

The Gospel of John (29); Healing a Nobleman's Son, the Second Sign

Introduction:

Today we move onward in our study of our Lord's ministry as penned by the Apostle John. Through the narrative before us, we follow our Lord and His disciples northward from Samaria into Galilee. After His arrival in Cana of Galilee, Jesus performed a miracle by giving life to the dying son of a nobleman, and He did so from a distance through His word. John described this miracle as a "second sign" that Jesus did, which is out of a total of seven signs related to us in John's Gospel.

This account will direct us to consider several matters respecting our faith. Principally, there are some lessons for us regarding the nature of afflictions and how the Lord employs them in bringing souls to faith. We also may receive instruction on how we are to react and respond to afflictions. And then we will also consider the nature of faith in the Lord and how the Lord increases our faith and how that faith is manifested in our lives. Lastly we will learn something about the nature of our Lord's word and how the Lord employs it in accomplishing His purposes in His people.

We read in verse 43ff that after a two day stay with the Samaritans, Jesus and His disciples traveled into Galilee, which lie just to the north. We read of John's description of our Lord's arrival in Galilee in **John 4:43-45**.

⁴³Now after the two days He departed from there and went to Galilee. ⁴⁴For Jesus Himself testified that a prophet has no honor in his own country. ⁴⁵So when He came to Galilee, the Galileans received Him, having seen all the things He did in Jerusalem at the feast; for they also had gone to the feast.

This paragraph begins an entirely new section of this Gospel. Some have regarded it as an interlude between that which we just completed considering and that which follows. John the Evangelist established the time and occasion for our Lord to depart Samaria and arrive in Galilee. A new narrative unit (pericope) begins with these verses.

Jesus had stayed two days with the Samaritans. Not only were the Samaritans most certainly influenced and affected spiritually, but we should assume that His disciples also experienced quite an adjustment in their thinking about the identity of the people of God and of God's plan to expand His kingdom beyond the borders of Israel. I suspect that with the apostles witnessing this encounter of Jesus with the Samaritans that it enabled them to embrace the later conversions of the Samaritans to Christianity that are recorded in the book of Acts (cf. Acts 8).

The statement of **verse 44** seems to be somewhat out of place. It reads, "***For Jesus Himself testified that a prophet has no honor in his own country.***" Although Jesus was greatly welcomed and received honor from the Samaritans, He knew that He would have no honor conferred upon Him by His own countrymen. Or at least, the Galileans would not honor Him for who He truly was, rather, they would only desire Him for what He could do for them.

The sentence of verse 44 is set forth as an explanation, but it is not clear exactly what it explains. The expression itself is found in all three of the Synoptic Gospels (Matt. 13:57, Mark 6:4, Luke 4:24). In each instance, however, it was our Lord's comment upon His rejection by the inhabitants of His home town of Nazareth. But here it is placed prior to His entrance into Galilee. Some have suggested, therefore, that John was declaring that Judea, not Galilee, was "his own country." In other words, they say that the reason Jesus was going into Galilee was that His ministry in Judea had not been received by most.

Some, it is true, argue that “His own country” refers to Judea which He was just leaving. “Both by fact and the current interpretation of prophecy, Judea alone could receive that title” (Westcott). Similarly Hoskyns maintains that Jerusalem was the home of every Jew. Preeminently must it be so in the case of the Messiah. It is often added that only this interpretation accords with the circumstances. Jesus had been rejected in Judea, His own country, so He turned to another region, Galilee.¹

The problem with this view is that the Gospel does not portray Jesus as having been rejected by the people of Judea. They had actually responded greatly to Him and His message. And further, John records that it was not due to difficulty or rejection of Jesus that He left Judea for Galilee, but because He had been so successful and His fame had spread widely (cf. 4:1-3). It is more likely that Jesus made this statement because He did not anticipate a true welcome of Him when He arrived in His “own country” of Galilee. This would, then, be consistent with what was declared of Him in the Synoptic Gospels. He must have been quite surprised at the warm welcome that He and His disciples received from the Galileans. And yet, even those who welcomed Him did not have true faith. It was a “faith” based upon what they saw, a “faith” based on seeing “signs and wonders”, rather than faith in Jesus for who He was, the very Son of God.

