

Believing, Not Yet Seeing: John 4:43-54
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We've been studying through the Gospel of John now for a few months, and we're now at the end of chapter 4. There are 21 chapters in the Gospel of John which means we'll be continuing in this study for many months to come. And I just want to take a moment at the start of this sermon to emphasize the fact that this church takes the Bible very seriously. I hope that the way we study the Bible in our Sunday School classes and the way the Bible takes such a central role in our worship services will communicate very clearly that we love the Word of God. Part of our mission at Three Rivers Grace is to "proclaim the truth of God's Word." And we want to be faithful in doing that week after week. We don't just want to dip into the Bible here and there, wherever we can find a quick life lesson that seems relevant to people's felt needs. We want to systematically and carefully and thoroughly delve into the riches of God's Word, because we believe what 2 Timothy 3:15-17 says, that "the sacred writings . . . are able to make [one] wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus," and that "all Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work." We believe that. We believe that what the Bible says about itself is true. We believe that this truly is the Word of God, and that we need it. We need to be taught from it. We need to be reprovved by it. We need to be corrected. We need to be trained in righteousness. These are words of life to us.

The Word of God is such an amazing gift. It's God's present to us. You may be thinking of Christmas presents these days. Our 3-year-old brought home a Christmas present from preschool the other day. It's for Stacy and me. And he put it under the Christmas tree which we put up recently. And he's still trying to figure out how much longer he has to wait until Christmas. He thought the day we put up the Christmas tree was Christmas. And he keeps asking questions trying to understand why we have a Christmas tree if it's not Christmas. And, of course, he's looking forward to getting some presents at Christmas, whenever that's going to come along.

Whatever it is you're hoping to get for Christmas, just think of this amazing present God has given to us in His Word. And you don't have to wait until Christmas to open it. Please don't wait to open this present. Open it now. Open it anew each and every day. It's truly the gift that keeps giving and giving and giving. It's inexhaustible.

God the Father gave us the gift of His Son, the Word, Jesus Christ, God in the flesh. So we have the Word of God in a Person. And we have the Word of God in written form, in this great Book we call the Bible.

And my prayer this morning is that we will not take it for granted. Don't take the Bible for granted in your personal life. And don't take it for granted that you're at a church where the Bible plays such a central role. I pray that we will all realize what a tremendous privilege it is to gather together with other believers who are hungry for God's Word. It is really remarkable what God is doing here, that there are folks here from different walks of life, from different parts of this city and region, from different backgrounds, and we come together with a common passion for the Bible. The fact that we will sit together for a couple hours each Sunday morning, not to hear stories, not to be entertained, not to feel good about ourselves, but to submit ourselves to the living and active word of God, which is sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing the thoughts and intentions of the heart (Hebrews 4:12). What is going on here is a miracle of God, and I am profoundly grateful to Him for it.

I want to encourage the children here, too, that you would not take this for granted. I pray that God will give you a heart to love the Bible and love these times of corporate worship when we can study the Bible together. Please listen. Please read along as we go through these passages. Please take to heart the truths that are taught. Please ask questions as you have them—ask your parents or your Sunday School teachers or me or others in the church. Please consider Jesus Christ—His life, His actions, His words, His death, and His resurrection—and please realize that He is more important than anything else in your life.

The Bible is such a treasure. And it is so powerful to change our lives. We think of passages like 2 Timothy 3, or the words in Isaiah 55, that my word "shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it."

I hope this will be a reminder and an encouragement to all of us of why we should be together week after week doing this very thing. We love the Bible. We believe it is God's Word. And we delight to study it and submit to it because we know that it is God's gracious gift to us, His revelation of Himself and His revelation of His plan to redeem sinners.

Well, with that reminder, let's jump back into our study of John, picking it up where we ended last time. For the past 3 Sundays we studied the account of Jesus' interaction with the Samaritan woman at the well. That was John 4:1-42.

