

No Honor, Your Honor

John 4:43-54

⁴³ After the two days he departed for Galilee.

⁴⁴ (For Jesus himself had testified that a prophet has no honor in his own hometown.)

⁴⁵ So when he came to Galilee, the Galileans welcomed him, having seen all that he had done in Jerusalem at the feast. For they too had gone to the feast.

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.

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.

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

⁴⁹ The official said to him, "Sir, come down before my child dies."

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.

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.

⁵⁴ This was now the second sign that Jesus did when he had come from Judea to Galilee.

Western Civilization and The Prophet

2,000 years ago, western civilization was quite different than it is today. If you understand the cause, you will understand the difference. What is that cause? The **Greeks** are usually attributed as being the fathers of the way the West has come to view reality. They developed science, philosophy, the arts, and mathematics to a degree unknown since the most ancient times of world history. They also conquered most of the world, at least as it was known to peoples from Europe to Africa to southern Asia. As they conquered, the Greek tongue became the spoken language of its whole empire. This allowed their view of reality to spread like a fire through previously diverse and very different peoples. When the **Romans** conquered the Greeks, they were inheritors of Greek civilization. So they basically took Greek civilization and put their own Roman spin on it.

But all of this was completely pagan. These cultures did not worship the true God, but retained all of the old gods and the worship of them. And this is what makes western civilization during the past 2,000 years so different. Starting in Jerusalem and spreading out to Judea, Samaria, and the ends of the earth, the gospel of Jesus Christ set people free from their worship of themselves and the gods and put it where it belongs: on the Creator and Maker of all things. We are not

different today because we have science or reason or philosophy or technology, for Greeks and Romans had all of that. It is who, in general, we worship that makes us so different (disregard the past 40 years from that comment).

This knowledge of God and his Christ had, at some point, become ubiquitous. Ubiquity means universal. In other words, everyone in western civilization knew about Jesus and knew that he was God. That doesn't mean they all *believed* it. Far from it. But the knowledge of Christ in our civilization overshadowed the knowledge of the gods, so that it became common place and they were shoved aside. Thus, to this day, eastern peoples think that everyone in the West is a Christian (which is why, for instance, Muslims want to destroy not only our religion, but western civilization).

Today we are looking at [John 4:43-54](#). It is the story of Jesus healing an official's son. At this point, you might be asking yourself, what does all of this talk about western civilization have to do with Jesus healing this official's son. The answer is, more than you might think. What I'm going to show you today is how the phrase, "a prophet has no honor in his own hometown" is the key to interpreting this story, and in turn, has great bearing upon our own culture's present disdain and rejection of Christ in ways not seen in the entire history of western civilization. I submit that our civilization has become

a kind of “hometown” for Christ, and as we read about in this story and others, he no longer has any honor here. What must be your response to this, will be the way we will conclude our time together.

Geographical and Attitudinal Context

To get at this, let's first look at the geography we are now moving into. The movement of Jesus from one place to another is always deliberate and important. We recall that the first place we find him is “[across the Jordan](#)” in the land of [Bashan](#), in the wilderness. From here, he travels east into [Galilee](#). Galilee is the region where he was born and brought up, for he was from Nazareth in Galilee.

He heads to [Cana](#), a town not too far from where he grew up, and still in Galilee. He goes up to the sea, still in Galilee, to [Capernaum](#). Then he attends a feast and travels all the way down to [Jerusalem](#) in Judea. Galilee and Judea have one thing in common. They are both the land of the Jews.

In the land of the Jews, we have seen many [attitudes](#) about his Jesus that have been pointed out.¹ Though the disciples put their faith in him, and they were all Jews, the rest of the people are painted in much greyer tones and shades. In

¹ What follows is summarized in D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John* (Leicester, England; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Inter-Varsity Press; W.B. Eerdmans, 1991), 236.

