

Believing In the Son

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[0 : 00] I was thinking as we were singing that wonderful old hymn, On Christ the solid rock I stand, all other ground is sinking sand.

The song's older than Canada. You know, you think about it. The song's older than Canada. And I can tell you this, that if Jesus doesn't come back, Canada can come to an end and that song will still be sung.

And in a sense, the song itself, you know, is an illustration of the truth that the song is testifying to. That was just an impromptu moment.

I never quite know how to describe how I came to faith in Jesus Christ. And the reason is this. Like on one level, I probably never stopped believing in Jesus.

And I have a very clear memory of when I was probably five. One of my earliest memories is being with my mom and asking Jesus to live within me.

[1 : 00] And I have a memory of that. But like a lot of people, once I hit puberty, other things start to become far more interesting than a relationship with Christ.

And Christianity, in the words of Nicky Gumbel, seemed boring and irrelevant. And lots of other things seemed far more relevant and far more interesting. And humanly speaking, you know, whether this was the first time I came to believe or whether it was just a return to something which had been planted in me when I was a very young child, in grade 11, in high school, through a series of circumstances, I started to think that maybe this Jesus person wasn't boring and irrelevant.

And over the course of a year, the real turning point came when I started to meet true Christians. And there was something about them that just seemed as if there was a sense of purpose and peace and presence in their lives.

And that made me curious. And I had this increasing longing and drawing to having something like what they had. And it led me eventually to, whether it was committing my life to Christ for the first time or recommitting my life to Christ, in heaven God can tell me all the accounting and processes. That's sort of irrelevant, you know. So, but I did sort of, you know, it was actually in a church where I had an altar call and I went to the front and I asked Christ, I repented and asked Christ to come into my life.

[2 : 39] This, you know, miracles and all that type of stuff or signs and wonders, in my case it didn't really have any place whatsoever. I know that there's some people here who could testify how it was seeing God work with miraculous power that started to open them up to Christ in a new and living way.

But for me it was nothing to do with that at all. It was actually meeting people who seemed to have something in their lives that I realized I had to have. And the gospel text talks about this sort of dynamic, about how God works in some people's lives, leading them to himself.

So I ask you to take your Bibles. You can use your pew Bibles or you can use your own Bible. And it's John chapter 4, verses 43 to 54.

If you're using the pew Bibles, it's page 922. We're a mainstream Anglican church.

The Diocese of Ottawa doesn't always view us this way. But, you know, probably if you went to Nigeria or Uganda or Kenya, you know, a place where most of the Anglicans in the world are, we're a mainstream Anglican church.

[3 : 50] And that means we open the Bible and try to learn from the Bible during our time of the sermon. So open your Bibles, John 4, 43, page 922.

And the story here, we're going through John's gospel. The story here follows immediately upon Jesus meeting the Samaritan woman at the well. And after Jesus had met the Samaritan woman at the well, he spent two days with the Samaritans.

And this story is well known to Christians, him meeting this woman at the well. And the story now takes place immediately after that one, verse 43. Now, after the two days, that's the two days he spent with the Samaritans, he departed from there and went to Galilee.

For Jesus himself testified that a prophet has no honor in his own country. So when he came to Galilee, the Galileans received him, having seen all the things he did in Jerusalem at the feast. For they also had gone to the feast. I just want to pause here for a second. I have some friends that when they speak in an ironic manner or in a facetious manner, I'm not entirely sure if they're being facetious.

[5 : 04] And I have other friends that when they're being ironic, you know, they change their voice. Or when they're being facetious, they do some visible or visual, an audible or visual cue that they're doing this.

But these three verses might sound a bit confusing. And the reason they're a bit confusing is that the writer, John, is being ironic. And we're not used to reading the Bible. And, you know, we don't think the Bible will be ironic.

We think the Bible will be pious. And that's a big problem, you see, because we bring pious expectations to the Bible. And so we're offended when we read the Old Testament.

And there's pillaging and raping and this and that. And if anything, you know, you read the book of the Old Testament, it does not seem pious. And we often bring our standards of piety to Jesus and are sometimes offended because Jesus isn't pious the way that we think he should be pious.

That's our problem, not his, by the way, folks. Because, you know, being a Christian means that he's the master, we're the disciple. He's not the disciple and we're the master.

[6 : 08] It's the other way around. So John here is being ironic. He's been ironic, as it will be seen in the rest of the story, that the Samaritans, with no miracles at all, come to believe that Jesus is the savior of the world.

