England told his young sons about a missionary who had gone from their church to far-off Sri Lanka. He described the hardships she would experience and told how she would often encounter poisonous snakes. Freddie, who was only 5, kept thinking about those dangerous reptiles. That night during his bedtime prayer, his father heard him say in a quivering voice, "O dear God, please take care of Miss Price. Keep her safe from those snakes". The power of the child’s intercessory prayer was soon demonstrated. For as the missionary was returning from a meeting one day, she saw lurking across her path a small but very deadly snake. Within striking range and with its head raised, the serpent was poised for the attack. Then suddenly it fled into the long grass. How she thanked the Lord for her deliverance! Some time later the mail brought this word from her pastor: "Little Fred never forgets to pray for you. Two Sundays ago he asked the Lord most earnestly to keep you from being harmed by the snakes!" She discovered that it was the exact day she had almost been killed’.

[www.ccbiblestudy.org/Topics/76Prayer/76GE06.doc](http://www.ccbiblestudy.org/Topics/76Prayer/76GE06.doc)

<sup>8</sup> See [http://www.cornerstonethechurch.com/Mobile/default.aspx?article\\_id=281819](http://www.cornerstonethechurch.com/Mobile/default.aspx?article_id=281819)

This is the man who said, ‘The Church is the only society that exists for the benefit of those who are not its members’.

<http://bpdtd.wordpress.com/2009/11/06/william-temple-archbishop-of-canterbury/>

See too <http://justus.anglican.org/resources/bio/61.html>