

## **About Prophets and Honour** **John 4:43-54**

Back in the mid-80s, Lesley and I attended a function at Morling College. It was held to honour Ron Rogers. The occasion was his retirement as principal of the college. All sorts of people got up and said all sorts of wonderful things about Ron Rogers and what he'd done for the college over many years. You probably know the sorts of things said on such occasions. Then, they gave Ron the opportunity to say a few words. As he started speaking, it soon became apparent that he was totally embarrassed by the whole function. He definitely wasn't enjoying all this attention being given to him. And I wondered to myself: What's going on here? Are we really honouring the man by doing something so obviously uncomfortable for him?

Have you ever been to a surprise birthday party where it's obvious the one whose birthday it is doesn't like parties? Or doesn't like that particular kind of party? Or have you ever been loosely involved with people organising a surprise party where it's obvious their main aim is to cause as much embarrassment as possible to the guest of honour? What's really happening on such occasions? Is the party really to give enjoyment and honour to the person? Or is the occasion really being set up to benefit other people – the people organising it?

How do you honour another person? It's a personal thing, isn't it? What gives honour to one person may be totally inappropriate for another. Some people love being the centre of attention at a surprise party; other people absolutely loathe it. To truly honour a person, you have to know who they are and what pleases them. The quest-

ion before us this morning is this: How do you honour Jesus?

### **Honouring Jesus**

We pick up in John's gospel at 4:43

*After the two days He left for Galilee. (Now Jesus Himself had pointed out that a prophet has no honour in his own country). When He arrived in Galilee, the Galileans welcomed Him. They had seen all that He had done in Jerusalem at the Passover Feast, for they also had been there.*

Jesus was honoured in Samaria. The woman said:

*Come, see a man who told me everything I ever did. Could this be the Christ?*

The people of the woman's town said:

*We no longer believe just because of what you said; now we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this man really is the Saviour of the world.*

Many Samaritans believed in Jesus. Why? What brought them to that point? We're not told much, are we? We don't have any miracles recorded. We're just told He knew all about the woman and that He talked with the others. Yet, the Samaritans recognise who Jesus is – and they make the appropriate response: they believe Jesus is the Saviour of the world.

Now Jesus moves from Samaria back to His own country and His own people. He resumes the trip He began back in 4:3. His time in Samaria's an interruption to that journey. As He resumes that trip, John informs us:

*Jesus Himself had pointed out that a prophet has no honour in his own country.*

The NIV puts this statement in brackets – as if it's an

aside in the narrative. But it's not an aside. In the Greek, it's clearly connected with both the verse before and the verse after. It explains why Jesus heads to Galilee and warns us how to interpret His reception there. It helps us understand what follows – not just in this chapter, but in the following chapters as well.

Back in John 1:10-12, we were told:

*He was in the world, and though the world was made through Him, the world did not recognise Him. He came to that which was His own, but His own did not receive Him. Yet to all who received Him, to those who believed in His Name, He gave the right to become children of God ...*

Here, in chapter 4, we've seen the Samaritans receive Him. They recognise Him as the Messiah, the Saviour of the world. Now Jesus returns to His own people and we have this statement:

*Jesus Himself had pointed out that a prophet has no honour in his own country.*

Yet, in verse 45, John tells us the Galileans welcome Jesus when He arrives. In other words, they appear to honour Him. On the surface, it seems there's a contradiction.

- Jesus says a prophet has no honour with his own.
- The Galileans, Jesus' own, honour Him.

What's going on? Did John blunder when he put Jesus' statement here? Do the Galileans prove Jesus wrong?

It's not a mistake – nor is Jesus wrong. It's a carefully worded statement. What's the basis for their welcome? They welcome Him because of what they saw Him do at the Passover Feast in Jerusalem. What did they see Him

do? For that we must go back to 2:23

*Now while He was in Jerusalem at the Passover Feast, many people saw the miraculous signs He was doing and believed in His name.*

These Galileans welcome Jesus because of the miraculous signs He did.