And the people in Galilee, Jesus' own people, the chosen people, they can't get it. All they want to do is see some spectacular miracles.

And so Jesus is going on one level, there's a superficial, superficial, like rock star type of quality that's going on in some parts of the Jewish nation.

But fundamentally, they don't sort of get it and they don't really hear his word. It's like, okay, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, Jesus. Get the words out of the way. Show us something dramatic. And so Jesus is being ironic as he speaks here, as we'll be seeing in a moment when Jesus rebukes the people for only wanting signs.

And the other thing we see about this is that Jesus doesn't go where it's easy. He goes where it's called. He goes to where people are going to ultimately reject him because, you see, at the end of the day, Jesus came to be the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

[7 : 24] He came to die. It's the only purpose he came for. He came to die as God's Messiah, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. So we continue reading verse 46.

So Jesus came again to Cana of Galilee where he had made the water wine. And there was a certain nobleman whose son was sick at Capernaum. When he heard that Jesus had come out of Judea into Galilee, he went to him and implored him to come down and heal his son, for he was at the point of death.

Then Jesus said to him, Unless you people see signs and wonders, you will by no means believe. Now just sort of pause here.

This verse, this rebuke, is key to the whole story. And the rebuke, this version of the Bible captures it by saying you people. It's as if there's crowds to see Jesus.

The nobleman, in a sense, breaks through the crowds to see Jesus. And you have to look at the whole context of John's Gospel. But almost definitely this nobleman works for Herod.

[8 : 32] And those of you who know your Bibles know what happens to Jesus when he goes to see Herod just before he's crucified. Remember, Herod's all excited that he's going to see Jesus because he hopes to see a miracle.

And so one of Herod's noblemen comes to see Jesus, breaks through the crowd and says, Come down and heal my son. And Jesus delivers a general rebuke.

He says, once again, he says, Unless you people see signs and wonders, you will by no means believe. And it's clearly a rebuke.

When I was in St. Paul University, that's where I went to prepare for the ordained ministry. I went there thinking that, I sort of knew that there were these liberal Christians and Orthodox Christians or Bible-believing Christians that there was a difference there, that liberals didn't really believe in miracles.

And I naively went thinking that if I could just, you know, tell them about C.S. Lewis's *Fern, Seeds, and Elephants*, if I could share Josh McDowell's *Evidence That Demands a Verdict*, if I could talk about F.F. Bruce's *The New Testament Documents, Are They Reliable?*, and a couple of other books like that, they would change their thinking.

[9 : 47] And to my shock, I discovered that when I was there, the very, very first class where there was a lecture, within one minute of the lecture, I could have gotten into an argument with the professor, and the next minute, and the next minute, and the next minute, and the next minute, and every minute.

And to remove the idea of God being able to sovereignly move in his created order, to remove the idea that God is sovereign and can act and can perform miracles, to remove that idea from Christianity, isn't like Anglicans and Baptists disagreeing over baptism of children.

religion. It actually means, to my horror, I discovered that it was a completely different religion, and that it affected everything virtually that we could talk about.

And it would lead to this, one of my best memories of my first year at St. Paul's, I came out of a lecture where I could have argued constantly with the professor, and I left thinking, that was the biggest pile of rubbish I've ever heard in my life.

And I'm sitting down to have coffee with my classmates, and they go, that was the most profound thing I've ever heard in my entire life. And I started to wonder if I was going completely and utterly insane because of the complete difference.

[11 : 05] Now, a text like this can sometimes be used against Christians to say that the belief in miracles is completely and utterly irrelevant. In fact, that it somehow lowers Christianity to be concerned with miracles.

And we can't go there whatsoever. One of the things which Jesus is warning us about here with signs, is that, you know, as I shared in my opening remarks about how I came to faith, miracles, in a sense, at least like visual miracles, any time a person comes to faith, it's the work of the Holy Spirit in your life, and it's a miracle.

But in terms of what we think of as miracles, miracles played no role whatsoever in my life. It was the love of Christians, it was the peace of Christians, it was being with them when they prayed and sensing that something was going on in this room that I just couldn't put into words, and that was what led me to faith.

But after I became a Christian, I realized that everything about Christianity involves a miracle. The fact that Jesus was incarnate is a miracle.

The fact that he was born of a virgin is a miracle. The fact that he rose from the dead is a miracle.