From Samaria to Galilee

Remember the journey Jesus is on. At the beginning of chapter 4, in verse 3, we're told that Jesus "left Judea [in the south] and departed again for Galilee [which is in the north]." But He made a very important stop along the way. He stopped in Samaria, which is located in between Judea and Galilee. And there was amazing spiritual fruit in Samaria. Jesus spoke words of life to the woman at the well. He revealed to her that He is the Messiah. And she went back and told the people in the town, and they came out to meet Him too. And they believed. In verse 42 they say 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 Savior of the world." Upon their request, Jesus stayed there 2 days. It was probably an amazing 2 days as He taught them and they sat at His feet learning from Him, just soaking up everything He shared with them.

Now those 2 days are over, and Jesus says goodbye to them and continues His trek northward to Galilee. That's what verse 43 tells us. "After two days he departed for Galilee."

But then look at verses 44 and 45. A lot of ink has been spilt trying to piece these two statements together. On the surface it may appear to be a contradiction. Verse 44 says that Jesus himself had testified that a prophet has no honor in his own hometown, which most likely would refer to the town of Nazareth where He grew up and the Galilee region where Nazareth is located. Jesus is heading into Galilee, his home turf, a place where folks will fail to honor Him because they just see Him as the carpenter boy, the guy who grew up in their little piece of the world and who may have some amazing powers, but still He's just our hometown boy. Familiarity breeds contempt.

What's confusing, what may seem like a contradiction, is that verse 45 goes on to say that when Jesus came to Galilee, the Galileans welcomed him. If they fail to honor Him, why would they welcome Him? Well, I think the rest of verse 45 makes it clear, especially when we connect it with the rebuke Jesus gives a few verses later.

Seeing without Believing

We could describe this group of Galileans as seeing without believing. That is, they are seeing Jesus' signs and miracles and are therefore fascinated with His unique powers. But they're not really believing. They believe in some sense, but it's not a saving faith.

The rest of verse 45 describes these Galileans as those who had seen all that Jesus did in Jerusalem at the feast. For they too had gone to the feast. In other words, many of these Galileans had

been down in Jerusalem for the Passover and had witnessed Jesus' miracles that He did there. Look back at John 2:23, "Now when [Jesus] was in Jerusalem at the Passover Feast, many believed in his name when they saw the signs that he was doing."

But what we learn in that short paragraph at the end of chapter 2 is that "believing" is not always believing. The next verses say, "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."

There were different reactions to Jesus' ministry. Many flat out rejected Him, as John alerts us to right away in the prologue of this book. John 1:11 says, "[Jesus] came to his own, and his own people did not receive him." That's discouraging. The next verse, though, gives us a hopeful statement, "But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God."

What we learn in the few verses at the end of chapter 2 is that there are those who would never say that they are rejecting Jesus. Just the opposite. They would say they are receiving Jesus. They would say they are, indeed, believing in Jesus' name. But it's not a genuine faith. And Jesus sees right through it.

Verse 24 shows us Jesus' knowledge, His knowledge of the true condition of their hearts. Jesus did not entrust himself to them. Where it says in verse 23, "many *believed* in his name," the same Greek word for "believe" is also used in verse 24 to say that Jesus did not "entrust" himself to them. Outwardly it seemed that they believed Him. But He didn't believe them. They appeared to be trusting in Him. But He didn't trust them.

In other words, Jesus didn't *believe* that their *believing* was real. He didn't *trust* the validity of their so-called *trust*. And Jesus certainly wasn't going to pander to the crowds. Especially when the crowds had only a very shallow faith in Him. That's not at all what His ministry was about. He wasn't performing these miracles just to gain a vast following of superficial fans. He saw right through the masses of people who were enamored with Him simply because of the signs He could do.

