



CHRIST
CHURCH

JOHN 4:46-54

³⁹ Many Samaritans from that town believed in him because of the woman's testimony, "He told me all that I ever did."⁴⁰ So when the Samaritans came to him, they asked him to stay with them, and he stayed there two days.⁴¹ And many more believed because of his word.⁴² They said to the woman, "It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is indeed the Savior of the world."

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.

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.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.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.

DAY 1

JOHN 4:46, 47

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.

As we come to this story we meet an official whose son was ill, ill to the point of death. The term used here for “official” is sometimes translated “royal official” and likely indicates someone with ties to Herod’s court, someone with status and wealth. One of the first things that we recognize is that wealth and status make no difference with respect to illness and death. In this case it is reasonable to assume that he had used his resources and influence to seek healing for his son to no avail. It is said that the Church father Origen called this world a “world of tears” in referring to the hardships known to humanity. Certainly this past year has confirmed that in this world we will have trouble!

- What hardships are you facing right now? What need is foremost in your heart?

One of the great things about our need is that it drives us to Jesus. Here we see that when this official hears that Jesus is in town he seeks him out, looking for healing for his son. To better understand this, note that Jesus had a reputation in Cana as the one who turned the water into wine. Surely everyone knew; everyone was talking about it. Word even reached this official in Capernaum, some 20 miles away. So in desperation he comes to Jesus and begs him (the term translated “asked” has a continual, persistent aspect to it) to heal his son. As we reflect on this encounter a couple of other questions come to mind:

- In the midst of your hardships, have you come to Jesus or are you seeking to solve your problems on your own?
- Rumor of the power of Jesus had reached this official’s ears so that in his time of need he knew where to go. In this month where we are thinking of the missionary emphasis of the church it might be good to consider to what degree you are contributing to rumors of the power, grace, and welcome of Jesus being spread in your family, neighborhood, workplace, etc....

PRAYER

Jesus, this is indeed a world of tears. We have felt this acutely in 2020, but this just confirms what we already knew. Today we want to name our troubles and take them to you. We know that you are powerful, gracious, and willing to hear our prayers and to act on our behalf. Holy Spirit, help us to be persistent in our asking and not to content ourselves with lesser solutions. We thank you for the grace you displayed in receiving this official and the promise that you are the same yesterday, today, and forever. We pray all this in Jesus’s name. Amen.

DAY 2

JOHN 4:48

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

We like to see where we're going. When there is ice on the windshield we clean it off before we go driving. In most situations we like to have a good idea of the end result before we engage in a new or risky activity.

But faith is something that we have without the privilege of seeing beforehand. As Hebrews 11:1 reminds us, *“Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.”* Being risk-averse we have a hard time trusting in others, much less Jesus, without seeing evidence regarding what it is we are believing. Are you sure the car can make it home on the spare tire?

John 2:23 shows us how many of the people in Jerusalem believed in Jesus because they saw the signs he had been doing. But when Jesus was in Capernaum, the official had to take Jesus at his word. The official asked for Jesus to come with him to heal his son; he wanted to make sure that Jesus could heal the boy in person. But Jesus invited him to greater faith and sent him away having to trust Jesus.

- How is God inviting you to believe beyond what you see?
- In what ways are you inviting others to trust in the Word of God rather than the things of this world?

Remember today that God is sovereign and rejoice in his grace upon those whom he loves. We are his children. In this month we are focusing on missions as a church; the children of God span the globe, those who trust in him are near and far. God's grace is a gift that we share with others. As you go about this week, this month, this year, think about those with whom you can share this gift, and delight in the fact that it has been given to you.

PRAYER

O Lord our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth: for all people in all times. Fill us with a trust that cannot be wavered, a faith that is built upon the rock. We cannot see the plans that you have laid for us. Grant us patience so that we may hope in you even when the way seems dim. May we trust in your Word which lights our way as we live before you. In Jesus's name. Amen.

DAY 3

JOHN 4:49-50

⁴⁹ The official said to him, “Sir, come down before my child dies.”

⁵⁰ Jesus said to him, “Go; your son will live.”

As Jesus comes to town, he is met by a father searching for help for his sick son. This man, an official, leaps to action as he hears that the miracle worker had returned to Cana. Remember that it was in this very city that Jesus saved the wedding party from crisis by turning water into wine. Perhaps that miracle worker may be able to save my son, he thought. So he comes to Jesus with a clear request: “Sir, come down before my child dies.” Hear the urgency in the father’s voice. As an official, he was probably a man who knew how to take responsibility and make things happen. This father sees his solution in Jesus of Nazareth and gives him a directive.

