

J. C. RYLE'S NOTES ON THE GOSPEL OF JOHN

4:43-54

43. Now after two days he departed from there and went into Galilee.
44. For Jesus himself testified that a prophet has no honor in his own country. 45. So when he came to Galilee, the Galileans received him, having seen all the things that he did at Jerusalem at the feast; for they also had gone to the feast. 46. So Jesus came again to Cana of Galilee where he made the water wine. And there was a certain nobleman whose son was sick at Capernaum. 47. When he heard that Jesus had come out of Judæa into Galilee, he went to him and besought him to come down and heal his son, for he was at the point of death. 48. Then Jesus said to him, Except ye see signs and wonders, ye will not believe. 49. The nobleman said to him, Sir, come down before my child dies. Jesus said to him, Go your way, your son lives. And the man believed the word that Jesus had spoken to him, and he went his way. 51. And as he was now going down, his servants met him and told *him* saying, Your son lives! 52. Then he inquired of them the hour when he began to amend. And they said to him, Yesterday at the seventh hour the fever left him. 53. So the father knew that *it was* at the same hour in which Jesus said to him, Your son lives. And he himself believed, and his whole house. 54. This *is* again the second miracle *that* Jesus did, when he had come out of Judæa into Galilee.

43.--[*After two days.*] The Greek words here would be more literally rendered, "After the two days:" *i.e.*, after the two days mentioned in the preceding verse.

[*Departed from there.*] Quesnel remarks, "It is an instance of self-denial, which is very uncommon, to leave those who respect and applaud us that we may go to preach among others from whom we have reason to expect a quite different treatment."

[*For Jesus...testified...country.*] This verse has much perplexed commentators. What is meant by the expression, "His own country"? If it means Galilee, as most suppose, how are we to reconcile it with the words which follow, "the Galileans received him"? And again, what is the connection between the verse before us and the one which precedes it? Why should our Lord go into Galilee when it was a place where He had no honor? And finally, how are we to reconcile the statement that our Lord had no "honor" in Galilee with the undeniable fact that nearly all His disciples and adherents were Galileans? All these points have given rise to much speculation and conjecture.

(a) Some, as Origen and Maldonatus, get over the difficulty in the following manner. They say that the words, "His own country," must mean

Judæa, and Bethlehem, where Christ was born. The sense will then be, "After two days Jesus departed from Samaria and went into Galilee, and not into Judæa, because in Judæa He received no honor and was not believed." This solution seems to me unnatural and unsatisfactory. Our Lord's going to Galilee was a premeditated journey and not a sudden plan decided on during His stay at Samaria. Beside this, there is no proof whatever that our Lord was not received and believed in Judæa. On the contrary, He "made and baptized" so many disciples in Judæa that it attracted the notice of the Pharisees and made it necessary for Him to "depart into Galilee."

(b) Augustine holds that "His own country" means Galilee, and seems to attach the following sense to the verse: "And yet Jesus testified that a prophet has no honor in his own country, for when He came into Galilee no one believed on Him except the nobleman and his house." This appears to me a far-fetched and unnatural interpretation. Tittman and Blomfield take much the same view and render it, "Although Jesus had testified," etc.

(c) Chrysostom and Euthymius think that "His own country" means Capernaum. This interpretation also seems to me improbable. We find Capernaum elsewhere called our Lord's "own city," but nowhere else "His own country." (See Matt. ix.1.)

(d) Theophylact suggests that the verse before us is inserted in order to explain "why our Lord did not always abide and continue in Galilee, but only came there at intervals. The reason was that He received no honor there." This also seems to me an unsatisfactory interpretation.

(e) Alford says, "The only true and simple view is that this verse refers to the next following, and indeed to the whole narrative which it introduces. It stands as a preliminary explanation of 'Except ye see signs and wonders ye will not believe,' and indicates the contrast between the Samaritans, who believed on Him for His own word, and His own countrymen, who only received Him because they had seen the miracles which He did at Jerusalem." This view of the text seems to me as far-fetched and unsatisfactory as any of those I have mentioned. Moreover, I doubt much whether the Greek word rendered "for," is ever used in the sense Alford puts on it, in the New Testament.

