

Take Jesus at His Word

John 4:43-54

Key Verse: 50

“Jesus replied, ‘You may go. Your son will live.’ The man took Jesus at his word and departed.”

How many of you have ever seen the movie, “John Q?” It’s a little old. It came out in 2002, we own it and it is a good movie. It’s about a man whose son suddenly becomes sick and is in dire need of a heart transplant. The family is poor and had no way to pay for it since the father lost his health insurance. They applied for all kinds of special funding and public aid there was, but they were turned down over and over again. In desperation, they sold their furniture, their truck and even their wedding rings. Church members donated generously, yet they were still far short of the money they needed. When the hospital was about to turn them away, the father took over the hospital and forced a specialist to do the transplant by offering his own heart so that his dying son might live. Although this was just a movie, I think it shows the desperation and the love a parent has for their children and how far they are willing to go for them.

The royal official in our passage today must have felt a lot like John Q as his son’s life hung by a thread. Jesus was his only hope. This compelled him to travel 20 miles from Capernaum, where he lived, to Cana where he heard that Jesus could be found. He doesn’t know if his son is still alive, or if he has died during his eight hour journey in search of Jesus. But when he finally does find Jesus, he has only one thing on his mind - getting Jesus to come back with him to Capernaum as quickly as possible, in the hope that there’s still time to save his child’s life. What a shock it must have been for him when he realized that Jesus wasn’t going to go with him. And what’s worse is that Jesus’ response to this ROYAL official’s request for help almost seems to be a rebuke. How can Jesus respond so harshly to a father who’s only trying to save his son’s life? Let’s see what God wants us to learn from today’s passage.

As we heard from last week’s passage, Jesus spent two days with the Samaritans and the woman from the well. That in itself is almost like a miracle especially since Jews and Samaritans would have rather killed each other than hang out together. It must have been a wonderful sight, seeing a broken woman restored and a whole town come to know that Jesus really is the Savior of the world. However all good things must come to an end and so after the two days Jesus left for Galilee. (v43) And it’s here that we see an interesting transition from the Samaritan to the Galileans. Take a look at verses 44-45. “(Now Jesus himself had pointed out that a prophet has no honor in his own country.)”⁴⁵ “When he arrived in Galilee, the Galileans welcomed him. They had seen all that he had done in Jerusalem at the Passover Feast, for they also had been there.” Look at the contrast between the Samaritans and the Galileans in how they treat Jesus. The Samaritans, the Jews enemies, urged Jesus to stay with them and they believe in Jesus after two days. But the Galileans, Jesus’ own people, didn’t accept him, that’s why he said that a prophet has no honor in his own country. But you might argue that the Bible says when Jesus returned to his hometown they welcome him. It’s true, at first Jesus does receive a warm welcome, but we’ll see that it’s not really sincere. The people are aware of the miracles he performed in Jerusalem, because they were there when he did them, and they hope that maybe they will get to see many more because after all he’s back home. And over time, what seems to start off well ends up in a disappointing way, both for our Lord Jesus and for those in his hometown.

People respond to Jesus in many ways. Three of them are like this: There are those who respond with “Just say the word and I believe” kind of faith. Like the Roman Centurion did in Matthew 8 when his servant was sick and he went to Jesus. Then there are those who say, “I will believe it when I see it.” The royal official in this passage is like this. He must be from Missouri which is called the “show me” state. And the last group of people don’t believe at all, they just want to see something happen. These type of people are only looking for a performance, like going to the theater. So we have the “just say the word” kind of people, the “if I see it” kind of people and lastly the “freak show” kind of people. Therefore we

shouldn't think that just because the Galileans initially welcome Jesus that they truly accept him as the Messiah. Because these people are not even "if I see it" kind of people, they are unbelievers fascinated by signs, they're the "freak show" kind of people. Thus Jesus is initially welcomed, but he is not truly honored. Jesus did not want to be welcomed as a miracle worker. Rather he wanted people to honor God's word through him. But instead of wanting to know God, his home town people only wanted to see a miracle.

