

# Exposition of the Gospel of John CHAPTER 16

## CHRIST IN GALILEE

by A.W. Pink

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### Transcript

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CHAPTER 16

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John 4:43-54

What has been before us from verse 4 to the end of verse 42 in this chapter is in the nature of a parenthesis, inasmuch as these verses record what occurred in Samaria, which was outside the sphere of Christ's regular ministry in Judea and Galilee. Here in the last twelve verses of the chapter we are brought onto familiar ground again. It would seem then, that we may expect to find a continuation of what was before us in the first three chapters of John's Gospel, namely, historical events and practical teaching in both of which the Divine and moral glories of the Lord Jesus are displayed, and beneath the narrative of which we may discern hidden yet definitely defined typical and prophetic pictures. We saw in our earlier studies that two things are made very prominent in the opening chapters of this Gospel. First, the failure of Judaism, the deplorable condition of Israel. Some solemn portrayals of this have already been before us. In the second place, we have seen the Holy Spirit drawing our attention away from Israel to Christ; and then at the beginning of chapter four a third principle has been illustrated, namely, a turning from Judaism to the Gentiles. Furthermore, we have observed that not only do we have depicted in these opening sections of our Gospel the sad spiritual state of Israel at the time our Lord was here upon earth, but the narrative also furnishes us with a series of striking foreshadowings of the future. Such is the case in the concluding section of John 4. Here, once more, we are reminded of the pitiable condition of Judaism during the days of Christ's public ministry. This is brought out in a number of particulars, which will become more evident as we study them in detail. First, we have the express testimony of the Lord Himself that He had no honor "in his own country." This was in vivid contrast from His experiences in Samaria. Second, while we are told that "the Galileans received him," it was not because they recognized the glory of His person, or the authority and life-giving value of His words, but because they had been impressed by what they had seen Him do at Jerusalem. Third, there is the declaration made by Christ to the nobleman—intended, no doubt, for the Galileans also—"except ye see signs and wonders, ye will not believe." All of this serves to emphasize the condition of the Jews—their inability to recognize the Lord Jesus the Christ of God, and their failure to set to their seal that what He spake was the truth. It is the

