

John 4:43-54 “A God You Can Take at His Word”

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- [0 : 00] You are listening to a message from Southwood Presbyterian Church in Huntsville, Alabama. Our passion is to experience and express grace. Join us.
- We're back in John's gospel this morning where he records for us encounters with Jesus. People who engage with Jesus and we get to see about that, John tells us, so that we might believe, so that we might have life, that we might find that abundant, eternal, life-giving relationship with Jesus.
- Our passage this morning is another sign, John tells us, of who Jesus is that it might strengthen our faith in him.
- It follows Jesus' encounter with the Samaritan woman at the well where Jesus agrees to stay two days with the reject Samaritans who are embracing him as the Messiah.
- And now he's on the move north again, back towards home base in Galilee. John 4 at verse 43.
- [1 : 17] After two days, he departed for Galilee. For Jesus himself had testified that a prophet has no honor in his 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 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.
- [2 : 32] 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.
- Thus far, God's holy word. And I want to make one general observation about God's word as we get started.
- Because it has become increasingly popular these days to believe that these biblical accounts we read are accounts of Jesus made up by his followers after his life.
- You know, Jesus didn't really perform miracles. Many say, come on. In fact, he didn't even claim divine authority himself, people will tell you.
- His disciples made these things up. I'm sure that some of you here this morning believe that. That that's how you understand these accounts.
- [3 : 38] And I want to address that briefly in light of this passage. Because it's really significant when you talk about such a historically influential person as Jesus.

With the significant claims that he makes. That you know if you're actually encountering the real Jesus. Think about the places here that we just read.

Jesus has gone from Galilee. Down to Jerusalem. For the Passover. Where he cleanses the temple publicly. And then he goes through Samaria.

Back up to Galilee. To Cana. Where not long ago at all. He turned water into wine. And so a couple towns over. They've been talking about Jesus.

And what he's been doing. And everyone seems to be talking about him. To the point that a man comes 15 or 20 miles. To ask him to heal his son. All of this traveling.

[4 : 37] And all these signs and wonders. Within about a 50 mile radius. Like Huntsville. Madison. Decatur. And some from these towns had come with him.

Down to Jerusalem. They'd been there for the Passover too. And they'd seen these things. And they were telling stories. They're following this. Everyone knows what's going on.

Now we know these accounts that we have. In God's word. Are written and received. In the lifetime of at least some eyewitnesses.

To these very events. And certainly many of their children. Who've heard these stories. Maybe their whole lives. These are publicly witnessed.

Publicly discussed events. You can't make them up. Without your account of them being dismissed. As fiction. As soon as it's published. The most reasonable explanation.

[5 : 35] For these. And for how people respond to them. In faith. And follow this Jesus. Is that this account. Is indeed. The real Jesus. That's only one reason.

Right. To trust God's word. When we read it. I'm happy to talk with you about more. You may have more questions about that. But it's an important one that our text brings up today. As Jesus performs another divinely miraculous sign.

See Jesus comes back home. Specifically where he performed his first public miracle. What John calls the first sign.

Where he might expect no honor. Because they know Joseph and Mary's son. Right. Everybody knows him. But here in his hometown.

They're at least surface level excited. That the hometown boy. Is a magic man. He's a miracle worker. Word is getting around. Right. Kind of cool that he's coming back.

[6 : 35] And we see they welcome Jesus. Generally because they like what he can do for them. They want the signs and wonders. Jesus realizes. Jesus. And we'll see Jesus is not against signs altogether.

Is he? But he knows it's faulty faith. To stop at the sign. Just as we discussed during the baptism earlier. You don't stop for medical care at the red emergency room sign.

Right. That's what Jesus is saying in response to the nobleman's plea. Isn't it? Verse 48. This father is desperate.

Right. His son is dying. He's heard of Jesus. He asks for help. I mean this seems like an easy yes for Jesus. Right. But Jesus wants more.

He wants to help him and others. Not stop at the sign. He answers this man's prayer. So to speak. With a heart level challenge.

[7 : 39] About his faith. You won't come and believe. Unless I put on a show for you. And that's a problem. Jesus is pointing out. He wants something more for the man.

Why do you come to Jesus? I think if we're honest. We can relate to people stopping at the sign. Can't we?

What are some ways we sometimes want the things that Jesus does for us. More than we want Jesus himself. Sometimes I think we too are interested only in the physical healing or provision.

We talk to Jesus only when we're sick or hungry or desperate. For some of us. Our relationship with Jesus is primarily about keeping our kids or grandkids in line.

That's why I'm associated with Jesus if I'm honest. I mean they need some good morals. Some good community. Sometimes.

