

Sermon outline and notes:

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John 4:45-54 “The Growth of Faith”

Intro. Heb. 11:6 says “Without faith it is impossible to please God, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.” Eph. 2:8 says, “For by grace are you saved through faith.” 1 John 5:4 says, “... this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith.” Faith is so important in our relationship with God. It is indispensable. We are saved by faith; we please God by faith; we gain victories through faith.

So we have the joy today of considering one of the great stories of the Bible that describes the growth of faith. The incident took place in the life of a certain nobleman (*basilikos*). This nobleman was probably a royal officer in King Herod’s court, or perhaps even a relative of Herod’s. In spite of his background, he became a believer in Jesus Christ. Notice that 3 times the word “believe” is used in the narrative, each of which indicates a stage in the development of his faith. First, look at v.48, “Unless you people see signs and wonders, you will by no means believe.” Then, v.50: “So the man believed the word that Jesus spoke to him.” And finally, v.53: “he himself believed, and his whole household.” At every step in his belief he reached a higher level of faith.

So as you listen this morning, I hope that you will grow in your faith as well. I want to challenge *you* to take the next step in the development of your own faith in God. So let’s see how faith grows and develops in a person’s life. First of all:

I. MANY BEGIN WITH CRISIS FAITH

What was it that caused this man to come to Jesus and put his faith in him? A crisis led this person to Jesus. We read in the last of v.46, “And there was a certain nobleman whose son was sick at Capernaum.” In v.49 he called him “my child,” which translates a Greek word (*paidion*) that means “a little boy.” Then it says in the last of v.47, “he was at the point of death.” This is a little boy whose illness has torn his father’s heart. You’re your child is dying, that is a crisis!

When death was knocking at the door of his home, he probably tried everything else first. Considering his position, and he could have the best that money could buy: the best doctors, the best nurses, the best medicines. But money is not almighty. Nothing was working.

So when he heard about Jesus, and heard that He was in a near-by town, he traveled about 20 miles to get to Jesus. Little did He know of the blessings he was about to receive, far greater than mere physical healing. And so it is that God will sometimes use trouble in our lives to bring about some spiritual good. Troubles have a way of turning our attention to God. Your heart may be breaking over some trial you are going through, but take heart! God wants to use that to bless you in some way through that trial. Had this nobleman been without trial, he might have lived the rest of his life without entering into a relationship with Jesus as Savior. Even though his faith started off small, it was in the right person, for his trial led him to Jesus. And that’s what matters.

Now I want to share with you:

A. The Positive Aspects of Such Faith - After all, that’s how many people are pressured into placing their faith in God. A crisis may cause someone to attend church after a long absence. It may lead to a person’s salvation. Crisis faith is a step in the right direction:

1. When You Believe the Reports about Jesus – Up to this point Jesus had only done one miracle in Galilee, which was His first, that of turning water into wine (John 2). Yet look at v.45, “So when He came to Galilee, the Galileans received Him, having seen all the things He did in Jerusalem at the feast....” Everyone in Galilee was talking about the miracles Jesus did in Judea. No doubt this nobleman also heard of Jesus, and so we read in v.47, “When he heard that Jesus had come out of Judea into Galilee” The nobleman probably had never seen Jesus. He had only *heard* of what He had done for others.

That is how faith works. Rom. 10:17 says, “So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.” He not only heard the reports about Jesus, but clearly he also believed them. So when faced with a crisis, he believed those reports and decided that Jesus could help his son.

This is the type of faith that many people have. We start off hearing about Jesus, perhaps as a child. We’ve heard of the great miracles He did. We’ve heard of His sacrificial love on the cross. We’ve heard of His resurrection from the dead. We’ve heard testimonies of the life changing power of Jesus Christ. Now question is this: do you believe the reports? Are you that far in the development of your faith? If you act on the basis of what you do know about Jesus Christ, then Jesus will nurture that faith and mature it. He will fan that little spark of faith and he will bring it to a flame in your heart and in your life.

