

John 4:31-54
June 1, 2025

Open with Prayer

HOOK:

Q: What are some reasons people look for signs or proof of God's activity as a necessity for faith? [Let people engage]

Transition: Jesus was met by plenty of people who heard He had and was performing miracles. So they came looking for Him to see it for themselves. What's interesting is that Jesus tends to get irritated with people who need signs and wonders. We're going to read an account of a royal official who sought out Jesus to heal his son because He heard he did miracles.

Jesus responds, "Unless you people see miraculous signs and wonders," Jesus told him, "You will never believe."

But we're also going to read about Jesus's view of doing the will of God. He teaches His disciples that His "food is to do the will of Him who sent me." It hopefully stirs our heart to ask ourselves, "Are we waking up each day to be about doing the will of our Father?"

My latest read is "Practicing the Presence of God" by Brother Lawrence. I know some of you have already read this short and sweet book. But he says, "Our only happiness should come from doing God's will, whether it brings us some pain or great pleasure. After all, if we are truly devoted to doing God's will, pain and pleasure won't make any difference to us." He goes on to say, "God never fails to show us the right way to go, as long as our only goal is to please Him and show our love for Him."

This was Brother Lawrence's default setting each day, and I hope all of us are doing the same. Let's read the text and see what we can learn from it.

BOOK:

³¹ Meanwhile his disciples urged him, "Rabbi, eat something."

³² But he said to them, "I have food to eat that you know nothing about."

³³ Then his disciples said to each other, "Could someone have brought him food?"

³⁴ "My food," said Jesus, "is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work."

³⁵ Do you not say, 'Four months more and then the harvest'? I tell you, open your eyes and look at the fields! They are ripe for harvest.

³⁶ Even now the reaper draws his wages, even now he harvests the crop for eternal life, so that the sower and the reaper may be glad together.

³⁷ Thus the saying 'One sows and another reaps' is true.

³⁸ I sent you to reap what you have not worked for. Others have done the hard work, and you have reaped the benefits of their labor."

³⁹ Many of the Samaritans from that town believed in him because of the woman's testimony, "He told me everything I ever did."

⁴⁰ So when the Samaritans came to him, they urged him to stay with them, and he stayed two days.

⁴¹ And because of his words many more became believers.

⁴² 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 Savior of the world."

Jesus Heals the Official's Son

⁴³ After the two days he left for Galilee.

⁴⁴ (Now Jesus himself had pointed out that a prophet has no honor in his own country.)

⁴⁵ When he arrived in Galilee, the Galileans welcomed him. They had seen all that he had done in Jerusalem at the Passover Feast, for they also had been there.

⁴⁶ 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 sick at Capernaum.

⁴⁷ 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 was close to death.

⁴⁸ "Unless you people see miraculous signs and wonders," Jesus told him, "You will never believe."

⁴⁹ The royal official said, "Sir, come down before my child dies."

⁵⁰ Jesus replied, "You may go. Your son will live." The man took Jesus at his word and departed.

⁵¹ While he was still on the way, his servants met him with the news that his boy was living.

⁵² When he inquired as to the time when his son got better, they said to him, "The fever left him yesterday at the seventh hour."

⁵³ Then the father realized that this was the exact time at which Jesus had said to him, "Your son will live." So he and all his household believed.

⁵⁴ This was the second miraculous sign that Jesus performed, having come from Judea to Galilee.

Process Observations/Questions:

Q: What stood out to you? What questions do you have? [Let people engage]

Q: What did you learn about man? [Let people engage]

Q: What did you learn about God or Jesus or the Holy Spirit? [Let people engage]

Q: What is your takeaway? [Let people engage]

LOOK:

The disciples were learning a valuable lesson that would encourage them in the years to come. And this should be our lesson as well. We are not alone in the work of the Lord, and we must never look on any opportunity for witness as wasted time and energy. It takes faith to plow the soil and plant the seed, but God has promised a harvest (Ps. 126:5–6; Gal. 6:9). In a few years, Peter and John would participate in another harvest among the Samaritans (Acts 8:5–25). Those

who sow may not see the harvest, but those who reap will see it and give thanks for the faithful labors of the sowers.

