

## John, Part 14: A Tale of Two Cities

**John 4:43 ESV** After the two days he departed for Galilee. **44** (For Jesus himself had testified that a prophet has no honor in his own hometown.) **45** So when he came to Galilee, the Galileans welcomed him, having seen all that he had done in Jerusalem at the feast. For they too had gone to the feast.

**46** So he came again to Cana in Galilee, where he had made the water wine. And at Capernaum there was an official whose son was ill. **47** When this man heard that Jesus had come from Judea to Galilee, he went to him and asked him to come down and heal his son, for he was at the point of death. **48** So Jesus said to him, “Unless you see signs and wonders you will not believe.” **49** The official said to him, “Sir, come down before my child dies.” **50** Jesus said to him, “Go; your son will live.” The man believed the word that Jesus spoke to him and went on his way. **51** As he was going down, his servants met him and told him that his son was recovering. **52** So he asked them the hour when he began to get better, and they said to him, “Yesterday at the seventh hour the fever left him.” **53** The father knew that was the hour when Jesus had said to him, “Your son will live.” And he himself believed, and all his household. **54** This was now the second sign that Jesus did when he had come from Judea to Galilee.

- I. Today we'll be studying the second of 7 miracles (or signs) performed by Jesus that the the Apostle John focuses on in his Gospel. Our text today begins by telling us that Jesus spent two additional days preaching to the people in the Samaritan village of Sychar, and we know from our study last week, that many Samaritans came to believe in Christ.
  - A. **John 4:42 ESV** They said to the woman, “It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for ***we have heard for ourselves***, and ***we know*** that this is indeed the Savior of the world.”
  - B. This is an important thing for us to remember. ***A second hand experience of God is no experience at all.*** Many people feel that they are Christians because their parents are (or were), or because they were raised in church, or have some other religious pedigree (such as agreeing with some Christian teachings). Some feel like they are Christians simply because it's the West Texas thing to be.
    1. But none of these things are ever enough to qualify as a valid experience of coming to know Christ.
    2. To be a Christian means you follow Jesus because you've had a personal revelation of the truth by the Holy Spirit; and that revelation resulted in conviction of sin, and the beginning of an inside-out transformation.
  - C. In one sense, this revelation of the truth is universal: the Holy Spirit always reveals the same truth about the same Savior, always is according to Scripture, and cannot be otherwise. But it is personal in the sense that each individual must hear and respond to the Holy Spirit's call to know Christ for themselves. One thing is sure; no one rides anyone else's coattails into the Kingdom of God!
    1. When our son Cameron told us he was an atheist, Ginger and I were devastated! But in spite of that, we prayed, not that we could convince him

