

The Healing of the Royal Official's Son

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[0 : 0 0] a bible and you can turn to John chapter 4 but you'll also find the words up on the screen. We're going to read from verse 39 to the end of the chapter. Many of the Samaritans from that town believed in Jesus because of the woman's testimony. He told me everything I've ever done.

So when the Samaritans came to him they urged him to stay with them and he stayed two days and because of his words many more became believers. They said to the woman we no longer believe just because of what you said. Now we have heard for ourselves and we know that this man really is the saviour of the world. After the two days he left for Galilee. Now Jesus himself had pointed out that a prophet has no honour in his own country. When he arrived in Galilee the Galileans welcomed him.

They had seen all that he had done in Jerusalem at the Passover festival for they also had been there. Once more he visited Cana in Galilee where he had turned the water into wine and there was a certain royal official whose son lay ill at Capernaum. 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 is close to death.

Unless you people see signs and wonders Jesus told him you will never believe. The royal official said sir come down before my child dies. Go Jesus replied your son will live. The man took Jesus at his word and departed. While he was still on the way his servants met him with the news that his boy was living. When he inquired as to the time when his son got better they said to him yesterday at one in the afternoon the fever left him. Then the father realised that this was the exact time at which Jesus had said to him your son will live. So he and his whole household believed. This was the second sign Jesus performed after coming from Judea to Galilee. So this is the third of seven signs that John records. The healing of the royal official's son. Can we read the signs and respond in the right way is a question that sometimes becomes really important. If like me you've ever been bewildered by foreign road signs like the time I drove up a Belgian bike lane. Sorry about that Belgium.

Or if you try and decipher those Japanese washing care labels or if you're on a building site and there are all kinds of safety guidelines. It's important that we can read the signs and respond in the right way. And if that's important for everyday life it's certainly crucial when it comes to John's gospel.

[3 : 0 4] John in chapter 20 in verse 31 he says these signs, so the seven signs that he has recorded, these signs are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name you may have life in his name. So the signs of John are pointers to the identity of Jesus. He wants to make it clear that Jesus isn't just a good man, good teacher, wise or a healer or some political figure. Jesus is the Messiah, God's promised Saviour and that he is the Son of God.

And that he's come on a mission. He's come on a mission to bring life. Life for all who will believe in him, who will trust in him. And as such it always calls for response.

Today's story is set against a backdrop. On the one hand there are groups of people who are believing as Samaritans and then also the backdrop of rejection or failing to recognise the Saviour among the Jewish people themselves. And against that backdrop there is this personal story. Here is a royal official with a personal crisis, with a family crisis. Can we imagine how he would feel his son nearing death with no help and no real hope? How will he in that setting, how will he read the signs about Jesus and how will he respond? Right now it is clear that we are in a variety of global crises.

Maybe today as you listen in you find yourself in a state of fear. Perhaps uncertainty. Maybe high anxiety and stress.

Perhaps frustrated or angry. I was just plain sad. In the middle of our crisis, how will we read the signs? How will we respond to the signs?

[5 : 38] Will they lead us, will they draw us to Jesus to find healing and to find hope? So let's begin to look at our story. The first thing we see as Jesus arrives in Galilee is a flawed welcome.

There is a problem in the way that he is welcomed. There's a change of location in verse 43. After two days he left for Galilee and that change of location brings a change of attitude.

He's just been in Samaria, a place where many Jews wouldn't even go because the Samaritans were regarded as despised half-breeds. They sort of mix and match religion. So they were hated or they were avoided.

And Jesus goes to a Samaritan town and he meets with and spends time talking with and brings salvation to an immoral woman.

And then following her testimony, a whole town comes to hear and to believe Jesus' words.

[6 : 48] These Samaritans see his identity. So in the woman's own words, as she leaves meeting with Jesus and goes back into her town, she says, Come see a man who told me everything I've ever done. Could this be the Messiah?

And then the people in the town, we know that this man really is the saviour of the world. Here in the story of this town, there is a discovery that God's love is like an ocean with no bottom, with no shore.

This mercy that extends to people who are regarded as nothing and nobody, people who are despised. We see the heart of Jesus, which is moved by need and which moves towards those who are suffering and those who need to know God and his hope.

But now he's come to Galilee. Now he's come to his home territory. And the emphasis is very much on not the words of Jesus, but what they had seen. They welcome Jesus because of what they have seen.

They are looking for Jesus to do miracles. That's where their interest seems to begin and end. Not in his words, not in his identity.

[8 : 15] They want miracles. It's also important, and John really wants to flag this up for us, that this is taking place, verse 46, in Cana in Galilee.

