

# "The Lord Speaks to Elijah" Matthew 18:21–35

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[0:00] And the Holy Gospel is found in the Gospel according to John chapter 4 beginning at the 46th verse. Glory to you, Lord Jesus Christ. So Jesus came again to Cana in Galilee, where he had made the water wine.

And 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.

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.

Jesus said to him, Go, your son will live. The man believed the word that Jesus spoke to him and went on his way. And 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 they 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.

[1:11] And he himself believed in all his household. This was now the second sign that Jesus did when he had come from Judea to Galilee. Before I came to faith, I was, through my teen years, I came to faith when I was 18.

In my teen years, I was a very different person from what I am now. I used to be the person that if you handed me a Bible, I would light it on fire in front of you.

I was a very angry person. That led to a lot of things in my life. A lot of drug abuse and alcoholism. A lot of things I'm not very proud of if I think back on it.

A lot of people I've used, and there's just a lot of things I've done I regret. And when I was 18, I was invited to go to this evangelistic event that was hosted by this charismatic movement that was really popular at the time within Ottawa.

And if you're not familiar with charismatic Christians, if you've never heard that word before, two ways I can describe them. If you know what a Pentecostal Christian is, just picture that on steroids.

[2:17] If you don't know what a Pentecostal is, picture a group of people who are so focused on supernatural things and on experiences. And I was involved in this movement for about four years.

Give or take four, maybe a little bit longer. And one of the things I remember from this time is that the main focus was, in fact, on signs and wonders. You heard this term all the time.

Signs and wonders. It was focused on healings, prophetic visions, word of knowledge, and of the like of that kind of genre. Everything out of this language. You were told all you needed to do was just muster up more faith.

And it would happen. You'd speak it into being. You'd name it and claim it. And if it wasn't happening, it just means your faith wasn't strong enough for that time.

You had a lack of faith on your part. Now, I'm not trying to say here that miracles don't happen because we read them. We read about them in the Bible. They happen. And I'm not here to criticize the charismatic movement because we can easily look at Anglicanism Anglicanism and pick out a lot of things that are not the best with it.

[3:28] But the thing is, churches are made up of sinners leading other sinners to the one who knew no sin, to Jesus Christ.

But the text we're looking at this morning critiques something about the human heart that so easily gets entangled with. And that's making ultimate things, which leads to replacing Jesus as Lord and Savior of your life, and makes them the ultimate things.

See, the thing is, I read this in a commentary this week. I thought it was a good line, so I'm going to include it. If you only believe in the miracle, you're actually living a pagan life.

A pagan life would be one who's just focused on getting results, on moralism, and of that kind of thing. Now, turn with me to John chapter 4, verses 46 to 54.

If you do not have a Bible, it's very helpful to have one. There's some on the table just outside the doors. You can just get up and get one whenever you want, or open it up on your phone. And we're going to approach this text in three ways.

[4:32] We're going to look at it, the first thing is the problem. The second thing is faith. And the last thing is the result. So the problem, the faith, the result.

Now, we've been going through the book of Joshua. And now, because Daniel's gone, I'm preaching on this text. So we're kind of parachuting into this text this morning. We don't know what happened before, and we don't know what happens after.

But the thing is about John's gospel, we're just going to take a moment, is that he is an eyewitness of Jesus' life, of Jesus' ministry, of Jesus' death, resurrection, and ascension.

He is the writer of five New Testament books. And the thing is, at the end of this chapter, chapter 4 that we're coming to, it closes a series of three conversations that Jesus is having with people of different social classes.

He talks with a leading Pharisee. A Pharisee is a religious teacher of that time named Nicodemus. This is where you get the famous quote. Whether you're here and you call yourself a Christian or you don't know, you're a Christian, I'm sure you've heard this quote.

[5:38] For God so loved the world that he gave his only son that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. We then move on to the next conversation, and that's with the Samaritan woman.

This woman is known as a woman who has multiple sexual partners. I believe it says five. She would have been considered the lowest, the lowest on the social standing in society, the bottom of the barrel, bottom of the ladder.

