

# Truth for Today

The Bible teaching radio programme

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## Some journeys Jesus made: Jesus in Galilee - John 4:43-54

How good are you at walking? We have two daughters who love walking. They would enjoy a good walk of 10-15 miles in a day. I might wish to join them but, alas, my walking ability is no longer up to that! Today we come to the last in our series of talks on 'Some journeys Jesus made'. It is, perhaps, stating the obvious but it needs to be said that journeys then would have been on foot - a much different proposition from today's jet-setting around the world!

While considering the early chapters of John's Gospel, we have looked at the Lord Jesus by the River Jordan (John 1:15-37). This would have been in the south of the land of Israel, by Bethabara (see John 1:28). Then in chapters 2 and 3, we looked at a visit to Jerusalem, about 15 miles away. In chapter 4, we saw Him making a visit to Samaria, some 35 miles away. Little wonder that during this visit John tells us that the Lord Jesus was "*wearied from His journey*" (John 4:6)! Now today, we are to look at a visit to the town of Cana in Galilee in the North, a journey of some 30 miles.

Before we look at that in detail, it is worth noting, with wonder, that the Lord Jesus spent any time at all in Galilee since there was a North-South divide in the land of Israel, much as there is in our own country today. He grew up in Nazareth in Galilee. This had such a poor reputation that it was said, "*Can anything good come out of Nazareth?*" (John 1:46).

When He was about to begin His public ministry, we read, "*Leaving Nazareth, He came and dwelt in Capernaum, which is by the sea, in the regions of Zebulun and Naphtali, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Isaiah the prophet, saying, 'The land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, the way of the sea, beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles: The people who sat in darkness saw a great light, and upon those who sat in the region and shadow of death, light has dawned'*" (Matthew 4:13-16). Capernaum was, of course, by the Sea of Galilee, about 20 miles from Nazareth and still in Galilee. During His public ministry, the Lord Jesus had no place that He could really call home. Indeed, He would say, "*Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head*" (Matthew 8:20).

When Joshua allocated the land to the twelve tribes of Israel (see Joshua 19), the tribes of Zebulun and Naphtali were allocated land in the north of the country, bordering on Syria, in the region which later came to be known as Galilee. The despised character of that region is emphasised by Isaiah's description, "*Galilee of the Gentiles*" (Isaiah 9:1), probably reflecting the fact that it came under the influence of its ungodly Gentile neighbours. The Lord Jesus was indeed that great light that dawned (Isaiah 9:2, Matthew 4:16). Of course, it was necessary that He present Himself as God's promised Messiah to the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem. Sadly, they would not receive Him (John 1:11) and it was in Jerusalem that He was crucified.

The fact that He chose to spend a considerable time of His three years of public ministry in 'Galilee of the Gentiles' shows to us in the clearest possible fashion His deep concern for the underdogs in society. Let none of us think that we are too insignificant or worthless to be outside His concern and compassion! The love that led Him to the cross of Calvary is a love that still flows out to every human being today!

It's time now to see where the Lord Jesus went when He left Samaria. We'll read from John 4:43-54: "*Now after the two days He departed from [Samaria] and went to Galilee. For Jesus Himself testified that a prophet has no honour in his own country. So when He came to Galilee, the Galileans received Him, having seen all the things He did in Jerusalem at the feast; for they also had gone to the feast. So Jesus came again to Cana of Galilee where He had made the water wine. And there was a certain nobleman whose son was sick at Capernaum. When he heard that Jesus had come out of Judea into Galilee, he went to Him and implored Him to come down and heal his son, for he was at the point of death. Then Jesus said to him, 'Unless you people see signs and wonders, you will by no means believe.' The nobleman said to Him, 'Sir, come down before my child dies!' Jesus said to him, 'Go your way; your son lives.' So the man believed the word that Jesus spoke to him, and he went his way. And as he was now going down, his servants met him and told him, saying, 'Your son lives!' Then he inquired of them the hour when he got better. And they said to him, 'Yesterday at the seventh hour the fever left him.' 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 household. This again is the second sign that Jesus did when He came out of Judea into Galilee.*"

Before we look at the details of this story, we should just remember that this is the second visit of the Lord Jesus to Cana. As John reminds us (John 4:46), it was there that He had turned the water into wine at the marriage feast (John 2:1-12). The linking of these two very different events - the first in a time of rejoicing and the second in a time of deep sorrow - shows us that there is no situation outside the ability of the Lord Jesus to help. That's still true for us today!

