

Text: John 4:43-54

Title: Believe because Jesus healed the royal's son.

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Introduction: You may know that the state of Missouri likes to refer to itself as the "Show-Me" state. They have that slogan on their car license plates. The origin of the slogan is uncertain. One story claims that the phrase came from Colorado rather than Missouri. During a miners' strike in the 1890s, Missouri miners were brought in to replace the Colorado workers. They were not well versed in Colorado mining techniques, so the bosses were often heard saying: "That man is from Missouri. You have to show him."

The phrase was popularized when a Missouri representative to Congress, who served on the U.S. House Committee on Naval Affairs, found himself a bit underdressed at a tuxedo-only naval banquet in Philadelphia. Part of his speech on that occasion said this about his state: "I come from a state that raises corn and cotton and cockleburs and Democrats, and frothy eloquence neither convinces nor satisfies me. I am from Missouri. You have got to show me." Missouri's Secretary of State explains on his website that the slogan "is used to indicate the stalwart, conservative, noncredulous character of Missourians."

Though often thought a virtue, misplaced non-credulity is one of the vices that John seeks to address in his Gospel. His purpose in writing is that his readers may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and believing have life in His name (20:31). In service of that purpose, John's Gospel teaches us the difference between walking by faith and walking by sight. John explains his purpose after writing about doubting Thomas's incredulity. Jesus tells Thomas in that chapter: "Thomas, because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed: blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed" (20:29).

That theme, the difference between walking by faith and walking by sight, is one reason John includes our passage about the healing of the royal's son in his Gospel. His purpose is to convince us to believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and have life in His name, while understanding that believing does not require seeing. Instead, we can simply take God at His Word. When He speaks, He is credible. I should not respond to His Word with the demand that He "show me," nor should you.

Our passage records three facts related to this important truth.

I. The Galileans welcome Jesus because of what they had seen (vv. 43-45).

Illustration: It was a joy to get to know our sister Beth Resch on Sunday. The Beth we met was in some ways different from the Beth that I had expected to meet. I thought Beth was likely a young lady who had grown up in a good Christian home and a Bible-preaching church, but that turned out not to be the case. Beth shared the way God's grace plucked her like a brand from the fire to send her to Zambia with the gospel's good news. Beth's testimony mirrored in some ways the blessed testimony of the Samaritan woman.

Application: The phrase *after two days* at the beginning of our passage is literally *after the two days* (v. 43), and it refers us back to the two days mentioned in verse 40 and the example of the faith of the Samaritans. It is as though John is asking us to remember what he has just written about the Lord's ministry in Samaria before he describes this event in Galilee.

In Samaria, the Lord did not do a miracle. In fact, He met the woman at the well as a very tired and thirsty man. He could have not looked less like an omnipotent miracle-worker. He did not feed 5000 at Jacob's well with five loaves and two fish-

es, but rather He sent the disciples into Sychar to buy groceries, and He asked a Samaritan woman for a drink of water.

There was no miraculous sign or wonderful deed that aroused the miraculous and wonderful faith of the Samaritans. Instead, it was the wonder-working words that Christ spoke, which caused them to believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and have life in His name (vv. 29, 39-42).

Now Jesus goes from that experience into Galilee, the region north of Samaria in Palestine. The reason He does so is given in verse 44: "For Jesus himself testified, that a prophet hath no honor in his own country." We know from the Gospels of Matthew and Luke (Matt. 13:54, 57; Luke 4:23) that Jesus was in His hometown of Nazareth in Galilee when He testified this truth. His hometown rejected Him, and He said so.

Here, however, John is not referring to Nazareth's rejection. In fact, he says in the next verse that Galilee on the whole welcomed Jesus's ministry in a way Nazareth did not. Instead, John applies the Nazareth quote to the rejection of Judea, that place that He had just left in a very serious manner (4:3), avoiding the mounting persecution that was fermented by the Pharisees. John calls Judea emphatically "His own country" because Bethlehem in Judea, the City of David, was His birthplace, and Jerusalem in Judea, the city of David's throne, was His royal city.

But even the friendly welcome of the Galileans pales in comparison to the faith of the Samaritans, and this is John's point. The Samaritans believed on Jesus because of His words. The Galileans welcomed Jesus because of what they had seen Him do in Jerusalem at the feast (v. 45).

You may remember that John tells us that the faith of those who believed because they saw miracles at the feast was in an important way deficient (2:23-25). Here, John reminds us that

the Galileans are still far from saving faith. They want to see more miracles rather than hear more of God's Word. Theirs is still a "show-me" incredulity. The Galileans welcome Jesus because of what they had seen, but Jesus was still not truly honored as the Messianic Prophet Samaria knew Him to be.

So, as we consider the contrast between the faith of the Samaritans, who believe Jesus's words, never seeing with their own eyes a miracle, and the show-me-again welcome of the Galileans, excited about the miracles that they had seen, which more closely parallels our own response to Christ? Do we believe what God says because He is credible? Or do we feel we need more than His Word? John wants us to know that when God speaks, we need no more. When we hear Him, we must believe. His Word deserves no less.

II. The royal came to Jesus because of what others had seen (vv. 46-48).

Application: I mentioned before that Jesus may have had to go through Samaria as described in 4:4 to avoid Perea, the seat of the government of Herod Antipas, on the other side of the Jordan. That said, this Herod also ruled over Galilee at this time as a king, and the word translated *nobleman* in our passage (v. 46) refers specifically to a royal of some kind, likely an official in the court of Herod Antipas or one of his relatives.

