

John 29 – The Second Sign: His Authoritative Word

09/15/2024

Scripture 1: (Jn. 4:43-54 ESV)

After the two days he departed for Galilee. (For Jesus himself had testified that a prophet has no honor in his own hometown.) So when he came to Galilee, the Galileans welcomed him, having seen all that he had done in Jerusalem at the feast. For they too had gone to the feast.

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. 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.

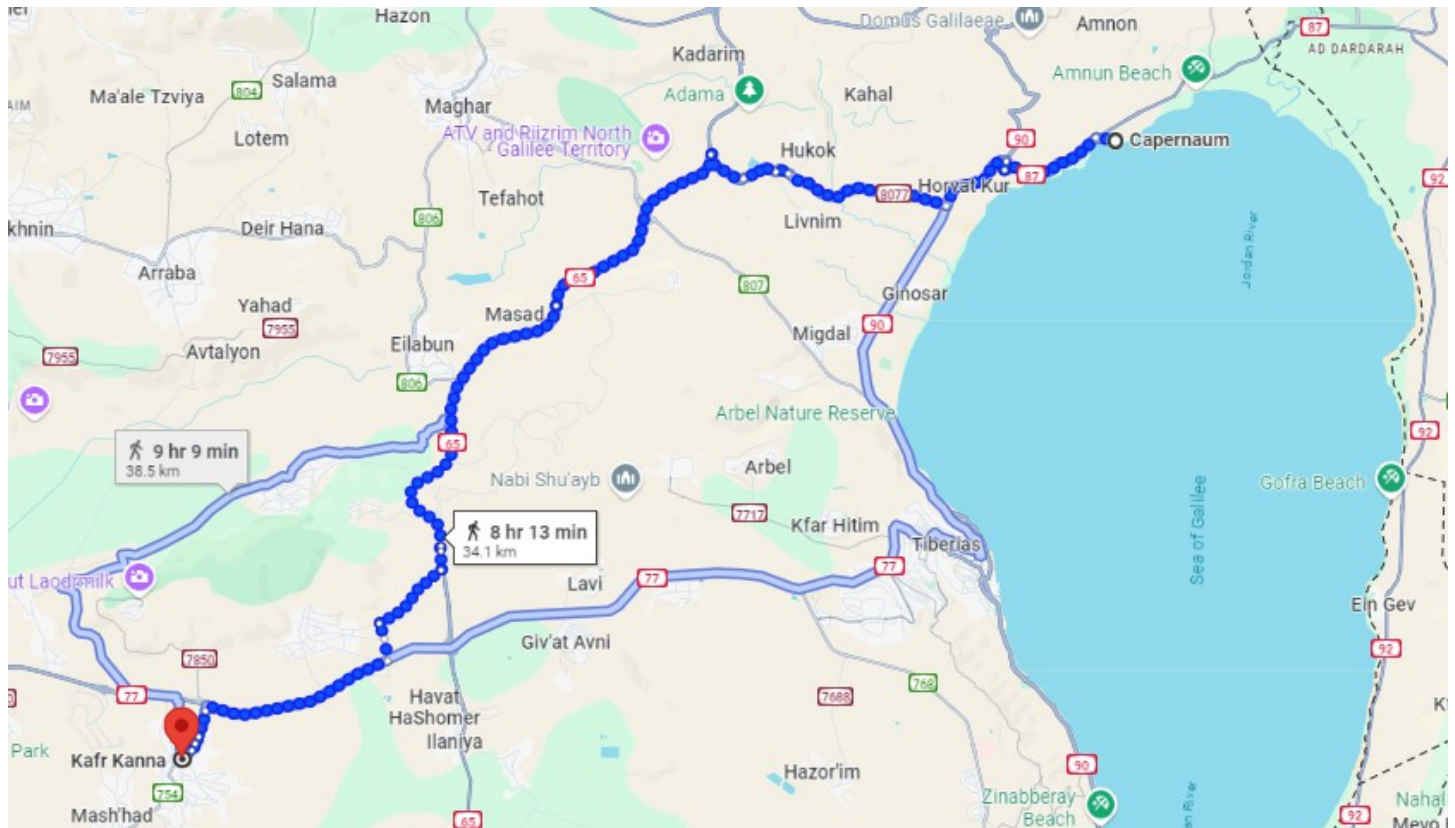
So Jesus said to him, "Unless you see signs and wonders you will not believe."

