

9. Jesus Heals a Royal Official's Son

John 4:43-54

The Gospel According to John

After Jesus had stayed two days with the Samaritans (v. 40), John the Apostle now continues in his narrative, following Jesus' journey north to the area of Galilee:

⁴³After the two days he left for Galilee. ⁴⁴(Now Jesus himself had pointed out that a prophet has no honor in his own country.) ⁴⁵When he arrived in Galilee, the Galileans welcomed him. They had seen all that he had done in Jerusalem at the Passover Feast, for they also had been there (John 4:43-45).

No Honor in One's Home Town

When Christ arrived in Galilee, the Galileans welcomed Him (Verse 45). Why does John mention that Jesus says that a prophet has no honor in his own country? (v. 44), but then writes that the Galileans welcomed Him or received Him. This seems to be a contradiction. Some say that John is referring to the fact that the Jews of Jerusalem did not welcome Him, even though He was born in Bethlehem of Judah, a close walk south of Jerusalem. The Lord had stirred up a hornet's nest in Jerusalem by clearing out the temple courts with a whip of cords (John 2:15-16), so the Jewish elders had no welcome at all for Him. Were the words "his own country" referring to Jerusalem or Galilee? □

Question 1) Why doesn't a prophet have honor in his hometown? Do you think that a man or woman of God can be stifled in this way by those who know them well? How can we avoid limiting others from reaching their potential in God? □

Cana of Galilee was eight miles north of Nazareth, so it is possible that the words, "his own country" could have been referring to Christ's hometown of Nazareth; whereas, most of the population of Galilee did receive Him.

What is it about our hometown that refuses to recognize God at work in us? We are not all called to be prophets, but as believers, we are all called to testify to the truth of God's Word to those whom God gives us an opportunity. The enemy will try to use our inexperience and lack of knowledge of Scripture to diminish our standing with those of our hometown or community. □

When the Spirit of God comes upon us, we are given power from on high (Acts 1:8), and we have tremendous potential as we step out in faith and believe God's Word. If you are a believer, you have been made sons and daughters of the Living God through the blood of Christ. The Bible says: "You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus" (Galatians 3:26). Because we are brought into a covenant relationship with God, our gift back to Him is what we do with that potential (Matthew 11:11-12). □

People will often form opinions of us based on who we were before we came to Christ. The enemy will seek to use those limiting opinions against us and hinder what we can accomplish for Christ. He wants to keep us from breaking free of that "box" of false expectations and

limitations. In your hometown, you may always be known as the fisherman's son, or the mechanic, or the town waitress, or however those in your hometown view you. Stereotypes and expectations of all kinds can hinder us from breaking free and being who we are meant to be. In Christ, however, we are no longer to regard one another from a worldly point of view. We are to see each other as new creations capable of high potential in the Lord. The Scriptures tell us that, if you are born-again, all things are made new:

¹⁶So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view. Though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer. ¹⁷Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come (2 Corinthians 5:16-17)

All our old traits and habits, both good and bad, are long remembered by some of the people who know us best. They may have said words, such as “He’ll never amount to anything,” or “He’s always been that way,” or, maybe, “He couldn’t even graduate, let alone do...” You name it! People affect us with their words, and it can be hard for us to break free from that self-image. In the text above, Paul the Apostle wrote that **“The old has gone, the new has come”** (v. 17). We need to cling to what the Word of God says about us and believe it, rather than listen to the lies of the enemy. Christ’s Word, our “mental food,” is on what we need to feed to be transformed by the renewing of our minds. The Spirit of God will help us to break free from the mental picture that often our thoughts portray to us. Under the inspiration of the Spirit, Paul the Apostle wrote:

I can do everything through him who gives me strength (Philippians 4:13).

Jesus also spoke similarly about the importance of faith:

He replied, "Because you have so little faith. I tell you the truth, if you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there' and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you" (Matthew 17:20 Emphasis mine).

