

Signs and Wonders

(John 4:46-5:17)

Expository Lessons from the Gospel of John

I. Jesus Leaves Samaria, Heals a Nobleman's Son in Galilee

- a. Read **John 4:46-54**
- b. Storyline:
 - i. Jesus departs Samaria (where he had encounter with the woman at the well) and returns to Galilee, to the village Cana, where He had turned the water to wine.
 - ii. Nobleman asks Jesus to come and heal his son, who is near death with a severe fever, in Capernaum (about 15 miles from Cana).
 - iii. Jesus does not go to see the boy; he just tells the father that his son will live.
 - iv. The father departs; his servants meet him on the way back and tell him his son's fever has left. When it is confirmed that the fever left at the same time Jesus spoke with him ("the seventh hour" = around 1:00 pm), the man and his household believe in Jesus.
- c. It's easy to skip over the miracles, to focus on what Jesus teaches, rather than his healings. However, there may be important questions to ask and things to learn here as well.
- d. **Question:** Why did the man believe that Jesus might be able to heal his son?
 - i. Note that most Jewish prophets did not heal the sick!
 1. Exceptions might include Elijah healing the son of the widow from Zarephath (**1 Kings 17:17-24**); and Elisha raising the Shunamite woman's dead son (**2 Kings 4:18-37**) and curing Naaman the Syrian of leprosy (**2 Kings 5:1-14**).
 2. However, in general there is not much in the Old Testament regarding prophets healing the sick.
 - ii. Possible reason why the man approached Jesus on this: the man may have heard reports that Jesus had performed other miracles (perhaps the Cana water-to-wine story had spread, for example). Also, bear in mind that the man was *desperate*. His son was dying, and he did not know where else to turn!

1. This reminds me of a disturbing encounter we had a few weeks ago in the Middle East, while teaching one night at a Christian house church in a Muslim country. In the middle of the meeting I was interrupted and told we had “*an emergency*.”
 2. A man entered the room holding his young child in his arms, who was mistreated by medical authorities (improper drug). We were told that his child’s kidneys were impaired; he had been told him that his child would go blind, and the local medical authorities were powerless to reverse that. The father heard I was in town, and came from another city nearby, by bus, thinking perhaps I could do something to help his child!!! (I had never been in a situation like that; as you can imagine, I felt helpless. All I could do was pray for the child, for healing.)
- e. After the father in the **John 4** story realizes that the healing occurred at the same time Jesus spoke with him, he believed in Jesus. As a result, his household believed in Jesus as well.
 - f. Note that before healing the boy, Jesus had said, “Unless you people see signs and wonders, you will by no means believe.” (**John 4:48**, NKJV)
 - g. This is the first miraculous healing recorded in John; there are many more healings throughout the gospels.
 - h. **Questions:** *Why* did Jesus perform miracles, or “signs and wonders,” during the course of his ministry? Why not just teach the truth, and expect the people to have faith? (After all, the vast majority of Christians *today* are able to come to faith in Jesus *without seeing any miraculous signs!*)
 - i. He did signs and wonders to fulfill prophecies about him (**Joel 2**, **Isaiah 53** and **Isaiah 61**).
 1. Read **Acts 2:16-22**
 - a. Peter says that the Spirit being poured out (which had just happened in **Acts 2:1-4**) was a fulfillment of **Joel 2:28-32**.
 - b. He also points to the wonders and signs, including the sun being turned to darkness, which happened in Jerusalem at noon about 40 days earlier, while Jesus was being crucified. (**Matthew 27:45**)
 - c. I believe that it is from the **Joel 2** prophecy that Peter is making the connection to Jesus, “a Man attested by God to you by miracles, wonders, and signs which God did

through Him in your midst, as you yourselves also know". (**Acts 2:22**, NKJV)