(f) The following explanation appears to me by far the most probable one. The words, "His own country," mean neither Galilee nor Judæa, but "Nazareth." The sense is, "Jesus departed from Samaria into Galilee, but not to His own country, Nazareth, because He testified, both now and on other occasions, that a prophet has no honor in his own country." In confirmation of the view I have maintained, it deserves notice that in the six only places in which the Greek word here rendered "country" is found in the Gospels, beside the one before us, it always means the town of Nazareth and not the district in which Nazareth is situated. (Matt. xiii.54,57; Mark vi.1,4; Luke iv.23,24.) The view I have supported is that of Cyril, Calvin, Calovius, Lampe, Poole, DeDieu, Pearce, Doddridge, Dyke, and Olshausen.

Our Lord's use of a proverb in this verse is again worthy of notice. It is another proof of the value of proverbial sayings.

The lesson of the proverb is a very instructive one. It is one of the most melancholy proofs of man's fallen and corrupt state, that he never values what he is familiar with, and that familiarity breeds contempt. Ministers of the Gospel discover this by painful experience, when they have resided many years in the same parish and ministered long in the same congregation. Those who have the most abundant supply of Gospel privileges are often the people who value them least. "The nearer the church, the further from God," is often found to be literally true. Those who live furthest off and are obliged to deny themselves most in order to hear the Gospel, are often the very persons who take most pains to hear it.

One grain of comfort, however, may be extracted from this painful verse. A minister must not despair and accuse himself of unfaithfulness because the Gospel he preaches is not honored in his own congregation and many remain hardened and unbelieving after he has preached to them many years. Let him remember that he is sharing his Master's lot. He is drinking the very cup of which Christ drank. Christ had no honor in Nazareth, and faithful ministers have often less honor among their own people than they have elsewhere.

Pellican thinks that our Lord "testified" the truth contained in this verse in reply to someone who asked Him why He did not go to Nazareth. I prefer the opinion that it simply means our Lord "always did testify, and made a practice of testifying."

45.--[*Galileans received Him.*] The word "received" probably means no more than that they "received Him with respect and reverence," as One who was no common person. There is no warrant for supposing that they all received Him with true faith and experimentally believed on Him as the Savior of their souls.

[*Having seen...things...feast.*] This expression confirms the view already maintained (John ii.23), that our Lord did many other miracles at Jerusalem at the first passover, when He was there, beside casting the buyers and sellers out of the temple. It is probable that the miracles recorded in the four Gospels are only a selection out of the number that Christ worked.

Here, as elsewhere, we see the special use of miracles. They served to arrest men's attention, and gave the impression that He who wrought them deserved a hearing. The Galileans were ready to receive Christ respectfully because they had seen His miracles.

[*They also had gone to the feast.*] This sentence is a useful proof of the universality of the Jewish custom of attending the great feasts at Jerusalem, and especially the feast of the Passover. Even those who lived furthest off from Jerusalem, in Galilee, made a point of going to the Passover. It serves to show the publicity of our Lord's ministry, both in life and death. When He was crucified at the Passover, the event happened

in the presence of myriads of witnesses from every part of the world. The overruling providence of God ordered things so that the facts of Christ's life and death could never be denied. "This thing was not done in a corner." (Acts xxv.26.)

46.--[*Jesus...Cana...water wine.*] The circumstance of our Lord going twice to Cana may be accounted for by remembering the fact that one of His disciples, "Nathanael," belonged to Cana, and that His mother, Mary, in all probability had relatives there. (See note on John ii.1.)

[*A certain nobleman.*] The Greek word rendered "nobleman" is only found here in this sense, as a substantive, in the New Testament. The marginal reading, "courtier or ruler," hardly makes it more clear. Some have conjectured that the nobleman must have been some one attached to Herod's court, and is therefore called "a royal person," which is the literal meaning of the word. Some, as Luther, Chemnitius, Lightfoot, and Pearce, have also conjectured that "Chuza, Herod's steward," whose wife Joanna became one of our Lord's disciples and "ministered unto Him" (Luke viii.3), must have been this nobleman. This is no doubt possible, and would be an interesting fact if it could be proved. But there is no authority for it except conjecture. Lightfoot adds a conjecture that if not Chuza, it might have been Manaen. (Acts xiii.1.)