The great missionary to India, William Carey, the father of modern missions, once said, “Expect great things of God and attempt great things for God.” Many of us don’t attempt great things of God because of the cap on our potential by those who are influential in our family or home town. Often, the limits are in our minds. Let's use the example of running the four-minute mile: □

Remember the four-minute mile? People had been trying to achieve it since the days of the ancient Greeks. Folklore has it that the Greeks had lions chase the runners, thinking that it would make them run faster. They also tried drinking tiger's milk, (their equivalent of steroids,)—not the stuff you get down at the health food store, but the real thing (Yes, real milk from real tigers. Imagine trying to "milk a tiger"! I would think that the fact that someone could milk a tiger should give them a claim to fame, aside from any athletic accomplishment!). But to their great disappointment, nothing they tried worked. The four-minute mile was not reached. So, they decided that it was impossible for a person to run a mile in four minutes or less. And for a thousand years, everyone believed it. Our bone structure is all wrong, they said. Wind resistance is too great. We have inadequate lungpower. There were many reasons. □

Then one man, one single human being, proved that the doctors, the trainers, the athletes, and the millions of runners before him, who tried and failed, were all wrong. And, miracle of miracles, the year after Roger Bannister broke the four-minute mile; thirty-seven other runners broke the four-minute mile. The year after that, three hundred runners broke the four-minute mile. And a few years ago, in a single race in New York, thirteen out of thirteen runners broke the four-minute mile. In other words, a few decades ago the runner who finished the very last in the New York race would have been regarded as having accomplished the impossible.

What happened? There were no great breakthroughs in training. No one discovered how to control wind resistance. Human bone structure and physiology didn't suddenly improve. But human attitudes did.¹

Just as Jesus was not accepted in his own town, don't allow others, or even your own mind, to place barriers that would hinder you from becoming all that you can be in God. Many of you have had words spoken over you that limit your potential and that need to be broken. Break free from the hometown attitude!

Question 2) What words have hurt you in the past that you recall too quickly? (For established groups, an alternative question: What type of things are often said that hurt and limit people?)

The Faith of a Royal Official

⁴⁶Once more he visited Cana in Galilee, where he had turned the water into wine. And there was a certain royal official whose son lay sick at Capernaum. ⁴⁷When this man heard that Jesus had arrived in Galilee from Judea, he went to him and begged him to come and heal his son, who was close to death. ⁴⁸"Unless you people see miraculous signs and wonders," Jesus told him, "you will never believe." ⁴⁹The royal official said, "Sir, come down before my child dies." ⁵⁰Jesus replied, "You may go. Your son will live." The man took Jesus at his word and departed.

John writes that Jesus went to Cana in Galilee, a few miles further north past Nazareth, the place where He grew up. Even though Jesus was having great success at knocking down walls between Jews and Samaritans, He did not please Himself, but He was directed by His Father to go to where He was needed, i.e., the dark land of Galilee (Isaiah 9:2). There, He was greatly welcomed by the people of Cana. This was the hometown of Nathanael (John 21:2). Here is also where the water was made into wine, the first miraculous sign that Jesus had performed (John 2:11).

John also tells us that another reason they welcomed Him was because they all saw what He did at the Passover Feast, for they too had been there (v. 45). Jewish adult males were expected to worship three times a year at the three principal feasts: The Feast of Unleavened Bread, commonly called Passover; the Feast of Weeks or Pentecost, and the Feast of Booths or Tabernacles in the fall. Many whole communities in a town traveled together. So, as many of the Galilean Jews returned from the Passover Feast, the word soon got around how Jesus had confronted the corruption in the Temple of God in Jerusalem. John had already told us of the

¹ John Maxwell, *Developing the Leader Within You*, Nelson Publishers, Page 95.

instance when Jesus pushed over the money tables in the temple courts and His use of the whip against the moneychangers (John 2:15). The other thing that John mentioned as happening in Jerusalem was the miracles He had performed:

Now while he was in Jerusalem at the Passover Feast, many people saw the miraculous signs he was doing and believed in his name (John 2:23).

As the people arrived home from the feast, it is very likely that the town of Capernaum became abuzz with the news of the miracles Jesus had performed in Jerusalem. John tells us of a certain royal official in Capernaum whose faith was sparked by what he heard. The Greek word translated “royal official” is *basilikos*, meaning “king’s man.” He was an official to the ruling tetrarch, Herod Antipas, one that fancied himself a king and ruler of Galilee and Perea. The royal official was a person of high rank in Herod’s court. His rank meant nothing now, though, he was a man in need of his son’s healing.

