

Do You Believe?

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Date: 03 May 2020

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[0 : 00] grace and peace to all of you who are watching or listening today. After another long week of social distancing, I hope and I pray that God has been working in your heart and reminding you of just how he has made you for relationship, not only with other people, but with him.

Today, we continue on through the story of Jesus as told by the Apostle John. If you have your Bible with you, would you open it up to John chapter 4?

Last Sunday, we saw how Jesus was on his way from Judea to Galilee, and he made a bit of a pit stop in Samaria. It was there near the town of Sychar that he met the woman at the well and had that conversation with her, and the Samaritans invited Jesus to stay with them for two days.

And Jesus agreed. He stayed with them for two days. Well, now Jesus is on the move again, and he's headed back, according to his original course, into Galilee.

So we pick up the story in John chapter 4, verse 43. After the two days, Jesus left for Galilee. Now Jesus himself had pointed out that a prophet has no honor in his own country.

[1 : 30] When he arrived in Galilee, the Galileans welcomed him. They had seen all that he had done in Jerusalem at the Passover festival, for they also had been there.

So the first thing that we notice from John is that Jesus is now going back into his own country. There's a signaled shift here.

He's been with the Samaritans in Samaria, and now he's going back into his own country, back into the territory of the Jews. But even more than that, he's going back into his own kind of home region, his own neck of the woods.

It's Galilee is where he has lived. That's where the town of Nazareth, his hometown, is. And what John says here, right at the beginning in verse 44, kind of casts a bit of a shadow over the rest of what we're about to read.

He says, Now Jesus himself had pointed out that a prophet has no honor in his own country or his own region. What does he mean by that?

[2 : 38] Well, I think the best place to go to understand that is to some of the other gospel records, which record Jesus saying a very similar thing. My mind goes to Mark chapter 6, where we read about Jesus visiting his hometown of Nazareth, and it probably happened around the time that we're reading of here in John.

Now, when Jesus went to Nazareth, the initial response was a good one. The people welcomed him. They were kind of excited. They kind of wondered, what are all these miracles that you've been doing?

But it wasn't long before that initial excitement wore off, and they began to say some things to Jesus, which were rather dishonoring. Isn't this the carpenter?

Isn't this Mary's son and the brother of James, Joseph, Judas, and Simon? Aren't his sisters here with us? And they took offense at him. Jesus said to them, A prophet is not without honor except in his own town, among his relatives, and in his own home.

So what's going on there? Well, it seems that the people in Jesus' hometown, they have kind of come to this attitude of, well, what makes you think that you're special?

[3 : 58] Aren't you, after all, just the village carpenter? And we know you. I mean, look at your families right here with us. If you were someone special, I think we'd have known about it.

You're just one of us. What makes you think that you're so good? They took offense at him. So the initial welcome turned into dishonor.

And I think that's kind of what Jesus is referring to here back in John, when he says, Now, he says, A prophet has no honor in his own country, or in his own neck of the woods.

Just like with the prophets long ago, there was this sense in which pride kind of mixes together with familiarity, and we just, we can't really accept that you, I mean, you're one of us.

We know you, that you have been chosen by God for a special purpose, to be a prophet, God's spokesperson. I don't think so.

[5 : 04] The pattern is repeating itself, or John is hinting that it's about to repeat itself again. Verse 45, When Jesus arrived in Galilee, the Galileans welcomed him.

So initially, the response is much like it was in Nazareth. The response is good. Jesus is back in his neck of the woods, and the people there are kind of, they're eager to have him. They're excited.

But John tells us why. They're excited. Why they welcome him. He adds a little clause onto that. The Galileans welcomed him, having seen all that he had done in Jerusalem at the Passover festival, for they also had been there.

Literally, having seen all things, as many as he did in Jerusalem. Okay, so this is part of the reason for the excitement, and for the big welcome, because not too long ago, we read in a previous message, that back in chapter 2, Jesus was in Jerusalem at the Passover festival.