So Jesus' first sign in Cana, now his third sign in Cana, they create bookends to this whole section from John chapter 2 to the end of John chapter 4, with the temple clearing in the middle.

So what do these signs, as we put them together, what do they teach us about Jesus? Jesus turned water into wine to keep a wedding celebration going, to show that he brings joy, that he brings grace, that he is the true bridegroom who ultimately is going to lay down his life, whose blood will be the wine that creates for lasting eternal joy.

Then there's the temple clearing. And Jesus identifies himself as the true temple. He is the way to God, to meet with God. He's the new centre of worship. And now here in this third sign, we're going to see him, in this healing brain, restoration and life.

So the Samaritans see and believe the words of Jesus, that he is the Messiah, that he's the saviour that God had promised, but that the Jews in that section are largely failing to see, and some are beginning to be resistant to Jesus.

[9 : 47] So there's responses. And so straight away, the question then becomes, well, how are we responding? And one thing that becomes clear in this passage is that a superficial welcome of Jesus is not enough.

The people in Galilee, they wanted Jesus for what he could give. Maybe get some people healed, maybe do something wonderful. Maybe today we find ourselves thinking, if I had Jesus, he could maybe give me a bit of peace, which I need right now.

Or I could get my life back. And so we pray for a while, or we have that sense of looking for Jesus, for what we can get. In a way, sometimes we can treat Jesus like, perhaps if there's a friend that we know who has skills or who has access, sometimes we maybe use that person for what they can supply, in which case we're not really being true friends at all.

John's gospel is saying to us, we need to receive Jesus for who he is, to welcome him as the saviour that we need.

Nothing else will suffice. So their welcome is flawed. But into that, we see Jesus as a merciful saviour.

[11 : 12] So we're back in Cana, and we're back in a family situation. But this is a totally different family story. So the first time he was in Cana, it was a family wedding celebration.

And Jesus keeps the feast going and provides true joy. Well, here's a very different story. Here's a dad who's desperately concerned for his second dying child.

But again, there's another sign that transforms a family. As we'll see, he transforms a family, not just for now, but for eternity. So we meet a royal official in verse 47, who hears that Jesus has come back, and he goes and he begs Jesus to come and heal his son.

Now, what's clear is the royal official is coming with desperation. He's coming with desperate faith. It's not clear how much he knows about Jesus. The other Gospels make clear that miracles were part of Jesus' public life from the very beginning.

He was giving windows into God's kingdom, that he's about restoration and about life and pushing back the forces of darkness. Perhaps he has seen some of these miracles.

[12 : 27] Perhaps he's heard the reports. There's the news spread of this one who is doing miracles. Could he be the Messiah? But we don't know.

But what we do know is that however much he has heard about Jesus, it leads him to act. I wonder today, have you begun to see who Jesus truly is?

Have you begun to see that with his power and with his truth, that he is the Son of God? And have you begun to see why he came?

That he is responding to our need, to our lostness, to the fact that spiritually we are dead because of our sin, separated from the one relationship that matters above all, our relationship with God.

And Jesus has come to be a saviour, to die on the cross, to go there, to take the punishment for sin, to give us forgiveness and eternal life. Have you begun to see that?

[13 : 34] Or do you recognise that? And the question is, will you act on that? We need to understand it's not how much we know that counts.

It's all about who we know. It's not about how strong our faith is. It's about who our faith is in.

So this royal official, he gives us an example to follow. With however much he knows, he comes to Jesus in faith. And we see in this, in his experience, just how merciful Jesus is, how willing to save and to restore Jesus is.

So on the one hand, he can point out the flaw in the welcome he's received in Galilee. So in verse 48, unless you people see signs and wonders, Jesus told him, you will never believe.

Unlike the Samaritan who believe in the words of Jesus, unless you see signs and wonders, you will never believe. But what happens next? Jesus in mercy and compassion gives a sign so that the man will believe.

[14 : 55] So the royal official said again, come down before my child dies. Jesus says, go, your son will live. And the man discovers the child was healed at the very moment that Jesus uttered those words.

And so one group, the Samaritans, they believe simply because of the words of Jesus. This royal official, he needs extra assurance. And Jesus in mercy, Jesus with a gentle heart, gives that assurance.

So we're getting an insight into the heart of Jesus for sinners and sufferers as we think about this sign. We read at the beginning, that invitation from Jesus, come to me if you're weak, come to me if you're burdened, and I will give you rest.

There's no qualifications on that. And he tells us why we can come with confidence it's because he is gentle and he is humble in heart.