He knows the human heart. He knows all people. He knows what is in man. And He knows there are many who outright reject Him. He also knows there are many who will give lip-service to Him, who may even think they are believing in Him, but it's only a fascination with something or other about Him . . . minus the deep repentance and submission and trust that comes with genuine conversion. They haven't been born again. They're not yet new creatures in Christ. And that leads right into Jesus' conversation with Nicodemus. The last statement in chapter 2

connects with the introduction to the account of Nicodemus. “for he himself knew what was in *man*. Now there was a *man* of the Pharisees named Nicodemus.”

All of that helps to inform our passage for this morning, because here again we have folks who have seen Jesus’ miracles and are therefore receiving Him / welcoming Him. But Jesus knows this is not real honor. They are superficially enamored with His power to perform miracles. Jesus knows them. He sees into their hearts.

He knows that this is different than what just happened in Samaria. The Samaritans He was just ministering to came to recognize Him as the Messiah, the Savior of the world. But these Galileans He rebukes for their shallow interest in Him, based on the signs and wonders. See in verse 48. Jesus is saying this to the man, the official, who has come to ask for his son to be healed. But the verbs here are plural. Jesus is not just rebuking this man, but the whole group. He says, “Unless you [all] see signs and wonders you will not believe.” The shallowness of their allegiance to Jesus is because they are merely looking at the miracles.

This is not to diminish the value of the signs and miracles themselves. In the very next chapter Jesus says, in John 5:36, “the works that the Father has given me to accomplish, the very works that I am doing, bear witness about me that the Father has sent me.” Jesus’ miracles serve an important purpose in validating His identity. He can do things that only God can do, which shows He is divine. He’s sent from the Father.

But if you’re only looking at the miracles and not connecting the dots to Jesus’ identity and the huge significance of that and what that means for you personally, then the miracles may just be a distraction. It’s supposed to be a sign. It’s supposed to point you to something. But if you just stand there staring at the sign, rather than the object to which the sign is pointing, then you’re going to be led astray.

Beware of churches or ministries that overemphasize miracles and underemphasize the Person and work of Jesus Christ. If there’s such a focus on the miraculous things Jesus can do for you while at the same time the identity of Jesus, Himself, is not made very clear, then there’s a problem.

This section of Scripture is meant to warn us in this regard. The contrast between the Samaritans who recognized Jesus as the Messiah, as the Savior of the world, and then these Galileans who are more interested in Jesus’ miracles than in Jesus, Himself.

Again, we’re reminded of the absolute necessity of knowing Jesus personally. Last week I talked about this, that you can’t have a relationship with Jesus vicariously through another person. Someone may introduce you to Jesus, but then you must

come to know Him for yourself. You need to say like those Samaritans in verse 42, “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 Savior of the world.”

In our passage this morning we learn this same lesson from a different vantage point. You need to know Jesus personally in the sense of knowing Him for who He is, not just the miracles He can perform or the ways He can provide. Certainly those are wonderful things, and we give Him praise for His great power and provision. But standing by and watching a miracle is not the same as entrusting your very life to Him, surrendering to Him all your hopes and dreams, submitting to His direction and commands to you, repenting of your sinful ways and resting in what He has accomplished for you in His death and resurrection.

I read a story of a young woman who became very ill. The doctors didn’t think she would live more than a year. This woman and her husband and her extended family had been loosely connected to a church, and the young pastor of the church reached out to them, visiting with them in the hospital, ministering to them, praying with them and for them. As the family struggled with this trial, they asked some difficult questions of this young pastor. They asked about Jesus’ healings in the Bible. Could He do the same now? And if not, what good is He? They prayed, the pastor prayed, fervently for healing. The family bargained with God, saying that they would be devoted to Him and devoted to the church if He would only bring healing. They made a commitment that they would attend church every Sunday if this woman was made well.

