

The Growth Of Faith Under Christ's Nurturing

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- [0 : 0 0] Good morning everybody and a very warm welcome to this service from Stornoway Free Church. We're pleased that you're able to join us and we thank you for joining us.
- I trust that today will be a day that God will bless to you and that he will bless us during our services today as well. I have one bit of information to give you first of all and it's about a little girl called Rhoda.
- Rhoda lives in Uganda and she's actually sponsored through the charity Compassion by our own Sunday School and Tweenies Youngsters.
- They take their weekly money and put it towards Rhoda's support. Rhoda lives in Uganda as I've said, our closest city is the city of Soroti and she's actually seven today, 28th of February.
- Her parents are both fathers, relatively poor, and she has five siblings. Now Compassion actually link up all the children that are supported through them to a local church.
- [1 : 0 5] So they have the support of a local church and that's the case with Rhoda as well. The church is very much a safety net and provides church-based staff that give support and also arrange for necessities such as food, water, shelter, clothing, household items, medical care, trauma counselling, school uniforms and other resources.
- Of course, along with that and most important of all, the children have access to gospel teaching. They get also medical check-ups and nutritional support, but also they give work training to them as they get older to try and prepare them for the future.
- Letters are sent from sponsors, in this case from the Sunday school and twinnies, as I've said, and they're then translated into the local language of wherever the children are placed.
- A relationship therefore begins between the sponsor and the child and children and that helps to bring some hope and positive change and very much a personal interest for the child and for the sponsors into the relationship.
- The children have already sent a birthday card in the post to Rhoda and also transferred money for her birthday. The project worker will meet with Rhoda and the family just to choose what they regard as a perfect gift for her.
- [2 : 3 5] In the past they sent Christmas cards and also uploaded photos along with the cards onto the internet through the website.
- And they sent her a message with photos of the snow that we had when the snow was with us. Now the latest update from Compassion tells us that there has been a spike of COVID-19 cases in Uganda, depending on the region.
- It varies from region to region. Some projects have now reopened. Rhoda is safe. We're told that she's now able to attend the project, her local project, and have activities there in small groups.
- A church worker visiting her home or going to the small group activities with other children. And that gives her further opportunities to hear the gospel and to receive support from her own children here in Stornoway.

So we're going to be praying for Rhoda today. And incidentally it's spelled R-O-D-A-H, not the Rhoda as we usually spell it.

[3 : 45] But do please remember her in your prayers and we'll try and bring you updates from time to time as we hear from her project through Compassion how she's getting on with her young life.

So we're going to begin our worship now, praising God. Firstly in Psalm 145, 145 in Sing Psalms.

And that's from page 189 of your psalm books. Singing to the tune Ellers, we're singing verses 1 to 7, verse 4 stanzas. Psalm 145, verses 1 to 7.

I will exalt you, O my God and King. Forever I will praise your holy name. I will extol your name forevermore. Day after day your praise I will proclaim.

Verses 1 to 7. I will exalt you, O my God and King.

[4 : 44] Forever I will praise your holy name. I will extol your name forevermore.

Day after day your praise I will proclaim. Great is the Lord, most worthy of all praise.

His greatness none can search or comprehend. Each generation will recount your deeds.

And to the next your mighty acts commend. They praise the splendor of your majesty.

The power of the works that you have done. I too will meditate upon your deeds.

[6 : 11] And your majestic acts I will make known. They will rejoice in your benevolence.

And your abundant grace. They'll celebrate the righteousness that you have shown to them.

In praise and joyful song they will relate. Let's turn now to read God's word.

We're reading today in the Gospel of John. John's Gospel, chapter 4, beginning at verse 27. This is immediately following the previous part of the chapter where we read about Jesus meeting the woman of Samaria with such wonderful effect on her life.

And so at verse 27, just then his disciples came back. They marvelled that he was talking with a woman. But no one said, what do you seek or why are you talking with her?

[7 : 34] So the woman left her water jar and went away into town and said to the people, Come, see a man who told me all that ever I did. Can this be the Christ?

They went out of the town and were coming to him. Meanwhile, the disciples were urging him, say, Rabbi, eat. But he said to them, I have food to eat that you do not know about.

So the disciples said to one another, has anyone brought him something to eat? Jesus said to them, my food is to do the will of him who sent me and to accomplish his work.

Do you not say there are yet four months, then comes the harvest? Look, I tell you, lift up your eyes and see that the fields are white for harvest.

Already the one who reaps is receiving wages and gathering fruit for eternal life, so that sower and reaper may rejoice together. For here the saying holds true, one sows and another reaps.