practical lessons taught by this passage which are to occupy our attention in the body of this chapter. Before pondering these we submit an Analysis of this closing section of John 4:— 1. Christ goes into Galilee, verse 43. 2. Christ's tragic plaint, verse 44. 3. Christ received by the Galileans, verse 45. 4. The nobleman's request of Christ, verses 46, 47. 5. Christ's reply, verses 48-50. 6. The nobleman's journey home, verses 50-53. 7. This miracle Christ's second in Galilee, verse 54. "Now after two days he departed thence, and went into Galilee" (John 4:43). Different indeed are God's ways from ours. During those days spent in Samaria many had believed on Christ to the saving of their souls. And now the Savior leaves that happy scene and departed into a country where He had received no honor. How evident it is that He pleased not Himself! He had come here to do the will of the Father, and now we see Him following the path marked out for Him. Surely there is an important lesson here for every servant of God today: no matter how successful and popular we may be in a place, we must move on when God has work for us elsewhere. The will of the One who has commissioned us must determine all our actions. Failure must not make us lag behind, nor success urge us to run before. Neither must failure make us fretful and feverish to seek another field, nor success cause us to remain stationary when God bids us move on. The one, perhaps, is as great a temptation as the other; but if we are following on to know the Lord, then shall we know when to remain and when to depart. "Now after two days he departed thence, and went into Galilee." This resumes and completes what is said in verses 3 and 4. The Lord, accompanied by His disciples, left Judea because of the jealousy and enmity of the Pharisees. He "departed again into Galilee" (verse 3). But before He goes there, "he must needs go through Samaria" (verse 4). We have learned something of the meaning of that "must needs." But the need had now been met, so the Lord Jesus departed from Samaria and arrives at Galilee. The religious leaders in Jerusalem regarded Galilee with contempt (see John 7:41, 52). It was there that "the poor of the flock" were to be found. The first three Gospels record at length the Galilean ministry of the Redeemer, but John's gives only a brief notice of it in the passage now before us. "For Jesus himself testified, that a prophet hath no honor in his own country" (John 4:44). The reference is to what is recorded in Luke 4. At Nazareth, "where he had been brought up," He entered the synagogue and read from Isaiah 60, declaring "This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears." Those who heard Him "wondered," and said, "Is not this Joseph's son?" They were totally blind to His Divine glory. The Lord replied by saying, "Ye will surely say unto me this proverb, Physician, heal thyself: whatsoever we have heard done in Capernaum, do also here in thy country. And he said, Verily I say unto you, No prophet is accepted in his own country" (Luke 4:23, 24). Proof of this was furnished immediately after, for when Christ referred to God's sovereign dealings of old in connection with Elijah and Elisha, we are told, "And all they in the synagogue, when they heard these things, were filled with wrath, And rose up, and thrust him out of the city, and led him to the brow of the hill whereon their city was built, that they might cast him down headlong" (verses 28, 29). Thus was He dishonored and insulted by those among whom His preministerial life had been lived. He was without honor in "his own country," that is, Galilee; and yet we now find Him returning there. Why, then, should He return thither? The answer to this question is found in Matthew 4: "Now when Jesus had heard that John was cast into prison, he departed into Galilee; And leaving Nazareth, he came and dwelt in Capernaum which is upon the sea coast, in the borders of Zabulon and Naphthalim: That it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Esaias the prophet, saying, The land of Zabulon, and the land of Naphthalim, by the way of the sea, beyond Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles; The people which sat in darkness saw great light; and to them which sat in the region and shadow of death light is sprung up" (verses 12-16). This furnishes us with another instance of the obedience of the perfect Servant. In the volume of the Book it was written of Him. Prophecy is not only an intimation of what will be, but a declaration of what shall be. Prophecy makes known the decrees of God. As, then, Christ had come here to do the will of God, and God's will (revealed in the prophetic word) had

