

the nobleman

in John chapter four

John 4:46-54

4:46 So Jesus came again into Cana of Galilee, where he made the water wine. And there was **a certain nobleman**, whose son was sick at Capernaum.

4:47 When he heard that Jesus was come out of Judaea into Galilee, he went unto him, and besought him that he would come down, and heal his son: for he was at the point of death.

4:48 Then said Jesus unto him, Except ye see signs and wonders, ye will not believe.

4:49 **The nobleman** saith unto him, Sir, come down ere my child die.

4:50 Jesus saith unto him, Go thy way; thy son liveth. And **the man believed** the word that Jesus had spoken unto him, and he went his way.

4:51 And as he was now going down, his servants met him, and told him, saying, Thy son liveth.

4:52 Then enquired he of them the hour when he began to amend. And they said unto him, Yesterday at the seventh hour the fever left him.

4:53 So **the father** knew that it was at the same hour, in the which Jesus said unto him, Thy son liveth: and himself **believed**, and his whole house.

4:54 This is again the second miracle that Jesus did, when he was come out of Judaea into Galilee.

one of the seven great signs

There are seven great miracles in the Gospel of John which are considered special signs of Jesus deity. The first of these is the turning of water into wine in chapter two, and the second one is the healing of the nobleman's son in chapter four. The water-into-wine miracle, the feeding of the 5,000, Jesus walking on water, and the raising of Lazarus are all well known. Sadly, much less attention is paid to the nobleman and the healing of his son.

This is a tragic omission, because there is much to learn about the nature of genuine faith from the nobleman. Notice that "believed" appears twice in the passage, once in 4:50 and once again in 4:53. There are two different aspects of believing on display in these verses.

caution: similar passages

The story of the nobleman and his son is not just neglected; it is also often confused with two other similar healing stories. The first of these is the healing of a centurion's servant in Mat. 8:5-13 and Luke 7:1-10. And the second is the story of the raising of Jairus' daughter in Mat. 9:18-25, Mark 5:21-24, 35-43, and Luke 8:49-56.

negatives

There is no doubt about the nobleman's concern for his son. (See the C lines on the next page.) However, because of his single-minded focus on his son's illness, the nobleman did not seem to show any interest in the problems that other people may have had. Is it being too critical to mention this?

The sinful man that Jesus healed at the pool in the next chapter was obviously selfish, since he protected himself at Jesus' expense (5:15-16). Likewise, the nobleman in chapter four might have hindered Jesus' work at Cana if he had been able to hurry the Lord away to Capernaum.

Since we empathize with the nobleman's natural concern, we are inclined to assume that he was *not* selfish. Certainly, his request seems more loving than self-serving. Nevertheless, there was still some self-interest involved, since he asked for the healing of his own son.

Is selfishness always sinful? Many will quickly answer in the affirmative, but a clear definition is required. Some dictionaries define being selfish as having *too much* concerned for one's own welfare or interests. Great, but how do we know when there is *too much* concern for self?

Mark the points below as correct (C), incorrect (X), or partly correct (▲).

A	()	The nobleman does not seem very important.
A-1	()	He is not as well known as Nicodemus.
A-2	()	The nobleman is unnamed and only appears once.
A-3	()	There are only nine verses on Jesus' interaction with him.
B	()	The nobleman seems somewhat selfish.
B-1	()	He was desperate.
B-2	()	He wanted Jesus to follow him.
B-3	()	He asked Jesus to heal his son immediately.
B-4	()	All he seemed to care about was his own son.
B-5	()	He was disruptive like Bartimaeus in Mark 10:48.
B-6	()	He would not have believed without the miracle (4:48).
B-7	()	He was not as polite as he should have been (4:47-49).
B-8	()	He was probably not thinking about needy people in Cana.
B-9	()	Jesus did not go with the nobleman because the man was selfish.

positives

In spite of the many thought-provoking lines on the previous worksheet, the main subject in John 4:46-54 is not selfishness. The main topic in all of John is believing in Jesus. That said, we still need to think about the nature of the nobleman's belief. Did he believe for selfish reasons?

If the nobleman was only interested in his son's healing, he did not have saving faith. Believing in Jesus as a great miracle worker has never been enough. On the other hand, it is also possible that the nobleman grew in faith, discovering far more in Jesus than he expected.

The nobleman did not ask the Lord to heal his son from a distant place (while Jesus was still in Cana). The unnamed centurion in Mark 8:8-10 asked the Lord to do so for his servant, but the nobleman in John chapter four probably did not expect such a great miracle.

Jesus commended the greatness of the centurion's faith even though he was a Gentile, but the Jewish nobleman was not praised in any way. In John, the focus is more on the object of faith (Jesus as God) and on having genuine faith in him rather than on faith being great or small.

Mark the points below as correct (C), incorrect (X), or partly correct (▲).

C	() The nobleman cared about his son.
C-1	() He traveled from Capernaum to Cana to ask for Jesus' help.
C-2	() He kept asking Jesus to go with him to heal his son.
C-3	() The nobleman seems like a normal father.
D	() The nobleman believed in Jesus.
D-1	() He believed enough to ask for help (4:47).
D-2	() He decided to believe what Jesus said (4:50).
D-3	() He carefully considered the evidence (4:52-53).
D-4	() His belief in 4:53 is the same as his belief in 4:50.
D-5	() He shows that full assurance (4:52-53) comes later.
D-6	() His faith grew like that of the blind man in chapter nine.
D-7	() His family and servants believed because he did so (4:53).
D-8	() His story is important because believing in Jesus is important.
D-9	() John 4:53 says that the man believed that Jesus is God (4:53).

worksheet answers

Everyone is at least somewhat selfish (B). The nobleman was so focused on his son that he probably did not think about the needs of others (B-8). He did not ask Jesus to heal his son immediately, however (B-3), and selfishness is not the main passage topic. Belief is, and the nobleman's belief in Jesus grew during the encounter much like that of the man born blind in chapter nine (D-6).

As for why Jesus did not go with the nobleman, there were multiple reasons. The main ones were probably to display the power of God by healing from a distance and to challenge the man's superficial faith. The man's self-centeredness may have been a secondary factor (B-9). He was probably polite enough (B-7), but, like all of us, he was more narrowly focused than Jesus was.

John 4:53 does not directly say that the nobleman believed that Jesus is God (D-9). However, there is a clear progression in the man's faith (D-6). His belief ran deeper in 4:53 than earlier in 4:50 (D-3). Moreover, John as a whole—beginning in 1:1 and continuing through Thomas' great confession in 20:28—stresses belief in Jesus as God. Though line D-9 is incorrect, it is in line with much of John.

So what?

We should believe in the Lord Jesus, including his deity, because of the testimony of the entire Gospel of John. Moreover, we should grow in our faith in the Lord and be assured of its veracity like the nobleman in chapter four. He and his entire household saw the miracle and knew that the healing of his son—at the exact time that Jesus announced it—was not just a coincidence.

The evidence was overwhelming, and every household member believed in Jesus. They followed the evidence, but they were not forced to go along with the family leader (D-7). Group pressure and pressure from above were often exerted to prevent people from following Jesus, but nobody was ever forced to believe in him. (See 3:16, 6:60-69, 7:46-52, 9:22,34, and 12:42-43.)

That said, it is correct to say that the nobleman was forced to make a decision (D-2). He could disbelieve and continue to insist that Jesus go with him (B-7) or he could believe what Jesus said and go home alone (4:50). Thankfully when the moment of decision came, he believed. In that instant, he entrusted his son's fate to the Lord Jesus. We should trust Jesus with our lives as well.

applications

Apply the points which you believe are most important or seem most needful.