The Greek word translated “labor” in John 4:38 is translated “wearied” in John 4:6. Sowing, cultivating, and harvesting are difficult tasks, not only in the physical realm, but also in the spiritual. There is no place in the harvest for lazy people. The work is too difficult, and the laborers are too few. The fields are “ripe unto harvest.” There are plenty of spiritually lost people in our lives to reach. We should have the mindset that NOW is always the time to reap!

Close in Prayer

Commentaries for Today’s Lesson:

Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). The Bible Exposition Commentary (Vol. 1, pp. 301-303). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

The Disciples (John 4:31–38)

When the disciples returned from obtaining food, they were shocked that Jesus was conversing with a woman, and especially a Samaritan; but they did not interrupt. They were learning that their Master knew what He was doing and did not need their counsel. But, after the woman left, they urged Jesus to share the meal with them, because they knew that He was hungry.

“I have food to eat that ye know not of” was His reply and, as usual, they did not understand it. They thought He was speaking of literal food, and they wondered where He got it. Then He explained that doing the Father’s will—in this case, leading the woman to salvation—was true nourishment for His soul. The disciples were satisfied with bread, but He was satisfied with accomplishing the Father’s work.

“Seek your life’s nourishment in your life’s work,” said Phillips Brooks. The will of God ought to be a source of strength and satisfaction to the child of God, just as if he sat down to a sumptuous feast. If what we are doing tears us down instead of builds us up, then we may well question whether it is the will of God for us.

Our Lord did not look on the Father's will as a heavy burden or a distasteful task. He viewed His work as the very nourishment of His soul. Doing the Father's will fed Him and satisfied Him inwardly. "I delight to do Thy will, O my God; yea, Thy Law is within my heart" (Ps. 40:8). The Samaritan woman was now doing the Father's will and finding excitement and enrichment in it. Jesus then changed the image from that of food to that of the harvest, which is the source of the food. He quoted the familiar Jewish proverb about waiting for the harvest, and then pointed to the villagers even then coming out to the well to meet Him, thanks to the witness of the woman. The disciples went into the village to get food for themselves, but they did no evangelizing. The woman took their place!

The image of the harvest is a familiar one in the Bible and is often applied to the ministry of winning lost souls. Both the Parable of the Sower and the Parable of the Tares (Matt. 13:1–30) relate to this theme, and Paul used it in his letters (Rom. 1:13; 1 Cor. 3:6–9; Gal. 6:9). We plant the seed of God's Word in the hearts of people who hear it, and we seek to cultivate that seed by our love and prayers. In due time, that seed may bear fruit to the glory of God.

No doubt the disciples had said, as they approached the city of Sychar, "There can be no harvest here! These people despise us Jews and would have no use for our message." But just the opposite was true: the harvest was ready and only needed faithful workers to claim it. For some reason, when it comes to witnessing for Christ, it is always the wrong time and the wrong place! It takes faith to sow the seed, and we must do it even when the circumstances look discouraging. Read Ecclesiastes 11:4 and take it to heart!

There is no competition in the Lord's harvest. Each of us has an assigned task and we are all a part of each other's labors (1 Cor. 3:6–9). One sows, one reaps; but each worker gets his honest reward for the work he has done.

John 4:38 indicates that others had labored in Samaria and had prepared the way for this harvest. We do not know who these faithful workers were, nor do we need to know; for God will reward them. Perhaps some of these people had heard John the Baptist preach, or perhaps some of John's followers had reached into this difficult field. Some archeologists have located "Aenon near Salim" where John baptized (John 3:23) near the biblical Shechem, which is close to Sychar and Jacob's well. If this is the case, then John the Baptist prepared the soil and planted the seed, and Jesus and the disciples reaped the harvest. Of course, the woman herself planted some of the seed through her witness to the men.

The disciples were learning a valuable lesson that would encourage them in the years to come. They were not alone in the work of the Lord, and they must never look on any opportunity for witness as wasted time and energy. It takes faith to plow the soil and plant the seed, but God has promised a harvest (Ps. 126:5–6; Gal. 6:9). In a few years, Peter and John would participate in another harvest among the Samaritans (Acts 8:5–25). Those who sow may not see the harvest, but those who reap will see it and give thanks for the faithful labors of the sowers.

