

Notes on John 4

© David H. Linden University Presbyterian Church, Las Cruces, NM USA revised October, 2012

Samaria in the OT is the capital city of the northern kingdom Israel. In the NT, Samaria is a region not a city. In 2:23-25 we read of a shallow faith from observing miracles in the place where God had placed His Name and His temple – Jerusalem. The Samaritans rejected God's city as His chosen center of worship. Here in John 4, no miracle occurred among the Samaritans, yet many believed (4:39). This would be a shock for Jews to read. The facts are clear: the highly privileged Jews did not believe, while despised Samaritans did. Nicodemus was an educated Jew of high position. The unnamed Samaritan woman is the opposite. Until the day Jesus met her, she was outside the mainstream of redemptive history, ignorant of true worship (v. 22), believing the popular views of her time and people. Nicodemus knew what the Scriptures said, even though he missed the message. In John 3 Nicodemus is a man of orthodoxy and unbelief! He was highly informed yet ignorant of the gospel. The woman at the well came out of corrupted teaching to immediate belief of the truth. She was morally corrupt, having lived a life far below the morality and reputation of the Pharisee. Both hear of salvation in the imagery of water. Jesus instructed Nicodemus on the cleansing of the new birth. For the Samaritan woman the water is the eternal life which comes as a gift only from Christ, and which satisfies the thirst of an empty heart.

John 4 is the only Scripture that tells us of this woman and of the amazing happening in that Samaritan village. What happened there was a brief moment not typical of Jesus' ministry. (See Matthew 10:5,6 and Luke 9:52,53.) It was a foretaste of salvation that would soon break out of the limits of the Jewish people to the whole world. (In one English version the word *world* appears in the Gospel of John 78 times.) In their new faith in the real Messiah, it was the Samaritans who said and rejoiced that Jesus is **the Savior of the world**. They were an early example of how fitting that title is for Christ. His own did not receive Him (1:11), so let the Jews read of this amazing response in Samaria! Years later, Jews would see large numbers of Gentiles believing in the God of Israel. John 4 shows that it began in Jesus' public ministry. In Acts 1:8, the Lord commanded that the Samaritans be included. (See also Acts 8:4-8.) John 4 shows that others were believed in the Messiah of Israel, whether Jews did or not.

This section is an example of an evangelistic conversation with an individual. It joins the message of new life to repentance from sin. It deals with worship in spirit and truth. It affirms Who Christ is, since John constantly connects Who He is to the needed response of faith. He did not separate faith as accepting the truth of facts from faith as trust. Jesus tells of His own cheerful motivation to do the will of His Father. Further, He linked His obedience to ours, as disciples are called to the same service of bringing in a harvest. Missionary work is presented here in terms of delight and success, because harvest is the happiest time of the year. In Samaria, Jesus showed a surprising example, of what would later become typical: there would be a worldwide bringing in of God's people (Isaiah 49:5,6). He must go through Samaria (v.4) and He must bring in other sheep (10:16).

4:1-4 See the notes on John 3 for comments on vv.1-4 about Jesus not baptizing. The Apostle does not say why it was necessary for Jesus to go through Samaria. It was the shortest route from Judea to Galilee. His Father's will (v.34) was for Him to reap a harvest among the Samaritans too (vv.34-38). He even stayed for two days (v.40), so the reason for the route through Samaria was not to arrive in Galilee as quickly as possible. Probably by going through Samaria Jesus could avoid being in places on the east side of the Jordan where John had been baptizing (1:28). Leaving Judah would avoid the appearance of competition with John the Baptist.

4:5,6 When Jacob was dying he gave a specific piece of land to Joseph (Genesis 48:21,22; Joshua 24:32). That plot was in clear view of Mt. Gerizim, which the woman would refer to in v.20. Joseph's tomb was near the well of Sychar. Jesus sat by that well. As a man He was weary; as God He never needed rest.

The connection with Joseph helps understand the Samaritans. They were the result of the inter-marriage of Assyrians and those Israelites left in the land after the Assyrian defeat of Israel (2 Kings 17:22-41). They claimed descent from Abraham. They accepted Genesis to Deuteronomy as Scripture, but no more. They

rejected worship at the Temple in Jerusalem, though that location was clearly what God has chosen (Psalms 48 & 78:67-72), but Jerusalem is not mentioned in the five books of Moses.

