

Day 1

Learn: Prayerfully read John 4.43-45. Verses 44 and 45 are tied together tightly in the Greek. To understand these two verses, you must appreciate both John's sense of irony and his subtlety. Jesus is coming out of Samaria, where he had enjoyed "unqualified, unopposed, open-hearted success" [Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 236], despite the fact that the people did not fully know God the Father. Now, Jesus returns to his own people in Galilee. At first, you might think v.45 contradicts v.44, but remember the irony and subtlety: John tells us of Jesus' view that a prophet is not honored by his own people; then John reports that the reception in Galilee was favorable *because* the people had seen Jesus do miracles in Jerusalem [most obvious in NET, but easily seen in NASB, NKJV, ESV, NLT]. These Jewish people from Galilee welcomed Jesus as a miracle worker, a magician, not as the Messiah. They were attracted to and impressed by his miracles, not his teachings. This interpretation is reinforced by Jesus' outburst at the crowd in v.48. While Jesus was in Samaria, John reminded us of who Jesus was, the Messianic Savior. The recognition of Jesus as Messiah by the despised Samaritans makes all the more tragically ironic the failure of most Jews to accept Jesus as the Messiah.

Reflect: How much do you follow Jesus because he can do things for you, and how much because you know who he is? For most of us, it is a combination, but what motive would Jesus want you to have? If Jesus never answered your prayers, if you never saw anything miraculous, how well would you continue to believe in him and to follow him? Does your faith waver when Jesus does not do what you hoped he would, or does it remain strong because you believe in his words and identity? These are serious questions to ponder, so take some time at the beach or in the garden and search deeply within.

Want to enhance your study? Invest in a useful study tool: If you had a good BIBLE DICTIONARY right now, you could look up words like "Messiah" and get a deeper appreciation for how they have been used throughout the Bible. Some one-volume dictionaries are IVP's *New Bible Dictionary*, the *HarperCollins Bible Dictionary*, the *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Dictionary*. Older dictionaries are often available on-line for free.

Day 2

Learn: Prayerfully read John 4.43-48. The royal official most likely was a Jewish functionary in the government of Herod Antipas, serving in Capernaum. Verse 46 is tied closely in the Greek to the previous verses: The NASB begins v.46 with "therefore." So after John has shown us the superficial faith of the Galileans, he launches into this true story about the visit of the official to *illustrate* it. The royal official had heard that Jesus did miracles, so he came to ask for one. On the surface of it, that might look like faith, but look at what Jesus says in v.48 to the crowd [the word for "you" in Greek is plural, like "you all"]: Jesus does not see this as faith in him as Messiah/Savior, just as hope in his tricks.

Reflect: Jesus might seem harsh toward the father even if he is accurate about Galileans in general. But Jesus often would say hard truths to challenge people to choose whether they really believed, and – if they did – to inspire them to deepen their faith in him and resolve to follow him. How well have you proven that your faith in Jesus as Savior and your confidence in the rightness of his teachings is sufficient to submit to him as Lord of your life?

Want to enhance your study? Learn how to use a CONCORDANCE. A concordance lists the words in the Bible and tells you where they occur, so you can trace them through all the scriptures. If you buy one, note that they now come tailored to individual translations, so be sure to find one that matches the Bible you use most for study. Older concordances, usually tied to KJV, are available on-line for free, as are some lexicons which combine elements of dictionaries with elements of concordances. Also, many study Bibles have mini-concordances in the back and/or "chain references" which will link you to other verses that express similar ideas. On-line Bibles often have a word-search feature for free.

Day 3

Learn: Prayerfully read John 4.46-50. When the royal official first came to Jesus, he was desperate, "imploring" [NASB] Jesus to go with him to heal his son. Even after Jesus erupted in v.48, the official remained single-minded: he did not argue with Jesus, just reiterated his plea. Jesus' answer was a surprise: he would not go! But Jesus declared the boy would live. This was a test of faith: there would be no sign today, just the word of Jesus. The official responded in faith. Whereas he had come out of desperation, willing to try *anything*, now he put his confidence specifically in *the character and word of Jesus*. This shows a lot of trust, and certainly was another step toward true saving faith.

Reflect: Take inventory of your prayer life and obedience. Do you primarily turn to God when you are desperate for some gift of grace, or do you communicate well with God all day, every day? Are you attracted to God's way only when

you need blessing, or are you diligently searching God's word every day for ways to improve yourself and your life? What do your answers suggest about how Jesus would view your priorities and faith?

