

The Gospel of John Belief that Trusts

John 4:43-54

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The word "faith" has taken on new meaning in our shifting culture lexicon with perhaps a greater sense of nuance and sophistication. I would suspect that most of you are known as "people of faith" in the circles where you work and live. To the world, faith is more about being in touch with the spiritual and religious elements of your being human than it is about a particular set of beliefs. Culturally, faith is like fashion. It is something you try on like clothes and add to your wardrobe.

But faith and trust, in and of themselves, can be an empty shell. Faith can be misguided. Trust can be wrongly placed. Because what ultimately matters is the *object* of our faith and not the *amount* of faith we have. We can be sincere and confident and place our faith in the most unreliable things. Right? How many of you think the Bengals will win the Super Bowl next year? Ok, that wasn't fair. But you can see the point. No matter how much faith you have that the Bengals may win the Super Bowl the result depends largely on the team and their play, not how much you believe in them.

In preparing for this message I was reminded of a critical moment of crisis and trust while I was traveling in Israel. Our CEO, who was a former Israeli tank commander, wanted to take my coworker and me to visit the old city Jerusalem. Keep in mind that this was in the fall of 2003 after 9/11 and during an intense period of bombings and unrest in Israel. And while I felt quite safe as we walked through the Jewish quarter and stood along the Wailing Wall, the site of soldiers walking around with machine guns did not set one completely at ease.

Our CEO knew that my coworker and I were Christians and asked if we wanted to see some of the holy sites in the city. Our CEO had brought a friend with us for safety. But as we reached a point in our tour, the friend had stopped and said we should not go further as it led through the Palestinian quarter of the city. I remember looking down and seeing a red line painted on the ground. After a brief discussion, mostly in Hebrew, our CEO and my coworker took off down the narrow street into dark confines the Palestinian quarter while his friend turned and started back to wait for us at the car.

In that moment, which felt much longer than the few seconds I stood there, I had to make a decision of faith and trust. I had only two choices and I can tell you that neither option held much confidence or assurance for me. On the one hand, I could follow after the men I knew into an area that held a perception of danger or I could follow a man I did not know into an area of safety. There I stood alone in the middle of a foreign city, and no matter how trivial it might seem, having a crisis of faith and trust, of hope and desire, weighing and considering what I should do.

This morning, through the inspired writing of John, we encounter a man who also stood at an even greater moment of crisis; a man with a son whose life hung on a moment of faith in a carpenter's son from Galilee. This passage comes at the end of a series of encounters that began at the start of Chapter 2 and ends at the end of Chapter 4. You can see the construction of the greater passage by looking at verse 1 of Chapter 2 where John writes, "On the third day there was a wedding in Cana in Galilee." Similarly, in verse 46 Chapter 4 John notes "So he came again to Cana in Galilee." Again to verse 11 of Chapter 2 we find the text, "This, the first of his signs Jesus did in Cana in Galilee." And then again in verse 54 of Chapter 4 we read "This was now the second sign that Jesus did when he had come from Judea to Galilee." John uses these common words and phrases to connect the included events in this part of his narrative as a single section of text.

We can look at John's gospel as an evangelistic narrative. He calls on his readers to see that Jesus was the promised Messiah and to have a believing faith in Him. In each encounter John emphasizes that people either believed or rejected the authenticity of Jesus' claim to being the Messiah. John records the beginning of Jesus' ministry where he is revealing Himself through signs that made evident His glory to some so that they might fully trust themselves to Him; in other words, that they would have genuine faith and believe.

I would encourage you on your own to scan Chapters 2, 3, and 4 and look for the words "signs" and "believe". Throughout these chapters these words recur over and over. Many were seeing these *signs* which would lead some to *believe* yet some would not believe. John's point is that many saw these signs but not all believed in a way that placed their trust in Jesus for who he was. But before we are too quick to judge let us remember that trust is risky. Trust is humbling. Trust runs against the grain of our own sense of self-sufficiency and pride.

Additionally in this section, we are to understand that true belief leads to eternal life and unbelief leading to condemnation and wrath. Notice the elements of these three chapters having to do with life. First, we have the new wine representing the life giving blood of Christ. Next we have the new life that comes through being born again. Then there is the Samaritan woman who is offered living water that will what? That will well up to eternal life. And here in this morning's text, at the end of this glorious section of John's Gospel, we find a man whose son gains physical life and a household that gains spiritual life.

