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SERMON TITLE: "Beware of Anti-Supernatural Christianity"  
SCRIPTURE: John 4:46-54  
DATE: April 8, 2018  
Check out the service at [www.fpcd.org](http://www.fpcd.org).

READ JOHN 4:46-54 and 1 Kings 17:20-24

*About* the time Billy Graham was beginning ministry in the 1930s, mainline churches had begun embracing ideas of the Enlightenment. People were enthralled with science and scientific advancement. It was the age of reason, not superstition. Philosophical ideas from Europe flowed into seminaries in the northeast and the development of modernism ensued. Out of that grew an anti-supernatural form of Christianity. That form of faith largely denied the existence of miracles as attested to in the Bible. They called miracles that could not be explained by science or reason "myths." Many scholars began interpreting Scripture in light of this philosophy.

C. S. Lewis never shied away from a challenge, and this was one challenge he took on. In 1947, Lewis published a book called *Miracles*. He asked the question, "Do miracles occur?" He wanted to help people consider the philosophical questions of the supernatural. His thesis was that just because we cannot reason them out or prove them scientifically does not mean miracles do not exist. Secondly, he wanted to know "If miracles are possible, how probable are they?" He reasoned that if there was sufficient evidence for miracles, then we might find they are quite prevalent!<sup>1</sup>

Today's passage is about a miraculous event. It is very similar to the story you heard about Elijah from 1 Kings. As I read it, consider your internal response to the story. Do you believe it? There are two parts to the miracle—perhaps more. See if you can catch both parts. READ John 4:46-54

Before we get into how you respond, Jesus made a strange statement: "Unless you see signs and wonders you will not believe."

Well, that's discouraging! Is Jesus suggesting the royal official is from the "Show Me State?" (Missouri is called the "Show Me State" because of the devotion of its people to simple common sense).

Perhaps Jesus thinks the guy is a naturalist. The natural is what springs up, or comes forth of its own accord. It happens without our effort or anything outside of it. Some examples of statements by a naturalist:

- Are those your natural teeth or dentures? (the ones that grow in the mouth; we do not make them or fit them)
- A dog in his natural state is covered with fleas. (only humans can fix that with flea powder)
- I love to get away from cities and concrete roads and be alone with Nature. (nature is not manmade)
- It may have been wrong to kiss her but it was very natural. (the natural kiss is not compromised by morality or cultural inhibition)

Naturalists can believe in God, but their god does not stand outside the world system or exist "on his own or take his own action which affects the natural." The naturalist's god would simply be a part of the world, not have power over it.<sup>2</sup>

The Supernaturalist believes there is another System outside of nature from which nature originates. While Nature may operate as designed by the System outside it without that System's interference; it could also be that the Designer (God) which is outside might occasionally come into the system and cause a miracle.

So was the man a Naturalist or a Supernaturalist? Did he believe in spontaneous miracles—the action from God who is involved in your life—who takes an interest in you from heaven?

Was Jesus searching for the guy's motive when he said, "Unless you see signs and wonders you will not believe?" Are you from Missouri, the "show-me" state?

But the guy seems pretty convinced of the possibilities of miracles.

What about you? Are you a Naturalist or a Supernaturalist? Or, perhaps at this point you are simply confused.

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<sup>1</sup> C. S. Lewis, *Miracles: A Preliminary Study*, New York: MacMillan Co., 1947), 8.  
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<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

You might be confused because you have prayed for healings but the person you prayed for did not get healed.

You might not have prayed for healing for someone, or prayed hesitantly because you were not sure healing was a possibility, even though you have heard of people who were healed. You wonder,

- Was it the medicine or doctors that accomplished the healing?
- Did the person just get better on his or her own?

The royal official was not put off by Jesus' off-putting statement. In fact, he became more determined: "Sir, come down [to my house] before my little boy dies."

Then Jesus cuts to the chase: "Go; your son will live." (vs. 49-50)

Now, here's the question. Had it been you, would you believe it? Or, would you have had to see the healing before you believed it?

Here's the second miracle: "The man believed the word that Jesus spoke to him and started on his way." (v. 51)

There must have been something special about Jesus.

Jesus had a reputation for healing, but he did not heal every person in the area at that time. Every single person dies. In fact, Jesus said this:

"Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life?" (Mt. 6:27)

But somehow the man released his beloved son into Jesus' hands. He turned over his problem to Jesus. He knew that he alone did not have the power, so he left his concerns with Jesus and headed home.

How are you at placing your loved one in Jesus' hands? Can you turn over your problems, whatever they are to his power? Or are you not sure whether you are a Naturalist or a Supernaturalist? Do you think it is more dependent on you, or on Jesus?

This is a common problem to have. It means we lack an understanding of power.

But you might understand simple, everyday power.

- Have you ever baked a cake from a mix that's expired and it doesn't rise? Think about the difference when you use fresh baking powder or yeast.

- For women, using mouse, volume builder, and hairspray—which makes you look like you have twice the hair. That's power.
- For men, owning a Corvette when you are single, vs. a station wagon when married with kids. ☺
- I had a Volkswagen with a diesel engine. Yes, it got great gas mileage, but it was so powerless I felt like Fred Flintstone needing to peddle it.

But Jesus' power is like the power of God which resurrected Jesus. There's no other power equal to it. Jesus has that kind of power; power that really brings God into your life in a way that you will not otherwise have.

John calls Jesus' acts of power "signs" (semeia). They are power or marvelous deeds or remarkable things that indicate God's work in the world. Signs inspire faith:

- the rainbow after the flood
- the lamb's blood on the doorposts that saved lives
- the birth of a child (Samuel, Isaac)
- the restoration of life to the boy, in response to Elijah's prayer

Signs point to the inbreaking of God's kingdom into the world—Supernaturalism. Besides his supernatural power, Jesus' "signs" also showed his authority and his unity with the Father.

Jesus did not heal the royal official's son because of the man's faith. He healed him because the Father breaks into the world. When his servants came with the good news that the boy's fever had broken, then the man believed in Jesus, that he was the Son of God. Not only did he believe when his son was healed, but *his whole family did, too*.

What signs of Jesus' power have you ignored? Recognize that those signs are to lead you to faith. Take a piece of paper and write down an act of power that you can recall in your or a friend's life. It was an act of power which is not natural but was the inbreaking of God's Spirit, indicating God's kingdom presence—Supernaturalism.

Now, write down the problem or habit or person you are handing over to Jesus today. Place what you have written in your Bible as your symbol of praise to God for his signs to you, and also trusting him with your greatest concern.

This story is a sign of the power of Jesus and why we should always seek healing—of heart, mind, soul, and body—from him. Become a Supernaturalist.

AMEN