



# Believe

JOHN

MESSAGE

STUDY GUIDE

GROUP MATERIAL

SONGS

## Examining the text & our hearts:

*Bible Reading: John 4:43-54*

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“After the 2 days [Jesus] departed from there [Samaria] to Galilee. **44** (For Jesus himself had testified that a prophet has no honor in his own country.) **45** So when he came to Galilee, the Galileans welcomed him because they had seen all the things he had done in Jerusalem at the feast (for they themselves had gone to the feast).

**46** Now [Jesus] came again to Cana in Galilee where he had made the water wine. In Capernaum there was a certain royal official whose son was sick. **47** When he heard that Jesus had come back from Judea to Galilee, he went to him and begged him to come down and heal his son, who was about to die. **48** So Jesus said to him, “Unless you people see signs and wonders you will never believe!” **49** “Sir,” the official said to him, “come down before my child dies.” **50** Jesus told him, “Go home; your son will live.” The man believed the word that Jesus spoke to him, and set off for home.

**51** While he was on his way down, his slaves met him and told him that his son was going to live. **52** So he asked them the time when his condition began to improve, and they told him, “Yesterday at one o’clock in the afternoon the fever left him.” **53** Then the father realized that it was the very time Jesus had said to him, “Your son will live,” and he himself believed along with his entire household. **54** Jesus did this as his second miraculous sign when he returned from Judea to Galilee. (4:43-54)

### SUMMARY:

Jesus’ healing the official’s son completes the series of signs beginning with changing water to wine. These two episodes form a matching pair of ‘Miracle-Quest’ stories.’ Both begin with a request,

followed by Jesus' rebuke, before he responds with a miracle—here a 'remote healing'—which becomes a catalyst for faith in Jesus. Such miracles are 'signs' highlighting Jesus' identity as more than a miracle-worker, as God-incarnate. Not all Jesus' 'signs' resulted in such recognition and saving faith; Nicodemus takes Jesus merely as a miracle-worker; this official goes beyond that. Some depreciate 'signs-based belief,' linked with miracles, as "*suspect, preliminary, immature faith*," inferior to 'word-based faith,' founded on Jesus' teaching. But why is the official's faith (produced by Jesus' healing-miracle) inferior to the Samaritans' faith, resulting from Jesus' 2-day visit? *All* of Jesus' signs—including healings, miracles, etc.—are recorded so we "would believe Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and... have life in his name." Today the same Jesus still heals and helps in order to draw people into a saving relationship with him.

## I. The Cana to Cana Cycle (Jn. 2:1-4:54)

"Jesus now completes the first itinerary of the Gospel. Having *begun at Cana in 2:1, he now returns to Cana*. His travels have taken him from Cana to Jerusalem, from Jerusalem into Judea, from Judea into Samaria, & from Samaria back to Cana. The circle of his first missionary journey is now complete." [Mark W. G. Stibbe, *John*, p. 70]

### A. The first major unit in John's narrative

- As he departs Samaria for Galilee. "*Jesus' first major ministry circuit* has almost come to a close. By labeling the healing of the official's son [in Galilee] as Jesus' 'second sign' in Cana of Galilee [4:54], Jesus ties 4:43-54 in with 2:1-11, this constituting 2:1- 4:54 as the first major unit in John's narrative about Jesus." [Andreas J. Köstenberger, *Encountering John*, p.]

### B. An *Inclusio* ['Bookends'] marking a Literary Unit

- "The first two [designated] sign-miracles are generally distinguished from the others because they are both performed in Cana of Galilee, and thus they form a geographical *inclusio* ['Cana to Cana'] in the early chapters of [John]. These chapters [2, 3, 4] also form a literary unit... thematically... [They] present *Jesus as the divine Messiah who offers newness of life to those who believe*. [They] convey what Paul says in 2 Cor. 5:17: 'the old has gone, the new has come!' [It's] the revelation of the new order in Jesus." [Stephen S. Kim, *Miracles of Jesus According to John*, p. 112]
- "*Inclusio* occurs...in the mentions of Cana (2:11 & 4:46), changing of water into wine (2:1-11 & 4:46), Capernaum (2:12 & 4:46), and the inadequacy of faith based on signs (2:23-25 & 4:45, 48)." [Paul Jaesuk Jr., *Intro. to the Literary Art of...John*, p. 82]
  - Both miracles in Cana of Galilee
  - First & second signs
  - Two concise 'miracle-quest stories' [Identical structure]
- "This link in the text alerts the reader [that] this present story [(the official's son) should be] understood in the light of the first miracle story [changing water to wine at the Cana wedding]." [Graham H. Twelftree, *Jesus the Miracle Worker*, p. 197]

