

John 4:46-54 The Healing of an Official's Son: Lessons from a Miracle

Strictly speaking there are no miracles for God to perform. It is easier for God to speak the world into existence than it is for you or me to make a tomato sandwich. With that said, for our sakes we see the Lord Jesus doing many signs and wonders, miracles. Why is this? How are we to understand the miracles of our Lord? Well, our text today will give us an opportunity for some lessons about miracles. Hopefully, it will be helpful to us this morning. I have three truths: 1) Miracles confirm the beginning of the Messianic Age; 2) Miracles do not compel genuine faith; and 3) Miracles picture the work of God to conquer death and give life.

1. Miracles Confirm the Beginning of the Messianic Age. In v. 54 John says, **“this was now the second sign that Jesus did when he had come from Judea to Galilee.”** We already know that Jesus did other signs in Jerusalem at the time he cleansed the temple (2:23). I think John is merely pointing out that this is Jesus’ second miracle in Cana after turning the water into wine. And, as we see with all the Gospel writers, Jesus’ ministry is FULL of miracles. And, as people see these miracles, they believe in him (such will be the case today with the official and his household).

With this in mind, I want to highlight briefly that Jesus’ miracles confirm the age of the Messiah. In other words, God puts his stamp on Jesus (and the Apostles) with miracles. Do you remember the story when John the Baptist sent messengers to Jesus to confirm his coming as the Messiah? In Luke 7 they ask Jesus: **“Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?”** And then we read: **“In that hour he healed many people of diseases and plagues and evil spirits, and on many who were blind he bestowed sight. And he answered them, “Go and tell John what you have seen and heard: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, the poor have good news preached to them. And blessed is the one who is not offended by me”** (Luke 7:19-23) This was all John the Baptist needed to hear. For he knew that the OT prophesied of this special time of the Messiah which would be confirmed with great signs and wonders.

Concerning this special “day” of the Messiah, Isaiah 29:18 says, **“In that day the deaf shall hear the words of a book, and out of their gloom and darkness the eyes of the blind shall see.”** Is. 35:5-6: **“Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped; then shall the lame man leap like a deer, and the tongue of the mute sing for joy. For waters break forth in the wilderness, and streams in the desert . . .”** In 26:19: **“Your dead shall live; their bodies shall rise. You who dwell in the dust, awake and sing for joy! For your dew is a dew of light, and the earth will give birth to the dead.”**

Brothers and sisters, God designed the first coming of the Messiah and his age to be filled with signs and wonders and miracles to confirm God’s promises in his Son. And, I believe this time of miracles continued for a season through Acts of the Apostles, particularly as the church was being planted among the Gentiles of the world. We are starting to see this with Jesus as he goes to Samaria, and even further to Galilee and beyond.

So, what about today? Concerning miracles, do we see the same and experience the same as Jesus and the apostles. My view is exactly what I've stated. God gave signs and wonders and miracles to confirm the days of the Messiah. At the same time I believe God can do miracles and even confirms certain things in peoples' lives through a miracle, particularly healing. I don't believe we see men or women walking around healing folks as Jesus and the apostles did. However, I believe we should pray for healing. God still heals and can do it as He desires.

2. Miracles Do Not Compel Genuine Faith. In other words, miracles in and of themselves, are not the primary cause of faith. Just because a person witnesses a miracle doesn't ensure that true belief and salvation will come. I believe the context of this passage shows that the majority of the Jews of Jesus' day were following him because of the signs and wonders he did, not because they desired to "*deny themselves*," "*take up his cross*," and "*follow him*" (Matt. 16:24). I think, in the beginning, this official (an appointed leader under Herod in the area of Galilee) had heard of Jesus' miracles in Jerusalem and possibly the water turned to wine at the wedding in Cana. Capernaum was about 15 miles away. So, he makes a great effort to see if Jesus can save his son from a sickness that is sure to lead to death. And when he comes, Jesus says to him, "***Unless you see signs and wonders you will not believe***" (v. 48). The word "you" is plural as Jesus addresses not only this man, but the other Jews in the area as well. REMEMBER our context! Jesus had just come from Samaria where there was no miraculous sign or wonder, YET many believed in him because of his word. But, this is not so with the Jews.