The other general point we should make is that throughout the Gospel of John the miracles of the Lord Jesus are referred to as signs. This contrasts with the other Gospels which use the word 'miracles'. Inspired by the Holy Spirit (2 Peter 1:21), John has chosen to describe those miracles which, besides being demonstrations of Jesus' power, were also significant pointers to who the Lord Jesus was and to the work He had come to do. In the turning of the water into wine (John 2:1-12), we see something of His power as Creator and His readiness to meet a real emergency. In our story today, we see Him as the One who had come to bring life to those who were perishing. So the Lord Jesus would say to Nicodemus, *"For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life"* (John 3:16).

Let's turn now to our story, John 4:46-54. It's interesting that it follows on from the encounter of the Lord Jesus with the woman by the well of Samaria. It would be difficult to find two more extreme examples of society. In the first we have a woman, despised by her fellow countrymen because of her lifestyle, making her journey to the well at a time when she would be alone. Now we have a nobleman from Capernaum who is from the upper strata of society. But the Lord Jesus deals in grace and blessing with each one. That's still a powerful lesson and encouragement for us today!

Capernaum was some 15-20 miles distant from Cana. There could hardly be a more desperate situation - a father whose son was dying (John 4:46). The nobleman could have sent one of his servants so that he might maintain his vigil by his son's bedside. Yet this father was prepared to make that journey himself, involving an absence of several hours during which his son might well have died. In a somewhat different context, Archbishop Desmond Tutu has written, *"Desperate people use desperate measures"*. Nothing less than a personal meeting with the Lord Jesus would suffice this desperate father!

He implored the Lord Jesus to come and heal his son (John 4:47). He had no one else to whom he could turn in his need. In the Greek New Testament, several different Greek words are translated 'to ask, or beseech, or implore'. It is interesting that the word used here is generally used when the one asking is of a similar rank to the one being asked. A different word is used when there is a difference in rank. That is really quite remarkable. Here is this nobleman, probably an official in the court of King Herod, coming to One of whom men said, *"Is not this the carpenter, the Son of Mary?"* (Mark 6:3). Certainly there were no outward signs of nobility to be seen in the Lord Jesus. By contrast, He was known as *"a friend of tax collectors and sinners"* (Matthew 11:19). He was so poor that, when the occasion demanded it, He had to ask to be shown a penny (Luke 20:24).

Yet clearly this nobleman had some idea of the worth of the One to whom he was speaking. Later on, the Lord Jesus would utter strong words of condemnation against the scribes and Pharisees for their failure to recognise Him. He said, *"The queen of the South will rise up in the judgment with this generation and condemn it, for she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and indeed a greater than Solomon is here"* (Matthew 12:42). The nobleman recognised something of that greatness! He may well have heard of the Lord Jesus turning the water into wine at Cana on that earlier occasion (John 2:1-12). Of that occasion, John comments, *"This beginning of signs Jesus did in Cana of Galilee, and manifested His glory"* (John 2:11). This nobleman surely recognised something of that glory.

At this stage in our talk, may I pause for a moment and ask you, my listener, if you have recognised that same greatness of our Lord Jesus Christ? The nobleman came in search of physical life for his son; God's gift of eternal life, that life which we all need if we are to get to heaven, is freely available to all who come in faith to His Son. In His prayer to His Father just before His crucifixion, the Lord Jesus said, *"This is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent"* (John 17:3).

