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A Most Loving Response

“So Jesus came again to Cana of Galilee where He had made the water wine. And there was a certain nobleman whose son was sick at Capernaum. When he heard that Jesus had come out of Judea into Galilee, he went to Him and implored Him to come down and heal his son, for he was at the point of death.” Jn. 4:46-47

“When he heard....”

Whenever certain people heard that Jesus was coming to town or was simply near by, they almost always responded in some discernable way. For example, two blind men were sitting by the road. When they heard Jesus was coming by, they cried out, *“Have mercy on us, O Lord, Son of David.”* (Matt. 20:29) When the blind beggar, Bartimaeus heard that Jesus was coming, he too responded in much the same manner: *“Jesus Son of David, have mercy on me!”* (Mk. 10:47) In the case of Zacchaeus however, when he learned that Jesus was about to pass by, he climbed a tree just to get a better glimpse of Him. So, in all these examples, their response brought them a tremendous blessing.

This Nobleman, which we began reading about earlier, like these others, had heard Jesus was simply in the vicinity of his home. And yet he made a days’ journey from his home in Capernaum all the way to where Jesus was in Cana, some sixteen arduous miles away. That’s quite an impressive response don’t you think?

A response like that is nothing less than the “substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.” It’s what the Bible calls “Faith.” (Heb. 11:1) Friend, let us pray that our faith becomes like his; a faith that ignores the obstacles, even the imagined ones, and instead makes the difficult responses that are sure to bring us eternal blessing!

Then Jesus said to him, “Unless you people see signs and wonders, you will by no means believe.” The nobleman said to Him, “Sir, come down before my child dies!” (Jn. 4:48-49)

“Unless you people see signs...”

It’s interesting that the KJV does not include the word “people” in this verse. However, the NKJV does and because it is printed in italics, it indicates the word was added for clarity. Verse forty-eight begins thus: *“Then Jesus said to him,”* which would seem that Jesus is speaking to the Nobleman and not so much to the “people.”



We can't be certain though, if Jesus was speaking exclusively to the Nobleman or for the benefit of others who were there. It could be that it was just the two of them alone. Either way, we are left wondering why Jesus would say, "*unless you people, (i.e. you aristocratic type or maybe you common folk or even you, Thomas) unless you see signs...you will by no means believe,*" when it seems most apparent to the reader that the Nobleman already believed.

After all, who would travel sixteen miles in that time to implore someone he perhaps had never met, to then be told "go your way, your son lives" and to then, without question or pause, turn around, start home, all the while believing his son is well, and yet have no faith? I for one, believe the Nobleman had faith (v.50) and I also believe that Jesus directed His words to everyone under the sound of His voice, even us today. (Lk. 21:33; Jn. 12:47-48)

Notice, if you will, a few verses earlier in this chapter (Jn.4), Jesus encountered a group of Samaritans who, despite the testimony of the woman at the well and despite the fact He performed no miracles, **still believed in Him.**

"Then they said to the woman, 'Now we believe, not because of what you said, for we ourselves have heard Him and we know that this is indeed the Christ, the Savior of the world.'" (Jn 4:42)

The previous verse states: "*And many more believed because of His own word.*" (v. 41). Therefore these words spoken by Jesus to the Nobleman and others, "*unless you see signs...*" (v.48) were, by contrast, meant as a rebuke perhaps to their little faith.

Clearly, not everyone had to see signs and wonders to believe. On the other hand, Jesus stated specifically that His miracles would be the necessary agent for faith, especially so among the Jews. For example, just before He raised Lazarus from the dead He prayed, "*Father I thank You that You have heard Me. And I know that You always hear Me, but because of the people who are standing by I said this, that they may believe that You sent Me.*" (Jn. 11:41-42)

But it wouldn't be long till the signs and wonders of both Jesus and His Apostles would cease and that faith in Christ would then be born out of men hearing the Word of God. Therefore Jesus, follow-

ing His resurrection, admonished Thomas, "*...because you have seen Me you have believed. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.*" (Jn. 20:29) For two-thousand years now, saving faith has emanated from the inspired Word of God. "*So then faith cometh by hearing and hearing by the Word of God.*" (Rom. 10:17)

But it wouldn't be long till the signs and wonders of both Jesus and His Apostles would cease and that faith in Christ would then be born out of men hearing the Word of God.

Jesus said to him, "Go your way; your son lives." So the man believed the word that Jesus spoke to him and he went his way. (Jn. 4:48-50)

"Go Your Way, Your Son Lives!"