Take a look at 46-50. "Once more he visited Cana in Galilee, where he had turned the water into wine. And there was a certain royal official whose son lay sick at Capernaum.⁴⁷ 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.⁴⁸ "Unless you people see miraculous signs and wonders," Jesus told him, "you will never believe."⁴⁹ The royal official said, "Sir, come down before my child dies."⁵⁰ Jesus replied, "You may go. Your son will live." The man took Jesus at his word and departed." Do you remember a couple of weeks ago when we studied John 2 when Jesus turned water into wine, he now returns to the same place Cana. At this time a royal official living in Capernaum, whose son is at the point of death, hears that Jesus is in Cana. Jesus is his last and only hope to save his son. So he quickly makes the roughly 20 mile journey in search of Jesus. I imagine he is like Bob Deffinbaugh (a pastor at Community Bible Chapel in Richardson, Texas) who gives this account. He says, "When I was 16 years old, my mother was seriously injured by a hit-and-run driver. I was the one driving her to the hospital, while my dad tried to stop the bleeding. I did not care about speed limits that day; I only cared about getting help for her as quickly as possible because I wanted help to save my mother's life." Amazingly the official finds Jesus, and he begs Him to come immediately and heal his son, who is about to die. I would guess that this royal official never had to beg for anything before. Most likely he was in a position of power and he commanded people to get things done. But here he was begging before Jesus. His pride, dignity and honor meant less to him than the well being of his son.

Seeing this man in this situation, would tug at our emotions but Jesus' response to him is a bit puzzling, almost disturbing. Jesus said, "Unless you people see miraculous signs and wonders, you will never believe." Some might ask, "How can Jesus be so rude, so insensitive, so critical?" Jesus seems to lack compassion toward this desperate man, whose only concern is the well-being of his son. From this we can see that Jesus is speaking to the royal official and a larger audience. Most likely the crowd is following the official hoping to see Jesus perform a miracle. And if Jesus had went to the royal official's home, the crowd would have followed him there too. And if they had witnessed the healing of this boy, word would have gotten out and Jesus couldn't do what he needed to get done. And remember that these Galileans don't really believe in Him as the Messiah. All they know is that he has performed signs before and they want to see if he's going to do some more. So Jesus' desire was to get rid of the crowd. So Jesus rebukes them for being interested only in his miracles and not wanting to get to know God. It's like they wanted to see a street performer. They weren't really interested in meeting God.

The on-lookers are merely sign seekers, and Jesus' words seem to send them home. Most likely the crowds would have left if nothing was going to happen. Why stick around if nothing sensational is going to happen? Jesus' words were a double edged sword. On one side they dispersed the crowd but with the other side they refined the official's faith. However, the royal official is not about to let his son die, and he knows that Jesus is his only hope. It may be that his faith is weak, that he needs to see to believe, but he does believe that Jesus is able to heal his son, and so he persists with his request and presses Jesus, "Sir, come down before my child dies." (v49) This is what Jesus was looking for, to see if he had real faith. Jesus tells the man, "You may go. Your son will live."

If the crowd had really been sincere, you would expect they would follow the official back to Capernaum to see if Jesus' words actually come to pass. But this confirms that these people are show seekers, not people of faith. When they heard Jesus say, "You may go. Your son will live," they probably said to

themselves, “Yeah, right!” Notice that the passage never says that anyone went with the official to Capernaum, or that anyone other than his household comes to trust in Jesus. So the crowd left, and the sign seekers go away disappointed that they didn’t get to see the latest show.

Also it seems from what we are told that this official believes that Jesus can heal his son if he is at his side but not from 20 miles away. However this man’s faith seems to grow in the few moments he pleads with Jesus. And so the official leaves to return to his son, believing the word of our Lord. Take a look at verses 51-54. “While he was still on the way, his servants met him with the news that his boy was living.”⁵² When he inquired as to the time when his son got better, they said to him, “The fever left him yesterday at the seventh hour.”⁵³ Then the father realized that this was the exact time at which Jesus had said to him, “Your son will live.” So he and all his household believed.⁵⁴ This was the second miraculous sign that Jesus performed, having come from Judea to Galilee.” When Jesus tells the royal official, “You may go. Your son will live,” the official doesn’t get what he asks for. Nevertheless, the man takes Jesus at his word and leaves Him to return home. This reminds us of Abraham, who also didn’t get what he wanted, and yet the Bible says that it was credited to him as righteousness because he believed God’s promise. (Gen 15:6, Ps 106:31, Rom 4:3,9,22, Gal 3:6, Jam 2:23) But what exactly what does the official believe? I think that he trusts Jesus, not knowing exactly what He meant. He understands Jesus to say that his son has not yet died, and that he will not die. As he makes his way home, his mind must be racing as he considers all the possibilities.