You'll remember there. He flipped the tables in the temple courts. He drove out the animals and the cellars. And John tells us back there in chapter 2, while he was in Jerusalem at the festival, many people saw the signs he was performing, and believed in his name.

[6 : 34] But Jesus would not entrust himself to them, for he knew all people. He did not need any testimony about men, for he knew what was in each person.

So, some of these Galileans had been there. They were among those who had seen the many signs, which Jesus had performed.

Back in chapter 2, John tells us that they believed in his name. And yet, when we looked at this in a previous message, we kind of wondered, did they really believe?

Jesus, it says, would not entrust himself to them, because he knew them. He knew what was going on in their thoughts, and in their hearts. And so, we kind of wondered, is their faith superficial?

Is it flawed in some way? Nicodemus kind of became an example of that. He believed that Jesus was a teacher, who had come from God.

[7 : 34] And yet, he did not receive, the testimony of Jesus. He did not believe the earthly things, that Jesus was telling him. And so, Jesus said, how can you believe the heavenly things, if I was to tell you about them?

There was a superficiality to his faith. There was a flawedness to it. It was incomplete. It only came part way.

And so, when we come back to the Galileans, we're kind of expecting to see something of attention unfold here. There's welcome, there's excitement, but Jesus has also said, the reception here, in Galilee, in home territory, it's not going to be, the same as it was, among the Samaritans, where they just kind of said, we believe that you're the savior of the world.

It's not going to go like that. So, once more, in verse 46, John tells us, once more, Jesus visited Cana, in Galilee, where he had turned the water into wine.

And there was a certain royal official, whose son lay sick, at Capernaum. When this man heard that Jesus had arrived in Galilee, from Judea, he went to him, and begged him to come and heal his son, who was close to death.

[9 : 00] Unless you people see signs and wonders, Jesus told him, you will never believe. So, Jesus is in Cana, the place where he had already done, a great sign, turning the water into wine.

We're not sure, just how many people, ended up knowing about that, because he kind of did it on the down low. But as he's there in Cana, there's a certain unnamed, royal official, presumably from Capernaum, who gets word that he's arrived.

And so he comes, to pay Jesus a visit in Cana. And the reason why, is because his son, is lying sick, in Capernaum.

John tells us, that his son, was close to death, verse 47. We find out a little bit further down, in verse 52, that he has a fever, and we presume, it's a severe one, if he's close to death.

And so, this man comes, to Jesus, and it says, he begged him, to come and heal his son. Let's get into the, the headspace, of this official, for a moment.

[10 : 16] Can you imagine, what he must be feeling? He's a royal official, and so we imagine, he's probably a person, with some wealth, with some means. He's probably, already, tried, all the doctors.

He's probably, already tried, a bunch of different, medications, and treatments. And yet, his son, he refers to him, in verse 49, as my child.

His, his son, lies sick, in bed, and he continues, to get worse, and worse, and worse, as the days go by. He doesn't look so good.

We imagine, you know, perhaps his, skin color's not looking, so good anymore. And his, fever is high, he's just burning up, and things are getting, worse and worse, and they've tried, everything.

And he's desperate. So desperate, that he, makes the 17 mile trek, as soon as he hears, that Jesus, has come to Cana, to come to Jesus, this guy who he's heard, has done miracles, or signs, maybe he can help.

[11 : 32] Those of you who are parents, you can imagine, just maybe what this man, might be feeling, just thinking of your own child, in this kind of situation, lying sick, in the bed at home, for weeks, and still not improving, but getting worse.

This man, is desperate. He comes, to Jesus, and begs him, come, heal my son, come with me, back to Capernaum.

And Jesus responds, in verse 48, with this, unless you people, see signs and wonders, Jesus told him, you will never believe.

What kind of a response, is that? I mean, it's not the one, that we're expecting here. It kind of seems insensitive, perhaps a little cold, don't you think?

This man has just come, and begged Jesus, to help heal his son, and Jesus, seems to be, rebuking him, about his, lack of faith.

[12 : 39] Unless, unless, you people, see, signs and wonders, you will never believe. So what's going on here? Is Jesus insensitive?

