

PM John 4:43-54 Faith, Faith and more faith

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[0 : 00] Now there are two passages from John's Gospel we want to read this evening. And the first of these is in John's Gospel chapter 2 and verses 1 to 11.

John's Gospel chapter 2 and this is entitled The Wedding at Cana. On the third day there was a wedding at Cana in Galilee and the mother of Jesus was there.

Jesus also was invited to the wedding with his disciples. When the wine ran out the mother of Jesus said to him, They have no wine.

And Jesus said to her woman, What does this have to do with me? My hour has not yet come. His mother said to the servants, Do whatever he tells you.

Now there were six stone water jars there for the Jewish rites of purification, each holding twenty or thirty gallons. Jesus said to the servants, Fill the jars with water.

[1 : 14] And they filled them up to the brim. And he said to them, Now draw some out and take it to the master of the feast. So they took it.

When the master of the feast tasted the water, now become wine, and did not know where it came from, though the servants who had drawn the water knew, the master of the feast called the bridegroom and said to him, Everyone serves the good wine first.

And when people have drunk freely, then the poor wine. But you have kept the good wine until now. This, the first of his signs, Jesus did at Cana in Galilee, and manifested his glory, and his disciples believed in him.

After this, he went down to Capernaum with his mother, and his brothers, and his disciples, and they stayed there for a few days.

Just to there, may God bless to us this reading in his word. Take the second passage that we're wanting to read in John's Gospel. This is in chapter 4, and from verse 43 to the end of the chapter.

[2 : 27] John's Gospel, chapter 4, from verse 43. After the two days, he departed for Galilee.

For Jesus himself had testified that a prophet has no honour in his own hometown. 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. So he came to Cana in Galilee, where he had made the water wine. And at Capernaum, there was an official whose son was ill.

When the 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.

So Jesus said to him, Unless you see signs and wonders, you will not believe. The official said to him, Sir, come down before my child dies.

[3 : 38] Jesus said to him, Go, your son will live. The man believed the word that Jesus spoke to him and went on his way. As he was going down, his servants met him and told him that his son was recovering.

So he asked them the hour when he began to get better. And he said to him, Yesterday, at the seventh hour, the fever left him.

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.

This was now the second sign that Jesus did when he had come from Judea to Galilee. May God bless to us this reading too. I want us to look at the story of Jesus healing this official son.

That's John chapter 4 from verse 46 to the end of the chapter. Now if you notice, I've entitled this Faith, Faith and More Faith because that's what it's all about.

[4 : 52] Here is this man and he comes with faith but his faith is developed and it grows and it prospers and there are various stages noticed in his development.

And that's what we're looking at. The way that faith grows here. And it helps us to see what real faith is. Because after all, in society today, when you speak about faith, it means lots of different things to different people.

The man in the street may say, I have faith, I believe in Jesus. But it means nothing to him in practical terms. He might go to church at Christmas, maybe at Easter, otherwise it's only funerals. He'll go to church for weddings. You don't go to church for nowadays because there aren't so many. But that's the sort of level of his faith. It's a belief of a sort but it's pretty empty.

And then there's a whole range of things. People say, it's my faith that counts but their faith is a bit woolly. But they've got a strong faith in faith. And then there's the Christian who's got a strong faith in Jesus.

[6 : 03] And so on. So what I'm saying is, you know, faith is difficult to define. And there's all sorts of experience of what faith is. And it does us no harm to look at this story and say, well, what did this man's faith consist of?

What are the various sort of stages there are in the description of faith? And how do these then relate to us? So we're going to go through this stage by stage, four stages of faith and then we'll sum up at the end how that relates to our experience.

But first of all, John sets the scene for this. He tells about the geography, the geographical background and so on. And that's where we go to start as well.

Jesus came to Cana in Galilee. Now, Galilee is in the north of the country that was called Palestine. And we know especially the Lake of Galilee.

And Capernaum was on the shores of that lake. But this happens in a town called Cana which was in the hill country surrounding the Lake of Galilee.

