

## **Seeing is not Believing** **John 4: 39-54**

### **Sermon by Rev. Nathan Eshelman** **Sunday January 16, 2011**

*Thesis:* Jesus teaches us that saving faith is the result of hearing the Word without the need for signs. John illustrates this by comparing three groups of people: The Samaritans, The Galileans, and the Official's family.

#### **I. The Samaritans**

- A. The Samaritans believe because they heard
- B. They asked Jesus to stay and continue teaching
- C. They knew that he was the Savior of the world

#### **II. The Galileans**

- A. No honor vs. welcoming him
- B. A request for signs and wonders
- C. Unless YE see signs and wonders (the church of the day)

#### **III. The Official's Family**

- A. Come before my son dies
- B. Trust God and he will live (belief without sight)
- C. The family believed (based on testimony of the word)

Our text for this morning is John 4:39-54 under the theme, "Seeing is not believing." As we look into our text this morning we are faced with a very real questions that the Lord Jesus wants each person to consider and meditate upon. What do you get out of your relationship with Jesus Christ? What is the purpose behind your prayers and your worship and your devotion to Christ? Are you committed to Christ because you believe that there is a need that is met by him? Or, do you serve him because you are hoping that it will make life a little more comfortable or even make your afterlife a little more comfortable?

Have you ever considered these questions? This is exactly what the Lord Jesus is asking us to face today. One pastor writes, "We have turned to a God that we can use rather than to a God we must obey; we have turned to a God who will fulfill our needs rather than to a God before whom we must surrender our rights... He is a God for us, for our satisfaction..." [David Wells, No Place for Truth, 114] Friends, what the Lord Jesus Christ is teaching us today is that that saving faith is the result of hearing the Word without the need for "What's in it for me?" He teaches us this by comparing three groups of people in the text: The Samaritans; the Galileans; and the Official's Family.

Let's get started this morning by looking at the first heading: The Samaritans. In the last two weeks we have talked extensively about the Samaritans both about how the Samaritan people came to be and about how their religion was one of syncretism between biblical Judaism and the paganism of the day. Of all of the people that were associated with Judaism in ancient times you might expect the Samaritans to be the ones least likely to respond to Christ; they have a horrible tract record of denying the Gospel, forsaking God's Word, killing the Lord's prophets, and bringing in their own false prophets. And yet, what was the Samaritan response to the Word of God preached by Jesus? Look at 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.” The Samaritans hear the Lord Jesus Christ in his preaching and they respond to it. The text says, “for we have heard for ourselves.” Now the word “hear” or its past tense, “heard” in the Hebrew context is implicitly associated with obedience. If someone “hears” something then it means that they obeyed.

We also use the word “hear” in the same manner to some degree. You say to your child, “Child, clean your room.” And there was eye contact and it appeared as though the message moved from your lips into the ears of the child. You come back 30 minutes later and the room is still the disaster that it was when you told them to clean it. So what do you say? “Didn't you HEAR me?” Now what lies behind that statement is this: Why didn't you obey me? It was the same way in a Jewish context: Hear O Israel, the Lord your God is one. Wrapped up in the statement that we call the Shema is this: Obey this one God.

What do we have from the Samaritans in our text today? They hear the Gospel, and because they heard the Gospel they obeyed the Gospel. You may be asking yourself, “What does the hearing of the Gospel require of me?” Lord willing, from this pulpit you hear the Gospel week after week, and I hope that it has been that way for the past 106 years. But what does obedience to the Gospel look like? Q160 of the Larger Catechism says, “It is required of those that hear the Word preached, that they attend upon it with diligence, preparation, and prayer; examine what they hear by the Scriptures; receive the truth with faith, love, meekness, and readiness of mind, as the Word of God; meditate and talk about it; hide it in their hearts, and bring forth the fruit of it in their lives. And, this is exactly what we see in this Samaritan revival of religion. We see that the Samaritan people responded to the preaching of Christ in such a way that they diligently turned toward Jesus; and they examined the Word, accepting it as God's own Word; they talked about it to those around them; and it brought forth Gospel fruit in their lives.

Now, I understand that this is where we left off last week. I am not retelling this small portion of the story because I don't have anything else to say to you as your pastor. Believe me, I've got plenty to say, and I am just starting year number three as your pastor today. So it's not that I don't have anything to say. The thing is – this text serves as a transition between chapter 4 and chapter 5 in the Gospel of John – the response of the Samaritans is very important to understanding our text.

