

NOBLEMAN'S SON

Introduction

The writer has already mentioned the first sign Jesus performed in Galilee (John 2:11). It showed his glory and as a result his disciples believed in him. He calls this 'the second sign'. It is another story of Jesus revealing himself and a man's faith developing as a result.

The first story was about faith developing as a result of what Jesus did. This story is similar.

We should always focus on Jesus rather than on our faith (or anything else about ourselves), but it is helpful to see how Jesus interacts with people; maybe we will recognise ourselves here.

How his faith began

It started as a result of severe trouble – his child was dying and he needed help fast. Who would not clutch at straws in those circumstances! For some people, that is the start of their Christian life – a sense of great need; for others it is different – God's call, for example.

Some people have called this 'a rebellious faith'. The child was gravely ill and likely to die, and the man's friends might have told him just to accept 'the inevitable'. But he did not. As long as Jesus was around he saw a possibility of recovery. Jesus commends persistent prayer that goes against the odds (Luke 18:1-8).

That has lessons for us. Jesus is Saviour of sinners, King of kings, and Ruler of his beloved Church. Therefore there is hope. No one has any right to despair; instead we should always pray and not faint. It honours him when we rebel against what seems inevitable (but is contrary to his expressed will) and ask him to deal with it because we have confidence in him. Every time we become disheartened or retreat into our comfort zone it should make us ask, 'What confidence do I really have in Jesus?'

He had heard about Jesus. Cana, where Jesus was staying, was about 20 miles from Capernaum where the man lived. He may have heard about the miracle of water turned into wine. It is more likely that he heard from neighbours who had been to the celebrations in Jerusalem and had seen Jesus and heard him speak (John 2:23-25). Evidently Jesus' reputation had gone before him and that was enough for the man to seek his help.

For many people the journey to faith in Jesus begins like that. They have heard from others who know him, and when a time of need comes they 'try him out'. That sounds like feeble faith, but true faith is always rewarded and it always grows.

He imagined that Jesus was limited, that he could only heal if he was present and that if the child died it would be too late for Jesus to do anything. Nevertheless it was real faith in Jesus' ability.

Jesus' challenge – his appeal

Jesus' initial response might sound surprising. He had come from Jerusalem where many people were impressed by his miracles but showed no regard for him. One writer put it this way, 'They were prepared in his presence to marvel, but never to worship, or to give him their whole personal trust.' Jesus saw they were more interested in spectacle and personal benefit than in God or eternal life. We see that again in connection with the feeding of the 5000 (John 6:25-27).

That sounds familiar. There are always people who like excitement and have little regard for God. They are not interested in hearing what he has to say, but may look for the excitement of alleged

new 'prophecies'. The Spirit warns, 'For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers' (2 Timothy 4:3).

Jesus challenged that attitude as well as unbelief when he said, 'Unless you see signs and wonders you will not believe.'

It raises an important questions. What is the basis of our faith? What evidence do we demand before we believe in Jesus? Do we believe in him or only in what our eyes can see?

Jesus words were probably directed to the people around more than to the man himself. The man was probably unaware of such issues, he simply pled with Jesus to come before it would be too late.

It was a genuine heartfelt appeal and Jesus responded immediately. Jesus does not wait till we have worked everything out before coming to our aid. Wilful ignorance is reprehensible especially when it is about something God has told us. But Jesus is practical; his priority is always our salvation. An appeal like that touches his heart and prompts immediate action.

Assurance and acceptance

Here we see a new stage in the development of the man's faith. Jesus' response was to speak, not to go to the man's home. He said, 'Your son lives', meaning 'he is restored to life'. It was a divine declaration. But the man still did not realise who Jesus was. He only had Jesus' word to go on – would that be enough for him? 'The man believed the word that Jesus spoke to him' – he accepted Jesus' assurance.

There is something about Jesus that compels such trust. The man did not yet know him, but the little he did know was enough to give weight to Jesus' words. No longer did he need Jesus' presence, his word gave confidence that he had done what he said.

Do we believe what Jesus says before there is any other available evidence for it? Is the Bible a decider?

When convicted of sin we may wonder how we are to be restored to God's favour. If we do not see any change in ourselves we may be in despair – no evidence of Jesus' saving work in us. But he tells us to trust what we do not see – his work apart from us reconciling people to God on the cross. Do you accept Jesus' assurance that his death was on behalf sinners and acceptable to God?

First believe the gospel (that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners) and entrust yourself to him, then go back to your heart and life to see if a change has begun. That is faith in him, not faith in something you can see.

Faith in Jesus as a Person

His faith developed again when he met friends who told him that the child had recovered the very moment Jesus had spoken to him.

The need had passed; the child had recovered. For many people that would have been the end of their interest in Jesus – just there to give them something they want. But the man and his household reacted differently.

Jesus had shown he was as good as his word. 'He spoke, and it was done' (Psalm 33:9). Just as the disciples saw the results of Jesus' command at the wedding in Cana, the household saw the result of Jesus' healing word. It showed his glory, and resulted in stronger faith for it showed more of himself.

The man had initially confined Jesus' power to his presence and prior to death. Jesus showed he did not need to be physically present to exercise his power. That showed something of his divinity.

Have we come to know Jesus? What have we seen of his saving power? Do we believe he hears in heaven and exercises his power on earth? Do we believe he has 'the keys of Hades and of Death' and is able to raise our body from the grave as well as bring our soul to God?

Like his disciples when the water was turned into wine that family believed in Jesus in a new way. Faith develops into personal attachment and commitment. We recognise that he is 'for us' and we must be 'for him'. It is a new relationship, a new loyalty, and a new worship.

It is a relationship that death cannot break. It brings hope, joy and peace. It transforms our outlook and attitude. It brings a new identity – belonging to Christ and to his people. 'If anyone is in Christ he is a new creation; old things are passed away, all things are become new' (2 Corinthians 5:17).

What is our faith like? Do we need to see other evidence before we will believe Jesus? Or is his word sufficient? Where does our loyalty lie – to ourselves in a desire to be entertained or gratified? Or is to him, in godly fear and total trust and commitment?