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John 4:43-54 -- A Second Sign

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 the second miracle performed on this return trip back into 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.

Notes:

Vs. 43 -- *after the two days* -- That is, after staying with the Samaritans for two days (cf. vss. 39,40).

Vs. 44 -- *Jesus Himself testified* -- The Greek indicates it was something He said at a point in time in the past. *a prophet has no honor in his own country* -- Occasions where Jesus said these words are recorded for us in Matt. 13:53-58; Mk. 6:1-6; and in Lk. 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 did 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 be drawn together. In all four Gospels, these incidents precede the feeding of the 5,000. The Synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark, & Luke) also all place their setting for this statement as occurring *after* John the Baptist had been taken into custody, and *shortly before* his death (Matt. 14; Mk. 6:14-29; Lk. 9:7-9), whereas apparently in John's record the Baptist was still quite active even as recently as the beginning of this chapter. Matthew's and Mark's closely parallel accounts *begin* their record of Jesus' public ministry after the imprisonment of John (Matt. 4:12; Mk. 1:14). Putting all of this together, we must conclude that John the Baptist either recently has 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 reconstruction is accurate, then these examples from the Synoptic Gospels had *not* as yet occurred. 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. It is interesting that this was apparently upon His 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 received with honor. As we put the accounts together, we find a common experience which 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.

Vs. 45 -- *So when He came to Galilee, the Galileans received Him, having seen all the things that He did in Jerusalem at the feast* -- No indication that they were rejecting Him. On the contrary, they seemed to welcome Him. *they themselves also went to the feast* -- Most devout Jews within a reasonable traveling distance would have gone to the feast, as prescribed in the Law (Ex. 23:14-17).

Vs. 46 -- *He came to Cana of Galilee where He had made the water wine.* -- 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. *there was a certain royal official, whose son was sick at Capernaum* -- A distance of approximately eighteen miles. 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.

Vs. 47 -- *When he heard that Jesus had come out of Judea into Galilee* -- News traveled abroad quickly concerning Jesus' whereabouts, a testimony to the impact He was already having. *he went to Him* -- Eighteen miles was a fair day's walk. He must have been quite desperate to leave his son at this time, knowing that he would be gone two days. He obviously had a hope in Jesus' ability to heal that went beyond mere curiosity. *he was requesting Him* -- The Greek verb indicates continual action. He did not get an immediate positive response from Jesus. The word also means to beg, request urgently, urge. 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". *for he was at the point of death* -- Hence, the reason for the father's urgency.

Vs. 48 -- Jesus addressed His response to the man, but seemed to be lumping him together with the entire unbelieving populace. The statement in Greek is very strong, "If ever y'all might not behold 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, however, it becomes obvious that Jesus is looking for a different kind of faith than just 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 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 norm.

Vs. 49 -- The father renews his plea again, restating the urgency of the situation.

Vs. 50 -- *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 required action (cf. Hebrews 11).

Vs. 51-53 -- When the man met his servants, they reported that his son was doing better. Upon comparing times, the official realized that this 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 believed 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? This means that he would have been taking a stand for Jesus, 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 drawn from this episode: First, 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). The point is that we do *not* always have to be present, or lay hands on someone, or anything else, for God to be able to heal or cast out a demon. 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. He 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.