

TWO MIRACULOUS SIGNS AND THEIR MEANINGS

John 4:43-5:15

Key Verse: 5:6

“When Jesus saw him lying there and learned that he had been in this condition for a long time, he asked him, ‘Do you want to get well?’”

In today’s passage there are two events, two conversations, and two responses to Jesus. The event in 4:43-54 is explicitly called Jesus’ second sign, while the event in 5:1-15 is often referred to as his third sign. It is generally accepted that there are seven miraculous signs in John’s gospel. Each sign reveals something significant about Jesus. Jesus is so great, awesome, majestic and amazing that he cannot be fully described with one or two signs. As we see many facets in a rare fine gem, we can find many aspects of Jesus’ beauty and glory through the signs given in John’s gospel. Though Jesus is so marvelous and wonderful, we need to receive him with faith. Let’s learn more about Jesus and how we should respond to him.

First, “Go, your son will live” (4:43-54)

As we studied last time, Jesus had spent two days in Samaria, having spiritual conversations with people. They confessed, “This man really is the Savior of the world.” Then Jesus resumed his journey to Galilee (43). In verse 44, the author inserts a parenthetical comment: “Now Jesus himself had pointed out that a prophet has no honor in his own country.” The word “country” is better translated “hometown” (ESV). Jesus’ hometown was Nazareth; he is referred to as “Jesus of Nazareth” (1:45). As Jesus entered Galilee from Samaria, he would have come first to Nazareth. However, the people of Nazareth did not honor Jesus as a prophet (Mt 13:53-58). So, they missed the blessing of his ministry. It must have been a sorrowful experience. Nevertheless, Jesus pushed on to upper Galilee: Cana, Capernaum, and Bethsaida, where people welcomed him. It was because they saw the signs he had performed at the Passover Festival in Jerusalem (45). Once more he visited Cana in Galilee, where he had blessed a wedding

by turning water into wine (46a). It was there that he first revealed his glory, and his disciples put their faith in him. Now, in this same Cana, Jesus would perform his second sign. This tells us that Jesus works where there is faith.

News of what Jesus was doing began to travel all over Galilee. It reached the ears of a certain royal official in Capernaum, some 25 miles away (46b). This royal official was probably a Gentile in the service of Herod Antipas. His son was very sick, close to death. Many young people today suffer from depression. Though their bodies seem to be healthy, they feel that they are dying inside. To most parents, the wellbeing of their children is more important than their own lives. This man must have done everything possible to help his son. Yet, his dignity and authority were of no use. When he heard about Jesus, hope was born in his heart. He came to Jesus in desperate humility and begged Jesus to come and heal his son. When our children, friends or Bible students have problems that we cannot solve, let's find hope in Jesus and pray for them.

What did Jesus say? He did not say "Yes!" and follow the man to his home. Instead, Jesus told him, "Unless you people see signs and wonders, you will never believe" (48). Why did Jesus say this? By "you people" Jesus was referring to the Galileans. Jesus saw this man as a representative of all Galileans. In solving his problem, Jesus wanted to send a message to them all: to believe that he is the Messiah, the Son of God, and to have life in his name (Jn 20:31). For this purpose, he would show them signs and wonders. Yet, Jesus implies that this was a concession; he is not pleased with this faith. He seems to contrast them with the Samaritans who listened to his words. This helps us realize the need for caution in considering signs and wonders. On the one hand, they are a powerful aid to encourage faith in the gospel (Ro 15:19). But at the same time, St. Paul warns us that the antichrist can perform signs and wonders that lead people to follow the lie (2Th 2:9). So, we need discernment. Signs and wonders need to be connected to Jesus and the word of God in the Bible. In addition, it is so easy for sinful people to misunderstand the purpose of signs and wonders. Beneficiaries of signs and wonders can become benefit-seeking and demanding, instead of believing in Jesus. Jesus could have been disappointed with the Galileans and lamented over them. But he did not turn to his disciples and say, "Let's go back to

Samaria and establish our base camp.” Jesus did not abandon the Galileans. He wanted to help them all by helping the royal official to grow in faith as an example. The royal official could not understand the magnitude of Jesus’ words; his heart was fully occupied with his son’s problem. So, he became anxious and said, “Sir, come down before my child dies.”

Then Jesus said, “Go, your son will live” (50a). The word “Go” is imperative; it is in command form. The words “your son will live” are a promise. Jesus’ words contain a command and a promise as God’s words throughout the Bible often do (Gen 12:1-3; Mt 6:33; Mt 28:18-20). The word of command establishes the proper relationship between Jesus and people. Jesus is God. His word is the word of God. When we hear and obey his word, we enter a relationship with God. The man had come to solve his problem and Jesus was willing to help. Yet, Jesus challenged him first to obey his word and have a right relationship with him. In this way, Jesus helps our faith to grow.