declared that the people in Galilee who walked in darkness, should see a great light, etc. (Isa. 9:1, 2) the Lord Jesus Christ goes there. "For Jesus himself testified, that a prophet hath no honor in his own country." How this reveals to us the heart of the Savior! He was no stoic, passing through these scenes, unmoved by what He encountered: He was not insensible to the treatment He met with, He "endured such contradiction of sinners against himself" (Heb. 12:3). The indifference, the unbelief, the opposition of Israel, told upon Him, and caused His visage to be "marred more than any man" (Isa. 52:14). Hear Him, as by the spirit of prophecy, He exclaims, "I have labored in vain, I have spent my strength for nought, and in vain: yet surely my judgment is with the Lord, and my reward with my God" (Isa. 49:4). So here, when we hear Him testifying, "A prophet hath no honor in his own country," we can almost catch the sob in His voice. For two days He had experienced the joys of harvest. His spirit had been refreshed. The "meat" which had been ministered to His soul consisted not only of the consciousness that He had done the will of the One who had sent Him, but also in the faith and gratitude of the woman who had believed on Him. This had been followed by the Samaritans beseeching Him to tarry with them, and the consequent believing of many of them because of His word. But such joyful harvesting was only for a very brief season. Two days only did He abide in Samaria. Now, He turns once more to Galilee, and He goes with sad foreboding. "For Jesus himself testified, that a prophet hath no honor in his own country." His use of the word "prophet" here is very suggestive. It was the word that the woman had used when her perceptive faculties began to be illumined (verse 19). There, in Samaria, He had been honored. The Samaritans believed His bare word, for no miracles were performed before them. But now in Galilee He meets with a faith of a very inferior order. The Galileans received Him because they had seen "all the things that he did at Jerusalem at the feast" (verse 45). So, too, the nobleman's house (verse 53) did not believe until a miracle had been performed before their eyes. Thus a solemn contrast is pointed. In Galilee He is not honored for His person's and word's sake; in Samaria He was. As prophet He was not honored in Galilee; as a miracle-worker He was "received." This principle is frequently exemplified today. There is many a servant of God who is thought more highly of abroad than he is at home. It is a true saying that "familiarity breeds contempt." Ofttimes a preacher is more respected and appreciated when visiting a distant field than he is by his own flock. "Then when he was come into Galilee, the Galileans received him, having seen all the things that he did at Jerusalem at the feast: for they also went unto the feast" (John 4:45). How this brings out the fickleness and the shallowness of human nature. For upwards of twenty years the man Christ Jesus had lived in Galilee. Little or nothing is told us about those years which preceded His public work. But we know that He did all things well. His manner of life, His ways, His deportment, His every act, must have stood out in vivid contrast from all around Him. Had His fellow-townsmen possessed any spiritual discernment at all they must have seen at once that Jesus of Nazareth was indeed the Holy One of God. But they were blind to His glory. The perfect life He had lived quietly among them was not appreciated. As the Son of God incarnate He was unknown and unrecognized. But now things were changed. The humble Carpenter had left them for a season. He had commenced His public ministry. He had been to Jerusalem. There He had sternly corrected the Temple abuses. There He had performed such miracles that many believed on his name" (John 2:23). Many of the Galileans who were in attendance at the Feast had also witnessed His wonderful works, and they were duly impressed. On their return home they would doubtless tell others of what they had witnessed. And now that the Lord Jesus returns to Galilee, He is at once "received." Now that His fame had spread abroad the people flocked around Him. Such is human nature. Let a man who lived in comparative obscurity leave his native place, become famous in some state or country, and then return to his home town, and it is astonishing how many will claim friendship, if not kinship, with him. Human nature is very fickle and very superficial, and the moral of all this is to warn us not to place confidence in any man, but to value all the more highly (because

of the contrast) the faithfulness of Him who changes not. "So Jesus came again into Cana of Galilee, where he made the water wine. And there was a certain nobleman, whose son was sick at Capernaum" (John 4:46). Why should we be told where the Lord was when He performed the miracle of healing the nobleman's son? Why, after mentioning Cana, is it added, "Where he made the water wine"? And why tell us in the last verse of the chapter, "This is again the second miracle that Jesus did, when he was come out of Judea into Galilee?" Surely it is apparent at once that we are to place the two miracles that were wrought at Cana side by side. The Holy Spirit indicates there is some connection between them, something which they have in common. Following this hint, a close study of the record of these two miracles reveals the fact that there is a series of striking comparisons between them, apparently seven in number. In the first place, both were third day scenes: in John 2:1 we read, "And the third day there was a marriage in Cana of Galilee;" and in John 4:43 we are told, "Now after two days he departed thence, and went into Galilee." Second, when Mary came to Christ and told Him they had no wine, He rebuked her (John 2:4), so when the nobleman asked Christ to come down and heal his sick child the Lord rebuked him (John 4:48). Third, in each case we see the obedient response made by those whom the Lord commanded (John 2:7 and 4:50). Fourth, in both miracles we see the Word at work: in each miracle the Lord did nothing but speak. Fifth, in both narratives mention is made of the servant's knowledge (John 2:9 and 4:51). Sixth, the sequel in each case was that they who witnessed the miracle believed: in the one we read, "And his disciples believed on him" (John 2:11); in the other we are told, "And himself believed, and his whole house" (John 4:53). Seventh, there is a designed similarity in the way in which each narrative concludes: in John 2:11 we are told, "This beginning of miracles did Jesus in Cana of Galilee," and in John 4:54, "This is again the second miracle which Jesus did, when he was come out of Judea into Galilee." Here is another example of the importance of comparing two incidents which are placed side by side in Scripture (sometimes for the purpose of comparison, at others in order to point a series of contrast); here we have an example of comparison between two miracles which, though separated in time and in the narrative, both occurred at the same place, and are the only miracles recorded in the New Testament as being wrought in Cana. "And there was a certain nobleman, whose son was sick at Capernaum." The word "nobleman" signifies a royal officer: probably he belonged to Herod's court; that he was a man of station and means is evident from the fact that he had servants (verse 51). But neither rank nor riches exempt their possessor from the common sorrows of human kind. Naaman was a great man, but he was a leper (2 Kings 5:1). So here was a nobleman, yet his son lay at the point of death. The rich have their troubles as well as the poor. Dwellers in palaces are little better off than those who live in cottages. Let Christians beware of setting their hearts on worldly riches: as Bishop Ryle well says, "They are uncertain comforts, but certain cares." No doubt this nobleman had tried every remedy which money could produce. But money is not almighty. Many invest it with an imaginary value that it is far from possessing. Money can not purchase happiness, nor can it ensure health. There is just as much sickness among the aristocracy as there is among the common artisans. "When he heard that Jesus was come out of Judea into Galilee, he went unto him" (John 4:47). This domestic trial was a blessing in disguise, for it caused the anxious father to seek out Christ, and this resulted in him believing, and ultimately his whole house believed. God uses many different agents in predisposing men to receive and believe His Word. No doubt these lines will be read by more than one who dates his first awakening to the time when some loved one lay at death's door—it was then he was made to think seriously and saw the need for preparing to meet God. It is well when trouble leads a man to God, instead of away from God. Affliction is one of God's medicines; then let us beware of murmuring in time of trouble. "And besought him that he would come down, and heal his son: for he was at the point of death" (John 4:47). This nobleman evidently had a measure of faith in the ability of the great Physician, otherwise he had not sought Him at all. But the measure of his faith was