And now we come to Jesus' conversation with an official. He's not given a name. This official most likely would have been a senior member of Herod's court.

Herod was a Roman-appointed person. They called him, they nicknamed him the King of the Jews in a derogatory way towards the Jewish people. He represented the Romans.

He was known of that time, if you read history books on him, as someone who built many buildings. He had grand schemes to build, and then he was also known as being very cruel.

[6:41] The official then, because of this, because of Herod's standing, had a very high social standing amongst the peers, because he was in Herod's court most likely.

So this brings us to the first point, the problem. We have to ask ourselves, but why would this man of such social standing want to talk to a poor religious teacher named Jesus, who wasn't even a part of the religious elite?

Why wouldn't he just look elsewhere? Why wouldn't he look to the leading healers of the land? Why wouldn't he look to the leading religious elite? But he goes to Jesus. Why? Well, let's look.

Verses 46 to 47. So Jesus came again to Cana in Galilee, where he had made water wine. And at Capernaum, there was an official who 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. So here we are given the scenario.

[7:45] Jesus is back in the region where he's done miracles, where he did the first miracle, turning water into wine. So he's famous. He's known within the area. I feel like anyone who does that would be quite known within the area.

He's known for this miracle. So his fame is everywhere. And the official hears that Jesus is back. It shows, though, how desperate this man is, because he seeks out Jesus. He doesn't go to one of his servants to go to Jesus.

He goes himself and meets with him. He goes personally. And according, I looked it up on Google Maps, this would have been an eight-and-a-half-hour walk. And that's not a short walk of that time. For any of us, taking an eight-and-a-half-hour walk is quite a big walk. But of that era and that geography, it's quite substantial. It's not a short walk.

And something we have to think about, Lord willing, that those here and those listening will never have, will never experience what it's like to have a child being sick to the point of death.

[8:45] Last winter, our son John, he got the flu for the first time. And it was during that time, last winter, in the news, they were reporting on the deaths of children in Ottawa because it was a really bad flu strain.

And this led us to feel super desperate. It felt we were out of control. Like, things were out of control. And we didn't know what to do. So we ended up going to the emergency room because he had the flu pretty bad.

But the thing is, the nurses basically rolled their eyes at us because we're first-time parents. We had no idea what the flu looked like in a child. And after a couple days, he started to get better.

But in that moment, I remember this, we just felt so gripped, desperate, because we couldn't do anything about it. We had no idea what was going on. And the official here, in this text, is in a state of extreme desperation.

He doesn't know what to do. His child is dying. He doesn't know what to do. So he goes to the one he's heard about, who's healing. He approaches Jesus and asks him to come and heal his son.

[9:48] In his culture, where social status is everything, this is pretty remarkable. He risks it all for his son by talking to Jesus. So look with me how Jesus responds.

Because it's not what you think. It's not how you think Jesus would respond. Let's look at the words. Verse 48. So Jesus said to him, unless you see signs and wonders, you will not believe.

See, Jesus' words here are somewhat harsh to this man. You would think Jesus would just say, of course, let's go. Let's go at once. But he doesn't. Why? Unless you see signs and wonders, you will not believe.

The you here is plural. So Jesus isn't just speaking directly towards this man. He's speaking in general towards all the people of this area.

Jesus is speaking about most people. They will not take Jesus' words at face value. They need signs and wonders. They need to see something to prove it. The Apostle John is not including this to show that miracles are bad.

[10:58] In fact, miracles are the main way that Jesus showed who he said he was. And proved who he said he was. So why is Jesus saying this?

Well, this brings us to the crux of this text that we're looking at. Jesus is honing in on something here. And then it challenges the official. Jesus wants to know where he's putting his faith.

Is it unless you see signs and wonders, you will not believe? And let's be honest. That's how we all tend to live our Christian lives, if we're honest. There's this UK Christian. I have his book, but I couldn't find it.

So I couldn't remember his name. I have the book somewhere in the box. I was looking for it, but I couldn't find it. This book is about his testimony. And he was a climber, so that's why I have the book, because I really like climbing.