When the father heard Jesus’ word, “Go,” instead of “I will come,” he must have been surprised. Jesus did not follow his expectation but told him to “Go.” It was a challenge to give up his expectation and obey Jesus’ word. It was not easy. He could have doubted Jesus’ love, wondering why Jesus didn’t come immediately. He could have doubted Jesus’ power, wondering if Jesus’ word would work from 25 miles away. Fear of his son’s death may have welled up within him, choking his spirit. But what did he do? The man took Jesus at his word and departed (50b). It was a decision of faith. As he began to go back home, putting one foot in front of another, the devil must have attacked him. But he resisted the devil, holding firmly to Jesus’ word. He believed that Jesus would keep his promise and that his word has power to give life. He responded to Jesus’ challenge with faith. This is how we should respond to God’s challenges. We should not rebel, or blow up, or ignore God’s challenges. We should respond with faith, as God’s challenges come through his word, servants, or circumstances. Then we can experience God’s power and love. This is how we can grow in faith that pleases God.

Let’s see what happened to the royal official and his son. While he was still on the way, his servants met him with the news that his boy was living

(51). It was everything he had wanted from Jesus. In such a moment, many people forget about Jesus in their joy of receiving his blessing. But there was something more on this man's mind. He wanted to know when his son got better. They told him, "Yesterday, at one in the afternoon, the fever left him" (52). He realized that it was the exact time at which Jesus had said to him, "Your son will live." He was sure, based on the fact, that at Jesus' word his son was healed. He connected the healing to Jesus and his word. He got the point that the sign was given in order to help him believe in Jesus. He committed himself to Jesus and testified about Jesus to his household; they all believed (53). They received eternal blessing and became a blessing to the people of Galilee. The author says this was Jesus' second sign (54). Jesus teaches us to take him at his word and experience his life-giving power.

Second, "Get up! Pick up your mat and walk" (5:1-15)

While Jesus' first two signs were done in Galilee, the next sign took place in Jerusalem. According to the law, Jewish men were required to go to Jerusalem three times a year for festivals: the Passover, Pentecost, and the Feast of Tabernacles (Ex 23:14-17). Jesus went up to Jerusalem for one of these Jewish festivals. Jerusalem was full of people in a festive mood. Many prominent and important people from all over Israel had gathered. It was a good chance to network with the powerful as well as enjoy the festivities. But Jesus went to the pool of Bethesda. Recent excavations have confirmed a pool with five covered colonnades. Around this pool, the blind, lame and paralyzed used to lie. An explanation of why these disabled people were there is given in the footnote--regarded as verses 3b-4. But these verses do not appear in the earliest manuscripts.¹ The point is that Jesus went to the place where disabled people were gathered. Among them, one had been an invalid, a paralytic, for 38 years. That is a long time to live in such a pitiful condition. He seemed to be hopeless and abandoned. No one paid attention to him. Yet it was this man to whom Jesus gave special concern.

¹ Verses 3b-4 seem to be added in some manuscripts for a clearer understanding of what the invalid man was talking about. If taken literally, they foster superstition and present God as one who promotes a cruel contest to receive healing. This is inconsistent with the Bible's teachings in general.

Verse 6a says, "When Jesus saw him lying there and learned that he had been in this condition for a long time...." Jesus saw him. In a recent ad, people with a disease plead with others to "see me." It is because people tend to overlook their personality and see only their disease. In a similar way, this man must have been ignored by others and regarded with disdain as an invalid. But Jesus' eyes fell on this man. Jesus observed him carefully and learned about him. Jesus came to deeply understand his problem. Then Jesus asked him, "Do you want to get well?" (6b) After living in his hopeless condition for such a long time, he probably gave up on being healed. Jesus wanted to rekindle his desire to get well. Having a desire to be healed is essential. Many doctors testify that patients with a reason to live fight hard to overcome their malady, while those who do not will easily surrender. This same principle applies for spiritual healing as well. To be healed of our sin sicknesses, such as pride, lust, selfishness, bitterness and the like, we should have a desire to be healed. Jesus inspired hope. He is the one who can heal our diseases. Jesus is the Almighty Creator God. Nothing is impossible for Jesus.

How did the man respond? "Sir, I have no one to help me into the pool when the water is stirred. While I am trying to get in, someone else goes down ahead of me" (7). He was not positive but seems to blame others and justify himself. But Jesus saw, even in this response, a seed of desire to be healed. Jesus said, "Get up! Pick up your mat and walk" (8). At once the man was cured, he picked up his mat and walked (9a). Jesus demonstrated one-sided love, power and mercy. Jesus is not limited by human responses or their lack thereof. Jesus' words initiate life-giving power to heal the worst sickness solely by his mercy. This Jesus enables us to get up from our spiritual paralysis and walk by faith. This is the gospel. We were dead in our transgressions and sins (Eph 2:5). Jesus did not wait for us to have the right response. Dead people cannot respond. Jesus came into the world to save us and died on a cross for our sins. He offered himself freely to all who believe. God makes us alive with Christ simply by his grace. Ephesians 2:4-5 say, "But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions--it is by grace you have been saved."