small. He had probably learned of the miracles which the Lord had performed at Jerusalem, and hearing that He was now in Galilee—only a few miles distant—he goes to Him. The weakness of his faith is indicated in the request that the Lord should "come down" with him to Capernaum. He believed that Christ could heal close by, but not far away; at short range, but not at a distance. How many there were who thus limited Him. Jairus comes to Christ and says, "My little daughter lieth at the point of death: I pray thee, come and lay thy hands on her, that she may be healed; and she shall live" (Mark 5:23). The woman with the issue of blood said, "If I may touch but his clothes, I shall be whole" (Mark 5:28). So, too, Martha exclaimed, "Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died" (John 11:21). But let us not censure them, rather let us condemn our own unbelief. But different far from this "nobleman" was the faith of the centurion that sought the Lord on behalf of his sick servant, and who said, "Lord, I am not worthy that thou shouldst come under my roof: but speak the word only, and my servant shall be healed" (Matthew 8:8). It seems to us this is the reason (or one reason, at least) why we are told here in John 4 that the nobleman came from Capernaum, so that we should link the two together and note the comparisons and contrasts between them. Both resided at Capernaum: both were Gentiles: both were men of position: both came to Christ on behalf of a sick member of his household. But in Matthew 8 the centurion simply spread his need before Christ and refrained from dictating to Him; whereas the nobleman bids the Savior "come down" to Capernaum. In Matthew 8 we find that the Lord offered to accompany the centurion—Jesus saith unto him, I will come and heal him" (verse 7). He does the very opposite here in John 4. In Matthew 8 the centurion declines the Lord's offer and says, "Speak the word only;" where as the nobleman meets Christ's rebuke by repeating his original request—"Sir, come down ere my child die" (verse 49). Thus we see again the value of observing the law of Comparison and Contrast. "Then said Jesus unto him, Except ye see signs and wonders, ye will not believe" (John 4:48). This was a rebuke. Not only was the faith of this nobleman weak, but he so far forgot himself as to dictate to the Lord Jesus, and tell Him what to do. The force of Christ's reply seems to be this: 'You are demanding signs of Me before you will fully trust your boy's case into My hands.' This is a serious mistake which is made by many seeking souls. We must not be so wickedly presumptuous as to tell God how to act and what to do. We must state no terms to the Lord Most High. He must be left to work in His own way. "Except ye see signs and wonders ye will not believe." How this brings out the omniscience of Christ! He knew this man's heart. A measure of faith he had, but he was afraid to fully commit himself. The Lord knew this, and so addressed Himself to the suppliant accordingly. "Except ye see signs and wonders ye will not believe." How searching this is! Is it not a word that many of us need? Is it not at this very point we most often fail? We ask God for a certain thing, and we have a measure of faith that it will be given us; but in the interval of waiting the bare word of God is not sufficient for us—we crave a "sign." Or again; we are engaged in some service for the Lord, and we are not without faith that our labors will result in some fruitage for Him, but ere the fruit appears we become impatient, and we long for a "sign." Is it not so? Is it true of you, dear reader, that "except ye see signs and wonders, ye will not believe?" Ah! have we not all of us cause to cry, "Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief" (Mark 9:24)? Fellow-worker, God has declared that His Word shall not return unto Him void (Isa. 55:11). Is not that sufficient? Why ask for "signs"? Fellow-Christian, God has declared that if we ask anything according to His will, He heareth us (1 John 5:15). Is not His promise enough? Why, then, crave for "signs"? "The nobleman saith unto him, Sir, come down ere my child die" (John 4:49). While it is evident that the nobleman was still slow of heart to commit himself, unreservedly, into the hands of Christ; nevertheless, it is good to see the spirit in which he received the Lord's rebuke. Though he was a nobleman he did not become angry when corrected; instead, he "suffered the word of exhortation," and with commendable importunity continued to plead his suit. "The nobleman saith unto him, Sir, come down ere my child die." Bishop Ryle has a helpful word on this: "There is here a salutary lesson for the young.