Although He will be accepted by those in Galilee (v. 45), “It was dependent on the wonder arising from their sight of the signs, not on a realization that Jesus was indeed the Christ, the Savior of the world. Their acceptance of Him was in its own way a rejection.”²

But perhaps what is suggested by this statement and that Jesus traveled to Cana is that He would not travel to His home town of Nazareth, which lie on the main road between Samaria and Cana. Jesus knew He would not be received in Nazareth, so He continued to Cana. This was the view of **Matthew Henry**:

Whither Christ went; into Galilee, into the country of Galilee, but not to Nazareth, which was strictly *his own* country. He went among the villages, but declined going to Nazareth, the head city, for a reason here given, which *Jesus himself testified*, who knew the temper of his countrymen, the hearts of all men, and the experiences of all prophets, and it is this, that *a prophet has no honor in his own country*.³

When Jesus arrived in Galilee He discovered some, perhaps many Galileans, who had witnessed firsthand His teaching ministry in Jerusalem, which had been accompanied with the performance of miracles. We read in **verse 45**, “***So when He came to Galilee, the Galileans received Him, having seen all the things He did in Jerusalem at the feast; for they also had gone to the feast.***”

Large numbers of Galileans would travel regularly to Jerusalem to observe the major feasts. This journey would have been in compliance to God’s Law given through Moses. We read of this in Exodus 23:

¹⁴“Three times you shall keep a feast to Me in the year: ¹⁵You shall keep the Feast of Unleavened Bread (you shall eat unleavened bread seven days, as I commanded you, at the time appointed in the month of Abib, for in it you came out of Egypt; none shall appear before Me empty); ¹⁶and the Feast of Harvest, the firstfruits of your labors which you have sown in the field; and the Feast of Ingathering at the end of the year, when you have gathered in the fruit of your labors from the field.

¹⁷“Three times in the year all your males shall appear before the Lord GOD. (Exo. 23:14-17)

The feast mentioned here was the Feast of Unleavened Bread, which was in conjunction with the observance of the Passover. This had been identified earlier John 2:23, “Now when He was in Jerusalem at the Passover, during the feast, many believed in His name when they saw the signs which He did.”

¹ Leon Morris, **The Gospel According to John** (William B. Eerdmans, 1971), p. 285f.

² Edward W. Klink, III, **John**. Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Zondervan, 2016), pp. 259f.

³ Matthew Henry, **Matthew Henry’s Commentary on the Whole Bible**, vol. 5 (Fleming H. Revell Company, n. d., originally 1721), p. 915.

And so, when Jesus returned to Cana of Galilee, there were present there many Galileans who had seen and heard Jesus when they had recently been in Jerusalem. They had been eyewitnesses of miracles that our Lord performed while there. Now it is true that John did not speak of Jesus having performed miracles while in Jerusalem, but that He did so is certainly implied here. By the way, this also reveals to us that John (as well as the other Gospel writers) did not record everything that Jesus did.

Once again we are reminded that Jesus did many things which are not recorded... It is not John's purpose to attempt a complete chronicle, but only select such events and teachings as will bring out his thesis that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God (20:31). So now he does not mention what the things were that so impressed the Galileans, but contents himself with pointing out that their attitude to Jesus was conditioned by what they had seen in Jerusalem.⁴

And so, many Galileans welcomed His arrival, which was perhaps somewhat of a pleasant surprise. However, although they in a sense received Him, it would seem that it was not with full honor. "They gave Him honor of a sort, but it was not the honor that was due Him."⁵ Our Lord Himself would say so shortly.

I. Jesus healed (gave life) to the nobleman's son (4:46-54)

Let us read the account in **verses 46** through **54**.

⁴⁶So Jesus came again to Cana of Galilee where He had made the water wine. And there was a certain nobleman whose son was sick at Capernaum. ⁴⁷When he heard that Jesus had come out of Judea into Galilee, he went to Him and implored Him to come down and heal his son, for he was at the point of death. ⁴⁸Then Jesus said to him, "Unless you people see signs and wonders, you will by no means believe."

⁴⁹The nobleman said to Him, "Sir, come down before my child dies!"

⁵⁰Jesus said to him, "Go your way; your son lives." So the man believed the word that Jesus spoke to him, and he went his way. ⁵¹And as he was now going down, his servants met him and told him, saying, "Your son lives!"

⁵²Then he inquired of them the hour when he got better. And they said to him, "Yesterday at the seventh hour the fever left him." ⁵³So the father knew that it was at the same hour in which Jesus said to him, "Your son lives." And he himself believed, and his whole household.

⁵⁴This again is the second sign Jesus did when He had come out of Judea into Galilee.