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spiritual. There is no place in the harvest for lazy people. The work is too difficult, and the laborers are too few.

The Samaritans (John 4:39–42)

Many of the Samaritans believed because of the testimony of the woman, and then many more believed when they heard Jesus personally. So excited were they about Him that they begged Him to stay with them; and He stayed for two days. During that short time, His word produced fruit in their lives.

It is important that new converts be grounded in the Word—the Bible. These Samaritans began their spiritual walk by trusting in what the woman said, but they soon learned to trust the Word taught by the Savior. There was no “secondhand” salvation. They knew that they were saved because they had believed His message. “Now we know!” was their happy testimony.

You would have thought that these Samaritans would have been narrow in their faith, seeing Jesus as the Savior of the Jews and the Samaritans. But they declared that He was “the Savior of the world” (John 4:42). They had been converted only a few days, but they already had a missionary vision! In fact, their vision was wider than that of the Apostles!

It is interesting to trace our Lord’s movements that brought Him to Samaria. He was in Jerusalem (John 2:23) and then came into Judea (John 3:22). From Judea He went into Samaria (John 4:4), and the Samaritans declared Him to be “the Savior of the world.” This is a perfect parallel to Acts 1:8—“And ye shall be witnesses unto Me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.” Our Lord has set the example. If we follow, He will give us the harvest.

This unnamed Samaritan woman was a fruitful believer: she bore fruit (“many believed”), more fruit (“many more believed”), and today continues to bear “much fruit” to the glory of God (see John 15:1–5). Nobody knows how many lost sinners have come to the Savior because of the witness of this woman recorded in John 4.

The Nobleman (John 4:43–54)

Our Lord continued His journey to Galilee (John 4:3) and came again to Cana. Galilee was known as “*Galil ha goyim*—Galilee of the Gentiles.” Apparently, Jesus had detected in Judea (His own country) the increasing hostility of the religious leaders, though the real opposition would not yet appear for some months. Our Lord was really never identified with Judea even though He had been born in Bethlehem. He was known as the Prophet from Galilee (Matt. 21:11; John 7:52). Jesus knew that the public response to His ministry in Jerusalem had been insincere and shallow (John 2:23–25), and that it was not honoring to Him at all.

Why did Jesus return to Cana? Perhaps He wanted to cultivate the “seed” He had planted there when He attended the wedding feast. Nathanael came from Cana, so perhaps there was a personal reason for this visit. Jesus was met at Cana by a nobleman from Capernaum, some twenty miles away. The man had heard about His miracles and came all that distance to intercede for his son who was dying. The first miracle at Cana came at the request of His mother (John 2:1–5), and this second miracle at Cana at the request of a father (John 4:47).

Was this man a Jew or a Gentile? We do not know. Nor do we know his exact position in the government. He may have been a member of Herod's court; but whatever his national or social standing, he was clearly at his wit's end and desperately needed the help of the Savior. He "kept beseeching Him" to travel to Capernaum to heal his son.

John 4:48 was not a rebuke of this nobleman. Rather, it was our Lord's lament at the spiritual condition of the people in general, both in Judea and Galilee. "Seeing is believing" has always been the "pragmatic" philosophy of the lost world, even the religious world. The nobleman believed that Jesus could heal his son, but he made two mistakes in his thinking: that Jesus had to go to Capernaum to save the lad, and that if the boy died meanwhile, it was too late.

We must admire this man's faith. Jesus simply said, "Go thy way; thy son liveth" (John 4:50). And the man believed Jesus and started to return home! Both the Samaritan woman and this anonymous nobleman must have rejoiced the heart of Jesus as they believed the word and acted on it.

The boy was healed the instant Jesus spoke those words; so the man's servants started out to find him so they could share the good news. (Again, it is the servants who know what is going on. See John 2:9; 15:15.) The boy had been healed at the seventh hour, which, in Roman time, would be 7 o'clock in the evening. The father certainly would not have traveled at night, for that would have been dangerous; nor would the servants have taken that risk. The father's faith was so strong that he was willing to delay going home, even though his heart yearned to see his beloved son.

When the father and the servants met the next day, their report confirmed his faith. Note that the father thought the healing would be gradual ("began to improve"); but the servants reported a complete, instant recovery.