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

Jesus said to him, "Go; your son will live."

The man believed the word that Jesus spoke to him and went on his way. As he was going down, his servants met him and told him that his son was recovering. 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." 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.

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



Sermon:

One of the unique peculiarities of John's Gospel is how the evangelist notates Jesus' miracles as “signs”. Some are referenced generally, as in chapter 2, where “...many believed in his name when they saw the signs that he was doing.” (Jn. 2:23 ESV) while others are more specific, “*This, the first of his signs, Jesus did at Cana in Galilee, and manifested his glory. And his disciples believed in him.*” (Jn. 2:11 ESV). Traditionally, the Church has identified seven specific signs emphasized by John {similar to the seven “I AM” statements of Jesus also recorded in John's Gospel. Coincidence? I think not.}:

1. When Jesus turned the water for ceremonial washing into wine at the wedding in Cana (2:1-11).
2. When Jesus healed the “official's” son by His mere word of command at a great distance (4:43-54).
3. When Jesus healed a paralytic on the Sabbath (5:1-15).
4. When Jesus fed the “five thousand” (6:1-15).
5. When Jesus walked upon the water; a sign unseen, except by the disciples (6:16-24).
6. When Jesus healed a man that was born blind on the Sabbath (9:1-16). And,
7. When Jesus raised Lazarus, His friend, from the dead (11:38-53).

Each of these signs serve as evidence supporting Jesus as God the Son: the *Logos* who is *Theos* and *Andros*. Each sign displays a different element of His divinity and each sign proves not only that Jesus is God, but that He is the same God of the Old Testament; that He actually is the LORD, YHVH, and not “another god”. The God of the Bible is one and the same God across both Testaments, unlike the suggestion of various early heresies {most notably Marcionism}.

Previously, we saw how Jesus' transformation of the water into wine “*manifested his glory*” in the first sign, by it being both a blessing and a sign of His mediatorial authority. Transforming the “waters of obligation” into the “wine of gladness”, signified a change in the New Covenant dispensation from the Law of Moses to the Gospel of Christ and pointed ahead to the “Wedding Supper of the Lamb”. {John 11 – The First Sign: The Blessing of Wine}. Now, we will see in this second sign how Jesus's word of healing demonstrates His divine authority, His mercy, and the capacity of His sovereign power to merely speak and have His command fulfilled.

So, “*After the two days he departed for Galilee.*”. After Jesus had spent an addition two days in Sychar teaching His new, Samaritan disciples, at their invitation (4:40), Jesus and His disciples continued on their way to Galilee. However, now a reason is given which may seem unusual and counter-intuitive to us, “*(For Jesus himself had testified that a prophet has no honor in his own hometown.)*”.

Th proverb about a “prophet and his home” that Jesus and John reference here, hearkens to the prophet Jeremiah: “*Therefore thus says the LORD concerning the men of Anathoth, who seek your life, and say, "Do not prophesy in the name of the LORD, or you will die by our hand"..."*” (Jer. 11:21 ESV), since Anathoth was his birth place (Jeremiah 1:1) and “*For even your brothers and the house of your father, even they have dealt treacherously with you; they are in full cry after you; do not believe them, though they speak friendly words to you.*” (Jer. 12:6 ESV). Elsewhere in the Synoptics, Jesus spoke this proverb (Matthew 13:57; Mark 6:4; Luke 4:24) but in direct reference to the people of His “hometown”, Nazareth in Galilee, which is the region where He was now going. However, within the greater context of John's Gospel and more narrowly in this chapter, the proverb is understood differently from its Synoptic use.

- When Jesus said it in the Synoptics, it was in regards to the Nazareth locals rejecting Him and His claim of fulfilling Isaiah's prophecy.
- Yet when Jesus uses it in John's Gospel, within the context of these “signs” and His “I AM” statements: the claims and evidences of His divinity; it becomes clear that the “hometown” He intends is Jerusalem because Jerusalem is “God's city” and the Temple, “God's House” is in Jerusalem. Jerusalem or “Zion” was Jesus' Father's earthly “home”.