4:6-9 The sixth hour is noon, six hours after sunrise. At that odd time the woman came alone for water. Usually women would come as a group when it was cooler, such as early morning, but not in the full sun of day. (We do not know the weather that day, but it may have been December when it was not very hot.) The entire village knew this woman's reputation, so she might have felt ostracized. The well was deep; Jesus had no equipment to draw water and he asked the Samaritan woman for a drink.

It was not Jewish custom for a man to speak to a Samaritan woman. She was quite surprised. Jesus' request meant that he would receive water from her, probably using a dish she had drunk from. Jews would rather go thirsty than do that. John showed the social situation: "*Jews have no dealings with Samaritans.*" The disciples were in the town to buy food. This was a one on one meeting. With no other Jews around to show their discomfort with her, Jesus could speak to her by Himself. His request of her revealed that He did not despise her. He asked for a drink, and I am quite sure He drank from her utensil in front of her. This was so unusual it prompted her to ask how He could do such a thing.

4:10 The Lord does not explain why He does not share the prejudices of His fellow Jews. We must also remember that all of the narratives in the Gospels and the Acts are given to us in very condensed form. Nicodemus did not stay only enough minutes in his visit in John 3 for the few words recorded there to be said and then there were no more. What is highlighted here is Jesus' response, "*If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, 'Give me a drink,' you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water.*" The Apostle John wrote of what is important.

This is John proclaiming the gospel! He loved to report Jesus using the verb *give* (6:27,32,33,63). Salvation is can be framed as a gift. Jesus claimed to be the giver of this gift. The gospel is a message of grace, and if salvation is to be by grace, then it must be a gift (Romans 4:2-4,16). This is consistent with John's emphasis that he wrote this Gospel so his readers would believe Who Jesus is and trust Him for the life He gives (20:31). Christ is still giving the gift of life.

The Lord moved from one kind of drink, the kind in that deep well, to living water, the kind that sustains spiritual life. Bread also sustains life (John 6), making eating it an excellent metaphor for receiving salvation.

4:11,12 Her questions made sense. She was puzzled by the living water. The best quality water flows from a spring, which they sometimes called "living water". She also noted His words about "*Who it is that is saying to you.*" So she asked if He was greater than Jacob. Later she asked if He might be the Christ (v.29)! This should show us that the Lord may not open the minds of those receiving the message all at once. Her response was not suspicion of deceit. He had no equipment to draw with, and the well really was deep, yet she sensed that He was serious. She too was serious to know what He meant. If He is greater than Jacob, He must be a very great man. Note her sense of history. There was a real Jacob who used that very well. He had left it for Joseph, and Samaritans considered themselves to be descendents of Joseph. She looked on that well as a gift to her people. Jesus offered to give living water. Centuries earlier Jacob had given a lasting gift to them. She wondered if Jesus spoke of a gift exceeding that. He really did.

4:13,14 Patiently the Lord showed He had in mind a different kind of water. In various chapters John records Jesus speaking in these analogies: a different temple (chapter 2), different bread (6), a different resurrection (11), a different kind of hearing (8), a different kind of shepherd (10), the true vine (15), and a king of a different kind of kingdom (19), etc.

Water: Water is so common and so necessary! Note how often in this Gospel the Lord uses water as an analogy. It is in John's baptism (chapter 1) and the change of water to wine (2), thus revealing His glory. It represents the onetime cleansing of a new birth (3), permanent satisfaction from emptiness (4), the Spirit living in those who come to Christ (7), and frequent cleansing from sin (13).

It is not as a reward but as a *gift* that the Lord gives sinners the satisfaction they cannot have in any other way. It is the opposite of temporary pleasure of the kind Moses rejected in Hebrews 11:25. The water from Christ enters the person and becomes so much a part of the one He saves that it overflows. Joy in the Lord is not in short supply. "Living water" was a way people in Jesus' day might refer to a constant flowing spring rather than a pool of still water. (Note Jeremiah 2:13.) A spring describes well the life of a Christian, a life eternally sustained by the Lord. John makes no mention right here of the Holy Spirit, but this will appear in 7:37-39. The new life is the promised benefit, given by Christ and produced by the Spirit.

4:15 Not knowing what He meant, the woman asked for this water. He had asked for something from her, now she asked for something from Him. There is already an element of trust in her words, yet with so little understanding. Christ was gentle with her.

