

The Second and Third Signs – *John 4:43 – 5:9*

Introduction – In this section, Jesus returns to Galilee and performs a second miracle (unseen again) in Cana. John then shifts to an incident when Jesus heads back up to Jerusalem for a feast and heals a man struck with a lifelong infirmity. Recall that we are in the section of John known as the “*book of signs*,” seven of them, culminating in the raising of Lazarus from the dead. In this section, the signs have a purpose; they are to reveal Jesus’ glory leading to faith in Him (1:14, 2:11). As we will see, that is different than coming to the belief that Jesus can do really cool and supernatural things, which is not the point. John is recording these signs to reveal Who Jesus is and not simply what Jesus can do.

The Second Sign: Faith in His Word (4:43-54) – Many Samaritans believed in Jesus during the two days He spent teaching there (4:39-41). In contrast, Luke tells us that when Jesus came to Nazareth, they tried to kill Him for His claims of fulfilling Isaiah’s prophecy (Luke 4:16-30). John may have that occurrence in mind as Jesus would have travelled through Nazareth on further down into Cana of Galilee. Even there, in Galilee, the interest in Jesus was mainly due to the miracles He had done in Judea (2:23). Jesus appears to be disinterested in “faith” due to enthusiasm by His miracles. Other gospel writers noted that Jesus did heal to reveal that He was the One fulfilling the prophecies (i.e. Matt 8:16-17). But Matthew and John both saw that something more profound was being revealed than simply that Jesus could heal.

Jesus is approached by a royal official (probably a member of Herod’s court) who’s son was sick and at the point of death and was in Capernaum, some 20 miles away. This man had also heard of Jesus’ healing abilities and so sought Him out. Jesus uses his query to openly chide the crowds desire to see signs and wonders for their own sake. The nobleman was not swayed and repeated his request. At this point, Jesus gives a command and a promise, “*Go your way; your son lives.*” And what is striking is that we are told that the man “*believed the word*” and went his way. He didn’t return until the following day when his servants met him and told him the hour the son had been healed. It was the very hour that Jesus had said His words. And this testimony brought the nobleman’s entire household to faith.

Some point out that Jesus’ first miracle of water to wine revealed His power over time and the second miracle revealed His power over space, and certainly that is true. But as we saw in the first sign there is something far deeper being revealed. In this sign, we are to see that Jesus’ word is God’s word. Jesus is the Word of God and when God speaks, that which He declares becomes. The point is not faith in a powerful man, but faith in the Word of God Who is a Person. Faith is not to be placed in what you see (the boy was not there). Faith is to be placed in God’s promises and in His commands. His Word is true, and His commands are good.

The Third Sign: The Works of His Word (5:1-15) – Jesus returns to Jerusalem for one of the feast days. He goes to a pool called Bethesda (house of mercy) where a multitude of sick people would gather, believing that an angel would come upon the water and bring healing. There was a certain man there who had been afflicted for 38 years. We have already seen that John has used standing water as a symbol of the incomplete or impotent ability of the Old Covenant administration to bring regenerate life (the water in the ceremonial waterpots, the need for a new birth of water and Spirit, the living water supplanting the water from Jacob’s well) and so here again, water stirred up by an angel is not enough. Something greater has come.

Jesus asked him, “*do you want to be made well?*” The question almost sounds rude, but it is a profound question that we need to be asked in our afflictions. How much are we asked to identify ourselves by our struggles, sins, or victimhood? Jesus asks, would you like to be identified by something else? The sick man gives his excuse/reason (v7) and Jesus simply replies, “*Rise, take up your bed and walk.*” Once again, Jesus’ word is enough. “*All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made. In Him was life, and the life was the light of men*” (John 1:3-4). God’s commands are not dead commands. His words have the power of being. This could be considered a performative statement as opposed to an indicative statement. His word received changes us, and for this man, he is immediately transformed. His identity is forever changed. And he walks in this new identity. Part of walking in the light is walking in a living command. “*Go your way; your son lives.*” “*Rise, take up your bed and walk.*” Augustine said, “*Lord, command what you will, and give what you command.*”

The narrative continues and the Pharisees dead use of the Sabbath is revealed. While it is true that there were Sabbath laws that condemned carrying a burden on the Sabbath (Num 15:32, Jer 17:21) the oral laws of the Pharisees had twisted this away from teaching a cessation of labor for the sake of Sabbath rest and celebration to scrupulous law-keeping down to the weight and distance of anything you carried. The Sabbath had become the burden to carry, killing the very life and rest God intended for the Sabbath to be.

Finally, Jesus finds the man in the temple and gives him a warning: *“Sin no more, lest a worse thing come upon you.”* Receive God’s good gifts when He gives them to you and do not forget that He has done so. This points out that we often have a deep and abiding memory of unanswered prayers while only a foggy recollection of answered prayers. His answered prayers ought to stoke our faithful obedience. Falling away again into sin after the blessing can make matters worse (2 Pet 2:21).

The Confusion over Signs – The signs are given to us by John to reveal the glory of Christ so that we would believe on Him, that is, to believe that Jesus is God, that He came to forgive us all our sins and save us from our just condemnation, to show us the Way to the Father. While it is true that Jesus can and does heal, on this side of heaven all these miracles are only temporary. The healed boy still died one day, as did the paraplegic. The wine in the jars still eventually emptied out. If our focus is on the signs, our faith will be ill-grounded. But if the signs reveal to us the glory of Christ, the destination that the signs point to, then our faith will be a living faith and His Word will be performative.

The School of Afflictions and the Glory of Christ – What benefits are conferred upon those who are afflicted? If the nobleman’s son had never been ill, his father might have lived and died in his sins. The affliction upon the lame man brought him face to face with Jesus and deal with his own identity. Afflictions are one of God’s tools to perfect us (James 1:2-4). Even the afflictions of Jesus on the cross perfected the Perfect One (Heb 5:8-9). Consider. Jesus lived a perfect life and yet He was perfected with holes in His hands and side. When your trial has placed a hole in you, take it to the Lord and hear, “yes, and my Son has a hole in His side, and it was needed for His perfection.” Suffering is unbearable if we don’t know that God is with us and for us. But in the school of affliction, any affliction, the goal is to bring you to the One Who’s affliction brought salvation to you and to the world. And it is only there that you, and your eternal life, is perfected (Psalm 119:71-72).

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