[8 : 35] I sent you to reap that for which you did not labour. Others have laboured and you have entered into their labour. Many Samaritans from that town believed in him because of the woman's testimony.

He told me all that ever I did. So when the Samaritans came to him, they asked him to stay with them, and he stayed there two days. And many more believed because of his word.

They said to the woman, it is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is indeed the saviour of the world. 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 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.

[9 : 49] 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. 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.

Amen. And may God again follow with this blessing our reading of his own holy word. Let's now join together in prayer. Let's call upon the Lord. Lord, our gracious God, we give thanks that you are the one whose praises we have been singing.

[11 : 00] The one who is exalted and great and majestic and holy in your being and works. So we thank you today, Lord, that we can come before you and draw near to you.

That we can speak with you and seek your blessing. That we can bring you the concerns of our heart and all the things that we would bring into our petitions along with our praises.

We thank you today, O Lord, for the promises of your word. The promise that you will not allow your word to return to you empty or void. You send it forth to accomplish that which you have purposed.

We pray that in our own case today, O Lord, that may be our blessing. That may be leading us further into the way of life eternal. We give thanks today, O Lord, that your word is true and reliable and has been tested down through many centuries.

We thank you for the testimony of your church throughout all these generations. That that testimony is always consistent in regard to your own faithfulness and in regard to the accomplishment of that work of Jesus Christ.

[12 : 13] The accomplishment of salvation for his people. We bless you today, O Lord, for the privilege we have and for the many ways in which that privilege of coming near to you is bounded by many other privileges too.

And we bless you today that you have placed us, even as the psalmist said of himself these days long ago, that you have placed us, as you placed him, in pleasant places.

That you have given to your people an inheritance, an inheritance that will last forevermore, that will prove to be for them, that which will be enjoyed throughout eternity.

O help us then, we pray today, to measure those things against the present world in which we are set. And help us to see, Lord, how short, how fleeting, how uncertain this present world is.

How full of difficulties, trials, pains, disappointments, compared to the permanent bliss and pleasure and peace of that world to come for your people.

[13 : 21] We thank you for the reality of these things, that they are as real to your people in faith and through faith as the present things are to our natural vision.

We thank you for the understanding that you give to your people, that you lead them by your Spirit into these avenues of your truth and your word, and that you give them, Lord, to see into these vistas of truth that open up through faith, even though we cannot physically see them at present, and even though we are prevented from seeing you physically.

Yet we know, Lord, that you are exalted to the right hand of the Majesty on high, that you bless your people through your Spirit from there. And we thank you, Lord, that whatever difficulties we have in explaining the things that we do believe, whatever difficulties we have in explaining our experiences of your presence and your redemption, we thank you for the experience nonetheless, that it is very real to us, that it is very precious to us, that we would not give it away for anything else.

Bless us then, we pray, today as we come together in this way. We thank you again for all that binds us together, not only physically and virtually, but especially in the bonds of your Spirit.

We pray today, Lord, that this may be to our advantage. Again, we ask your blessing to be with us as a congregation of your people. Bless us, we pray, in our homes, in our family lives.

[14 : 58] Bless us in our circumstances in life. Bless us through this pandemic, this lockdown. Blessed to us, we pray, that we may again use such a providence to draw near to God, that we may find, O Lord, our hope, our confidence in you alone, that we may be weaned away from trusting in the things of time and sense.

Grant that we may all the more place our confidence in Jesus, the one who came into this world, who experienced life in this world of suffering and of opposition, and gave himself to the death that we deserved, so that we might live.

Bless us then, we pray, in all our concerns. Bless especially any of us today who are ill, or who have loved ones who are ill, whether it's through COVID or other illnesses.

We pray that you'd bless them. Bless those anticipating or going through surgery, or recovering from illness or from surgery. Bless them, we pray. Give us in all our concerns and all our anxieties, Lord, to know our heart being stilled by you, by your spirit.

Give us to rest through the peace that Christ gives to us, that garrisons our hearts and minds in his name. We ask today for our children, that they will be blessed, that you would graciously, Lord, bless them as they grow up, and as they're made familiar with the gospel, as they see it in the lives of your people, as they are taught it at home and in our Sunday school, in tweenies, and thus even in creche, we find a familiarity given of what it means to be with the Lord's people.

[16 : 39] Oh, Lord, bless all that to them, we pray. And today we pray for little Rhoda in Uganda. We pray for her and give thanks for the support that our Sunday school and tweenies were able to give to her.