All people, rich and poor, servant or royal official, we all experience life’s ups and downs. When we are in life’s valleys, let us not become discouraged because it is often the times of difficulty that result in great blessing to a family, such as the one we read about in this account. As he saw his son’s health declining, desperation, as well as hope and faith in God, began to rise when he heard of the miracles that Christ had been doing in Jerusalem. □

Question 3) What stories of lives being changed, prayers heard, or healing testimonies have you heard that have influenced you in the past? Briefly share some of these encouraging stories.

The Four Growth Spurts to the Faith of the Royal Official □

1) **He believed enough to travel nineteen miles to see Jesus.** There is something about this royal official that is wonderful to consider. First of all, he did not leave the decision to someone else, such as his wife or a servant; he went himself. He could easily have justified sending a servant to ask Jesus to come to his son; after all, he was probably swamped in his official role. The distance from Capernaum to Cana was around eighteen miles uphill. If you would like to see a map of the area, you can set your browser to go to the following Web address: <http://bibleatlas.org/full/cana.htm>

As he watched his son decline in health, he could have sought a medical doctor. Instead, he placed his faith in Christ and decided that he would visit the Lord Jesus and plead with Him to walk the nineteen miles to Capernaum to heal his son. One wonders if the boy was already in a coma when the father left, for the official was sure that his boy was dying (v. 47). The five-hour walk from Capernaum to Cana, I’m sure, was a time of brokenness and heartache at the thought of losing his son. Had he made the right choice? How much time did he have left before his boy died? While walking as fast as he could, I can imagine that he must have had a battle with many fears clamoring in his mind. “What if Jesus was too busy? Can He do the things that they say He can do? Do I have enough time to go this far and for Jesus to get back in time?” He was limited in his faith by thinking that only the physical presence of Jesus could heal his son. He believed that God only has one way of healing, i.e., the hand of the healer must be laid on his son. We also can limit God by thinking that the Lord only uses a certain way to answer our prayers.

2) **He begged Jesus for His help.** I'm sure the man spent the five-hour journey walking as fast as he could and probably praying desperately for his son, fearing that he would not see his son's sweet smile again. The very thought of losing his son was unbearable to contemplate. This man cared deeply for his son, and he would do anything for him to be better. When he got to Cana and found Jesus, he **"begged him to come"** (v. 47). In the Greek language, the phrase is in the imperfect tense, so it should be paraphrased that he kept on begging Him over and over again. This man would not let up; He put all his hope in Jesus, gambling that the Lord would agree to come to his home and pray for his son. He knew that his son was close to death (v. 47) and that he had little time. He pled out of urgency and desperation. Jesus' reply seems rather harsh at first, but the response was spoken in the plural to those around Him: □

"Unless you people see miraculous signs and wonders," Jesus told him, "you will never believe" (John 4:48).

The words were directed not only to him but to the crowd as well. It is possible that it had become like a circus of people looking for the next sensational act of the Lord. The royal official came, more than likely, still in his official garb, hopefully, to add even more weight to his request for Jesus to come and pray for his son. The man, dressed in his formal garb and quite desperate, drew even more of a crowd who wanted to see what was happening. Jesus knew human nature and human motives. The Lord wanted to take him further in his faith walk because the man believed that only the up-front, personal visit to his house would be instrumental in healing his son.

This is similar to Martha's faith at the death of her brother, Lazarus, when she said to Jesus, **"Lord," Martha said to Jesus, 'if you had been here, my brother would not have died'"** (John 11:21). Christ wanted the royal official and us, as well, to expand our faith to believe without seeing, i.e., to believe on the integrity of the Word of God, i.e., God's habitual truthfulness, and not by signs and miracles, as beautiful as they are when God moves in answer to prayer. In his desperation, the royal official starts to dictate to Christ as to how Christ must come to Capernaum to heal his son. The lesson to be learned by us is that we must leave God to perform His works in His way. The kind of faith that pleases God is that which acts and responds not because of a sign or answer to prayer but based on the Word of God. This was a call for the official to find true faith. □

After the resurrection, Jesus revealed Himself to Thomas. Showing him the nail prints in His hands and feet, He said to him, **"Blessed are those who do not see yet believe"** (John 20:29). The Lord longs for His people to trust Him and step out on His Word even if they do not see any evidence for believing:

²²"Have faith in God," Jesus answered. ²³"I tell you the truth, if anyone says to this mountain, 'Go, throw yourself into the sea,' and does not doubt in his heart but believes that what he says will happen, it will be done for him. ²⁴Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours" (Mark 11:22-24).

