

Signs and Wonders

John 4:46-54

The Lord had returned to Cana in Galilee. It was there that he had turned the water into wine. An “official” who resided at Capernaum heard that Jesus was once again in Galilee. The official’s son was ill, actually at the point of death. So the man came to Jesus and asked him to come and heal his son.

The response of the Lord is surprising. He did not inquire, so far as we know, about the boy and his illness. He did not indicate that he would hurry to the scene. The Lord used the occasion to make a negative comment about the Jewish perspective on belief, and what might justify it. This was the Lord’s reply to the man’s request: *Unless you see signs and wonders you will not believe.*

The man continued to plead for the Lord’s intervention. He did not want the child to die. The Lord did not go to the boy, but told the official to return home with a promise from the Lord that the boy would live.

The man, we are told, “believed the word that Jesus spoke...” He started toward Capernaum and was met by a delegation of servants who told him that the boy was recovering. He asked them when the child had started to get better. “Yesterday at the seventh hour,” they said. The man recalled that this was the exact time that the Lord had told him the boy would live. He believed and apparently told the members of his household what had happened and so all his house came to believe. The official went believing without a sign, received the blessing of healing for his son, and then faith was engendered in the household as well.

Paul, the apostle, in writing to the church at Corinth, (1 Corinthians 1:18-25) described the Gentiles as seeking “wisdom.” That may sound like a compliment but Paul did not mean that they were seeking the wisdom of God. On the contrary, they were seeking a rational explanation of things that would give them reason to believe that the Christ had come, and that his death on the cross was God’s way of redeeming his people from their sins. The Gentile inclination was to say, “Explain it to me in a way that satisfies my ability to understand it, and then I will believe but not before. Paul says that the Jewish inclination was to say, “Do a miracle and only then will I believe!”

Why did the Lord, who was doing signs and wonders, downplay the use of them? Paul tells us that the preaching of Christ crucified is not wisdom to the Gentiles; it is folly or foolishness. And the preaching of Christ crucified is not a sign miracle to Jews. That is only a stumbling block to them. They saw the cross as weakness. The Messiah, if that is who Jesus was, should have led a great rebellion against the ruling Romans and made the Jewish people the rulers of the world. He should have given them the nations as their slaves. He should have made their lives a carnal paradise. But he did none of that, and so for many Jews he was a fraud.

Paul insists that they have failed to see that God’s wisdom, which is unlike man’s, was being displayed in the atoning death of the Lord. And, that God’s power, which is unlike earthly power, was being manifested by the death of the Messiah on the cross. Those who demand signs will never come to Christ. Those who demand a philosophically satisfying explanation will never come to know the Lord as savior.

The man returned to his house with only the promise of God. His son was healed. We have the promise of God that he will pardon our sins if we depend on Christ

to save us. We have the promise of God that he will justify us in his sight, if we put our faith in Christ alone.

The Lord has said to the world that sins are dealt with by the cross. The Lord has given the one great confirming sign, the resurrection of the Lord from the dead, but no other signs are needed. We are told to repent of our sins and put our confidence in Christ, who has the righteousness that we need. His obedience was a perfect obedience to the will of the Father. He left heaven's splendor with the promise of the Father to sustain him, and he accomplished our salvation as the perfect man of faith.

by Joe Nesom