Once we recognize this shift in perspective, then the beginning of chapter 4, “*Now when Jesus learned that the Pharisees had heard that Jesus was making and baptizing more disciples than John....he left Judea and departed again for Galilee.*” (Jn. 4:1-3 ESV) and the true reason why Jesus left Judea becomes apparent:

- the Pharisees “encouraged” Him to move along;
- they drove Him away; because
- they rejected Him and His teaching.

Thus, when we read, “*So when he came to Galilee, the Galileans welcomed him...*” in the proverb's light, we understand that while Jesus was “welcomed” in Galilee, He had “*no honor*” in Jerusalem. But why was He welcomed so gladly?

- Because the Galileans had “*...seen all that he had done in Jerusalem at the feast. For they too had gone to the feast.*”.
- Because they saw and heard the prophetic signs which Jesus performed at the Temple: His religious zeal in overturning the tables and driving out the money changers, and His words concerning the destruction of the Temple (2:13-23).

This explains why the majority of Jesus' recorded ministry across the four Gospels takes place in Galilee and how Jesus became so well-known and famous across Galilee, so quickly; an explanation taken for granted in the Synoptics.

Jesus was famous in Galilee because people from Galilee were in Jerusalem for the Passover and they saw His early signs. Then, they spread the word about Him every where. Jesus was not famous because He visited every town and every synagogue; instead, He visited every town and synagogue because He was already famous and because people were interested in hearing what He had to say on account of His prophetic signs and wonders.

So, after leaving Samaria, Jesus “*...came again to Cana in Galilee, where he had made the water wine.*”, likely as part of a preaching circuit, as described by Mark 1:38 and Luke 4:43. Meanwhile, “*...at Capernaum there was an official whose son was ill.*”.

What does Scripture tell us about this “official”? Our English translations do not give us many details, but the Greek does provide more depth. This “official” was a *basilikos*, a word that may sound familiar if you ever learned much about medieval church history or ancient architecture, as in the term “basilica”. A basilica¹ is a large, oblong building with a semicircular apse that, during the Roman Empire, served as a public forum and a court of justice. Both the terms basilica and *basilikos* were derived from the Greek word *basileus*, meaning “king”, because this forum was where a king or their representative, a *basilikos*, would dispense justice and thereby “rule”. This “official”, this *basilikos* was likely a “royal official” in Herod Antipas' government or he

1 <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/basilica>

was a surviving relation to the Hasmonean dynasty {and so, still considered “royal”} loyal to Herod. It is very unlikely that this “official” was a Gentile or working for the Roman government {like the Centurion in Capernaum, whose servant Jesus healed (Matthew 8:5-13)}.

This difference in the social status and station between he and Jesus increases the story's impact. He was a nobleman: a high-ranking and influential government official; someone for whom expenses were of little concern, especially where their family's welfare was concerned. We would reasonably expect that having a sick child: a “deathly ill” son; every possible remedy or suggested cure had been explored and every doctor consulted. The story which John is telling, suggests that this *basilikos* had now reached a point of utter desperation but, when he heard about Jesus, “*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.*”

- This man had lost all hope but then he heard some good news which restored the hope of hope.

Hope is a wonderful thing. Hope drives and empowers us to do all that we do. But the important question is:

- What is our hope? What or who do we hope in and for?

We all hope for the future. We hope for our children's prosperity. We hope that the stock market will rise and we hope that prices will go down. We hope that we will have a good day at work. We hope that we will return home safely at the end of the day.

We hope that the Presidential election will go in the way we prefer, and we hope that the results will ultimately be accepted by everyone and that there will be an orderly transfer of power. We hope that our US government will never become wicked and oppressive.

We hope for the salvation of the “Lost”. We hope that the sick will be healed. We hope that people will love one another and be kind. We hope that there will be “peace on earth” someday. We hope in the resurrection on the Last Day, and we hope in Christ Jesus as our justification before the judgment seat of God.

But, how do we live out of that hope? How did this “royal official”, this “nobleman”, act out of his hope?

“... *he went to [Jesus] and asked him to come down and heal his son...*”. Is that really any different from what we do when we pray? Actually, this “official” acted very different from most all of us today, because of how he approached Jesus; first and foremost, he humbled himself before Christ.

