

“A Royal Official’s Faith”

JOHN 4:46-54

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Most of us are probably familiar with the first miracle that Jesus ever performed. Several years ago, we studied how Jesus changed water into wine at a wedding celebration in Cana of Galilee. That was His first miracle and is recorded for us in John 2. However, many people may not realize that the Bible specifically identifies the Lord’s second miracle. This morning, then, I would invite you to turn with me to John 4 (p. 1661). The first miracle took place during a time of great celebration, but the second miracle takes place during a time of great sickness and stress as a royal official’s son comes down with a high fever.

Most of us probably understand what it feels like to have a loved one go through a life threatening illness. As most of you know, when our daughter was about 6 weeks old, she got a rather high fever. We took her to the hospital late on a Saturday night, and for the next several hours, we suffered with her. As parents, that was a stressful situation. We were there in the ER all night and into the early hours on Sunday morning as they poked and prodded our newborn little girl, and there was basically nothing that we could do. Perhaps some of you have been in a similar situation. And even if not, then perhaps all of us can at least try to imagine what this man is going through as his young son comes down with a high fever and is basically right there at the point of death. If you will, let us please look together at John 4:46-53...

⁴⁶ Therefore He came again to Cana of Galilee where He had made the water wine. And there was a royal official whose son was sick at Capernaum. ⁴⁷ When he heard that Jesus had come out of Judea into Galilee, he went to Him and was imploring Him to come down and heal his son; for he was at the point of death. ⁴⁸ So Jesus said to him, "Unless you people see signs and wonders, you simply will not believe." ⁴⁹ The royal official said to Him, "Sir, come down before my child dies." ⁵⁰ Jesus said to him, "Go; your son lives." The man believed the word that Jesus spoke to him and started off. ⁵¹ As he was now going down, his slaves met him, saying that his son was living. ⁵² So he inquired of them the hour when he began to get better. Then they said to him, "Yesterday at the seventh hour the fever left him." ⁵³ So the father knew that it was at that hour in which Jesus said to him, "Your son lives"; and he himself believed and his whole household. ⁵⁴ This is again a second sign that Jesus performed when He had come out of Judea into Galilee.

As we look back at this paragraph of God's word, I would like for us to focus our thoughts this morning on the royal official's faith, and as we study, I believe we will find several things to admire, several qualities that we can imitate. And truly, that is the reason why this passage is in the Bible.

I. **First of all, for example, we find that THE ROYAL OFFICIAL TOOK HIS PROBLEM TO JESUS (verses 46-47).**

And right here we should note that the term *"royal official"* literally refers to the *"king's man"* or *"a man of the king."* Today we might equate that position with a member of the president's cabinet—the Secretary of the Treasury, the Secretary of Defense, and so on. The *"royal official,"* therefore, was probably one of King Herod's advisors, a man in a position of great authority. Some have suggested that this is Chuza, King Herod's personal steward. You might remember that the women who supported Jesus out of their personal means are listed in Luke 8:3. Among several others, we read of *"Joanna the wife of Chuza, Herod's steward."* This, of course, was written later, but if true, it certainly makes sense, that after her son was healed, Joanna started financially supporting the Lord's ministry out of her own personal means, out of thankfulness for what the Lord had done for her son. Another possibility is that this man is Manaen, a man referred to as one of the teachers and prophets in Acts 13 at the beginning of the First Missionary Journey. In that passage, the Bible refers to *"Manaen who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch."* Again, this is only a possibility, but it shows at least another believer who was associated with King Herod.

But whatever this man's position, we find that he comes to the Lord with a serious concern—his son is sick and suffering with a fever, but this is not a Children's Tylenol kind of fever; but instead, according to verse 47, the child is at the point of death. The official, therefore, comes with a problem that only Jesus can solve. As a ruler, we can probably safely assume that he had already tried the various doctors. We can probably safely assume that he was pretty much out of options at this point. Again, let us try to put ourselves in this man's position. Most of us would do pretty much anything for our children. Today, we take them to the doctor when they are sick. We go to Urgent Care, we go to the ER, we go to one of the outstanding hospitals here in Madison, we go to the pharmacy, we do whatever it takes. And we assume that this man did the same thing, but nothing was helping, and so he took his concern to the Lord.