The fact that he performed miracles. The fact that the Bible itself is a miracle. That everything about Christianity is a miracle.

[12 : 29] And to have no miracles is to have no Christianity. That Christians who tell you that it is crass or unspiritual or wrong to talk about miracles or to believe in miracles, that really what they're trying to do is they're trying to avoid the fact that God has authority and that he is sovereign in the world, and they're really expressing that which is a different religion from what biblical Christianity is.

Like, without Jesus performing miracles, without Jesus being a miracle, Jesus is irrelevant. Like, it means he just died.

Like, get on with it, folks. Like, move on. It's like, I don't know how many of you read the Post, and they had this long couple of articles, I think it was yesterday, about this Hungarian poet who just died, and George Jonas ended it by talking about a poem that the guy wrote about when he dies.

And he says, and the poem basically says, you know, when I die, I'm dead. Like, and get on with it. It's basically the thrust of the poem. And if Jesus is just a guy, if Jesus isn't a miracle, if everything about Christianity isn't a miracle, then, folks, we should probably be at Starbucks right now, and we should probably be reading the paper, and we should be having a nice latte and not wasting our time here.

I mean, that's my view, folks. Like, everything about Christianity is a miracle. So, while miracles didn't have a role in me becoming a Christian, after I became a Christian, I realized that they're

absolutely central to the Christian faith, and I can't understand prayer, or redemption, or the Bible, or the Christian life, or anything if I don't understand that God can act.

[14 : 19] If God hasn't, in fact, raised Jesus from the dead, defeated death, and sin, and hell, and hostile spiritual powers, if Jesus has not, in fact, through his death, opened the gate of heaven for me, if Jesus has not been able to send his Holy Spirit into my life, spiritually changing me, and making me a child of God, and what on earth is anything at all about?

We don't need more moral rules. Now, what Jesus is talking about here, then, is not, in fact, the story isn't Jesus denying the role of miracle, because he's going to perform a miracle.

That's what he's going to do. He's not saying, I came not to perform miracles. What he's talking about is something else. He came, this rebuke is telling us that we are not in control when it comes to God.

That's what Jesus is saying. We are not in control when it comes to God. You see, if we come to God demanding signs and wonders, then what we are saying is that I have my conditions, and until God meets my conditions, I am going to ignore him.

I, you know, I've talked to many people over the years who've said, like, if God really wants me to know him, why doesn't he perform a miracle right before my eyes? I've had many, many people tell me that.

[15 : 45] If God really, really wanted me to be his, he would perform a miracle in front of me right now. I mean, you know, you get this idea of some strutting poppycock of a man, some strutting pigeon, sort of demanding that the almighty God, the creator of all, sustainer of all, that God has to sort of get off his high horse and come and bow down to this pigeon, you know, strutting around, looking very, very important.

I hope I'm not offending any of you if you have that view, but, you know, if you think about it, if God really does exist, it's a preposterous demand. And sometimes the idea sounds very preposterous, but often it sounds very learned and educated.

It's the scientist or the philosopher who demands that if God is really worthy of being worshipped, he has to have the appropriate political beliefs or the appropriate beliefs about the relationship of men and women, or he has to act in particular ways.

He can't violate the laws which the scientist or the philosopher, the academic believe, have to govern the universe in a particular way. Or maybe it's very, very pious or super spiritual or new agey and the real God has to act in this way or this way or this way or this way.

And so the Jewish people, in a sense, what they're doing in this particular story is they have a whole degree, a whole list of pious conditions that God has to meet and they want him to meet them.

[17 : 07] And Jesus says, no. No. He says no. I mean, he does it sort of in an odd way. He just sort of ignores it and he rebukes it when he sees it.

It's an issue of control. It's an issue of control. And Jesus says, you know, this is going to get you nowhere. The sign in this particular story comes, and this is really important, we're going to see in a moment.

The sign in this story comes after the man has trusted the words of Jesus. That's when the sign comes. Let's continue reading the story.

Still not used to glasses. 49. So verse 48, there's this rebuke. Then Jesus said to him, unless you people see signs and wonders, you will by no means believe. The 49, I mean, this is so wonderful. This noble man's heart is revealed here. The noble man hasn't come down to see Jesus make chairs spin in the air or make horses talk or do anything like that.

[18 : 15] He just loves his son. And he just has heard that Jesus might be the one who has the power to heal him. And all he does is want help for his son.

