



# Auburn Presbyterian Church

*Passionately loving the Lord Jesus Christ and radiating that love to every individual*

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## **“Over Land and Sea” John 4:46-54**

O Lord, may the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts, and your Word from the page come alive in us, by the power of Your Holy Spirit, that we may be healed—brought more into Your presence, which is health, indeed! In Jesus, we pray it.

Every month when we gather for healing ministry, we open God’s Word to learn more about God’s healing. One of the things we’ve been learning is that Jesus healed in many ways. Tonight we join Jesus up north in Cana as Jesus does another healing, and this one, also, has its unique character. Open your Bibles with me to John’s gospel this time, and find chapter 4. We’re going to read verses 46-54, about the second sign Jesus did. Listen with me for God’s Word TO US TONIGHT, as I read these words aloud. *[text]*

Once again, Jesus surprises. He’s come up north to his home base from an early trip south to Judea and Jerusalem. He’s taken the direct route through Samaria, where he met the woman at the well at Sychar. He’s traveled to the town of Cana, where he had performed his first miracle, or “sign”, as John our gospel writer likes to call them.

This man comes up to Jesus. John records he was a royal official from Capernaum. Capernaum was a border town of Galilee, and this man works for Herod the Tetrarch, who is often called “king” in the gospels. His boy back home is really sick, and this dad is worried enough to track Jesus down. Perhaps he had heard about Jesus’ earlier “sign” up in Cana, when he made the water into wine, and so decided to try to find Jesus there. We can imagine the man’s excitement when he finds his guess was correct. Here’s the man he has been looking for! He begs Jesus to come down the hill to seaside Capernaum and heal his boy.

Now what Jesus says is interesting. He’s rather put out by this request. Capernaum is about 18 miles from Cana, as the crow flies. Perhaps it’s a 25 mile walk—a full day’s hike, for sure. But it’s not the walk that has Jesus peeved. “Unless you people see signs and wonders, you never believe,” he says. “You people”—Jesus probably sees that this man has a lot of foreign blood in him, as was true for many “northerners”. People around Jerusalem cited this fact of intermarriage among Jews and Gentiles in that region as one more reason to look down on the “northerners”. And Jesus criticizes these people for their demands for something spectacular—that’s the “wonder”. Wonders and special effects seem to distract people from getting the meaning of the miracles, or “signs”. And Jesus is ‘way more interested that people “get it” about him and God’s unfolding plan of salvation, than he is about the miracles or their effects upon the people directly involved. But like the Syro-Phoenecian woman Jesus met as Mark records in his chapter 7, this man is not dissuaded by Jesus’ criticism. He asks more urgently for Jesus to save his boy, before he dies.

What does Jesus do? Well, nothing. Actually, it doesn’t seem to perform a healing here at all. He has supernatural knowledge of this boy’s recovery, and he tells that to his father. And

the father believes him—he puts his trust in Jesus' Word. First thing in the morning, he gets up and races down the hill toward home.

On the way, some of his servants meet him on the road; they've come to tell him his boy has made a turn toward health. When did this change happen? asks the father. About 1 p.m. yesterday, they say. The father stops, and reimagines his meeting with Jesus—at about 1 o'clock! He falls on his knees and breathes a silent prayer of thanks. Then he gets up, and the whole group resumes the trip toward Capernaum, and the recovering boy.

Now, what do you notice about THIS story, perhaps compared to the others we've been looking at over these evenings together? One obvious thing—Jesus seems to do so little. He doesn't have the patient there to touch, to come against the illness, to ask questions. It's healing by long distance, isn't it? It seems certain that's how the father understood it, because of the "coincidence" of Jesus' word at the same time as the break in the boy's fever. It's more than knowledge; it's deliverance from disease.

One of the implications for us is, we are on solid ground when we minister healing in the Name of Jesus to people who are not in the room tonight. Jesus is not limited by distance. His healing can cross "land and sea" to deliver people from what ails them. So what we have called "proxy healing" is Biblical.

There's another thing to notice, even if it's not so much about healing—at least at first glance. The man believes Jesus' word, the text says. Now, the word "word" is not a neutral four letters, especially in John's gospel. Remember how John begins? "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God....The Word became flesh, and dwelt among us." That living Word is Jesus. So this father believes what he was told—very much like the first father of faith, Abram, in the book of Genesis. But the father also sees that word coming from a divine Source.

One more item. John says this was "the second sign" of Jesus. Remember, virtually none of Jesus' miracles are done for the "wonder" they evoke in others. They are all "sermon illustrations", to underline the truth of what Jesus has been saying—or in John's gospel, the truth of Jesus' identity as the Living Word of God. They are to be windows to discover God's presence, God's nature, God's care, and God's call to "repent and believe in the gospel" of the Kingdom of God, inaugurated in human history by the life and ministry of Jesus. THAT'S always what Jesus wants people to get, not that he's a "miracle worker". It's about him, and it isn't.

It's like an "ikon" our Christian brothers and sisters in the Orthodox churches are more used to. These paintings in their churches have never been idols to be worshipped. No, they understand these to be meditation aids. Through them we might meet more of God. It's like the ways Christians view the Bible—it's our primary window to God. But some Christians, when they talk about that window, concentrate on the pane of glass itself, it's inerrancy. But the way God intends the Bible is a way to see what's on the other side—looking through the pane of glass, and seeing more of Him.

So, are we seeing more of God through this reading from Scripture tonight? The closer we get to God, the healthier we become. People who die in Christ are fully with God, and enjoy a kind of health—the Bible uses the same word for 'health' as it does for 'salvation'—we can barely imagine. Do you see more of that ahead OF YOU? Do you sense God's nearness, God's desire for deliverance, but most of all, God's desire for intimate connection with you? Then you

have made a turn toward health, just like this official's son. Keep growing toward God, our Maker and Lover, and celebrate Him who wants to live in and through you.

[This sermon preached to the congregation of Auburn Presbyterian Church, Auburn, California at the March 16, 2006 Friday evening Healing Service, by Rev. Kenneth B. Winter.]