That idea's reinforced by what John goes on to tell us in chapter 4. Keep your finger in chapter 2, but turn to 4:46.

*Once more He visited Cana in Galilee, where He had turned the water into wine. And there was a certain royal official whose son lay sick at Capernaum. When this man heard that Jesus had arrived in Galilee from Judea, he went to Him and begged Him to come and heal his son, who was close to death.*

*"Unless you people see miraculous signs and wonders," Jesus told him, "you will never believe."*

On the surface, Jesus responds to this royal official – but it's more than that. It's in the plural. He's talking to the Galileans in general – indeed, to people in general.

But, you may ask, isn't welcoming Jesus because of His miraculous signs still honouring Him? A welcome's a welcome isn't it? They're excited to see Him. They want to follow Him around. He's the flavour of the month. That's good, isn't it? Turn back again to 2:23 – but this time we'll also read the next two verses:

*Now while He was in Jerusalem at the Passover Feast, many people saw the miraculous signs He was doing and believed in His name. But Jesus would not entrust Himself to them, for He knew all men. He did not need man's testimony about man, for He knew what was in a man.*

John distinguishes different levels of *belief* – he uses the same word, but the context shows he makes distinctions between how people believe in Jesus. There's *belief* and then there's *belief*. Some simply believe Jesus' miracles. They believe Jesus is a wonder-working man. They're attracted to Him because of all these wonderful miracles. But that's as far as their belief goes. They fail to perceive the sign part of Jesus' miraculous signs. They fail to see that these signs point not just to what Jesus can do but also to who Jesus really is. They fail to take the step of believing in Jesus at that level. They haven't got to the point of recognising and embracing the complete Jesus – the eternal Word become flesh. And that's the far more important step.

It's important to know the place of miracles.

- On the one hand, they do have evidentiary value – they have value in pointing to who Jesus is. In John 14:11, Jesus says:

*Believe Me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in Me; or at least believe on the evidence of the miracles themselves.*

At the end of his gospel, John writes:

*Jesus did many other miraculous signs in the presence of His disciples which are not recorded in this book. But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in His name. (20:30-31)*

So, the miracles are important to faith.

- But believing in the miracles alone isn't sufficient. Jesus keeps challenging people to get beyond that step. People must recognise the more important thing: the miracles are signs that point to who Jesus

is. For example, turn over to 10:24

*The Jews gathered around Him, saying, "How long will You keep us in suspense? If You are the Christ, tell us plainly?"*

*Jesus answered, "I did tell you, but you do not believe. The miracles I do in My Father's name speak for Me, but you do not believe because you are not My sheep ..."*

The problem wasn't that these Jews didn't see the miracles. The problem wasn't that they denied Jesus did miracles. They believed at that level. The problem was they didn't recognise what the miracles signified: namely, that Jesus is the Christ, the Messiah.

That's what's happening here in chapter 4. Jesus just left Samaria, where He's honoured as the Christ, the Saviour of the world. He returns to His own people, where He's "honoured" as a miracle worker. But His own people haven't taken the next step the Samaritans took. They haven't recognised who Jesus really is. And because they fail to take that next step, their apparent "honour" is actually dishonour. They vastly undervalue the person before them. They don't truly know Him and so they can't truly honour Him.

It remains the same today. All sorts of people say they "honour" Jesus.

- Radicals "honour" Jesus as someone who paid the ultimate price of dying for the cause in which He believed.
- Atheists "honour" Jesus as an example to mankind and a person who lived and taught good morals.
- Moslems "honour" Jesus as a great prophet, second

only to the prophet Mohammed.

- Hindus "honour" Jesus as a divine being alongside thousands of other divine beings.
- Many "honour" Jesus as a good teacher or someone who lived a good life.

