



Text: John 4:46-54¹

Series: *Life in His Name* – The Message of John’s Gospel

Title: Part 9 – Signs of a Growing Faith

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Gary Burge tells the following story in his commentary on John’s Gospel:

During my first semester in seminary a professor told me a remarkable story from his early years as a pastor. A young woman had become critically ill and her prognosis was grim; she would likely die within the year. Her family had a nominal “Easter and Christmas Eve” commitment to the church, so the discussions in the hospital between this young pastor and this family always plowed new ground. The woman challenged him: If Jesus healed in the Bible, he should be able to heal me today. If not, what use was he? So she prayed. The pastor prayed. The whole family prayed—and pleaded and begged and bargained. If God would only show mercy, the family urged, they would completely recommit themselves and come to church every Sunday. This earnest young pastor prayed with all his heart. He refused to join the ranks of those who said, “If it is thy will.” It was God’s will that she be healed, he concluded.

Then to his amazement, God healed her—completely. And with the physicians shaking their heads, she was sent home from the hospital. Next Sunday, the entire family was there in the front pew, dressed and sparkling. The young woman gave her testimony, praising God for his goodness. The following Sunday, the family was there again. In four weeks, it was only the woman and her husband. And after that, attendance was sporadic until they dropped into their previous pattern. 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 dimmed to nothing.²

How is that possible? Sadly, it’s very possible. I could tell you a very similar story about a person for whom our Deacons prayed many years ago in our Fireside Room right over there, a person who was dramatically healed, who was regularly encouraged toward faith in Christ by several of our people but who today shows no sign of faith at all. But I’m glad to say I could tell of another person for whom we prayed, who was also healed of cancer and who is active in

¹ Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version, copyright © 2001 by Crossway Bibles, a division of Good News Publishers. Used by permission, All rights reserved.

² Gary M. Burge, *The NIV Application Commentary: John* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 2000), 166.



serving the Lord. What made the difference? Don't miracles produce faith? Well, let's think about that together for a while.

This morning I want to talk with you about "Signs of a Growing Faith." There is nothing more important to Jesus than belief in him and his most important priority in the lives of his followers is that we have a growing faith in him. In the story we're about to read from John's Gospel we see Jesus at work, nurturing, urging, pushing, inspiring faith in him. Please understand that Jesus is not interested in merely inspiring faith for its own sake; he is interested, rather, in inspiring faith *in him*. Many people talk about "having faith" or about "believing," but it's crucial that we understand that the Bible encourages faith *in Jesus*, not faith in faith or belief in the power of belief. Bible faith is Jesus-faith; Bible belief is belief in Jesus. That's what our focus is this morning.

I'm reading from John's Gospel, chapter four, beginning in verse 43 and reading through to verse 54, the end of the chapter. This is God's holy, inspired and authoritative Word; let's hear it with due reverence and respond to it with living faith.

⁴³ After the two days he departed for Galilee. ⁴⁴ (For Jesus himself had testified that a prophet has no honor in his own hometown.) ⁴⁵ 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.

⁴⁶ 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. ⁴⁷ 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. ⁴⁸ So Jesus said to him, "Unless you see signs and wonders you will not believe." ⁴⁹ The official said to him, "Sir, come down before my child dies." ⁵⁰ Jesus said to him, "Go; your son will live." The man believed the word that Jesus spoke to him and went on his way. ⁵¹ As he was going down, his servants met him and told him that his son was recovering. ⁵² 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." ⁵³ 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. ⁵⁴ This was now the second sign that Jesus did when he had come from Judea to Galilee.

First of all, let's look at **the foundation for faith** with which John begins this story.