Jesus' immediate response, while true in general, might have seemed a little off-putting to this father: *"Unless you people see signs and wonders, you will by no means believe"* (John 4:48). Sadly, that statement was true of the vast majority of people who came into contact with the Lord Jesus. Some twenty or more years later, Paul could still write to the Corinthians, *"For Jews request a sign..."* (1 Corinthians 1:22). But this father was to show that he was altogether different! Although he had come believing it necessary that the Lord Jesus come to his son's bedside, when Jesus said to him, *"Go your way; your son lives"*, (John 4:50) his faith was such that he was ready to act on Jesus' word, and we read, *"...he went his way."* The man's actions demonstrated the faith that was within his heart! So James writes, *"I will show you my faith by my works"* (James 2:18).

Remember we said that Capernaum was some 15 to 20 miles distant from Cana. The return journey would have required this nobleman to stay overnight somewhere. The next day, as he journeyed home, his servants met him with the good news that his son was recovering (John 4:51). This news, tremendous as it was, was not enough for this father. He has to ask when it was that his son began to recover (John 4:52). To his great joy and to the strengthening of his faith, he learns that it was at that moment when the Lord Jesus had said, *"Your son lives"* (John 4:51). His servants must also have been deeply impressed by that fact so that we read, *"And he himself believed and his whole household"* (John 4:53).

On another occasion when the Lord Jesus was in Capernaum, a centurion came asking for help for his servant who was *"lying at home paralysed, dreadfully tormented"* (Matthew 8:6). That concern for someone as lowly as a servant clearly marks this centurion out as someone special. Roman centurions were not normally known for their kindness! When Jesus offered to come and heal him, Matthew tells us, *"The centurion answered and said, 'Lord, I am not worthy that You should come under my roof. But only speak a word, and my servant will be healed. For I also am a man under authority, having soldiers under me. And I say to this one, "Go," and he goes; and to another, "Come," and he comes; and to my servant, "Do this," and he does it.' When Jesus heard it, He marvelled, and said to those who followed, 'Assuredly, I say to you, I have not found such great faith, not even in Israel!'"* (Matthew 8:8-10).

So the first great lesson we can learn from this nobleman is the challenge that it presents each one of us, namely: Do we have that faith in the Lord Jesus which takes Him at His word and is prepared to be obedient to His word? His invitation is, *"Come to Me, all you who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light"* (Matthew 11:28-30).

You may recall that on that first Easter Day when the Lord Jesus appeared to His disciples, Thomas was not with them (John 20:24-29). John tells us, *"The other disciples therefore said to [Thomas], 'We have seen the Lord.' But he said unto them, 'Unless I see in His hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and put my hands into His side, I will not believe'"* (John 20:25). Thomas was altogether too precious to the Lord Jesus for Jesus to leave him in the darkness of unbelief and, for Thomas's especial benefit, appears to them one week later. After Thomas had wonderingly confessed Jesus as his Lord and his God, Jesus said to him, *"Thomas, because you have seen Me, you have believed. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed"* (John 20:29). Today, we are amongst those who, unlike those disciples, have not seen the Lord Jesus when He was a Man upon this earth. This special blessing, then, is for us too. May each of us know that blessing of having not seen but having believed!

The second important lesson from today's talk is that, however small or deep our need is, we can bring it to the Lord Jesus and find help in Him. Joseph Scriven (1819-86) plumbed the depths of human need. On the eve of what should have been his wedding day, his bride to be drowned. He later emigrated to Canada and subsequently was engaged to be married. Once again, his bride to be died, this time after a brief but fatal illness. His well-known hymn, "What a Friend we have in Jesus", was written not so much as a direct consequence of these sad events, but rather to comfort his mother when she was going through a particularly distressing time. We close with the lovely words of the first verse of that hymn.

*What a Friend we have in Jesus  
All our sins and griefs to bear;  
What a privilege to carry  
Everything to God in prayer.  
Oh, what peace we often forfeit,  
Oh, what needless pain we bear,  
All because we do not carry  
Everything to God in prayer.*

Thank you for listening. May you know the blessing of the Lord today!

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