But if that's as far as it goes, it's vastly inadequate. Such "honour" is in fact dishonour. For unless we honour Jesus as the Christ – the Son of God, the eternal Word become flesh – we don't honour Him at all.

### The Second Miraculous Sign

Come back to the text in chapter 4. We meet this royal official in verse 46. We don't know a great deal about him – but the title indicates he had some level of local importance. More importantly, he has a dying son. That brings him to Jesus. He's heard something about Jesus. Perhaps he too was in Jerusalem and saw the miracles. He hopes Jesus can do something for his son. He hopes Jesus can prevent this tragedy looming on his horizon.

In verse 48, there's a level of rebuke in Jesus' reply:

*"Unless you people see miraculous signs and wonders," Jesus told him, "you will never believe."*

We don't know the level of belief this man had. Was he fully confident Jesus could heal his son? Was it simply a last-ditch grasping at straws after he'd tried everything else? We don't know. It's unlikely the man thought in terms of the different levels of belief John's introduced. His concern was his dying son. At that point, he didn't see beyond that limited horizon.

Is Jesus' mild rebuke uncaring? Should Jesus just have dealt with the man's pressing need and not worried about these other matters? If I went to the doctor to check why

my foot had turned green and he said:

That's not your real problem. What you really should be worried about is your green-eyed soul.

Would I pay attention to him? Would I actually care if he was right or would I be too worried about the colour of my foot? Would I do anything about my soul or would I find another doctor?

Yet, we should recognise the things we see as our most pressing needs – the things that occupy our minds and distract us from everything else – may not, in fact, be our greatest need. They could be side-tracks. They could be preventing us seeing the main game. Perhaps there is something far more important to focus on.

The man persists in his request – verse 49:

*The royal official said, "Sir, come down before my child dies."*

Has his horizon shifted? Did he understand what Jesus said in verse 48? Did he move from belief in miraculous signs to belief in Jesus? In his anxiousness, could he do that? We don't know. The repeated request reflects the heartfelt cry of a father whose son's dying. He hopes Jesus can do something to save his son.

Verse 50:

*Jesus replied, "You may go. Your son will live."*

*The man took Jesus at His word and departed. While he was still on the way, his servants met him with the news that his boy was living. When he inquired as to the time when his son got better, they said to him, "The fever left him yesterday at the seventh hour."*

*Then the father realised that this was the exact time at which Jesus had said to him, "Your son will live." So*

*he and all his household believed.*

Jesus promises healing. This official believes Him and departs. It's 1pm. Capernaum was some 25kms from Cana. Somewhere between the two, the official meets his servants coming to meet him with the good news. They compare notes and realise the boy was healed at the time Jesus pronounced it. The result: the official and all his household *believe* in Jesus.

At what level did they believe?

- Did they believe in Jesus as a wonder-worker – a person who just cured this boy from a distance?
- Or did they believe in Jesus as the Messiah, the Son of God, the eternal Word become flesh?

We're not told. The latter's strongly implied – that he believes as the Samaritans. As you read John's narrative, it looks like he makes progress:

- He begins by begging Jesus to heal his son.
- After the initial rebuff, he still requests healing – he doesn't give up.
- When Jesus pronounces the boy well, he takes Jesus at His word.
- Then, when he realises the healing took place at the time of Jesus' word, he believes.

At the end of Jesus' first sign in Cana, we're told that the disciples *put their faith in Him*. At the end of this second sign, we're told the official and his household *believe*. The implication's strong.

There's a small problem here at the end. I don't think it's a big thing, but I mention it because some of you may be wondering. What's John mean by saying it's the *second* sign? Back in chapter 2, he indicates turning water into

wine at Cana is the *first* sign. But then, in 2:23 he says Jesus did lots of miracles at the Feast in Jerusalem. So, how's this rate as the *second*? Two possibilities.

- It may be it's the second sign that results in true belief.
- More likely, it's Jesus' second sign done in Galilee – or in Cana.

