

Greater Than Death

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[0 : 00] Well, it's really, it's a great thing to be able to come into preaching the sermon series on John, the end of John 4. We've just had three sermons on the woman at the well, the Samaritan woman, and now we have an equally joyful account of a royal official, of a very unpopular king, whose life is changed in the same way that the woman's life was changed.

And it's interesting in this Gospel of John that we're going through that Jesus is holding life out to people, all different kinds of people. He is giving life to them, and he is asking them, he is calling them to receive that life by believing him, very simply, by putting their faith in him.

And it's amazing how that gift of faith, that life, affects people in the Gospel of John. With Nicodemus, and with the woman at the well, and with this man today, we see faith grow.

There's a change in their faith. It takes a bit longer for the religious guy, Nicodemus. You see that change over the whole Gospel. But for the Samaritan woman, and for this man we're going to hear about today, there is a remarkable change that happens in their faith, in their receiving of the life that Jesus gives to them.

And it's a very important passage for us, because there's a strong invitation in John here for us to grow in our faith, to trust Jesus for the life that he gives to us.

[1 : 48] And this is an important growth for us, whether we've been a Christian for 90 years, and there's someone here today whose 90th birthday is today, and also that we, whether we are a brand new Christian, or somebody who's thinking about Jesus.

All of us need to grow in our faith. So this passage is such a gift for us this morning. Look at chapter 4, 43 through 54.

Because what you see happen here is through one man's belief, life is given to a dying boy. It's a gift. The gift of belief that Jesus gives life through grows as this man unwraps it in this passage. So he teaches us a lot about faith and how it grows. And I want to particularly think of three things that we see here. The first is that growing faith knows your need of God.

Growing faith knows your need of God. Look at verse 46 at the end of it. This royal official is at home in Capernaum with his son, who's burning up with fever, and he's dying.

[3 : 03] And he hears about Jesus. He hears about the incredible things that Jesus has done in Jerusalem, and that Jesus has come back down to Cana, which is about 20 miles away.

And he knew when he heard that, with all his heart, that his family needed Jesus. He knew, my son is dying.

There is nothing I can do for him. I'm completely helpless. This man is my only hope. And if you are a parent, you can be in the shoes of this royal official.

You know that if you had a son who was dying, you would do anything, anything to save him. And in his terrible helplessness, he knew that this man, there's no one other than this man who could help his son.

And this is the way our faith grows as well, because each of us need what only Jesus can give. We need the life that comes from a healed relationship with God the Father.

[4 : 07] And this is something that is very easy for us to forget, because what happens is that sin deceives us. And especially if you have been a Christian for a while, sin deceives you into thinking you really don't need God all that much.

There's not a keen sense of the need that we have for God. And what happens is then, if I don't know my need for God so powerfully, then I cool towards God.

I think I don't need him. And my heart is no longer warm towards him, soft, living heart that God promised in Ezekiel.

And that's why it's so important to be in this season of Lent. In Lent, at the very beginning on Ash Wednesday, we hear these words, remember that you are dust, and to dust you will return. Well, that doesn't do a whole lot for our pride, does it? And what it does is it tells us we each need God desperately. And Lent is a season that brings about a renewal of our faith, knowing that we need God.

[5 : 20] And in fact, every service that we have in the Anglican Church, which is a great blessing for us, includes a public confession of sin. And we're going to do that in a few minutes, as soon as I get over with the sermon.

But what we are saying in the confession of sin, to one another and to God is, I need Jesus. I need him for my life. I need him to heal my relationship with God.

I need him to heal my soul through the forgiveness of sins. I need his life. And that's the fundamental thing that we need in our relationship with God.

In order for our faith to grow, we need to know him. And you know, this is what the church is all about. God means us to help one another and help the community around us to trust Jesus so that we can have life.

This basic thing that we need. And so Jesus means St. John's Vancouver to be in the healing business. Knowing that we desperately need to be constantly growing in the life that God gives because otherwise there is death.

[6 : 31] You know, in my last church on the Sunshine Coast, I was in a small community, and I got to know my mechanic very well. Partly because my car made that a necessity.

I also knew him because we were in the fire department together. And what we did was we had lots of talks together. And he was about 20 years older than me.

And he would often bring up things about church. And he would say that, you know, I could come to your church someday. But he said, you know, I could never do that.

I said, why not? He said, because if I go, your church will be struck by lightning. I said, what do you mean? He says, you don't know the things that I've done. I have lived, I have lived a sinful life.

And I said to him, well, there's a very helpful saying in thinking about what the church is. And that is that the church is not a hotel for saints.

[7 : 29] It is a hospital for sinners. And I said, you know what? You are uniquely qualified to come to church. You need that hospital.