Now, we need to understand that the Lord was about 20 miles away at this point (according to most commentaries). I looked it up on Google Maps, and it gave a distance of 26 miles, I clicked the box for walking directions, and Google basically said, "You really don't want to do that!" The royal official, though, hears that Jesus is in the area, and he leaves his dying son at home to go find the Lord. And from a purely professional point of view, this man was an official in the kingdom of Herod, a king from the same family as the Herod who had tried to murder Jesus when He was a baby. So this official, then, throws caution to the wind, he takes a leap of faith, and he goes out looking for Jesus, because he has some idea that Jesus will be able to help him with his concern.

When the official arrives and finds the Lord, he finds that the Lord is surrounded by people (I say this because of the first thing Jesus says), but even though there were other people there, the royal official starts *"imploping [Jesus] to come down and heal his son"* (verse 47). And based on the wording here, this was not a one-time request, but it went on for some time—he was persistent! He was begging the Lord over and over again: Please, Lord, come to my house and heal my son! My little boy is about to die! Please, dear Lord, do something!

And just a side note here: Normally, royal officials do not travel 20 miles to beg an unemployed carpenter to do something for them! But again, the man was desperate! And again, I should also just briefly point out that there is not yet any kind of spiritual aspect to this situation. The official does not approach Jesus as the Son of God, he does not approach Jesus as a disciple or follower at this point, the official does not connect God to any of this quite yet, but he simply wants this Jesus who changed the water into wine to do something.

His son's illness, therefore, caused this man to turn to God, even though he might not have realized exactly what he was doing at the time. Today also, tragedy and difficult circumstances will sometimes lead people to go looking to God for help. And ultimately, we know that God cares about what we're going through. God cares about our physical health. God cares about those who are sick. That's why Jesus spent so much time healing people—those with leprosy, those who were paralyzed, the woman who had been bleeding for twelve years, the blind, the deaf, and so on. God cares about our health, and sometimes God uses our physical challenges to invite us closer to Him. Our challenge is to use those struggles as opportunities to turn to God, just as the royal official did. When things are not going well, let us turn to God for help. First of all, then, the king's servant took his concern to Jesus.

II. There is a second basic idea we can learn in this man's progression of faith, and that is: THE OFFICIAL PERSISTED EVEN IN THE FACE OF OBSTACLES (verses 48-49).

So we have this man who has traveled more than 20 miles to beg the Lord to heal his little boy, and then we see the Lord's response in verse 48, ***"Unless you see signs and wonders, you will not believe."*** And with that, we might be thinking: What??? At first, it looks like Jesus is rebuking the man, and we think to ourselves: What did this royal official do to deserve what appears to be a rather harsh statement? But when we look at the grammar, we find that the word ***"you"*** is plural. That is why the translators of the NASB have added the word "people." "People" is not actually in the text, but it is implied. Jesus, therefore, sees this man begging for help, he might be looking at the official, but the message is really to those who are only there trying to see some kind of trick, to those who are only there to maybe see some more water turned into wine. To those people, Jesus says, ***"Unless you people see signs and wonders, you will not believe."*** He was criticizing the crowd, and the official seems to be caught in the crossfire.

And yet in spite of that rather harsh statement, we find in verse 49 that the man repeats his plea as he says, ***"Sir, come down before my child dies."*** In other words, the official is not distracted, he is not discouraged, but he continues to press the Lord to heal his little boy. He persisted even in the face of this little bump in the road. The official knows that he is not just looking for some spectacular thing, he is not just looking for the thrill of a magic trick (like those people in the crowd), but he is looking for someone to come down and heal his son: Sir, you need to get to my house and do something! You need to fix this situation!

