JESUS HEALS AN OFFICIAL’S SON

John 4:43–54

Key Verse: 4:50

“ ‘Go,’ Jesus replied, ‘your son will live.’ The man took Jesus at his word and departed.”

“Are you a Christian?” If we ask this question, so many people say, “Yes.” Maybe they think so because their family was Christian and they grew up attending church. Some think believing in Jesus means mentally agreeing to basic Christian truths. Some think they started believing at a specific time in their lives, and so naturally, they still do. Sometimes it may seem that everybody’s a Christian. But John’s Gospel tells us a different story. It shows that though we may know many things about Jesus in our minds, when life’s problems actually confront us, we don’t really know how to believe. And without believing in Jesus in real life, we can’t be saved. In today’s passage Jesus encounters many people, and especially one man, who seem to believe in him, but actually they don’t. Jesus says and does some radical things to help this one man believe. We want to learn through this study what faith really is and how we can truly have it. May God open our hearts and speak to us personally through his word today.

Look at verses 43–45. Jesus leaves Samaria and arrives in Galilee. But the two days with the Samaritans were quite different from what he expected to happen among his fellow Galileans. The Samaritans came to him to listen to his words, and because they did, their eyes opened to see he’s the Savior of the world. But Jesus knew the Galileans would come to him because they got excited about the miracles he could perform. They had been to Jerusalem during the Passover and had seen the miracles Jesus could do there. Now they wanted to enjoy some bragging rights that this amazing Jesus was from their area, Galilee. Though outwardly they welcomed him, Jesus knew they were not really honoring him from their hearts. He knew their faith in his ability to perform miracles didn’t really change their inner persons (2:23–25).

Look at verse 46a. Jesus went back to the town of Cana in Galilee, where he had turned water into wine. These people had already experienced an amazing miracle of Jesus, but only his disciples understood it. At this point it seems good to stop and ask why Jesus went back to Galilee, to some of the same places he’d already been. Why not stay with the truly believing Samaritans? It was because the Father sent him to minister to an unbelieving world and to his own unbelieving people. Jesus was going to Cana in Galilee in obedience to the Father’s will.

What happened? Look at verse 46b. Here we find “a certain royal official.” It means he was working for Herod the tetrarch. As a royal official he was a high ranking man. But he had a problem. His son lay sick at Capernaum. Capernaum was about 20 miles northeast of Cana. Look at verse 47. News about Jesus and his whereabouts traveled fast. This royal official was in Capernaum, but he already heard that Jesus had arrived at Cana. So he traveled those 20 miles in person to ask his help for his sick son. Though he was a royal official, with great dignity, he was a father first. He was willing to take a chance and put himself out there in order to help his son. We also see in this verse that this royal official “begged” Jesus. That’s a strong word. It’s surprising that a royal official would beg anyone. It shows his desperate need. Often it takes a desperate problem to get us to really come to Jesus. It says his son was “close to death.” Later, we see the boy had a fever (52). It was a poignant moment when a father was humbling himself before Jesus on behalf of his dying son.

How did Jesus respond? Read verse 48. Wow that’s harsh. Jesus doesn’t seem to care about this man’s tragic situation. Instead he rebukes him! In so many of his encounters with suffering people Jesus was full of love and compassion, and ready and willing to humble himself to help. But in this case he’s behaving differently. The fact that this is an important man, a royal official, doesn’t seem to faze Jesus at all. The man is begging, but Jesus is not moving. Why? He says it’s because the man is seeking a miracle instead of truly believing. The man wants a miracle first, then he’ll believe. In fact, Jesus says all the Galileans are pretty much the same. Though he’s compassionate, Jesus doesn’t want to be involved in such a superficial ministry, just giving people the miracles they want. Jesus wants to give people something much more important, and more permanent—faith, real faith, personal faith. How? Based on Jesus’ words here in verse 48, faith has to be there *before* he performs a miracle. We know the famous saying, “I’ll believe it when I see it.” But Jesus wants us to believe first, without seeing. How can that happen?

Look at verse 49. This royal official could have been so offended. He’d come in person and begged, but Jesus rebuked. He could have left in a huff. But he didn’t get emotional. He persevered. He said, “Sir, come down before my child dies.” He was exercising a little bit more of faith. It shows that faith is somehow related to persevering, especially when we don’t get what we want. When things seem bad and we seem to be rejected, faith means to not give up but persevere.