We pray that that will be blessed to her. We ask that you bless the project that she is part of, that you bless the teaching that she receives, that you bless to her the means of support that our small amount of finance is able to provide.

We thank you that that means so much to them. We pray for our family. We ask for our parents, for our siblings, and ask that you would bless them, Lord, through this support as well.

We pray for the work of compassion throughout the world, for the many, many hundreds of thousands of children that we know of are sponsored through them in different parts of the world, especially in the more deprived areas of the world.

Lord, bless their work, we pray. I grant that you bless those who have administrative and managerial roles within compassion. Lord, bless them, we pray.

[17 : 47] Bless all who are in charge of the many projects throughout the world in these places. We ask that you would make us thankful for the dedication, for the Christian commitment that is shown.

And we pray that the many, many thousands of children who benefit will come themselves not only to know you, but to be made a means of blessing to others. For we know that many of them, Lord, have a concern to bring benefits and advantages to their own communities.

We thank you for the way that that has so often happened. And we pray that that will continue to be the case. Bless, Lord, our troubled world at this time. Grant that you would be pleased to give us of your guidance and of your strengthening throughout what remains of this pandemic.

We cannot ourselves, Lord, foresee when the end of it may be or what the outcome of it ultimately may be. We pray that you would bless us through it and that you would grant throughout the world, O Lord, that those who have had their lives devastated, those who have lost loved ones especially, that they will be turned into the ways of the Lord.

Lord, that you would be pleased, Lord, to bring out of the grief and the tragedy of these times, that you would bring the joy of salvation and the confidence that faith in Christ brings.

[19 : 07] Lord, we ask that you would bless us now and bless us here locally in all the ways in which we need your blessing from day to day. Receive our thanks and cleanse us from sin.

For Jesus' sake. Amen. Well, children, again, we're looking at one of the Psalms today in which we find a verse that applies to Jesus.

That's in Psalm 68 and at verse 18. Psalm 68, verse 18. You ascended on high, leading a host of captives in your train and receiving gifts among men, even among the rebellious, that the Lord God may dwell there.

And train there, of course, means procession. A procession after someone used to be known as their train. It's not the kind of thing you find now when we speak commonly of a train.

So it's the procession of captives that are mentioned there. Now, this verse is actually used in Paul's letter to the Ephesians, chapter 4 and verse 8.

[20 : 13] And it shows us that from the New Testament, our understanding of this verse applies it to Jesus. It's really a prophecy about Jesus when it was written, when Psalm 68 was written.

And when you take it together with Ephesians, chapter 4, and what it tells us there in that chapter about Jesus, we can see a number of things that this verse tells us about Jesus that are very, very precious to us.

First of all, it's about the resurrection of Jesus. Last week, we spoke from Psalm 22 about the death of Jesus, though we saw also how the psalm ends with a mention of his victory.

And here, you ascended on high, means that when Jesus went up to heaven, before that, he rose from the dead. And the resurrection of Jesus was real.

The Bible doesn't allow us to think that that didn't actually happen, although many people you'll find in the world choose not to believe in the possibility of Christ's resurrection.

[21 : 20] The Bible is true. The Bible is God's word. And what God's word tells us is correct. So Jesus rose from the dead.

He came out of the grave. He appeared to many people, to disciples and others, after he was risen from the dead a number of times. He was 40 days.

In fact, on the earth, after he rose from the dead, before he was taken up to heaven. But what it says here is, you ascended on high. That's the second thing.

After the resurrection, there's the exaltation of Jesus. That means Jesus being raised up to glory in heaven. Jesus being seated at God's right hand, as the Bible puts it.

In other words, Jesus being installed as king, if you like. The exaltation of Jesus, you ascended on high. And that too is important for us because Jesus has been crowned as the king of the whole creation.

[22 : 22] The Jesus that we worship, that we pray to, that we give thanks to, we're doing that to this Jesus and about this Jesus who is now on his throne.

That's the second thing. There's the resurrection, there's the ascension or exaltation of Jesus. But then it speaks there of that Jesus, again, is as victorious as this exalted king, leading a host of captives in your train, in your procession.

In the old days, back in the days of the Old Testament and even the days of the Roman Empire, quite often, when you found a king going out to war against his enemies, if he came back victorious, he would bring back lots of prisoners and they would be walking after them, very often tied up in chains, just to show his own people that he had been victorious.

It was the proof of his victory, or one of the proofs of his victory. And you'd find them being taken after his chariot through the streets of the capital city.

