

John 4 (2)

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[0:00] Amen. The official said to him, Sir, come down before my child dies.! Jesus said to him, Go, your son will live.

The man believed the word that Jesus spoke to him and went on his way. In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. Amen. So, our sermon series, Through John's Gospel, continues this morning.

If you remember last week, we left off with Jesus ministering to the Samaritans. And many of them coming to believe in him and proclaiming that he is the Savior of the world.

So, this week, we see Jesus returning home to Galilee. The reception there is not quite as enthusiastic. And that's on one level understandable.

You know, Jesus says that a prophet has no honor in his hometown, basically, right? And I get that personally, because no matter whatever else I do in my life, when I go home, someone is going to remember me as the kid who ate a ton of cat food at a family gathering.

[1:23] Yep. Sorry. Uh-oh. Have I ruined your Lord's Day, Deacon? I think so. Okay, I won't go on on that point.

Of course, it's different with Jesus. He is the incarnate Word of God. He is the God-man.

Yet, his reception in his home territory is different than the reception he got in Samaria, which is what we looked at last week. The faith that Jesus encounters in Galilee, when he does encounter faith there, is more reserved, it's more hesitant, than the faith that Jesus encountered when he was in Samaria.

How so? Well, let's look at our text to find out, because I think we see a clear example of that. Then let's think about what the implications are for us when we think about what faith in Jesus means.

So look with me, if you will, in John chapter 4, starting in verse 46. After the two days he departed for Galilee, where Jesus himself had testified that a prophet has no honor in his own hometown.

[2:40] 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. Now, at first when we look at what is really this transition passage, Jesus going back to Galilee, we might scratch our heads a little bit.

Why does the text say that a prophet has no honor in his hometown, and then immediately go on to say that the Galileans welcomed Jesus? I think it makes more sense when we look at the reception that Jesus received in Samaria.

What happens there? There he's asked to stay with them. Many Samaritans acknowledge him as the Messiah, as the Savior of the world. On the other hand, in Galilee, Jesus was welcomed as someone who had performed signs in Jerusalem.

We could say that he was welcomed not as the Savior of the world, but as a kind of local celebrity, right? It's not as if they had faith in Jesus as Savior in Galilee in the same way that we saw in Samaria.

They were interested in the signs that Jesus performed, but that is, of course, not the same thing as true and living faith in him. We see that difference really demonstrated in the way that the official approaches Jesus in the following verses.

[4:09] We read, So he came again to Cana in Galilee, where he had made the water wine. At Capernaum, there was an official whose son was ill.

When this man heard that Jesus had come from Judea to Galilee, he went to him and asked him to come down and heal his son, for he was at the point of death.

Notice how this official, who was probably an official in King Herod's administration, approaches Jesus. He approaches Jesus in a kind of panic, right?

But unlike some others who approach Jesus throughout the Gospels to ask for physical or spiritual healing on behalf of others, this official's faith is not clear for us to see.

He, for example, does not tell Jesus that he is unworthy, that Jesus should come under his roof. He doesn't ask Jesus to only speak the word so that his son will be healed.

[5:11] He doesn't say that he is only looking for the crumbs that fall under the Lord's table. No, he rather insistently asks Jesus to take a trip to his house.

How does Jesus respond? Jesus says, unless you see signs and wonders, you will not believe. Remember, in John's Gospel, we see this over and over again, faith that depends on seeing miracles is not thought that highly of.

And Jesus is, in a sense, rebuking the man, and rebuking the Galileans as well, who seem more interested in miracles than they are in Jesus himself. But Jesus is also in challenging this official, calling him to a more genuine faith.

Of course, the official is distraught enough that it seems not to register with him. He appears to grow more insistent. He says, sir, come down before my child dies.

Of course, if the man, the official, had faith in who Jesus really is, he would have realized that Jesus didn't have to come to his house to heal his son.

[6:30] Did Jesus have to be in the same room with the boy to save him from death? Absolutely not. Jesus has authority over nature and has authority over death.