### C. "First Sign" (2:11); "2nd Sign" (4:54)—Ambiguous Signs

- "Second sign"—"Jesus did this as his *second miraculous sign* when he returned from Judea to Galilee." (Jn. 4:54)
- In John a "sign [is] an act of Jesus that provides the witness an opportunity for insight into Jesus' true identity"—Robert Kysar
- For most of Jesus' signs/miracles "abundant indications in narrative & dialogue direct the reader to interpret how the 'signs' 'signify'. What obtains for most of the [4th] Gospel's signs, however,

*does not obtain in the case of the first two deeds explicitly labeled 'signs'. [Jn. 2:11; 4:54] No subtle dialogue or suggestive motifs surround the wine miracle or the healing of the royal official's son to guide the reader into a process of reflection. Yet the absence of textual clues has not prevented interpreters from suggesting how these 'signs' 'signify'...The signs' ...unknown-ability provokes a quest to discover the hidden Truth." [Harold W. Attridge, "Ambiguous Signs, an Anonymous Character..." NT Studies, Vol. 65 (2019) pp. 274, 278-9]*

#### D. John's concept of appropriate faith

- "Faith in the Gospel of John is not simply belief in miracles..."—D. Moody Smith
- **Note:** 4th Gospel of John: **miracle/sign -> belief/faith**; In the Synoptics (opposite) **belief/faith -> miracle**
- "The 4th Gospel presents *faith...as the result of the miraculous deed [sign]* (2:11; 6:14; 20:30-1). [In] the Synoptics (on the other hand)...*unless there's...trust [faith]* the possibility of a miracle doesn't exist." [Jürgen Becker, *Jesus of Nazareth*, p. 181]
- "It is God who works miracles, and *not even faith is a precondition*...Miracles can be performed independently of faith, but [also] *miracles do not always produce faith* [e.g. Jn. 5:1-9]." [Charles B. Cousar, *Texts for Preaching: Year C*, p. 321]
- "The miracles of the 4th Gospel are...referred to as signs...They point to Jesus as the one sent from God...They have the express function of raising the question of who Jesus is & suggesting an answer...Those who want to reject Jesus are reluctant even to credit the authenticity & actuality of his signs (Jn. 9). Faith in the Gospel of John is not simply belief in miracles...*The miracle stories...create the possibility of genuine faith.*" [D. Moody Smith, *4th Gospel in 4 Dimensions*, p. 73]
- The "Cana-to-Cana-cycle...[is] bracketed by his first 2 signs (2:11; 4:54)...The cycle begins with 2:1-11...the concluding healing miracle [is] in Galilee (4:43-54)...*The purpose of this literary unit is to clarify John's concept of appropriate faith...This kind of faith is exemplified by the royal official at Cana.*" [Peter-Ben Smit, "Cana-to-Cana...", ZNTW, V. 98, #1-2 (2007) pp. 143-4]

#### E. Two 'Miracle-quest' Stories

- "The author emphasizes "the connection of the two signs, explicitly linking them in 4:46 & 54, so that they form an *inclusio*... The second Cana sign [makes] reference to Jesus' return to 'to Cana in Galilee where he had made the water wine' (4:46) and concludes (4:54) by referring to 'his 2nd miraculous sign when he returned from Judea to Galilee.' The *inclusio* is reinforced ... [since] in these *two stories we have the only two concise & discrete miracle-quest stories in John*...without any [extended]...discourse attached...[There's a] framework...explicitly relating them to each other as the first and second Cana signs." [John Painter, "Inclined to God" in CC. Black (ed.) *Exploring the Gospel of John*, pp. 360-1]

## II. Matching Pair of 'Miracle-Quest Stories' (Jn. 2:1-11; 4:46-54)

### A. The Anatomy of the 'Quest Story'...

1. The 'quester' [requester] makes an implied or explicit *request*
2. The quest dominates the story...
3. The 'quester' seeks something crucial for human well-being...

4. There may be an objection or difficulty to be overcome, [*a mild rebuke*]...
5. Jesus' word or action...[*response* is] the key to resolution
6. The outcome..." [John Painter, "*Inclined to God*," in CC. Black (ed.) *Exploring the Gospel of John*, p. 358]
  - "The two best examples of concise...quest stories are the 2 Cana stories in Jn. 2:1-11 & 4:46-54 which are...*miracle-quest stories* ...*The distinguishing feature...is the rebuke of Jesus*. This constitutes the objection [#4 above: "Woman, why are you telling me? My time hasn't yet come" (2:4); "Unless you people see signs & wonders you'll never believe!" (4:48)]...This appears to be a definitive, if bewildering, refusal to act, [which] constitutes an objection, a problem to be overcome if the quest is to be successful." [John Painter, "*Inclined to God*," in CC. Black (ed.) *Exploring the Gospel of John*, p. 358]