[8 : 47] Some of us just want intellectual superiority. To be able to argue or impress someone. Or seem like we know more theologically. Rather than knowing more Jesus personally.

You may have any of those struggles in your own heart. I'll tell you where I see this struggle the most. In our community. Sometimes in my own heart.

We so often want a Jesus who fits into our schedule and life plan. I call it comfortable Jesus. We're not interested in going deep with the real Jesus who might disrupt my life.

He might mess with where I live. Or how much money I make and what I do with it. Who I spend my time with. My kids activities. Their preparation for college.

Maybe for you you feel this sense of Jesus. Here is my weekly calendar. There are exactly 36 uncommitted minutes left.

[9 : 54] And I promise I'll do with them whatever you want. Jesus. With those last 36 minutes. Have you felt that way? Jesus I want a church that I can enjoy going to.

And I can make some friends. I'll even study the Bible a little bit when it's convenient for me. So I can play church reasonably well. That'll give me some social credibility. And I expect you to make my family peaceful.

Because honestly we're pretty decent people. But if I'm really honest I'm not longing to know you more. I certainly don't want you changing my life too much.

Unless I ask you specifically. And then maybe something extreme. Friends we sometimes come to Jesus.

Bring our prayers to him. And we need to hear his reminder. That we are just here for the signs and wonders. For what he can do for us.

[10 : 57] John Calvin says what's happening here in this passage. Is our heavenly father often does not comply with our prayers in every detail. But goes to work in an unexpected way to help us.

So that we may learn not to dictate to him in anything. That we trust him. Consider why Jesus insisted on going deeper with this man and the others around him.

Can a faulty faith based merely on signs and wonders. Hold up in a world of suffering? I mean maybe in this case his son gets healed.

But someone else he loves is going to get sick next. Right? Can a faulty faith based merely on signs and wonders be enough when Jesus goes to the cross?

What good will he be to me then? What's he going to do for me hanging up there? Where? Jesus knows that we need to go beyond the signs to the one they point to.

[12 : 07] To the person of Jesus himself. He's helping with that. So when the nobleman asks again for Jesus to come heal his son. Jesus says go.

Your son lives. The man takes Jesus at his word doesn't he? He believes and goes. There's certainly a lot in this story about faith.

But this is full faith. It's confirmed when the son is healed. The man explains to his family and servants what Jesus has done. And they all believe full faith what Jesus is working on here in this encounter.

That the reason he pushes back on the man a little bit when he comes. Is that he wants this full faith that sees where the sign is pointing. That comes to see the true Jesus for who he really is.

What does this sign point to? What is it that it's a sign of? Signs point to something. What's it telling us about Jesus? Well anyone who heals serious sickness like this has a lot of power.

[13 : 18] Power over creation. Over the physical realm. But perhaps there are other doctors with great techniques. Other magicians with tricks to work such powerful changes.

Jesus wants to be abundantly clear when he heals this boy. He heals how? With a word? Immediately? Just at that time?

From a distance? Miles and miles away? There is no one who does this. This is not just power.

This is God-like power. This is like the God who created the universe by the word of his power. This sign shows Jesus not as a carnival trickster.

Not as a physician with newfangled methods. But as God himself ordering molecules and healing people with a word.

[14 : 21] Further, I think this sign points to the fact that Jesus cares and is powerful not just when he's physically present.

Why is that important? How important is that going to be for Jesus' followers when he returns to his father in just a couple of years? And he's not there with them in that way anymore.

He's not physically with this boy they've never met. But Jesus cares. And Jesus can heal. Do you see how Jesus is taking care to push the man toward what matters most?

Yes, Jesus heals his son's body. But Jesus is also healing the hearts of the whole household. Jesus demonstrates for the man not what he asks for, but what he most needs.

To know who Jesus really is. So much more than a magic miracle worker who can fix something for him every once in a while. No, no, no, a God who cares deeply.

[15 : 28] Who rules supremely over all creation. Who can be trusted implicitly. Even, even when he doesn't do what you ask him to do.

So that we would always come to him no matter what. No matter what our need is. No matter how we feel that we could come to him. John Bunyan who wrote Pilgrim's Progress once said, I was driven to such straits that I must of necessity go to Jesus.

And if he had met me with a drawn sword in his hand. I would sooner have thrown myself upon the edge of his sword. Than have gone away from him.

For I knew him to be my last hope. I would sooner have thrown myself on Jesus' sword. Because no one else could I trust like him.

Is that the way you come to Jesus? Not for the things that he can do for you. For how good he promises to make it all right away. But in fact regardless of what he does.