He's not there for anything else. And so the nobleman said to him, sir, come down before my child dies. Verse 50, Jesus said to him, go your way, your son lives.

So the man believed the word that Jesus spoke to him and he went his way. Go your way, your son lives. So the man believed the word that Jesus spoke to him and he went his way.

You know, folks, that's a verse, part of a verse you should memorize. So the man believed the word that Jesus spoke to him and he went his way. Jesus is revealed here as the Messiah who has true healing authority.

Jesus is able to effortlessly perform a miracle. He doesn't pray to God. He's 40 kilometers away from the young man and he just says, your son will live.

[19 : 21] The man, without having any visible evidence that Jesus has done what he said he has done, immediately turns around and walks back.

He trusts that Jesus has healing authority and he just goes. He trusts, he abandons himself to the word of Jesus.

He trusts the word of Jesus. He trusts that Jesus has this healing authority and he goes. It's the beginning of the Christian life, folks. You know, one of the things that used to really, I mean, one of the things which I've been learning more and more and more as I get older as a Christian is that God doesn't leave us to try to figure things out all by ourselves with wild speculation.

That if we attentively read his word, God himself will show us and tell us what it is that he desires of us. And so here we see he rebukes these people for their desire for control, even though their control is very pious.

He speaks a word and the man, just like the Samaritans, purely on the word of Jesus, trusts the word of Jesus and visibly shows that he trusts the word of Jesus by leaving and heading home.

[20 : 43] And that's what God asks of us, to hear the words of Jesus and to trust them and act as if they're true. It's the first step of faith.

The Bible passage itself here is going to tell us the point that it's the first step and that this extra step is going to be needed, but it's the beginning of true faith in him when we hear the words of Jesus, we trust them and we start to live as if they are true.

Let's continue reading and see what happens. Verse 50, Then Jesus said to him, Go your way, your son lives. So the man believed the word that Jesus spoke to him and he went his way.

And as he was now going down, and that's because Cana is higher than Capernaum, so he's literally going down. As he was now going down, his servants met him and told him, saying, Your son lives.

Then the man inquired of them the hour when he got better, and they said to him, Yesterday at the seventh hour, the fever left him. That's one o'clock in the afternoon. So the father, verse 53, The father knew that it was at the same hour in which Jesus said to him, Your son lives.

[21 : 56] And he himself believed, and his whole household. He himself believed, and his whole household. We see here that to believe in Jesus, that to believe that Jesus has come from God and has healing authority is the response that God desires of us.

Now one of the things that we're going to see over the next few weeks as we go through John's Gospel is what believing in Jesus, what does that mean? That's going to continually be opened up before us in terms of what it means to, you know, to hear Jesus' word, to trust his word, to open ourselves to him, to just trust that he's a trustworthy person, that he is who he says he is, to in a sense stake our lives on him and to stake our lives on this.

This is going to continue to grow and grow and grow as John's Gospel continues to unfold to describe to us what that means. But the thing I'd just like to leave you with in closing, because I'm going to close right now, is with this.

God is a spectacular God. And maybe today you're saying to yourself, I'm not quite sure what this believing means. If you just say to God right now in prayer, God, whatever that means, whatever this means in verse 53, believed in him, make it so.

Make it so in me. Whatever that says in chapter 4, verse 53, I want that to be true in me. And God will make it so. Let's pray. Let's pray. Let's pray. Let's pray. Let's pray. Let's pray.

[23 : 32] Let's pray. Jesus, thank you so much that you love us.

Thank you, Father. Thank you, Jesus, that even when you rebuke us, you rebuke us out of love.

You rebuke us not to belittle us or to demean us, not to crush us or to hurt us, but that even when you rebuke us, you do it because you love us, that you desire us to come to you.

Loving Father, may your Holy Spirit be poured out upon us with fresh power that we might be able to slow down and hear the words of your Son and take them to heart and live the words of your Son.

And Father, for those of us who have an idea about what verse 53 means about believing in your Son, may your Holy Spirit just deepen us and deepen us and deepen us so that all that is within us might be just one yes to you and to your moving in our lives.

And Father, for those of us who are still trying to figure that out, may all that is meant by verse 53, may it be true in our lives.

[24 : 58] All that is meant by verse 53, Father, may it be true in our lives. This we ask in the name of Jesus, your Son and our Savior. Amen.