This presumably rich, powerful, and influential nobleman went to see Jesus, a poor itinerant Rabbi and a common tradesman, a carpenter like His father, Joseph. The man with “everything” went to the man with “nothing”, to beg for the life and health of his dying son. Ordinarily, only such desperation will cause the proud to humble themselves. He further humbled himself by going to Jesus, himself. He did not send a servant in his stead, nor did he summon Jesus to come to him. He went to make a personal appeal because of his father's love for his son. Traveling to where Jesus was, was exceptionally humbling for him. He traveled from the important trade town of Capernaum to the socially unimportant village of Cana.

Interestingly, most trade routes have not changed over the centuries and millennia because the roads of antiquity were influenced by the terrain and topography in every region. Travelers went around mountains instead of over them. They took the easier “low road” rather than the rougher “high road”, even when the rougher may have been shorter or faster. {Most of the main roads in Europe are built upon a foundation of the ancient Roman roads, which were built over and along earlier routes.} Therefore, the most reasonable route to use if hiking from Capernaum to Cana today, is likely close to that of the 1st Century. This route is about 34 kilometers, or

just over 21 miles, and for the well provisioned, dedicated, focused, and determined hiker under good conditions, would take 8 to 9 hours of walking. This would not be an easy trip today and I do not imagine that this would have been an easy “day trip” during the 1st Century (especially during the summer when this story took place). This would have been a planned and provisioned endeavor requiring at least two days to travel one-way.

So, it would have been a terrible inconvenience for this official to travel to Jesus. It would have been onerous, challenging, difficult, and perhaps dangerous thus making it a very costly trip: in time, money, and effort. But the greatest possible cost lay in what the nobleman risked in humbling himself by traveling to Jesus, because this desperate father risked not being present at his son's passing, by chasing after this last desperate hope, since he was “...*at the point of death.*”

Ultimately, this nobleman humbled himself by **not** {leaning upon his own understanding} (Proverbs 3:5b), instead {trusting in the LORD with his whole heart}. This nobleman humbled himself and went to beg Jesus for a miracle, and ask Him for something that only **God** could do. “*So Jesus said to him, "Unless you see signs and wonders you will not believe."*”, accusing the nobleman of being like so many others: unwilling and unable to believe except when provided with incontrovertible proof. Although “accusing” is a poor choice of words; “challenging” him would be better because:

- Jesus is God. Therefore, Jesus must speak the truth (9th Commandment; Numbers 23:19).
- Jesus knew that the man believed, but he also knew that the man did not yet understand that he believed. Therefore, Jesus challenged the nobleman to trust Him: to have faith, to have *pisteuo*; and prove his belief through his actions (James 2).

The nobleman begged Jesus, “*"Sir, come down before my child dies."*”, asking a prayer of faith and demonstrating his confident belief that Jesus could and would heal his son. He asked Jesus for something that he believed Jesus was able to do: something which, according to Scripture and the Jewish faith, God alone can do; thereby, just by making the “Ask”, he was proclaiming his hope and trust in Jesus.

Then Jesus answered the nobleman, “*"Go; your son will live." The man believed the word that Jesus spoke to him and went on his way.*”.

There are two major points we should take away from the story at this point:

- Hearing Jesus speak with **authority**; the nobleman believed Jesus and went on his way: an example of faith plus works. Leaving demonstrated far greater faith and stronger confidence than did his initial journey to Cana. Leaving proved the man's faith. He did not ask Jesus for a sign. He demanded no proof or assurance, nor did he insist upon a “guarantee” or promise. Instead he trusted Jesus and accepted His Word as truth.
- Jesus made two authoritative pronouncements, He spoke and it was so. The imperative command “Go...” and the declaration of “...*your son will live.*”. Jesus did not pray. He only had to say. Jesus merely spoke and it was true. Jesus needed to perform no elaborate ritual; no dramatic laying on of hands or other prophetic action.

We see a glimmer of Jesus' divinity as the Word through Whom “...*All things were made...*” (Jn. 1:3 ESV); commanding reality just as Moses wrote, “*And God said...and there was...*” (Gen. 1:3 ESV). Jesus did not need to put on a show. Jesus did not need to invoke the LORD's favor. Jesus did not need to intercede and ask God to act. Jesus did not even need to do, He only needed to say. Nor did God act through Jesus, as He acted through

the prophets. Instead, Jesus acted as God, in the name of God, because Jesus is God and the nobleman “... *believed the word that Jesus spoke to him...*”. The nobleman trusted Jesus' Word, as a Word spoken by God.

