

## The Second Sign – Jesus heals the Official's son

John 4:43-54

### The Official's Story

It's not the sort of thing I'd normally do. Go myself.

I'm a respectable man, in a position of responsibility. Both at Herod's palace, where I exercise considerable authority, and in my own household, my job is to direct others to go out in the heat of the day and get things done.

But I was desperate.

I suppose every father loves his sons. But me... Well for a start off – I only have the one. And it took so very many years for him to come along. We'd all but despaired of ever becoming parents, but then – just as we thought we were too old – finally, it happened.

And since the moment I knew that Joanna was pregnant, my boy has been the most important thing in my life. I'd do anything for him.

Even go chasing after this itinerant healer that everyone was talking about. Not that we hadn't tried every other option first - he was really the last resort - but by this stage my boy was so ill that it was pretty clear this was the last chance.

It was a long walk from Capernaum to Cana. Mostly uphill. As I plodded on, mile after mile, I had time to think.

Were the stories about this man Jesus true? After the trouble with John the Baptist, Herod had been keeping a close eye on him. The first reports had suggested that he was some sort of ten-a-penny wonder-worker. Then that he was a rabbi with a new and quasi-revolutionary teaching based on love and forgiveness. More recently that he was claiming some sort of divine heritage.

What did I think? If you'd asked me then, I'd probably have said something like...

"I belong to the people of Israel. I observe the Law. Pray and fast. Attend the Temple according to our customs; follow the rules and do what is expected of me. But I'm not one to get worked up about religion. Don't get me wrong. I'm very happy to accept that God is in heaven. But my view is that I'm here on earth - an educated man, not a zealot - and dealing with the politics of the here and now is what I'm about. Power. Authority. That's my stock-in-trade."

Except when it comes to my son.

And as I paced the miles, I realised in a new way that although human power and authority could affect life in so many ways – good and bad – they were incapable of granting life in the face of death.

Only God could do that. Life is in *God's* hands.

And I realised that beyond all things, I really wanted to believe in this Jesus character. Wanted to believe that there was something of God about him, and that he could do a miracle and heal my son.

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And then, an hour after midday, there I was. In Cana, standing in front of him.

And surrounded by people who weren't looking for the answer to life and death, but were merely there for the entertainment value. Or for what they could get.

"Jesus, Jesus" they called, "If I tear this coat in half, can you make each half grow into a new coat before our eyes?"

"Can you change *this* water into wine?"

"Hey! Jesus! Can you make me taller?"

"Jesus! Jesus! If you are the Son of God, turn these stones into bread..."

And Jesus just stood there patiently. As if he was waiting for something..

I fell on my knees. My heart was in my mouth.

"Jesus – I beg you. Please. Come down to Capernaum with me and heal my son. Without you, there is no hope. Please."

Then Jesus looked around at all of us, and said "Unless you see signs and wonders, you will not believe."

The crowd turned from demand to discontent and began to disperse. The excitement was over. One or two of them had the grace to look embarrassed. The stones into bread character seemed to deflate and crawled away.

And me? I stayed. In a place where I had expected only compliance or disappointment – a yes or a no - I had found a challenge.

"Don't just believe in what you hope I can do for you. Believe in who I am."

Believe in who I am.

And in that moment it was as if a veil had been drawn away.

It was still the same man in front of me, but more *there*  
more *present*  
more *real* than anything I had ever experienced before

I saw him in a new light...  
...the light of heaven

And he radiated – what?  
Goodness. Peace. Wholeness  
Power and authority to bring these about.

He looked at me and smiled, as if he had known me forever.  
“Go,” he said. “Your son will live.”

And I did.

I absolutely believed and trusted that this Jesus had not only the authority and the power to do this, but the will – the desire – to do so.

Some words of the prophet Isaiah came into my head

“a son [has been] given to us;  
authority rests upon his shoulders;  
and he is named  
Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God,  
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.<sup>1</sup>”

This was who I had seen when I had looked into Jesus’ face.  
I had seen God’s Messiah  
And more than that – I had seen the face of God Himself.

And He had seen me.

All of me  
Good bits, bad bits, mixed motives, certainties, confusions – the lot  
I was known, accepted, held and assured that there was nothing in all creation that I could do which would make him love me more than he did.  
And nothing that could make him love me less.

And that this held not only for me, but also for my son.  
And also for my wife  
And for our household  
And beyond...

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You could call it “obedience”  
Going. Doing what he said, I mean

And in a way, I suppose it was  
But it wasn’t an unthinking, imposed, “do as I say” obedience  
They type I’ve always expected from my servants.

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<sup>1</sup> Isaiah 9: 6

No – this was an option which I was offered  
Which I thought through and decided to take.

I chose to do what he said  
Because I trusted him.  
Trusted him with the most important thing in my life.  
My son.

And you know the rest of the story.

I set off home, and the following day, as I was descending the long road from the hill country to the lakeside, I met some of my servants, who told me that my boy was alive.

I had to ask – even though I knew the answer.

“At one in the afternoon, the fever left him.”

Of course it did. Jesus had given me a sign to share, as well as a new life to live.

For me. My boy. My wife and household. And beyond.

I tell my story often – to anyone who will listen.  
And people sometimes ask if I think the boy would have been healed if I’d responded to Jesus in a different way.  
If I’d made a scene, made demands.  
Or just voiced my disappointment at no obvious sign, and left in a huff, full of resentment.

And I always ask them in return  
What do you think?