Much more significantly, it points to who Jesus is. Jesus can heal a boy who's near death. Moreover, He can do it from a distance. He doesn't have to be present with the boy at the time to heal him. He doesn't have to look at the boy or physically examine or work out what's wrong with him. He doesn't have to touch the boy or anoint him with something or give him medicine. He doesn't have to talk with the boy or be present with him. He doesn't have to check out whether the boy has faith. He does it all from a distance – and in such a way that it takes a while for people to work out a miracle's occurred.

Who can do this sort of thing? Have you ever met anyone like this? Have you heard of anyone else doing this sort of thing? John's already told us his answer back in chapter 1. Jesus is the Word who made all things. To heal from a distance fits easily within the powers of that person.

Of course, if you don't like that answer, you can come up with other suggestions.

- Perhaps Jesus had a good spy network. His secret messengers brought Him up-to-date information on the boy's breaking fever before the father knew about it. But how did they get the information to Jesus at the right time – there were no mobiles or

fax machines.

- Perhaps Jesus took a gamble on the outcome. If He claims the boy will live and He's wrong, is the father likely to come back and make a fuss? He's at his wits' end already. Jesus is a last resort. If Jesus doesn't work, He'll just be added to the list of failed remedies. The father will be too busy grieving to even remember going to Jesus. No one will give it a second thought. It's because the gamble paid off that we remember this story.
- Perhaps Jesus merely made a lucky guess.

You can always find ways to explain away miracles if you really try. They may not make much sense. There may be big gaps still to be worked out. But they give you something to cling onto – something that allows you to avoid having to believe in Jesus. There's a long history of that sort of thing.

Or you can come to John's conclusion: what Jesus did here is a God-like action and shows God-like ability and the reason He could do that is He's God become man. According to John, this isn't the first God-like thing He's done. Nor, if you go on in John's gospel, is it the last. John piles up his evidence. He writes in order that we may believe Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, the eternal Word become flesh.

### Conclusion

How will you honour Jesus? Many of His own people – many Israelites of Jesus' day – didn't get beyond the miracles. They liked the miracles He did. They happily benefitted from them. They didn't deny He could do them. They believed to that extent. But that's as far as it got. They never progressed beyond their fascination for

miracles. They didn't see the reality of who Jesus is. So they honoured Jesus as a miracle-worker. At times, they were even prepared to crown Him as a King and follow His earthly leadership. But they didn't recognise the truth about Jesus. And so they failed to truly honour Him. They didn't truly believe in Him.

But there were others – the Samaritans and some amongst His own people – who saw the significance of who Jesus is. They recognised Him as the Messiah, the Saviour of the world, the Son of God. They drank the living water He offered. They entrusted themselves to Him.

How do you honour Jesus today? At what level do you believe in Him?

- Do you believe He existed – that He actually walked on this earth?
- Do you believe He did miracles – that the things John tells us about truly happened?
- Do you believe enough to come to church each week and learn more about Him and even sing about Him?

That's all well and good, but it still may not be true belief – the belief Jesus looks for.

These days, people claim to believe it's important to reduce our carbon footprint. How can you tell if someone really believes that?

- When they buy books about green energy and put them on their bookshelves?
- When they start talking about lifestyle changes to reduce their carbon footprint?
- When they walk to work instead of driving the car?
- When they're out there campaigning for change and

trying to persuade everyone they meet to adopt the changes they're already doing?

True faith honours Jesus as God the Son. It gets beyond the miracles to the reality the miracles demonstrate. Jesus is the Word become flesh; God become man. And if that's who Jesus truly is, then the only way to properly honour Him isn't to demand more miraculous signs. It isn't by simply knowing more about Him. It's isn't by simply sitting in church week after week. It's by being satisfied with the living water He offers. It's by relying on Him alone for your eternal destiny. It's by submitting to Him as God every moment of every day. It's by campaigning for Him and His kingdom.