## B. The Royal Official's Quest (Jn. 4:46-54)

- In "this story...Jesus is formally introduced as a healer."—Graham Twelftree
  - "The ethnic identity of the royal official is...to debate[d in the absence of] an explicit statement. A. H. Mead insists he is a Gentile officer in the service of Herod Antipas. *The contextual evidence seems to support this conclusion*. The verse immediately preceding...may provide a clue to his Gentile identity...The Samaritans [recognize Jesus as] the 'Savior of the world' (4:42). This...seems to be a *literary hinge* to what follows... the salvation of the Gentile household of the royal official." [Stephen S. Kim, *Miracles of Jesus According to John*, p. ]
  - Problem: "his son...was about to die" (4:47) "Death is the problem, not a particular illness."—R. Alan Culpepper
1. The 'quester' [requester]...The royal official took the initiative...to approach Jesus [with] an explicit *request*"
  2. The quest dominates the story—to "heal his son, who is about to die"...dominates the story"
  3. The 'quester' seeks something crucial..."the life of the official's [son] is at stake"
  4. An objection [*mild rebuke*] to overcome—"Unless you people see signs & wonders..." [the man] must reiterate & persist"
  5. Jesus' word [in *response*]: "Go, your son lives" (4:50)
  6. The outcome "not only was the boy healed, but also the official believed & his whole household."

– [John Painter, "*Inclined to God*," in CC. Black (ed.) *Exploring the Gospel of John*, p. 358]

## C. Request—Rebuke—Response Pattern

In John 4:46-54 "Jesus is confronted by a father whose little boy is seriously ill. Jesus, once the *request* is made for healing, *rebukes* the people around him for depending on signs & wonders for faith. The father, however, persists, Jesus [*responds*], without explanation, heals the boys from a distance. As in the first Cana episode (2:1-11) [the Cana wedding], a *request* is followed by a rebuke ...followed, somewhat inexplicably, by a *response*. The gap between Jesus' rebuke & his response has to be filled by the reader's imagination in both instances." [Mark WG. Stibbe, *John*, p. 19]

### 1. The Official's Request (4:46-47)

– There was a “royal official whose son was sick. 47 When he heard that Jesus had come back...to Galilee, he went to him & begged him to come down & heal his son, who was about to die.” (4:46-47)

– “The official's movement toward Jesus [on] hearing from the Galileans of the wonders that Jesus did in Jerusalem (4:43)...The man approaches Jesus because he's heard...that he is a wonder-worker.” [Francis J. Moloney, *John*, pp. ]

### 2. Jesus' Mild Rebuke (4:48)

– “Jesus said... ‘Unless you people see *signs and wonders* you will never believe!’” (4:48)

– The statement “assumes...Jesus as healer *can be* the basis of faith for the readers...Yet the *slight rebuff*...is raising questions about faith that is dependent on miracles.” [Graham Twelftree, “*Jesus the Healer...*” in C. Koester (ed.) *Portraits...*, p. 83]

– ‘You’ (pl) With “these words...Jesus address[es] not only the audience in this story but also readers of his Gospel.”—G. Twelftree

### 3. Jesus' use of “Signs & Wonders” (4:48)

– “‘Signs & wonders’ in 4:48 may hark back to the ‘signs & wonders, performed by Moses at the exodus’—Andreas Kostenberger “

– In this text [John] perhaps uses [the phrase, ‘signs & wonders’] to emphasize the demand for miracles of greatness *similar to those performed by Moses*.” [David A. Redelings, *Epistemological Basis for Belief*, p. ]

– “However, the signs (miracles) of Jesus in the 4th Gospel do not have an obviously Mosaic character. Jesus' signs are miracles of abundance & healing.” [Martinus C. Boer, *Johannine Perspectives*, p. 87]

– “The phrase [‘signs & wonders’] reflects...the OT action of God...This, and parallels with the first sign at Cana, together suggest that *rather than a condemnation of signs-faith*, this is a plain statement that unless people see God act decisively in the world, they will not believe.” [Chris Seglenieks, *Johannine Belief...*, p. 50]

### 4. Jesus “rebuke” recognizes that “signs (miracles) can have a helpful role”

– In the 2nd sign, when the royal official asks Jesus to heal his son, Jesus declares ‘Unless you people see *signs & wonders* you will not believe’ (4:48). The statement has been understood variously as a rejection of signs, or a tolerant rebuke for demanding them, or a test for the official, or a disparagement of signs-based believing. But it seems rather to be a *statement from Jesus recognizing that signs [miracles] can have a helpful role in fostering a life of believing/entrusting*. Subsequently the man believes/entrusts himself to Jesus' word of healing, journeying home to find his son alive (4:50). He then ‘believed’/ ‘entrusted,’ together with his whole household (4:53-4). Sign & word interact in his journey of faith.” [Warren Carter, *John*, p. 97]