Let's say it would be Rome or wherever it would be. And all of these prisoners will be walking in procession in a train after the chariot of the victorious king.

[23 : 40] And what we find here and in the New Testament is that when Jesus rose from the dead and then was exalted to heaven, what happened was that all his enemies, especially the devil and his helping angels, were defeated.

And they were defeated in such a way that it was made clear to those in heaven itself, to all the other angels, that Jesus was victorious.

He just led them as his captives. So today, the devil still has power. There are still people in the world the devil uses for evil deeds.

But he is not in charge of the world. Jesus is in charge of the world and he is in charge of the devil as well. He controls what he is or isn't able to do.

We give thanks for that because it gives us assurance that whatever bad things happen in the world, they are not outwith the control of Jesus, although there is a lot of mystery in that.

[24 : 45] So, he ascended on high, leading a host of captives in his procession. And then he says, receiving gifts among our four men. When Jesus went to heaven, he received there the gifts that we know of as our salvation.

Where is the gift of forgiveness come from? It comes from Jesus and from his victory over sin. Where does the gift of God's presence come from?

God's living in our hearts comes from Jesus and his victory. That's what this verse is telling us. Jesus received through his own victory, he received gifts.

And again, if you go back to ancient times, very often you find not only were the kings that were victorious, coming back with a lot of prisoners following them, they would also have taken some of the precious things that their enemies had back to them and divide that or give that to some of their own people as presents or as gifts of war.

And that's what really this verse is saying as well. Jesus received gifts which he gives to his people, the gifts of salvation. And he mentions especially that the Lord God may dwell there, may dwell amongst us.

[26 : 04] And the most precious gift that comes from Jesus is the gift of the Holy Spirit because with the Holy Spirit comes life, eternal life.

When the Spirit lives in a person's life, that person is alive spiritually. And it's through the Holy Spirit that that life goes on and will go on all the way through to heaven itself.

So here is a verse that's full of wonderful things about Jesus. When we think of all the good things that Jesus brings to us, especially the gifts of salvation, well they come to us because he rose from the dead, he ascended to heaven, he led all his enemies captive, he received gifts, and he gives out those gifts to us who trust in him.

The moment you come to trust in Jesus, you receive the gift of eternal life. Isn't that a wonderful thing that all of that is tied up in one verse of the Old Testament that's a prophecy about Jesus.

Well let's say the Lord's Prayer now together. Let's pray this prayer. Our Father which art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven.

[27 : 26] Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors, and lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory forever.

Amen. Let's turn now to John chapter 4, and for a short time let's look at the final part of that chapter from verse 46.

John chapter 4 at verse 46. This is the account we have here of Jesus healing a son of this official who is not named and healed him from whatever it was, illness he was suffering from.

So he again came to Canaan Galilee when it made the water wine, and at Capernaum there was an official whose son was ill, and so on down to the end of the chapter.

Well, on a nice bright day like today, in the last couple of days, we could say that spring is certainly in the air, and already you can see some tender shoots or little buds beginning to appear, the birds are getting a bit excited because it's getting near nesting time for them as well.

[28 : 47] And these tender shoots, these little buds that are beginning just to appear, are very easily damaged. A gale of wind, as we often find in this part of the world, even after things have begun to grow, can really damage them severely.

But these buds, if they grow through, will actually grow through to the abundance of growth that we look forward to in the summer. The same growth that's beginning now with a tiny little shoot, it's the same growth that continues on until you get the abundance of leaves or fruit, if it's a fruit tree or a bush, in the summertime or autumn time, in the abundance of fruit that comes from that very small growth to begin with.

And that's an illustration of what you find in this chapter, in this passage especially. It's an illustration really of faith in Jesus. Faith in Jesus, which begins as a very small shoot but then grows under the nurturing of Jesus himself.

That's really the title of our study today, you might say, is that, the growth of faith under the nurturing or the care of Jesus. Jesus. And in verse 50, you find again a verse that's a key verse in the passage.

Jesus said to him, go, your son will live. And especially this part, the man believed the word that Jesus spoke to him and went on his way. Now as we'll see, that's an advance on what you find earlier when the man believed that Jesus was able to heal his son.

[30 : 30] This is an advance on that. He now comes to believe the word that Jesus said to him about a son, that a son would live. And it moves on from there to the end of the passage where when the father reached home and made this inquiry, he himself believed and all his household.

So you see how the thing has really come from believing that Jesus was able to do this and then actually believing the word of Jesus and then coming with his household, all his family coming to believe in Jesus.