But I think that's a part of his testimony. Before he came to faith, he was really trying to push the harder climbs. He just kept going and going and going. And then there's this moment he decided to climb this notorious mountain on his own solo, on his own.

[11:59] He only had a rope that rappelled down once he got to the top. And the thing that makes it more dramatic is that he did it in winter conditions, which means that it's harder. You get more notoriety if you do it.

But it's harder and it's more dangerous, because things are more unpredictable in winter conditions. But as he got to the top and he started rappelling down, he slipped. And he fell.

And he landed on a ledge, a very small ledge that didn't really give him much room to move around. And he was very exposed to the winter conditions. He had nowhere to hide from the wind, from the snow.

And he was in a blizzard. You're always in a blizzard when you're on a mountain going down for some reason in winter conditions. And so he's on this ledge. He doesn't have his rope anymore, because he fell. He fell on rappel. And after a couple hours, he knew he was going to die, because he was so exposed and it was becoming night.

So he decided to pray in desperation. And he prayed that he said that, God, if you get me out of here, if you let me reach out off this ledge and grab my rope, I'll commit my life to you.

[13:08] But in order for him to do that, he had to step off the ledge. And he does it. He writes about it in the book. He actually just steps off the ledge. And as he's going, he grabbed his rope.

Now, I'm not here saying that this is how we should live our lives. We should just step out in faith like that. He stepped out, and he grabbed his rope. And the story after this is about his commitment to that prayer he said.

This is a remarkable story. But this leads us to thinking how faith works, right? We ask, and God delivers. This is a unique story. It does happen, but it does happen all the time.

Have you ever prayed for something and it didn't happen? Or it felt like God wasn't listening at all?

A new job, maybe. Maybe you prayed for a new job. Maybe discipline in some area of your life.

Maybe better health, or for someone to be saved, or for someone to be healed. Or maybe to have a baby. See, these moments can often be some of the most testing times in the Christian walk.

[14:12] They often lead people to reject Christianity because it appears God doesn't exist or care about them. I mentioned I was only a part of the charismatic move for four years.

I believe that if I prayed for something and spoke it into being, it would happen. It didn't, and I left the faith for many years. But luckily God was not done with me.

But if you look at the book of the Psalms, if you don't read the Psalms, I highly recommend you read the Psalms. Try to read them every couple months. Because the Psalms show us something of this continual subject of appearing God does not listen.

You hear, where are you God? Why aren't you acting? I'm suffering. I'm oppressed. Crying out night and day at the very point of death. But they always end the Psalm in praise, adoration, and trust in the true living God.

See, Jesus challenges this man. Are you only approaching me for signs and wonders? How does the official respond? Let's look. Let's look at the text.

[15:17] Verse 49. The official said to him, Sir, come down before my child dies. The official basically ignores Jesus' words and his response.

And he doesn't give any attention to it. He just repeats what he came to ask Jesus for. To heal his son. To come and heal his son. He's desperate. Can you imagine?

Can you imagine? Just say you're in this scenario. If you go to somebody who's known for healing people by laying his hands on them. And the only thing they say to you is, Go.

Your dying son will live. Wouldn't you want more assurance than that? Really, like, think about it.

But the official's response is pretty remarkable.

This guy is remarkable that he would go on in such a high social standing to Jesus. And then his response is remarkable. Look at it in verse 50. He says this. So Jesus said to him, Go, your son will live.

[16:17] The man believed the word that Jesus spoke to him and went on his way. He leaves. He leaves. Not because Jesus did anything. But because Jesus said his son will live.

And he believed his word. In surgery, before they do anything, most of the time, they take x-rays to see what the problem is. The current Pope had x-rays done and it showed that he needed something on his lungs to be removed.

And as they were doing the surgery, they found that, in fact, he had cancer and he needed a part of his lungs removed. See, they obviously didn't wake him in this moment to consult with him first.

The surgeon took action and removed a part of his lungs. We put our hands, or our lives, into the hands of surgeons. Not based on successful surgeries, but on their word that they will, in fact, do the surgery and it will be successful.