We read in **verse 46a**, "*So Jesus came again to Cana of Galilee where He had made the water wine.*" We had considered this first sign of Jesus, turning water into wine at the wedding reception in Cana. Perhaps John makes this statement to connect this miracle with this His first sign. The reader is to remember all of the proofs of who Jesus is by what He did.

Why did Jesus go here to Cana? Not only had they been there before, but Nathanael, one of Jesus' disciples who was with Him, was from Cana (John 21:2). And it is likely that Jesus' mother, Mary, had relatives in Cana. Therefore Jesus and His disciples could probably be assured that they would find accommodations in Cana while they were in that region.

We then read in **verses 46a** and **47**,

"And there was a certain nobleman whose son was sick at Capernaum. When he heard that Jesus had come out of Judea into Galilee, he went to Him and implored Him to come down and heal his son, for he was at the point of death."

⁴ Morris, p. 287.

⁵ Ibid.

This nobleman was a man of wealth and influence, but his son fell ill, seriously so. The nobleman was probably an influential political figure in Galilee. Some translate “nobleman” as “royal official.”⁶ This nobleman must have traveled the distance from Capernaum to Cana, a distance of about 10 to 15 miles. He knew of Jesus’ reputation of a great healer. But He probably also knew of Jesus’ great compassion and of His willingness to help those in need. That this notable man came himself reveals how deeply concerned he was and that it was imperative that in order for his son to live, Jesus would have to heal him.

This man’s concern for his son brought him to Jesus. Often the Lord will use the burden of parents for their children to bring those parents to Jesus. “In all the Gospels we never read of any sons or daughters coming to Christ on behalf of their parents.”⁷

The Lord rebuked the man, saying, to him, “*Unless you people see signs and wonders, you will by no means believe*” (v. 48). Here our Lord revealed that he knew the state of this man’s soul, even the nature and degree of his faith. It was due to this man hearing or perhaps seeing Jesus bring forth miracles that moved him to seek out Jesus. He had “faith” in Jesus, but it was flawed and weak. He did not imagine that Jesus could heal his son at a distance. Twice he implored Jesus to come down with him to his son. But in spite of this man’s deficient faith; nevertheless, the Lord had compassion on him. And the Lord saw to it that when this man returned to his son, his faith would be much stronger and of a much purer nature.

Our Lord made a generalization regarding the nature of the “faith” of many people. He said to the man, but then He used the plural verb with its subject the plural “you.”⁸ He spoke to the man, but rebuked them all: “*Unless you people see signs and wonders, you will by no means believe.*” But it is clear that the Lord is saying that faith in Him that is based on signs and wonders is not true saving faith. The Samaritans had believed on Jesus solely due to His word to them (cf. 4:42), but the people of Galilee would not believe unless they saw signs and wonders.

This man had a kind of “faith” when he came to Jesus, or else he would not have come. But his faith was based only on what he could “see.”

What the Galileans saw in Jesus was not who He truly was; it was who they selfishly wanted Him to be. They thought themselves to be healthy, when in truth they were already dead. This is why Jesus speaks right past that father to the crowds, right past the concern of that father to the concern of His Father.⁹

But thankfully, our Lord’s words to this father drew a higher and nobler faith from him. We read the father’s response in **verse 49**: “*The nobleman said to Him, ‘Sir, come down before my child dies!’*”

Jesus does not deny the poor faith which this official had but declares that this is not enough. His thus calling for a better faith, one that is real, must, however, not lead us to the hasty generalization that Jesus wrought signs only in answer to real faith and never where faith is absent. A study of the miracles reveals that they were used in both ways.¹⁰

The man was not dissuaded from pleading with Jesus by Jesus’ initial rebuke of his faith and that of the Galileans in general. Desperation drove the man to look to Jesus Himself, not simply for what Jesus could do, but to look *to Him* for the healing of his son.

He (Jesus) first attempts to turn this man’s faith in a higher direction, namely upon Jesus’ own person and his heart. And Jesus succeeds. With pleading reverence the man lays all his distress upon Jesus’ heart.¹¹

⁶ Klink, **John**, p. 260.

⁷ J. C. Ryle, **Expository Thoughts on John**, vol. 1 (The Banner of Truth Trust, 1987, orig. 1869), pp. 261.

⁸ The verb, “unless you see”, contains the second person plural subject, “you.” This is why the NKJV translates it as “you people.”

⁹ Klink, **John**, p. 263.