So it's really the growth of faith under the nurturing of Jesus. Here are first of all the shoots of faith and then we'll look secondly at the growth of it, mostly at the growth of it.

He came to Cain and Jesus came there where he had made the water wine and that ties in of course with the first miracle he did that we saw in chapter 2. And at Capernaum there was an official, he would have been an official probably of Herod the king and his 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.

[31 : 44] The circumstances of this man brought him to Jesus. He was brought with a sense of his need and the need of his son to this Jesus that he knew was able to do for him what he couldn't do himself, what nobody else could do for him.

Now our circumstances don't always bring us the kind of sense of need that brings us to Jesus but as we're living in this world under pandemic and lockdown conditions, one of our prayers is that God will use that providence to bring us as a people to a sense of our need of himself and go as this man did to Jesus with our sense of need.

He believed that Jesus could do this for him, that he could heal his son. And we can say in this context that's really faith in its infancy. There are many other people as we'll see in a study later actually that came to regard Jesus as a worker of miracles but never actually came to place their trust and confidence in him as saviour.

And that's quite possible. There are many people in the world that believe Jesus lived and may even believe that Jesus was able to do these miracles but have never come to trust in him for themselves as a saviour, as one who forgives their sin, as one who is able to save them spiritually, eternally, with eternal life.

And so in this instance we can say this is the faith in its infancy, this is the first shoot of faith in this man's life, but it doesn't mean that in every similar circumstance in the world there is in fact real faith in Jesus.

[33 : 34] In this case it was so. So we'll follow through from there to Christ's response. Here is this man with his sense of need, with his belief that Jesus can do this for him, and Jesus then says to him, unless you see signs and wonders you will not believe.

Now that seems to be a bit of a rebuff to begin with, a bit of rejection almost, a bit of rebuke, until you realize that the you here is actually plural.

You could see it in the older translations, perhaps a bit easier in this sort of context, with the word ye, unless ye believe. This is Jesus speaking not only to this man as an individual, but also taking in the crowds that are around him at this time.

And he's really speaking to the whole crowd as well as to this individual. And what he's saying is, unless you see signs and wonders, you will not believe.

And that really is a significant verse, because earlier in the chapter, where you come back around to verse 45, 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.

[34 : 55] And that takes you back to chapter 2. And you can see there that the welcome they gave to Jesus was a welcome not as a saviour, but as a miracle worker.

They were taken up with this man's ability, as they saw, to do things that were spectacular. They were wanting to attach themselves to him as disciples, only so that they would be part of this great movement of miracle working.

So when they saw all that he had done in Jerusalem, and here he was, now in Galilee, they had come back from Jerusalem themselves, they had seen what he had done there, so they welcomed him into their midst.

Now that takes you back to chapter 2, as we said, and it's always interesting and important to compare the parts of the Bible that actually relate to each other like this.

Chapter 2 and verse 23, when he was in Jerusalem at the Passover feast, many believed in his name when they saw the signs, that's the miracles that he was doing.

[36 : 00] Then notice, but Jesus on his part did not entrust himself to them, because he knew all people and needed no one to bear witness about man, for he himself knew what was in man.

In other words, there's again an example of people believing in Jesus only to the extent of believing in his ability to work miracles. And in John's gospel, this reaches its climax when Jesus in chapter 6, after the incident of the feeding of the crowd with the bread, 5,000, he began teaching them then about what that meant, presenting himself as one they needed to trust in as God's Messiah, God's provided Messiah for them.

And you find, of course, that at that juncture, many went back, coming to the end of chapter 6. Many of his disciples, his followers, heard and said, this is a difficult saying, who can accept it?

And many turned, verse 66, and went back, and no longer walked with him. He was a disappointment to them, because he demanded more than that they just see him as a miracle worker.

He demanded that they put their faith in him, that they see him as God's Messiah, God's Savior. That was too much too far, especially when it meant that he was going to die in order to accomplish that.

[37 : 33] So come back to chapter 4. Now take all of that with you. And verse 48, Jesus said to him and to the crowd, unless you see signs and wonders, you will not believe.

That's really a preparation for the words that you find in verse 50. The man believed the word that Jesus spoke to him.

In other words, believing in Jesus is something far more than just believing in him as a worker of miracles, as someone able to do some spectacular stuff. When you contrast what you find in verses 41 to 42, you can see how there is the opposite of believing in him simply as a miracle worker.

Here's the Samaritan woman, remember, she'd gone back to her hometown, she told them about Jesus, and she herself was convinced this was the Christ, and she invited them to come and see for themselves, and they believed because of her testimony, but then when they met with himself, he stayed with them for two days.