Sickness and death come to the young as well as the old. But the young are slow to learn this lesson. Parents and children are apt to shut their eyes to plain facts, and act as if the young never die young. The gravestones in our cemeteries show how many there are who never reached to man's estate at all. The first grave ever dug on earth was for a young man! The first one who ever died was not a father, but a son! He, then, who is wise will never reckon confidently on long life. It is the part of wisdom to be prepared." We trust these words will come home to the hearts of Christian parents who read this chapter. In the action of this father who came to Christ on behalf of his child there is an example which you will do well to emulate. If you are not deeply concerned about the soul's welfare of your children, who is likely to be? It is your bounden duty to teach them the Word of God; it is your holy privilege to bring them in prayer to God. Do not turn over to a Sunday School teacher what is incumbent upon you. Teach your little ones the Scriptures from their earliest infancy. Train them to memorize such verses as Psalm 9:17; Jeremiah 17:9; Romans 6:23, etc., and God has promised to honor them that honor Him. Be not discouraged if you are unable to detect any response, but rest on the promise, "Cast thy bread upon the waters, and thou shalt find it again after many days." "The nobleman saith unto him, Sir, come down ere my child die." How the response of Christ to this request brought out the perfections of Jehovah's Servant! This "nobleman," remember, occupied a high social position; most likely he was a member of Herod's court. To any man governed by fleshly considerations and principles, this would have been a tempting opportunity to make a favorable impression in society; it offered a chance to gain a footing in high places, which a man of the world would have quickly seized. But the Lord Jesus never courted popularity, nor did He ever toady to people of influence and affluence. He ever refused to use the ways of the world. He "condescended to men of low estate," and was the Friend not of princes and nobles, but of "publicans and sinners." Well may each servant of God take this to heart. "Jesus saith unto him, Go thy way; thy son liveth" (John 4:50). The Lord never turns away a soul that truly seeks Him. There may be much ignorance (as indeed there is in all of us), there may be much of the flesh mixed in with our appeals, but if the heart is really set on Him, He always responds. And not only so, invariably He does far more for us than we ask or think. It was so here. He not only healed the son of this nobleman, but He did so immediately, by the word of His power. "Jesus saith unto him, Go thy way; thy son liveth." This nobleman was a Gentile, for there were no "nobles" among the Jews; and in harmony with each similar case, the Lord healed his son from a distance. There are three, possibly four, different cases recorded in the Gospels, where Christ healed a Gentile, and in each instance He healed from a distance. There was a reason for this. The Jews were in covenant relationship with God, and as such "nigh" to Him. But the Gentiles, being "aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise" were "far off" (Eph. 2:12, 13), and this fact was duly recognized by the Savior. "And the man believed the word that Jesus had spoken unto him" (John 4:50). Here once more, we are shown the Word (John 1:1, 14) at work. This comes out prominently in the miracles described in this Gospel. The Lord does not go down to Capernaum and take the sick boy by the hand. Instead, He speaks the word of power and he is healed instantly. The "words" He spake were "spirit and life" (John 6:63). And this imparting of life at a distance by means of the word has a message for us today. If Christ could heal this dying boy, who was at least ten miles away, by the word of His mouth, He can give eternal life today by His word even though He is away in heaven. Distance is no barrier to Him. "And the man believed the word that Jesus had spoken unto him, and he went his way. This is very blessed. It shows us the power of the spoken word not only on the boy that was healed, but on his father, too—"Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God" (Rom. 10:17). The nobleman had heard the word of God from the lips of the Son of God, and real faith, saving faith, was now begotten within him. He raises no objections, asks no questions, makes no demurs; but with implicit confidence in which he had heard, he believed, and went his way. No "signs" were needed, no feelings required to impart