[16 : 34] For himself. For the fact that he's the only one you can even hope to trust completely. Because he is the true God that you can take at his word.

His powerful, life-changing, hope-breathing word. That's what this sign shows us about Jesus.

Okay, I want to apply this in two ways. Two ways as we think about this. Both of them thinking about what it looks like when we come to Jesus and believe him to be who he really says he is.

The God that this sign shows him to be. The God we can take at his word. And first, and this is a bit harder. I want to think specifically of times when God doesn't answer your prayer the way you want right away.

I would ask for a show of hands when that's happened for you but we all know that's all of us. I don't know if you've picked up on this lately. From people you know.

[17 : 45] Maybe those of you who pay close attention to the prayer guide. There are a lot of hard physical illnesses in this church family right now.

A lot. There are more hard situations that can't be printed. You believe that. I hate the ravages of cancer.

Of mental illness. Of death. And we typically do not have in those situations a direct promise from Jesus like the one this noble official got.

Your son will live. Usually we don't have that. Many of us are right now where all of us have been at some time when immediate miraculous healing does not come.

When God doesn't answer my prayer right away. when cancer or miscarriage or other tragedy strikes and my world is turned upside down and I'm crying out.

[19 : 00] I've been there. What does this look like in our lives when we come to Jesus not just for the sign. We may not have that yet.

But for who he really is. If he's really working that kind of faith in us what does that look like? A couple things we see in this story. Twice interestingly Jesus does not grant the request of the nobleman for him to come with him and heal his son.

Friends keep asking. Keep praying. Like the persistent widow you're praying to a powerful and personal God.

He cares. Unlike the unjust judge he doesn't delight in scorning his children. Keep praying. But seeing Jesus also enables us to live by faith.

Jesus doesn't do what the nobleman asks but the nobleman does what Jesus asks. He goes home and believes the word of Jesus.

[20 : 10] even when we when we don't have the sign in hand yet when we don't see the answers when we don't know what God's up to we can keep following this God worthy of our trust.

And finally we can share with others. Certainly this man rejoiced in his son being healed. No reason to downplay that. But he and his whole household believed.

Believed what? who Jesus was. They didn't have to believe about the son once he was alive. They knew that. They believed Jesus' divine nature because the nobleman shared not only about his son's healing but also about the Savior's power didn't he?

So you can share of the goodness and greatness of Jesus while you are still waiting on the answer. But only if you've seen him beyond the signs.

If it's only about the thing he's gonna do for you then you have to wait till you have it but if there's a God you can trust in the meantime you can for your own heart and for the hearts of others share about him already.

[21 : 24] Do you see you see why we must see Jesus not merely signs and wonders? this man receives his son back restored to him.

Many of us have prayed for ourselves for those we love and not seen them restored to us. If you're only with Jesus for the signs for what he can do for you at that point you're out right?

there better be something more divine power over death a divine perspective beyond time and the realities of this life and this broken world a divine personal care for you that understands that your heart can only take so much.

In fact sometimes y'all have taught me this sometimes it's when we don't get our prayers answered the way we want and the timing we want that we learn to cling to God's eternal healing isn't it?

That we learn to hope in a fresh way in a world with no more death or tears and put our stake there more than here.

[22 : 43] We learn to treasure a God in a way we never have before a God who right now shares our griefs and one day wipes away our tears.

Friends not having that direct promise is hard. Living by faith is hard. We are praying with you and for you your God is with you and for you.

In fact second application consider what it means to take God at his word with the promises that he has given us.

This is a preacher trick. I said two applications this one has like 34. Okay so all in the second one get excited. The pro all think of all the promises way more than 34 that we don't have specifically for all of those promises we wish we knew there are so many promises that we do have and that we must embrace that we can absolutely take to the bank because of the power of God's word.

Let me just mention a few see if your heart needs to embrace one of these this morning. some of us really battle with doubts about our salvation.

[24 : 18] Hear the words of Jesus truly truly I say to you whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life has passed from death to life whoever believes in Jesus is not condemned.

In fact Jesus promises this is the will of my father that everyone who looks on the son and believes in him should have eternal life and listen to your savior I will raise him up on the last day.

Hear the voice of your good shepherd who laid down his life for the sheep and take Jesus at his word today. Many of us have been praying for years and years for our kids and our hearts ache for the wayward adult children that we still love so much that seems God doesn't do anything.

God would have you remember what you saw this morning in the sacrament of covenant baptism. I will establish my covenant an everlasting covenant.

I will be God to you. I will be God to your children after you. I will be their God. He hasn't left them.

