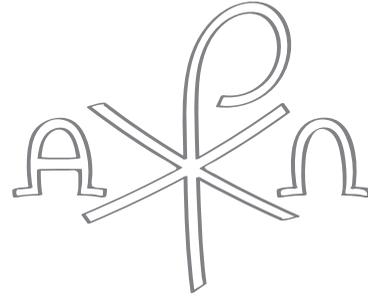


THE TWENTY-FIRST SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

Study Notes for the Christian Layperson

by: Rev. Andrew Richard



JOHN 4:46-54 ESV

Author and Date:

Written by the Apostle John around 90 AD. Prior to this account in John's record of the Gospel, Jesus had a lengthy conversation with the Samaritan woman at the well. After this reading, Jesus healed the paralyzed man at the pool of Bethesda. This Gospel reading is the second of Jesus' signs, there being a total of seven in the Gospel according to John (2:1-11, 4:46-54, 5:1-17, 6:1-15, 6:16-21, 9:1-41, 11:1-44).

⁴⁶ So he came again to Cana in Galilee, where he had made the water wine. And at Capernaum there was an official whose son was ill.

- This reading opens with a reference to John 2:1-11 when Jesus turns water into wine, "This, the first of his signs, Jesus did at Cana in Galilee, and manifested his glory. And his disciples believed in him" (John 2:11). Beginning this passage in this way makes us expect that Jesus will do another sign and that it will end with more people believing.
- Capernaum is where Jesus lived, having moved there from Nazareth (see, for example, Mark 2:1). The official was in Jesus' adult hometown and was likely familiar with the reports that were spreading about Jesus.
- Cana and Capernaum are separated by about 17 miles, a walk that took the better part of a day. Yet they are neighboring towns, and so news would spread between the two. Apparently the official had heard the report of what Jesus had done changing water into wine, knew the sorts of things that Jesus could do, heard Jesus was near, knew his son was about to die, and so set out from the shores of Galilee on the day-long trek uphill to Cana.

⁴⁷ When this man heard that Jesus had come from Judea to Galilee, he went to him and asked him to come down and heal his son, for he was at the point of death.

- Judea was the region that included places like Jerusalem and Bethlehem. North of Judea was Samaria, then north of that was the region of Galilee, which included the area around the Sea of Galilee.
- "From these words, it is evident that he had an immature faith. The fact that he asked Jesus to help his son is a sign of faith, for if he did not believe and expect every good from Jesus, he would not have approached Him and asked for His help. But the fact that he asked, and twice said that he wanted Him to come to his house and help his son, is a sign of his immature faith. For if he had a steadfast faith, he would have freely said with the centurion, 'Lord, speak but a word and my servant will be healed!' [Matt. 8:8]. But he did not believe that Christ's word was powerful enough to heal the sick unless Christ were personally present." (Johann Spangenberg, *The Christian Year of Grace*, 341)

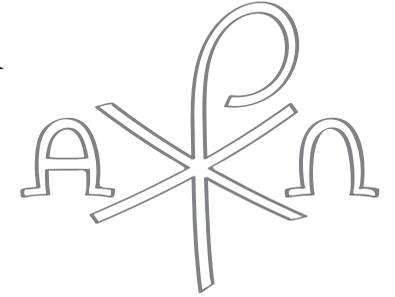
⁴⁸ So Jesus said to him, "Unless you see signs and wonders you will not believe."

- The official wasn't content to base faith on the Word alone, but wanted faith to depend on the Word *and*... The Word *and* seeing Jesus do something. Jesus rebukes this, not because this faith is *bad*. No faith is "bad" that clings to Christ. But Jesus desires that the man base his faith on His Word alone, not the Word *and*....
- There are times you do the same thing as the official. You want the Word *and* obviously answered prayers. The Word *and* some sign (other than the multitude recorded in sacred Scripture) that the Word is true.

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The Word *and* healing. The Word *and* relief from pain. The Word *and* a happy life. “Unless I see in his hands the mark of the nails, and place my finger into the mark of the nails, and place my hand into his side, I will never believe.” (John 20:25)

⁴⁹ **The official said to him, “Sir, come down before my child dies.”**

- The official asks the same thing again. His weak faith persists like a baby that can only cry out and grab a finger. You can imagine the sort of patience we would have with this man: “Did you not just hear a word I said? You don’t need me to come down! You need the Word! Get it through your thick skull!” But thank God Jesus is much more patient with us. He doesn’t rebuke again. He is patient and bears with our weak faith and gives the Word that will strengthen that faith.

⁵⁰ **Jesus said to him, “Go; your son will live.” The man believed the word that Jesus spoke to him and went on his way.**

- Seventeen miles back home and all day to think about what might await him. He knows what he *saw*. He saw a dying child. He saw his son’s pallid face. He saw pale lips. He saw his closed eyes. He saw the child’s distraught mother. It’s enough to make one faint from anxiety, or bite one’s nails clean off the fingers. But this official boldly marches back home saying, “Forget what my eyes see. Curse, to the depths, what my senses perceive. I have something better. I have the Word of Jesus, and *that* is sufficient.”
- The Word might seem weak as a foundation for faith unless it has something else with it. But the Word is sufficient by itself. Compare Jesus’ Word to Jesus Himself and you’ll see how true this is. Jesus seemed like a weak foundation for salvation. His strength was beaten out of Him. He stood helpless before His accusers. He was too weak to carry His own cross all the way up Golgotha. He died quickly as far as crucifixions go, letting go of life long before the criminals crucified on either side of Him did. Is this seriously your foundation for salvation? Yes! Yes it is! Jesus may have looked weak, but that’s how He chose to defeat sin, death, and the devil.

⁵¹ As he was going down, his servants met him and told him that his son was recovering. ⁵² So he asked them the hour when he began to get better, and they said to him, “Yesterday at the seventh hour the fever left him.” ⁵³ The father knew that was the hour when Jesus had said to him, “Your son will live.” And he himself believed, and all his household.

- The seventh hour was about 1:00 p.m.
- “Faith believes in God’s Word alone, just as the nobleman believed in Christ’s words. Even though outwardly no means are visible, even though all reason strives against it, faith still clings to God’s Word and knows that God can do more than we can possibly understand (Ephesians 3:20). Even when in times of trial everything departs and vanishes, faith alone must cling to the Word; it is a Word of unshakable truth (John 17:17). Whoever builds upon it, builds upon bedrock (Matthew 7:24). Whoever wishes to feel and understand things before he will believe, will not come to true faith. In worldly things feeling and understanding come first, then afterwards comes belief. But in divine things faith must come first; then one feels God’s power and understands His wisdom.” (Johann Gerhard. *Postilla*. Vol. 2.)
- You see the heavy cross that Jesus placed on this official and what came of it. The only thing that’s different at the end of the reading than the beginning is the official and his whole house have a stronger faith. Jesus uses cross and trial like this for your sake as well. It says in Isaiah 26:16, “O LORD, in distress they sought you; they poured out a whispered prayer when your discipline was upon them”. Tribulation drives you quickly over the 17 miles to Jesus and you return with a stronger faith, more certain of Jesus’ love and salvation and resting securely on his Word.
- ⁵⁴ **This was now the second sign that Jesus did when he had come from Judea to Galilee.**
- What we were set up to expect has now come to fruition: Jesus did another sign, and more believed. Yet in the end faith depended on Jesus’ Word, not sight.



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