It turns out she was healed. To the great surprise of the doctor’s, she was able to leave the hospital and made a full recovery. The next Sunday the whole family was there at church. The woman shared what God had done for her. The next week the family was there again. But within a month it was just the woman and her husband. And within a couple more months even they returned to their old pattern of only attending from time to time. Gary Burge, who shares this story, says, “Before long, the woman rationalized the entire incident. She had experienced the most dramatic sign God could give her: healing, bathed in prayer and surrounded by the church. But after only two months, its power had dimmed to nothing.”¹

That’s seeing without believing. Wanting a miracle. Wanting to see a miracle. But not really wanting Jesus, Himself. Not really trusting and resting in Him.

¹ Gary Burge, John, 166.

Believing without Seeing

We contrast that, then, with the faith exercised by this official. This man may have started out very much like those Galileans who were merely interested in Jesus' miraculous powers. After all, that's what motivates this man to come to Jesus. His son is at the point of death, and he's heard of Jesus, the miracle worker. So he comes and he's asking, asking, asking for Jesus to help. The tense of the verb in verse 47, where it says he "asked him to come down and heal his son," the tense of the verb "ask" implies a continuous action, a repeated action. The NASB says he "was imploring him to come down and heal his son." Please, Jesus, come help me. Jesus, come with me. Jesus, my son is sick. He's about to die. Please come with me and heal my son! Jesus, help me.

Jesus issues the rebuke of verse 48 to this man as well as the group. But what happens next separates this man from the others. For he demonstrates a faith that goes deeper than seeing. He believes without seeing.

Notice that Jesus doesn't agree to go with the man. That's what the official is asking for. He wants Jesus to come with him to his house. Jesus doesn't do that here. But He does heal the boy.

In the words of verse 50, where Jesus simply says, "Go; your son will live," in those words are the power of Jesus to heal. Jesus isn't merely a miracle worker. And He doesn't have to be there physically present with the sick person in order to heal. He can pronounce something, no matter where He is, and no matter where the need is, and His word will be effective.

And I think it's at this very point that the official gives evidence of a faith that is different than those around him. See what the verse says right after Jesus' word of command and word of promise. Jesus says, "Go [and implying, "I'm not going with you, but go, yourself, back to your home . . . and then the promise] your son will live." And then the verse tells us, "The man believed the word that Jesus spoke to him and went on his way."

We might expect him to voice some disappointment about Jesus not coming with him. But there's no hint of that. It seems that in the moment of Jesus speaking this word of promise, this word of hope, this word of healing from a distance, the man sees that Jesus is one of a kind. He's not a mere healer. He is One who speaks with authority, with divine authority.

This official was no longer seeing Jesus simply as someone to save his son from physical death. He was seeing something of Jesus' divine identity, as One bringing spiritual life. So without protest, the man goes on his way believing that what Jesus said was certainly going to happen. The man went away knowing that his son would live, because Jesus said so. Jesus had healed his

son, even though the man had not yet seen the result of it. His eyes hadn't yet seen his healthy son. But with the spiritual perception of his soul, he knew that it was true. He believed while not yet seeing.

And then there was a wonderful confirmation of what Jesus had done. As the man was going down . . . [Cana was up in the hills west of the Sea of Galilee. Capernaum was down right along the Sea of Galilee. So his journey was through the hills downward toward his home in Capernaum]. Apparently some of his servants had started out to look for him to tell him the good news about his son. They met along the way.

This would have been a great conversation to hear. Verse 52, "So he asked them the hour when he began to get better, and they said to him, 'Yesterday at the seventh hour [1pm] the fever left him. The father knew that was the hour when Jesus had said to him, 'Your son will live.'"

The man already believes and knows in his heart that what Jesus said is true. He is trusting that his son will live. But now he receives testimony from his own servants of the immediacy of what Jesus accomplished here. At the very hour, the very moment, Jesus spoke the words, the fever left his son. That's how powerful Jesus' word is. Even from many miles away, the healing was immediately effective. And now the official and his servants get to rejoice together as they piece together what has taken place.