4:16-19 Christ has been speaking only of eternal life. That life is not just unending existence, or even eternal happiness. It is life from God and God is holy. The life being offered clashed with the kind she has been living. She had been filling her life with what could never satisfy. The Lord gives a life that cannot fit in with its opposite, a life of sin. To have the water of genuine eternal life, she must turn from the false source of life. Thus Jesus brought up the subject of her husband.

Her reply is evasive, and yet painfully true. She had no one committed to her; the previous men were not true husbands either. We can only wonder what kinds of promises had been made to her and broken. Certainly her life was one of disappointment. John does not say whether she was the one leaving those men or if they left her. Her choices were contrary to the commandments of God. Her emptiness revealed her need.

The Balanced Message: Jesus offered eternal life; this is gospel. Jesus opposed sin and to this woman He joined to His gospel message the need for her to admit her sin. Thus the gospel for sinners is joined with the law's demands upon sinners. The gospel and the law are not the same. One requires faith and the other repentance. A sinner cannot have saving faith without repenting, but one can never repent without believing in Christ. Here the law and the gospel appear together; both are spoken on the authority of God. The Samaritan did not win eternal life by changing her life, i.e., by repenting. (The Bible never speaks of justification by repentance!) The water Jesus had for her was truly and fully a gift. For her to receive it, she had to turn from her sin. To preach only what God offers for free, omits the standard and the requirements of God that show how much we need His gift. Gospel can only be gospel if it saves from something. To preach only law, leaves out what God has done for us. It leaves the sinner guilty and hopeless. Our faith for justification is never in our law-keeping but only, always, and completely in God's free gift. Justification never brings us to a life of freedom from obedience but to God-directed conduct, which is freedom in obedience to God. Our obedience is never meritorious; it is a result of faith in what Jesus has merited for us.

The Lord showed that He knew her completely (Hebrews 4:13). He had said if she knew what He would give and Who He was, she would ask living water from Him. By showing how He could see into her life, He showed Who He was the same way He did with Nathanael in 1:48-50. The woman does not leave offended; she continues the conversation. He had given reason why she should take him even more seriously.

4:19 If Jesus, a Jew she had never met before, could tell her what He knew about her life, He must be a prophet. Prophets communicate things known only to God and revealed by Him through them. The truthfulness of their message is one test of their genuineness. She knew Jesus spoke the truth about her, so she was convinced that Jesus was a Man from God! Nicodemus had drawn a similar conclusion from Jesus' miracles. In Samaria, the woman was surprised that Jesus did not follow the cultural prejudices of His own people. He was humbly willing to drink water she drew for Him. He was willing to talk with her though she was both a Samaritan and a

woman. Clearly Jesus was different. While she could not judge the truth of His claim to be the giver of eternal life, she could see these other features in the way He treated her.

4:20-24 This woman has a sense of history. She refers to her ancestors again. Samaritans were convinced that Mount Gerizim was the place where people should come to worship God. Gerizim was the mount of blessing in Deuteronomy 11:29 & 27:12. It could be seen from that well.

Since she saw Jesus as a prophet, she set before Him the tradition of her people, and wondered if this prophet of God will tell her who is right. She sensed that He would know. She received a full reply:

- 1) She was ordered to believe! Ethics is not limited to conduct; it would be a rejection of His imperative for her not to believe what He was about to tell her. In our day we may forget that God has the right to order us to believe whatever truth He has revealed.
- 2) It is not from her fathers that this will be settled, but by the Father who has chosen how to be worshipped. He is the Lord Who actively seeks that we should worship Him. By saying this, Jesus showed that the issue of right worship is settled by God, not by the creative imaginations of the worshipper.
- 3) The issue of where to worship the Father is about to become irrelevant. Wherever the Jews worship and wherever Samaritans worship will not matter, because worship will not be centered in a temple of the Jews or the Samaritans. When the new day of new covenant fulfillment arrived with the coming of Christ, the externals of old covenant worship became obsolete (Hebrews 8:13).
- 4) Samaritan worship was ignorant because they rejected all the Scriptures given by the Lord after the time of Moses. They did not recognize David or his sons as kings of God's people. Their Israelite ancestors had set up alternative shrines in Bethel and Dan. This was the great sin of Jeroboam the son of Nebat (1Kings 12:25-33). With that came a false worship of the Lord Himself, even setting up images to worship contrary to His commandments. When the revelation of God is rejected, ignorance is inevitable, and human invention will replace true worship.
- 5) Only the Jews had this more complete revelation from God. God commanded the temple in Jerusalem in the days of Solomon and its rebuilding in the days of Ezra. When rebuilt, God promised a greater glory for that temple than in the time of Solomon (Haggai 2). Such Scriptures were rejected by the Samaritans. So Jesus could say they did not know what they were worshipping.
- 6) With the Jews it was different. They had the words of God (Romans 3:2). The salvation (in Greek it is *the* salvation, not merely salvation) is of the Jews because salvation can only come from God, and to the Jews He had given His gospel message. Through them came the Messiah.
- 7) A new day has already come because Christ has come. The temple on Mt. Gerizim was torn down by Jews in 129 BC. The temple of God in Jerusalem would be rejected by Him and in 70AD it too would be destroyed. God will still be worshiped, but not in a specific locality, and not in a temple of stones. In the coming of Christ, the agenda of God progressed to worldwide proclamation and worldwide worship.
- 8) Though the woman had raised the matter of geography, the Lord moved the subject to the One worshiped and to how God must be worshiped. The Father will be worshiped in spirit and in truth. Geography will be irrelevant.
- 9) In spirit – this probably is not a reference to the Holy Spirit, but spirit in contrast to a physical building. Those who place very high priority on constructing a church building should notice the emphasis the Lord made. Worship happens in our spirits in any place we are. Formerly, the robes of the priest and the furniture of the tabernacle or temple were required. Now all that is required is that we physically gather to worship; plus He has required the use of physical water for baptism plus bread and wine for the Lord's Supper. There is no appointed architecture for church buildings and no word that we ought to have one. I am writing this in Canada, a cold country much of the time, so for practical reasons (not spiritual reasons) we need something more sheltered than brothers in Malawi or Cuba.
- 10) In truth – because error about God leads to a false worship of God. The Samaritan rejection of so much Scripture resulted in confusion. Christians must strive for as accurate a knowledge of God as we can find in God's written Word. Error in doctrine is another term for confusion in the mind.

Summary: Notice what the Lord did! He told her her religion and her people were wrong. Some would say this is not the way to do effective evangelism. In John 4 there was no miracle for her to see; Jesus' evangelism was effective in a simple proclamation of truth and frank rejection of error. Soon she would not be faced with a choice of two places of worship. She was a Samaritan woman face to face with the Messiah of Israel. He called her into worship in spirit of the Father Who is Spirit, and instructed her in truth, the foundation of all worship.

4:25,26 I do not assume that the woman mentioning the proper place of worship was her attempt to change the subject from her mixed up life with many men. She spoke of Christ as a prophet seriously and thus as a man with answers. Now she changes the subject from prophet (of which there were many) to Messiah (and she was expecting only one). Her description of the Messiah was that He would explain and reveal truth ("tell us all things"). That is what Jesus had been doing with her in her personal life and in the matter of worship. Her statement in v.25 could easily be taken as a question as she wondered if Jesus might be that Messiah. This is the very opposite of avoiding Him because her deeds were evil. She was coming to the light (3:19-21).

Jesus told her He is the Messiah. This is most unusual. With the exception of private conversation with His disciples and the question the Sanhedrin pressed on Him just before His crucifixion (Matthew 26:63), there is no record of the Lord telling anyone else that He was the Messiah. (See Matthew 16:13-20.) This open admission to a woman, a Samaritan woman, not one of His disciples, and a person He probably would not see again in His days on earth, is remarkable. Her believing acceptance of all He had said to her, including correction of her people's teaching, was rewarded with more (Hebrews 11:6). The Lord said, "*Take care then how you hear, for to the one who has, more will be given ...*" (Luke 8:18). How He responded to this woman is a wonderful example of this!

4:27-30 We ought to read this very carefully. Jesus' disciples were amazed that Jesus was talking to a woman. It was not just that she was a Samaritan. Scholars report from ancient writings how much men looked down on women; then we see in Scripture, especially in Jesus' friendship with Mary and Martha, that He treated them in fellowship and conversation the same way He did men. (Furthermore, we should not miss that the Lord never appointed a woman as a leader in the church, or as an apostle.) It is not that Jesus simply said something to her, but that He carried on a normal conversation with her.