- of his error, but rather that God would reveal himself to Cameron personally, so that what he received would be genuine, and not second-hand smoke!
2. Thankfully the Lord heard and answered our prayer, and drew Cameron to himself, through an experience of his very own.
- D. Whether or not you claim to be a Christian, and no matter how long you claim to have been one; can you say you have had such an experience of Jesus? Can you say you know him by **personal** revelation? Or do you claim to know him because you think you've "always been a Christian" or have "a Christian heritage"? I dare you to ask him to reveal himself to you personally today!
- E. Our text tells us that, although Christ's original intention was to travel to Galilee, he had no problem deciding to stay for two more days in Samaria, doing effective ministry. The passage also tells us **why** this an easy decision for him.
1. **John 4:44 ESV (For Jesus himself had testified that a prophet has no honor in his own hometown.)**
  2. While the Samaritans were rejoicing that the Messiah had come to them, bringing a promise of free-flowing, living water that they might never thirst again, Jesus knew what awaited him when he got to his own neighborhood.
- F. When Jesus reached Galilee, he would be on his home turf. The events in our passage today take place in Cana (where Jesus turned water into wine), which was only 6-7 miles from Jesus' hometown of Nazareth. And make no mistake, news of his growing fame had travelled fast!
1. The gospels show that Jesus often had an odd reception when he came home!
    - a) **Matthew 13:54 ESV** and coming to his hometown he taught them in their synagogue, so that they were astonished, and said, "Where did this man get this wisdom and these mighty works? **55** Is not this the carpenter's son? Is not his mother called Mary? And are not his brothers James and Joseph and Simon and Judas? **56** And are not all his sisters with us? Where then did this man get all these things?" **57 And they took offense at him.** But Jesus said to them, "A prophet is not without honor except in his hometown and in his own household." **58** And he did not do many mighty works there, because of their unbelief.
    - b) In Luke's account, the people in the synagogue at Nazareth drove him out of town and tried to throw him off of a cliff!
    - c) Though the woman at the well quickly perceived that Christ was a prophet, this "prophet" would not receive respect or honor even in his own hometown! Jesus' ministry didn't enjoy "home field advantage"!
  2. Because of this, Christ appears to be in no rush to get home, especially in light of the opportunity God had opened for him in Samaria. But at last it was time to go, and just as the Spirit of God had led him, so that he "must needs" go to Samaria, the same Spirit was now leading him back to Galilee.
- II. But there is something interesting in the text. Though Jesus had said "a prophet is not without honor except in his hometown and in his own household", the very next line says that "the Galileans welcomed him." Is this contradictory to what Christ had said? Had he misread the Galileans? Had they repented and changed?

- A. The Bible says that they “welcomed him, having seen all that he had done in Jerusalem at the feast. For they too had gone to the feast.” What is this talking about?
1. Remember when we studied chapter two? Jesus went to the passover feast in Jerusalem and overturned the tables of the merchants and money-changers in the temple and caused a big ruckus with the Jewish leaders. This is one of the things John might be referring to that they saw.
    - a) In their minds, perhaps cleansing the Temple meant that Jesus was not afraid to take action! If he was the messiah, they would need that kind of forcefulness to deal with the Romans and set things back in order!
    - b) Also they were from Cana - where Jesus turned the water into wine! Remember how that had transpired?
      - (1) Jesus’ mother Mary had told the household servants at the wedding to do whatever Jesus told them to. And the result was that Jesus turned water into the finest vintage anyone had tasted; and he had done so unbeknownst to anyone at the party (except the servants)!
      - (2) Well, have you ever tried to keep that kind of secret? Perhaps the servants who knew about the miracle spilled the beans and began to make Jesus famous in Cana since his departure!
  2. In any case, the people of Cana in Galilee were glad to see Jesus, and the reason probably had more to do with what they thought he could do for them with his growing influence and miraculous power, rather than simply acknowledging who he was, and what he was revealing about the Father.
- B. Let’s explore the cities of Nazareth and Cana side by side and see what we can learn about the ways that people consider Jesus...both of them wrong. Call it “a tale of two Cities”! In Nazareth (in both Matthew’s and Luke’s accounts) the overriding attitude toward Christ was *familiarity*.
1. **Matthew 13:55 ESV** *Is not this the carpenter's son? Is not his mother called Mary? And are not his brothers James and Joseph and Simon and Judas? 56 And are not all his sisters with us? Where then did this man get all these things?"*
    - a) In Nazareth, they recognized him as Jesus, the son of a humble carpenter and no one special. But they failed to recognize him as Christ (which means “God’s anointed one”).
    - b) Some might have remembered how his mother had gotten pregnant before she and Joseph were married. Perhaps there was someone who had changed Jesus’ diapers in the nursery! It’s hard to think of someone as the messiah if you knew them as a baby!
    - c) And what about his brother’s and sisters? Maybe someone spent some time with them in the youth group and saw how they fell asleep in church or cussed on the basketball court. Surely the siblings of the Son of God wouldn’t do that!
  2. So they thought, “Who is this ‘carpenter’s son’ to come here and claim that ‘the Spirit of the Lord is upon him to bring liberty and healing?’ (like Luke says Christ did in Nazareth, fulfilling Isaiah’s prophecy). **Matthew 13:57a**

**ESV And they took offense at him.** Their sin was familiarity, and the old saying runs true, “familiarity breeds contempt”.