We may never know how this Nobleman felt at the moment Jesus spoke these life-altering words. And it doesn't matter. It's safe to say, however, that as he was returning home and his servants met him with the news that, "*Your son lives,*" he felt a sense of relief, perhaps even a joy unspeakable. We can only imagine.

We can perhaps imagine a reunion not unlike the prodigal who was spotted at a great distance by his anxious father, who then ran to embrace the son who once was lost but now was found. Now, an anxious Nobleman runs home to sweep up in his arms the child that Jesus saved and share with the waiting family the compassionate words of our Lord. And if that wasn't enough, his entire family responds in faith in Jesus Christ.

What a joy it is when our own children respond in faith to Jesus Christ, when they take that step forward to confess their faith, to repent of their sins and to be buried in baptism. Truly we can be assured that because of that child's loving response, that child lives.

Danny Johnson

West Monroe, LA

Do You Want to Be Well?

“After this there was a feast of the Jews, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. Now there is in Jerusalem by the Sheep Gate a pool, which is called in Hebrew, Bethesda, having five porches. In these lay a great multitude of sick people, blind, lame, paralyzed, waiting for the moving of the water. For an angel went down at a certain time into the pool and stirred up the water; then whoever stepped in first, after the stirring of the water, was made well of whatever disease he had. Now a certain man was there who had an infirmity thirty-eight years. When Jesus saw him lying there, and knew that he already had been in that condition a long time, He said to him, ‘Do you want to be made well?’ The sick man answered Him, ‘Sir, I have no man to put me into the pool when the water is stirred up; but while I am coming, another steps down before me.’ Jesus said to him, ‘Rise, take up your bed and walk.’ And immediately the man was made well, took up his bed, and walked. And that day was the Sabbath.” John 5:1-9

The Gospel of John records some of the first signs that Jesus began to work in Cana of Galilee and Jerusalem. His first sign is at the wedding in Cana where Jesus turns the water into wine. In John 5:1 John writes, “After this there was a feast of the Jews, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem.” The “after this” refers to the second sign Jesus performed in healing the Nobleman’s son.

There was healing taking place but not for everyone.

We are also told that “there was a feast of the Jews and Jesus went up to Jerusalem.” Burton Coffman comments on this feast: “So much depends upon the meaning of ‘a feast of the Jews’ in this verse that controversy has raged over it for centuries, the importance of it lying in this, that if the Passover is meant, then the ministry of Christ would be calculated at about three and one-half years; but if some lesser feast was meant then his ministry could be calculated as much shorter.” Coffman believes that the Passover is meant because many ancient manuscripts translate this “the feast of the Jews,” and if that is the meaning then it is most certainly a Pass-

over.

Now the third sign that John records is the healing of the paralytic man. He had been in this condition for thirty-eight years. That is a long time to suffer with an infirmity. This man was at the pool of Bethesda. The word “Bethesda” means “House of Mercy.” There was healing taking place there but not for everyone. Those who managed to enter the pool first after the stirring of the water would be healed, but not the second or third. We are told there was a great multitude of people at the pool. All of them were expectant and hoping for mercy.

There were five porches at the pool. This pool was a popular health resort similar to such places all over the world, from Hot Springs, Arkansas, and Mineral Wells, Texas, to Bath in Somerset, England. The healing powers of mineral water are famous all over the world. However, there was something more than mineral water stirring in this pool. If it had just been the healing power of mineral water, why did it now work for everyone instead of just the first one to enter the pool?

We wonder what the scene may have looked like when the water was stirred. Was there a battle among the invalids as they strove to be the first into the water? Why was only the first one into the water healed? Why not all of them? Was the stirring of the water true or was it just a myth or legend?

There was a multitude at the pool, but Jesus approaches this particular invalid. Jesus’ question for the man is, “Do you want to be made well?” What a question to ask! And yet, do we really want the prescription that Jesus gives us for our wellbeing? There are multitudes today who are spiritually sick, and many may not even know that they are sick. If Jesus were to ask us if we wanted to be made well, what answer would we give? Would we give a reason or an excuse?

This man had this infirmity for thirty-eight years. How long had he been coming to the pool Bethesda? Jesus knew his condition even before he answered the question. Jesus knows our condition and he is able to heal.

Do you want to be healed? Someone says, “This is a foolish question.” However, it is true with many

ailments that people must want to be well; they must want to make a change. In counseling we often hear that we can't help someone unless they want to be helped. There is a recognition here of the fact that certain people who have been invalids for a long time are satisfied just to rely on the services of others rather than assume any responsibility themselves. Jesus cannot help us unless we cooperate with him.