She went into the town. Leaving her water jar may be a sign that inviting others to come and meet Jesus was her priority. She could walk faster without it, and she intended to return to where Jesus was. To her people she did not announce that Jesus is the Messiah, but she opened the question that He might be. Her invitation "*come and see*" is like 1:39 & 46. In evangelism we are not able to open the eyes of the blind, only the Lord can make men see. But we are given the privilege to invite others to *come and see*. Thus evangelism by nature is simply presenting Christ. Her admission that Jesus could reveal her past would make her fellow Samaritans marvel. No wonder they wanted to see who this man was.

4:31-34 The Lord did it again! He used a common word for a more important meaning. The disciples spoke of ordinary food. They had gone into the town for that food (4:8) and had returned with it, while Jesus had remained behind tired and thirsty. He said He had food to eat. As has happened so often in this Gospel, they wondered if He meant food of the same kind. That was His opportunity to speak of the food of doing the will of God. This cannot mean that doing the will of God is a duty and no more. Since it is given in the analogy of food, it must mean that, just as food satisfies a physical need, doing the work of God is satisfies the soul.

4:34 He spoke of *finishing* the work the Father had given Him. It is only in this Gospel that the words "*It is finished*" appear (19:30). His finishing indicates complete obedience because He fulfilled all the Father assigned. The evangelism at the well in Samaria and Jesus' work on the cross came together as composite work. When we think of food, we rarely think of it as a duty to accomplish; we consider food something to meet a basic need. Man was created to work (Genesis 2:15); to do nothing is to be deprived of satisfaction. (See Proverbs 12:14 & 22:29.) Thus work in itself is a wonderful gift. The Lord Jesus, instead of presenting His work on earth as an

unwelcome burden, spoke of His service as *a gift from His Father*. As food sustains, serving brings joyful satisfaction. The Apostle Paul spoke the same way in Romans 1:4; 12:3 & 6; 15:15,16; & 1 Corinthians 15:10.

4:35-38 The Lord spoke about His work and our work! We have no role in any atoning labor, but we are not limited to being observers only when it comes to delivery of the message. We are participants in it (2 Corinthians 6:1; John 20:21). In His analogy of reaping a harvest He said, “I sent you to reap...” Just as the food He spoke of was the will of the Father, not regular food, the reaping He means would not be in agriculture but the souls of man. This is much like “*I will make you to become fishers of men*” (Mark 1:17).

A number of difficulties are connected to this passage, though there is simple truth being taught:

- What is meant by the “four months”? Did the Lord mean that in about four months from the time He was speaking, it would be harvest time for some crop? Perhaps, but we do not know, yet it affects the guesses as to what time of year it was. (See Appendix 2A.)
- What are the white fields? Were they within physical sight of the disciples as Jesus spoke – perhaps Samaritans in white clothes approaching right then?
- If the reaping was right then in a spiritual harvesting of Samaritans, (undoubtedly He did mean this) then what was the specific labor that preceded this? It would appear that some reference is being made to a spiritual labor among those Samaritans.

We should be humbled when we run into difficulties of interpretation, and everyone does! We should not turn away from a text when this happens but seek in it what we can be sure of. This text teaches much:

1. Jesus had work and He connected His work to ours in v.38 – a great encouragement – and this work is successful and ends in rejoicing for all involved (v.36) – another great encouragement! We should maintain a tight parallel. Jesus’ work was to do the will of the divine Sender, and so is ours.
2. Fields are already white. In other words, this is not a delayed harvest but a current one (note *already* in v.36). This conveys a situation of urgency. This speaks against sloth. It is the opposite of “nothing to do”. The Lord opposes passivity. He had to go through Samaria because the Father had work for Him to do there, work more important than eating lunch.
3. The addition of the element of wages being dispensed gives the impression of work being finished. This is different from the overwhelming sense of burden one may have in thinking we have a job that will never be accomplished. The wages are not later on payday, but were being received. This indicates that work IS being finished even as it continues. In 2 Timothy 4:7 & 17, Paul expressed a sense of closure in his particular assignment from the Lord. Every worker must look to his own task with a sense that “I must finish, not everything that needs to be done, but *this* that I have been given to do!”
4. Possibly the order, “*lift up your eyes*” has in it the sense of being alert and paying attention. Paying attention counters ignorance. There are three imperatives: *look, lift up, and see*.
5. A general principle is given that needs much attention: *One sows and another reaps*. This is more than asserting simple teamwork, though that is present in this principle. The sowing and reaping may be in different generations. Pioneer missionaries rarely see the fruit of their own hard work. How much and how early one sees results in one’s lifetime is God’s sovereign business. The truth to be believed is that sowing and reaping are connected and the eternal results will be there. The complementary workers may never meet each other in this life, but they will rejoice together. Look how emphatically the Lord said this, “*The saying holds true...!*”
6. Very few are pioneers; those who follow after them should remember that success in the later work was directly related to the early work, which may have appeared fruitless. Only God sees the whole, but we must discipline ourselves to remember that we who come later enter into the work of others. This ought to instill humility into those with apparently “successful ministries” and deep respect and patience for those in pioneer labor.