assurance. "He believed, and went his way." This is how salvation comes to the sinner. It is simply a matter of taking God at His word, and setting to our seal that He is true. The very fact that it is God's word guarantees its truthfulness. This, we believe, is the only instance recorded in the New Testament where a "nobleman" believed in Christ—"not many noble are called" (1 Cor. 1:26). "And as he was now going down, his servants met him, and told him, saying, Thy son liveth. Then enquired he of them the hour when he began to amend. And they said unto him, Yesterday at the seventh hour the fever left him" (John 4:51, 52). The word "yesterday" brings out a striking point. Cana and Capernaum were only a comparatively short distance apart: the journey could be made in about four hours. It was only one hour after midday when the Savior pronounced the sick boy healed. Such implicit confidence had the nobleman in Christ's word, he did not return home that day at all! I can picture the father on his way back home, going along happy and rejoicing. If some one had enquired as to the occasion of his joy, he would have been told it was because his child, at the point of death, had been restored. Had the enquirer asked how the father knew his child was now well, his answer would have been, 'Because I have the word of Christ for it—what more do I need!' And, dear reader, we too, shall be full of peace and joy if we rest on the sure Word of God (Rom. 15:13). The father's enquiry of his servants was not because of unbelief, but because he delighted to hear a recountal of what God had wrought. As John Wesley remarked on this verse, "The more exactly the works of God are considered, the more faith is increased?" "So the father knew that it was at the same hour, in the which Jesus said unto him, Thy son liveth: and himself believed, and his whole house" (John 4:53). The nobleman's faith here is not to be regarded as any different from what is attributed to him in verse 50: it is simply a repetition, brought in here in connection with his house believing, too. It is a very rare thing to find a believing wife and believing children where the father, the head of the house, is himself an unbeliever. What an example does this incident furnish us of the mysterious workings of God!—a boy brought to the point of death that a whole house might have eternal life. Let the reader study carefully the following questions in preparation for the next lesson:— 1. What is the meaning of "Bethesda," and what is the significance of the "five porches"? verse 2. 2. Why are we told the impotent man had suffered thirty-eight years? verse 5. 3. Why did Christ ask the impotent man such a question as is recorded in verse 6? 4. What does the man's answer denote? verse 7. 5. What important principle is illustrated in verse 11? 6. What moral perfection of Christ is seen in verse 13?

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