The rarity of a nobleman and a person connected with a royal court seeking Christ under any circumstances is observed by Glassius and others. It shows us that Christ will have trophies of the power of His grace out of every rank, class, and condition. In the first chapter of St. John's Gospel, we see fishermen converted; in the third, a self-righteous Pharisee; in the beginning of the fourth, a fallen Samaritan woman; and in the end, a nobleman out of a King's court.

Pearce thinks that the nobleman was one of the class called Herodians. (Matt. xxii.16.)

[*Son was sick at Capernaum.*] We should always notice the number and greatness of miracles which our Lord worked at Capernaum, and the dignity of the persons at whose instance they were worked. Here He healed the Centurion's servant. (Matt. viii.5) Here, in all probability, He restored to life the daughter of Jairus, the ruler of the synagogue. (Mark vi.21.) And here, in the present instance, He healed the nobleman's son. Three distinct and leading classes had each of them a mighty miracle wrought among them. The Centurion was a Gentile soldier. The ruler of the synagogue was a Jew of high ecclesiastical position. The nobleman was connected with the highest civil authorities. The consequence, no doubt, was that the name and power of Christ became known to every leading family in Capernaum. No wonder that our Lord says, "Thou Capernaum that are exalted unto heaven." (Matt. xi.23.) No place was so privileged as this city.

The idea entertained by some that this "nobleman" was the same as the Centurion in Matt. viii.5, and that the miracle here recorded is only the

same miracle differently reported, seems to me entirely destitute of foundation. The details of the two miracles are entirely different. The miracle before us is nowhere else reported in the Gospels.

47.--[*Heard that Jesus had come, etc.*] This verse shows how widely spread was the fame of the miracle wrought at Cana upon the occasion of our Lord's former visit, and how great was the report of our Lord's miracles at Jerusalem, brought back by the Galileans who went to the feast. In no other way can we account for the nobleman going to our Lord and beseeching Him to come and heal his son. Our Lord must have got the reputation of being One who was both able and willing to work such cures.

Musculus remarks on this verse how much more love descends than ascends. In all the Gospels, we never read of any sons or daughters coming to Christ on behalf of their parents.

Dyke observes, "Some crosses drive men to Christ, especially in our children. This was the cross that subdued Egypt; and to great men, such as this ruler, who have much to leave their children, this cross is the greatest."

48.--[*Jesus said...Except ye see, etc.*] Our Lord in this verse appears to refer to the common desire expressed by the Jews to see miracles and signs as a proof of His Messiahship. "Cannot you believe unless you actually see with your own eyes a miracle worked? Is your faith so small that except you see something you cannot believe?" No doubt our Lord knew the heart of the man before Him. He wished to test his faith and to draw out from him more earnest desires after the mercy that he wanted. The resemblance between our Lord's first answer to the nobleman and His first answer to the woman of Canaan, who came to Him about her daughter, deserve comparison. (Matt. xv.24.)

Chrysostom remarks, "Christ's meaning is, Ye have not yet the right faith but still feel towards Me as only a prophet. He rebukes the state of mind with which the nobleman had come to Him, because that before a miracle he believed not strongly. Thus too He drew him on the more to belief. That the nobleman came and entreated was nothing wonderful, for parents in their great affection are wont to resort to and talk with physicians. But that he came without any strong purpose appears from this, that he only came to Christ when Christ came into Galilee, whereas, if he had firmly believed, he would not have hesitated when his child was at the point of death to go into Judæa."

Glassius thinks that our Lord, in these words, intends to contrast the faith of the Samaritans with the unbelief of the Galileans. The Samaritans believed without having seen any signs or wonders at all.

Chemnitius thinks that our Lord, in this verse, spoke with special reference to the state of mind in which He found the inhabitants of Cana upon His second visit. He thinks that He found them aroused to a state of expectation and curiosity by His miracle of changing water into wine, but

still destitute of any real saving faith.

Poole compares the nobleman to Naaman, who had faith enough to come to Elisha's door to be healed of his leprosy, but was stumbled because Elisha did not put his hand on the diseased place but only sent him a message. (2 Kings v.11.)