Jesus answers him by telling him to go. Notice how Jesus’s response parallels the father’s words.

The father says, “Come.” Jesus says, “Go.”

The father says, “before my child dies.” Jesus says, “your son will live.”

We know from the response of the official that Jesus’s words rang trustworthy in his heart, for he “believed . . . and went on his way.” What happened in this moment? This man of authority realized that trusting in Jesus meant yielding to his authority. The man had expectations for how Jesus would address his needs. Imagine what would have happened if he had held onto his own directive with a clenched fist? Perhaps he may have said, “Sir, but my son is dying. If you are able to save him, he needs you to come now!” That response may have been in line with how he typically related to his subjects in his office. But the official knew that this Jesus was no subject of his. In that moment, he realized that Jesus would not be controlled.

Today marks the beginning of Lent, a season when we mourn our sin and let go of earthly things that disrupt our hearts from delighting in God. We too, like the official, come before Jesus with expectations. Perhaps you are asking Jesus to come in particular ways. That is a very good thing, for Jesus urges us to draw near to his throne of grace and present our requests to him! Yet the story of the official and his son teaches us that God often answers our requests in unexpected ways, sometimes contrary to our own thinking. In fact, it prefigures the great plot twist that this lenten season leads up to. What person would have dared to contrive a story where it is the Son of God himself who is crushed for the iniquities of the world? The story that God writes is far more beautifully dynamic, oozing with more redemptive plot twists than anything we could write for ourselves.

Take a moment to reflect on how you may be challenged and comforted during this season of Lent by the surprising story of Jesus. How may you take time to lay down your hard-and-fast expectations and tune your heart to Jesus’s voice, the voice that invites us to everlasting life?

PRAYER

Father in heaven, you are Spirit, powerful and free. No creature, no structure, no philosophy, no expectation of ours could ever constrain you. In your good pleasure you have set the course of our fallen world to experience the redemption of all things. Tune my heart to your voice. May I be eager to heed it, even when surprised and caught off guard. How precious to me are your thoughts, O God! How vast is the sum of them! If I were to count them, they would be more than the sand! Most of all, give me ears to hear the loving voice of your son Jesus, the founder and perfecter of my faith. It is in his name I pray. Amen.

DAY 4

JOHN 4:50-53

⁵⁰ The man believed the word that Jesus spoke to him and went on his way. 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.

At the end of his gospel, John states his purpose for writing. He wanted all people to believe Jesus is the Christ, the promised Messiah, the Son of God. He writes with urgency because this believing is a matter of life or death. There are things we can be wrong about without serious consequences. This is not one; this has eternal consequences. We can't be wrong about who Jesus is or about what “believing” means.

Out of all the things Jesus said and did, the Holy Spirit directed John to those words and actions that would best accomplish this purpose of revealing who Jesus is. John calls miracles signs. They are not an end in themselves, but point to Jesus, God's Son, who was sent into the world to give life. The healing of the official's son early in Jesus's ministry was one of these signs.

It is not hard to imagine the desperation this father felt as he had exhausted every means at his disposal to help his precious son, his dying son. Time is short. His heart is racing. He can think of nothing else. This miracle worker he had heard about is his last chance. Would he listen? Would he care? Would he come? With his tiny seed of faith, he brought his request.

Jesus did not allow sympathy to rob him of the opportunity to grow this tiny seed. When he told this desperate man he would not believe without a sign, he gave a challenge that would require a choice. But love for his son compelled him; the seed is growing. Then Jesus gives a harder test: “Go, your son will live.” Such simple words without conditions, yet spoken with such authority. But go??? Unbelief would have heard a refusal. But Jesus creates and builds faith as He Himself meets us in our place of need. Belief comes as we experience the truth of Who He is. This father's growing faith was revealed in his decision to trust Jesus's word and start for home without argument. Jesus's word was enough. His word created what it spoke; it was a living, life-giving word!

God delights in rewarding our trust in Him. This father did not have to wait until he was home to hear the good news about his son. When the servants confirmed his son had begun to recover at the exact moment Jesus had spoken, he “believed.” He knew, without doubt, that Jesus was God and that he gives another kind of life. His heart was bursting with an explosion of joy and gratitude! He could hardly wait to tell his family! He had come to Jesus to ask for healing for a physical need, and Jesus had a far bigger gift to

give. He and his family are now spiritually, eternally alive. He would never stop thanking Him! He would never stop telling!

The heroes of faith named in Hebrews 11 were sure of what they hoped for but had not yet seen. They lived as if these promises were already realized. Spend some time thinking about their faith, what words they believed that caused them to do what they did.