The official appears at this point to have no real idea who he's talking to. He appears to think he's simply talking to a kind of faith healer.

But Jesus not only shows his authority to the official, he also shows compassion. He says, go. Your son will live. The official's faith in Jesus was certainly imperfect. But we read that he believed Jesus, and he went on his way.

He came to Jesus in desperation, not really knowing who Jesus is. And his faith in Jesus depended on seeing signs and wonders, but at the end of the day, he believes the word that Jesus speaks.

[7:38] So he goes home. Text tells us, as he was going down, his servants met him and told him that his son was recovering. So he asked him the hour when he began to get better, and they said to him, yesterday at the seventh hour, the fever leapt him.

And the man remembers then. It was at the seventh hour that Jesus told him that his son would live. Imagine that.

Jesus speaks with authority, and at that moment, this man's son is saved from death. Jesus didn't have to come to the official's house.

He didn't even have to lay hands on the boy. He didn't have to perform some kind of healing ritual. Nothing like that. Jesus simply spoke, saying that the boy would live.

And he did. Because that is the kind of authority that Jesus has. Authority over nature, and authority over death.

[8:55] And we see that something even greater than physical healing is the result of what happens here. Our text tells us that 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. So the sign, as great as it was, was not the greatest thing. The greatest thing is that the official believed in Jesus, and so did his whole household.

The sign, of course, was great. The boy lived, but the end result is even better. The whole family was saved. We see why John's Gospel treats faith in the signs themselves as insufficient.

Because if faith in the signs doesn't lead to faith in Jesus, then what was the point? The text tells us this was now the second sign that Jesus did when he had come from Judea to Galilee.

So this is the second sign that he did in Galilee after changing the water into wine. This morning's text was fairly short, just a few verses.

[10:20] But there are a few things, quite a few things, we could take away from this text. There are a few things I want us to consider. The first is the official's level of faith in Jesus.

Simply put, the faith that the official showed in Jesus paled in comparison to the faith of some of the Samaritans, which we talked about last week. The Samaritans examined Jesus with the intention of trying to figure out if he is the Messiah, and they quickly came to the conclusion that he is the Savior of the world.

The official's intentions were much different. He came in a panic with the desperate hope that his son might live.

He was scared. It's not that he came with the goal of trying to figure out if Jesus is the Messiah. He just came for help. Yet he believed what Jesus said to him.

And Jesus healed his son. And even more than that, the official and his whole household were saved. All of this reminds me that we can be inclined to think of faith in the wrong way.

[11:44] We can fall into thinking of faith as a good thing we do that causes God to reward us. We can think of faith as a work that merits salvation and come to the conclusion that our salvation ultimately depends on how much faith we have.

The official's example makes it clear. Our salvation does not depend on how much faith we have. Our salvation depends on who our faith is in.

Is our faith in Jesus? Because strong faith that is not in Jesus will do absolutely nothing to help us. On the other hand even weak and struggling faith in Jesus is enough because it doesn't depend on our faithfulness but on the faithfulness of God in Jesus Christ.

The official's faith was weak but the Jesus that he believed in that he ultimately trusted is strong enough to save even those with weak faith.

He believed Jesus out of desperation and what happened. Jesus saved him and his whole household. Maybe there's someone here this morning who knows their faith to be weak and is struggling.

[13:25] I would urge you if you're there or if you're ever there don't look to the strength of your faith for assurance. Look to the Savior look to Jesus look to his faithfulness he is strong enough to save those who are weak and those who are struggling.

have a long track record of doing that. I would also urge us in a sense not to follow the example of the way in which the official approached Jesus which brings me to my next point.

We should not use faith as a tool to get what we want from God. The official believed after he got what he wanted out of Jesus.

He was looking for a sign. Now that sign did lead to him having genuine faith but it doesn't always work out like that. That's the danger of simply looking for a miracle or for God to intervene instead of trusting in Jesus for who he is.