49.--[*The nobleman said, etc.*] This verse shows the earnestness of the nobleman's desire for relief, quickened and sharpened by the apparent rebuff contained in our Lord's reply to his first application. Yet it was a saying exhibiting much ignorance. It is clear that he did not discover what our Lord hinted at--that possibly he might be helped without His coming down to see his sick son. He neither denies the truth of our Lord's words nor enters into argument. He only knew that he felt in grievous distress and begged our Lord to "come down ere his child died." That our Lord could heal him he did not doubt. But that He could heal him at a distance, without even seeing him, was something that he could not yet understand.

Chrysostom says, "Observe how these very words show the weakness of the man. When he ought, after Christ had rebuked his state of mind, to have imagined something great concerning Him, even if he did not before, listen how he drags along the ground! He speaks as though Christ could not raise his son after death, and as though He knew not in what state the child was."

Brentius remarks that the nobleman did not bring to Christ faith but merely a spark of faith.

50.--[*Jesus said to him, etc.*] Three things are very deserving of notice in this verse. (a) We should observe our Lord's marvelous kindness and compassion. He takes no notice of the nobleman's weak faith and slowness of understanding. He freely grants his request and gives his son life and health without delay. (b) We should observe our Lord's almighty power. He simply speaks the words, "Thy son lives," and at once a sick person, at several miles distance, is cured and made well. He spoke and it was done. (c) We should observe, not least, the unhesitating confidence which the nobleman reposed in our Lord's power. He asked no more questions after he heard the words, "Thy son lives." At once he believed that all would be well and went his way.

Cyril observes on this verse that our Lord here healed two persons at one time by the same words. "He brought the nobleman's mind to faith, and delivered the body of the young man from disease."

Chrysostom remarks, "What can be the reason why in the case of the Centurion Christ undertook voluntarily to come and heal while here, though invited, He came not? Because in the case of the Centurion, faith had been perfected, and therefore He undertook to go that we might learn the right-mindedness of the man; but here, the nobleman was imperfect. When therefore he continually urged Him, saying, 'Come down,' and knew not

clearly that even when absent He could heal, He shows that even this was possible to Him in order that this man might gain, from His not going, that knowledge which the Centurion had of himself."

Bishop Hall observes, "The ruler's request was, Come and heal. Christ's answer was, 'Go thy way, thy son lives.' Our merciful Savior meets those in the end whom He crosses in the way. How sweetly does He correct our prayers; and while He does not give us what we asked, gives us better than we asked."

51.--[*Now going down.*] The relative position of Cana and Capernaum are not precisely known at the present day. The exact site of Capernaum is matter of dispute among travelers and geographers. All we can glean from the expression before us is that Cana was probably in the hill country and Capernaum on the lake of Galilee. Hence a person leaving Cana for Capernaum would "go down."

[*Your son lives.*] The meaning of this expression must evidently be, "Your son is so much better, that he is comparatively alive from the dead. He was as one dead. He is now alive."

52.--[*Inquired...the hour.*] This man's mind seems at once to have laid hold on the nature of the miracle and to have acknowledged the power of Christ's word.

[*When he began to amend.*] The Greek expression so rendered is a very peculiar one and only found in this place. It is literally, "Had himself better: in more elegant order." Let it be noted that here, as elsewhere, we find an expression which is only used once in the New Testament. This shows that it is no valid argument against the inspiration of any text of passage that it contains Greek expressions nowhere else used.

[*Yesterday at the seventh hour.*] This expression has been differently interpreted according to the view which commentators take of St. John's mode of reckoning time. Those who think that he numbered hours in the same way that we do, maintain that it means, "at seven o'clock in the evening." Those, on the contrary, who maintain that St. John observed the Jewish mode of computation, say that it means "at one o'clock in the afternoon."

I have already given it as my decided opinion that John observes the Jewish mode of reckoning time, and I therefore hold with those who think that "the seventh hour" means one o'clock. The arguments of those who say that if it had been one o'clock, the nobleman would never have taken till the next day to reach home, appear to my mind quite inconclusive. For one thing, we know nothing accurately of the distance from Cana to Capernaum. For another thing, we forget the slow rate at which people travel in Eastern countries, on bad roads, in a hilly country. For another thing, it is entirely an assumption to suppose that the nobleman had nothing else to do at Cana when he came to Jesus about his son. For anything we know, he had, as a nobleman, business of various kinds which made it impossible for him to reach home in the afternoon after Jesus had said, "Thy son lives."