- What specific words from God have directed you in your life in both times of crisis and on ordinary days?
- How has your faith grown as you have trusted/ believed God's word?
- Whom can you tell?

PRAYER

Wonderful, merciful Savior, how can we say thanks for all you have done for us? Father, you have given beyond what we could ask or imagine, and the best is still to come. We praise you, Jesus, for taking our punishment so that we could have eternal life. Open our eyes to see lost people, here and far away. Open our hearts to love and care. Today we remember our missionary families in many places throughout the world. Please encourage them in their work, and create and build faith in people through your Word. Jesus, we want you to be known and worshiped! Amen

DAY 5

JOHN 4:46, 54

⁴⁶ So he came again to Cana in Galilee, where he had made the water wine. ... ⁵⁴ This was now the second sign that Jesus did when he had come from Judea to Galilee

Jesus is said to have come again to Cana. Cana, a prime location on the Roman road from Ptolemais to Magdala. Cana, where Roman-era occupation has been confirmed by archaeological excavation. Cana, where Jesus enriched, enlivened, and made possible a wedding feast and where he now heals a child of a deadly fever. In these two accounts of the work of Jesus in Cana, we see that he does not limit his renewing presence to the Jewish people.

The *New Bible Commentary* edited by Wenham, Motyer, Caron and France gives insight (p. 1035):

Most of John's record centers on Jerusalem, but the few narratives he includes that are located in Galilee are significant. ... John notes that Jesus had himself recognized that a prophet was without honor in his own country (44). There is dispute over what own country here means. In the synoptics the saying refers to Nazareth; but here it is most likely that John understands it as the Jewish homeland as distinct from Samaria. There is particular point here in comparing the ready reception the Samaritans gave to Jesus for who he was and the welcome of the Galileans for the miracles he did. On the other hand, the homeland may be considered to refer to Jerusalem, where in this gospel Jesus was not well received. In this case, the reception in Galilee would be by way of contrast.

The former suggestion is the more likely. The Galileans were clearly greatly impressed by the reports of signs performed in Jerusalem at the Passover.

So we come to consider the distinction between loving Jesus for who he is or loving him for what he does. Perhaps we can rely on the fact that what he does helps to reveal to us who he is. In these two accounts, we can easily see how it worked out well for those who were healed. But let's not miss the ultimate gift he offers: his eternal forgiveness and presence. In the water-to-wine sign, he points to our future union where he is the bridegroom and the Church is the bride, when we will drink the wine of his blood he provides for our wedding feast. In the sign of the official's son, Jesus points to his constant presence with us on earth in his Word, through the Holy Spirit, even when he is physically not seen.

Poetry can help reveal the glory of Jesus he shares with us:

Epiphany at Cana

by Malcolm Guite

Here's an epiphany to have and hold,
A truth that you can taste upon the tongue,
No distant shrines and canopies of gold
Or ladders to be clambered rung by rung,
But here and now, amidst your daily living,
Where you can taste and touch and feel and see,
The spring of love, the fount of all forgiving,
Flows when you need it, rich, abundant, free.

Better than waters of some outer weeping,
That leave you still with all your hidden sin,
Here is a vintage richer for the keeping
That works its transformation from within.
'What price?' you ask me, as we raise the glass,
'It cost our Saviour everything he has.'

The Parent's Prayer

by Charles Wesley Taken from *Village hymns for social worship* from 1840.

Jesu, great healer of mankind,
Who dost our sorrows bear,
Let an afflicted parent find
An answer to his prayer.

I look for help in thee alone,
To thee for succour fly;
Come down and heal my darling son,
Now at the point to die.

By deep distress a suppliant made,
By agony of grief,
Most justly might thy love upbraid
My lingering unbelief.

But thou art ready still to run,
And grant our heart's desire:
Lord, in thy healing power come down,
Before my child expire.

Jesus, if thou pronounce the word,
The gracious answer give,
My dying child shall be restor'd,
And to thy glory live.

Rebuke the fever in this hour,
Command it to depart;
Now, let me behold thy power,
And give thee all my heart.

O save the parent, in the son
Restore him, Lord, to me;
My heart the miracle shall own,
And give him back to Thee.

I will, I will obey thy word,
To thee my all resign,
I, and my house will serve the Lord,
And live forever thine.

PRAYER

Thank you for your mercy to us. We praise your name for ever and ever! Deepen our capacity to cling to you as our ultimate blessing. Help us especially when the circumstances of our lives grieve us. May we rejoice with those who rejoice and mourn with those who mourn. Reveal your quiet presence to us as you hear our prayers and answer in love. Amen.