2. "When evening had come, they brought to Him many who were demon-possessed. And He cast out the spirits with a word, and healed all who were sick, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Isaiah the prophet, saying: 'He Himself took our infirmities and bore our sicknesses.'" (**Matthew 8:16-17**, NKJV; quoting **Isaiah 53:3**, describing the Suffering Servant to come, who would heal the sicknesses of the people.)
3. Read **Luke 4:16-30**
 - a. Jesus reads from **Isaiah 61:1-2**, which speaks of "liberty to the captives", "recovery of sight to the blind".
 - i. (A side note: observe that the version of **Isaiah** Jesus is reading from here, which mentions "recovery of sight to the blind", follows the Septuagint rather than the Masoretic Text.)
 - b. It seems to me that Jesus is suggesting his ability to heal people as the Great Physician was a fulfillment of the prophecy in **Isaiah 61**.
 - c. Jesus anticipates the response of the people, that *they want to see him perform miraculous healings* for them just as they heard he did in Capernaum. (He did more than one healing in Capernaum, but the first may have been the one mentioned in **John 4**).
4. John the Baptist, sent as the forerunner to "prepare the way of the Lord" (**Mark 1:3, John 1:22-23**) and understanding the prophecies, would have understood the significance of these signs performed by Jesus. Consider the following exchange between Jesus and the disciples of John the Baptist:
 - a. "Then the disciples of John reported to him concerning all these things. And John, calling two of his disciples to him, sent them to Jesus, saying, 'Are You the Coming One, or do we look for another?'"
 - b. "When the men had come to Him, they said, 'John the Baptist has sent us to You, saying, 'Are You the Coming One, or do we look for another?'" And that very hour He cured many of infirmities, afflictions, and evil spirits; and to many blind, He gave sight.

- c. “Jesus answered and said to them, ‘Go and tell John the things you have seen and heard: that the blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, the poor have the gospel preached to them. And blessed is he who is not offended because of Me.’” (**Luke 7:18-23**, NKJV)
- ii. Performing miraculous signs and wonders is also something that Moses did. Moses foreshadowed Jesus in so many ways, as foretold in prophecy of **Deuteronomy 18:15-19**, that God would raise up a Prophet “*like Moses*” from among their brothers.
 1. Stephen, speaking of Moses said, “He brought them out, after he had shown wonders and signs in the land of Egypt, and in the Red Sea, and in the wilderness forty years.” (**Acts 7:36**, NKJV)
 2. Recall that Moses was concerned that the Jews would not believe him. Therefore, God gave him signs and allowed him to perform wonders, to convince them (**Exodus 4:1-9**).
 - a. First signs: wood staff turning into a snake, leprous hand being healed, and water turned to blood. Recall also that Moses brought healing from leprosy of Miriam (**Numbers 12:10-15**) and healed the people of poisonous snakebite (**Numbers 21:4-9**).
 - b. Additional signs included bringing the 10 Plagues upon Egypt and parting the Red Sea.
- i. Further thoughts on “signs and wonders”
 - i. When Jesus sent out the twelve to preach throughout Israel, he gave them the ability to do signs and wonders as well.
 1. “And when He had called His twelve disciples to Him, He gave them power over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal all kinds of sickness and all kinds of disease.” (**Matthew 10:1**, NKJV)
 2. “And as you go, preach, saying, ‘The kingdom of heaven is at hand.’ Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out demons. Freely you have received, freely give.” (**Matthew 10:7-8**, NKJV)
 - ii. Similarly, when Jesus sent out the seventy, two-by-two, He said:
 1. Read **Luke 10:13-20**