They didn't have cell phones. They couldn't send a text or a picture or connect over FaceTime. Many hours passed in which the man's believing was without seeing. And that, of course, is an essential component of true faith. As Hebrews 11:1 says, "Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen." This man believed in Jesus. Not just in Jesus' power to heal, but in Jesus Himself. This man trusted personally in Jesus. He walked away from that conversation with an assurance, a conviction, that even though he didn't yet see it, he knew that Jesus' words had already done something, were already taking effect. So his journey back toward home would have been one of joyful expectation, an eager anticipation of rejoicing with his family, not just because their son is well, but because Jesus did this!

There's an added detail here that we wouldn't notice unless we're familiar with the geography. Cana and Capernaum are less than 20 miles apart. Jesus spoke to the man at 1 in the afternoon. If he had departed directly for home he could have gotten there the same day. Most likely he was on a horse, given his position as an official. So why is it that it's not until the next day that the man meets his servants and they tell him, "*Yesterday* at 1pm the fever

left him.” And that was the same time Jesus had said, “Your son will live.”

Why didn’t this man rush home? Why did he take his time? How could he sleep that night? It’s because he believed the words Jesus spoke. Just consider the contrast between what must have been a hurried journey to Cana in order to seek Jesus’ help, and then his apparently unhurried return trip back to his home. He believed the words of Jesus, even without seeing the results.

And then when he finally does get home, the rest of his household believes too. We’re continuing to see the multiplying fruit of Jesus’ ministry. This entire family, the entire household, is being transformed by the powerful word of Jesus.

How should this encourage us? It’s not as though Jesus is saying to every one of us that our sick loved one will get well. He’s not saying to each one of us that the trial will shortly go away. Whatever trials come to your mind right now, things that aren’t going well in your life. It’s not that Jesus is telling us in this story, “I’m going to fix it right now!” He doesn’t promise to do that every time. We don’t know what His plans are for the sick loved one, or when we have our own health problems or mental health problems. We don’t know what’s going to happen with the strained relationship, or a financial crisis, or difficulties at the job, or trouble finding a good living situation.

We should certainly run to Jesus, like this man did, and plead for help. And we know that He’s able to help in whatever way He sees fit. Jesus could have travelled back to Capernaum with this man, laid His hands on the man’s son, and healed him. He could have let the son die. He could have raised the son from the dead later, like He did with Lazarus. He could have done any number of things.

And it’s His prerogative in our trials also, to do whatever He sees fit. So the lesson for us is not to expect a miracle every time we ask for one. Rather, the lesson is to trust Jesus every time, whether we get the result we want or not. Whatever happens we can bank on the promise of Romans 8:28, “And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.”

I hope today each of us can return to our homes like this official did, joyful and restful, because we’re trusting in Jesus. There may be a number of situations that we’re not sure how they’re going to turn out, but Jesus has promised good to us.

In closing, then, as you reflect on whatever trials you may be facing today, here are some things we can draw from this passage. First of all, run to Jesus and ask for help. Talk to Him, ask Him repeatedly. Don’t be afraid to sound desperate, because that’s exactly what you are.

And then listen to His Word. Listen to what He tells us in Scripture. Search through this Book for promises. And believe those promises. Preach these promises to yourself when you're tempted to despair.

And then act accordingly, which means you do what He says. Jesus told this man, "Go," and the man went. Why? Because he believed. You see, believing and obeying are inseparable. As you trust the promises of Jesus you'll also obey the commands of Jesus.

Beware of seeing without believing. Don't be someone who is looking for the next spiritual high, the next amazing experience, the next miraculous answer to prayer, while your heart is actually far from Jesus. Beware of seeing without believing. Instead, let's believe even when we can't yet see.

We need to exercise faith that is truly faith, meaning we can't yet see with our eyes the concrete fulfillment of the promises. We have to walk by faith, not by sight. We have to persevere knowing that what He says is true, and we can trust Him. As we return to our homes today, may we go with the joyful expectation that this man had. Let us experience the peace and hope that comes from believing the words of Jesus.