Well, I think the first thing, to, take into consideration, is, is the context here. Notice that Jesus, says these words, both to, to the man, and, to a larger group.

He says, unless you people, unless you plural, see, signs and wonders, you, plural, will never believe. So he's, he's having a bigger group conversation here.

But he also does speak to the man. It says, unless you people, see signs and wonders, Jesus told him, you will never believe.

And so what's going on here? Well, I think that, if we just, go off of, what's there in Jesus' words, words, we can, we can get a bit of a picture.

[13 : 40] He's, he's having a conversation with the larger group here. And why would Jesus be saying this? Probably, and it's kind of implied from his words, they're, they're pressing him to show them a sign, to do a miracle for them.

And the sense of it, you almost get is, you know, give us some proof that what you're saying is right. And give us a sign that we should listen to you.

And this coming from many people who had already seen the signs that he had done back in Jerusalem. And so that's the first thing to keep in mind.

There's a larger group conversation going here, but Jesus also speaks to the man as well. So, so what's going on here? I think it's good for us to remember those words that we heard back in John chapter two, which I read earlier.

Those words were, Jesus would not entrust himself to the people up in Jerusalem. Why? Because he knew all people. He was not needing any testimony about men, for he was knowing what was in each person.

[14 : 53] So Jesus knows what they're thinking. He knows what's going on in their hearts. And I think if we, if we remember that, then suddenly we start to see this phrase, this, this reply a little bit differently.

Is Jesus being insensitive and cold? Or, is he perhaps telling them what he really knows about what's going on in their hearts?

I don't think that Jesus is just kind of writing them off with a, with kind of a, you know, passing judgment kind of comment. I think what he's doing is holding the mirror up to these people and saying, do you see just how, how, how hard your hearts are?

How stubborn and skeptical and unbelieving they are? You've already seen signs. Believe me now, listen to the words that I'm saying.

As it pertains to this particular man who now enters into this, to the midst of this and begs for Jesus to come heal his son. And I think Jesus knows what's going on in this particular man's heart as well.

[16 : 15] And maybe it's a little bit different than the larger group. We don't know for sure what Jesus knew about him. But perhaps it was, perhaps Jesus knew that this man was, was not really thinking about who Jesus was.

He just saw him as, as a healer, as a miracle worker. I'm here to get my healing, my miracle worker, almost treating him like a doctor. I've come for my, for the, the service of healing.

And so come with me and, and, and do it. Please. But I think Jesus knows that even though this man believes he's able to heal, it would seem so, that his faith is still not at the place that it needs to be, that it should be.

That, that real kind of deep trust and recognition of just who it is that he is asking is not there. It's almost as if he's maybe just looking for the, for, for his miracle and, and then he can go his way.

But, Jesus longs for this man and all of these people to, to truly, sincerely, from the heart, believe him, believe his words, trust, trust the truth of, of who he is.

[17 : 45] That's what I think is going on here in this situation. The conversation goes on. Jesus drops this bomb on them. I think he really holds the mirror up to them.

Do you see how you guys do not believe? You guys are stubborn hearted. Imagine that there was some silence there, maybe, perhaps, a pause.

And the royal official says to Jesus in verse 49, Sir, come down before my child dies. So he, he asks again.

It doesn't mean that he, he hasn't heard Jesus or taken Jesus' words seriously, but, but he asks again. And the real test as to whether he is listening, whether he will believe, comes in what Jesus says to him next.

Jesus, I imagine, looks him straight in the eyes and says, go. Your son lives or your son will live. The original, it's present tense.

[18 : 53] Your son lives. And it's not in the sense of he's, his life is hanging on by a thread right now and one day he'll recover. It's not just a prophecy. The sense of it is, go, your son lives.

He's recovering. As we speak, he is right now starting to, beginning to, and will continue to get better. This is the moment of testing for this man.

It's here that, that what Jesus has said earlier, you don't believe as you ought, as you should. It's here that Jesus will, in a sense, give this man the personal invitation to believe as he ought.