**"So he came again to Cana in Galilee, where he had made the water wine."
John 4:46**



This is Jesus' second visit to the town of Cana in Galilee recorded in John's Gospel. On his first visit Jesus had been presented with the dilemma faced by a newly married couple who were about to run out of wine during their wedding celebration. Jesus had solved their problem by taking six large stone jars holding a total of about 180 gallons of water and turning the contents into wine for the feast. It was a miraculous, gracious provision and John concludes that story with these words:

“This, the first of his signs, Jesus did at Cana in Galilee, and manifested his glory. And his disciples believed in him.” John 2:11

John describes the turning of water into wine as a “sign” and we find the same word in the passage we’ve just read. It’s a word that John uses very intentionally. Other Gospel writers refer to the same events in Jesus’ life as “miracles” but John calls them “signs.” A “sign” points to something and later in his Gospel John tells us what the signs in his Gospel are pointing to. He wrote...

“Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.” John 20:30-31

To what did the “sign” of turning water into wine point? What did that “sign” reveal about Jesus? The Old Testament prophets that had predicted the coming of “the Christ” had prophesied that when God’s anointed king arrived there would be an abundance of good things poured out on God’s people. We could quote several prophets on this point but this morning I’m going to let the prophet Joel stand in for all of them. The prophet Joel had written about the day of the Christ...

“And in that day the mountains shall drip sweet wine, and the hills shall flow with milk, and all the streambeds of Judah shall flow with water” Joel 3:18

When the disciples saw Jesus turning 180 gallons of water into wine, they realized that they were seeing Joel’s words fulfilled before their eyes and they “believed in him.”

After turning the water into wine, John tells us that Jesus, his mother Mary and his disciples left Cana and spent several days in the town of Capernaum before heading off to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover (2:12-13). While they were in Capernaum Mary and the disciples must have talked about what had happened in Cana and John begins the story of this second “sign” by telling us that the echoes of Jesus’ first sign were still being heard in Cana and Capernaum and in the region around them.



Second, let's look at **the crisis that called for faith.**

“And at Capernaum there was an official whose son was ill.” John 4:46

We don't know much about this official. He was probably an official who served the local king, Herod Antipas. He was a man of influence – he was a royal official.³ He was a man of means – he had servants. He was a local power broker but his son was at death's door and there was nothing he could do about it! As Kent Hughes observed...

There are many things money cannot buy. Money can buy a king-sized bed, but it cannot buy sleep! Money can buy a great house, but it cannot buy a home! Money can buy a companion, but it cannot buy a close friend! Money can buy books, but it cannot buy brains! Money can buy a church building, but it cannot buy entrance into heaven! And as our text suggests, money cannot buy life and health.⁴

For many of us, it's a crisis that brings us to Jesus. When we come to an end of ourselves, when we finally “hit the wall” and realize that all of our options are dead ends, that's when we finally turn to Christ.

This man was a power broker but in the face of his son's illness, he was broken and powerless! What could this heart-broken father do? Here is where we see...

The first sign of a growing faith ... he asked Jesus for help

“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.” John 4:47

Somehow the story of Jesus turning water into wine came to his ears. Perhaps when he first heard the story he thought it was just a story, an “urban legend,” but when his son became deathly ill, the story became one on which he pinned his hopes. He wondered: “Could this Jesus who turned water into wine also give life to my son? Does he have that kind of power?”

Remember John's purpose in the Gospel: that those who believe in Jesus “may have life in his name.” Here for the first time in the Gospel, but not for the last (cf Lazarus, chapter 11), we see Jesus actually give life to someone. In the story that immediately precedes this one in John's Gospel we read that Jesus had told

³ The Greek word, *basilikos*, is related to the word for king, *basileus*.

⁴R. Kent Hughes, *John : That You May Believe*, Preaching the Word (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Books, 1999), 138.



a woman near a well in Samaria that if she believed in him he would give her “eternal life” (John 4:14). And now we watch as Jesus actually gives life to a deathly ill little boy. You see John includes the story of the healing of this boy to demonstrate that Jesus has the power to give life, and not just physical life, but also eternal life, to those who believe in him. This “sign” points to the truth that John declared about Jesus at the very beginning of his Gospel that...