### 5. Jesus' Refusal to ‘go down’ to Capernaum

– “The royal official...think[s] that Jesus’ presence is necessary for his son to live, &...he repeatedly asks Jesus ‘come down’ to Capernaum; but Jesus refuses to descend...[For Jesus] the efficacy of his word is what’s important, not his physical appearance in Capernaum, & so he refuses to ‘go down’...’Going down’ at the urging of the official would place him at the beck & call of those who *see him as nothing more than a miracle-worker*...In the 1st Cana miracle he [rebuffed] his mother’s request (2:4), so also in the 2nd Cana miracle he refuses the [official’s] request to ‘go down’.” [James L. Resseguie, *Strange Gospel*, p. 132]

– This “narrative...teaches the reader *not to demand ‘seeing [a miracle] for oneself’* as a condition for trust in Jesus. Such a demand is considered unreasonable, when there’s already reasonable evidence for trust” [David A Redelings, *Basis for Belief*, p]

#### 6. Jesus Response—his healing word of command; the Official believed Jesus’ word (4:50)

– “Jesus told him, ‘Go home; your son will live.’ The man believed [Jesus’] word...& set off for home.” (4:50)

– Jesus “heals the child by the authority of his word...The response of the official...is impressive...The man believed, & the object of his belief is the word that Jesus had spoken to him...The response of the man [is] wordless acceptance of the command of Jesus: ‘and he went’(4:50).” [Francis J. Moloney, *John*, pp. ]

#### 7. Confirmed by the Official’s slaves (4:51-53)

– When his servants confirm the time of the healing, he *knows*—in the sense of grasping the significance of...what’s taken place ...He fully grasps the connection between Jesus’ word of life & his own trust in it. His knowledge validates his belief...&, seeing that, all his household come to belief as well.” [Peter J. Judge, “*Royal Official*,” D. Hunt (ed.) *Character Studies*, p. 313]

#### 8. The official “believed along with his entire household.” (4:53)

### D. Two instances of ‘believed’ (4:50, 53)

- “The *man believed* the word that Jesus spoke to him, and set off for home.” (4:50)
- “*Then the father...he himself believed* along with his entire household.” (4:53)
- “The distinction between 4:50 & 4:53 [is] a *difference between ‘belief in Jesus’ word’ and belief in Jesus himself.*”—Gail O’Day

#### 1. Believing Jesus’ word of miraculous healing—‘your son lives’ (4:50)

– “The official...abandons his repeated request for Jesus to come down to Capernaum, & trusts solely on [Jesus’] word spoken to him...The man’s belief is based entirely on Jesus’ word...The official’s willingness to believe Jesus’ word that his son ‘lives’ illustrates the... perspective of 5:24 ‘the one who *hears my word & believes* the one who sent me has eternal life &...has crossed over from death to life’. *The repetition of the man’s belief confirms his conversion* from...appearance...to correct judgment, from death to life. Twice it says that the official *believed.*” [James L. Resseguie, *Strange Gospel...John*, p. 132-3]

#### 2. Believing in Jesus Himself

- The timing confirmed, the official's "faith in the miracle-worker's word is confirmed, & the narrative suggests...that his faith has grown into *believing Jesus in full*, John's sense of 'believe'." [Lamar Williamson, *Preaching...John*, p. 56]
- The double stress on belief...makes clear that it was consequent to the word of Jesus (4:50, 53). In the first instance the royal official believed Jesus' word when he first said, 'Go, your son lives'...The man...*'believed the word that Jesus spoke to him, & set off for home'* (4:50). [Later,] when the official receives confirmation...the narrator once again emphasize that *'he himself believed along with his entire household'* (4:53). *His initial belief in Jesus' word bears fruit & turns to belief in Jesus himself.*" [James L. Resseguie, *Strange Gospel... John*, p. 133]
- "In this story a Galilean [official] approaches Jesus after hearing about him but *advances to full faith* (4:43-54)"—Philip Judge
- "*Faith of a new kind is a consequence of [Jesus'] performance of this sign...The double stress on belief...makes clear that it was consequent to the word of Jesus (4:50, 53). In the first instance the royal official believed Jesus' word when he first said, "Go, your son lives.'* Then, when he learned that the healing took place at the moment Jesus said 'Your son lives,' he believed & so did his whole household." [John Painter, "*Inclined to God*," in D. Moody Smith (ed.) *Exploring the Gospel of John*, p. 360]
- "The father's faith is differently described: On hearing the word of healing, he 'believes,' & on meeting his servants *his faith is brought to maturity, he becomes a believer...in Jesus*, & so do the members of his household." [G. Beasley-Murray, *John*, p. 71]
- John sees "*miracles as a proper ground for faith*...[given] *some essential idea of Jesus' teaching & claims*. For many characters in the Gospel, these conditions are already satisfied, so their belief in Jesus results immediately from learning of a miracle. *This is the case with the disciples of Jesus...after the wedding miracle...& the royal official*" [David A. Redelings, *...Basis for Belief*, p]