And I do too. And he looked at me a little bit questioningly. But that really is what we are about as a church.

We are meant to be a hospital for sinners. When Jesus said, I came to seek and save the lost, he's very clear that all of humanity is lost.

That is our default. We are dead in our sins without him. That's his diagnosis. And our faith grows as we know that we are sinners in need of a hospital, in need of a place where we can hear the gospel of Jesus, hear the healing that he gives to us, understand our need for Jesus to save us and bring life to the world.

And I wonder if you believe that today, that you need Jesus desperately today. It is the key for us to have a living, growing faith.

[8 : 39] It is what we are about as people who meet together as Christians. Now the second thing about faith that we see in the sky, besides that we need God, is that growing faith is a faith that perseveres.

It's a faith that persists. Now this is a wonderful thing about this man. He is so persistent. And it must be because of his deep love for his son.

It's a strong love and he is determined to bring Jesus to his dying son. And there's no obstacle that's going to prevent him from getting Jesus there. As soon as he hears Jesus is in Cana, he takes off on his horse.

And it's probably still dark because I did a little check of Google and it told me that on a hilly road, it'll take a day's travel, at least seven hours, to go by horse that distance.

So he must have left before dawn or earlier to get there at 1 p.m. in the afternoon. And he finds Jesus there. When he gets there, he knows exactly what he's going to tell Jesus.

[9 : 50] And he says in verse 48, please come down to heal my son because he is at the point of death. But the answer he gave must have been puzzling. It must have been somewhat discouraging because Jesus said, unless you, and he says it in plural, all of you crowds that are

around here see signs and wonders, you will not believe.

Well, what Jesus is saying is there's a very popular and a shallow faith that surrounds him right now. It's a faith that believes when things are going very well and when things are exciting, when things are happening.

But it is gone, this faith, when things get tough. And what Jesus does is he rebukes that thinking. It seems a little bit harsh to a man who's coming in desperate need like that.

But remember, Jesus knows this man's heart. He has been holding the gift of faith out to this man. He's doing it right now. And what he does is he actually invites this man to grow in his faith and to trust him and not the signs themselves.

To put his trust in him, the man Jesus, who is God. And you know, the official doesn't argue with Jesus. He, in fact, in a sense, he's admitting, yes, that's part of who I am.

[11:13] Have that superstitious faith. But he asks a second time, sir, please come down before my child dies. It's very poignant. You can see his heart.

He is clinging to Jesus as his only hope for his son, even though he doesn't know much about him. It's a symbol. It's a very simple and humble, persistent asking.

And that teaches us something crucial about growing faith in Jesus. Persistent asking is what God is calling us to.

Because there's many times when you and I don't understand God's timing. There's lots of times when we are disappointed. We are puzzled.

We don't know why God's timing is the way it is. He corrects us and what we are wanting as well. But always, Jesus is inviting us and teaching us to ask and ask again.

[12:13] We've already seen that in the conversations Jesus has had with people. He invites them continually to ask for his life. And so this is what Nicodemus asks for.

He says, how can a person be born when he is old? How can he be born from heaven? And the Samaritan woman says, please give me that living water so that I will not be thirsty.

That water that wells up into eternal life. So a growing faith asks Jesus and keeps on asking for the life of God. And Jesus calls us to do this.

If you were to go further on in John in chapter 16, Jesus says very clearly, until now, you have asked for nothing in my name. You haven't asked for the life that only Jesus can give.

He says, ask and you will receive that your joy may be full. Well, full joy only comes through the life that we receive as we trust in Jesus Christ.

[13:14] So ask. You haven't done it so far. Ask. A few years ago, I saw probably an extreme example of this.

As I was part of a baptism of a man in his 80s. And this man, his wife was a Christian and she had been praying for him for 60 years to know Jesus Christ.

And for 50 of those years, he was completely opposed to God and the idea of Jesus Christ. He was one who said, well, that's just a crutch. You know, if you're somebody who's strong and independent, you don't need God.

Why would I consider it? But then a slow change took place 10 years before his baptism. He began to ask about the gospel, to ask about who Jesus is and to actually begin considering him.

And he and his wife began to have conversations about faith and what God is about. And finally, he made a commitment to trust Jesus to give him life.

[14:18] Well, you can understand how overjoyed this woman was. This is the joy that Jesus promises when you ask. And he asked to be baptized. So, and he couldn't get out of his house because of his physical limitations.

And he was baptized in his living room. The most unique, powerful baptism I've seen. But you see what happened here. This is persistence.

It comes, it's about coming to Jesus through lots of difficulty. Coming to him through discouragement and a time, a timetable that's not yours.

But this is a faith that grows. You may have been coming to Jesus about something in your life and you're coming to St. John's today. Having prayed for loved ones or praying for grace in difficult situation in a difficult relationship.