Jerusalem the Jews challenge him ([John 2:18-20](#)), the disciples fail to understand him ([2:22](#), and many who appeared to believe in him were actually false converts ([2:23-25](#)), grass that grows for a short time but quickly burns in the hot sun because the roots are not deep. Their “faith”, if you can call it that, was generated mostly by seeing miraculous signs. [They put their faith in the signs and not in the Son.](#) Even Jesus’ discussion with Nicodemus is, at least at this point in the book, of very little hope for the man’s salvation.

It is not until Jesus comes to [Samaria](#) that things change. Samaria was, you will remember, the land of half-breeds. They were neither Jew nor Gentile, but something in between, thereby making them worse than either in the minds of both. Here, Jesus meets an unnamed woman near the well of Jacob. This woman has all the marks of the lowest of the low: a woman, a Samaritan, a poor, extremely sinful outcast that even other Samaritan women don’t seem to want to be associated with. Yet, when Jesus talks to her, she is overwhelmed with his knowledge of her sin, discussion of himself, and compassion that he shows her. And unlike anyone else in this book thus far, save the disciples, [she believes](#) ... not in any sign, but in his self-revelation as the Messiah and Savior. Not only that, but when she tells the people in the village, they all come out to him and the whole town is said to have believed in

him. The people that were not supposed to believe, believe. His own kin doubted, questioned, procrastinated, surveyed, and everything else you can think of except believe.

This is the context, both nationally and geographically, of our passage today. Jesus now departs **back to Galilee**. He spends two days with these Samaritans, but leaves them to return back home. Why does he return to Galilee? **Vs. 44** has the almost inexplicable reason, **“For Jesus himself had testified that a prophet has no honor in his own hometown.”** The word “For” connects this proverbial statement used in other ways in the Synoptic gospels to the departure for Galilee. Jesus returns to Galilee for prophets have no honor in their own home.

But it does not seem to make a whole lot of sense that Jesus would go to Galilee because a prophet has no honor in his own hometown. That is why scholars have come up with a dozen different ways of making the text say something it doesn't say. But it is clear, Jesus is returning to the land of his home and John tells us it is because he has no honor there. That is what we need to figure out.

This doesn't make sense, *until* you remember that **Jesus' mission was to the Jews**. His coming through the lands of Gentiles and Samaritans is a kind of prophetic way of announcing that he will be for them a savior after the Jews reject him; but the Jews rejecting him could only come if he

came to them. Thus, most of his ministry is taken up in Galilee and Judea to Jews. Yes, some Jews did believe in him, but most did not, and this was a major part of his mission.

These ambiguous and even doubtful attitudes I have mentioned from the Jews are critical if you are to see his eventual coming to the world outside of Israel as well. If their attitude would have been full acceptance, he never would have died for anyone's sin. We could follow several bunny trails here, but I mention it only to help you see that Jesus' going back to Galilee is directly related to having no honor. While he goes sincerely to be their Messiah (and our story will show that to some degree), and to call them to trust in him, ultimately [his going is so that they will reject him, because a prophet has no honor in his own hometown](#). That's the key. The entire story of the healing of this official's son must be read through this lens, if you are to have any hope of understanding why this is in the Bible, other than as filler of some kind of miracle that Jesus did. Rarely are even the miracles here simply as an end to themselves.

They Welcomed Him?

That said, when you read [vs. 45](#), you might think what I have just said is crazy. "Doesn't it say that the Galileans *welcomed* him?" you may ask me. Where is this continuing bad

attitude towards Jesus in our story? The welcome is not an embracing of Christ by faith, but a spurious welcome, and ironic welcome, for it says they welcomed him “having seen all that he had done in Jerusalem at the feast.” They went with him, because the entire nation was supposed to make the journey once a year to Jerusalem. Because of his delay in Samaria, they beat him back home. Now he returns to them and they are excited, a lot like when a big celebrity comes to town, or when a famous speaker comes to your church. Jesus was becoming a celebrity.