I don't know about you, but this reminds me a little bit of the Canaanite woman who came to Jesus begging Him to heal her daughter in Matthew 15. But instead of just doing it, the Lord ignored the woman. She continued to push it, and the Lord finally says, ***"I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel."*** The woman kept on shouting, she bowed down before Jesus and said, ***"Lord, help me!"*** The Lord said, ***"It is not good to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs."*** The woman said, ***"Yes, Lord; but even the dogs feed on the crumbs which fall from their masters' table."*** And at that point, the Lord said, ***"O woman, your faith is great; it shall be done for you as you wish,"*** and her daughter was healed immediately. At first, we might wonder why Jesus made it so difficult, but then we realize in the end that the Lord was really challenging this woman's faith. He did this several times, and perhaps that is what He is doing with the official here in John 4.

Like a coach who challenges the team, Jesus was putting a little obstacle out there to see what the man would do with it. I'm thinking of the men's breakfast we had several months ago where we studied the public reading of God's word. We practiced with some tongue twisters, and we played some distractions in the background—slamming doors, screaming babies, fire engines, coins dropping (all things we have actually heard during our sermons here), and we did these things to challenge ourselves, to make ourselves stronger. In a similar way, Jesus appears to be challenging the official to take it to the next level. The official certainly could have just turned and walked away, he could have given up, but he did not—he stuck with it, and he insisted that Jesus come to his house to heal his little boy who was at the point of death.

As we try to apply this basic idea to our situation today, let's think about those times when we might be tempted to just give up on the Christian faith. We may come to a time in our lives when we start to doubt whether God is really listening to our prayers, we may come to a time when we really struggle with some temptation, we may come to a time when we really just want to skip it—let's just forget the whole thing, the Christian life isn't working, let's just give up and try something else. During those times, that's when we dig in and stick with it—even when we may not feel like it. That's when we dig deep and lean on the example of the king's official here in John 4. Even when he might have felt rebuked by the Lord, he thought about his little boy, and he kept on asking. As Jesus said in Matthew 7:7-8, ***“Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened.”*** Or, as God said through the prophet Jeremiah in Jeremiah 29:13, ***“You will seek Me and find Me when you search for Me with all your heart.”*** Faith, therefore, is not just handed to us, but we must ask, seek, and knock—we must overcome obstacles, just as the official did here in John 4.

III. **There is a third basic idea we can take away from this man's faith, and that is: THE OFFICIAL TOOK JESUS AT HIS WORD AND OBEYED (verses 50-54).**

In verse 50, Jesus said to him, ***“Go; your son lives,”*** and at that point, the man was faced with a serious dilemma. On one hand, this man had left his son at the point of death and had traveled more than 20 miles to go bring Jesus back to his home in Capernaum to make it happen. In his mind, Jesus had to come to his son. But on the other hand, the official is not really in a position to bargain. So, does he stay there continuing to harass the Lord, or does he go home? You see, Jesus had put His word between this man and the healing of his son, and he forces the man to make a decision based on faith. Well, thankfully, the Bible says that, ***“The man believed the word that Jesus spoke to him and started off.”*** Or, as the NIV puts it, ***“The man took Jesus at his word and departed.”*** That right there is a leap of faith, because at this point, all this man had was the word of God. There was no spectacular healing, there were no magic words, Jesus didn't even touch the boy, the man could not see a change, there was no evidence, there was no stage (like we have with all of these modern “faith healings” we see around us), there was no dramatic slap on the forehead, but all the man had was this simple statement, ***“Go; your son lives.”***

And with that statement, Jesus avoided giving a show to these people who wouldn't believe anyway, and he also gave the official a chance to prove his faith. And with that, there is no arguing, there is no squabbling, there is no more pleading or begging, but the man simply turns and starts heading for home. He obeyed the word of God.

