

## Jesus Gives Life - John 4:46-54<sup>1</sup>

**Before the lesson** – Print the handout, “A Life-Giving Encounter with Jesus,” for each class member for the Information session (on the last page of the lesson plan). Have pencils or pens to distribute for the Information session.

**Fellowship Question:** (Use *one* of these to break the ice, begin some discussion, and lead into the study):

Describe your last week as a traffic sign. (My week was a “One Way” sign because...)

Name one person who “adds life” to your life when you are with them.

### Information

- Distribute the pencils/pens and the handout, “A Life-Giving Encounter with Jesus.”

Let’s recall the reason John wrote his Gospel. Let’s read together the verses at the top of the page. (John 20:30-31)

In these verses, put a circle around the word believe, a box around life, and a star in the margin when Jesus’ name is used.

Believe and live are “interconnected core realities in John.”<sup>2</sup> Patterns are important to notice as we read the Bible. This is one of the patterns - belief leads to life and it is all due to Jesus.

In silence, let’s read the story for today from John 4:46-54. Read through it once without making any marks. Then, read it a second time making the same marks you did for John 20:30-31.

Repeating words through a Gospel are important hints to what the main message is.

Another pattern in John’s Gospel is the emphasis that Jesus is more than a mere man, or a mere miracle worker, or a mere prophet. Jesus is God the Creator.

As the next passage is read aloud, make the same marks you did for John 20:30-31.

- Have a class member read John 1:1-5, 10-14. (It is also on the handout.)

In the original creation story (Genesis 1), God speaks and things happen.

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<sup>1</sup> This lesson is copyrighted by Dr. Rick Jordan, Great Bible Teachers, Inc, 2023. More lessons may be found at [greatbibleteachers.com](http://greatbibleteachers.com).

<sup>2</sup> David F. Ford, *The Gospel of John: A Theological Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2021), 122.

“Like the first sign at the wedding in Cana, there is an echo of creation, suggested both by the effect of the **word** of Jesus and by the repetition of **Jesus did** (or ‘Jesus created’).”<sup>3</sup>

This miracle is called a “sign” in John’s Gospel. We will talk more about why he chose that word in a minute. For now, let’s look at this pattern used for these seven miracles or signs. The chart has the first two signs, but the pattern is the same with all seven.

[Walk through the chart which is on the second side of the handout.<sup>4</sup>]

What barriers did the royal official have to overcome to be able to talk with Jesus? (physical distance between he and Jesus; social expectations regarding role and status; reputation; pride; doubt; no wanting to leave a sick child at death’s door, etc.)

“Jesus was in Cana and this man lived in Capernaum, almost twenty miles away. That is why he took so long to get back home. There could be no more improbable scene in the world than an important court official hastening twenty miles [all uphill!] to beg a favor from a village carpenter... He was in need, and neither convention nor custom stopped him from bringing his need to Christ. His action would cause a sensation but he did not care what people said so long as he obtained the help he so much wanted.”<sup>5</sup>

In response to the father’s request, Jesus complains about people who only want miracles from him. How does this affect the royal official in his cause?

V 48 “This is the only use of ‘wonders’ in John; it is obviously unfavorable, for in Johannine thought an overemphasis on the wondrous blinds the eye to the miracle’s ability to reveal who Jesus is.”<sup>6</sup>

“The second miracle at Cana has a twofold significance: first, it stresses faith, and thus is a culmination of the preceding scenes in Part Two of the Book of Signs; second, it stresses Jesus’ power to give life and thus introduces one of the major themes of Part Three.”<sup>7</sup>

What evidence do we have of the father’s faith? What does that teach us about faith?

Look at the handout again. This time, put an exclamation mark in the margin beside anywhere that the promise or the fulfillment of the promise that the man’s son is alive and well because of Jesus’ power.

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<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> Marianne Meye Thompson, *John: A Commentary*, The New Testament Library (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2015), 114.

<sup>5</sup> William Barclay, *The Gospel of John*, Vol 1, The Daily Study Bible (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1975), 174, 175.

<sup>6</sup> Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel of John*. The Anchor Bible, Volume 29 (New York: Doubleday, 1966), 191.