Last, but not least, it seems hardly probable that the nobleman would have asked our Lord to come down to Capernaum at so late an hour as seven o'clock in the evening, or would have set off on his own return at that hour and met his servants in the night.

[*The fever left him.*] Trench remarks that the words seem to indicate that there was not merely an abatement of the fever, but that it suddenly forsook him. (Compare Luke iv.9.)

[*Himself believed.*] Beda remarks on the matter of the nobleman's believing, that "there are three degrees of faith--the beginning, the increase, and the perfection. There was a beginning in this man when he first came to Christ; an increase when our Lord told him that his son lived; and a perfection when he found him to have recovered at that very time."

[*His whole house.*] This expression probably means "his whole family," including children and servants. We have no right whatever to exclude children from the sense of the words. Remembering this, we shall better understand what is meant when it is written, "St Paul baptized "the household of Stephanas," or when it is related that the house of Lydia was baptized. (1 Cor. i.16; Acts xvi.15.)

There seems no reason for doubting that the nobleman, from this time forth, became a thorough, true-hearted believer in Christ. If, as some suppose, he is the same as Chuza, Herod's steward, we may perhaps date the conversion of Joanna his wife to the period of the verse now before us.

Bishop Hall remarks on this verse: "Great men cannot want clients. Their example sways some; their authority more. They cannot go to either of the other worlds alone. In vain do they pretend power over others who labor not to draw their families to God!"

54.--[*This second miracle, etc.*] The plain meaning of these words is that our Lord had worked no other miracle in Galilee before this one, excepting that of turning the water into wine at Cana. It appears likely that many of our Lord's earliest miracles were wrought in Judæa and Jerusalem, although we have no record of them except in the second chapter of St. John's Gospel. (John ii.23.) This fact is noteworthy because it throws light on the wickedness of the Jews at Jerusalem, where at last Christ was condemned and crucified.

Chrysostom remarks, "The word 'second' is not added without cause, but to exalt yet more the praises of the Samaritans by showing that even when a second miracle had been wrought, they who beheld it had not yet reached so high as those who had not seen one."

Origen says, "Mystically the two journeys of Christ into Galilee signify His two advents. At the first, He makes us His guests at supper and gives us wine to drink. At the second, He raises up the nobleman's son at the point of death,--*i.e.*, the Jewish people, who after the fulness of the Gentiles attain salvation. The sick son is the Jewish people fallen from

the true religion." This is patristic interpretation! Allegorical expositions like this destroy the whole value of God's Word. At this rate the Bible may be made to mean anything.

Chemnitius thinks that with this chapter ends the first year of our Lord's public ministry, and gives a useful summary of the principal events comprehended within it. These are: the Lord's baptism, the calling of the first disciples, the miracle at Cana, the miracle of casting out of the temple the buyers and sellers, the conversation with Nicodemus, the tarrying in Judæa and baptizing, the testimony of John the Baptist, the journey through Samaria, the arrival in Galilee, and the healing of the nobleman's son. Epiphanius, he observes, calls it the "acceptable year" of our Lord's ministry, because it was the most quiet and peaceful.

Bengel, in closing this chapter, observes that St. John seems to arrange our Lord's miracles in threes. He relates three in Galilee--the first at the marriage in Cana, the second on the nobleman's son, the third in feeding five thousand men (John vi.); three in Judæa--the first at Bethesda at pentecost (ch. v), the second after the feast of tabernacles on the blind man (ch. ix), and the third on Lazarus before the passover (ch. xi.) So also after the ascension he describes three appearances of our Lord to His disciples. (John xxi.14.)

Dyke observes how God keeps account of all the gracious means He affords men for their good. "The *second* miracle is specified to aggravate the infidelity of the Jews; that though Christ had now done another and a second miracle, yet only the ruler and his household believed. Two miracles wrought, and one household converted! God takes account not only how many men are won by a sermon (Acts ii.41), but of how many sermons are lost by men."