We see this throughout Jesus' ministry. The Jews often demand of Jesus, "*show us a sign*" and "*we will believe*." Do you remember John 6 after Jesus fed the five thousand? After this miracle many of the people continued to follow him so they could eat and see another and maybe see another wonder. But when Jesus begins to teach them what it means to "eat" his food (to believe in him, to follow him as the true bread of life), many of them walk away. This is when Jesus says to the twelve, "*Do you want to go away as well?*" to which Peter says, "*Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. And we have believed, and have come to know, that you are the Holy One of God.*" (John 6:66-69).

Now, by the grace of God, this man (and his household) will truly believe. BUT, up until this time, I believe he was coming to Jesus that he may heal his son, not save his soul. SO, back to our truth: Miracles cannot compel genuine faith. Brothers and sisters, this was the majority of those who followed Jesus in these early days of ministry. And, sadly not much has changed in our day.

Miracles have the effect of "shock and awe;" if there is anything that "tickles" the ears and "amazes" the eyes, it is a good miracle. In my travels from Mexico to Africa to Russia, I have heard of sooooo many "miracles" that have amazed the crowds. One of the biggest stories I have heard is of the Virgin Mary who appears to Juan Diego in Mexico. At the same time the story says that his uncle was healed of sickness, and there was a mass "conversion" of the Aztecs. (Today, she is called the "Virgin of Guadalupe"). These kinds of stories ABOUND. But, it seems

to me that if miracles could cause conversions, the world would be saved by now. Personally, I am very skeptical of these “so called” miracles. And we know that Satan and his demons can also deceive in many ways. This is a mystery. But, at the end of the day, MIRACLES are not the cause of faith. So, how does faith come? Paul says that **“Faith comes by hearing and hearing through the Word of Christ”** (Rom. 10:17).

I think our church culture reflects a fascination with outward signs and flashy experiences, and a lot of external additives, particularly in our gatherings. I just found out this week that some churches actually use smoke machines (for what!). I think what draws people are often “big” dramas and “big” productions as opposed to the simple ways of God through the power of the Word and the simple power of a godly life. Brothers and sisters, the normal ways God works in the building of his church are not “miracles” and “flashy” experiences and “big” dramas. What does He use? He uses the normal means of Grace, the preaching of the Word, the taking of the Lord’s Supper to remember the death of Christ, the fellowship of Christians together as we sing hymns and songs of Christ. God works in the messy lives of struggling pilgrims in this evil world as we meet together, encouraging one another to obey the commands of Christ. These things are WAY more effective than many of the tactics used in so many churches in our culture.

At the end of the day, our faith is not based upon miracles, but upon the SURE WORD of God. This means the work of God through the Church is powerful. But, the things we do, and see, and take part in, are very “ordinary.” We don’t want “shock” and “awe” when we come here. We want the normal means of grace. It is usually the case that those who place their hopes and aspirations in miracles do not experience change where it counts (deny yourself, take up the cross, follow me). Folks like this, if the power of God through the Holy Spirit does not regenerate and bring life, we will never believe.

Brothers and sisters, what you win a person with is what you will have to keep him/her with. Because of this, many church leaders are continually looking for the next “big” thing to get their church EXCITED. Well, I/WE refuse to do this! You will not get that here! But, you will get the normal, faithful, means of grace. This also means that church life in our relationships are often messy. They aren’t full of “exciting” things. The ways we love one another are always normal life. Brothers and sisters, don’t look to the things that “tickle” your ears. They won’t save you. And in the end, though “spectacular” at the moment, will never bring the power of God that leads to repentance and faith and love for God and his gospel! At the same time, this way is the long, hard, difficult, road of the Christian life! Be faithful! Be faithful in the small things and you will reap the greatest of harvests.

