

From the Pulpit of the Japanese Baptist Church of North Texas
February 26, 2017

The Second Sign

John 4:46-54

4:46 So he came again to Cana in Galilee, where he had made the water wine. And at Capernaum there was an official whose son was ill.

4:47 When this man heard that Jesus had come from Judea to Galilee, he went to him and asked him to come down and heal his son, for he was at the point of death.

4:48 So Jesus said to him, "Unless you see signs and wonders you will not believe."

4:49 The official said to him, "Sir, come down before my child dies."

4:50 Jesus said to him, "Go; your son will live." The man believed the word that Jesus spoke to him and went on his way.

4:51 As he was going down, his servants met him and told him that his son was recovering.

4:52 So he asked them the hour when he began to get better, and they said to him, "Yesterday at the seventh hour the fever left him."

4:53 The father knew that was the hour when Jesus had said to him, "Your son will live." And he himself believed, and all his household.

4:54 This was now the second sign that Jesus did when he had come from Judea to Galilee.

1. Request of an Official

There was an official in a town of Capernaum in Galilee. He probably served feudal lord Herod. Since he had many servants in his house, he must be rich.

The most people don't believe in God, don't rely on Him, and

don't seek for God, while they live a peaceful life and are fulfilled with everything. However, when they suffer, they start to look at and seek for God. In most cases, people come to God through sufferings and receive big blessings, which are greater than the sufferings. Then, Psalm 119:71 says, "It is good for me that I was afflicted, that I might learn your statutes."

However, when we are struggling in the middle of our sufferings, we can't say "This is good to me". Especially like this official whose son was almost dead. The death of your parent is sad; however, seeing your child's death is worse. Jacob, father of Israel, had been grieving for long when he had heard the death of Joseph, his beloved son. Sons and daughters of Jacob tried to comfort him; however, Jacob said, "No, I shall go down to Sheol to my son, mourning." (Genesis 37:35) And he wept for his son.

Jeremiah 31:15, which is quoted by the New Testament, says, "Thus says the LORD: A voice is heard in Ramah, lamentation and bitter weeping. Rachel is weeping for her children; she refuses to be comforted for her children, because they are no more." Seeing the death of the children is terrible. The sorrow may have people reject any comforts.

In today's verse, the official was almost losing his son so that he was grieving terribly. If his son was his only one, it meant that he was going to lose his inheritor. He might not be able to pass down his social status and property. The death of his son meant that he was losing his future, too. This official felt despair of both losing his son and his future. Therefore, this official came to Jesus for relief.

He could send his servants but he came to Jesus by himself, and it

showed his love as a father. The Scripture called this person “official” at the beginning; however, in verse 53, he was called “father”. The love of father compelled him to Jesus.

2. Answer of Jesus

The father appealed to Jesus found at Cana, saying, “Come down and heal my son, for he is at the point of death.” Jesus answered, however, “Unless you see signs and wonders you will not believe.” Jesus said to the father like this for the people surrounding Him, since people at Galilee pestered Jesus to make some wonders when He turned back from Judah. If Jesus came down to Capernaum with this father, people from Galilee followed them and even thrust in the house to look at how Jesus heals the son. Jesus wanted the father, and the people, to have faith in God and Jesus who does wonders, and taught that the sign and wonders shouldn’t be the reasons to believe.

“Unless you see signs and wonders you will not believe.” The father in this story didn’t falter, after Jesus said to him like this. Moreover, he kept appealing, “Sir, come down before my child dies.” We often give up if God doesn’t answer right after our prayer; though He still hears. God sometimes tries to make our prayer more dedicated, persevering, and purer through listening. Even though it looks like “refuse” from God, He never does. We have to learn to pray and appeal dedicatedly, to wait for His time and His answer in faith.

Jesus gave greater answer to this father, than just following him and healing his son. He didn’t need to take hours to come down, and healed the son having illness with high heat and going at the point of death, right at the time He said, “Go; your son will live.”