But there’s more. How does Jesus respond to the man? Look at verse 50a. The man said, “Come down” but Jesus said “Go.” The man’s idea was to bring Jesus with him. But Jesus’ idea was different. Did Jesus just not like going to Capernaum? Of course not. Does he refuse to go because he doesn’t like being bossed around by a royal official or showing him special favors? No. Jesus refuses to go with the man not because he doesn’t like him, but in order to help his faith to grow more. How would Jesus’ not going with him help his faith grow? In a sense it might badly discourage the man. But Jesus was setting up a situation in which, if the man wanted to keep believing in him, he could only hold onto his promise: “Your son will live.” There was nothing else the man could do. This is a crucial element of true faith. Some people say faith is blind. But faith is never blind. Faith means believing God’s word. Sometimes there’s no evidence that God’s word will come true. But because it’s God’s word, we believe it.

There’s another crucial element of faith here. As we’ve seen before in John’s Gospel, faith involves action. This man had a promise from Jesus, “Your son will live,” but he would have to act on it. How? He would have to go home without Jesus, believing that his promise would come true. This is where faith really grows—when we begin to act based on God’s promises to us. How did the man respond? Read verse 50b. He acted based on Jesus’ promise. He acted like he believed it would happen. It may sound simple, but it was really not easy. When he first started on his journey, he probably didn’t feel so good. He was going back home empty handed. No Jesus. No healed son. All his efforts had produced no good result thus far. The man could have let his emotions or calculations start eating away at him. He could have asked himself, “How can Jesus expect me to just believe this?” But to overcome his feelings and thinking, he probably just kept repeating Jesus’ promise to himself, “Your son will live, your son will live.” Jesus’ promise was all he had to hold onto. But in this way the man’s faith shifted, from seeking a miracle to really believing Jesus’ promise, before it actually happened.

Often we’re just like this man. We want Jesus to do what we want him to do. We want his help only for what we think we need, in our own way and at our own time. And we want to control the outcome. Often this is how we pray. But we can’t learn faith that way. To really learn faith, we’ve got to learn to take Jesus at his word, especially when we seem to be getting nothing our way. But what does that even mean? Well, it means to really believe what he says. What does Jesus say? Jesus is still speaking to us. How so? He’s given us his very great and precious promises in the Bible (2Pe1:4). In John’s Gospel Jesus promises to give us life. He promises to make us children of God. He promises that we will see his glory and experience his grace and truth. He promises to save us from condemnation. He promises to show us God’s great love. He promises to quench our thirsty souls. He promises that the fields are ripe for harvest. And the list goes on and on. Whenever we study the Bible, we need to be paying close attention to what Jesus is promising and really take him at his word. Only when we take him at his word and act like we believe it can we begin to have personal faith. So what promise of Jesus are you holding onto right now?

What happened next? Look at verse 51. What great news! The man’s son was living! What a huge relief! He must have wanted to rush home to hug him and have a big celebration. The man got what he wanted from Jesus! Yay! But the story doesn’t end here. Look at verse 52. Why did the man stop to inquire about when his son got better? He wanted to know if the boy just happened to get better on his own, or whether it was actually because of Jesus that he was healed. But how could he know for sure? It was all about the time. When did the boy get better? The servants knew. They couldn’t forget it. It had happened the previous day, at one in the afternoon.

What did the man do when the servants told him the time? Look at verse 53. It’s very interesting that only at this point does it say that he believed. What does it mean? It means his faith now found the right object—not a miracle, not even a promise, but Jesus himself. Yes he had experienced the power of Jesus’ word to heal his son even from 20 miles away. But this wasn’t just about the power of Jesus’ word. It wasn’t just about the miracle of his son’s healing. The man’s faith was now rooted and grounded in *Jesus himself*. He really believed *in Jesus.* And his believing wasn’t just theoretical; it came from personal, first-hand experience, and it blessed his entire household. We see in this event how the man’s faith grew. He had a little bit of faith just to come to Jesus at first. His faith grew a little bit more when he persevered to keep asking his help. His faith took a giant leap forward when he took Jesus at his word and departed. And his faith reached maturity when he confirmed that the healing really came from Jesus. Look at verse 54. This miraculous sign shows that Jesus plants real faith.

So faith grows. It’s never static; it needs to go deeper. How can our faith grow deeper to maturity? We need to keep coming to Jesus personally. We need to keep asking his help. We need to take him at his word and act like we believe it. And we need to learn to keep the focus on Jesus. Really, for our faith to grow to maturity, we need his help. How does he help us? It’s through real-life suffering and trials. 1 Peter 1:6,7 says, “In all this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. These have come so that the proven genuineness of your faith—of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire—may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed.” In brief, God allows suffering and trials in our lives to refine our faith. Instead of avoiding our suffering or complaining about our suffering, we need to see how God is working to help our faith in Jesus grow deeper and more genuine. May God bless us to take Jesus at his word and act on it. May God deepen our faith in Jesus and make us a real blessing.