¹⁰ R. C. H. Lenski, **The Interpretation of St. John’s Gospel** (Augsburg Publishing, 1942), p. 350.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

It is as though Jesus said to this man, “Oh that you would think less about the wonders and more about Me!”¹²

In **verse 50a** we read, **“Jesus said to him, ‘Go your way; your son lives.’”** And the response of the man was a fuller, true faith in Jesus Christ. We read in **verse 51**, **“So the man believed the word that Jesus spoke to him, and he went his way.”**

We should say a word about the English translations of verse 50. The New King James Version (NKJV) reads, “Go your way; your son *lives*.” The English Standard Version (ESV) reads, “Go; your son *will live*.” The ESV translates the verb in the future tense, “your son will live.” The NKJV translates the verb in the present tense, “your son lives.” The NKJV correctly translates the present tense of the Greek word that John used. Jesus declared to this man that his son was no longer dying. He lives. The ESV carries the idea that the son would improve until he became well, but this is not what Jesus said to the man. “Your son lives!”

We read in **verse 50b**, **“So the man believed the word that Jesus spoke to him, and he went his way.”** God wants us to believe on Him for His Word, not because we see some physical evidence as evidence or proof that we can believe Him. “A sinful and adulterous generation” expects or demands to see a miracle before believing on Jesus (cf. Matt. 12:39). That is very dishonoring to the Lord.

We read in **verse 51ff**:

*⁵¹And as he was now going down, his servants met him and told him, saying, “Your son lives!”
⁵²Then he inquired of them the hour when he got better. And they said to him, “Yesterday at the seventh hour the fever left him.”
⁵³So the father knew that it was at the same hour in which Jesus said to him, “Your son lives.” And he himself believed, and his whole household.*

When the man inquired what time his son was restored to health, he was told the seventh hour of the previous day. This “seventh hour” was probably at 1:00 in the afternoon. It was not that the boy began to recover at the seventh hour, but that he was fully healed at the seventh hour. It was then that “the fever left him.” “The boy was completely restored, so completely that the servants were at once hurried off to the father.”¹³

The last verse is a summary statement, positioning the account within the narrative of the larger Gospel. **Verse 54** reads, **“This again is the second sign Jesus did when He had come out of Judea into Galilee.”** John’s Gospel sets forth the ministry of Jesus as manifesting seven signs. This is the second of those seven. The Gospel writer declared this to be the second sign in order to bring to remembrance to his readers the first sign, as well as for others forthcoming. “*Fresh* mercies should revive the remembrance of former mercies, as former mercies should encourage our hopes of further mercies” (Matthew Henry).

II. Lessons we may learn from our account

1. There is no one that is not vulnerable to the afflictions in this life, even the *young man*.

Here we read of *a son* who was deathly ill. Though he was a young man (we would surmise), perhaps just a boy, one in whom we would think have strength and vitality, nevertheless he was near death. Perhaps a short time before, death seemed to be quite distant from him. But now it was upon him. Death was at his door and knocking.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid, p. 355.

Christians, even all human beings, should be mindful of their own mortality. Death might be at our door, if it were not for the mercy and grace of God. If we would think rightly, we would be cognizant of the “uncertainty” of life from our perspective, and live accordingly. Oh yes, from God’s perspective, the duration of every lifetime is a fixed certainty. As **J. I. Packer** once expressed, “Christians should view their own forthcoming death as an appointment in Jesus’ calendar, which He will faithfully keep.”¹⁴ God has declared, “For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven: a time to be born, and a time to die” (Ecc. 3:1f). And this time to die is fixed by God in His eternal decree. We should always be mindful, therefore, that we are responsible to God for the time that He has given to us. We are to be as King David, who wrote, “My times are in Your hands” (Psa. 31:15).

And yet, there is something about fallen man that he will ignore or even suppress the thought of his own mortality. The Lord Jesus described this kind of man as a “fool.” We read of our Lord’s parable of the man who lived with no regard of his mortality, that it might be sooner than later. In Luke 12 we read of our Lord’s parable of the rich fool:

¹³Then one from the crowd said to Him, “Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me.”

¹⁴But He said to him, “Man, who made Me a judge or an arbitrator over you?” ¹⁵And He said to them, “Take heed and beware of covetousness, for one’s life does not consist in the abundance of the things he possesses.”

¹⁶Then He spoke a parable to them, saying: “The ground of a certain rich man yielded plentifully. ¹⁷And he thought within himself, saying, ‘What shall I do, since I have no room to store my crops?’ ¹⁸So he said, ‘I will do this: I will pull down my barns and build greater, and there I will store all my crops and my goods. ¹⁹And I will say to my soul, ‘Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years; take your ease; eat, drink, and be merry.’ ²⁰But God said to him, ‘Fool! This night your soul will be required of you; then whose will those things be which you have provided?’