Believing and trusting Jesus' Word; being filled with a new hope, this nobleman left to return home to his family. Then the next day, on his way home he encountered some servants sent to bring him news, “*As he was going down, his servants met him and told him that his son was recovering.*”. Seeing them approach, I am certain this nobleman's heart dropped. I am certain his blood pressure rose. I am certain that his anxiety level immediately went through the roof because, whose would not? Seeing them approach, he knew that the only reason they were there was to bring him news about his son, but he did not know what that news would be.

Doubt surely invaded his mind, wondering: Is my hope in Jesus misplaced? Is Jesus a false prophet. Did my son die while I was gone? Was he alone? Did he feel abandoned? Was this trip into the Galilean hinterland to see Jesus a waste of time and effort?

But the nobleman should not be blamed for this. Even the strongest and most devout of Christian believers experience and suffer these kind of feelings because they are the “slings and arrows” of Satan and the “...*flaming darts of the evil one...*” (Eph. 6:16 ESV), but although they may hit us, we are fortunate that they can be caught and blocked, unable to greatly harm us by the “*shield of faith*”. This is spiritual warfare.

We can almost hear his desperate plea, begging them to tell him news of his son; then, we can imagine his joy upon hearing that his son was recovered. His son was well and would live, just as Jesus had declared. Praise the LORD!

Then he asked them when his son recovered, “*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."*” and “*The father knew that was the hour when Jesus had said to him, "Your son will live."*”. The nobleman's hope in Jesus was confirmed. His faith was proven true. His confidence was reaffirmed and improved. This was clear evidence of a miracle; a sign that something supernatural and extraordinary had happened.

- Just as, “*And God said, "Let there be light," and there was light.*” (Gen. 1:3 ESV) so, {And Jesus said, “*Your son will live.*” and the boy lived.}

After returning home and seeing the evidence with his own eyes, and embracing his living child once again, then “...*he himself believed, and all his household.*”. This does not mean that he did not believe before, but now he knew and understood that he believed.

- Now he admitted to believing in and trusting in Jesus.
- Now his faith was made public.
- Now he had something tangible to point to as being the reason for his faith: his son; rather than just relying upon an argument based on “feelings” or “opinions”.
- Now he **knew**; he *oida*'d and he had *gnosis*.
- Now he understood and he had the knowledge that Jesus is God; that Jesus is trustworthy and true; that Jesus's word is authoritative truth.

Not only did the nobleman believe, but also “...*all his household.*”. His son and his family, along with all of his servants; everyone in close contact who knew about the miracle. They believed because they saw the {sign and

wonder} of the boy's recovery, as Jesus had challenged the nobleman. They saw the evidence of God's power and glory manifested through Jesus's declarative word. They knew and therefore, they believed.

“This was now the second sign that Jesus did when he had come from Judea to Galilee.”

- The first sign manifested Jesus' **glory** as that of the LORD God.
- The second sign manifested the **authority** of Jesus' Word as that of the LORD God.
 - As God the Son, Jesus spoke and therefore, it was so.

So, what does this story teach us about Jesus?

It displays His authority differently than in the Synoptics, where we see at the end of the Beatitudes, *“And when Jesus finished these sayings, the crowds were astonished at his teaching, for he was teaching them as one who had authority, and not as their scribes.”* (Matt. 7:28-29 ESV). There the sense of His authority came from the definiteness and surety of His teaching, *“...But **I say** to you...”* (Matt. 5:32 ESV), yet here His authority is that of an active cause with a definite effect.

This also differentiates Jesus from the Old Testament miracle performing prophets: Elijah, Elisha, and Moses.

- When Elijah commanded the widow of Zarephath to use her oil and flour he did so by explaining, *“For thus says the LORD, the God of Israel...”* (1 Ki. 17:14 ESV); thereby invoking the LORD's authority in commanding her.
- When Elisha “healed” the spring at Jericho, he said, *“Thus says the LORD, I have healed this water...”* (2 Ki. 2:21 ESV); thereby invoking the LORD's power and crediting Him with the action.
- When Moses worked the miracles in Egypt, he spoke with implicit authority as the LORD's messenger, but the miracles still occurred by him obeying the LORD's direct prescription, *“And the LORD said to Moses, “Say to Aaron, ‘Stretch out your hand with your staff over the rivers, over the canals and over the pools, and make frogs come up on the land of Egypt!’”* (Exod. 8:5 ESV). Then, in order to end them, Moses still had to ask God, *“...and Moses cried to the LORD about the frogs, as he had agreed with Pharaoh. And the LORD did according to the word of Moses.”* (Exod. 8:12-13 ESV).