Question 4) Why does God want us to believe before we see?

The royal official was not put off by Jesus' words, but continued to plead, "Sir, come down before my child dies" (v. 49). His words reflect his passionate desperation at the lack of time his son had. Jesus said to the man: "You may go, your son will live" (v. 53).

3) **The official believed Jesus' word that his son would live.** He did not respond saying, "What, no sign! No prayer! No hands laid on him! What is this? That's not the way it's supposed to happen! How can I know that what you say is true? Are you saying that I am supposed to believe the work of healing has already taken place without you coming to him?" Amid the official's desperation, he combined belief with a response. This is the main lesson that John would have us take home from watching this scene. This kind of faith is God-honoring faith, one that believes and responds with action in his life. □

I'm sure there were many questions in the man's heart, but he did not give vent to them. He took the Lord at His word and departed. If we'd have come across him that evening, we would have found him still in Cana, full of joy and thankful to the Lord. He stayed the night resolving to return to his healed son in the morning. His work of interceding on behalf of his son was complete. The royal official knew within himself that his son was healed, even though he did not yet see it with his physical eyes. The royal official was told to believe God's Word and to respond to it in faith. He chose to believe the word of Jesus. In his inner being, there was a peace that passes all understanding that caused his soul to be at rest. The next morning, he set out on the eighteen-mile trip home to Capernaum. □

⁵¹While he was still on the way, his servants met him with the news that his boy was living. ⁵²When he inquired as to the time when his son got better, they said to him, "The fever left him yesterday at the seventh hour." ⁵³Then the father realized that this was the exact time at which Jesus had said to him, "Your son will live." So he and all his household believed. ⁵⁴This was the second miraculous sign that Jesus performed, having come from Judea to Galilee (John 4:51-54).

His servants left Capernaum for Cana the next day to find their master and let him know the good news, and they met each other on the way. He found out from them that the miracle happened at the seventh hour of the day before (v. 52), precisely at the time Jesus had said, "Your son will live" (v. 53). The seventh hour would have been one o'clock in the afternoon, plenty of time for him to walk the five-hour downhill journey home, but in his heart, he believed his prayer was heard and that the Lord had acted in response to his belief. I want to ask him about it when I meet him! □

4) **He and his whole household believed.** When he got home and saw his family, how much joy would have flooded his soul when he gathered his son into his arms after thinking he might never see him again? No wonder his whole household believed when they found out that, the very time Jesus told him to go, was the very moment his son was healed. This miracle touched many lives, not just the son's life, but the whole household believed (v. 53). It's interesting to note that, later, Jesus had two people that supported Him out of their private means, Joanna the wife of Chuza, and Herod Antipas' steward (Luke 8:1-3). King Herod Antipas had his residence in Capernaum. Perhaps, it was the same family. We can't be sure as the Lord Jesus touched many, but it is

logical to assume that the family was so touched that they wanted to support the ministry of Jesus. We never know how a good deed will come back to bless us (Ecclesiastes 11:1).□

As we close this study, I would like you to take a few minutes and ask the Holy Spirit to bring to your mind the false limitations and false negative expectations with which you have struggled. These may have been forced upon you by others, or they may be a product of your negative inner dialogue. God the Father wants you to be free of these limitations. Let us do as William Carey admonished; "Expect great things of God and attempt great things for God."² Our expectation of what God can do and wants to do for us is affected by our view of Who He is. Remember how He answered this man's prayer! Remember His compassion as He reached out and touched this young man's life and answered this desperate father. Keep in mind; we do not have to be deserving of favor. We come to a God who is already wanting to show us His favor.□

Take a moment to allow God to bring to mind these false limitations. Provide a quiet time for this to happen, and close in prayer:

Prayer: Father, help me to open my mind and heart to all that You have prepared for me. Keep me from setting limits on myself or setting limits on others. Teach me to act in faith on Your Word and respond to it. Amen!

Keith Thomas

Email: keiththomas@groupbiblestudy.com

Website: www.groupbiblestudy.com

² As quoted in *The Baptist Herald and Friend of Africa* (October 1842) and "The Missionary Herald" in *The Baptist Magazine* Vol. 35 (January 1843), p. 41