- a. Jesus says, “Woe to you” to Chorazin; if the mighty works they saw had been done in Tyre and Sidon (pagan areas nearby), they would have repented in sackcloth and ashes.
 - i. Purpose of signs of God’s power: to convict people of their sin and bring them to repentance.
 - b. “Then the seventy returned with joy, saying, ‘Lord, even the demons are subject to us in Your name.’” (**Luke 10:17**, NKJV)
 - i. Jesus responds, “Nevertheless do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rather rejoice *because your names are written in heaven*.” (**Luke 10:20**, NKJV)
2. After Jesus rose from the dead, when He sent out the disciples, He told them that they would be accompanied by “signs and wonders.”
- a. Read **Mark 16:14-20**
 - i. He sends them out to preach to the whole world and says, “These signs will follow those who believe...”. The signs include: ability to heal the sick, drink poison unharmed, and handle poisonous snakes.
 - ii. Purpose of the signs as stated in **verse 20**: “the Lord working with them and confirming the word through the accompanying signs.”
 1. You may have noticed in your Bible a footnote regarding **Mark 16:9-16**, which is included in some Bibles but not in others. Some ancient manuscripts had it, but others did not.
 2. Eusebius (bishop in Caesarea and early church historian, who died 339 AD) commented on this in *Gospel Problems and Solutions, to Marinus*. In Question No. 1 of that work he mentions that there were some copies of Mark’s gospel that had the longer ending, but others did not. He mentions that some in his day might

want to reject the longer ending. Then he adds another perspective:

- a. “Another view, from someone diffident (*reluctant*) about considering anything at all in the text of the gospel as not genuine, however transmitted, is that there is a twofold reading, as in many other places, and that both are to be accepted; it is not for the faithful and devout to judge either as acceptable in preference to the other.”
- b. We see the apostles and other disciples performing signs and wonders in the **Book of Acts**.
 - i. “And they continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers. Then fear came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were done through the apostles.” (**Acts 2:42–43**, NKJV)
 - ii. In the ‘Prayer for Boldness’ in **Acts 4**, the apostles prayed, “Now, Lord, look on their threats, and grant to Your servants that with all boldness they may speak Your word, by stretching out Your hand to heal, and that signs and wonders may be done through the name of Your holy Servant Jesus.” (**Acts 4:29–30**, NKJV)
 - iii. “And through the hands of the apostles many signs and wonders were done among the people. And they were all with one accord in Solomon’s Porch.” (**Acts 5:12**, NKJV) Then it mentions that many sick people were brought to the apostles, and all were healed. (**Acts 5:16**)
 - iv. “And Stephen, full of faith and power, did great wonders and signs among the people.” (**Acts 6:8**, NKJV)
 - v. Simon the sorcerer, after being baptized, was with Philip and, “was amazed, seeing the miracles and signs which were done.” (**Acts 8:13**, NKJV)

- vi. Regarding Paul and Barnabas, in Iconium:
“Therefore they stayed there a long time, speaking boldly in the Lord, who was bearing witness to the word of His grace, granting signs and wonders to be done by their hands.” (**Acts 14:3**, NKJV)
 - vii. Paul later would remind the Corinthians, “Truly the signs of an apostle were accomplished among you with all perseverance, in signs and wonders and mighty deeds.” (**2 Corinthians 12:12**, NKJV)
 - viii. Signs and wonders were being performed constantly by the apostles and others in the years immediately after Jesus died and rose.
- iii. **Question:** If signs and wonders happened then, why don't they happen now?
- 1. That is a great question, but one that is beyond the scope of *this* lesson!
- iv. **Question:** If someone were to work signs and wonders today, should that be taken as a clear sign that God is behind what they are doing?
- 1. Jesus warned us, “For false christs and false prophets will rise and show great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect.” (**Matthew 24:24**, NKJV)
 - a. It is not “if”, but “*when*” they will arise and perform signs!
 - b. While miraculous signs can be an indication of God working, they can also come from elsewhere!
 - 2. Jesus warned us at the end of the Sermon on the Mount, that there would be many on the Day of Judgment who had performed wonders and signs in His name, who would be rejected.
 - a. “Many will say to Me in that day, ‘Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?’ And then I will declare to them, ‘*I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!*’” (**Matthew 7:22-23**, NKJV)