[7 : 16] Galilee is, well, it's in the hole in the mountains if you like to see that. You know, it's down in the bottom and the hills go up around. And Cana is a town in the hill country in that general region 16 or 17 miles from Capernaum.

So that's the sort of distances that we're talking about. It's the place, as he says here, where he had made the water into wine. And that's the story that we read earlier.

And I think he's putting it in to just remind us. You remember Cana? That's the place where the miracle took place. That's the place where the first sign was given and people came to faith through it.

Well, keep on listening because that's the sort of story we're going to hear again now. A story of faith that developed as Jesus did wonderful things.

So he's reminding them of what's been done there already with a view to creating interest. Now, there was at Capernaum an official whose son was ill.

[8 : 22] This official is a royal official. Now, we need to understand this. Most of you do suspect anyway. The government of Palestine in those days that it was part of the Roman Empire.

So ultimately, the imperial government was in control. But in each area, generally speaking, certainly in Palestine, they had their own local rulers.

So in Galilee, there was a king of the house of Herod that was ruling under the general control of the Roman governor of the Roman Empire, effectively.

And it's one of the officials of the king Herod whose son is sick here. So it's a royal official word to think about. And his son was ill and that is the occasion of what happened here.

So that there is the setting of what is going on here. Now, let's look at this faith and how it develops. And stage one is faith, faith in Jesus' presence.

[9 : 29] And you see this coming out in what is said here. When this man heard that Jesus had come from Judea to Galilee, he went to him and asked him to come down and heal the son for he was at the point of death.

Faith in the presence of Jesus. If I want anything to happen, Jesus has got to be there to do it. If I can only get Jesus down to Capernaum, then everything will be fine.

His presence will make the difference. Faith in the presence of Jesus. Now, we're going to see there's something better than that.

But nonetheless, we shouldn't devalue this too much. Because this was quite a good thing that he had. Here he is and he's up against it.

And there's no human help. And he says, but we can go to Jesus and he can help. And I reckon that that's a pretty good thing to have.

[10 : 35] A conviction that when all else fails, Jesus, if only he were present, he could help and he would help in that situation. And it's a fairly strong faith that he's got in the presence of Jesus.

Because he goes to some length to get Jesus down there. He makes this journey of 16 or 17 miles, which I reckon most of us would think quite a long journey on foot of course.

And in those days perhaps it wasn't quite so long because how else were you made to go a journey except on foot. But 16 or 17 miles uphill in mountainous country is quite a difficult and arduous journey.

But he's quite prepared to go that distance if only he can get Jesus down to Capernaum to heal his son. And I think the fact that he's prepared to go to that length speaks of something of the nature of the strength of his faith.

And when he gets to Jesus you can see it coming out still. He came down, he asked him to come down and heal his son.

[11 : 47] And that word asked suggests a degree of urgency or even of repetitiveness. He's pleading. He's not just saying please come down and heal my son.

He's urging it upon Jesus. He's putting it before him in stronger terms. He's adding argument to argument. Pleading his case before Jesus.

And that again is an evidence of the strength of his faith. So this is faith in the presence of Jesus. If only Jesus can be there everything will be fine.

And to my mind it's a good faith as far as it goes. And it's not uncommon at this time indeed it's the common sort of faith that people did have in Jesus if they had faith at all.

You may know the story of Martha and Mary who had a brother Lazarus. and Lazarus dies. And they send word to Jesus about his illness and he doesn't come and he dies and he's buried.

[12 : 50] And then Jesus comes and both Martha and Mary say to Jesus Lord if you had been here my brother would not have died. And you see what sort of faith have they got?

Faith in the presence of Jesus. If only he was present this wouldn't have happened. And I say that was a common faith and a good faith. because there was another incident that you may remember where somebody comes to Jesus and Jesus says I'll come and heal your son.

Come and heal your servant I think it is. And the man says just speak the word. That's all that I want. I don't want you to come down. I just want you to speak the word.

And Jesus says what faith this man has. He had faith in the promise of Jesus. In the word of Jesus. He didn't need to have the presence of Jesus.