Please bow your heads with me as we ask God to bless our work in the Word this morning with the light and life of His Son.

Please turn to Chapter 4 of John where we will begin at verse 43. Follow along as we read at the beginning this morning's text.

43 After the two days he departed for Galilee. 44 (For Jesus himself had testified that a prophet has no honor in his own hometown.) 45 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.

John begins by locating his readers back on the journey that Jesus began at the beginning of the chapter. They were on their way from Judea to Galilee. Having now arrived, John reminds us that Jesus expects to have no honor as a prophet in his home region. As he arrives John means for us to see that this is an ironic reception. The context here in light of the responses to Jesus' ministry is that John is likely writing tongue in cheek. There is irony here in that the welcome He receives is based upon his reputation for working miracles not because of his identity as the Messiah. He is welcomed because He is a popular figure not because they have trusted Him as Savior.

In verse 45, John cements the connections here to Chapter 2, reminding his readers that these people had personally seen all that he had done at the Jerusalem feast. These are some of the same people from Chapter 2. And like that Jerusalem crowd whom Jesus would not entrust Himself to, Jesus knew that they welcomed Him for his popularity and not as those who truly believed Him to be the Messiah. This is a sharp and sad contrast to the Samaritans who earlier in this chapter believed that He was indeed the Savior of the world.

This takes us to the main part of this passage. John takes us back to Cana where he records another encounter with Jesus; one where we will see belief turn to faith and trust. We pick up again in verse 46.

46 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. 47 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.

John reminds us that Jesus is back in Cana where he turned the water to wine. But in contrast to the celebration context of the first account, we find **a man in a dire position**. This is not the joyous occasion of a wedding. To the contrary it is quite the opposite; a family grieving over the pending death of a son. The man of this passage is a royal official, probably a person of high position in Herod's court. But despite all his wealth and power, he finds himself helpless to save his son from a serious illness.

Few things can bring the heart of a parent to such a desperate point as the injury or serious illness of a child. Most of us can only begin to understand the misery and suffering of watching a child slowly die. Imagine the desperation of a father whose

final option is to humble himself and to seek out a man he has never met so that he may beg for the life son. Isn't it interesting how it often takes a moment of crisis to bring us to our lowest point before we will seek out Christ?

Despite the fact that he is a Roman government official he humbles himself to **make a daring petition** of this Jewish teacher. Socially and politically he is superior to this simple teacher. Nevertheless, he is driven on by the severity of his son's illness and pending death and more importantly the hope of a miracle he goes to Jesus and pleads with him to come and heal his son. "Please come and heal my son," he asks. "Please," he repeats, "for he is about to die."

It is safe to assume the he also comes to Jesus because of His reputation for performing miracles. And so at one level, he believes in Jesus. But he believes as one whom he hopes can perform a miracle and not because he recognizes the true nature of Jesus as Savior. And while he seeks Jesus out of mistaken identity, he is about to discover there is far more to this man than he ever imagined. How ironic that while he stands and asks Jesus to save his son's life, he stands before the one who will soon save his life as well.

The next few verses take us to the moment of encounter. The royal official meets Jesus and pleads for the life of his son. But as we will see despite his desperation he has a deficient faith. Let's read again starting in verse 48.

48 So Jesus said to him, "Unless you see signs and wonders you will not believe." 49 The official said to him, "Sir, come down before my child dies." 50 Jesus said to him, "Go; your son will live." The man believed the word that Jesus spoke to him and went on his way.

To be honest, this is not the response that we would expect. Jesus does not answer his plea with words of help and assistance. Instead, he offers what would be heard as **a bitter rebuke**. While these words are addressed to the man, the use of the plural "you" in Jesus' response indicates he is talking to all those gathered around as well.

Many of those gathered wanted to see a show. The sense of this to some was to break out the popcorn and soda pop and see what miracle Jesus would do next. These were people who could see the signs and wonders Jesus did, but were blind in their faith and unable to trust. Like Nicodemus, they believed that Jesus was special, as a teacher and doing miracles. But they were not willing to place their trust in Him and believe he was the Messiah foretold in Scripture.