To accept the words of Jesus as the truth, even without being able to see whether, and confirm whether, what Jesus has said is happened in reality.

it's quite a moment. And I would have loved to have been there to just see how this man was processing all of this. The question that probably everybody in the crowd is wondering is, so, is he going to go?

[20 : 13] Does he believe Jesus? Does he believe this? or is he going to continue asking Jesus to come with him? Notice that Jesus both grants and denies at the same time.

He grants his request to heal, but he denies his request to come with him. No, go. You go your way. Your son lives.

And so, this is the moment of testing for this man, faith looks like not asking Jesus again and leaving Jesus.

Will he? John tells us in verse 50, the man took Jesus at his word and departed. Literally, the man believed the word that Jesus said to him and left.

So, yes, he did. he came all this way, about 17 or so miles and he left empty-handed, trusting that Jesus' words were true and that his son was recovering.

[21 : 33] The story goes on in verse 51. While Jesus was still, or sorry, while the servant was still on the way, while the official was still on the way, his servants met him with the news that his boy was living.

When he inquired as to the time when his son got better, they said to him, yesterday at one in the afternoon, the fever left him. Then, the father realized that this was the exact time at which Jesus had said to him, your son lives.

So, he and his whole household believed. Can you imagine that moment as the official is on his way back to Capernaum and he sees his servants coming in the distance?

What's going on in his mind? They're either coming to bring news of death or life.

Can you imagine how he must have felt as they got near and he saw the expressions on their faces and then as he finally heard the news from their own lips? He's getting better. He's better.

[22 : 45] Oh, how that must have just made this father rejoice in his heart. He does what probably many of us would do and inquires about the time.

I don't think we should read into that that he was doubting that Jesus' word had anything to do with it. But he inquires as to the time.

They tell him and the father, it says, realized that this was the exact time at which Jesus had said, your son lives. The end result, so he and his whole household believed.

And I think by now in this account as we come to this moment, we realize that believed here does not mean in just the superficial sense or in the flawed sense.

It means in the full sense that he is the Messiah. I mean, ironically, Jesus said, unless you see a sign, you will never believe.

[23 : 53] And yet, Jesus gave him a sign and he did believe. he did come to believe in the true deep sense, to trust this one and his words.

So what's here in this account for us today? Well, I think the first thing that we don't want to miss is how we see the glory of Jesus in this account.

We've been talking about that through this whole series, looking for those moments which reveal the glory of Jesus. That's what John said that he saw of Jesus, his glory, how he was full of grace and truth.

Well, how do we see that in this account? I think first of all, we have an easy time seeing how Jesus is full of truth. At the critical moment in the conversation as this man is begging Jesus to come and heal his son, Jesus, in one sense, it doesn't seem speak speaks out of grace, but he speaks the truth.

He holds up the mirror of truth of what he knows to be true in their hearts and minds. You people are stubborn hearted and you don't believe, even though you've seen signs, many of you.

[25 : 17] so the truth, we see that all through this. But what about the grace of Jesus?

How do we see that Jesus is full of grace in this account? Especially when it comes to that moment where Jesus kind of rebukes the man while he's begging for him to come and heal his son.

Well, I think as we reflect on that moment, one of the lessons that we see there is that God's grace doesn't always come to us in the way that we expect, especially as it pertains to Jesus and his words.

Jesus knows what's going on, not just in their hearts and in this man's heart, but in my heart, in your heart, in our thoughts.

love. And sometimes it's a gift of grace, it's a thing of love for him to tell us not just what we want to hear, but what he knows we need to hear.

[26 : 31] I often think of as an example, you know those moments when you were eating something and maybe you got a little bit of sauce on your face and you missed cleaning it off and you end up going for two hours and bumping into all kinds of people and you've got the sauce on your face and you don't even know it and none of them even says anything to you.

Finally, someone has the guts and isn't worried about offending you or the awkwardness of it and they care enough about you to point out the truth of how you got sauce on your face.