3. Recall that even the Egyptian sorcerers could match Moses and Aaron for producing miraculous signs, in the beginning. However, they were only able to last “four rounds” in this spiritual contest.
 - a. Round One (Exodus 7:8-13): Aaron casts down his staff, which becomes a serpent; then the Egyptians cast down their rods, which also become serpents. However, Aaron’s serpent/rod devours theirs!
 - b. Round Two (Exodus 7:20-22): Water turned to blood, the First Plague. Again, the Egyptians apparently can match Moses and Aaron.
 - c. Round Three (Exodus 7:26-8:3): Plague of frogs, the Second Plague
 - d. Round Four (Exodus 8:12-15): The sorcerers finally “throw in the towel” after Moses and Aaron bring lice (or gnats depending on your translation) upon the land of Egypt, in the Third Plague. The Egyptians cannot replicate this miracle and admit defeat, declaring “This is the Finger of God!”
 - e. Note that ancient Jewish tradition, cited by early Christian writers indicated that there were two pagan Egyptian priests or sorcerers who battled against Moses and Aaron, named Jannes and Jambres. These men are discussed by Paul as examples of the kind of corrupt men who will turn people away from God in the last days, in **2 Timothy 3:1-8**.
 - i. “Now as Jannes and Jambres resisted Moses, so do these also resist the truth: men of corrupt minds, disapproved concerning the faith”. (**2 Timothy 3:8**, NKJV)
 - ii. Eusebius, bishop of Caesarea and early church historian, in his *Preparation of the Gospel*, Book 9, chapters 7-8 (likely written c. 315 AD) discusses Moses, Jannes and Jambres. Eusebius quotes from Numenius of Apamea, a second century philosopher originally from Syria, who followed the teachings of Plato and Pythagoras. The following quote Eusebius takes from the third book of Numenius’ *On the Good*:

1. “And next in order came Jannes and Jambres, Egyptian sacred scribes, men judged to have no superiors in the practice of magic, at the time when the Jews were being driven out of Egypt. So then these were the men chosen by the people of Egypt as fit to stand beside Moses, who led forth the Jews, a man who was most powerful in prayer to God; and of the plagues which Moses brought upon Egypt, these men showed themselves able to disperse the most violent.”
2. (Eusebius then comments on this quote, writing “Now by these words Numenius bears witness both to the marvelous wonders performed by Moses, and to Moses himself as having been beloved of God.”)
4. Paul warned, “The coming of the lawless one is according to the working of Satan, with all power, signs, and lying wonders, and with all unrighteous deception among those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth, that they might be saved. And for this reason God will send them strong delusion, that they should believe the lie, that they all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness.” (**2 Thessalonians 2:9–12**, NKJV)
 - a. We must always love the truth. Hold fast to the truth, even in the face of great signs.
 - b. Do not take pleasure in unrighteousness.
5. We are warned of miraculous signs that will be done by Satan (the *dragon*, **Revelation 12: 7-9**) and those with him, in the Book of Revelation.
 - a. **Revelation 13:1-4**, “the beast”, who is with Satan, is mortally wounded then miraculously healed. All the world then follows the beast.
 - b. **Revelation 13:11-14**, a second beast “performs great signs...deceives those on the earth by these signs.”

- j. Conclusions regarding “signs and wonders”
 - i. Jesus performed them, in fulfillment of several prophecies. It was a sign not only that He was sent by God, but also that He was the one like Moses (**Deuteronomy 18:15-19**) and He was the Suffering Servant that Isaiah spoke of (**Isaiah 53**); this fulfilled other prophecies as well.
 - ii. Some hard-hearted people would not believe regardless of the signs shown to them.
 - iii. Jesus and the apostles used miraculous signs to bring people to faith and repentance, in the beginning. This continued powerfully after the resurrection, and we see it throughout the **Book of Acts**.
 - iv. Satan and those with him can do miraculous signs as well. We see that in the story of Moses and the Egyptian sorcerers. Jesus warned us that after him false christs and false prophets would come who would even perform miraculous signs. However, they would pull people into unrighteousness and pleasure-seeking. We must love the truth and not be drawn off course by great signs.
 - 1. For me: “signs” that have pulled God’s people away from the truth are not limited to miracles such as healings. Fast-growing churches or large groups can be seen by some as “signs of God’s approval.” Yet many times churches that manifest such “signs” are turning a blind eye to the kingdom teachings of Jesus and the apostles regarding living righteous lives.
 - 2. We are always being tested. We must *love the truth and hold on to it*, never letting go even in the face of “signs and wonders”!