“In him was life and that life was the light of men.” John 1:4

The official travelled from Capernaum to Cana, a distance of about 20 to 25 miles, perhaps on foot, or possibly by horse or donkey. Notice that he came in person to appeal to Jesus. He could have sent his servants, but he didn't. He made the journey himself and pled with Jesus to come to Capernaum. The ESV simply says that he “asked [Jesus] to come down and heal his son” but the word translated as “asked” is written in Greek using a continuous tense (imperfect).⁵ “Imploring” (NASB) or “begging” (NIV/NCV) would better catch the tone of his appeal. There is a desperation in his appeal ... what else would we expect from a man fighting for his son's life? There is recognition in this man's heart that Jesus is his last and only hope.

This draws us to...

The second sign of a growing faith ... he kept asking Jesus for help!

Not only does he arrive imploring and begging Jesus to come back to Capernaum and heal his son, but when presented with what might appear to be a rebuff by Jesus, he just keeps on asking!

**“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.’”
John 4:48-49**

We have a broken hearted father here! Doesn't Jesus care? Doesn't he know what's going on?

It all looks pretty harsh until you realize that Jesus isn't really speaking to him, but to the crowd that have gathered around him. The word “you” is plural. The NIV captures that sense with “Unless you people see miraculous signs and wonders...” You see the people of the region not only remembered what Jesus had done the first time he visited Cana, but many of them had been in Jerusalem at Passover and had witnessed Jesus perform signs there. John didn't record every sign that Jesus performed, but only selected ones. This is John's summary of what Jesus had done in Jerusalem...

⁵ Burge, loc cit.



“Now when he was in Jerusalem at the Passover Feast, many believed in his name when they saw the signs that he was doing. 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.”

John 2:23-25

Some of the people around the official were among this crowd from Jerusalem that Jesus had sensed did not truly believe. He knew that all they wanted was a show and they “welcomed” (4:45) Jesus back to Galilee while they fought for front row seats to witness his latest miracle. “Signs” pointed to belief in Jesus; “signs and wonders” could easily be taken as entertainment for their own sake!

What makes the difference? How does the same action by Jesus become for one person a “sign” that leads them to Jesus and for another a “sign and wonder” that becomes a spiritual dead-end that leads no where? There is a clue in what Jesus said later in the Gospel...

“Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me, or else believe on account of the works themselves.” John 14:11

When we understand that these miraculous interventions by God are an invitation to believe in Jesus, and when we move beyond these things, as wonderful as they are, to Jesus himself, then they become “signs” for us. But whenever we caught up in looking for the next “sign,” we’ve already turned them into “signs and wonders” and the more we hunger for them, the more resistant our soul becomes to the belief in Jesus that they are intended to inspire. “Signs” call us to believe; “signs and wonders” invite us to marvel.

This official was not among the “signs and wonders” crowd ... he wasn’t there for the show. He just wanted Jesus to heal his son. And so he let Jesus words pass right by on their way to their intended target and he cried out...

“Sir, come down before my little boy dies.” (NRSV)

His tone moves from imploring to demanding. The Greek case is actually a command ... he’s demanding that Jesus come with him! But when we are interceding before the Lord for those we love the Lord knows our hearts even if our mouths mis-speak. When our hearts are in pain as this man’s heart was our mouths often betray our true desire – Jesus knew that! This man had the same spirit of intercession that Jacob had when he cried out to the Lord...

“I will not let you go unless you bless me.” Genesis 32:26

He exemplified Jesus instruction on persistent prayer when he taught ...



“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 the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened.” Luke 11:9-10

A belief that is based on “signs and wonders” easily grows bored and moves on to the next thrill; true faith keeps on asking, and seeking, and knocking, until Jesus answers. This man kept on moving in the direction of true faith to...

