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AN EXPOSITORY STUDY OF ST JOHN'S GOSPEL

(Continued)

Prof. F. F. BRUCE, M.A.

II. Jesus Reveals Himself to the World (John 1:19—12:50)

(c) MINISTRY OF JESUS IN GALILEE, JERUSALEM AND BY THE LAKE

(John 4 : 43—6 : 71)

i. *The Nobleman's Son* (John 4:43-54)

Ch. 4, v. 43—*And after the two days he went forth from thence into Galilee.*—Thus He completed His journey from Judaea mentioned in v. 3. The two days are those which, according to v. 40, He spent with the Samaritans of Sychar.

v. 44—*For Jesus himself testified, that a prophet hath no honour in his own country.*—This proverbial saying is ascribed to Jesus by the Synoptists also (Matt. 13:57; Mark 6:4; Luke 4:24); but in their record His 'own country', is Nazareth, where 'He marvelled because of their unbelief' (Mark 6:6). Here, however, His 'own country' (*patris*, as in the other Gospels) is not Nazareth or Galilee, but Judaea—not so much because of His birth at Bethlehem (cf. John 7:42, a notable instance of 'Johannine irony'), as because Judaea, and more particularly Jerusalem, represented the central headquarters of 'those who were His own', who refused to receive Him when He went there (John 1:11). It is to Jews of Jerusalem that Jesus says in this Gospel: 'I am come in my Father's name, and ye receive me not' (John 5:43).

v. 45—*So when he came into Galilee, the Galilaeans received him, having seen all the things that he did in Jerusalem at the feast: for they also went unto the feast.*—If Jerusalem refused Him, however, Galilee welcomed Him. His fame had reached the northern territory before Him, carried by Galilaeans who had been in Jerusalem during the passover of John 2:13 ff., and had seen 'His signs which He did' (John 2:23). It was not until a year later that His Galilaeans following began to dwindle (John 6:66).

v. 46—*He came therefore again unto Cana of Galilee, where he made the water wine.*—Cf. John 2:1-11, with the exposition of those verses. The Evangelist emphasizes that the very place where Jesus first manifested His glory on what was in any case a joyful occasion was now to witness a further manifestation of His glory in a time of sorrow. On the former occasion old life was transformed into new life; on this occasion life is rescued from imminent death.

And there was a certain nobleman, whose son was sick at Capernaum.—The word translated 'nobleman' is *basilikos*, an adjective derived from *basileus*, 'king'; he was probably attached to the service of the king, i.e., Herod Antipas, tetrarch of Galilee from 4 B.C. to A.D. 39, who appears to have been popularly called 'king' (cf. Mark 6:14), although the Romans withheld the full royal title from him. Some have suggested that he was Chuza, Herod's steward (Luke 8:3). It is less likely that he was attached to the service of the Roman Emperor, who was also called *basileus* by his Greek-speaking subjects in the East. Codex D, with some Coptic and Latin texts, has *basiliskos* ('petty king') instead of *basilikos* (cf. Vulgate *regulus*, whence 'ruler' in the Douay version). There is nothing to suggest that this man was a Gentile; he is to be distinguished from the centurion of Matt. 8:5 ff. and Luke 7:2 ff., whose 'servant' (*pais*, Matthew) or 'slave' (*doulos*, Luke) was cured once when Jesus was in Capernaum. Here Jesus, by a word spoken at Cana, confirms the cure of the nobleman's son in Capernaum. Capernaum (*Kefar-Nahum*, the village of Nahum) is the modern Tell-Hum, on the north-west shore of the Sea of Galilee, about 16 miles east by north-east from Cana (cf. John 2:12).

v. 47—*When he heard that Jesus was come out of Judaea into Galilee, he went unto him and besought him that he would come down, and heal his son; for he was at the point of death.*—As we have been told in v. 45, news of Jesus' mighty works had been spread throughout Galilee by the pilgrims returning from the passover in Jerusalem. Jesus' arrival—just in time, as it seemed—must have been grasped by the eager father as the last hope for his sick son.

v. 48—*Jesus therefore said unto him, except ye see signs and wonders, ye will in no wise believe.*—His recent experience in Jerusalem was fresh in His mind, when many had accorded Him a superficial belief because they saw His signs without appreciating their meaning (John 2:23). But these words to the nobleman may well have been intended as a test of his faith. (This is the only occurrence in this Gospel of *teras*, 'wonder' or 'miracle'—a word which is never found in the New Testament except when accompanied by *semeion*, 'sign'.)

v. 49—*The nobleman saith unto him, Sir, come down ere my child die.*—The nobleman is in no mood to discuss the nature of his faith; he knows what he wants, and he believes that Jesus is the only one who can do it. So he beseeches Jesus to come home to Capernaum with him at once—perhaps on horseback—before his son dies. He uses the diminutive *paidion*, 'my little boy'.

v. 50—*Jesus saith unto him, Go thy way; thy son liveth.*—Unlike the centurion, the nobleman did not ask Jesus to speak but a word and work the cure, but this was the answer which he received to his request. 'Your son is better already.' Life, almost extinguished in the grim battle with death, had suddenly revived and won the victory.

The man believed the word that Jesus spake unto him, and he went his way.—He was content; he was not interested in signs and wonders, but in his son's life, and his ready acceptance of Jesus' assurance proved the quality of his faith. He proceeded to take his homeward way (*eporeueto*, imperfect tense).

v. 51—*And as he was now going down,*—the same verb (*katabaino*) as he had used in his plea to Jesus (v. 49). As Capernaum lies on the lakeside, far below sea-level, his journey there from Cana involved a literal descent of several hundred feet.

his servants met him, saying that his son lived.—The welcome news brought by these servants (Gk. *douloi*, 'slaves') corroborated something that he had already accepted as true from the lips of Jesus.

v. 52—*So he inquired of them the hour when he began to amend.*—We may translate ‘when he took the turn for the better.’ The father was thinking of a crisis, not of a process, and expressed himself in the aorist tense (Gk. *kompso-ton eschen*).

They said therefore unto him, Yesterday at the seventh hour the fever left him.—The cure had taken place suddenly, at the seventh hour. According to the normal Jewish and Roman reckonings, this would be 1 p.m., (counting the hours from sunrise). Some, however (like Westcott), think of the probability that the father would in that case have reached home the same day, and suggest that John is following a system which counts the hours from midnight and midday, as we do. There is some evidence for such a system in Asia Minor in the second century A.D. If the boy was cured at 7 p.m., then the father might wait until the morning before setting out for home. But we cannot be sure; even if he received Jesus’ assurance at 1 p.m., his confidence in the fulfilment of His word could have been so strong that instead of hurrying home he completed some other convenient business. (Similar problems about the reckoning of hours arise in John 1:39; 4:6; 19:14.)

v. 53—*So the father knew that it was at that hour in which Jesus said unto him, Thy son liveth.*—This was what he had suspected, and for that reason he asked the question.

and himself believed, and his whole house.—The day before he believed what Jesus said (v. 50); now, together with his household (wife, children, dependents and servants), he believed in Jesus personally, acknowledging His messianic claims.

v. 54—*This is again the second sign that Jesus did, having come out of Judaea into Galilee.*—The point is that, just as Jesus’ ‘beginning of signs’ was performed on an earlier occasion when He had newly returned from Judaea to Galilee, so this second sign was performed immediately after another return from Judaea. The signs of John 2:23 do not come into the reckoning here; the Evangelist is enumerating the Galilaeian signs at this point.

(To be continued)