²¹“So is he who lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God.” (Luke 12:13-21)

Younger people will often have little thought of their own death. Actually this is a rather paradoxical matter, for on the one hand, it would seem that the younger generation has a preoccupation with death. Our recent Halloween season would suggest this is a growing trend in our culture. But it seems that generally a younger person, who knows that any and all might meet death, believes that he will be the exception for quite some time to come. He is invincible, or so he thinks. I recall that was my thought as a young man, and I lived accordingly. But in the Lord’s providence one of my good friends with whom I was with on a Friday night, passed into eternity the following Saturday morning through a hunting accident, a stray shot from a .22 rifle. The Lord used that event to put the fear of God in my own soul regarding the uncertainty of life, from our perspective. The Lord made vivid to me my own mortality. I was converted to Christ a few weeks later.

Job expressed these words in his prayer to God:

“Man who is born of woman

Is of few days and full of trouble.

²He comes forth like a flower and fades away;

He flees like a shadow and does not continue.

³And do You open Your eyes on such a one,

And bring me to judgment with Yourself?

⁴Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean?

No one!

⁵*Since his days are determined,*

The number of his months is with You;

You have appointed his limits, so that he cannot pass. (Job 14:1-5)

¹⁴ J. I. Packer, **Concise Theology; A Guide to Historic Christian Beliefs** (Tyndale House Publishers, 1993), p. 248.

May the Lord help us to be mindful of the wonderful life that He has granted us and may we enjoy it and value it, as we live before Him. But may He also enable us to keep our own mortality before us, no, not in a morbid, fearful way, but that it might help lead us toward wisdom, ordering our lives according to the will of God. We should hear the word of God to Israel as though it were directed to us, “prepare to meet your God” (Amos 4:12).

But this son who was near death, had *a father*, who happened to be a “nobleman”, a man of some political importance and perhaps a man of some wealth. But his stature and power was not before his mind, for his son was “at the point of death” (John 4:47). He had heard that Jesus was coming into Galilee. Perhaps he himself had been in Jerusalem recently and had seen Jesus perform miracles. He had come to believe that there was no hope for his son, that is, unless he could have Jesus “come down” to his son in Capernaum and heal him. And so this nobleman traveled the 10 or 15 miles to Cana and came to Jesus.

Several lessons may be seen from this man and his coming to Jesus. Just as there is no one that is not vulnerable to the afflictions in this life, even *the young man*, so it is that...

2. There is no one that is not vulnerable to the afflictions in this life, even the *rich man*.

J. C. Ryle (1816-1900) drew this lesson from this passage:

The lesson is one which needs to be constantly impressed on the minds of men. There is no more common, or mischievous error, than to suppose that the rich have no cares (i.e. deep concerns). The rich are as liable to sickness as the poor; and have a hundred anxieties beside, of which the poor know nothing at all. Silks and satins often cover heavy hearts. The dwellers in palaces often sleep more uneasily than the dwellers in cottages. Gold and silver can lift no man beyond the reach of trouble; they may shut out debt and rags, but they cannot shut care, disease, and death. The higher the tree, the more it is shaken by the storms: the broader its branches, the greater is the mark which it exposes to the tempest. David was a happier man when he kept his father’s sheep at Bethlehem, than when he dwelt as a King at Jerusalem, and governed the twelve tribes of Israel.¹⁵

There is a temptation to think this way, however, “If only I were a rich man, I would not have the troubles of this life that so plague me.” We think too much like **Teveye**, who sang,

Lord who made the lion and the lamb,
You decreed I should be what I am.
Would it spoil some vast eternal plan?
If I were a wealthy man.¹⁶

But what underscores this thinking is that life would be much better off for us if that were so. The Scriptures, of course correct this wrong notion, giving us a right assessment and perspective on this matter. James wrote,

⁹Let the lowly brother glory in his exaltation, ¹⁰but the rich in his humiliation, because as a flower of the field he will pass away. ¹¹For no sooner has the sun risen with a burning heat than it withers the grass; its flower falls, and its beautiful appearance perishes. *So the rich man also will fade away in his pursuits.* (James 1:11)

¹⁵ J. C. Ryle, **Expository Thoughts on John**, vol. 1 (The Banner of Truth Trust, 1987, orig. 1869), pp. 253f.

¹⁶ From the “Fiddler on the Roof”

But it is ultimately not the matter of how many riches that one has that is the problem, the real problem is how much the heart *desires* to have riches. And so, the problem of riches can be that of the rich man or the poor man. Paul wrote of this, telling Timothy how to properly pastor his church.