This man began with *crisis faith*. He was about to lose his son, and he had no other recourse but the Lord Jesus Christ. Many people came to Jesus with their crises, and He did not turn them away. The nobleman's crisis faith became *confident* faith: he believed the Word and had peace in his heart. He was even able to delay his trip home, knowing that the boy was out of danger. His confident faith became *confirmed* faith. Indeed, the boy had been completely healed! And the healing took place at the very time when Jesus spoke the Word. It was this fact that made a believer out of the nobleman and his household. He believed that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of God; and he shared this faith with his family. He had *contagious* faith and shared his experience with others.

This is one of several miracles that Jesus performed "at a distance." He healed the centurion's servant from a distance (Matt. 8:5–13, and note that he too lived in Capernaum), and He healed the daughter of the Canaanite woman in the same manner (Matt. 15:21–28). These two were Gentiles and, spiritually speaking, were "at a distance" (Eph. 2:12–13). Perhaps this nobleman was also a Gentile. We do not know.

John 4:54 does not state that this healing was the second miracle that Jesus ever performed, for that would contradict John 2:23 and 3:2. This was the second miracle He performed *in Cana of Galilee* (see John 2:1, 11). He certainly gave those people special privileges.

But we must note that both miracles were “private” rather than public. Mary, the disciples, and the servants knew where the excellent wine had come from, but the guests did not. (Of course, it is possible that the servants told the story to others.) The nobleman’s son was healed at Capernaum, not Cana; but news traveled rapidly in those days and certainly the word got out. Jesus’ first miracle at the wedding revealed His power over *time*. The Father is always making water into wine, but He takes a season or two to finish the work. Jesus made the wine instantly. In this sense, our Lord’s miracles were only *instantaneous* copies of what the Father is always doing. “My Father worketh hitherto, and I work” (John 5:17). The Father is constantly multiplying bread, season after season, but the Son multiplied it instantly.

In the second recorded miracle, Jesus showed His power over *space*. He was not limited simply because He was in Cana and the sick boy was in Capernaum. The fact that the father believed the word and did not know the results until the next day is evidence that he had confident faith. He trusted the word that Jesus spoke, and so should we.

Blum, E. A. (1985). *John*. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 2, pp. 287-288) Wheaton, IL: Victor Books

c. *The repentance of the Samaritans* (4:39–42).

4:39. The little revival among **the Samaritans** is notable because the theme of natural rejection by Israel had been sounded (1:11) as well as the note of a wider ministry (3:16; cf. Acts 1:8). The **testimony** of the woman, though, from one point of view was unnecessary (“not that I accept human testimony,” John 5:34); yet it was effective. That Jesus knows what is in a person and that He has comprehensive knowledge of one’s life is an indication of His deity (Ps. 139; John 1:47–49; 2:24–25).

4:40–41. The witness of the woman led to the Samaritans’ personal confrontation with Jesus. **He stayed** with them **two days**. The word “stayed” (from *menō*, “to remain, to abide”) is a favorite Johannine theological term (cf. 3:36; 6:56; 15:4; etc.; and comments on 1:38). **Because of His words many more became believers**. “Words” is singular in Greek (“His word”). His message was the cause of their faith. Personal testimony plus the message of Jesus is still God’s means of salvation.

4:42. Faith based simply on the testimony of another is only secondary. True faith moves to its own experience and confrontation with Jesus. **We have heard for ourselves** is the more adequate basis. Jesus **is the Savior of the world**, not in the sense that everyone will be saved (universalism) but that His light shines for all (1:9). The light is not limited to the nation Israel, but is for “every nation, tribe, people, and language” (Rev. 7:9).

9. the official’s son (4:43–54).

4:43–45. After His **two-day** ministry in Samaria, Jesus and His disciples continued north into **Galilee**. Now **Jesus Himself had pointed out that a prophet has no honor in his own country**. This proverbial saying mentioned by Jesus (cf. Matt. 13:57; Mark 6:4) is cited by the author John. Is His “own country” Judea or Galilee? Or is His “own country” heaven, with His being rejected in His “own land” Israel? Generally, Galilee was more favorable to Him, but even there men tried to kill Him (Luke 4:18–30). John was perhaps preparing his readers for the upcoming rejection; he may have been saying that even with the warm reception Jesus received **in Galilee**, He still was not really accepted (cf. John 2:24–25; 4:48). They had been impressed by His clearing the temple **at the Passover feast** (2:13–22) and His miracles (2:23). But the people’s enthusiasm for the Healer (cf. Mark 5:21, 24b) did not always indicate they had faith in Him (Mark 6:1–6).