Furthermore, crisis faith is a step in the right direction:

2. When Your Faith Leads to Action – John says in v.47, “When he heard that Jesus had come out of Judea into Galilee, he went to Him and implored Him to come down¹ and heal his son....” As a nobleman, he could have sent servants, but he did not.² He acted on his faith by traveling 20 miles of hill country to get to where Jesus was. Even on horseback, that was a good distance. Then, when he got to Jesus, the text actually says he “kept beseeching Him” (*erotao*, imperfect tense). Even so, if your faith is genuine it will lead to action. James chapter 2 says “faith without works is dead.” If you truly believe in Jesus you will seek His help, and the help of God’s people. You will pray and ask Him to meet that need in your life.

Now it was not only faith that led to action, but also love for his child. How many of you have ever had a very sick child? Well, you know that your child is very close to your heart, and you will do just about anything to get that child well. He was also driven by desperation. His child was now at death’s door, and no efforts to save him had been fruitful. He was clearly at his wit’s end and desperately needed the help of the Savior. So he went to Jesus and we can understand his repeated pleadings.

So even though faith often begins with a crisis, and leads us to a first step of faith in Jesus, it is inadequate & lacking. God does not want you to have nothing more than crisis faith. I’ve seen plenty of crisis faith in my ministry. In a crisis they come to church, or come to my office and ask prayer. Yet as soon as the crisis passes, I do not see them anymore. So before we move on, I want to show you why such faith alone is lacking. So consider with me:

B. The Negative Aspects of Such Faith:

1. It Inadequately Recognizes the Power of Jesus – In the last of v.47 we read that he “implored Him to come down and heal his son.” He repeated the same request in v.49. He took for granted that in order to affect a cure, Jesus would have to travel from Cana to Capernaum and would have to come to the bedside of the boy. Initially, he had no idea that Jesus could work at a

¹ Since Cana is in the hills of Galilee and Capernaum is by the sea, Jesus would “come down” if He went with the man.

² The first miracle at Cana came at the request of His mother (John 2:1-5), and this second miracle at Cana at the request of a father (John 4:47) – Wiersbe.

distance of some 20 miles just by the power of His word.³ He certainly did not have any idea that Jesus could even raise his son back to life if he had already died!

Do you believe that Jesus can answer prayer, and do a great work in your life from His throne in heaven, or do you believe that one of His ministers must physically be present with you? Or do you believe that you have to be in a church sanctuary for Jesus to do a work in your life? How fully developed is your faith? Sometimes our faith is limited in what we believe Jesus can do.

2. Such Faith May Demand Prior Confirmation - Jesus says in v.48, “Unless you people see signs and wonders, you will by no means believe.” When Jesus returned to Galilee, the Galileans wanted Him to prove Himself with an act of power. They wanted to see the miracles they had heard about. By implication He complains that this man, who had already heard so much of Christ, was like them. He was still standing on the lowest rung of faith’s ladder. His confidence, and that of others like him, had to be constantly fed by signs and wonders.⁴ Such people are more interested in sensational miracles than in His wonderful words of life, and the beauty of His character. They want to see the signs, but they fail to consider the message the signs are intended to convey! Jesus did not want to be regarded only as a miracle worker while the message of His person was rejected. He had found a better faith in Samaria. There He had found people who needed no miracles, but who believed on Him, not because of miracles, but because they heard Him themselves, and His words touched their consciences and stirred strange longings in their hearts.

The same problem is still with us today. The faith of our generation is also woefully lacking. “Seeing is believing” has always been the “pragmatic” philosophy of the unsaved world, and even much of the religious world. Let a preacher come to town working miracles, and many will flock to him. Or let a teacher come preaching the gospel of material prosperity, and the people will come. But let a preacher simply come preaching truths about Jesus, and few will desire to listen.

Now based on v.48 which kind of faith is superior? Is it faith based on the Word of God and eyewitness testimony, or faith that insists on seeing confirmation with our own eyes? The answer is obvious. For too many the bare word of God is not sufficient for us—we crave a “sign.” Or we insist on getting some feeling before we will believe. Folks, it is not true faith if we have to see or feel something before we will believe! Why ask for “signs”? We are going to see in just a moment that the word of Christ should be enough.