This Herod is the one who murders John the Baptist. The first-century historian Josephus recorded Herod's history with John the Baptist as an explanation for the eventual destruction of Herod's army. Herod was attacked by the father of the wife he divorced to marry his half-brother's wife Herodias. Here is what Josephus wrote about this history:

"But to some of the Jews it appeared, that the destruction of Herod's army came from God, and, indeed, as a righteous punishment on account of what had been done to John, who

was surnamed the Baptist. For Herod ordered him to be killed, a good man, and who commanded the Jews to exercise virtue, both as to righteousness towards one another, and piety towards God, and so to come to baptism. For that the baptizing would be acceptable to Him, if they made use of it, not for the putting away (remission) of some sins, but for the purification of the body, after that the soul had been previously cleansed by righteousness. And when others had come in crowds, for they were exceedingly moved by hearing these words, Herod, fearing lest such influence of his over the people might lead to some rebellion, for they seemed ready to do anything by his counsel, deemed it best, before anything new should happen through him, to put him to death, rather than that, when a change should arise in affairs, he might have to repent" [*Antiquities*, xviii.5.2].

As we read about the royal official of our passage, I wonder whether he was one of those at the party who watched Herodias's daughter dance. Was he someone who witnessed the horrific sight that followed of the head of John the Baptist on a platter next to the sandwiches and punch bowl? What we do know was that this man worked for a wicked king.

He had walked 25 miles from Capernaum to Cana to find Jesus. He had left behind a young son who was sick to the point of death. He finds Jesus and requests that Jesus come down to Capernaum with him to heal his son. What Jesus says to him next is startling (v. 48): "Except ye see signs and wonders, ye will not believe." Jesus said that to the royal official of Herod, but He meant for it to describe more than him (*ye* is plural).

What is startling to us about this answer is that it seems like Jesus trivializes the suffering of this man and his son to make a statement about the shortcomings of his faith and that of many others. But from Jesus's point of view, it is in fact the shortcoming of the faith of many that is the critically important issue. For Him, the child's health could be easily fixed.

The question for us in all this is whether verse 48 puts its finger on a critically important issue about our faith. When Jesus says, “ye will not believe,” He uses emphatic language. He is saying, “Unless you see signs and wonders, you will in no way believe.” Is that true of us?

Every sickness and even death of every parent and child is correctable, if only the Lord can fix this faith-problem first. To truly believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, is to have life in His name, eternal life. Thankfully, this problem does not stay unresolved in the lives of the royal and his family.

III. The royal left Jesus believing what he had not yet seen (vv. 49-54).

Illustration: 5G communication technology, with its almost instantaneous 2 millisecond latency speed, enabled the first remote surgery to be performed in 2019. A doctor in Beijing was able to do brain surgery on a Parkinson's patient who was 1900 miles away.

A February article I saw reported the first such surgery for gastrointestinal cancer. Think of all the know-how that goes into such a feat. First there is the medical know-how of the surgeons and other medical professionals; then there is the engineering and manufacture of the medical tools and robotics; and finally, there is the invention and implementation of 5g communications networks. That is a lot of know-how spent on removing a tumor from a colon.

Application: Our passage wraps up all that 21st century capability and puts it into one simple phrase uttered by Jesus in verse 50: “Go thy way; thy son liveth.” With no medical training, with no operating room, with no robots, and with no 5g communications towers, Jesus made a desperately sick little boy who was 25 miles away completely well again. And there was no need for the recovery room or those terrible liquid-

only diets they feed you in the hospital. Both the fact of this miracle and the timing of it are confirmed by the royal. John too tells us plainly that Jesus did a miracle (v. 54).

But the timing notwithstanding, this is not really a miracle that anyone could see Jesus do. And just as important to the purpose of John here, the royal official had faith long before the timing had been confirmed. Verse 50 tells us he believed the word that Jesus had spoken unto him. He found out only later that his faith in Jesus's word was not in vain. And then his whole family believed that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and believing they together found life in His name.

John wants us and our families to do the same. He wants us to understand that faith in Jesus's words is never in vain. He can be trusted. As the Christ, the Son of God, He is Ultimate Trustworthiness. He is the Way, the Truth, and the Life. None come to the Father, but by Him (John 15:6).

Will we demand of Him signs and wonders before we are willing to trust His words, His claims and His promises? Will we ask to put our fingers in His hands and side, like Thomas, before we believe that He is risen as He has said? Are we willing to faithfully walk by faith, trusting His promise, and not by sight, protesting that He must show us. Jesus told Thomas, "Blessed are those who have not seen but have still believed."

Conclusion: In addition to his Gospel, the Apostle John also wrote three letters to local churches. In the first of these, he encourages the faithful that the day will indeed come when they can add sight to their faith in Jesus's words:

"Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when He shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is. And every man that hath that hope in him purifieth himself, even as He is pure" (1 John 3:2-3).

Our need for faith is only temporary. “Keep this hope in you,” says John. “Purify yourself of the doubts of Thomas and the need to see signs and wonders before you are willing to believe. Believe Jesus’s claim to be the Christ, the Son of God; believe His promise to save; and you will have eternal life in His name.”

“A man came—I think it was actually in Philadelphia—on one occasion to the great George Whitefield and asked if he might print his sermons. Whitefield gave this reply; he said, ‘Well, I have no inherent objection, if you like, but you will never be able to put on the printed page the lightning and the thunder.’ That is the distinction—the sermon, and the ‘lightning and the thunder.’ To Whitefield this was of very great importance, and it should be of very great importance to all preachers, as I hope to show. You can put the sermon into print, but not the lightning and the thunder. That comes into the act of preaching and cannot be conveyed by cold print. Indeed it almost baffles the descriptive powers of the best reporters.”

—David Martin Lloyd-Jones,

*Preachers and Preaching*