And Jesus recognises that that special faith. So that the faith in the presence of Jesus is the common faith of the time. And that's what this man has.

[13 : 55] And he's to be commended for it. Faith in the presence of Jesus. If only Jesus is present everything is going to be fine. That's where he starts. That's stage one.

Now there's another sort of faith. And it's expressed by Jesus. And this is not faith in his presence but it's faith in his miracles.

And we've got that in verse 4. I can't read this writing down. So Jesus said to him unless you see signs and wonders you will not believe. That's verse 48.

Unless you see signs and wonders you will not believe. Now there's difficulties about this. But you see what he's talking about. Jesus is talking about another sort of faith.

It's a faith that rests on the need to see signs and wonders. Now the difficulty that I have here first of all is this.

[14 : 54] That Jesus seems to be criticizing them for faith in miracles. Whereas we get the impression that that's what miracles were for.

Namely that they were meant to create faith. And that indeed is what comes out in John's gospel in particular. John says at the close of his gospel Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples which are not written in his book but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ.

So you get the impression that miracles were done so that people might believe. So that they would create faith. And Jesus here seems to be criticizing that point of view.

Again we've got this coming out in the story that we read of changing the water into wine. This, the first of his signs, Jesus did at Cana in Galilee and manifested his glory and his disciples believed in him.

And it was true of a wider public. When he was in Jerusalem many believed in his name when they saw the signs that he was doing. So we've got this teaching, signs are given to promote faith.

[16:13] Faith in miracles, faith through miracles is what John is talking about throughout his gospel. Why then does Jesus criticize them by saying unless you folks see signs and wonders, you will not believe.

Well, I don't know if you feel it this way, but I feel that if we translated this just a wee bit differently to my ear, it sounds different. It says here, unless you see, but you could also translate this, if you do not see signs and wonders, you do not believe.

And that to my mind is a slightly different nuance, just a different feel to it. If you don't see signs and wonders, you don't believe. In other words, they only believe when they see the signs and wonders. They see a sign and say, oh wonderful, isn't it great? And then they forget about it until the next time and they see a sign and they say, isn't it wonderful, isn't it great?

Faith was, no, miracles were meant to create a settled disposition about Jesus. A miracle was meant to make people say, isn't he trustworthy?

[17:33] Can't we put our trust in him always? But Jesus is speaking about a situation where their faith is sporadic. It's only when they see a miracle that they believe, otherwise they don't believe at all.

That seems to me to be what Jesus is getting at. There's a faith in miracles that doesn't go beyond the miracles. And that's what he's criticizing here. So here's a faith that's different.

Not faith in the presence of Jesus, but faith in the miracles of Jesus. I must say, I do also find it difficult to know why Jesus said this to this man, because to my mind there's no great evidence that he was in that category.

But I think what we can see is his reaction to this. That Jesus, the official said to him, sir, come down before my child dies.

He reiterates the need for the presence of Christ. Jesus may be warning him not to put his trust in miracles, but it seems to me that he takes aboard that warning and he says, but I do need your presence.

[18:43] You just come down before my child dies. So that now is the thing that's going to be challenged. Do you really need the presence of Jesus?

And that's what he goes on to speak about next. And that's the third stage that he depicts here in regard to faith, or the third type of faith that there is.

There's faith in the presence of Jesus, there's faith in the miracles of Jesus, and now here is faith in the word of Jesus. because this is what is given to him.

Jesus doesn't go down, but he speaks a word. Jesus said to him, go, your son will live. Now, this is important because later on this word, your son will live, is used twice in this story.

And the repetitive nature of it seems to me to make this a key statement. statement. So I want to look at this key statement and see if we can get at what I think is the status of it.

[19:54] Now, here, of course, in our translation, it's a promise. Your son will live. Means, your son is going to get over his illness, and he's going to get on fine.

He's going to recover, and all is going to be well. And the way it stands in our translation, it's a promise that the man can put his trust in.

But I'm asking the question, is it really a promise? Because this is not the future tense, the way it's translated, this is the present tense. And I do think, yeah, I think I can say that now, I can certainly suggest, and I do think myself, that this shouldn't be translated as a promise about the future, but as a statement about the present.