The man's response to the question was, "I have no man to put me in the pool when the water is stirred." Was this an excuse or a reason? In this case it is very likely a reason. The competition was fierce, and he simply was not quick enough. It wasn't that he didn't want to be the first in the pool, he just couldn't make it happen. The paralytic does not seem to be offended by Jesus' question; he gives a plain and simple explanation.

We certainly see obedience demonstrated when the man does exactly what Jesus said

What Jesus says next is amazing. He tells the man to "rise, take up your bed and walk." While there is no mention of faith in the passage, we certainly see obedience demonstrated when the man does exactly what Jesus said to do. Someone has suggested what if the man responded, "Look, Lord, I do feel a lot better; and, later on, if I still feel this way, I'll try to do what you said." Who can doubt that such a response would have forfeited his blessing?

There is an implication in Jesus' question to the man that he fully believed he could be healed if he could just get to the water before the others. He didn't doubt he could be healed; he just needed help getting to the water. This man may have waited another thirty-eight years for that kind of help and still never made a breakthrough. His encounter with Jesus would be life changing. He needed a word from the Great Physician, and when it came, he responded immediately.

Why would Jesus tell an invalid of thirty-eight years to "rise, take up your bed and walk?" The Lord must have had some expectation that his command would meet with faith in the man. It is possible that among all the multitude waiting for the stirring of the water that day this man was the only one who had faith to do what Jesus commanded.

We also wonder why an invalid like this man would even attempt to rise, let alone walk. Something in this exchange with Jesus must have given him a glimmer of hope. When the question "do you want to be made well" was asked, this man must have sensed that he was in the presence of a man who had the power to make him well. This man could heal without the aid of angels stirring the water. Jesus could simply speak the words and the words would result in the very actions they described. His words are powerful and true.

All of us have our spiritual infirmities and we think that we want to be well. But do we truly want to be made well? Are we willing to hear the words of Jesus and act on them? Are we ready to take responsibility? Or do we want to continue for a while longer in our condition and ask Jesus to come back later?

Here is where the real difficulty lies. We hear the promises of Jesus, and our hearts run out to claim them, and we believe we mean what we say. The promise that we are to be partakers of the divine nature (2Pet. 1:4) excites us and we want to embrace these changes. However, the price for the cure for our brokenness is often more than we want to pay. There is this promise for escape from the corruption that is in the world through lust, but we are not sure if we want to escape from that life, at least not today. So, we console ourselves with the idea that we will do it tomorrow, just not today. When the Lord says, "Rise, take up your bed and walk," we respond that we will do that first thing in the morning. As someone has stated, "Men often mistake their imagination for their heart; and they believe they are converted as soon as they think of being converted." It could be true that we do not really want what we think that we want.

We are told that this man was made well immediately, and he took up his bed and walked. We pray that this would be the case for everyone. Every soul has the power to do what Jesus commands. The question is do we have the will to do what he commands? Do we really want to be made well?

L Scott Gage

Fayetteville, AR

Hagan's Tunnel

Having grown up in the mountains of southeastern Kentucky, I've always been attracted to mountains. As a boy I spent much of my leisure time running through the woods, scampering up and down hillsides with seemingly little effort. The effort required is now much greater (there's more of me!), but I still like hiking around on the mountains. Nothing is more refreshing to my soul than vistas enjoyed from high altitudes.

In addition to my enjoyment of being on the mountains, I also have enjoyed times inside the mountains. Not far from my home area were the Water Caves. My brothers, cousins and I would occasionally grab carbide lamps, flashlights and miners' lights and crawl into this natural formation that extends miles into the earth. It frankly frightens me now to think of what could have happened to us, but at the time we were fascinated by the adventure.

It's been several years since my last spelunking expedition. But recently I went off in search of another kind of cavern, one made by people.

I had only recently learned of the tunnel in the southwestern end of Harlan County. Constructed years ago, it serves as a main conduit for coal-hauling trains. On one side of the mountain is Sampson, KY; on the other is Hagan, in Lee County, Virginia. After hiking a short distance, I stood before the opening. The smell of coal was strong,

I can't help but see an analogy between the tunnel and my life.

from pieces that had fallen from swift-moving trains. A rush of cold air came through the opening. The light at the end of the tunnel was small, telling me that this tunnel was longer than any I had seen before. (Hagan's Tunnel is just over a mile in length.)

There was something mystical about this sight. Perhaps it was the fact that it served as a passage from one place to another. Maybe it was the darkness of the interior, with only a faint window of light at the end. I pondered the value of the man-made cavern, thinking of how it had made possible

the movement of millions of tons of coal through the years. I also imagined what it must be like to ride through the darkness toward an ever-increasing glow of light ahead.