The place of the return is important, especially for John. “He came again to Cana in Galilee” (vs. 46). Where have we seen Cana before? In Chapter 2, at the wedding where Christ gave his first sign. In fact, vs. 54 tells us that this was his second sign in Cana, the first being the turning of water into wine. Thus, our story today in Cana really bookends everything we have seen in chapters 2-4 and ends the first unit of the book of John. It is a kind of inclusion, where what we saw at the start is what we see at the end too.

What did we see at the start? What have Jews been believing in? Signs. They have been believing in signs. “Many believed in his name when they saw the signs that he was doing. But Jesus on his part did not entrust himself to them, because he knew all people” (John 2:23-24). As we will

see several times later in this book, this “believing in his name” was a temporary, false belief, not brought on by biblical faith and repentance. This is the context of the second miracle in Cana too.

The Official and his Son

At this point we learn about a certain official who had an ill son. This man lived in **Capernaum**, which is about 16.6 miles from Cana as the crow flies. It would have been a long day’s journey to get there from Cana. This official heard that Jesus had come from Judea to Galilee, so he made the trip, found our Lord, and ask him a question. “**Jesus, will you come down to Capernaum [Capernaum is lower in elevation than Cana)] and heal my son, because he is near the point of death**” (vs. 47).

This story bears some striking similarities to another story told in the Synoptics about a **Centurion’s Servant** who is ill. Some of these similarities are that a man of some political clout comes to Jesus to heal someone. Both of them live in Capernaum. Jesus heals both people from a distance. But the differences outweigh the similarities. In our story, it is the man’s son; in the other, a servant. Here the boy is sick; in the other the servant is paralyzed. In the other story, the centurion is a Gentile. Here, we are not told what he is. The other man

is a military officer; ours is a Herodian Bureaucrat. So anyone who tells you that these are the same stories is simply pulling your leg, probably in hopes of making you think the Bible is contradictory. There is no reason why Jesus can't heal two people in similar ways in the same town. In fact, that makes a lot of sense that he would, because one would have seen the first miracle or heard about it firsthand.

The biggest difference has to be Jesus' response. In the story told by **Matthew (8:5-13)** and **Luke (7:2-10)**, Jesus **positively assesses** the man's request as a request that has arisen from faith. This clearly Gentile lord is showing great faith in the Lord of Gentiles. The man displays this faith in remarkable ways saying, "I am not worthy to have you come under my roof, but only say the word, and my servant will be healed" (**Matt 9:8**). Perhaps he had got wind of the miracle told by John here, or perhaps our miracle comes after that one. If Matthew's miracle took place first, then this man's faith is even more evidenced. Indeed, this man who was himself under authority, submits to Christ's authority, and for it, Jesus says, "with no one in Israel have I found such faith" (**Matt 9:10**).

Fitting the same theme I'm looking at in the story in John, Jesus' assessment of our official is **quite skeptical**. He tells the man, "Unless you see signs and wonders you will not believe"

(John 4:48). This is the very opposite response from the parallel story. The man says, “Sir, come down before my child dies” (vs. 49). Even though Jesus doubts the man’s genuine faith, he nevertheless heals the boy, in the same way he healed the Centurion’s servant, and this bears a comment.

Power of God’s Word

Jesus simply speaks a word and the boy is healed. He is, after all, the “word” of God. Indeed, Jesus speaks a word 16 miles from where the boy is, and the boy is healed. See, then, the true power of the Son of God who is the Word of God. With a tiny word, “Go; you son will live,” the boy is healed, miles from where Jesus and the officer are having this discussion. Has there ever been any miracle worker that could do this? Of course not. Look at the charlatans of today. Behold how they do their miracles: The person has to be right there with them so that they can touch them or blow on them (or knock them over). But Jesus does not touch anyone. The boy is not even near him. His Word is so powerful that it seeks out the exact sick person it intends to heal, and it heals him completely. Jesus’ word doesn’t miss its mark. He does not accidentally heal the wrong person. He does not botch his miracle, nor is it only a partial healing.

