

## STUDY GUIDE

*(This week will look in depth at one miracle of Jesus)*

**Monday, June 15 – Read John 4:46-49** Consider that immeasurably brief moment just before the beginning when there was nothing and then there was something. Is it really possible for something—energy or matter—to come out of nothing without the causal action of a nonmaterial entity? People who trust Scripture’s testimony believe God’s Word sheds light on that shadowed moment just as the universe began. Whatever you may believe about the timing of creation events, Holy Scripture declares one paramount fact: the only true God created everything by the power of His word. Keep this in mind as we focus on the miracle of Jesus healing the royal official’s dying son. But first, to see this text with fresh eyes, you must paradoxically and intentionally put yourself in the dark. Sometimes in order to see what you’ve never seen before, you have to forget whatever you’ve heard before. Think of it this way. When you watch a movie with a surprise ending the second time, you can no longer be surprised. You probably won’t watch with rapt attention as you did the first time. You might even go get a snack while the movie still plays, because you know you won’t miss anything. In the same way, we tend to read familiar Scripture passages with less than rapt attention. So, the secret to approaching this and many other familiar passages is to pretend you’ve never read it before and you don’t know how it turns out. That’s hard to do, but as you will see in this case, everything hangs on not knowing what you already know. This miracle began with a royal official whose son was dying in Capernaum, a town about eighteen miles from where Jesus was staying in Cana. In a last-ditch attempt to save his son’s life, the royal official sought out Jesus to ask Him to go back with him and heal his son. That’s as far as we should go now or else we will start dragging in ideas we need to forget. You’ll see what I mean as we dig deeper over the next few days.

**Tuesday, June 16 – Read John 4:50-51** Our first task is to reconstruct this miracle’s timeline. So let’s hunt for time references in the story. Here’s what we find: “When he [the royal official] inquired as to the time when his son got better, they said to him, ‘Yesterday, at one in the afternoon’” (John 4:52). Notice there are two key reference points. The word yesterday tells us the story spans two days. The first day—let’s call it Monday—is the day the royal official found Jesus and asked Him to come heal his son. That happened at what Jews of that day would have called the “seventh hour,” which is equivalent to our 1:00 p.m. At that moment, Jesus said to the man, “Go...your son will live” (v. 50). Then sometime on the second day (Tuesday) “while he was still on the way, his servants met him with the news that his boy was living” (v. 51). Simple enough. However, if we make a couple reasonable assumptions consistent with the facts of the story, you’ll be surprised at what we discover. We need to ask the following two questions: When did the man leave home to go find Jesus? And when did the man head back home after meeting with Jesus? The first question is the most important to our fresh insight. When did the man leave home? Let’s assume he felt a sense of urgency and left home early in the morning on Monday, the same day he found Jesus. Why? This is the second of only seven miracles John reported, and he elevated love throughout his gospel. So maybe John was moved by this desperate love for a son, a man not wanting to leave his child’s bedside any longer than necessary. Many of us played the waiting game as a member of our family is dying. They weren’t conscious, they didn’t make any movement to let us know they knew we were there. But there was no way we would leave their bedside. What if they did rouse and we weren’t there for them? Now transport that fact into this story, along with the more compelling reality that the key persons are a young boy and a father who would do anything to save his son. For the father, the idea of leaving his son’s side, of not being there in case he roused for a few minutes, would have been unthinkable. Unless ... there was a slight possibility ... a last hope? Put yourself in the father’s place. He heard that Jesus—who many people assumed was some kind of prophet with healing powers—was in Cana. You’re going to leave your suffering son, and make the trip as quickly as you can to try to bring help. But you would do everything in your power to return as quickly as you could. That’s what the father must have had in mind. So when did he leave for Cana to find Jesus? It’s reasonable to assume he did not leave until Monday morning. The facts located in both the text and in the geography of the area support that theory. Capernaum, where the boy lay dying, was eighteen miles from Cana, where Jesus was. Walking at a steady pace, the father could be in Cana in about six hours. If we assume he left Monday morning, a six-hour trip would put him in Cana—you guessed it—right around the “seventh hour” (adding a little time for him to locate Jesus once he got into town). Fits the text, doesn’t it?