<sup>7</sup> Brown, 197.

There is debate among Bible scholars whether this story is the same story as the Synoptic Gospels' story of the Centurion who had a sick son. There are several significant differences, one being the focus of the story.

“The synoptic account of the Centurion’s boy stresses the man’s faith, so that it has become the center of the story; in the Fourth Gospel the father’s faith is made plain, but the weight falls on the life-giving word of Jesus (‘Your son *lives!*’)”<sup>8</sup>

In the Gospel of John, once again, we see the repetition of a word. “The clue to the Evangelist’s purpose in the narrative, its ‘sign’ value, lies in the threefold reference to the statement of Jesus to the officer: ‘Your son lives’ (vv 50, 51, 53). The healing of the boy is a sign of the power of Jesus to give life, which in the discourse that follows will be defined as ‘eternal life’ (5:24), and even life from the dead, resurrection life (5:21, 25-26, 28-29).”<sup>9</sup>

The royal official and all his family became followers of Jesus. We don’t know what that means exactly. For example, was there a public ceremony, such as baptism? Did this require any change in his role in the royal palace? We do not know these details, but we can assume this meant some significant changes in the lives of the official and his family.

“This courtier was a man who faced and accepted the facts. He had seen what Jesus could do; he had experienced it; and there was nothing left for it but to surrender. He had begun with a sense of desperate need; that need had been supplied; and his sense of need had turned into an overmastering love.”<sup>10</sup>

“Jesus is attracting to himself a strikingly diverse group of believers: Jewish disciples, Samaritans, and now a family identified with the royal court, the Roman Empire, and Hellenistic civilization.”<sup>11</sup>

More about the seven signs in the Gospel of John:

“John narrates fewer miracles than do the Synoptics...almost one half of the Marcan narrative of the public ministry concerns the miraculous. John describes only seven miracles each carefully selected to encourage the faith of the reader...In the Synoptic tradition, there is much more attention to the marvelous act of the miracles and the enthusiasm they produce...This vivid coloring has faded in John; here the miracles are narrated with discretion, and detailed descriptions of the marvelous are avoided.”<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> George R. Beasley-Murray, *John: Second Edition*, Word Biblical Commentary (Waco, Texas: Word Books, 1999), 72. (author’s italics)

<sup>9</sup> Beasley-Murray, 73.

<sup>10</sup> Barclay, 176.

<sup>11</sup> Ford, 123.

<sup>12</sup> Brown, 525.

A sign gives direction. These miracle stories were designed by John as guideposts pointing the way to a more clear understanding of who Jesus was and what Jesus' life mission was. Look again at the verse on the top of the handout.

The signs are witnesses. Does your Bible have an adjective that describes the sign in verse 54? (examples: “the second powerful sign”<sup>13</sup>; “the second authenticating sign”<sup>14</sup>) What adjective would you use to describe this sign?

“While the use of this term [sign] as applied to a miracle is not unique to [the Gospel of] John, it is the only word used for miracle in that Gospel. John, then, presented the miracles not merely as supernatural deeds nor as manifestations of supernatural power, nor even as exceptions to the usual current of events, but definitely as material witnesses to underlying spiritual truth. The teaching attached to each miracle is designed to bring out its spiritual significance, and conversely, the miracle is the concrete demonstration of the power discussed in the teaching.”<sup>15</sup>

### **Transformational Exercise**

There have been “signs” in everyone’s spiritual journey that help them come to know God or to know God in a deeper way.

What might be some events that people experience that serve as “signs” for them?

Like in today’s story, maybe there was a healing of some sort. Or, like in the previous sign of water turned to wine, God broke through the normal ways and made things better. Maybe a Scripture or a song or a person came into your life at just the right time. It reminded you that God cared about your life and your situation.

If you were to write a “Gospel of Jesus According to [Your Name],” what would be one “sign” that you would be sure to include?