How common is it for us to adopt the mindset of God I will believe if you just do this one little thing for me. And all of a sudden we find ourselves treating God like our genie or like our cosmic vending machine.

[14:54] I remember doing that to a ridiculous degree when I was a kid. You know God just show your power in helping me to beat this video game. Yeah that's a that's a prayer of little me in case you're wondering.

And then I felt like God let me down when it was game over. That's an extreme example but we can be so tempted to do just that.

And it has nothing to do with faith in God for who he is. It has nothing to do with actual faith in Jesus. The preacher and author Tim Keller put it like this.

if you say I believed in God I trusted God and he didn't come through you only trusted God to meet your agenda. We see from the example of this official that trusting God to meet your agenda should not be confused with really trusting God.

But I don't want to just beat up on the official from this story. He did come to Jesus for help. Which brings me to my third point.

[16:15] As believers we should come to the Lord with our burdens in prayer. You might be thinking well of course isn't that obvious?

But I am going to say again we need to come to the Savior who loves us and to clarify not as our vending machine or not because we'll only believe if he answers our prayer in exactly the way we're demanding.

But we need to come to him in prayer with our burdens. If the official came to Jesus when he was in need without giving any evidence beforehand of knowing who Jesus really is how much more should those of us who know Jesus come to him with our troubles and our burdens?

again not because we're only interested in what we can get but because we know and trust the Lord and we know that even if he does not answer our prayers in the way that we want he always answers our prayers in the way that we need.

To be really honest to be transparent I can find myself being tempted to worry for a long time before it occurs to me to pray about what I'm worried about. Anyone else have that problem?

[17 : 35] Yeah. I'm reminded of what the Puritan preacher Thomas Watson once said. He said Jesus Christ went more willingly to the cross than we do to the throne of grace.

That rings true doesn't it? So if something is weighing on you don't wait don't hesitate go to God in prayer don't wait pray before you worry God hears God answers not as a genie who grants wishes but as a loving father who knows what we need more than we do.

I would add that what we need more than anything is to be carried safely home to the eternal joy that God has promised to those who love him.

That brings me to my closing point for this morning. What does this morning's passage tell us about Jesus? Jesus would say that in rescuing the official son from death Jesus demonstrates his authority over death.

The implications of that for all of us are deeply personal because that means that Jesus has the authority to rescue you from death and the authority to rescue me from death.

[19 : 15] When we see the authority that Jesus exercises in the Gospels it should bring us great joy and give us great hope. Jesus forgives sins.

He has the authority to do that because he is God in the flesh and because he died for sinners on the cross to pay our debt. And that means that Jesus can and will forgive the sins of all who put their trust in him.

And Jesus has power to save from death. He has authority to do that because he is God in the flesh and because he rose from the dead on the third day to defeat death, rose in victory.

And that means that Jesus can and will raise all of those who trust in him. And that's a very personal thing.

Still remember the moment in my life that it dawned on me concretely that I was going to die one day. my freshman year of high school a classmate of mine died unexpectedly in a car accident.

[20 : 29] And that day I realized and from that time on I could never forget that I too will die and I don't know when it's going to happen.

But what used to be a source of terror to me no longer strikes me in the same way. I know that unless the Lord returns in my lifetime I'm going to go to the grave.

But death will not defeat me because death could not defeat my Savior. Now I'm a young guy but I've already thought about what my wishes are for when the day comes that I die.

I've talked to Elaine about what I want my funeral to be like, where I want my burial to be. I've told her that I want my headstone to bear this simple inscription, Jesus is Lord.

And all of that is no longer a source of anxiety because I know that Jesus is Lord and that my Redeemer lives. that He has the power to raise us from the dead.

[21 : 52] Every believer has the assurance that even after our bodies are laid to rest, the Lord will raise us up again. Every believer has the assurance that there is coming a day when the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise, and we will always be with the Lord.

So, brothers and sisters, we believe not simply because we have seen signs and wonders, but because the risen Lord has said so, and He is the way, the truth, and the life.

in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.