And then you read in verse 41, many more believed because of his word. They said to the woman, it is no longer because of what you said that we believe, what we have heard for ourselves, and no, that this is indeed the saviour of the world.

[38 : 57] You see, their believing came to be saving believing, believing in Jesus as God's saviour, whereas in chapter 4, the Galileans are still stuck with Jesus in their view as just a miracle worker, spectacular, something they welcomed, something they wanted to be part of, something exciting, something new, but not saviour, not actually God's Messiah.

And that's where you find the next part of it so interesting. In verse 49, this is the response of the official. Jesus said to them, unless you see signs and wonders, you will not believe.

You've got to go further, he's saying, than just believing in me as a miracle worker. And the man says, sir, come down before my child dies. You see what's happening.

This man is just making it known, well, miracle worker or not, that's not what I'm concerned for at the moment. I'm not concerned just to be part of a movement that sees things that are spectacular and find a sense of excitement through that.

My concern is for my dying son. Please come down before he dies and heal him. That's the shoots of faith.

[40 : 13] There you find this man just coming slowly into the way of faith, faith, the way of trusting in Jesus which is now going to develop as we see the growth of faith.

Here is Christ's word to him in verse 50. Jesus said to him, go, your son will live. More or less saying the same thing as your son is alive or your son has recovered.

He will live. The man believed the word that Jesus spoke to him and went on his way. See the difference? Here is a man who believes the word of Jesus for what it is.

He is not concerned to be part of a spectacular sideshow, if you like. He is now believing in Jesus in the word that he has spoken.

He is prepared to act on that. He went on his way on the basis of what Jesus had said. That is a real test as well, of course, because at that moment he was not able to verify with his own eyes that the word of Jesus was actually true.

[41 : 25] He could not see his son at home. He was miles away from there, 20 miles or so. He was not yet at the position where he could physically see his recovered son.

But he still believed, like the Samaritans believed, the word of Jesus. He believed the word that Jesus spoke to him. And that's always an ingredient of faith.

The man didn't say, Lord, I can't believe until I have more evidence. He didn't say, until I see him for myself, I'm not going to believe your word.

I'm prepared to accept its possibility, but I won't believe it until I see for myself, until my particular reasoning, my eyes for myself, see my son recovered.

You see, that's what John is saying happened as you go to chapter 20. That's what happened with Thomas, wasn't it? The disciples told him that they had seen the Lord, and he himself, his response then, you remember, was, he said to them, chapter 20, verse 25, he said, unless I see in his hands the mark of the nails, and place my finger into the mark of the nails, and place my hand into his side, I will never believe.

[42 : 44] And the next occasion, eight days afterwards, Thomas was there when Jesus appeared amongst them. He was now, of course, risen from the dead, as he had been the first time. And he said to Thomas, put your finger here and see my hands, put your hand out and place it in my side, and stop disbelieving, is what it means, do not disbelieve, stop disbelieving and believe.

And Thomas, of course, answered, my Lord and my God. And Jesus said, have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and have believed. That's you and I today who believe in Jesus on the basis of his word, his trustworthy word, his faithful word, his reliable word, his authoritative word, like this man is an example of the man believed the word that Jesus spoke to him.

So, therefore, you're seeing the nature of faith and the ground of faith, what your faith rests on. As we've seen in chapter 20, blessed are those who have not seen and believe.

And, of course, that fits in very much with what you find elsewhere. Let me just mention a couple of texts that you can take alongside of that. Hebrews chapter 11, of course, is a chapter about faith as it's seen in the lives of all the people that are mentioned there.

And, amongst them you'll find, to begin with, first of all, I should say at the beginning of the chapter, there's a definition of faith in a sense. Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.

[44 : 30] You see, the Galileans were looking for the things that you could see and verify and enjoy and rejoice in. But, Jesus was saying, no, faith goes deeper than that. Faith is more than faith in me as a miracle worker.

Faith is in me as the saviour, as one who is able to deliver you from your sins. That's really the impact of John's theology in that passage. Here is Hebrews actually telling us that faith is the conviction of things not seen.

This is what the unbeliever, especially the atheistic unbeliever, cannot accept because faith is necessary before you accept it, before you accept this definition.

Faith is, in fact, the conviction of things not seen. And when you go to 1 Peter, you'll find that mentioned as well in another form, but it's the same thing, 1 Peter 1 verse 8, talking there about Jesus and these people he's writing to, saying to them, though you have not seen him, you love him.

Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that's inexpressible and filled with glory. What it's saying is, though you do not see him now, believing in him, through believing in him, you rejoice with this joy of salvation.

[45 : 55] That's the place where our faith rests. And the sad thing is, of course, that we can't, as we would like, transfer this faith to somebody else.

And when you find the world saying, and when you find the atheistic world and the humanistic world really saying to us, you believe in things that are not verifiable, you believe in things that have never been proved to be the case.

Well, that's not quite true because many people saw Jesus having risen from the dead, although some chose not to believe. The fact is, faith itself as a gift of God, as something that's a product of the work of the Holy Spirit as it's produced in your life, that faith itself, accepts the word of God, and accepts the word even when your reason can't follow through to understand everything that you're being told.

I cannot explain to myself or to you how it is, the mechanics, if you like, of the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. But if I don't believe it, and if I don't believe in it, I'm not going to be saved.

It's part of the foundation of my salvation, it's that upon which my faith rests as a fact of which Jesus is saying, this is true.

[47 : 25] And for us, that's enough. We don't need to actually then say, well, until it's proved to my satisfaction and I see it with my own eyes and I'm able to fully understand that I will not believe.

this is what you say, the man believed the word that Jesus spoke to him. And it goes on from there, it doesn't just that he accepted it, the chapter then goes on towards the man receiving assurance.

Verses 51 and 52, let's follow it through. As he was going down, down to his home, 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 left him and the father knew that was the hour when Jesus had said to him, your son will live.

You see, it's all coming together. It's not that he didn't believe before, but the believing he had before was a tender thing, a small shoot of a thing, if you like, and now it's coming to growth.

He believed the word that Jesus said to him, he acted on that word, he went down home, as Jesus had said to him, and now that he meets some of his servants, this is not just a mere curiosity on his part as to when his son began to get better, he wants to get into more of the detail of it, as you do as a Christian.

[48 : 53] There's nothing wrong with you looking for more information, a better understanding of the word of God, better understanding of the workings of God, of the way that Jesus operates, of the teaching of the Bible about him, about God, and about salvation, all of these things, as you want more and more of an understanding of them, it's so that your faith will grow, so that your faith will be strengthened, so that your faith will be more and more an assured faith.

And it's interesting, isn't it, that yesterday at the seventh hour, the fever left him. When did you ever hear of a fever just like that, instantly leaving somebody suffering from a fever?

A fever almost always takes its time gradually before the person begins to get better and recover from it. But in this instance, the sevens had noticed this, they were with the boy, and all of a sudden, the fever was gone.

Why was it gone? Because Jesus worked the miracle. From his word, this, Jesus worked this miracle in this boy's life.

faith. That's what convinced the father towards greater assurance in Christ himself, greater assurance of faith. So there you have it from verse 47 through to verse 50, then through to verse 53.

[50 : 16] The buds through to the growth, through to the fruit of faith, if you like. Faith grows, it's actually designed to grow. Now let me just say, early faith, or you might say weak faith, or fragile faith.

We use all these words to describe faith at times, or the beginnings of faith. Sometimes, of course, faith can be strong from the outset. But anyway, faith, even in its early stages, is still real faith.

Don't be put off today by thinking, if you don't have strong faith, if your faith isn't the same caliber as somebody else you know is a Christian, it can't be real faith.

It is real faith that rests in Jesus. Even if you still need a lot of assurance, even if you still face doubts and trials and difficulties in your understanding, if today you're trusting in Jesus alone for eternal life, that is faith.

A faith that's designed to grow. And it grows as you have accepted the word of Christ and continue to accept the word of Christ. And of course, that really means for us the whole Bible, word of God.

[51 : 31] And it's in this context of living in this world, living in a world that's full of real difficulties and trials and testings for us.

That's where your faith is to grow. And as you meet these trials, just like the tender shoot that begins to resist the wind and get stronger as it grows, so your faith, as you send more roots down into Jesus where your faith rests, that's where your strength comes from.

And as you live by Christ's word, as you go on, that's how the faith that God has given you develops. One of the, I think I mentioned, John Laidlaw is one of the people that wrote a book on the miracles of Jesus, and I've been using that book during the studies very gladly because there's so much good stuff in it.

It's John Laidlaw, the miracles of our Lord. This is what he says about this passage. The process of this man, he's talking about this procedure from the beginning through to a stronger faith, the process was one of reasonable assent.

What he means by that is an assent on his part, but it's a reasonable one, it's with a measure of understanding. It's not just accepting something that he doesn't know anything about.