And so what he's really saying to the man is this, your son is alive and well. Your son is alive and well. And that is a remarkable statement, and he needs to put his trust in that statement, if that's the way he considers it.

And so what's in mind here is that Jesus recognizes what the situation is. And with the insight that comes from above, he's making a statement that the boy has got better, and that he's fine now.

[21:18] And this is the assurance that he gives to the man if we take it as a statement, your son is alive and well. A statement of the reality of the situation.

And that is more likely to my mind than considering this as a promise. It's a statement of fact. But there's another way of looking at this whereby it's not simply a statement of fact.

It's let us see something like a royal edict, a proclamation of things.

Now when I was thinking about this I remembered when Charles became king. I heard it at the time and I thought it was done in a rather offhand fashion.

He announced that Prince William was now the Prince of Wales. I actually googled it and looked up what he actually did say and it wasn't quite as low key as I thought it was.

[22 : 22] He said something like I have the pleasure of appointing Prince William Prince of Wales. Now is that a statement? I don't think that's a mere statement.

It's a proclamation. Here's the king speaking and by his act of speaking Prince William became Prince of Wales. It's words.

But it's words that worked. It's words that were effective. It was a royal proclamation that accomplished what was said. And I'm thinking you know that's what Jesus was doing here.

Your son is alive and well. Not a statement of fact but a sovereign proclamation of the king, the creator of the world, the healer of people's bodies.

He's saying your son is alive and well. And in speaking these words he became alive and well. That's the way I think we should consider these words.

[23 : 25] But at any rate the point is this whether it's a promise or a statement or a royal proclamation as I believe it is. Jesus is asking this man to believe his word.

To take his word at its face value and to act upon it. And the man does that. He doesn't stay and plead with Jesus. Oh please come down I can't be sure unless you come.

He doesn't continue there asking for what he had wanted to happen. Maybe he's still got some forebodings. I think that may be in his mind. But nonetheless he takes Jesus at his word and he goes home.

And that indicates to my mind some sort of belief in the word that Jesus has spoken. Some sort of confidence that what Jesus had said, however he understood it, that what Jesus had said was true. And that's the standard of faith that he has now reached. You don't have to have the presence of Jesus if you have the word of Jesus. you don't have to have him really there at your side if you've got the promise of Jesus.

[24 : 32] That's faith in Jesus' word. And you might say can you get anything higher than that? And the answer is yes you can. There is a further stage that we've got here, a further development and I'm calling that faith in the person of Jesus.

Jesus. Now here is what happened in this story and I don't want to make a big thing of this but I do want to mention it because it's a hobby horse of mine as you may remember I spoke about this sort of thing before but I just want to get the timing of this event properly in mind.

The man believed the word that Jesus spoke to him and went on his way. As he was going down from the hill country of Cana in Galilee down to the shores of the lake of Galilee 16 17 miles.

As he was going down his servants met him and told him that his son was well. 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.

Now the seventh hour what's he talking about here? Well I talked to you last time I was here about this and I'm going to do again. You know you've been taught perhaps that the Jews counted from 6am to 6pm and from 6pm to 6am.

[26 : 00] There was 12 hours of day, there was 12 hours of darkness and the seventh hour therefore is 1pm in our counting. And Jesus and the servants say to him yesterday at 1pm the fever left him.

Now that's a common interpretation of these events. But to me you know it doesn't make much sense. If this happened at 1pm in the afternoon the man had time to get home before it got dark. 16 or 17 miles downhill five hours to do that before dark sure he could have done it especially when he was anxious to know if Jesus' word was true.

He could have done that. But if you say it happened at 1pm you really got to say he just he didn't go. He spent the night in Cana of Galilee and the next day he went and his servants meet him and say yesterday at 1pm it happened.

To my mind that really doesn't hold water. It doesn't figure that that would happen. This man is going to go immediately at 1pm this time to get home before dark.

[27 : 13] Why didn't he go? To do the timing in that way just to my mind doesn't make sense. But if you do the timing in our way of counting as I've argued before that we should do then the 7th hour is 7pm.