The third sign of a growing faith ...he trusted Jesus’ word

“Jesus said to him, ‘Go; your son will live.’ The man believed the word that Jesus spoke to him and went on his way.” John 4:50

The “signs and wonders” crowd wanted to see something; they wanted to see Jesus restore the sight of a blind man right before their eyes; they wanted to see an arm to grow back as they watched; they wanted to see a lame man dance. And they were probably willing to travel wherever Jesus wanted to go in order to see the show! But Jesus doesn’t give them a show.

Although Jesus gives the official what he needs, he doesn’t give him what he asked for. The official wanted Jesus to come down to Capernaum but Jesus didn’t budge. He stands firm in Cana and speaks a word that has power in Capernaum ... but the official can’t see it. He is forced to trust in Jesus’ word.

And He took Jesus at this word. “Your son will live” is literally, “your son lives.” The man walked away, his asking, begging, imploring finished. Jesus had spoken and that was enough. This is full blown faith on display. What is faith?

“Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.” Hebrews 11:1

“Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.” (KJV)

“Faith means being sure of the things we hope for and knowing that something is real even if we do not see it.” (New Century Version)

“What is faith? It is the confident assurance that what we hope for is going to happen. It is the evidence of things we cannot yet see.” (New Living Translation)

Faith in Jesus doesn’t require that we see him; it only requires that we hear him because...

**“faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.”
Romans 10:17**



We're in exactly the same position the official was in 2000 years ago. Our faith question is always: Will we take Jesus at his word?

This man went on his way ... but I can only imagine, as the old carol puts it, that he "wondered as he wandered." He wondered: "what am I going to find when I get home?" He believed and he wondered. But belief is what controlled his behaviour. I want you to notice something with me. He went on his way but he didn't return to Capernaum right away. He waited in Cana over night before beginning his journey home. This meeting with Jesus occurred at "the seventh hour" (v.52) of the day which is reckoned to be about 1pm our time.⁶ He could have made it back to Capernaum that evening, especially if he had been travelling on horseback, but instead he chose to wait until the next day. That is how settled his mind was after hearing Jesus' word. That is the peace that comes when our hearts are settled on God's Word.

As he journeyed home we see...

The fourth sign of a growing faith ... his understanding of Jesus deepened

"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." John 4:51-53

When he heard Jesus' word he didn't know if his son would gradually recover or even how health would return to him. He trusted Jesus word that his son would live but what he heard from his servants staggered him. They told him that the very hour Jesus had spoken the words "your son will live," his son didn't just "begin to get better," but rather "the fever left him" instantaneously! Jesus had said "your son lives" and he did! At that moment! From 25 miles away! John expresses the official's deepened faith by saying that "he himself believed" – he really, really believed!

This official was beginning to grasp a truth about Jesus that John returns to again and again in his Gospel ... Jesus is the source of life! This boy, so near to death, had received life from Jesus simply at his word.

"For as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, so also the Son gives life to whom he will." John 5:21

Twenty-five miles was nothing to Jesus! He's the one who called the entire created universe into existence! From Cana to Capernaum; from the throne of

⁶ See Burge, loc cit



heaven to the streets of Olds ... those distances don't matter to him. When he speaks "life," there is life! He is "the eternal Word" of God through whom all things were made...

"He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. In him was life, and the life was the light of men." John 1:2-4

At the heart of this story of a growing faith is the word Jesus spoke into this man's crisis. **What word is Jesus speaking into your crisis? What word is Jesus asking you to trust?** Let me encourage you to establish your faith in God's Word. Get into the Bible and find a word from the Lord that speaks into your situation. Let me start you off with some suggestions. Here are some "words of Jesus" on which you can build a growing faith. Do any of these speak into your situation?

**"My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness."
2 Corinthians 12:9**

"I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?" John 11:25-26

**"Whatever you ask in my name, this I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask anything in my name I will do it." John
14:13-14**

**"Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid."
John 14:27**

"In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world." John 16:33

"Do not fear, only believe." Mark 5:36

- **Invitation to Prayer Ministry**
- **Final Song: Speak, O Lord**
- **Benediction**