Let as many bondservants as are under the yoke count their own masters worthy of all honor, so that the name of God and His doctrine may not be blasphemed. ²And those who have believing masters, let them not despise them because they are brethren, but rather serve them because those who are benefited are believers and beloved. Teach and exhort these things.

³If anyone teaches otherwise and does not consent to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which accords with godliness, ⁴he is proud, knowing nothing, but is obsessed with disputes and arguments over words, from which come envy, strife, reviling, evil suspicions, ⁵useless wranglings of men of corrupt minds and destitute of the truth, who suppose that godliness is a means of gain. From such withdraw yourself.

⁶Now godliness with contentment is great gain. ⁷For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. ⁸***And having food and clothing, with these we shall be content.*** ⁹***But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and harmful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition.*** ¹⁰***For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.*** (1 Tim. 6:1-10)

Paul spoke about the godly man as a contented man. He gave reasons why he should be so.

(1) ***“For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out”*** (6:7). The first reason the godly man should be contented with his godliness is that knows that he had nothing to begin with; he came into the world naked. He also knows that the things of this world belong only to this world. When God calls him home, he will leave behind all but his soul. This is the idea of **Ecclesiastes 5:15f**,

“As he came forth of his mother's womb, naked shall he return to go as he came, and shall take nothing of his labor, which he may carry away in his hand. And this also is a sore evil, that in all points as he came, so shall he go: and what profit hath he that hath labored for the wind?”

(2) ***“And having food and clothing, with these we shall be content”*** (6:8). The godly purposes to be content with what God has given him and he purposes to be content with what God has not given him. Since God is able and is willing to care for His own, the godly man may be patient in waiting for God's provision, and content with what God in His goodness has given him. Our Lord bid us to pray, “Give us this day our daily bread.” We are to be content that He is able and willing and faithful to give us all we need.

“Food and clothing” probably speaks to the necessities. A place of habitation is probably included in the expression. The idea is that we should be content with what God has given us to sustain ourselves. We are to be content and assured that He is our Provider and that we need not worry about how our food or housing or clothing will be provided us, for we know that it will be in God's own way and in His time.

The Psalmist in Psalm 37 wrote of the assurance that the godly may have in God's provision for them and the certainty that the ungodly will not prosper. Even if the godly suffer occasions of deprivation, it will turn out okay for them in the end, for God has purposed to bless them. Here are a few verses from that psalm:

¹⁶A little that a righteous man has

Is better than the riches of many wicked.

¹⁷For the arms of the wicked shall be broken,

But the LORD upholds the righteous.

¹⁸The LORD knows the days of the upright,

And their inheritance shall be forever.

¹⁹They shall not be ashamed in the evil time,
And in the days of famine they shall be satisfied.

²⁰But the wicked shall perish;
And the enemies of the LORD,
Like the splendor of the meadows, shall vanish.
Into smoke they shall vanish away.

²¹The wicked borrows and does not repay,
But the righteous shows mercy and gives.

²²For those blessed by Him shall inherit the earth,
But those cursed by Him shall be cut off.

²³The steps of a good man are ordered by the LORD,
And He delights in his way.

²⁴Though he fall, he shall not be utterly cast down;
For the LORD upholds him with His hand.

²⁵I have been young, and now am old;
Yet I have not seen the righteous forsaken,
Nor his descendants begging bread.

²⁶He is ever merciful, and lends;
And his descendants are blessed. (Psa. 37:16-26)

(3). ***“But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and harmful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition”*** (6:9). This is not a warning against the rich. It is a warning against those ***who long to be rich***. They do not desire foremost to be godly; they long to be wealthy. They do not see contentment in being right with God; contentment in their estimation is found in the accumulation of wealth. They are not satisfied because they are not rich. They may never become rich, but they never cease longing to be rich. These are troubled people, and they bring trouble not only to themselves, but to others about them.

a. They who desire to be rich fall into ***temptation***. Their longings to become rich leads them to be tempted to compromise standards of honesty and integrity. They sacrifice their godliness for gain. The temptation for riches is too great seeing that is for what their heart longs.

b. They who desire to be rich fall into ***a snare***. Their temptation is a snare to them. A snare was an ancient way of catching birds or game. A loop of rope was placed on the ground and the game was lured to it by some form of bait. The snare would then be drawn closed and the animal or bird would be captured. The longing to be rich will trick one into being caught in ways that were unexpected.

c. They who desire to be rich fall into ***many foolish and harmful lusts***. They soon not only desire to be rich, but they desire other sins also. Sin does not stand still. Sin sowed in the life will reap more sin. The love of money will show itself in many more sins in time.