- a) Do we ever approach Jesus this way? Do we ever think that we’ve got him so figured out that when the Holy Spirit tries to draw us deeper into the knowledge of him, we resist?
  - b) Do we ever let our circumstances and preconceived notions dictate for us who he is, rather than listening to Scripture and the voice of the Holy Spirit? Of so, that is the sin of familiarity, and we are warned that Christ chooses not to display his power in such an atmosphere.
  - c) **Matthew 13:58 ESV And he did not do many mighty works there, because of their unbelief.**
- C. But it was different in Cana. They went the other direction. Their sin was to place demands and expectations on Jesus, making him to be someone that he wasn’t, and missing his true mission entirely. Essentially they wanted to use him for their own purposes.
1. To them Christ was strong political leader, just waiting in the wings to flex his muscle on their behalf. He was also a “wine-making machine”; there to be the life of their parties, and deliver on their every demand.
  2. While the Nazarenes know him as Jesus, but not Christ; the people of Cana knew him as conquering and powerful Messiah, but not the Lord of all, to whom they must submit.
    - a) Are we ever like that? Do we ever make demands on Christ for miracles or blessings in accordance with our own agenda? Do our prayers sound more like orders we place at a drive thru window, or online to Amazon?
    - b) Do we like him to be the messiah who pulls our backsides out of every jam we’re in, while never bothering to hit our knees and pray, **Luke 22:42b ESV “Nevertheless, not my will, but yours, be done.”**
- D. So in Nazareth they disregarded him, and in Cana they sought to use him, but neither chose to honor him for who he truly was.
- III. So into this “Cana” environment of demands and no Lordship, comes a government official. He too is from the region of Galilee, living about 15 miles away in the coastal city of Capernaum. In him, and his encounter with Jesus, we see Christ’s answer to **both** the Nazareth and Cana way of relating to Christ.
- A. The Bible is unclear as to what kind of official he is, Roman or Jewish, but most commentators that I looked at tended to believe that he was an attendant to Herod the Tetrarch, a Jew. The most important thing we notice about him is that he has come to Jesus with urgent need. His son is sick, even dying, but he has heard that Christ has miraculous power to heal.
    1. So, as any father would, he begins to implore and beg Jesus, asking him to come to Capernaum, that he might heal his ailing son.
    2. In this way he demonstrates the “Cana” way of coming to Jesus. At this point, Christ to him is purely utilitarian; a means to a desired end.
  - B. The official shows no concern for who Jesus really is, what he says about himself, what kingdom and power he represents, and certainly he shows no

concern for what Jesus might require of him! This is very different from another government official who once approached Jesus, asking for a similar miracle!