You're praying about direction in work, direction of your life should take. Praying for your children, your family who may not know the Lord. Praying for help that you can do what is right in a situation you are facing.

[15 : 29] God teaches us here to persevere. He is telling us to keep coming to Jesus about these things just like the official does. A year ago, we were going through the epistle of James and there's a blessing for you as you persist in coming to Jesus.

It says this, Blessed is the one who perseveres under trial for when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life which God has promised to those who loved him.

Well, God loves you and his promise is for you today. This is how your faith will grow as you persist in coming to Jesus. And then finally, there's a third and crucial way that the faith grows in this official's life and it's very simply, he takes Jesus at his word.

Look at verse 50. Jesus says to this man, Go, your son will live. And the translation lets us down a little bit at this point because literally, it says, Go, your son lives now.

Well, the official must have been surprised by this, maybe a bit disappointed because his whole life was focused on bringing Jesus to this boy. How can Jesus heal this, my boy, if he's not in the room with him?

[16 : 53] Don't I need his presence? What if my boy dies? What will my wife and family think if I come back empty handed? And Jesus is telling him, Go with nothing but my word.

With nothing but my promise for you. And they're sure to say his family when he goes back, you're coming back with nothing but his word? That's it? But this man takes that risk.

He takes Jesus at his word. And it says here in verse 50 that the man believed the word that Jesus spoke and he went on his way.

He obeyed that word to go. And that's an amazing moment in this official's life. It's a risky one because he had to believe that Jesus has the power over death with just a word.

And with just a word that he can give life powerfully. He has to believe that Jesus keeps his promises even though he doesn't really know Jesus. But he also has to trust that Jesus knows his son.

[17 : 57] That he knows his son is ill and where his son is as well. What is wrong with him? And he has to know that Jesus is deeply committed to his son's well-being.

So all of these thoughts are going through his head and in that time he makes the decision to believe. And he actually acts on Jesus' word. His life and his decisions are determined by what Jesus said.

And you know that is the turning point in his life and his family's life. It is a joyful ending. Verses 51 through 53. He's traveling back home the next morning.

His servants meet him on the road and tell him that his son was recovering. Now that's not a helpful translation either because it's the same words that we heard before in the original.

They came with this message your son lives. And of course those are the words Jesus spoke and that's the first thing the official thought of was Jesus' words.

[18 : 57] That's why he asked what time did he get better? Well it was one in the afternoon yesterday that the fever left him they said. Well the father knew that that was the very hour that Jesus had said your son lives.

And so we have this little line which is so powerful and full of joy he himself believed and his whole household with him. Now the question is what did they believe?

They didn't have to believe that their son was better he was there in front of them standing up completely healthy. What they had to believe is that that miracle was a sign.

A sign of something that they could not see. A sign that Jesus is the giver of life. of all eternal life of all that is good and right that he gives life with God himself forever.

A life that they had not known until this point. So you see Jesus in this account gives two kinds of life that day. The life of this son this beloved son but also eternal life for a whole family through this growing faith of this official who unwraps the gift of faith that Jesus has given to him.

[20 : 15] So I want to close by noticing something about his faith. It is a faith that grew and blossomed for one reason. There is a change that takes place.

He starts with a superstitious belief that says you know if I approach Jesus in just the right way I'll get what I really want and need. but a profound change takes place when he takes Jesus at his word.

Remarkable change because very quickly his faith turns into a living belief that Jesus himself is the giver of all life. And that's what John says at the beginning of his gospel that Jesus that at the very beginning Jesus was life and he is life enlightens every person.

And that belief is contagious. It overflows so that his whole family believes that Jesus really is what the Samaritans had found out the savior of the world.

So I want to close by saying that this passage was a deep gift for the first Christians that John wrote to because when Jesus left the father to go to heaven they would have asked how can I follow him? [21 : 32] How can I trust him when I don't see him? Well John tells us here that Jesus left us his word that it is the power of salvation that when you take him at his word he comes into your life.

He gives the life of God to you. He comes to you by the power of his Holy Spirit. And we at St. John's deeply need our faith to be renewed today.

through the word that Jesus gives the Holy Spirit gives us that life. He helps us to unwrap the gift of faith that Jesus holds out to us today.

The Holy Spirit shows us our deep need for God so that we can turn to him in humility. He shows us the deep the he shows us the strength that we have.

He gives us the strength we need to persevere and to persistently come to him. And wonderfully he opens Jesus' word to us so that we can embrace Jesus' promises hold fast to them and actively obey his word.

[22 : 43] Let's pray for the Holy Spirit to grow our faith to renew our love for him to renew the life that we have in Jesus Christ. Amen.