### III. Recognizing Jesus in the Cana Cycle

#### A. Recognition Type-scenes

John's Gospel is "a series of...attempted, failed, and occasionally successful recognition scenes."—Alan Culpepper

- The episodes in John "1-4 [serve] as recognition narratives...that have been reworked in order to accentuate the recognition of Jesus...In these partial recognition scenes, Jesus is successfully recognized by those who encounter him. The signs...point to Jesus' identity & are tokens ['clues, evidence'] of recognition..." [George Parsenios, *Rhetoric & Drama*, p. 109]
- "Who will recognize that Jesus is the Word become flesh?...The plot of the Gospel...[is] a series of recognition (or non- recognition) scenes. Belief & unbelief, recognition & non-recognition of Jesus...is the fundamental [issue]"—[R. Alan Culpepper, *Gospel & Letters of John*, p. 71]
- "The constitutive *elements [of a recognition type-scene*, Kasper B. Larsen] notes include
  - the meeting of the two parties [e.g. disciples meet the resurrected Jesus]

- the cognitive resistance to recognition [‘It can’t be...’; Thomas: “Unless I see & touch...”], the display of tokens [Jesus: ‘Behold my hands & feet’]
- the recognition proper [‘It is the Lord,’ & “My Lord & my God”]
- the attendant reactions of the parties.” [Alex. P. Thompson, *Recognition & Resurrection Appearances of Luke 24*, p. 23]

## B. The Cana Wedding– a (partial) Recognition scene

- Sign (token, evidence): Jesus turns water to wine; his glory manifest. Recognition? Yes; Jesus’ disciples believe

## C. Jerusalem Temple Incident—*Failed* recognition scene

- Sign: Jesus ‘cleanses the Temple; offers sign of his bodily resurrection; Recognition? No, Rejection

## D. Nicodemus—*Failed* Recognition scene

1. Sign: He saw Jesus’ Jerusalem signs; Recognition? No, “How can these things be?”—Nicodemus
2. “Nicodemus’ belief in Jesus was...[as] a Miracle-Worker”—Graham Twelftree

## E. Samaritan Woman—Recognition scene

## F. Healing the Royal Official’s Son—Recognition scene

- Sign: Remotely restoring of his dying son; Recognition? Yes “He believed along with his entire household”
- “The royal official comes to Jesus because *he believes that Jesus can heal his son*. At the end, however, *he and his whole household believe*, just as Jesus’ disciples had believed following the first sign...This appears to mean that they [official & household] *believed something more than the initial assumption that Jesus could heal their son*, but the content of that

## G. Movement toward Faith during the Cana Cycle

- “The 4th Gospel moves Jesus from Cana & back to Cana. Each sign is part of a distinct *movement toward faith*. The 1st story, of the changing of water into wine, heads the first movement toward faith. The narrative moves from the lack of faith by the Jews to partial faith by Nicodemus, *to complete faith*...in John the Baptist. [It’s] movement toward faith...in a *Jewish context*.”
- “The ‘second [sign]’...the healing of the official’s son, comes at the end of the second movement toward faith. [Initial] lack of faith is seen in the Samaritan woman, who then exhibits partial faith, before the villagers...*declare complete faith*. This second movement...is set in a *non-Jewish context*.” [Graham H. Twelftree, *Jesus the Miracle Worker*, pp. 199-200]

## IV. Jesus’ Signs (miracles) as a Basis for Belief (20:30-31)



- These [Signs] are recorded so you may believe Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, & by believing...have life in his name” (20:31)
- “Jesus said...‘Unless you people see signs and wonders you will never believe!” (4:48)
- “Ultimately...signs play a positive role in the Gospel [20:30-1]. Quite often, scholars place *far too much emphasis upon a handful of verses like 4:48* that give a negative impression of signs.” [J. David Woodington, *Dubious Disciples*, p. #105]

