**18th October 2015**

**John 4. 43-54**

I don’t like this passage. It is too challenging. First of all, for a Lancastrian, it presents some linguistic difficulties. I’m still a boy from Burnley where we drop our ‘h’s. The key verse in this story is the statement that a prophet has no honour in his own country. I fear there will be some mispronunciations. I hope it doesn’t put you off listening. It is also challenging because it asks whether or not we honour Jesus or dishonour him.

The first thing that would be helpful to do is to walk through this text together and point out some strange things that need to be explained.

Verse 43: Jesus has just spent two days in Samaria, and he is now leaving for Galilee. The time in Samaria was spectacularly successful. It appears that the whole town of Sychar was turning to Jesus as the Messiah and the Saviour of the world. The focus there is not on his miracle-working power, but on his word. “We have heard him for ourselves, and we know that this is indeed the Saviour of the world” ([John 4:42](http://biblia.com/bible/esv/John%204.42)). This is a better response than anything Jesus got among his own Jewish people. Strange.

Galilee is where Jesus grew up in Nazareth. About 10 miles north of Nazareth was Cana, where he turned water to wine (back in chapter 2), and about 15 miles east from Cana was Capernaum where the official with the sick son in this story lives. So Galilee is Jesus’ homeland in a special sense. He is leaving Samaria, which is not his homeland, and turning now to his own stomping grounds.

But verse 44 says ‘Now Jesus himself had pointed out that a prophet has no honour in his own country’. So I take John to be saying that Jesus intentionally goes where he is less honoured than in Samaria. He’s coming again to his own people knowing that they don’t understand him and don’t honour him for who he is.

The second strange thing that needs explaining is the way verse 44 connects to what follows. He goes to Galilee, his own people, because he expects no honour there. Now verse 45: “When he arrived in Galilee, the Galileans welcomed him.” That isn’t what we expect. They’re supposed to dishonour him according to verse 44. How can John say, “A prophet has no honour in his own hometown, *therefore* they welcomed him”?

The answer is that the “welcome”—the reception—is not what it looks like on the outside. There is a kind of receiving Jesus that has no true honour for his person in it. It’s just an interest in his signs and wonders.

This is not new in John’s Gospel. In [John 2:23–25](http://biblia.com/bible/esv/John%202.23%E2%80%9325)?

23 Now while he was in Jerusalem at the Passover Festival, many people saw the signs he was performing and believed in his name.[a] 24 But Jesus would not entrust himself to them, for he knew all people. 25 He did not need any testimony about mankind, for he knew what was in each person.

They “believed,” John says, but this was not a kind of faith that Jesus accepted. It was simply an excitement with his miracles, not what they pointed to, namely, his beauty and glory as the Son of God, the Messiah, the Saviour of the World—the things that the Samaritans saw, even though the emphasis there didn’t fall on miracles, but on his word.

When John mentions Jesus’ coming to Cana in verse 46, he draws our attention to the fact that this is the place he had done his first sign in Galilee by turning the water into wine.

Now, you might think John is turning our attention away from this sign-seeking attitude of the Galileans when he tells us that the official shows up at the end of verse 46. But not right away. In fact, he is going to make his strongest indictment of the Galileans here.

47 When 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 signs and wonders,” Jesus told him, “you will never believe.”

The ‘you’ is plural: Jesus does not address the man only. He addresses the whole group he has been talking about—the whole region of his own hometown. And now he says explicitly what we’ve been arguing. Verse 48: “Unless you see signs and wonders you will not believe.” You are sign-seekers. You are “wonder-worshipers.” You say you believe, but your belief—like those folks in Jerusalem in [John 2:23](http://biblia.com/bible/esv/John%202.23) —is not real belief that honours me. We can call it *belief*, but it’s not the kind that unites you to me as one who sees and treasures me as the Son of God full of grace and truth. In fact, it dishonours me. So verse 48 is the most explicit indictment of all along with verse 44 that a prophet has no honour in his own home area.

But now what about this official? Was he in that crowd who believed but didn’t believe? Believed as a sign-seeker, but not as a Saviour-seeker? A lover of Jesus’ power, but not a lover of his person?