The fact is miraculous signs do not automatically lead to faith. That was certainly true in the ministry of Jesus, and it is true to this day.

One time a young woman had become critically ill and her prognosis was grim; she would likely die within the year. She and her family had been nominal Christians, attending Christmas and Easter. Her young pastor visited her in the hospital and she challenged him: If Jesus healed in the Bible, he should be able to heal me today. If not, what use is he? So she prayed. The pastor prayed. The whole family prayed and pleaded and bargained. If God would only show mercy, the family urged, they would completely recommit themselves and come to church every Sunday. Then to everyone’s amazement, God healed her completely. And with the physicians shaking their heads, she was sent home from the hospital. The next Sunday, the entire family was there in the front pew. The young woman gave her testimony, praising God for his goodness. The following Sunday, the

³ Jairus had a similar limited faith (Mk. 5:23). The centurion, whose servant was ill, certainly had a superior faith (Lk. 7:1-10; Mt. 8:8).

⁴ Wiersbe believes this was not a rebuke of this nobleman. Rather, it was our Lord’s lament at the spiritual condition of the people in general. The NKJV translates it “you *people*,” not necessarily for the reason just given, but because “you” is plural. Unless there is reason to believe otherwise, the nobleman should be included in “you.”

family was there again. In four weeks, it was only the woman and her husband. And after that, attendance was sporadic until they dropped into their previous pattern. Before long, the woman rationalized the entire incident.⁵ All she had was crisis faith.

So folks, we need more than crisis faith. Even though we often begin with such faith:

II. WE SHOULD MOVE ON TO A CHALLENGED FAITH

As I said in the introduction, faith is so important in our relationship to God. So He wants to challenge our faith, to grow our faith to a new level. If you have only small, crisis faith, then pray with the father in Mark 9:24, “Lord, I believe; help my unbelief.” So notice with me first of all:

A. The Role of Jesus in Developing Faith – No doubt Jesus was moved with compassion for the boy, but He had other work to do as well. He ministered to the father to develop his faith. Notice how He does so. After correcting his inadequate faith in v.48, He challenges his inadequate faith. Again, in v.49 the nobleman said to Jesus, “Sir, come down before my child dies!” Yet in spite of the nobleman’s repeated pleadings, Christ refuses to go with this man to his house. Instead of yielding to the nobleman’s command, He gave a command of His own in v.50, “Go your way; your son lives.” Such a statement would challenge this man’s faith to have nothing more to go one than the promise of Jesus, “your son lives.”

How many times has the Lord challenged and stretched your faith? Often He refuses to answer our initial pleadings that He might challenge us to move on to a higher level of faith. Also, in the nobleman’s case, He refuses to come that He may heal at a distance, and thus manifest still more wondrously His power and His grace. The more Jesus is magnified, the more our faith in Him will grow. When He says “No” to your request, perhaps He wants to do something greater. When you realize how great Jesus is, when you realize how merciful Jesus is, when you realize how powerful Jesus is, you can have great faith in Him.

B. Our Responsibility to Respond with a Developing Faith – What is our responsibility when God is challenging our faith? What kind of faith should we exercise? Based on our story today, let us:

1. Exercise *Persistent* Faith - When Jesus rebuked his faith in v.48, he did not pout and turn away. Though he was a nobleman, he did not become angry when corrected. Instead, with determination to get healing for his son, he kept pleading (v.49), not only because of his desperate love, but also because he believed that Jesus could heal his son. Note how intense, how eager, how persevering was his pleading! This showed that his faith had heart and vitality in it. It was no sudden impulse, but a real persuasion of the power of Jesus to heal. Otherwise, he may have turned away at the rebuke. But to whom else could he go to conquer such a serious problem?

Illustration: One of the great examples of such persistent faith was the Syrophenician woman [tell story of Mt. 15:21-28].