Now, who did the hard work in relation to the Samaritan harvest? I do not know. Was the Lord referring to some previous work of John the Baptist, or was it a reference to His own work at the well while the others were shopping for food? I simply do not know. This we do know: The Lord gave very helpful teaching here that is very clear in general application, even though it is difficult to discern its specific reference in that day.

4:39-43 The Samaritan harvest In no other place in the Gospels do we read of a town that responded like this one, no not in Israel (Luke 7:9). Many Samaritans believed because of a new convert's testimony, and many more also because of Jesus' word (vv.41,42). There is no mention of any miracle performed among them. One can sense the tide shifting to the Gentiles even prior to the events in the Book of Acts.

When Jesus stayed with the Samaritans in that town (v.40), so did His disciples. There were no motels, so this must have been culture shock for them to be sleeping in Samaritan homes on beds slept in the night before by people with whom the Jews have no dealings! (4:9) This was good preparation for Acts 1:8 and 8:4-8. The Samaritans were proclaiming Jesus of Nazareth to be the Savior of the world! At that point, they were ahead of the understanding of the Jewish disciples. They rejoiced that the grace of God was spreading outside the small confines of Israel. Israel's Messiah was now their Savior. After this delightful episode, the Lord returned to His primary mission to the covenant people of Israel. He returned to Galilee (v.43), i.e., to "Galilee of the nations" (Isaiah 9:1). John the disciple was there. Near the end of his life, he would write this narrative for us, and write it not in his mother tongue but in Greek so the Roman world could read of the Savior of the world.

4:43-54 The Healing of an Official's Son What follows is really another chapter, a story of something back on the familiar soil of Galilee. This unit (4:44-54) brings to an end a larger segment of this Gospel that began and ended with miracles in Cana of Galilee. This is not a coincidence; it is a way that the apostle used to convey deliberately that chapters 2-4 should be viewed as a unit. Jesus began and ended back home, with a trip to Jerusalem and a return by way of Samaria in the middle. Cana is very close to Nazareth. Thus the end of John 4 completes a section of this Gospel where there had been a more favorable response to Him than we shall see in Jerusalem in chapter 5. The passion to kill Christ was only predicted in 2:19. It is very evident in 5:18. The contrast is gripping but sad: Samaritans believed in large numbers (4:39-42), while His own people in rejecting Him (1:11), contradicted and insulted Him repeatedly.

In Isaiah 9 God promised the light of the Messiah shining in Galilee. This prophecy, in my opinion, is a pivotal OT prediction, one that provides the background that Galilee is the place where the Lord Jesus did "*most of His mighty works*". (See Matthew 11:20-24.) Nevertheless, John gives more space to various visits to Jerusalem, the center of official opposition to Christ, and the location of God's temple. Galilee was still the region with which Jesus was identified (7:52). He was often called "Jesus of Nazareth". It was also the place of origin of most of His disciples, and the place where more than "five hundred brothers at once" were witnesses of His resurrection (1 Corinthians 15:6). It was also the place where a number knew him from childhood (6:41-43) and could not imagine that He had come down from heaven.

4:43-45 The Lord left a place (Samaria), where every word He spoke was accepted as the word of a prophet of God, to go back to His own people. There in Samaria He was accepted as the Messiah and acclaimed as the Savior of the world. Back among Jews, His welcome was from the curious. They had seen the signs mentioned in 2:23-24, and they had an appetite for more (v.48). The "welcome" was weak; the honor was absent. A prophet has no honor at home (Matthew 13:53-58).