Not far from Hagan's Tunnel is Cumberland Gap. Just over two hundred years ago, Daniel Boone made this route famous as a passageway to the West. It was a difficult journey as wagon trains carefully made their way across the mountains. Travelers can now make the journey much more easily, thanks to a tunnel opened in 1996 that connects Tennessee with Kentucky. At just under a mile in length, this tunnel is shorter than Hagan's.

But Hagan's Tunnel is not nearly the world's longest. Perhaps you've heard of the "Chunnel", a tunnel that was opened in 1994. The Chunnel doesn't cut through mountains, but dives low into the earth beneath the English Channel. For 31 miles, trains race at speeds up to 100 miles per hour, carrying passengers between England and France. A trip that once took several hours now takes only 20 minutes. In its first five years, more than 28 million travelers took advantage of the improved route.

A bridge performs a similar service as a tunnel: both transport the traveler from one point to another in a more direct way than was previously possible. But there's again that mysterious element that tunnels possess. Instead of arching over gaps or chasms in plain view of all, a tunnel takes a dark route. Even while passing through, the voyager may not be able to see his surroundings. He only knows where he hopes to go, and trusts others to get him there.

I can't help but see an analogy between the tunnel and my life. Both are means of transport, and both are often enveloped in darkness. But at the end of each is a light, drawing me toward my destination.

Comparing our lives to objects and events around us is not uncommon. Consider, for example, Job's reflection on his life: "My days are swifter than a weaver's shuttle, and are spent without hope. Oh, remember that my life is a breath! ..." (Job 7:6,7). In these two different images, Job made his point clearly: Our lives go by so quickly!

Later in Job's contemplations, it seems like he might be thinking of a tunnel: "He has fenced up my way, so that I cannot pass; and He has set darkness in my paths" (Job 19:8). At that point in his life, Job felt trapped in darkness, much as one might feel who is traveling through a tunnel. He knew the journey would end at some point, but he knew not when or where. All he could do was to continue trudging along.

But the Bible has good news for travelers like Job. We are told in God's word that we are not alone, nor do we have to travel in darkness. God made the tunnel we call life, and He can guide us safely through.

David knew about God's sure guidance through the dark times of life. He once wrote, "For You will light my lamp; the Lord my God will enlighten my darkness" (Psalm 18:28). In Psalm 27:1 he wrote, "The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The Lord is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?" God is often described as one who gives light. Without Him we stumble and grope. With Him we see the way before us clearly.

The people of Israel well understood this quality of God. During the years of their wilderness wanderings, God provided them with continual guidance. During daylight hours they saw the pillar of smoke; after dark it was a pillar of fire. God's presence did not at any point of the journey depart from His people (Exodus 13:21,22).

But how does God shine His light on our journey through the tunnel of life? We see no pillars of smoke or fire before us. Does God really guide us as He guided His people in the past?

Once more we turn to David: "Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path" (Psalm 119:105). Through His revealed word, the Bible, God guides us in the way we should go. That is as true today as it has ever been.

Peter also compared God's word to a light: "And so we have the prophetic word confirmed, which you do well to heed as a light that shines in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts" (2 Peter 1:19). The book we hold in our hand is more than ancient literature; it is God's way of leading us through the dark passages of our lives.

As I stood before Hagan's tunnel, I wanted to go inside. But without a light, I knew it wouldn't be wise. I would trip over obstacles I could not see. There might be other unseen dangers. Before daring to walk through the tunnel, I would need a reliable source of illumination.

My life is a tunnel, and at times a very dark one. I can see light at the other end, but will I be able to make it that far without falling? With God's help and His light, I can. He'll lead me safely all the way!

Timothy Hall
Hem-Lines Oct. 18, 2007

*Your word is a lamp to my feet
And a light to my path.
I have sworn and confirmed
That I will keep Your righteous judgments.
I am afflicted very much;
Revive me, O LORD, according to Your word.
Accept, I pray, the freewill offerings of my
mouth, O Lord,
And teach me Your judgments.
My life is continually in my hand,
Yet I do not forget Your law.
The wicked have laid a snare for me,
Yet I have not strayed from Your precepts.
Your testimonies I have taken as a heritage
forever,
For they are the rejoicing of my heart.
I have inclined my heart to perform Your statutes
Forever, to the very end.*

Psalm 119:105-112



Volume 43 - Number 2 - Mar/Apr 2024

BC is published every other month. Send all inquiries, address changes and subscriptions to the editor: L Scott Gage, PO Box 3425, Fayetteville, AR 72702-3425 Voice 479-521-6809

Email: Lsgage129@cs.com

www.basicchristianity.net