Do you have a persistent faith? Oh, that you too would have a faith that weathers the storm of appearances or a lack of understanding of the ways of God. When you pray and nothing happens, will you quickly assume that God does not care about you, or that He cannot help you? Please follow the example of this man, who kept pleading. Jesus said in Matthew 7:7, “Keep on asking, and it will be given to you; keep on seeking, and you will find; keep on knocking, and it

⁵ Burge, 166-167

will be opened to you.”⁶ The Lord never turns away a soul that truly seeks Him.

There is something else Jesus challenges us to do:

2. Believe the Mere Word of Jesus – By the time we get to v.50, Jesus insisted that he trust Him to the point of believing His promise, “your son lives.” He did not go with Him. He did not give him a sign. All He gave him was a promise, an assurance that his son would be okay. That is the best definition of faith I have ever read, faith is taking God at His Word. Faith is just simply believing what God says about the matter.

What would you do if you were in his shoes? Would you just believe the word of Jesus and go home with the full confidence that you would find your son healed? Or would you continue to beg Jesus to come with you? Would you demand that he give you a sign, or some other assurance that your prayer will be answered? Not in this man’s case! We are not told if there was any struggle in the mind of this nobleman. He may have wondered if he should just accept Jesus at His word, or continue to entreat Jesus to go with him. Yet slowly, perhaps, but decisively, he accepted the word of Jesus though he saw no outward evidence that Jesus had healed his son. He raises no objections, asks no questions, but with implicit confidence in what he had heard, he believed, and went his way with an inner assurance that his boy was going to be okay. No “signs” were needed, no feelings required to impart this assurance.

This is what we have to do. We have Christ’s bare word, and no more, to trust for everything. We must not demand a miracle or sign from heaven. We must simply take God at His Word. This is how salvation comes to the sinner. We are saved by faith in God’s promise to grant forgiveness and eternal life if we simply trust in Jesus as our Savior. So will you believe Him when He says that He will save you and forgive you if you will only believe in Him with simple trust? Don’t add any other conditions. The very fact that it is God’s Word guarantees its truthfulness.

Now, the nobleman’s faith has flamed up indeed. He believes not upon the mere reports of others, but upon the word of Jesus. Therefore, having advanced in his faith, he illustrates the fact that:

III. WE CAN EXPERIENCE A CONFIRMED FAITH

This is the great joy of exercising faith in God. As you trust in Him, He answers your prayers and you experience the confirmation of your faith, which results in even greater faith. So let’s see from our story what we can learn about experiencing a confirmed faith:

A. Our Faith Will Be Confirmed by the Answer to Our Prayers – In Capernaum the mother and the servants have noticed the sudden and remarkable recovery in the boy. Filled with rejoicing, they cannot wait for the arrival of their master. So the servants, probably at first light the next day, go on their way to meet their master. So John says in v.51, “And as he was now going down, his servants met him and told him, saying, ‘Your son lives!’” What exciting news! Now let’s pick up with vv.52-53, “Then he inquired of them the hour when he got better. And they said to him, ‘Yesterday at the seventh hour⁷ the fever left him.’ So the father knew that it was at the same hour in which Jesus said to him, ‘Your son lives.’” The nobleman became even more excited when he found out that his son was healed the very same hour that Jesus promised his healing. And so his experience has just confirmed his faith to make it even stronger!

⁶ Thus translating the present tenses.

⁷ The boy had been healed at the seventh hour, which, in Roman time, would be 7 o’clock in the evening. The father certainly would not have traveled at night, for that would have been dangerous. So they probably met the next morning.

How many times have you had your faith confirmed? When you first believed in Jesus as your Savior, didn't you experience the peace of God in your soul? Then, as you began to walk with God, is there anything more exciting than experiencing God answer prayer in an amazing way? Those of us who have walked by faith for many years have many experiences of answered prayer. Thus, our faith grows even more. St. Augustine said, "Faith is to believe what we do not see; and the reward of faith is to see what we believe." That is exactly what happened here!