For this reason alone, you ought to believe that he is who he says he is. He I want to say that this is the point of saying

that Jesus is a prophet. Prophets speak the truth about God. Jesus is telling you that he is the Messiah, and the miracles attest to his word. Believe his testimony, or at least believe in him upon the miracles that he did, as he once told the Jews. **Not in the miracles themselves, but in the Worker of the miracles.**

As John tells us at the end of this book, this is one of the main purposes of this story and so many others in this gospel. He is writing so that you might believe in Jesus. When doubts come, think on these objective facts. If you have never trusted in Christ, believe upon the Son, for he has the power to do any miracle that he chooses. Perhaps the greatest miracle of all is his desire to convert many people through the word. So believe upon Jesus and be saved, for he is able to heal a boy 16 miles away with the mere word of his mouth.

The man in our story “**believed the word that Jesus spoke to him and went on his way**” (vs. 50). This is a positive assessment of the man, of that I have no doubt. Yet, we get more of the story to see that this initial belief is probably different from his later belief. Here is what I mean. The word “**believe**” is repeated in vs. 48, 50, and 53. In the first verse, Jesus says “**unless you see signs and wonders you will not believe**” (“signs and wonders” is a tip of the hat to Moses, which could probably be a whole sermon in itself, but takes us

too far afield for our purposes today). In the second verse, the man believes. But what kind of belief was this? What was the object of his belief? Faith has an object, and as we have seen, so many have as the object of their faith the miracles rather than the man.

As the story unfolds, the man is going back down to Capernaum from Cana, when his servants (who obviously knew where he had been), met him on the road and told him that his son was recovering (vs. 51). The officer asked them, “When did this occur? What time did he begin to get better?” (vs. 52). The question presupposes a kind of faith that needs confirmation! So they answered him, “Yesterday at the seventh hour the fever left him.” When they told him this, he knew that this was the exact hour that he had spoke with Jesus when he said, “Your son will live.” Thus it concludes, “And he himself believed, and all his household” (vs. 53).

I believe this second belief is the belief that comes from true faith. This was no miracle worker. The man was now no longer believing that Jesus was a miracle worker. He believed that Jesus had a kind of power and knowledge that surpassed anyone that ever lived. Thus, he “himself” believed. The Greek verb has a third person ending on it which translated means, “he believed.” But John adds the **emphatic** pronoun “**himself**.” This time, he *really* believed! It adds, not only did

he himself believe, but also his whole household. This typical phrase in the book of Acts shows something similar to the story of the woman at the well. When true belief came to her, it spread to the town. When this man believed, it spread to all those around.

So there is a progression in the word “believe” in this story. First, he is chastised by believing only in signs. Jesus’ words here were meant to induce true believe, not the false belief that so many others can have. You need to make sure that your belief is not false belief by asking yourself what is the content of your faith? What are you believing in? Are you believing in God to give you money or riches or physical healing? Is this why you are believing, for some other end than Christ himself? Or is your faith in Christ himself, in his love for you, his death for you, and his life for you?

The second belief here is a kind of hesitant faith, but it is a step in the right direction. Sometimes you just need to get moving. You just need to start believing, even if you are not quite sure about the claims of Jesus. But this movement must be in the right thing! It must be in Jesus for Jesus’ sake, and not in Jesus for what he can give you, as if he were a genie in a bottle. This can be a true faith, but if it is, it is a weak faith. Weak faith is different from false faith. But it could also be a

false faith, if it is not a true faith, that is, if it is faith in the wrong thing. Only you know the thought of your heart.

But the third faith is a faith confirmed and certain of what it has held to be true. This is a strong faith. It is good for a man to see with his own eyes the mighty acts of God through Christ and thus believe. But blessed are those who do not see and yet believe. Yet, our faith which does not see Christ with the eyes can still be confirmed and certain because we have the word of God and the historic evidence that these things really happened. Thus, seek our a certain faith by trusting in the powerful word of Christ as revealed in the gospel.