4:46,47 Earlier in Cana an urgent problem (2:3) required immediate attention and this was the situation again. This time an official who was undoubtedly a servant of "King" Herod had a very sick son. We do not know if this man was a Gentile, though it is possible. If so, John 3 and 4 report encounters with a Jew (Nicodemus), a Samaritan, and now a Gentile. John may have been showing a foretaste of the development in the Book of Acts. The official (sometimes called a royal official) pleaded for Jesus to come and heal his son. The stories of miracles in Jerusalem had spread to Galilee. If anyone needed a miracle, this man was facing the death of his child. He had probably walked the distance to Cana, approximately 14 miles. If Jesus would come and heal the child, it was worth the walk.

The same story? In Matthew 8, a Roman military officer in Capernaum asked the Lord to heal his suffering servant. This centurion declined the Lord's offer to come to his home. It was not necessary; the Lord need only speak the word. Jesus commended his faith. In John 4, the man from Capernaum traveled to Cana to ask Jesus to come to his home concerning his son, who was dying. The Lord did not commend his faith, and did not offer to go but healed him from a distance.

Numerous scholars think this is the same story with multiple discrepancies. What this reveals is the low view many academics have for Scripture. If this is the same story, the four Gospels are a hodgepodge of sloppy writing and the texts are unworthy of our trust. If that view is true, there is no successful work of the Holy Spirit overseeing the human writers, guiding their minds (2 Peter 1:20,21), and keeping the facts fresh in their memories as Jesus promised (John 14:25,26). A skeptical view of Scripture is fatal to having confidence in the Bible, and it is all so simple to avoid. The two stories are two stories, not two garbled accounts of the same incident.

4:48 The Lord objected that Galileans were so enamored with signs and wonders. Many in our day are preoccupied with such things to the point of neglect of the gospel message. In God's ways, the thing signified is much greater than the sign that does the signifying! A bride who thinks more of her ring than her husband is a fair analogy of the distortion of miracles the Lord so often encountered. The Jews had a deep cultural and religious defect when it came to signs and wonders, a problem that Paul (a Jew) pointed out in 1 Corinthians 1:18-25. Signs were often given but not always, to authenticate a prophet (7:31; 9:17; Mark 6:14,15; Luke 7:11-17). Once authenticated, the proper issue should be: what does that prophet say from God? By a preoccupation with signs, their good purpose was obscured as the means to it became the chief fascination. Those who study John should meditate carefully on 2:23-25, a text that throws light on 4:48, and some other reports of faith such as 8:30,31. (See Appendix 8A The Popularity of Jesus.) The Lord reacted to the prevailing distortion concerning this aspect of His work, but He reminded opponents (5:36; 10:32) and disciples alike (14:10,11) that miracles made clear to all Who He was. In his closing remarks, the Apostle John connected faith to miracles (20:30,31). Faith in Christ was his desired goal and the basis of his choice for the very few miracles he reported. If attention is held to the sign, the sign has been abused. If attention is turned to Christ, the sign has served its purpose. No Gospel concentrates on the significance of signs to the degree that this one does.

4:49,50 The Lord was talking with a man in anguish. He did not make him wait long for a word of hope. Jesus declined his plea to go to Capernaum to do the healing. Distance is irrelevant to the power of God. The man believed Jesus' promise and announcement. In the centuries since, this man has become an example of a person with genuine faith. I suppose, with his thoughts on his son's plight, that he had no idea how the Apostle John would later report what had happened in his heart. The man believed the word of the Lord. Not all will see miracles, but for all in every age, the required response God insists on is that we believe His word. This man did, and when he headed back to Capernaum, he was not disappointed (see Romans 10:13). Faith is not identified by its intensity or zeal. The key to faith is having the word of God as its object. This official of Herod the Tetrarch had only the word of Christ and with only that word He left, his mission accomplished. Jesus had given him all he needed. It was entirely up to God to make His promise true.

4:51-54 The servants traveled to Cana to find him and when they did, he had good news before arriving at home. They compared times and found that the word of Christ given at 1:00 PM was the time the fever left. In this way Jesus, of not very far away Nazareth, was manifested as the Christ, the Son of God. The man who believed in v.50 is the same man who believed in v.53. There is such a thing as growth in faith. The disciples believed in 2:11 too, but faith can and ought to grow as enlightenment in the word of God increases. This faith was obviously in Christ, and it was spreading. The impact of this sign and the timing of it, registered with everyone in the household. They also believed.

Christ was back in Galilee. This was only His second sign there. Many more would follow. John chose to record just a few moments in the ministry of Jesus. The next chapter is some time later, back in Jerusalem again.