II. Jesus Heals a Paralyzed Man

- a. Read **John 5:1-17**
- b. Storyline:
 - i. Paralyzed man wants to be healed; when water is miraculously stirred, first one in is supposed to be healed.
 - ii. Note that the Majority Text (based on the greatest number of ancient manuscripts) has the **end of verse 3** and **verse 4** (as do KJV and NKJV translations), while some other modern translations do not. That is the part explains what is going on!
 - iii. Jesus heals the man.

- iv. Jesus end up getting criticized, because He healed the man on the Sabbath (Saturday). In fact, the people are so upset at Jesus they want to kill him!
- v. Jesus sees the man again later and gives him a warning.
- c. Jesus criticized for healing the man on the Sabbath. Why? Is this an overreaction?
 - i. Even Jesus' enemies admitted that He performed miracles. Instead of claiming the healings were not genuine, they criticized Him doing these healings *on the wrong day!* Throughout His ministry, His enemies said this was not from God, because:
 - 1. He did it on the Sabbath, which violated what Moses taught in the Law; and
 - 2. He was getting his power from Satan, rather than from God.
 - ii. What did Moses actually say regarding the Sabbath?
 - 1. Keeping the Sabbath was the Third Commandment. Read **Deuteronomy 5:12-15**. The Jews were not allowed to work on the Sabbath, nor were their servants, nor even their animals!
 - 2. Also consider **Exodus 31:12-17**, where it is clear that God meant this to be taken very seriously. Death penalty for those breaking it!
 - 3. However, should *healing* someone on the Sabbath fall within the category of *prohibited work*? What do you think?
 - iii. Jesus' response to his critics: "Yes, *I am working*, but so is My Father."
 - 1. If I were faced with this kind of challenge, my natural response would be something like, "*I am not really working*; I am just healing someone, releasing them from their bondage."
 - 2. However, Jesus instead "doubles down" here, stating that in fact *He is working on the Sabbath*. (For a typical Jew that would mean admitting you were breaking the Law of Moses, punishable by death!)
 - 3. Furthermore, He was *putting himself on the same plane as God!* That incited his opponents to become even more upset with Him!
- d. Jesus' warning to the man: stop sinning, or something even worse than total lifetime paralysis will happen to you!

- i. Jesus was the strongest preacher against sin of all time. This is reminiscent of other very severe warnings Jesus gave regarding the dangers of sin. Some similar examples:
 1. “But I say to you that whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart. If your right eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and cast it from you; for it is more profitable for you that one of your members perish, than for your whole body to be cast into hell.” (**Matthew 5:28-29**, NKJV)
 2. “And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.” (**Matthew 10:28**, NKJV)
 3. Read **Mark 9:42-48**
 - a. (Instead of causing “one of these little ones” to stumble) “It would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck, and he were thrown into the sea”
 - b. Better to cut off hand or foot and go through life maimed, or to pluck out an eye
 - c. ...than to go through this brief life healthy but end up being *cast into hell fire for eternity!*
- ii. Jesus gave the healed paralytic a sobering reminder of the dangers of sin. It leads to a much worse fate than the one he just escaped (being paralyzed for 38 years). May the warning he received also serve to *remind us* of the seriousness of sin, and the dangerous consequences *if we do not repent!*