### A. The Issues—What’s the value of ‘Signs-based Faith’?

- “Jesus did the healing but only after complaining about belief based on signs & wonderful acts. [1.] Is Jn. 4:48...a *mild rebuke* of an excessive dependence on signs [miracles] as a basis for faith? Or [2.] is it a repudiation of all signs-based faith? Is Jesus saying that faith founded upon wondrous acts has no value at all? Or [3.] (a 3rd alternative) are we to infer from these words that faith based upon signs [‘signs-faith’] is inferior to a faith that does not require signs? *This [4:48] is a key verse...[on] the relationship of faith and experience as it pertains to the signs.*” [Robert Kysar, *John, the Maverick Gospel*, p. 82]
- “Commentators struggle with whether signs are positive or negative in John...Some verses in John may suggest that signs do not generate true faith that leads to discipleship. [Among influential scholars,] Bultmann regards John’s signs negatively. R. Brown regards ‘signs-belief’ as only a preliminary step to salvation. But *this flies in the face of the Gospel’s purpose statement* (20:30-31). *John intends that [Jesus’] signs & works should lead people to faith.*” [Willard M. Swartley, *John*, p. ]
- “The value of signs for promoting faith in Jesus is not always clear. The 4th Gospel appears to present competing conceptions about the relationship between signs (*semeia*) & believing (*pisteuein*)...[John] narrates...Jesus’ signs ‘that you may come to believe...’ (20:31)...*Jesus’ sign during the Wedding at Cana is in perfect accord with this statement. The sign inspires faith. The disciples believe* (2:11). But...although many people believed in Jesus (2:23) because of his signs, he would not entrust himself to them. Two chapters later, at 4:48 Jesus appears even to *rebuke the royal official for requesting a sign* by saying, ‘Unless you people see signs & wonders you will never believe!’ Are signs...a proper basis for faith, or not? The Gospel of John appears to be of two minds on the subject...*Tension exists in [John’s] statements about signs...* [so] opposite positions can be equally valid...[Perhaps it’s] an intentional move that *leads one to reflect on the paradox...*The tension is not resolved, but... allowed to stand.” [George Parsenios, *Rhetoric & Drama in...John*, pp. 122-3]

### B. Is ‘Sign-faith’ inferior to ‘Word-faith’?

- “It’s often suggested...John views with suspicion...signs-based faith & favors a higher faith based on the word of Jesus”—W Salier
- J. Moloney argues that “*Faith based on miraculous signs [is] inadequate*, that authentic Johannine faith is radical belief in the word of Jesus.” [Mary L. Coloe, *God Dwells with Us*, p. 76 #46]
- “Jesus accomplishes this miracle in a way that enhances the official’s faith *from ‘sign-faith’ to ‘word-faith’*. John introduces [this] theme in chapter 2 [2:23-25]...It is apparent that *‘sign-faith’ is not pleasing to our Lord...*He chooses not to commit Himself to ‘sign-faith’ believers...Jesus wants people whose faith is grounded in His word, not in miracles...*‘Sign-faith’ is inferior to ‘word-faith’.*” [Robert L. Deffinbaugh, *That You Might Believe – Study...of John*, Lesson #11]
- “The reason why this faith [2:23-5] is flawed is not stated...Numerous scholars write it off as ‘signs-faith’ & inadequate on these grounds, *that cannot be established either from this passage or...the preceding narrative.*” [Seglenieks, *Johannine Belief*, p. 41]

### C. Faith sufficient for Salvation

- “Faith is *not simply to believe that Jesus is a wonder-worker*; it is the believe that as a wonder-worker he is the Messiah, and so to believe *in* him (2:11; 11:45). (Fortna).” [Stephen Voorwinde, *Jesus’ Emotions in the 4th Gospel*, p. 107 #114]
- “*Faith that recognizes the true identity of Jesus, whatever the basis of that faith*—seeing the miracle-signs, hearing the words [of Jesus], witnessing the risen Lord, or none of these—is *sufficient for the blessing of salvation... We cannot say that all faith in and based upon the signs [miracles] is insufficient* because belief needs the ‘word’ as its proper basis. [We cannot say this, since] John does approve of belief in [Jesus, based on] miracles (20:30-31). John is convinced that miracles adequately testify to Jesus’ true identity.” [Graham H. Twelftree, *Jesus the Miracle Worker*, p. 232]
- “When belief in the miracles is deficient, it is because such belief sees the signs as proof only of the (divine) miracle-working power of Jesus... [In the context] of the story of Nicodemus (2:23-25), the Jews are said to believe only ‘in his name’ (2:23), rather than in ‘the name of the only Son of God’ (3:18; 1 Jn. 3:23).” [Graham H. Twelftree, *Jesus the Miracle Worker*, p. 233]
  - **“Signs [miracles] alone are adequate for salvation”– Graham Twelftree**
- “The clear statement of Jn. 20:31—‘But these [signs] are recorded so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name’ – means that the signs alone are adequate for salvation and a full understanding of Jesus. The words (6:33; 8:30) or works of Jesus are adequate for faith. What is inadequate, in some instances, is not the miracles but the response to them & the limited understanding of Jesus that may arise from believing in Jesus on the basis of the signs. Where there is fault...[it’s in] the individual who does not see.” [Graham Twelftree, ...*Miracle Worker*, p. 233]