[25 : 51] He hasn't given up on them. Keep asking. I will be God. I will be God. I will be God. I will be God. Perhaps some of us have thought I've got this struggle that I live with every day and it's really heavy and I'd like to share it with someone but it's just too big or too bad to share with my pastor or my grace group.

In fact, well honestly it's too bad for Jesus to forgive me. I just carry it around every day fearfully. I'm exhausted.

Jesus says all that the Father gives me will come to me and whoever comes to me I will never cast out. Whoever comes I will never cast out.

Try him. Take him at his word. Some of us are sitting here this morning frantic, worried, wondering how we're going to make ends meet even this week.

Jesus says all these things, all these things will be added to you. Don't worry, he says.

[27 : 09] In fact, we read this week in our Bible reading plan from Philippians 4, my God will supply every need of yours, every need of yours according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus.

Jesus. I know because we've been talking about sharing our faith so much lately that some of us feel totally inadequate, absolutely unconvinced that we could point someone else to Jesus.

Listen to his promise as we come to him, as we follow him, he says, I will make you become fishers of men. You come to Jesus, you rest in his divine nature and power and he promises living in him, with him, you will bear fruit.

He does that in you. Most of us know what it's like to feel alone. It's all up to me and my resources and strength every day or honestly, no one cares about me or notices me.

Jesus says, behold, I am with you always to the end of the age. In fact, Jesus is so committed to never leaving you or forsaking you that when he does return to his father, he sends to you his spirit to dwell in you.

[28 : 37] If I go, I will send him to you. He has not left you alone. He has not left you alone. I promise I won't do 34, but I got more.

I've talked with young and old in this church who struggle to feel that it's really true that Jesus is more valuable than the things of this world that are right there in front of them every day.

They feel more real, more impactful so often in our lives. how can I give up comfort or friends or success to have Jesus?

Jesus promises everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or lands for my name's sake will receive a hundredfold and will inherit eternal life.

Jesus promises that true life, abundant life, eternal life comes from him and actually consists in knowing him that that's where life is.

[29 : 48] Will you keep trusting your feelings or will you take God at his word? It's not just that we sometimes feel exhausted and overwhelmed when we're following Jesus but it's easy to feel that that's the way it should be.

Jesus promises again as we come to him I will give you rest. In fact when you are weak when you are at your lowest he promises his grace is sufficient which means you don't have to be.

Do you believe that? all right just one more for now. Many of us wonder about what's after this life.

We fear death uncertain unknown. Jesus understands that these concerns trouble our hearts and he speaks to us let not your hearts be troubled.

Believe in God believe also in me. In my father's house are many rooms if it were not so would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you and if I go and prepare a place for you I will come again and will take you to myself that where I am you may be also.

[31 : 13] The God who spoke and fifteen miles away molecules reorder viruses obey a dying boy is healed he promises you that he's coming back for you to take you to be with him where he is forever.

So many glorious promises from this God that we can take at his word that we must take at his word. I'm not suggesting please hear me that these magically remove all struggles.

That's not the point. But I pray that one or two for you would build your faith in a God you can trust. As we close this morning I want to talk one more time especially to those who are hurting for yourself for those you love who are longing to receive healing from Jesus like the nobleman and his son in this story you want that to be your story.

Living by faith and not right now by sight is hard. Trusting God when it doesn't seem to be working out is difficult.

it should not be done alone. But I want to encourage you I want to encourage you by reminding you that Jesus the God of the Bible the God you can trust not merely because he's powerful and his word is not bound by time or space and it transforms molecules and hearts.

[33 : 02] Praise the Lord that is true. But especially he's a God you can trust because he's a God who entered our pain. Knowing our great need that we were dying in our rebellion in our brokenness knowing that we didn't have the strength to hold on to him he grabbed hold of us and would not let go.

He cared about us so much that he entered this world faced temptation endured rejection had his body racked with agony even tasted death because of his great love for us.

He says that he is with you and for you he is. He promises a future without pain or death or tears you can count on it.

He tells you to trust him today. You can take him at his word. Let's pray. Jesus for all the things that you have given us that we can hold on to as we cling to you we give you thanks.

We confess the feebleness of our faith. How quickly the circumstances of our lives and the temptations around us make us forget and not trust what you have told us.

[34 : 46] Thank you for loving us. Thank you for coming for us. Thank you for never letting us go. Give us hope in you today. Build our faith that it might stand strong in the tests of this life that it might overflow from us to others who are hurting.

Thank you for giving us faith and being with us by your spirit. In your name we say it. Amen. For more information visit us online at southwood.org.

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