Paul also gave reasons why those who long to be rich (i.e. the covetous) are neither godly nor content: ***“For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil”*** (6:10). Again, this sin does not abide alone. This sin of love of money is a “root”, it will bear other kinds of sins when it takes root and sprouts in a man’s life. This sin calls for many other sins to come and dwell in the heart.

(1) ***“For which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness.”*** Paul warns that some have become apostate, forsaking and denying Jesus in word or deed, because of their love for money. They are as the stony ground hearers in our Lord’s parable of the sower. Jesus told the parable to the multitudes:

Behold, a sower went out to sow. And as he sowed, some seed fell by the wayside; and the birds came and devoured them. Some fell on stony places, where they did not have much earth; and they immediately sprang up because they had no depth of earth. But when the sun was up they were scorched, and because they had no root they withered away. And some fell among thorns, and the thorns sprang up and choked them. But others fell on good ground and yielded a crop: some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. He who has ears to hear, let him hear! (Matt. 13:3-9)

Later, among His disciples, He explained the meaning of the parable. Of the seed sown in stony soil He said, "Now he who received seed among the thorns is he who hears the word, and the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and he becomes unfruitful" (Matt. 13:22)

For the love of many and the cares of this world, they forfeited the eternal riches and reward of the world to come. They lived for this world rather than for Jesus who gives an inheritance in the world to come to all of His followers who are trusting in Him.

(2) ***"And pierced themselves through with many sorrows."*** I have a book in my library entitled, ***Whatever Happened to their Kids***. It is a book of short accounts of the children of the rich and powerful. It could be seen as a book of illustrations about the truthfulness of this verse. The rich have pierced themselves through with many sorrows, and often it would seem that much source of their sorrow must have been in their observance of the life of their children.

The point of the matter is this: There is no one that is not vulnerable to the afflictions in this life, even the *rich* man.

3. God in His providence will commonly use afflictions in this life to bring people to faith in Jesus Christ.

I suspect that this father had already exhausted all the help and hope that his wealth and connections might have brought him respecting his son. Some are like that poor woman who came to Jesus. Mark wrote, "Now a certain woman had a flow of blood for twelve years, and had suffered many things from many physicians. She had spent all that she had and was no better, but rather grew worse" (Mark 5:25f). But it is often in the purpose of God to bring a man to an end of his resources, so that he might finally "come to himself." I love the narration of the prodigal son, that after he had exhausted all of his resources, we read:

¹⁷"But ***when he came to himself***, he said, 'How many of my father's hired servants have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger! ¹⁸I will arise and go to my father, and will say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you, ¹⁹and I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Make me like one of your hired servants."

Frequently there is a stubborn self-sufficiency on the part of those who are "noble" and influential, who have many resources which they will call upon before they will ever humble themselves and call upon the Lord. It is clear that God had brought this nobleman to the end of his resources, or at least to see the futility of putting his faith and hope in them, so he came some distance with anxiety and yet hoping against hope that he might find help for his boy.

He would probably later confess as the psalmist,

I know, O LORD, that Your judgments are right,
And that in faithfulness You have afflicted me. (Psa. 119:75)

And,

It is good for me that I have been afflicted,

That I may learn Your statutes. (Psa. 119:71)

As J. C. Ryle once wrote:

Affliction is one of God's medicines. By it He often teaches us lessons which would be learned in no other way. By it He often draws souls away from sin and the world, which would otherwise have perished everlastingly. Health is a great blessing, but sanctified disease is a greater. Prosperity and worldly comfort are what all naturally desire; but losses and crosses are far better for us, if they lead us to Christ.¹⁷

And so, here we read that it was a wealthy, quite influential man whose son was ill. He was distressed. He was brought to an end of his resources. He saw Jesus as his only hope for the recovery of his son.

4. God in His providence will commonly use afflictions in this life to bring His people to greater degrees and quality of faith in Jesus Christ.

In the pericope (episode) we are considering in John 4:43-54, the quality of faith in Jesus is a major emphasis. When Jesus came into Galilee, we read that the people "received Him" (4:45), but it is clear they did so with insufficient understanding of who Jesus was and what He was about. They believed in Him for what they thought He could do for them. And this nobleman, came to Jesus with a measure of faith, but it was like the crowds. It was a deficient, defective faith.