Quick Application: Miracles still have great value, especially as we read about them in the Bible. In the end, this man did see his Son healed. And He believed in the Lord Jesus that day (along with his household). But, we know that he believed, NOT BECAUSE OF THE MIRACLE itself, but because of the power of the Lord Jesus Christ who healed his son. Also, when we read the Bible, there are sooooo many miracles in the history of God’s people. And if a person is willing to

discount one of them, then he/she must be willing to throw them all out. But we can't do that. In this way, miracles validate the Word and Work of God in this world, which brings us to our final truth.

3. Miracles Picture the Work of God to Conquer Death and Give Life. This is the most important truth about the miracles of Jesus at that time. I think this one of John's (and the other Gospels) emphases in his book. This means that when we see miracles, we must look beyond the miracle to see what it reveals. It is interesting that John says in v. 43 that "**after two days**" Jesus departed for Galilee. This means that on the "**third**" day he came to Cana. And on the "**third**" day he healed the official's son. John says this was his "**second**" sign (v. 54). Do you remember back in cp. 2 that Jesus also came to Cana on the "**third**" day where John says this was the "**first**" of his signs (2:1, & 2:11). In both these signs, we see powerful pictures of the Son giving life, one with water to wine and the other as he saves this boy from death. . . . What will Jesus do a couple years from then? He will lay down his life on the cross as a sacrifice. Death will come to him. But, what will he do on the third day? He will rise again.

So, right at the beginning of John's Gospel with these two "signs" (miracles) we see that God is starting to fulfill his promise from Gen. 3:15: "**I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel.**" In his resurrection the "head" of Satan is crushed. Death has been overcome. The great enmity between sinful men and a holy God has been opened to world (This is why Jesus tells the woman at the well that he will give her "**living**" water. And, this is why Jesus tells us disciples to see the "**harvest**" of the Samaritans.) Brothers and sisters, this is why Jesus came . . . to expiate and propitiate sin (to take away our sins upon himself AND to take the wrath of a holy God upon himself). And then, in the resurrection he conquers death FOREVER. This is the real meaning of these two miracles! This is John's purpose.

Miracles, as great as they are, still serve as a picture of that which is real. They are like types. They serve a purpose. They picture the deeper truth. What is this truth? What is the real? Miracles picture the work of God to conquer death and give life. Miracles take what is bad and make it good. The blind see. The deaf hear. Those who are crippled walk. Demons are cast out. The dead are raised. These are all examples of the effects of sin in this world. "**The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Jesus Christ our Lord.**" Jesus says, "**I came that they might have life, and have it in abundance**" (John 10:10).

Brothers and sisters, this is the purpose of miracles. They always picture the sure things of heaven where the son of God sits at the right hand of God. And NOW, Paul says we have been raised and are "seated with him in the heavenly places" (Eph. 2:6). In another place he says, "**If any man be in Christ, he is a new creation**" (2 Cor. 5:17). This is why, NOW, He has given us the Holy Spirit as a "**guarantee**," a "**down payment**" as we wait for our full redemption (2 Cor. 1:22). NOW, God has given us the Spirit of Life. We are compared to the "**first fruits**" of a

harvest (Rom. 8:23). This is why Paul prays for the Ephesians that that they would know the **“power that works in them,”** the same “power that rose Christ from the dead” (Eph. 1:19-20).

These are the things that miracles picture. Brothers and sisters, today, you do not see Christ physically. But, life has been given to you. And until the return of Christ and the consummation of all things, we live by faith and our hope is in the final resurrection of our bodies (See Rom. 8 and 1 Cor. 15). And in the meantime, let me finish with the words of Paul to the Ephesians for a final application.

Eph. 4:17-24: **“Now this I say and testify in the Lord, that you must no longer walk as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their minds. They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, due to their hardness of heart. They have become callous and have given themselves up to sensuality, greedy to practice every kind of impurity. But that is not the way you learned Christ!— assuming that you have heard about him and were taught in him, as the truth is in Jesus, to put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.”**

These are the lessons of miracles. 1) Miracles confirm the beginning of the Messianic Age; 2) Miracles do not compel genuine faith; and 3) Miracles picture the work of God to conquer death and give life.