4:46–47. The **certain royal official** is not identified. He could have been a Gentile or a Jew, a centurion, or a minor official in Herod’s court. Possibly he was a Jew because Jesus included him among the people who desire signs and wonders (v. 48; cf. 1 Cor. 1:22). **His son** had been **sick**, and undoubtedly he had exhausted all the local means at his disposal. Failure of position and money to solve his problem drove him from **Capernaum** to the village of **Cana**, 20 to 25 miles away, hoping that the Healer would save his **son** from **death**.

4:48. Jesus’ address to him, though sharp, was necessary. A faith built only on miraculous signs is not a complete faith (cf. 2:23–25). Many (**you people**) hesitate to **believe** in Jesus apart from seeing **miraculous signs** (*sēmeia*) **and wonders** (*terata*). Faith in **Jesus** is absolutely necessary, but not all believers are given public portents (cf. Matt. 16:1–4; 1 Cor. 1:22).

4:49. The **official** was in no position emotionally to argue his case theologically. All he could plead for was mercy, for his **child** was at the point of death.

4:50. Jesus’ calm reply to the official’s desperate request created a crisis. **Jesus** announced, **You may go. Your son will live**. If the official really believed that Jesus could make a difference in Capernaum, he must also believe Him now in Cana. So he **took Jesus at His word** and left.

4:51–53. **On the way** back the official must have pondered Jesus’ promise every step of his journey. **His servants met him with good news. His boy was living**. The official asked **when his son** recovered. The healing was no accident, for it occurred at **the exact** moment Jesus made His promise to him. It was **at the seventh hour**, which by Roman time was 7:00 in the evening. The man’s faith grew, and he brought **all his household** to faith. The lesson of this incident is that Jesus’ power is able to save from death even at a great distance. His Word has power to work; people are simply to believe His Word.

4:54. Both signs **in Galilee** (changing the water into wine [2:1–11] and healing the official’s son) demonstrate that Jesus is the Promised One. Yet both signs had a certain hidden aspect to them. Only the disciples and some servants saw His miracle at the wedding, and this healing was not in public view.

White, J. E. (1998). *John*. In D. S. Dockery (Ed.), *Holman Concise Bible Commentary* (p. 472). Broadman & Holman Publishers.

Jesus was clearly on a mission, a mission that was God-informed and God-directed (5:30; 6:38; 8:26; 9:4; 10:37–38; 12:49–50; 14:31; 15:10; 17:4). What was that mission? To confront people—all people, as the Samaritan woman demonstrated—with the truth of Himself. Jesus told them that the “fields are ripe for harvest” and that in entering that field for work, it makes no difference whether one plants the seed or brings in the crop. This is an important truth, for there should never be competition among Christians regarding differing fields of service. All should share in the joy of seeing the kingdom of God extend.

SAVIOR OF THE WORLD (4:39–42)

Jesus’ encounter with the woman at the well, and her subsequent sharing of that conversation, resulted in many Samaritans believing in Jesus. After they met Jesus themselves, they believed not because of what the woman said but because they had come to believe themselves “that this man really is the Savior of the world.” This confession of the Samaritan believers, that Jesus was the “Savior of the world,” is only found in the New Testament here and in 1 John 4:14. Only through Jesus is the world able to be saved, and that salvation is indeed for everyone in the world.

TRUE BELIEF (4:43–54)

After his time in Samaria, Jesus returned to Galilee. There he met a royal official whose child was near death. Jesus commented how the belief of the Galileans was tied to His production of miraculous signs and wonders. This provides an interesting contrast, for the Samaritans believed “because of his words,” while the Jews believed because of “miraculous signs and wonders.” As Jesus would later say to Thomas following His resurrection, “Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed” (20:29).

The Holy Bible: New International Version. (1984). John 4:31-54. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.