Want to enhance your study? PRAY before you read, and PRAYERFULLY REFLECT afterward. By reflect, we do not mean some Buddhist concept of meditation by emptying your mind. Rather, we mean the Christian concept of filling your mind with God's word. After you read, take some time to just think about it. Experts recommend you spend at least as much time thinking as you do reading! This not only gives your brain a chance to process the material and thus learn at a higher level of analysis and synthesis, but it also gives the Holy Spirit the opportunity to further illuminate the scriptures for you. Sometimes it is worthwhile to think about a whole passage. For example, the meaning of this passage comes out as you consider the whole. Sometimes it is more worthwhile to consider one verse, turning it over and over in your mind, considering how you could apply it to your life or how it changes what you think. Try this every day!

Day 4

Learn: Prayerfully read John 4.50-53. The distance between Capernaum and Cana is about twenty miles, over very hilly terrain, too far for making the round trip in one day riding some poor animal. This explains why the man was still on the road the next day. When the man heard that his son was doing better and that this improvement began right when Jesus spoke that his son would live, the man developed true faith in the identity and work of Jesus. Establishing what would be a common pattern in the New Testament, the man's whole family came to faith in Jesus as a result of this healing. They sensed the hand of God in this miracle, and thus they believed in Jesus' identity as the Messiah-Savior from God.

Reflect: Jesus gave this boy life; he gave the boy both physical life in his healing and spiritual, eternal, life in his inspired faith. It is easy to get overly focused on what we would like to improve about ourselves or our lives. If you reflect that we all deserve to die and go to Hell for our sin, it is easier to focus on being thankful for the blessings we have. If you are a believer in Jesus, you have new life! You have citizenship in Heaven and reconciliation with God! You can be intimate with God even now, and grow in your transformation into the person God intended you to be! Every other blessing is a bonus! Take time today to list the things for which you are grateful, and let God know about it!

Want to enhance your study? A BIBLE ATLAS is a fun tool to have. Take a look at Schlegel's *Satellite Bible Atlas*, Aharoni's *The Carta Bible Atlas*, Beitzel's *The New Moody Atlas of the Bible*, and Rasmussen's *Zondervan Atlas of the Bible*. Many websites offer free access to maps for different periods of Bible history.

Day 5

Learn: Prayerfully read John 4.53-54. Since John told us that Jesus did many miracles in Jerusalem, it is interesting that he calls this one the "second sign." Perhaps it is a literary technique John is using to draw attention to the specific incidents he is highlighting in the ministry of Jesus or perhaps it was just the second sign given in Cana to the Galileans. What is significant about this "sign" or miracle? Take a moment and think about what is different in this miracle from the one in Cana we saw before, turning water into wine... Here are some considerations for you to ponder after you have made your own list: This was a healing; it was done at a distance, showing distance means nothing to Jesus; it was a person Jesus changed, not a thing; it was life-giving; it inspired faith in a family that did not believe previously, whereas the first sign inspired a deepening of faith in the already believing disciples.

Reflect: Do you realize that Jesus can do anything he wants? It was through him that God the Father created the world [John 1.3]; he can give both physical and spiritual life; he has been anointed King [1 Timothy 6.15] and named High Priest [Psalm 110.4; Hebrews 5.5-9] by God the Father. There is nothing he cannot do in this universe. Put your faith in him! Put your faith in him, not only to save you from eternal death, but also to provide you with the right way of life! What is it you hope Jesus will do in you or in your life this year? Ask! Ask expectantly. He might choose not to do it, he might choose to delay doing it, he might choose to do it over time, or he might do it differently than you expect, but continue to trust him and in his provision, for he will use all things for the good of those who love him [Romans 8.28]!

Want to enhance your study? Some scholars have tried to "harmonize" the gospels to get a fuller picture of the life of Christ. They try to figure out a timeline of Jesus' life and they present his life in order, drawing from all four gospels. [Harmonies come in full Bible format or just the gospels]. Most HARMONIES are available for well under \$20. One is Dallas Theological Seminary Professor J. Dwight Penecost's *A Harmony of the Words and Works of Jesus Christ* [be sure the word "harmony" is in the title, else you are getting his commentary, not the scriptures]. For the really studious, another idea is to buy a book that discusses the life of Christ, such as Paul Barnett's [history] *Jesus and the Rise of Early Christianity*, Darrell Bock's [scripture analysis] *Jesus According to Scripture: Restoring the Portrait from the Gospels*, Penecost's [commentary] *The Words & Works of Jesus Christ*, or John Walvoord's [theology] *Jesus Christ Our Lord*.