David Ring² was a stillborn baby. After delivery, he was put aside on a table, motionless, for 18 minutes. Later he would say, "It isn't over until God says it is over." Miraculously, he revived, but suffered from cerebral palsy. He could not walk or talk normally. When he was 11 his father died, and at age 14 his mother, who had done everything for him, also died. David, too, wanted to die. At school, children teased him for his disability and called him every name except his own. He would go home and cry every day--tears flowing down his cheeks. He tried to commit suicide frequently. One day, his sister brought him to church, and he heard the message that God loves him and Jesus died for him. He accepted God's love by faith. He no longer wanted to die; he wanted to live. Everyone at his school noticed his change and they were amazed. They held an all school assembly and asked him to explain what happened. He told them all that it was God's love. Later, he was voted the most popular student in his school. God called him to preach. Many people told him that he would never succeed. But he has preached in over 6,000 churches. Many told him he would never marry. But God granted him a beautiful woman of God and they have been married for decades. Many told him that he would never have children. But God granted him four children and three grandchildren. He loves Jesus who gives new life. He often says, "I have cerebral palsy. What's your problem?" Since Jesus gave him new life, he encourages others to trust Jesus and experience his power. Let's remember Jesus words: "Do you want to get well? Get up! Pick up your mat and walk."

The day on which the healing took place was a Sabbath. When the man began to walk around on his new legs, carrying his mat, the religious leaders were not happy. They said sternly, "It is the Sabbath; the law forbids you to carry your mat" (10). They were not concerned about the man, but about an interpretive provision of the Sabbath law. In truth, they were paralyzed by legalism, so they did not respond at all to a great miracle. Instead they threatened the recipient of grace. The man wanted to shift their attention from himself and said, "The man who made me well said to me, 'Pick up your mat and walk'" (11). When they asked him who healed him, he did not know. He should have looked for Jesus to thank him. His failure to

² <https://www.iamsecond.com/seconds/david-ring/>

give thanks is shocking. Shepherd Daniel Zhivaev of the MGIMO UBF Chapter in Russia had a very hard time last year. His wife Hannah had an extended hospital stay. Daniel had to care for his children, cook, clean and go shopping. This, on top of his full-time work in his company. At the same time the missionaries in his chapter had to return to Korea for treatment. So he had to prepare Sunday messages and Christmas worship service. He had very little time for personal reflection and prayer. He became irritable and angry and began to swear, even in front of his children. Then he developed a sore throat and a lump on his left side. Doctors could do nothing. At that moment, Daniel realized that God did not like him speaking bad words. So, he began to say "Thank you, God" and "Praise God" no matter what happened. Within a week, he was healed. He had learned to thank God in all circumstances.

Jesus' grace of initiative is amazing. Once again, Jesus went to the man. This time he was in the temple. It must have been a wonderful experience to be with normal people in the temple instead of all the disabled people at the pool. Jesus said to him, "See, you are well again. Stop sinning or something worse may happen to you" (14). Jesus wanted him to remember that he was once a helpless invalid, but now he was healed by Jesus' grace. Those who have received Jesus' grace must remember what Jesus has done for them. Jesus also warned him to stop sinning. Jesus did not mean that his paralysis was caused by sin--though all disease and death ultimately come from sin. Jesus meant that the condition of his soul was more serious than the condition of his body. If he did not stop sinning, he would spend eternity in hell. His specific sin seems to be not believing that Jesus was the Messiah in spite of his healing. Furthermore, he was not thankful at all. This is the root of sin (Ro 1:21). In response to Jesus' gracious warning, the man went away and told the Jewish leaders that it was Jesus who had made him well (15). For this, Jesus would be persecuted.

Through this sign, Jesus shows us that just as he came to heal the most pathetic among all the disabled, so he came to save the worst of sinners. Jesus' salvation comes solely by his mercy, not through any human merit. Nevertheless, how we respond to Jesus is really important. The royal official, after receiving Jesus' grace, believed in Jesus as the Messiah. He committed

himself to Jesus and led his household to faith and eternal blessing. On the other hand, the former invalid, after receiving great healing grace, neither acknowledged Jesus as his Messiah nor gave thanks to him. The eternal consequences are very serious. Jesus has had tremendous mercy on us all. Let's acknowledge him as our Messiah and give thanks to him.