#### D. Signs & Believing in John—a Paradox?

- “The essential quality of the signs...is drawn from their role as tokens [‘clues, evidence’] of recognition...They [*signs*] are essentially tokens of recognition.” [George L. Parsenios, *Rhetoric & Drama in...John*, p. 108]

##### 1. Signs (miracles) can elicit True Faith

– “There are those who see the true significance of the miracles [signs] enabling them to believe in Jesus and who see correctly who he is in relation to the Father. From the...ending of John—‘these [signs] are written so that you may come to believe’ (20:31)—it is clear *John thought that the signs could elicit true faith & that they did so for the disciples*. At the conclusion of the first miracle [sign—changing water to wine] John says that his disciples believed in him (2:11). *Similarly the official whose son was healed* is said to believe (4:53)... [Such faith] grasps the divine action in Jesus...The miracles are expected to lead to belief [yet,] it is *belief in the words of Jesus* that’s...*the ultimate form of belief-response to Jesus*.” [G. Twelftree, *Jesus*, p. 231]

##### 2. Can Saving-Faith be based on signs alone?

– “*Do signs...provide ground for saving faith?* Can an adequate belief-response be made on the basis of signs alone?...Signs can (and should) evoke belief, but sometimes they do not (12:37). Some of these belief-responses are not adequate (2:24-25)...2:11 may be the only occurrence of ample belief based on signs...Thus signs are not a guarantee for an adequate...belief-response. Nevertheless, *belief based on signs can be recommended by both Jesus* (e.g. 10:37-38) & *John* (20:30-1). Moreover, Thomas seems to come to a true belief-response based on seeing & perceiving the miracle/sign of the resurrection (20:27-29). Thus... signs...[can] result in a sufficient understanding & belief-response...In conclusion,

contra[ry to] many scholars, signs can be a basis for adequate belief [i.e., saving faith].”  
[Cornelis Bennema, *Power of Saving Wisdom*, pp. 146-7]

### 3. Negative Views of Faith based on Signs—“*inferior, suspect, preliminary, immature faith*”

– “For John...signs, when properly understood, lead to faith...The 4th Gospel however, expresses an ambivalent attitude towards these signs. Although the signs are...performed for the purpose of leading people to faith (20:30-1), *faith based on signs is depicted as inferior or even suspect faith* (2:23-4; 4:48)...*Signs do not always lead to adequate faith. Some people want the signs because of the physical benefit they provide...Some people see the signs, but never see beyond them to the truth to which they point* (12:37). Other people, however, see the signs and believe in the one who...perform[s] them. For those in the last category, the signs are important aids to faith. Even so, *faith that is dependent on signs is preliminary, or immature faith. Ultimately, those who ‘see’ must move beyond a ‘signs’-faith, for ‘Blessed are the people who have not seen & yet have believed’* (20:29b)” [Mitchell G. Reddish, *Introduction to The Gospels*, pp. 191-2]

### 4. Positive & negative statements about ‘signs-based faith’

– “Some scholars claim that faith based on signs is an *inferior or inadequate faith*...Bultmann refers to Jn. 2:23-25 &...argues that faith based on signs is *not ‘trustworthy faith’*...Jn. 4:48 & 20:29 are also taken...to support the view that Jesus denigrates faith based on signs...[Yet,] others argue on the basis of Jn. 20:30-31 that signs evoke faith so...*there are both positive and negative statements about signs in relation to faith...There’s no ‘perfect faith or mature faith’...in John’s Gospel. The concept of ‘signs faith’ would be foreign to John*...Whether people believe through hearing Jesus’ words or seeing Jesus’ signs or upon others’ testimony, their faith is constantly being challenged by Jesus...The problem doesn’t reside in faith that is based on signs, but in the ‘perceiver of the sign’.” [Sunny K-H Wang, *Sense Perception & Testimony in...John*, pp. 150-60]

### 5. The Problem with ‘signs-based faith’ is the Person

– “Debate [has] revolved around the place of...signs in coming to faith, *with a common view understanding signs-based faith as necessarily inadequate*. While some faith based upon the miraculous is flawed, *John does not...picture...signs-based faith [as] being inadequate, & belief in the signs is encouraged*. The issue is not the sign itself, but what’s perceived [by the person] & how one goes on to respond to Jesus. (In 2:23-25 the inadequate faith is not directly linked to the signs.) Seeing & hearing can each be means to believing, yet neither comprise a response [*per se*].” [Chris Seglenieks, *Johannine Belief*, p. 8 & #24]

– “Whether people believe through hearing Jesus’ words or seeing Jesus’ signs or upon others’ testimony...The problem doesn’t reside in faith that’s based on signs, but in the ‘perceiver of the sign’.” [S. K-H Wang, *Sense Perception & Testimony*, p. 160]

– “The ambiguity regarding...signs in John arises because they both conceal & reveal (9:39)...Signs may show the presence of the divine, but *the disposition* of those [people] who see the signs *determines the response*.” [Willard M. Swartley, *John*, p.]