“Your son will live.” This is a faithful translation from the original language, and it suggests the truth that God’s words make us alive. Jesus said in Matthew 4:4, “Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.” This verse teaches us that God literally gives lives to every single creature in this world, and it doesn’t cast anchor at supporting our heart to be delight. Genesis 1:3 shows that God created this world through this word, “Let there be light.” God’s words created this world; and it make all animals and plants of the world alive.

There is a vision in Ezekiel 37:4-6. In the vision, God said prophet Ezekiel, “Prophesy to these bones and say to them, ‘Dry bones, hear the word of the Lord!’” Then the Word of God made flesh come upon bones and cover them with skin. Then they came to life. When we die, our body eventually becomes bones. That’s the process all of us know. But the Word of God can reverse the process. This vision describes how God’s words make lives. The hymn #134 sings, “Wonderful words of life” Yes the Word of God is the life giving word. It takes hours to reach Capernaum from Cana by walk, between over 15 miles. However, Jesus’ words worked and gave life to this son beyond distance.

3. Faith of the Father

The father believed in the words of Jesus. Jesus told those who were around him, “Unless you see signs and wonders you will not believe.” (verse 48). People were only interested in seeing miracles, but the father believed in Jesus without seeing signs. He believed in the words of Jesus and went back toward his home. At the middle of the way

home, he saw his servants coming to him. He might think they brought a bad news, his son's death. But, it was a good news. His son was recovered. The father asked the servant about the time of recovery of his son. They said, "It was yesterday one o'clock in the afternoon." The new day started after sunset in the area, then the servants said, "yesterday." But it was the same day according our system. "One o'clock in the afternoon." It was just the time that Jesus said the father, "Your son will live!" The father didn't seek signs, but he saw an evidence the the words cured his son. When we believe the Word of God, we will actually see it is trustworthy.

Verse 53 says, "And he himself believed, and all his household." Not only the father, but also the mother, the son, and the servants; all his household believed in Jesus. How wonderful it is that this account concluded by the sentence that he himself believed, and all his household," not by a sentence like "the son was cured." This miracle was the second miracle at the town of Cana, and the story of the first miracle also ended by the sentence, "And his disciples believed in him."(John2:11)

It is very special experience that some one is healed by miracle. However, the healing is not eternal, even it is given by miracle. We may get another illness. Even we are healthy, our life will end someday. The visible is not eternal. It never remains forever. But, faith will remain forever. Faith means to accept that the Word of God is true. In kanji character, we first write "man" then "word" next to "man" for "faith" or "to believe". Faith is to trust the Word of God. Without listening to the Word of God, trusting in it, and put it into practice, we can not live only by seeing or experiencing miracles.

A person said, “God leads us to death for giving us life.” This is very hard statement to hear, but it is true. In our life we experience that things are getting worse, and despair and darkness are coming, if we don’t face to actual death. Sometime we have to walk in “the valley of death” as Psalm 23 mentioned. But, those who believe in God will be led from despair to hope, darkness to light, and death to life, by the Word of God. Abraham and Sara got Issac, the promised child after they reached the age could not have a baby. They died physically once, then they lived again. It happened when Abraham offered Issac as a sacrifice. Issac died once, then lived again. The father died once when his son almost died. He lived again when his son was healed.

Sufferings make us humble. They teach us it was wrong that we can live by our own power without trusting God. We need to face honestly to our own, and to our sins that we haven’t believe in the true and faithful God. We only can grow our faith trough such repentance. Dying to sins and old self, we live a life empowered by God.

Our baptism means the death of our old self and the new life in Christ. A person, who was hesitating to be baptized for a long time, told me, “I want to have new life, but I am afraid of dying old life.” If you have the same thought, please remember that God allowed His Son to die, but He gave Him life again. Lord Jesus died on the cross, and was resurrected to the new life. This Lord is with us. We die with Him, and we live with Him. When we take this step, we will see the words of the Lord, “You will live.” work in us.

(Prayer)

Dear Father God, we are easily influenced by visible things. Teach us to listen to the Word, and believe in the Word. Lead us to the experiences of greater miracles that the Word give us life. We pray this in the name of Lord Jesus.