While still on his way, he is met by his servants, who have news of the boy’s condition and do not want their master to agonize any longer than necessary. And as soon as the servants see their master, they call out the good news that his son will live. The words sound strikingly similar to what Jesus told him just a few hours before. You can almost see the face of this father, the look of relief and joy that comes over him. The father could have left it at that and only enjoyed God’s blessing without investigating any further. Then he would have gotten the physical blessing and not the spiritual, he would never have met God personally. How often do we stop as soon as we receive God’s blessing without going all the way to get the whole blessing? But the official starts to put the pieces together. He recognizes the relationship between the words of Jesus and the words of his servants. Jesus was right but now the ruler begins to wonder about his words. Has Jesus spoken as a prophet, assuring him that the child will not die, and will get better on his own? Or, did Jesus produce a miraculous, long distance, healing as he spoke some eight hours earlier?

The father has a desire to know, this is real faith, wanting to know the truth, to really know about God, real faith never stops asking questions because real faith has a desire to know God personally. So the ruler poses this question to his servants: “Just exactly what time was it when ms son suddenly improved?” They tell him it was 1:00 o’clock when the turning point came. And then it hit him and he knows for certain, because that was precisely the time Jesus assured him of the child’s well being. It was a miracle indeed, a miracle brought about by our Lord speaking only a word. It is a miracle just like creation, when He spoke the world into existence in the beginning.

The father knows he has witnessed a miracle, and he believes, along with his entire household. Have we not already been told that he believed in verse 50? At that time, the official believed what Jesus said. The belief we see in verse 53 is a deeper, more informed belief, a belief in Jesus as the Messiah, as the Savior of the world. This man and his whole household become a household of faith. This is the way faith is. When the first disciples came to Jesus they believed, as they walked the life of faith with Jesus their faith grew and grew. And the more they see of Him, the more their faith in Him grows. Faith is not a static thing, something we experience once and then it remains constant. Our faith should grow as we come to know Jesus and his word better, as we see that the One in whom we have placed our trust is even greater than we imagined!

If you notice, this miracle is similar to changing water into wine. When Jesus turned water into wine, he did it in a way that not very many people knew about it. It was a sign evident to only a few, which results in the faith of Jesus' disciples. So too is it with the healing of the royal official's son. Jesus performed the miracle in such a way that only the official knows that it's a miracle. And then he testifies of this miracle to his household and all of them believe. Jesus accomplishes this miracle in such a way that the official's faith goes from "seeing is believing" to "taking him at his word" kind of faith. Do you remember what it says at the end of John 2, chapter where Jesus turned water into wine? "Now while he was in Jerusalem at the Passover Feast, many people saw the miraculous signs he was doing and believed in his name. ²⁴ But Jesus would not entrust himself to them, for he knew all men. ²⁵ He did not need man's testimony about man, for he knew what was in a man." (Jn 2:23-25) This means that Jesus didn't commit himself to those who needed to "see to believe." This type of faith was not pleasing to him. It was not a bad point to start, but it shouldn't end there. Nicodemus, like his fellow-Pharisees, was not willing to take Jesus at His word. He had one question after another. However the woman at the well took Jesus at His word, and so did all the people of Sychar. In contrast the Galileans were impressed by the signs, but not willing to take Jesus at his word.

Another thing that we can learn from this passage is, like the royal official, all of us think that God can solve our problems they way we want. I don't know about you but sometimes when I pray, I tell God what I want and then proceed to instruct him how to do it. The official thinks Jesus can save him if Jesus goes with him to his home but he is wrong. Jesus intended to heal the boy, but he did it in his own way, not according to how the official prescribed. When we pray and seek God, we must leave room for him to work and discover his mighty power along the way.

When we run into difficult times and have trouble we complain and think "why me?" However sometimes God brings adversity into our lives, something that's beyond what we can handle for a reason. It's to draw us to himself. Because for some of us that's the only way we'll ever go to him. However when we come to him for our needs, we can learn from him and experience his amazing power and as a result our faith can grow and mature. And we can go from, "I have to see to believe it," to "just say the word" kind of faith. Jesus is the one that we can take at his word because he keeps it. Who in the world can we take at their word? Former President Bush Sr. famously said, "Read my lips, no new taxes," and a short time later he raised taxes anyway. And who among us have always kept our word? Either everyone lies or they don't have the authority to carry out what they say. But Jesus keeps his word, he keeps his promise. We must take Jesus at his word that he gives us the forgiveness of sins and eternal life. John 3:16 says, "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life." Let's take Jesus at his word and believe that we have eternal life in Him.