Despite this response, the official continues his pleas for help. He is not there to see more signs and wonders. He is there so that his son would be healed. And so **the urgent plea is repeated** one last time, "Please sir, come down before he dies." Perhaps Jesus is testing this man to see if he will humble himself to the point of trust. Perhaps the bitter rebuke cut to the man's heart as he realized the weakness of his faith.

But this time Jesus says to him, "Go, for your son will live." At these words the official is satisfied that what Jesus has said would be done. But note that he leaves only getting part of his request. Jesus does not come and heal as if His presence were needed to complete the miracle. He simply speaks the words that the man's son will live. It is not what the official asked for and there is no reason or evidence to indicate that his request has been granted. But it is enough for the man to believe and he goes on his way home. What is important here is not so much the amount or degree of faith, but the one in whom he placed had his faith and trust in.

The last few verses of this passage contain a double blessing. It is the wonderful ending that ties everything together and then hands us one more surprise that we would never have imagined. John writes not only of the healing of the son, but records the faith and belief of the official's entire household. Follow as I read verses 51 to 54.

51 As he was going down, his servants met him and told him that his son was recovering. 52 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." 53 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. 54 This was now the second sign that Jesus did when he had come from Judea to Galilee.

It is hard to know what is going through this man's mind as he travels home. It is clearly of some distance, because along the way he is met by his servants who bring him the good news. His **child has been restored**. In my mind's eye, I see this man dancing around on the road like wild man and then falling to his knees in tears. What relief and what joy he would have experienced. After gaining his composure, he asks them the details about when his son got better. And he learns it was at the moment that Jesus said "Your son shall live." Now there can be no doubt that Jesus was the source of his son's healing. Whatever faith had begun in the heart of this man grew into trust and just as his son miraculously was healed, the official miraculously believes.

But it did not stop there. We are not told how, but when the family hears of this news, the **entire household believes and is redeemed**. The official goes home and shares his faith with others. And just as the Samaritan woman shares with the town and they believe, so this man's encounter with Christ is shared and an entire household comes to trusting faith and is saved. True belief is powerful and will replicate itself in others. True belief will be obvious to others and will resonate with and will draw those whom the Lord has called to be saved. As scripture says, "How beautiful the feet of those who bring good news."

As we conclude this morning, let me bring you back to my own moment of crisis in the Old City of Jerusalem. What did I do? What direction did I choose? In the end, what mattered was not the amount of faith I had. Neither heading into perceived danger, nor turning back to the car felt like good alternatives. But in the end it was not about how much I trusted but whom I trusted. So even with fear and concerns clearly in mind, I chose to follow those I knew into the Palestinian Quarter.

Faith is trusting in the substance or truth of what we cannot see. It is an assurance that what we believe is in fact true, though we may not be able to prove it. If you think about it, it does not take faith to believe in something that we can prove to be true. The official believed that Jesus could heal his son even though he had no proof and that his request was not answered in the way he thought it would be. He could not see his son to know he had been healed. He couldn't pull out his cell phone and call his wife to see if his son was feeling better. All that he could do was believe and trust in the person who had spoken those words of life.

As we reflect on this morning's message I would like us to consider **what faith and trust look like**. In what ways are you challenged to place our trust in Christ our Savior? Do you function and live as if all of God's promises are true? Do you doubt them and depend upon ourselves in moments of crisis? In the midst of struggling with sin and temptation do you believe lies rather than the truth of Scripture? Do you trust ourselves to Christ and believe that His ways are best? In the midst of doubt do you believe that Christ's sacrifice on the cross was enough? Do you believe in the essence and power of the Gospel?

For some this morning, you may be struggling with your own belief. Do you have a **belief that trusts**? Just as we have seen in John's Gospel, there were those who believed in Jesus but did not have a faith that trusted in Him as Messiah and Savior. True faith leads to trust in Christ. It places confidence in the work of Jesus on the cross. It is a belief that leads to eternal life. False faith on the other hand leads to condemnation and wrath. It is a belief in the person of Jesus and can even believe in the miracles he performed. But it does not trust in Christ as Lord and Savior. There are many here this morning who would love to help you answer those questions. It is my hope that you will seek someone out and ask them what it means to believe.

Please bow your heads as we pray...