[52 : 57] It's a process of reasonable assent at every step. And then he says, believe up to present evidence according to the present light that you have, and then by so honouring God, expect more evidence, fuller light, and stronger faith.

What most of us need in our Christianity is not more evidence, the lamp can be choked with oil if the oil is not used, he says, it is to follow with entire cordiality the light that has shone so fully on us already.

Let me just repeat that. What most of us need in our Christianity is not more evidence, but it is to follow with entire cordiality, joy, the light that has shone so fully on us already is light, that Jesus himself is the light of salvation.

And isn't it a wonderful thing, just to complete this point, in the growth of faith, that Jesus was as much a helper to this father in his faith, as he was a healer to his son.

You see, the whole thing is within the one package, isn't it? As you read about this father and his relationship to Jesus, and as you read about his son and the way that he came to be cured by Jesus in this miraculous way, you'll find those two things combined so wonderfully and inseparably together, that Jesus is as much a helper to the father as he is a healer of the son.

[54 : 40] But it's not finished with that, I know the time is passing, let me just come to the final point. The growth of faith, Christ's word, the man's acceptance, then the man's assurance, and now you find the man's family.

He believed and all his household, when he realised the exact moment that Jesus had said this to him was the moment his son was relieved of his fever.

Now that's an interesting thing in relation to the previous passage as well. Here is a woman in Samaria, a place that was not associated with belief in Jesus, and Jesus met her and changed her life.

There's one woman in Samaria, and through that one woman being saved, many Samaritans came to be saved, also came to believe in Jesus. It spread through the people of Sychar in Samaria, until many of them said and gave their own testimony, we know that this is indeed the Saviour of the world.

And here is this one Galilean official, in contrast to the many Galileans who don't go so far as to accepting Jesus as God's Saviour, here is this one Galilean saved, and that spreads in its influence to the whole of his household, including the son who was ill, because it says, his whole household believed, all his household.

[56 : 06] It began with him, it reached the whole of his household. It began with that one woman, it reached the whole of that region of her people. We are never saved for ourselves alone.

We are never saved simply for our own salvation alone. It always has a relation to other people, whether it's in our own home, in our community, in our workplace, whatever it is.

As somebody put it, when you take up a stalk of corn, you'll always find clods of earth still attached to it. Same with my daily is when I lift them for the winter, I clean off the earth because so much earth still attaches to them.

That's how it is with a person whose life has been changed by Jesus. There are so many other attachments, so many other people, so many other contacts, you're never saved for yourself alone.

That's why Jesus said in Matthew chapter 5 and verse 16, let your light so shine amongst people that they may see your good works and glorify your Father who is in heaven.

[57 : 23] Let me close with this. Is Jesus for you today more than just a spectacular miracle worker? Have you come to rest in him as your saviour?

Do you know him as one who is in a living relationship with you through faith in his name? God, and if you know Jesus today as a Christian, is it not your desire, even now, but especially when these restrictions with COVID are over, to let your light shine to bring glory to your Father and benefit to your fellow human beings?

God, Lord our God, we thank you for the faith that you give to your people. We know that we don't produce it ourselves, it is a product of your creative power, and yet, O Lord, you teach us so often in your word that we are responsible for its growth and seeking from you the grace and the power that enables it.

God, grant your blessing to us today to strengthen us in faith, and Lord, for any of us who may still require to be convinced that we should place our trust in you, may your Holy Spirit today work that faith in us that unites us to Jesus in an effectual calling.

Hear us now, we pray, and accept us for Jesus' sake. Amen. Let's conclude by singing in the Scottish Psalter, Psalm 119, and at verse 140, and we'll sing to the tune St. Bernard, Thy words most pure, therefore on it thy servant's love is set, small and despised I am, yet I thy precepts not forget, and so on to verse 144.

[59 : 23] verse 14. Thy words most pure, therefore on it thy servant's love is set, small and despised I am, yet I thy precepts not forget.

Thy righteousness is righteousness which ever doth endure, thy holy law, Lord, also is the very truth most pure.

Thy holy law, and anguish have me found, and take it hold on me, yet in my trouble, my delight, thy just commandments be.

Eternal righteousnesses in thy testimonies all, Lord, to me understanding give, and ever live I shall.

Now may the grace of God the Father, the love of Christ the Son, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you now and evermore. Amen. Thank you for joining us once again for this service.

[61 : 41] Do please join again in the evening at 6.30 when the service will be conducted by Reverend Kenny I. MacLeod. May God bless you during this week ahead and keep you safe.

Thank you.