The Samaritans hear. The Samaritans believe. The Samaritans have changed lives – they actually want the Lord Jesus Christ to stay so that they can continue to praise him and to worship him and to learn at his feet. They now understand that this is not just some rabbi with a heart for Samaritans. This is the Savior of the World. Now this is a profound statement coming from the Samaritan people. They did not see Jesus merely as a Jewish Rabbi who defected to the outer-regions. They did not see Jesus as anyone false. They did not seek him for something that he could offer to them. They did not see him as something that could meet all of their little Samaritan needs – it would have been easy for them at this point to be filled with pride and to say, “The Messiah came to us! He's ours. He's on our side,” but they didn't say those things. They saw the Lord for who he really was and is. In verse 42, they call him “the Savior of the world.”

In our second heading we examine the Galileans and their response to Christ. You would think that the humble Galileans would understand these things; they would get it. Look at verses 43-45, “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 once done in Jerusalem at the feast. For they too had gone to the feast.” Talk about a strange couple of verses. Jesus goes to Galilee and how does verse 44 begin? Look at it. Our pew Bibles begin verse 44

with FOR. The KJV and NKJV begin with FOR as well. Some translations have the word, “now” and I must tell you that “now” is a bad translation of that Greek word. The translators are trying to figure out what is going on in the text instead of just translating the text. The word in Greek is GAR, and it means “for” or “because.” So put the two sentences together: Jesus Goes into Galilee because (or for) Jesus himself had said that a prophet it not accepted in his own town. And what happens when he gets into Galilee? Cheers and celebration! Jesus is here! Here's the key to the city! Welcome back Jesus! Does this sound strange to you? Verse 43: Jesus goes to Galilee. Verse 44: A prophet is not accepted in his hometown or it can be translated native land or some say fatherland. Verse 45: A warm and cheerful welcome from those that Jesus said would not accept him.

What is going on? You see John the Gospel writer is telling us that Jesus is not really being accepted in this region where he is going. He is showing us that he may be welcomed, but welcomed and accepted are too different things in the mind of John. Notice the middle of verse 45, “Having SEEN all that he had done.” The text does not say, believing his message the Galileans obeyed Jesus. It says these guys saw what they thought were parlor tricks and they wanted more. Entertain me Jesus. Fill my needs. I have a wedding coming up, do you think that you could bar tend for me? I wonder what else Jesus could do for us? And all of these ideas are swirling around the depraved minds of the Galileans and they want Jesus to come and to meet their needs and fill the voids in their lives and entertain them with things that they have never seen. Welcome Jesus! Welcome Jesus after our own imaginations!

And then we come to verse 46, “So he came again to Cana in Galilee where had made the water into 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.”

Friends what happens here in this verse is that Jesus knows that the Galileans as a group have very little desire to see him as a Savior. They have very little desire to see him as Lord of Lords or as King of Kings. They have very little desire to see him in the beauty of holiness. They have very little desire to hear his words of salvation or his words of redemption or his words or hope for a fallen and rebellious world. They have only come to see his tricks. “We don't want to hear. We want to see.” This was the sin of the Galileans. And friends, I am afraid that this is the sin of the modern church as well. We live in an age where people are consumers of Christ and consumers of religion. Many evangelical Christians do not think about going to worship to praise him or going to worship to learn from Christ, or going to worship to just give him honor and praise. We go to consume. What's in it for me? Me. Me. Me. What can this Jesus do to make my life easier or my life better or my life more fulfilling?

“Jesus! Come! My son! He's going to die! You need to come quickly!” Here is Jesus' response in verse 48, “So Jesus said to him, unless you see signs and wonders you will not believe.” Jesus rebukes him, doesn't he? For those of you that are using the Authorized Version – is the “You” in the text “Ye” or “Thou”? It's “Ye”, isn't it, and do you know what that means? It means that Jesus was not talking to one specific person, but he was talking to a whole group of people. He could have said, “Unless you Galileans see signs and wonders you will not believe!” You see, they were not concerned with hearing the word. They were not concerned with what the Larger Catechism describes in Q160 which we read today. They were interested in one thing, a sign; give us a sign. They were truly the consumers in that time. They should have been the ones that received the Word with gladness, but that was not the case. The prophet Isaiah said that the Lord Jesus would come to his own and his own would not receive him.

Again, here is a difference between those that receive Christ on Christ's terms and those that receive Christ made in their own image. John Owen said that if you are satisfied with an imaginary Christ you must be satisfied with an imaginary salvation. This is serious friends. Is the Jesus that you worship the same Jesus that the Scriptures proclaim? Do you come to this Christ that John is revealing in his Gospel, or are you one of the YE in this text – one of the YE that demand things and signs and wonders from the Lord Jesus? We need to take Christ on his terms. Often the Puritans would talk about how they would rather not be in heaven if the Lord Jesus were not there. You see, life is about Him, about bringing glory to Christ, and about living a Christ centered life. As we come to Christ, our question should not be, “What is he going to do for me?” but rather the question needs to be, “How can I best glorify him?”