**Wednesday, June 17 – Read John 4:47-51** Now let’s add to the timeline, and you’ll see something puzzling. The man and Jesus had a brief conversation that couldn’t have taken more than two or three minutes. Here’s what Scripture records:

"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 signs and wonders,' Jesus told him, 'you will never believe.' The royal official said, 'Sir, come down before my child dies.' 'Go,' Jesus replied, 'your son will live'" (John 4:47-50). After that brief exchange it was probably about 1:05 p.m. What did the man do next? Remarkably, the text says, "The man took Jesus at his word and departed" (v. 50). At this point the text rushes us right along, and we tend not to pause and put two and two together. The next verse says, "While he was still on the way ..." (v. 51). If we read too quickly, we picture the man leaving Jesus and immediately heading home. But that's not what he did. How do we know? Because he didn't meet his servants on the road until the next day. This is incredible! He did not rush right home. He could have made it. It was only 1:05. Yes, he had already walked eighteen miles that day, and another eighteen would have been a challenge. But again, who cared? His son was dying! If we were in that situation we would glance at our phone, calculate when we could get home, realize we could be there before nightfall, and take into consideration that it would be an easier and quicker trip being a downward slope from Cana to Capernaum, and would have hightailed it. Within a mile of home, we would have quickened my pace even more, probably breaking out into a sprint when we neared our street and saw our house in the distance. Then we would have burst through the front door, breathlessly shouting, "Is he alive? Is he alive?" Yet a loving father who went to desperate lengths to seek Jesus' help on the chance He would drop everything and come heal his boy didn't head home on Monday. He waited around Cana until Tuesday morning with no email or phone to check on his son. His hope rested in Jesus' word, and he took it to heart. That's remarkable faith! I'd love to have that kind of confidence in Jesus' reassuring words. But hold your horses; you know too much. It's not the kind of faith we think it is. Let's move on.

**Thursday, June 18 – Read John 4:51-53** There's one more crucial observation. Notice the father's reaction when he met the servants on his way home. John, our gospel writer, was very clear that the man did not actually "believe" in Jesus until after receiving word about his son's recovery. Wait a minute! If he didn't even believe until then, what was going on when he "took Jesus at his word and departed"? Now is the time to forget what we already know about what happened. We know (because we've seen the movie) that Jesus healed the boy long-distance. The royal official did not know that. Jesus did not say, "You may go; I will heal your son long-distance." All Jesus said was, "Your son will live". How would the royal official have understood what Jesus meant? In the same way you understand a doctor who comes into the waiting room after performing critical surgery on your loved one. He walks in, you put down your magazine and lean in for his report, and he says, "You can all rest easy. The surgery went fine. Your dad is doing well. You can see him in a couple of hours." In that moment, you are not hearing him claim to have performed a miracle. You're hearing a report from someone who you believe has the necessary experience and knowledge to give you accurate and authoritative information. He knows what he's talking about. That's what puts you at ease. You take his word and depart for some supper in the hospital cafeteria.

**Friday, June 19 – Read Hebrews 1:2-3; John 4:46-54; Isaiah 55:10-11; 1 Peter 1:23; Ephesians 5:25-26; John 15:7-8; Ephesians 6:17** Now that we have created the timeline and discovered what it reveals, let's back up from the story and collect ourselves. This miracle unveils something we moderns hardly appreciate. The greatest demonstration of God's deity is His ability to create everything by the power of His word. That's who He is. That's what He does. His words are not just informative; they are performative. Divine words spoken long-distance from over eighteen miles away had caused the terminally sick boy to recover. We must adopt a higher view of the Word of God than we often do. We need to approach the Bible believing it is more than a repository of accurate and authoritative information. It is that, of course. But too often we stop there. We milk its instruction, principles, precepts, and eternally true information for all they're worth and try to live according to them. That's right and good. But God's Word is more than that. God's words perform His will. It has always been that way, and so it shall remain. God's words cause everything that counts. God's words created everything (Gen. 1) and sustain everything (Heb. 1:2-3). He is not a grand watchmaker, as the deists claim, who created the material universe that now functions by fixed laws independent of His faithful involvement. If He ever was to stop speaking His will for this universe to exist, at that very moment everything would stop existing. God's words always accomplish His purposes (Isa. 55:10-11). His words create faith (Rom. 10:17) and cause spiritual rebirth (1 Pet. 1:23). They discern and expose our inner thoughts (Heb. 4:12). They cleanse (Eph. 5:25-26) and sanctify (John 17:17). His words can be in us so we bear much fruit (John 15:7-8). And thankfully, His words defeat the Enemy of our souls (Eph. 6:17). God spoke. He still speaks, and good things happen.

*Adapted from: <https://www.dccpromo.com/fresh-eyes-rp/>*