– “While seeing [signs/miracles] can lead to believing (2:11) it is not necessary for belief (20:29) & *at times seeing does not lead to belief* (6:36), for believing requires a volitional response [of the will].” [Chris Seglenieks, *Johannine Belief...*, p. 7]

– “John has a favorable idea of the relation of signs to belief in Jesus...Belief in Jesus is *limited by human failings, not by the nature of signs*...[Lack] of continuing belief [is] due to the *faulty character of individual[s]*...not to any inherent deficiency in the evidential value of signs...[For John] *miracles could be a proper ground for faith*...[given the basic] knowledge that Jesus...had a credible message & credible claims...The knowledge of Jesus & God... *given through signs* and other testimony, is *sufficient to justify genuine belief in Jesus*.”  
[David A. Redelings, *Epistemological Basis for Belief according to John*, p. ]

## V. Across the Evangelical Spectrum—Diverse Contemporary Views on Healing, Miracles, etc.

- “Today, evangelical Christians can be roughly divided into 3 distinct groups:
- [1.] “First there are those who believe that the charismatic gifts [1 Cor. 12:8-10] ceased as soon as the NT was completed & disseminated to all the churches. ‘Cessationists’ thus conclude that everything that passes as a charismatic experience today is in fact misguided emotionalism [or worse]...”
- [2.] “At the other extreme are the Pentecostal, charismatic & ‘Third Wave’ Christians who believe that the charismatic gifts [including healing, miracles, etc.] are for today & thus should be pursued & practiced.— the ‘Continuationists.’
- [3.] “In between the ‘Cessationists’ & ‘Continuationists’ are Christians who are not theologically opposed to the exercise of charismatic gifts, but they are cautious. These people are often concerned with the extreme emphasis placed on the gifts in some Pentecostal, charismatic, or third-wave circles as well as some unusual practices that at times accompany these gifts (e.g. being ‘*slain in the Spirit*’, ‘*laughing in the Spirit*’, etc.). The latter group is ‘continuationist’ in theology but does not emphasize or pursue the charismatic gifts the way charismatic Christians do.” [ Gregory A. Boyd, Paul R. Eddy, *Across the Spectrum: Understanding Issues in Evangelical Theology*, p. ]

## Questions

1. Jesus healed the official’s dying son; that was a *miracle*, however in John 4:54 it’s called a “*sign*.”
  - a. What’s the difference between a “*miracle*” and a “*sign*” in John’s Gospel?
  - b. What is the author trying to convey by using the word “*sign*”?
2. In John 4:43-54 we can identify the elements of Request—Rebuke—Response—Result
  - a. What is the ‘request’?
  - b. What is the “rebuke”?
  - c. What’s Jesus’ “response”?
  - d. What is (are) the “results(s)”?
3. In considering Jesus’ “rebuke” (4:48)

- a. What might the phrase “*signs and wonders*” signify in an OT context? [Search for this phrase on a Bible website; what shows up?]
  - b. The pronoun “you” in 4:48 is plural—“you people;” so is the rebuke aimed at the official, the ‘crowd,’ or both?
4. The verb “believed” occurs twice—in both 4:50 and also 4:53. What (if any) is the difference? How would you describe the official’s faith in each case?
5. Several influential scholars distinguish between “*signs-based faith*” (engendered by *seeing* a sign/miracle) and “*word-based faith*” (resulting from *hearing* Jesus’ teaching/preaching). Plus, some claim “*signs-based faith*” is inferior &/or inadequate compared to “*word-based faith*.”
- a. Do you agree or disagree with this claim (why/why not)?
  - b. Does John’s Gospel support this distinction and this ranking?
6. Read the “purpose/theme statement”—John 20:30-31.
- a. What are the various “signs” provided by John in this Gospel; do they include miracles, healings, works of power? What else is indicated by “signs” in this “purpose statement”?
  - b. Does this statement support or refute the claim “*signs-based faith*” is inferior to “*word-based faith*”?
7. Does God/Jesus still perform miracles (e.g. healings) today or was that only in the era of Jesus & the first apostles?