[Close in a prayer something like this:] *God, give us the signs we need when we need them, so we can see that you care for us in small things (like running out of wine at a wedding) and in large things (like the critical illness of a loved one). Amen.*

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<sup>13</sup> *First Nations Version: An Indigenous Translation of the New Testament* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2021)

<sup>14</sup> Scot McKnight, *The Second Testament: A New Translation* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2023)

<sup>15</sup> Merrill C. Tenney, *John: The Gospel of Belief: An Analytic Study of the Text* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1948), 29.

## A Life-Giving Encounter with Jesus<sup>16</sup>

**John 20:30** Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples that are not written in this book. **31** But these are written so that you may continue<sup>[a]</sup> to believe that Jesus is the Messiah,<sup>[b]</sup> the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name.

- a. 20.31 Or *may come*
- b. 20.31 Or *the Christ*

**John 4:46** Then he came again to Cana in Galilee, where he had changed the water into wine. Now there was a royal official whose son lay ill in Capernaum. **47** When he heard that Jesus had come from Judea to Galilee, he went and begged him to come down and heal his son, for he was at the point of death. **48** Then Jesus said to him, "Unless you<sup>[a]</sup> see signs and wonders you will not believe." **49** The official said to him, "Sir,<sup>[b]</sup> come down before my little boy dies." **50** Jesus said to him, "Go; your son will live."<sup>[c]</sup> The man believed the word that Jesus spoke to him and started on his way. **51** As he was going down, his slaves met him and told him that his child was alive. **52** So he asked them the hour when he began to recover, and they said to him, "Yesterday at one in the afternoon the fever left him." **53** The father realized that this was the hour when Jesus had said to him, "Your son will live."<sup>[d]</sup> So he himself believed, along with his whole household. **54** Now this was the second sign that Jesus did after coming from Judea to Galilee.

- a. 4.48 Both instances of the Greek word for *you* in 4.48 are plural
- b. 4.49 Or *Lord*
- c. 4.50 Gk *son lives*
- d. 4.53 Gk *son lives*

**John 1:1** In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. **2** He was in the beginning with God. **3** All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being **4** in him was life,<sup>[a]</sup> and the life was the light of all people. **5** The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overtake it.... **10** He was in the world, and the world came into being through him, yet the world did not know him. **11** He came to what was his own,<sup>[b]</sup> and his own people did not accept him. **12** But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, **13** who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God. **14** And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son,<sup>[c]</sup> full of grace and truth.

- a. 1.4 Or *through him. And without him not one thing came into being that has come into being. In him was life*
- b. 1.11 Or *to his own home*
- c. 1.14 Or *the Father's only Son*

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<sup>16</sup> All passages are from the New Revised Standard Version Updated Edition (NRSVUE)



## Seven Signs in the Gospel of John<sup>17</sup>

<b>Text</b>	<b>Jesus...</b>	<b>Jesus has power over...</b>
John 2:1-11	Changes water to wine	Quality
John 4:46-54	Heals the nobleman's son	Distance/Space
John 5:1-9	Heals the long-sick man	Time
John 6:1-14	Feeds the five thousand	Quantity
John 6:16-21	Walks on water	Natural law
John 9:1-12	Heals man born blind	Misfortune
John 11:1-46	Raises Lazarus	Death

### First Two Signs Compared<sup>18</sup>

<b>The First Sign at Cana</b>	<b>The Second Sign at Cana</b>
1. Jesus' mother reports that the host has run out of wine.	1. The official comes to Jesus with a request that his son be healed.
2. Jesus rebuffs his mother and ignores her request.	2. Jesus rebuffs or ignores the request.
3. Jesus' mother tells the servants to do whatever he tells them.	3. The official renews his petition.
4. Jesus commands the servants, "Fill the jars."	4. Jesus commands the official, "Go, your son will live."
5. The servants obey Jesus' word.	5. The man obeys Jesus' word.
6. The servants "who had drawn the water" know.	6. Corroboration by the servants who know when "his fever left him."
7. The disciples believe.	7. The official and his family believe.

<sup>17</sup> Adapted from Merrill C. Tenney, *John: The Gospel of Belief: An Analytic Study of the Text* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1948), 30-31.

<sup>18</sup> Marianne Meye Thompson, *John: A Commentary*, The New Testament Library (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2015), 114.