It seems to me that Jesus is testing him. The official is asking for a miracle for his dying son in an atmosphere where people love to see miracles. And he seems to be asking for the same reason any unbelieving person would love to see a miracle—I have a health need, fix it. Not: I have sin, forgive it, and give me power to live for you. Unbelievers don’t love God; they use God. So Jesus bluntly says to the man—it says that Jesus said “to him” (verse 48)—that he and the other Galileans are sign-seekers: “Unless you see signs and wonders you will not believe.”

I take it to be a test. How does the official respond to Jesus’ rebuff? He doesn’t even comment on it. He simply repeats his request. Verse 49, “Sir, come down before my child dies.” Neither Jesus nor John comments on the man’s sincerity. Jesus simply gives him a gift. Verse 50: Jesus said to him, “Go; your son will live.”

John says (still in verse 50), “The man took Jesus at his word and departed.” What is remarkable about this is that the man had asked Jesus to *come* with him. But when Jesus simply spoke, “Go; your son will live,” the man obeyed without a question. He believed and went. He did not insist on seeing the miracle. He did not complain that Jesus would not come with him. And amazingly, he simply left, John says, *believing*. I’m inclined to think that in that moment of seeing Jesus speak so sovereignly in spite of his accusations, something awakened in the man. He saw something more than a miracle-worker.

Then the next day we get the confirmation of the healing at the very hour when Jesus spoke the day before. And the confirmation re-establishes the man’s faith, and his household believes also.

Was his faith the mere sign-seeking kind? It doesn’t seem like it. He seems to have passed the test. And who is he? He is described as a royal official. The king-like figure over Galilee was Herod Antipas. He was a wicked man. He had married his brother’s wife and put John the Baptist to death.

Calling this man a “royal one” or a “royal official,” John makes a connection with this court. So maybe John’s point is: Yes, this man believed. But he is more like the Samaritans than like the hometown folks whom Jesus criticizes as sign-seekers. So his faith may be an added contrast to Jesus’ “own kind” who don’t honour him.

So, stepping back, what is the main point of this text? What is the writer doing?

The main thing he is doing is showing us the greatness of Christ by this astonishing miracle; but as a part of that, John wants to help us overcome obstacles to seeing the glory of Christ in the text. The way he does this is by showing us the kinds of things that keep people from honouring Christ.

So let’s look at these two aims as they relate to us: first, the kinds of things that keep us from seeing and savouring the glory of Christ, not just his signs; and second, the miracle that he did and what it tells us about him.

**What Keeps Us from Seeing Jesus’ Glory**

Verse 42 tells us what stood in the way of a true understanding of Christ and a saving belief in him: “a prophet has no honour in his own country.” There is something about being part of Jesus’ home that hinders their faith. Now none of us is part of Jesus’ hometown. So you may think this doesn’t apply to us. But the inner sinful impulses that made it hard for his own people to receive him and honour him—those same impulses may be in us. What are some of them?

I see three. **First, the pride of attachment to someone special**. A kind of vicarious sense of importance. The people could say that this great miracle-worker grew up in their town. This makes them want for him to do his miracles. So they “honour” him in that way. But why do they want him to do these miracles? Because the more he does, the more their attachment feeds their ego. They don’t see the glory of humble service. They don’t feel the need for his grace. *They use him*. *His power and fame feeds their pride*. And so they don’t honour him for who he is, even though they think they are doing.

This impulse is very much alive today and can infect us and keep us from knowing Christ the way he really is. We can be attached to a church, or a movement, or a music style, or a person, or a ministry in a way that starts to feed our ego. And it will seem justifiable because it’s Christian. And subtly we begin to want this Christian thing to thrive not for the glory of Christ, but because it feeds our ego, our pride and sense of identity and importance. And when that happens, it becomes harder and harder to see Christ for who he really is—the one who saves by grace alone, and who calls us to lowliness and servanthood.

A second hometown impulse that may be in us even though we are not part of Jesus’ hometown is **a sense of entitlement**. If he is from our town, then we get first choice, or at least special requests. O how this mindset is still with us and creeps into our souls. If you ever start to feel entitled in yourself to the blessings of Christ, you are falling away from grace. A sense of deservedness or entitlement will keep us from knowing Christ. We will not honour him for who he is if we slip into this mindset.