What the Galileans saw in Jesus was not who He truly was; it was who they selfishly wanted Him to be. They thought themselves to be healthy, when in truth they were already dead. This is why Jesus speaks right past that father to the crowds, right past the concern of the father to the concern of the Father.

The Christian is reminded in this pericope, and especially in the exhortative commentary by Jesus, to live with an appropriate posture of self-critique.¹⁸

But the Lord in His dealings with this man brought a measure of development, a measure of substance to his faith. He came to Jesus in faith; he left Jesus with greater and better faith. And if we read this episode rightly, we too, will leave with greater and better faith in Jesus. Here is one description of the greater lesson of this episode:

The kind of belief this pericope displays for the reader is one that is firmly rooted in the person and work of Jesus. Jesus is not rebuking the failing faith we all might have but a faith that is resting on inappropriate objects, that is, faith that is inappropriately motivated. Are we motivated to believe in a "god" who does things for us in the manner we deem most appropriate? Or is our belief rooted in the God who declares "I AM," to which we are to respond, "Yes, You Are!" (Exo. 3:14). Are we motivated to believe in a "god" in whom we derive pleasure? Or is our belief in the God in whom pleasure is entirely redefined and established? Let us not believe as the Galileans but as the children of God. Let us worship God not for the wonders He can perform but for the wonder that He is. A God who is worthy of worship even when there is no "sign," and even when our request goes unanswered – even still He is to us our God, the true sign and wonder.¹⁹

There is one more important lesson from this pericope I would like us to consider, then we will close.

¹⁷ J. C. Ryle, **Expository Thoughts on John**, vol. 1 (The Banner of Truth Trust, 1987, orig. 1869), pp. 255.

¹⁸ Edward W. Klink, III, **John**. Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Zondervan, 2016), p. 263.

¹⁹ *Ibid*, p. 264.

5. The Lord Jesus shows forth to this man and to us that His Word is as good and as important as His presence.

The man came to Jesus and desired that Jesus come down with him to Capernaum where his son was about to die. He desired the presence of Jesus before His son believing that in so doing, his son would be healed. But the Lord directed him, and the Holy Spirit directs to us, that the Word of Jesus is as good as His presence. His Word is with power, even as His presence. We read of this emphasis on His Word in verses

⁵⁰Jesus said to him, “*Go your way; your son lives.*” So *the man believed the word that Jesus spoke* to him, and he went his way. ⁵¹And as he was now going down, his servants met him and told him, saying, “Your son lives!”

⁵²Then he inquired of them the hour when he got better. And they said to him, “Yesterday at the seventh hour the fever left him.” ⁵³So the father knew that it was at the same hour in which *Jesus said to him*, “Your son lives.” And *he himself believed, and his whole household.*

It was the Word of Jesus that brought this fuller, richer, more informed, faith, not only to this man, but also to his household. We, too, are to place our faith in Jesus Christ, but more, we are to believe His Word that He has spoken to us through this written Word.

One more word from **J. C. Ryle** is in order:

We learn, lastly, from this passage, *that Christ’s word is as good as His presence.* We read that Jesus did not come down to Capernaum to see the sick young man, but only spoke the word: “Thy son liveth.” Almighty power went with that little sentence: that very hour the patient began to amend. Christ only spoke, and the cure was done: Christ only commanded, and the deadly disease stood fast.

The fact before us is singularly full of comfort. It gives enormous value to every promise of mercy, grace, and peace, which ever fell from Christ’s lips. He that by faith has laid his hold on some word of Christ, has got his feet upon a rock. What Christ has said, He is able to do; and what He has undertaken, He will never fail to make good. The sinner who has really reposed his soul on the word of the Lord Jesus, is safe to all eternity. He could not be safer if he saw the Book of Life and his own name written in it. If Christ said, Him that cometh to Me, I will in no wise cast out,” our hearts can testify, “I have come,” we need not doubt that we are saved. In the things of this world, we say that seeing is believing. But in the things of the Gospel, believing is as good as seeing. Christ’s word is as good as man’s deed. He of whom Jesus says in the Gospel, “He liveth,” is alive forevermore, and shall never die.²⁰

The emphasis of Jesus giving life to this dying nobleman’s son through the power of Jesus’ word from a distance, sets the stage for the theme of the next chapter of this Gospel. We will consider there another discourse of Jesus on spiritual life that comes to us through the Son of God.

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you.
My love be with you all in Christ Jesus. Amen. (1 Cor. 16:23)

²⁰ Ibid, pp. 256f.