And of course he's not going to go down in the darkness even although the matter is urgent you didn't go in the darkness in those days. Maybe if there was a good moon you would but otherwise no.

So he stays until daylight. The first light he's up and in his way and the servants are in the same position. At 7pm the boy get better.

They wait a couple hours to see if his go to relapse. He doesn't. And they say we must send word. And the first light of dawn they set out and they meet on the journey. And the servant says yesterday at 7pm he got well.

it makes perfect sense. So the timing of this is at 7pm it happened. He stays the night. The next morning he sets out and the servants meet him.

[28 : 16] And that makes sense of the timing of events. I know you're not very interested in it but I think that's the way we've got to see this story. Okay. Now there's more to it than that of course.

That's just setting the scene. We've got a problem here about translations and again I don't want to make a big thing of this but it is important.

It seems to me that this translation in particular and others as well seem to suggest that the healing was a gradual thing. First of all it says the servant told him that his son was recovering.

Well that's not what the word says. His servants told him your son is alive and well. The same word that Jesus used. His servants told him his son was alive and well.

What Jesus had said. The very words that Jesus had said. There's no word there of slowly recovering or anything like that. And similarly he asked them the hour when he began to get better.

[29 : 23] There was no began to in the Greek of this passage. he asked them when he got better. So we're not thinking of a slow recovery as this translation seems to think.

We're thinking about a quick recovery. When did he get better? Not when did he begin to recover? He got better in a moment. Because after all that's the way that Jesus didn't do things.

Here's Peter's mother-in-law. She's sick of a fever. She's been in bed for a while. And Jesus heals her and she gets up and does the housework. You know, that's the way things worked. She didn't have to stay in bed for two days to recuperate or even have a night off.

She gets up and ministers to them, does the housework for them. And similarly the man lying at the gate of the temple who was healed, he didn't hobble home and do some exercises for six weeks and then begin to jump around with joy because he was healed.

He got up and jumped around for joy because he was healed. that's what God does. He doesn't begin a process of recovery. He does it like that. That's the stories as we've got them elsewhere and that's the story that we've got here despite what our translation happens to say.

[30 : 38] The New International Version I think is better in this respect. So what the servant said was he's alive and well using the very words that Jesus had used and the man asked when did he recover?

And they say yesterday at the seventh hour. And then the man recognizes that was what Jesus said to your son will live. And this you see makes sense of the idea that this was a royal proclamation.

Away there in Cana Jesus said your son will live and away down in Capernaum the son recovered. Just like that. Jesus spoke the word up the hill and it happened down at the lakeside.

just like that at the very hour. And that you see was confirmation of trusting Jesus word. His word was effective. What he proclaimed then happened at the moment of proclamation.

Because that's what happens when the creator speaks. Let there be light. There is light. Lazarus come out. And Lazarus came out. And Jesus in this case says your son is alive and well.

[31 : 50] And the son became alive and well. That's the way things happen in the scriptures. So that's the story. But you see this leads to a further development of the man's faith.

And he himself believed. Wasn't he believing already? Yes he was believing already. But this is an additional thing. He believed there's a higher stage than he reaches.

And all his household with him. And we've got to ask what sort of belief was this? And all I can see is it's not belief in the presence of Jesus.

He knows now that you don't have to have Jesus present before things happen. It's not even just trusting his promise, trusting his word. There's something more.

Another stage is reached. And that's what I think I would call faith in Jesus person. Faith in the person of Jesus. And it means, you see, that he doesn't say you can trust Jesus' word.

[32 : 53] He can now say you can trust Jesus. He doesn't just say if Jesus says something you can count it on becoming true. He now realises you can trust Jesus whether he speaks or doesn't speak.

You can trust him. You can trust him. He's a trustworthy person. So it's not his presence in which you trust. It's not his words even in which you trust. Although you can do that of course, both of these.

But it's the person in which you trust. And that's the final stage of his development here. He's passed from trusting in the presence of Jesus through trusting in the promise of Jesus to coming to trust in the person of Jesus.