In just a couple of chapters, in John chapter 6 and verse 37, Jesus will say, whoever comes to me, I will never drive away.

[16 : 09] I will certainly welcome whoever comes to me with faith, whoever recognises me as saviour, whoever reaches out, cries out, I will come and I will never send them away.

Do you see the welcoming heart of Jesus? Do you hear him inviting you to come to him?

To invite him in to your life, into your circumstances, to give you hope, to give you peace, to give you a future. In chapters 2 to 4, we get a wonderful picture of the mercy of Jesus.

Who are the people that respond with faith? Who are those that Jesus moves towards? Those facing shame. The bridegroom of the wedding who'd failed to provide for his guests.

Facing that public shame, Jesus steps in. Those who are facing the injustice of being denied a place to worship, Jesus steps in and clears the temple.

[17 : 25] Those whose lives are empty and who are despised because of their moral behaviour, the women of Samaria.

And now, this man who is desperate and in a personal crisis, all of them a weak Jesus compassion.

Sometimes I'm not sure that we understand or that we can ever understand just how deep the Saviour's love is, just how merciful he is, that his posture towards us is not finger wagging, but arms wide open to welcome and receive us.

And now that he's in heaven, now that he's enthroned in glory, his heart hasn't changed. He still sends that heart of mercy to you to give you hope today.

And then we see in response to Jesus' sign, a family who believes. There's evidence of faith in the man. In verse 50, John says, the man took Jesus at his word.

[18 : 44] There's faith. Jesus says, your son will live. The man believes, takes Jesus at his word. When Jesus says, whoever believes in me will not perish, but have eternal life, we can take him at his word.

Whoever comes to me, I'll never drive away. We can take him at his word. I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to their father except through me. We can take him at his word that if we come to him, then we will come to know our father in heaven.

Now, Jesus performs this sign, a powerful miracle, healing the boy at a distance, backing up his identity as saviour of the world.

The official has exercised faith and his seeing the sign led to believing. When he's told the boy was healed at one in the afternoon, the father realised this was the exact time that Jesus said your son will live.

So he and his whole household believed. that boy was saved twice over. He was healed physically but he was also healed spiritually.

[20 : 05] Now he too is trusting in Jesus as saviour. Now he too has the hope of eternal life. Just a little reminder for us if you're listening in and you're a Christian to be praying for your family and to be praying for families, praying for families in our church.

that salvation would come to whole households. Pray for mums and dads as they look to teach the Bible and to pray for and with their children. Look to bring them up in faith in challenging circumstances.

I sometimes think of Jonathan Edwards, a theologian from a past century. He used to, I think daily, pray for six future generations, praying that each of them would know the Lord and would serve Jesus.

Important to pray for families and households. But this royal official, a wonderful story, through his tears, through his pain and anxiety, he is able to read the signs about Jesus.

He came to Jesus in faith and he believed. God, we are always being called to respond today to the Saviour.

[21 : 26] The Bible is very clear. There are only two ways that Jesus relates to us. Either he will relate to us as our judge if we refuse him, if we don't allow him to deal with our sin and to forgive us, then we will pay the penalty.

Jesus will be the judge or Jesus will relate to us as a friend, as a Saviour, as our elder brother, as the one who loves his church and who gave himself for the church so that he might have the joy of spending eternity with his bride.

His call has come to him, to believe that he is for you and to respond. We see just how merciful and how loving Jesus' heart is towards us most clearly at the cross.

Here's the story of a son who was close to death but there at the cross Jesus didn't just go close to death, Jesus tasted death, Jesus died and he didn't die for anything that he had done wrong, he died in our place for our sins.

He didn't have to do that in love, he chose to do that. Just as the father chose it to send, the son he loves to be our Saviour, so Jesus in love comes and he tastes death and there God's just anger against our sin falls not on us but it's funnelled onto him so that we might know love, we might know forgiveness, we might have joy in the family of God.

[23 : 28] That just as this family in our story, they had joy as they welcomed Jesus into their life. So we can have joy knowing his mercy that runs deeper than our circumstances that is there for us in our suffering, in our sin, in our sorrow.

When we think about signs, the cross itself stands as a blazing neon sign showing us the dazzling glory of God's merciful love extended to us in the coming of Jesus.

Will you come to him for mercy and rest today? God's love to say, let's pray once again together.

Let's pray. Lord God, we thank you for your son Jesus, for his mercy, and we thank you that he remains compassionate while he sits in the glory of heaven, ruling and reigning over all things, interceding, praying for his people, the church, and calling others to come to him.