B. Our Faith Will Be Confirmed that We Might Come to Know God, or Know Him Better - In v.53 the text says, "And he himself believed." He had already believed the word of Christ. Now he fully believes *in* Christ. Now he follows Him, not as a Healer only, nor even as a Prophet only, but as the Messiah and Lord. He realized that Jesus was more than a mere man. How else could he heal from a distance merely by His Word and the exercise of His will?⁸ This is the Son of God he has spoken with! And so his faith grows to saving faith.

What a lesson this is for us. One way our faith grows is by learning more about who Jesus really is. The size of your faith doesn't matter nearly as much as the greatness of the object of your faith. The nobleman's son was healed because He trusted in the LORD Jesus.

C. Our Faith Will Be Confirmed that We Might Share It with Others – Not only did the nobleman believe, but the last of v.53 indicates that "his whole household" believed as well. You see, a true faith is one that is shared with others. Let's see what happened in the case of the nobleman.

When he got home, his wife met him. You can imagine what that mother has been going through! But now, see the delight that sparkles in that woman's eyes! Their son has been healed! He explains what happened. He tells her about what Jesus said and did, and she without hesitation she believes in Him also. And the father goes to the boy and tells him about going to the prophet at Cana and how He spoke the words of healing. The little boy cries, "Father, I believe in Jesus. He is the Son of God." And I'm sure that the servants of the house likewise believed on Jesus. Perhaps this is one reason why Paul said to the Philippian jailer in Acts 16:31, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household." Oh, the joy of having a whole household believe in Jesus. That's what God wants for every family. There must have been a grand baptism soon after, when they all went to confess their faith in Jesus. Not only was the child cured, but the whole household was cured from the sickness of sin. Again, what an example does this incident furnish us of the mysterious workings of God! A boy was brought to the point of death that a whole house might have eternal life. May the Lord work such a wonder as that in all our houses!

So we see here that a faith that is confirmed is a faith that should be shared. As you share your testimony of what God has done in your life, you will help others believe in Jesus.

Conclusion: What kind of faith do you have? Do you just believe certain facts *about* Jesus. Or do you have nothing more than crisis faith? You come to church and seek Jesus only when you have a crisis in your life? I've seen that plenty of times in my ministry. Or have you put your faith in Jesus as Savior and Lord? You may be here today mainly because you are going through a crisis. That's okay. But having heard this message, will you now move on to a more fully developed faith, and trust in Jesus for what's most important of all, and that is the salvation of your soul? Faith is taking God at His Word. Will you trust Him today? I wonder how many here today are not yet in the faith

⁸ On two other occasions Jesus heals from a distance: the healing of the centurion's slave (Matt. 8:5-13; Luke 7:2-10) and the healing of the Phoenician woman's daughter (Matt. 15:21-28; Mark 7:24-30).

with other members of your family. Why don't you trust Christ today, and step out on faith to confess Him as Savior, that your family may be made complete as intended by the Lord. Finally, there may be some believers here today who are going through trial, and God is testing and stretching your faith. Will you keep trusting Him to see you through that trial? Trust His promises, and seek not a sign or outward confirmation, and in time, your faith will be gloriously confirmed.

Sources: Gary M. Burge, *The NIV Application Commentary: John* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000); William Hendriksen, *New Testament Commentary: John* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1955); Matthew Henry, *Commentary on the Whole Bible* (accessed from *Online Bible*, 1706-1721); Alexander Maclaren, *Expositions of Holy Scripture*, Vol. 10 (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1977 reprint); Larry Pierce, *Online Bible* [Ver. 4:23] (Ontario: onlinebible.net, 2012); Arthur W. Pink, *Exposition of the Gospel of John* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1975); A.T. Robertson, *New Testament Word Pictures*, Vol. IV (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1931, accessed through *Online Bible*); Charles H. Spurgeon, *Spurgeon's Expository Encyclopedia*, Vol. 3 (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House), 239-250; Merrill C. Tenney, *John: The Gospel of Belief* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1948); Dr. Jerry Vines (notes from his sermon on this text); Warren W. Wiersbe, "*Be*" *Series: New Testament Volumes 1 & 2, John* (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1989). Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from *The New King James Version* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1982). McGee & Hobbs read, but nothing more to add.

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