And that's how in this story we'll get faith, faith and more faith. faith. Now, what does that say to us? What sort of faith do we have?

What sort of faith should we have? What about faith in the presence of Jesus? Well, you know, fine, that that's a non-starter as far as we are concerned.

[34 : 00] When Jesus ascended to heaven, it was, we might say, an option that was taken off the table. this is obvious, but we have the new way of looking at things underlined in John's gospel at the end.

Jesus said to him, have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed. So, for people today, trusting in the presence of Jesus is not an option. He's not with us in person. He's not going to be with us in person. And Jesus says, you're a happy person, even if you don't see me, but if you believe in me.

So, don't say I'm trusting in the presence of Jesus, because that's a non-starter in our circumstances today. What about faith and miracles then?

Now, I could speak for quite a while on this one. I want to be quite brief. I think in the whole, the Bible down plays the importance of miracles in creating faith.

[35 : 07] I believe in miracles. I don't believe that they're everyday occurrences. If they were, they wouldn't be miracles. But I do believe in miracles. But on the whole, the Bible warns us against putting trust in miracles.

The general tenor of the New Testament was to downplay them. Jesus said, an evil and adulterous generation seeks after signs. So, we're not to be seeking after signs.

We're not going to be saying, oh, if only I could have a miracle done for me, I would believe. If only I could see something extraordinary, some sign from heaven, I would believe. That also isn't on the table either.

There was somebody, of course, in the New Testament, in a story that Jesus told, who wanted a sign from heaven. And it was a rich man, the rich man who didn't believe Jesus' word.

And he went to torments. And there, he wanted something to be done for his sons, for his brothers. And he sent Lazarus back to tell them the truth. And Abraham says, no, I'm not going to send Abraham back.

[36 : 18] Well, no, he didn't say that. Eventually, what happened was, send Lazarus back to tell them the truth. And the message is, if they do not believe the scriptures, neither will they be persuaded, though one rise from the dead.

The man was saying, give them a miracle on their belief. The word isn't enough. A miracle, that's what counts. And Jesus says, it's not on. If they don't believe the scriptures, they're not going to believe miracles either.

So miracles have their place in Christian experience, I believe. But they don't have this place where we put our trust in them, or we need to see them before we believe. Because that really is not believing in miracles at all.

It's believing the evidence of our eyes. And that's not what faith is. So faith in Jesus' presence is not on the table. Faith in Jesus' miracles is a non-starter.

And that's us left with faith in Jesus' word and faith in Jesus' person. And of course, faith in Jesus' word is all important. That's what we've got.

[37 : 31] That's what we go by. Come to me, all you who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. There's a promise, and we have to believe it, and we have to act on it.

And the way to find rest is to trust in the promise. To go to Jesus and say, please give me rest. You've promised it. Faith in the promises of God is what brings us to Christ, and which equips us for many things in the Christian life.

Faith in Jesus' word is all important. And the more we look at the promises and say, these are true, the healthier our Christian life will be.

But at the same time, we've got to recognise there's something more than that, and that's faith in the person of Jesus. So, we have not just to say we can trust in Jesus' word.

We have to be able to say we can trust in Jesus as a person. We don't just say his promises are reliable. We have to learn to say something a wee bit further than that, which I find difficult to define.

[38 : 39] We've got to be able to say he's reliable. And that means, you see, that whether we've got a nice promise that fits our case or not, we can still trust in him.

Whether we've got a word from scripture that suits our condition or not, we can still say, but I trust in him because he's a trustworthy person. And that's the best faith you can possibly have.

So, let's look at ourselves and see, are you trusting in his promises? Good. If you are, if you're not, that's where you have to start. Take the promises and lay hold upon them and say, I'm going to put all my weight upon them because these promises won't let me down.

But go on from there and say, whether he speaks to me or not, whether I feel him with me or not, he's still reliable. I can trust in him always. He's a trustworthy person.

That's faith in its fullest form. May God bless to us his word. Now, we're going to sing in Psalm 140. position. Thank you.