While Moses's word was as God's Word to Aaron and Pharaoh (Exodus 4:12-17), Jesus's word was truly God's Word itself. While the prophets needed to pray and ask for the LORD's blessing and action, Jesus spoke and it was so. He commanded and was obeyed without needing to invoke the LORD's authority; Jesus did not need to ask God to heal people because Jesus healed them Himself.

These evidences of the power and authority of Jesus's Word proves that Jesus's Word is the greatest and surest authority. We believe that Scripture is His definitive Word, inspired by the Holy Spirit and recorded by men. We believe that Scripture carries the full authority and weight of Christ concerning everything it says. Therefore, we believe that the whole of Scripture has been given for our instruction, reproof, and training in every good work (2 Timothy 3:16-17).

This means that if we listen to Jesus, and obey Him and His Word, then we will not go wrong. Although we may interpret or understand His Word wrongly at times, if we are faithful, diligent, and conscientious about applying Scripture to our lives plainly, then it shall always lead us towards our greatest good.

Beyond this story proclaiming the authority of Christ's Word, we also need to learn from the nobleman's example.

As Christians, we need to live out of our expectant hope. We need to live as if we believe our hope in Christ Jesus will be fulfilled and may be fulfilled at any moment.

What if we lived like we actually believed that Jesus will return any minute now? What would that do to our priorities and our anxieties? How might they shift or change? What if we lived like we believed that we might die at any minute and would immediately be translated into glory with Christ? Would you live any differently? What would you do now and what would you delay? Would you “waste” as much time on frivolities and inanities, as you do now?

This nobleman lived out his hope in Jesus actively, at the risk of great personal cost. He believed that Jesus could change his life, so he went and asked Him to change it. Then he obeyed Jesus's command because he trusted Jesus's authoritative word.

- Jesus said it. He believed it. That settled it.

If you trust in Jesus for your salvation and He tells you to Go! “...and sin no more.” (John 5:14, 8:11); then you must live repentantly and you need to live differently. You must actually “Go, and sin no more.” Just having faith in Christ, believing in and believing Jesus, is not enough for our salvation; it is only the first part. First, we must believe, then we must trust Him and do as He commands.

First, this nobleman demonstrated his belief by going to Jesus and trusting that his need would be taken care of. He left his dying son because he had faith that Jesus would heal him. This nobleman acted in response to what he believed God would do. Then, this nobleman also humbled himself before Jesus before asking. He did not assume his entitlement. This powerful and influential nobleman humbled himself and **asked**, when otherwise, his life and position afforded him the right to command and to demand. He asked Jesus for help and he expected Jesus to answer; however, not because it was he who asked, but because he believed Jesus is the LORD God.

Honestly, how often do we first humble ourselves when we pray as modern Christians? How often do we assume that God will positively answer our prayers merely because we ask? How often do we pray from a sense of entitlement believing that we deserve it; believing that God must answer how we want? How often do we expect Jesus to answer our prayer because of who we are, instead of because of who He is?

Far too often and that is something we all (myself included, especially) need to repent of and let the Holy Spirit change within us.

So, remember to **first** humble yourself when you pray. Remember that God will answer because of who He is, not because of who you are, and that is a reason which should cause you great joy, because we deserve none of the good that God gives us.

Remember to live out of your faith. Live as if you honestly believe that Christ is coming soon. Expect the expected to happen in unexpected ways and at an unexpected time. Know and believe that Jesus's word is true and the truth. Know that He spoke with authority and believe that Scripture is the highest authority that we can appeal to because it is God's holy Word.

Lastly, welcome Christ and rejoice that He is in your life, because you can see and know about all the amazing and wonderful things that He has done. Remember, the evidence of His many “signs and wonders” are available at your fingertips to read; so, go and see for yourself. Believe in Him and believe Him. Repent of your sins and trust Jesus Christ enough to obey Him in all things.

AMEN