And we normally trust the piece of paper that's hanging behind them in their office. See, we find ourselves at the end of these three conversations that Jesus has. But the one thing that is common with them is the question of what you believe in.

[17:33] What are you trusting in? A sign? Or Jesus' word in himself? See, if you're sitting here and you don't call yourself a Christian, and maybe you're listening on the podcast, and you're just curious what do Christians really believe in, what are you putting your faith in?

Because it's in something. Maybe you've set yourself up really well financially, and you have the best portfolio, and you could buy, and the best portfolio you could buy, and you think to yourself, you're set and secure.

And honestly, maybe you are right now. What happens if the market crashes, or your health goes? Are you still secure? Maybe you've put your faith in athletic accomplishments. They bring you a sense of meaning and purpose.

What happens when your body can't do it anymore, or you injure yourself? There are many examples we can use to fill in the blank. But all these things are fleeting.

They give you a sign that you're progressing or achieving something, but that's it. Unless you see signs and wonders, you will not believe.

[18:42] Look again with me at verse 50. Jesus said to the official, Go, your son will live. The man believed the word that Jesus spoke to him and went on his way.

See, the Christian life is built around God's word. A word that has been tested and stands firm. And when the word is pushed aside, faith goes with it.

What we have here in the Bible is a very trustworthy thing. There is more manuscripts of the Bible than most of the things in history that we trust and were taught in school.

There's thousands of manuscripts, and they're pretty exact. There's things that are taught about certain Roman emperors or certain philosophers, and there's only two manuscripts, and they're partial.

But we treat them as gospel. The Bible has thousands of manuscripts, and they're all pretty exact. That is something you can put your faith in, is that this is, in fact, a worthy, trustworthy source.

[19:51] This is, in fact, God's word. And the thing that also this verse shows us, it shows us who Jesus is. See, Jesus is fully man, but he is fully God.

He can speak things into being. He does not need to lay his hands on people. He can speak healing into being. It shows that he is fully God here in this moment.

The Christian life is built on God's word, on trusting in God's word. So what happens? Well, look with me at verses 51 to 54. 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 they 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. The official's son is healed instantly. It shows who Jesus is, that he is fully God.

[21:09] And his servants confirm this the next day when he's heading home. See, notice what happens at Jesus' word, as Jesus' word is confirmed. The official's faith matures.

Through his faith on Jesus' word, his household comes to faith as well. And household here means just, it would have been the adults and the children coming to faith. His entire house comes to faith through his faith and the act that happens.

So what does this have to do with me, you might be asking, or listening online? See, we all need to ask ourselves, are you trusting in the miracle or the miracle giver?

What dictates your faith, your trust? What are you putting your trust in? This text shows us God's deep love to heal those who call on him. He healed this man's son, so he may live.

But God gave his son, so all may be healed. There's no greater miracle than a converted heart. God gave his son to heal hearts, to turn the hearts to him, to turn people to him, to those who put their faith and trust in him.

[22:21] See, this is the time in the sermon where the preacher normally gives application. So what is it? See, this text calls all Christians and non-Christians to take seriously who Jesus is.

Did he rise from the dead? Is he the one? Is he the Messiah? If you're here and you call yourself a Christian, are you trusting in the person of Jesus or what he does for you?

If you're here and you call yourself a non-Christian, are you trusting in yourself? Will that sustain you? Will that go with you through when you die? Is your faith in the word made flesh or on the miracles you hope to receive?

This is what the text challenges. This text points to who Jesus is, to he is God. And it also points to our hearts about what we are putting our faith in. Is it what Jesus does for us or are we faith in him and what he's done for us?

Sorry, has he saved us or not? But how do I do this? You may be asking. You can't do it on your own. You can't muster it up with your own faith. It's a gift given by the Father.

[23:27] So you have to ask Jesus to take control of your life, to help you give up the things that hinder you from going closer to him, to make your heart more like his. Read his word.

Let it reform you more and more. Meditate on the person of Jesus, what he does, how he interacts with people, and what he's done in your life. In the spring this year, I did the funeral for my

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