In a way, this dilemma is something that all of us face whenever we are told by God to do something. We look in the Bible, we know what we are supposed to do, and the question is: Do we do it, or do we try to work our way out of it? I'm reminded of a retired teacher who lost her entire life savings in some kind of elaborate investment scheme. She finally went to the Better Business Bureau, and they said, “We could have helped

you if you had only come to us first. Didn't you know we were here?" And the retired teacher said, "I knew you were there, but I didn't go to you first, because I was afraid you would tell me not to do it." In the same way, sometimes people refuse to go to the Lord, they refuse to go to the Scriptures, because they are afraid of what they will find, and so they refuse to take Jesus at his word. But thankfully, the officer believed the Lord, and turned, and went home. That was a hard thing to do.

And so we look at this passage and we have a question: Are we like the officer? Do we have the faith that he had? Do we believe what the Lord has said? Do we obey without stalling or arguing? As I was preparing this morning's lesson, I ran across an interesting quote Henry Jordan, who played for the Packers back in the 1960's. He was also instrumental in starting Summer Fest over in Milwaukee. Well, Mr. Jordan once explained why he played pro football. He said, "I play for the love of the game, the love of the money and the fear of Lombardi. When he says 'sit down,' I don't look for a chair." What an interesting attitude to have—an attitude that all of us need to have when it comes to the word of God. As we step back and look at this passage, I hope we can see that it is not a story about healing, but it is a story about faith. In fact, as one author has pointed out, "If this were made into a movie, the sick boy would never be named, and there'd never be a scene with him in it. What you would see is a dad, who has faith, and whose faith is put to the test." This morning, I would encourage all of us to think of just one area where we may be holding back from God, and over this next week, let us just take at least one step to show God that we take Him at His word. Do we need to speak up at work? Do we need to bite our tongue during an argument? Do we need to meet a need in the neighborhood? Do we need to recommit to putting away some kind of secret sin? The point is: All of us can take a step to show that we take God at His word. As the Bible says in Hebrews 11:6, **"...without faith it is impossible to please God."** Faith is demonstrated in the things that we do. And, as John wrote at the end of his book, **"...these have been written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God"** (John 20:31).

Conclusion:

As we close, I hope you've noticed there is one little detail we have not yet studied—we haven't talked about what happened! The man leaves to go home, and at some point in that journey, he is met by his servants who bring him the good news that his son was alive. Well, that's a pretty nice coincidence, isn't it? I suppose this man was wondering the same thing, and so he asked the servants when the young man **"began to get better."** Notice: He was thinking in terms of a process—when did my start to come around? But the servants said, **"Yesterday at the seventh hour the fever left him."** In other words, this was not a long process, but at exactly the seventh hour the young man was completely healed. At that point, the official knew that that was the exact moment when Jesus had said, **"Your son lives."** Someone has said that answered prayer is a coincidence where God prefers to remain anonymous. Very interesting! In other words, it was not a coincidence at all. And as a result, the officer's entire household came to believe in Jesus. The word of God had accomplished its purpose. As God said in Isaiah 55:11, **"So will My word be which goes forth from My mouth; it will not return to Me empty, without accomplishing what I desire, and without succeeding in the matter for which I sent it."** Again, this is not really a story about a sick young man getting better—this is a story about faith. The king's official took his problem to Jesus, he persisted in overcoming obstacles, and he took Jesus at His word as he responded with faithful obedience.

If we want to be pleasing to God, we will do the same thing today. We look at what God did for us by sending Jesus to die on the cross, and we respond in faith; that is, we take God at His word, we turn away from sin, and we allow ourselves to be buried with Christ in baptism—immersed in water for the forgiveness of our sins. If

you have any questions, please let us know, but if you are ready to obey the gospel right now, please let us know as we sing this next song. Let's stand and sing...

To comment on this lesson: fourlakeschurch@gmail.com