Lord, we pray today that just as we see in our story Jesus' compassion for the sick, Lord, we pray that you would show mercy to those who are sick and suffering.

[25 : 05] It's some that we know in our families and in our friendship groups and in our communities. Lord, we pray for healing and restoration. We thank you for doctors and nurses and care workers.

We ask that you would sustain each one of them. Lord, we thank you for your mercy in the virus seeming to be under a greater level of control and we pray that that would continue in our own country.

But we also remember parts of the Americas and parts of South Asia where there is still a huge battle going on, many lives being lost, much trauma, happening.

And Lord, we pray that you would show mercy. Lord, we pray for national recovery as we turn our attention to the future.

We pray for financial recovery. We think of thousands of people who have been made jobless in the last week. Lord, we ask for provision.

[26 : 06] We pray for compassion. We pray for good solutions for business leaders, for governments, for employers.

Lord, we pray for social recovery. Having spent so much time on our own, we thank you for greater opportunities to see family and friends. We pray that as a nation we'd continue to do that safely to avoid any spiking.

But Lord, we recognise maybe in a more profound way than ever before how important it is to be physically present with the people that we love and care about. And so we pray that you would bless us as we move towards greater relationship.

Lord, we pray for a recovery of emotional health because of the isolation, because of the fear, because of trauma and grief that's been experienced. Lord, may you show great mercy to us.

May you provide true and lasting healing. recovery. Lord, may you provide spiritual recovery that in the middle of this crisis there would be a turning to yourself, recognising that you and you alone ultimately bring lasting hope, lasting healing, and you bring true life.

[27 : 26] Lord, we pray for the global church today. We thank you for parts of the world that are able to open up for worship, albeit in very different circumstances. We pray that that would encourage our brothers and sisters in Christ.

We pray that they would have a sense of joy in being together. We pray too that there would be joy of knowing new people joining the church. Thank you for all those stories of people in this time being led to online church, being led to read the Bible and to pray, and for those who have put their faith in Jesus.

We pray to see lasting spiritual change through this time. And we pray in Jesus' name. Amen. Now, let's sing again.

We're going to sing from Psalm 146. We're going to sing the first six verses, and then we'll sing the hymn Across the Land. Praise the Lord, my soul, O praise Him.

I'll extol Him all my days. While I live to God, my Savior, from my heart I will sing praise.

[28 : 53] Do not put your trust in princes, mortal men who cannot save.

All their plans will come to nothing when they perish in the grave.

Blessed is the one who truly looks for help to Jacob's God.

Blessed is the one who places all his hope upon the Lord.

He who made the earth and heaven and the seas with all their store.

[29 : 53] He who keeps his every promise, who is faithful evermore.

You're the word of God, the Father, from before the world began.

Every star and every planet has been fashioned by your hand. All creation holds together by the power of your voice.

Let the skies declare your glory. Let the land and sea rejoice. You're the author of creation.

You're the Lord of every man. And your cry of love rings out across the land.

[31 : 06] Yet you left the gaze of angels, came to seek and save the lost, and exchanged the joy of heaven for the anguish of a cross.

With a prayer you fed the hungry, with a word you come to see. Yet how silently you suffered that the guilty may go free.

You're the author of creation. You're the Lord of every man. And your cry of love rings out across the land.

With a shout you rose victorious, wresting victory from the grave. And ascended into heaven, leading captives in your way.

Now you stand before the Father, interceding for your own. From each tribe and tongue and nation, you are leading sinners home.

[32 : 31] You're the author of creation. You're the author of creation. And your cry of love rings out across the land.

You're the author of creation. You're the Lord of every man. And your cry of love rings out across the land.

And now let's pray.

Lord God, just as that Samaritan village said they no longer had to believe simply because of the words of this lady, she testified to who she'd met, that they had come to know for themselves Jesus as the saviour of the world.

We pray that that would be our own personal experience, that we would know Jesus as the saviour of the world. We also pray that you'd help us to share the message of Jesus with others so that many around us might have that joy of knowing Jesus as saviour for themselves.

[33 : 53] So we pray that you'd go with us into this new week. We ask that you'd give us strength for all the tasks and challenges and opportunities that lie ahead. May we be conscious that your mercy is there for us each step of the way.

Amen. Now, just to remind you, if you belong to our church, especially Digital Tea and Coffee, as always, is on at 12. We have Monday prayer at 8.

And the community groups are meeting to study John's Gospel together. So hopefully we'll see some of you there and look forward to sharing with you again soon.

Okay, take care and God bless. Thank you.