The Galileans did not hear, they merely saw, and seeing is not believing rather hearing is believing. Romans 10:14 says, “How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching?” This is why preaching is so central to Reformed worship. Preaching is the normal means by which God converts sinners and conforms them to himself. All of you need to ask of yourselves, “Am I coming to worship like a Samaritan who wants to hear the Word and receive it with gladness? Or am I coming as a Galilean who wants to see signs and wonders and wants to know what's in it for me?”

The Samaritans heard. The Galileans did not hear. And we see another group under the third heading of our text this morning: The Official's family. This is described in verses 49 through the end of the chapter. What we have here is an official in the land, truthfully I am not sure what exactly the role of this official was, but the Greek word for official is one who works for the kingdom. Official can also be translated as nobleman. The assumption is that this was someone who was working for Herod and acting in some type of political capacity.

This official's son is sick, and not simply sick but dying. So he hurries to meet the Lord Jesus and he says these words that we have already read where he asks the Lord Jesus to heal his son who is at the point of death. We then see the Lord Jesus give this Galilean a rebuke while he calls the people as a whole to examine what they would want from the Lord Jesus – asking them, “Do you merely want a sign?” Can you have me on my own terms? And the nobleman does not back off does he? The nobleman must have quickly done some self-examination and asked, “Why do I want to talk to the Lord Jesus? Is it that I am grasping at straws and hoping for the best, or is it because I believe that the Lord Jesus can heal my son?”

The Shorter Catechism says in Q36, The benefits which in this life to accompany or flow from justification, adoption, and sanctification are assurance of God's love, peace of conscience, joy in the Holy Ghost, increase of grace, and perseverance therein to the end. So our nobleman looked into his heart and realized that he too believed the message that Christ brought. He heard the Word; he was not just reaching out for a sign. He saw that he had assurance of God's love, and peace in his conscience and an increase of grace; and as a result, he reached out by faith and asked once again.

He stormed the very throne room of grace, didn't he? “Sir, come down before my child dies!” He storms the throne room of grace. You see, when we believe the Gospel, there are benefits for us, but the thing is that we must believe on Christ's terms and worship on his terms and live on his terms. As a result we are watered and fed and cared for and loved because God cares about us in Christ, doesn't he?

The Lord Jesus put this very serious question before him, “Are you going to believe because of who I am, or are you just looking for someone to meet your needs?” It really is a lot like marriage. Do you love your wife or husband because of who he or she is, or do you love them because of what they do for you? If you love them for what they do for you, I’m sorry, that’s not love; that’s selfishness. But when you love them for who they are, you will receive benefits of that love, won’t you? It’s the same with Christ. There is great benefit in believing his word, in hearing his word, and in heeding his word. “Go and your son will live.” Such grace. What a merciful Jesus reaching out to unworthy sinners. Go and your son will live. And notice that the nobleman does not say, “No! Jesus you must come, you must touch him as you pray, or you must hold him as you call the sickness out of him.” That was not the case.

The second half of verse 50 says, “The man believed the word that Jesus spoke to him and went on his way.” Notice two things about this verse. First, notice that he believed his word without the need of a sign. He did not need the actual physical Jesus in his home rather he believed. He trusted Christ and Christ’s terms. This is faith; this is believing in the Jesus of the Bible. The official added no extra things or rituals that Jesus would have to do, but he believed just as Jesus revealed himself. The second thing that I would like you to notice is the term “Went on his way.” The Greek has the connotation that he just continued on after this event occurred. It seems as though the passion and the urgency had gone away. He trusted and believed what Jesus said, and he went on his way home to see his son. RC Sproul notes, “He didn’t say, I’ll just go and see if that’s true. He didn’t grab Jesus by the hand and physically drag him to his house. Rather he grew calm. He stopped pleading. And he departed.” He worked his way home.

Verses 51-54 show what happens when the nobleman got home. He got home and received confirmation that Jesus healed his son just as he said that he would and just at the time that he said that he would. One writer notes, “Had the enquirer asked how the father knew his child was now well, his answer would have been, ‘Because I have the word of Christ for it. What more do I need?’” And hearer, we too, shall be full of peace and joy if we rest in the sure word of God. The father’s enquiry of his servants was not because of unbelief but because he delighted to hear a recounting of what God had done.” [Arthur Pink] We see that as a result of his own belief, his whole household also believed. They too received the word and were saved. A son was brought to the point of death so that the whole family could live. And, how did they live? They lived because they believed in the words of Christ unto life.

Friends, we too must believe the Word of God on Christ’s terms. We cannot come seeking a sign, but we must come as empty sinners crying out for grace. The Samaritans understood it and lived. The Galileans rejected it to their harm. The official’s family believed it for life. What will you do with this Jesus? This Jesus who offers you himself on this very day?

Amen.