And even though you don't want to hear that because of all that that represents over the past two hours, you're thankful for it because they're telling you that truth holding up the mirror to you means that you don't have to go the next two hours with all these people that you're going to bump into embarrassing yourself.

And so, yes, sometimes it's a gift of grace to hear not just what we want to hear, but to hear what we need to hear.

Sometimes those hard truths, those words of correction, of feedback, those things that expose what's not good in us.

[27 : 57] And I believe that it is a gift of grace and Jesus was full of grace even as he said these words to the man. Maybe he was thinking the moment was something like you're here for a miracle, but as a gift of grace, I want to help you to see the bigger picture of what's really going on here.

It was a gift of grace that Jesus did the miracle for him and granted his request. But I think in some ways, an even bigger gift of grace came in the fact or in the way that Jesus did it.

With that initial word of rebuke or correction followed by granting this miracle in a way that would force this man to make that decision, am I going to really trust you and really believe or not?

as a result, a bigger gift of God came to this man and his son got not just life for a few more years, but life forever, eternal life.

That's what Jesus has been promising to those who believe. Another way that we see the glory of Christ is in the authority and the power that Jesus wields in this situation.

[29 : 35] Think of this from the perspective of the official. This man in front of him speaks and 17 miles or so down the road his son begins to heal and get better and recover and the fever leaves him.

This is amazing. I mean, who can do something like that? This Jesus speaks and the power of God to heal and give life is unleashed 17 miles down the road.

This is something that no mere man can do. It's evidence that Jesus really is the son of God, the Messiah, that he has the authority of his father and the power of God himself.

Finally, this story leaves us with a big question. and I think the question comes from Jesus' words in verse 48.

Unless you people see signs and wonders, you will never believe. That last word, believe, is critical. What does Jesus want from these people, from this man?

[31 : 16] He wants them to trust him, to listen to his words and believe them, to come to see the truth of what's really going on, of who he is and what he has come to do for them.

Do you believe? Put yourself in the crowd there that day. Do you believe that Jesus is the Messiah? Do you believe that he's the son of God?

Do you believe that the words he speaks are the very words of God and are true? And do you believe them not just superficially up here, agree with them, recognize that they're from God, but do you believe them in here?

Do you embrace them as reality? Do you embrace him as that one whom God has sent into the world? This is the big question and the response of the people that day is unbelief.

It's stubbornness. It's skepticism. They want Jesus to do another sign, another miracle, and they've already seen some signs and some miracles.

[32 : 35] Jesus is saying, I've given you enough. Now, listen to my words. Accept them. Believe. Believe. see that this stubbornness and skepticism is there in your own heart.

I think Jesus wants the same of us. Do you believe? Do you believe my words? Do you believe the words of Jesus?

Do you believe that he is the son of God? were you waiting for a sign? Perhaps a personal miracle of some sort?

Jesus is not just an entertainer or a performer. He's not just come into this world to give us whatever we want.

The reality is Jesus has come to give us something even better. He has come to give true life, eternal life.

[33 : 45] He has come to give forgiveness from God. He has come to give salvation, deliverance from the justice of God that is coming upon our world because of our sins against God.

He has come to offer you peace between you and God restored relationship with him. The key to receiving all of this is faith, it's belief.

And it very much oftentimes looks like the kind of faith that he was calling the official to have, the kind that is going to trust his words and believe even though we may not be able to see with our eyes just what he has promised yet.

Jesus is not a miracle dispensing machine. Jesus has come to call you, to call me, to put our trust in him, to put our trust in God, to a trust kind of relationship with God.

So the question his words leave us with is, do you believe? do you believe? Let's pray.

[35 : 33] Father in heaven, we thank you for these words which you have given us. We thank you that we get to see what happened a little bit and what was said that day.

Oh God, I pray and ask that you would give all of us who are listening and watching ears to hear, ears to hear what you said to the people that day and what you are saying to us.

We ask that you would help us to trust you more and to believe you for the things which you have said as great or as impossible as they may seem or feel to us.

We thank you that you are a gracious and honest savior. We love you.

We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.