And third, almost the opposite of the first two (but that’s how devious and subtle sin is) is **a sense of over-familiarity with Jesus.** This man is one of us. We know his mother and his brothers. He has always been so ordinary. How can he be what he claims to be? That same mindset can be in us: We are so familiar with the Bible, and with Jesus, and with Christianity, that it can’t shock us. He can’t do anything really mind-blowingly powerful. He’s too familiar.

O how we need to guard against these three impulses in our own souls. The first two (the pride of attachment and a sense of entitlement) minimize his grace. And the third (over-familiarity) minimizes his power. You dishonour Jesus when you minimise his grace or minimise his power.

And in conclusion, notice that this is exactly what John wants us to see in his healing of the official’s son. He wants to help us overcome these blinding impulses and see the grace and the power—the mercy and the might—of Jesus as he heals the dying boy.

First, notice **the grace of it**. He heals this child in a very unbelieving atmosphere. The first thing he says to the official when he pleads for his son is, “Unless you see signs and wonders you will not believe” (verse 48). Jesus does not commend the man or the people around him. He is provoked at the sign-seeking false faith that abounds in Galilee. And in that context, he gives the free gift of healing.

And he gives the gift to a man he’s never met, who has attachments in some way probably with the court of wicked Herod Antipas who had his cousin John the Baptist, murdered, and who says nothing about the person or the power of Jesus. He just wants him to come.

In other words, when Jesus decided to heal this boy, it was grace. He was not looking at anyone’s merit or desert. It was a free, gracious gift. “We have seen his glory full of grace and truth, and from his fullness we have received grace upon grace.” If you have the pride of attachment or a sense of entitlement, you won’t be able to see this.

Finally, John wants us to see not only the grace of the healing, but the **power of it**. The boy was dying of a fever. The power of Jesus to heal is seen in the fact that he did it with a mere word. He simply said, “Go, your son will live” (verse 50). And at that one word, the physical chemistry of a boy’s body changed.

The power is seen in that distance was not hindrance. The boy was 15 miles away in Capernaum. He could have been 15,000 miles away. It would not have mattered. When Jesus speaks with authority, there are no spatial limitations to his power.

And the power of his healing is seen in the fact that it was immediate. John draws special attention to that. At the very moment Jesus spoke, it was done.

A dying boy healed with a word, over distance, at once. Such is the power of Jesus. Grace and power. Mercy and might.

A couple of weeks ago I spoke about Father Emmanuel a Palestinian Christian Orthodox priest from the village of Aboud in the West Bank. I spoke of a remarkable miracle where a Muslim woman whose son was about to have his lfie support system switched off came to pray in his church and then she received a call to say he had come back to life. I said there were more stories, so let me share another one with you. Father Emmaunel was called to a family house because a young woman in the house could not stop crying. It transpired that she had just been told by the doctors that she could never become pregnant. ‘It’s impossible’ they had said to her. Father Emmaunel replied that to God all things are possible. He encouraged her to stop crying and to come to the church. She turned up at church with her husband and knelt and prayed, weeping heavily. Father Emmaunel put his prayer stole around her and prayed for her. He said it felt as though cold refreshing after was being poured over them. A deep peace settled on them all. Father Emmanuel told them to go home and to ring him in 40 days. Sure enough she did and told him the news. She was pregnant. She now has two children.

It’s a remarkable story, and God is doing remarkable things in that country. How do we react to that story and this gospel story? With disbelief and doubts about the power of Jesus? Do we minimise his grace – surely not for us, e are not good enough or deserving enough to receive help from the Lord. Or perhaps we are too proud to ask for help, to ask for prayer, it’s embarrassing, or we want to keep control.

May the Lord remove all pride, all entitlement, all blinding familiarity, and reveal to us the glory of the grace and power of Christ.

Most of Sermon taken from John Piper

<http://www.desiringgod.org/messages/go-your-son-will-live>

**Questions:**

1. **Why does Jesus say ‘a prophet is without honour in his own country?’**
2. **Do you believe that ‘unbelievers don’t love God but they use God?’**
3. **Discuss what you think of the suggestions of how we dishonour Jesus through pride of attachment, entitlement and familiarity. Can you see any links in your own life?**
4. **Do you think Jesus was testing the royal official? Does Jesus test us?**
5. **Where do we see the grace and power of God?**