Let me return to the belief from the household again. This belief is the unusual work of God, for people cannot believe unless God opens their eyes. And yet, it demonstrates God's desire to save many people together! Perhaps he even did it through the means of this man telling everyone in the house the very story John told us here about the conversation, the word, the hour, and the healing. That is my guess. If so, [the man became an evangelist](#) and told people what Jesus had done for him, just as the woman had become. This is the natural thing that happens to anyone that has been saved. They see the change in their lives. They see the work of God upon them. They see the newness of life he has given them. And they tell people about it (who lights a light under a bush)?

But Christians are too quick to lose this experiential knowledge of salvation, and how quick they are to shut their mouths, no longer remembering what has been done for them, no longer naturally telling people about Jesus. So we go to seminars for help, and preachers preach guilt inducing messages trying to coax people into doing what used to come naturally to them. The solution to this problem is to **remember what Jesus did in history**, to compare it with everyone else, and to think anew what **he has done for you**. It is not a miracle that he has worked in your life? Can you not remember the place from which you were brought? Do you remember how you were when you were newly saved or newly changed in some later way of sanctification, where you told everyone and didn't think twice about it? Why did you do this? Why do you not do it now as you once did? Rekindle the passion for Christ by thinking a fresh on the power of Christ today.

Beware the Attitude of a Prophet in his Hometown

In light of this thought on telling others about Christ, and in light of the last verse which I am about to come to, I am brought to think again to the opening of the sermon, of the purpose of this story in the Gospel of John as explained in that proverb about hometowns, and in the purpose that Jesus gave this sign in Cana. The verse says, **"This was now the second**

sign that Jesus did when he had come from Judea to Galilee” (John 4:54).

Jesus’ assessment of the Jews is not overturned by the man’s faith. Rather, his assessment is a more general assessment of everything he has seen in Israel up to this point. And though this particular man and his household believed (a remnant of Jews always did and always has), the majority were still clamoring after signs and wonders. This sign, for them, only spurred on their false faith, for it impressed them more with the miracle, while they refused to believe in Him.

A prophet has no honor in his hometown. This is why Jesus came to Cana. This is why Jesus performed this second sign in that city. How does this relate then to western civilization? I’m drawing a parallel here between Jesus’ biological home, and his “home away from home” in western civilization. The similarities are that in both places, people were too familiar with Christ to actually believe anything astonishing about him. Familiarity breeds contempt.

Western civilization is crumbling to the ground, its edifices are disintegrating under the structures before our eyes. Every day our courts strike down another moral law and congresses pass immoral laws in their place. We no longer know right and wrong. We no longer care. I submit it is because western civilization has become too cozy and familiar

with Jesus and he no longer has any honor here. We have tamed him. We have created him in our own image. “Is this not the carpenter’s son? Aren’t these his brothers and sisters? Can anything good come out of Nazareth? Can God come in the flesh?”

This attitude pervades every nook and cranny of our entire civilization in the west. And if you let it, it will reach into your soul and steal you away from Christ. This is why I gave you the exhortation to think anew on Christ in your own life and in the lives of these people 2,000 years ago. You must be zealous for Christ, or you will be consumed by the culture; firm in your convictions or you will be swept away by the onrushing tide, fight the battle of faith, or you will be taken captive by the enemy. This is more than a warning for you. It is a warning for our civilization. And yet, our civilization starts with the church, and her people actually caring and sharing about the omnipotent, omniscient, compassionate Jesus they say they believe in.

Jesus has shown himself powerful, yet again, in our passage. He has warned us about believing in the wrong thing. We have seen the attitudes of Jesus in these three chapters of John, that eventually led the same people to crucify him on the cross. Heed the warnings and behold the beauty of the son of God. He has living water and bread to feed you with. His

death is an atonement for sin and he offers you the way of eternal life.