1. **Matthew 8:5 ESV** When he had entered Capernaum, a centurion came forward to him, appealing to him, **6** “Lord, my servant is lying paralyzed at home, suffering terribly.” **7** And he said to him, “I will come and heal him.” **8** But the centurion replied, **“Lord, I am not worthy to have you come under my roof, but only say the word, and my servant will be healed.** **9** For I too am a man under authority, with soldiers under me. And I say to one, ‘Go,’ and he goes, and to another, ‘Come,’ and he comes, and to my servant, ‘Do this,’ and he does it.” **10** When Jesus heard this, he marveled and said to those who followed him, **“Truly, I tell you, with no one in Israel have I found such faith.”** And Jesus mercifully healed his servant!
2. So in the same city (Capernaum), a gentile, addresses Christ as Lord, and demonstrates such incredible faith in Christ, that Christ marvels at him!
- C. Contrast this to the official in John 4, whose request is of such a different nature that it draws, not marveling, but rather a rebuke from Jesus!
  1. **John 4:48 ESV** So Jesus said to him, “Unless you see signs and wonders you will not believe.”
  2. So both the Roman Centurion and the Jewish official make a similar request. But notice that with the Centurion, Christ is enough! He is big enough, he is powerful enough, and he is good enough. He was commended because he believed in Jesus before he saw a thing. He was resting and trusting in Jesus. Resting and trusting is the very definition of believing in him.
  3. **Isaiah 30:15a HCSB** For the Lord God, the Holy One of Israel, has said: “You will be delivered by **returning** and **resting**; your strength will lie in **quiet confidence**.”
  4. But in the official, there is a hint of doubt that Jesus is sufficient in his urgency and fear. And that fact does not escape Jesus. He sees in him that he is merely “rolling the dice” on Jesus, rather than trusting him confidently.
- D. His credo is “seeing is believing” - the attitude that had affected all of Cana! “Show us a little something Jesus, and then we’ll join your parade!” But the Centurion understood that faith works on the opposite principle, that “believing is seeing”! He believed and Jesus mercifully healed his servant.
- IV. So Jesus was challenging the “Cana” attitude in him, showing him that he was not a vending machine, cranking out miracles at the drop of a nickel, and the turn of a knob. He wanted him to see that he was more than just a miracle worker. He was the mighty savior of Israel, King of Kings and Lord of Lords. But what about the Nazareth attitude in the official? Did he have a Spirit of familiarity with Jesus?
  - A. Notice the two statements of what the official wanted in the text: **“he went to him and asked him to come down and heal his son”** and then he said to Jesus, **“Sir, come down before my child dies.”**
    1. To this man, Jesus physical presence was critical to success. He had perhaps heard of other miracles Christ had done, where he had touched lepers, the blind, the deaf and the mute and they were healed and cleansed.

Obviously in his mind, the secret formula for obtaining healing was in Jesus' physical touch!

- a) This reminds me of Naaman the Syrian in the Old Testament; a government official who came to Elisha to be healed of leprosy.
  - b) But Elisha the prophet refused to even come out of his house and talk to him, instead sending a servant to tell him to bathe in the Jordan river 7 times and he would be healed. That was not what Naaman expected!
  - c) **2 Kings 5:11b ESV** "Behold, I thought that he would surely come out to me and stand and call upon the name of the Lord his God, and wave his hand over the place and cure the leper. **12** Are not Abana and Pharpar, the rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? Could I not wash in them and be clean?" So he turned and went away in a rage.
2. Our expectations of how God should work will always scuttle us. Can I teach you a rule? Anytime you think you have Jesus figured out, you don't. Any formula you construct to understand his ways is meaningless simply by virtue of being a formula!
- B. But what does Jesus do for the official? He shows himself to be bigger, more powerful, and far more good and loving than the official could ever imagine. He breaks the power of the spirit of familiarity when he does something completely unexpected and simply says the words, "Go; your son will live."
1. And with those simple words, the official discovered something better than applying his own expectations to Jesus, or assuming that he had him figured out. **John 4:50b ESV** The man believed the word that Jesus spoke to him and went on his way.
  2. He discovered what the Centurion discovered; that believing is seeing. He believed Jesus and came home to word that his son began to recover the moment Christ had spoken.
  3. And the greater result was that he made the shift from seeing Jesus as a mere means to an end, to believing on Jesus as Lord. **John 4:53b** And he himself believed, and all his household.
- C. We can never win by demanding that Jesus fit into the model of our preconceived notion of who he should be or assuming we know everything about him.
1. Why don't you begin a habit today of daily praying as Jesus instructed us, **Matthew 6:10 ESV** "Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven." This is so much better than thinking we can get God to meet our demands!
  2. In addition, can we commit to starting each day (or each moment) with a spirit of expectation and faith, saying to Jesus, "What do you want to do? Surprise me, Lord! Don't let me assume that I know who you are and what you want to do. Draw me deeper today into the mystery of who you are!"
- D. It always results in good things when we trust him, believe him and rest in him. Not as we assume he is, or we assume he should be, but as he reveals himself to be! **Psalms 86:8 ESV** There is none like you among the gods, O Lord, nor are there any works like yours.