

John 4 (Part 3) :43-54 • A crisis of faith

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This is our 3rd installment. I never know what to call it exactly. The 3rd part of our study through John chapter 4, and we're picking it up in verse 43. John 4:43. So follow along in your Bible as I read, it goes like this:

"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, (the servant, or rather) 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.' ⁴³ The father knew that (this) 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.'" (ESV)

Stop there. Let's pray.

Father, we thank You so much for time in the Word this morning. It is our heart's desire to hear from You. We need Your truth in our lives. We need it to permeate our hearts. We are exposed, Lord, on any given day or week to so much falsehood, so much deception that we need to wash our hearts, literally bathe our hearts, Lord, in Your truth. And I pray that we would do that today. So we thank You, Father, for Your Word. Your Word is truth. Be with us as we study and help us, Father, we ask in Jesus precious name, amen. Amen.

As you read here, after spending time in Samaria for a couple of days, Jesus is now back in the area where He had been raised. And He made a mention about going back to that area where the people knew Him. They knew His parents, they knew His brothers and sisters they'd watched Him grow up and that sort of

thing. And He made a mention of the fact that "a prophet is never honored in his own hometown."

I've mentioned a few times that I'm really glad I never got called back to minister in Minnesota, frankly, where people watched me grow up because I'm not sure they would take me seriously. Because as I was, I mean, Jesus grew up sinless. He never gave them any reason to doubt along the way, even when He was young that there was anything about Him that was not honorable and that sort of thing. I gave people lots of - lots of ways to see me as less than honorable in my young years and so forth. So I've always kind of been glad that God called us to plant, a church 1500 miles away from where all that happened.

But you know when you start to read this passage, even though Jesus had made this statement about a prophet not receiving honor in his own hometown, it seems like they're kind of excited to see Him. Because you read there in verse 45 where it says, "*when He came to Galilee, they (the Galileans) welcomed Him*" So, you can assume that means that there was probably a crowd, that gathered around, and they were excited to see Him come back. And you would kind of think that Jesus would think to Himself, "Hey, this is cool that people are excited to have me back."

And all that sort of thing. But He wasn't. And the reason that He wasn't is given to us in the rest of verse 45, and it's the reason that they were gathering and all excited is because we're told here that they'd "*seen all that He had done in Jerusalem.*" In other words, while they were there and Jesus was there in Jerusalem at the Passover, they'd seen some miracles and so forth, and they were excited to see some of those same things happening in their own backyard.

They didn't gather because they wanted to hear the truth. They didn't gather because they believed that Jesus was the Messiah or the "savior of the world," like the Samaritans had declared. You remember that? Without one single miracle, we believe this Man is the "savior of the world," they said. The Jews didn't gather for that reason, they gathered because they wanted to see some fireworks. They wanted to see something exciting take place. And that is why they came.

And lo and behold, it looks like they're going to get their wish because eventually, as we see, and keep reading in verse 46, that we're told that, "*at Capernaum there was an official,*" your Bible may say nobleman, maybe even royal official, "*whose son was desperately ill.*" And were told in verse 47 that, when he "*When this man heard that Jesus had come from Judea up to Galilee, he went to Him and asked Him to come down and heal his son for, he was at the*

point of death." And, we don't really know much about this man who came except the fact that he had a need. He had a very pressing need.

In fact, it was so pressing he was willing to travel the 20 miles or so from Capernaum to Cana to come and get Jesus to come back with him, to Capernaum, to touch his son, that he might be healed. Jesus presented for this man, a ray of hope, in what was otherwise a pretty hopeless situation.

And hope is a very powerful thing. And he began to hope in Christ. And the crowd is probably delighted to hear that this man has this issue because again, they came to see something fun. They were probably even willing to make the trip to Capernaum with Jesus, you know, as a crowd, we'll just all go, and we're all just going to see this wonderful thing. Because that's what they wanted to see, they wanted to see a miracle show.

And you can see, you know that was the attitude of the crowd by what Jesus says in verse 48. In fact, but it says, *"...Jesus said to him,"* So He's speaking to the man who's talking to Him, but He's also talking to the crowd when He says, *"Unless you see signs and wonders, you will not believe."* And the reason we know Jesus was also talking to the crowd, is that the two instances of the word "you," in that verse, in the Greek are plural.

So if this was a Southern Bible, it would say, "Y'all just want to see a miracle, it's all y'all that you want." Right? Aren't you glad it wasn't written like that? Yes, thank you very much. But anyway, Jesus is addressing, the crowd and their attitude and why they've come.

And you might read this and think that Jesus is being a little cruel. Well, and if not cruel, maybe harsh. Because here's this father, and he's desperate. I mean, he wants to see his boy healed, obviously. And Jesus, the first thing Jesus says in response to this man is, "well, you people, you just want to see a miracle, that's all you want." And you might be thinking to yourself, you know what? You could have been a little nicer. Let me just tell you, Jesus has a plan here. He knows exactly what He's doing. He knows exactly what He's saying, and this is a test of faith, and that's what He's doing with this man. Even in the midst of his very challenging circumstances, Jesus is going to test his faith.

Do you know that sometimes God tests our faith? I'm sure you do if you've walked with the Lord for any period of time. And the Bible has a lot to say, particularly in the books of James and Peter. Let me show you on the screen first from James. James writes and says,

James 1:2-3 (ESV)

Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials, of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness.

"Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials, (and that word means tests) of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces (something good, and he calls it) steadfastness." So he tells you to literally, consider it a joyful thing when you go through a trying circumstance.

I rarely do. I'll just be honest with you right now. True confession time. I rarely consider tests and trials as a joyful thing. I might later, when I realize, what the Lord has brought out of it in my life. But during the thing, I'm rarely very happy about it. And then later on in verse 12, it says,

James 1:12 (ESV)

Blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial, for when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life, which God has promised to those who love Him.

There's quite a bit about testing. Peter has something to say as well from 1 Peter chapter 1, it says that:

1 Peter 1:6-7 (ESV)

In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.

Now again, you see another passage that talks about testing and connects it to rejoicing. Because of knowing what is happening in the midst of the testing. Which is the purification of your faith, even though by fire.

Fire is never a fun thing to really think about as it relates to our spiritual lives and the growth that we go through. Because fire is something that always consumes. You know that right? Fire consumes. It has that burning element of fire. But what does it consume? Well, it takes away the dross so that what you're left with is the pure genuineness of your faith. And then finally, from 1 Peter chapter 4 on the screen:

1 Peter 4:12 (ESV)

Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you.

And then the reason I share this passage about testing is because it speaks directly to what I hear so often from Christians, when they're going through a time of testing and a time of difficulty. They are surprised. They're surprised they're having to go there. And they'll even come to me and say, "Pastor Paul, what's this? What's this I'm going through? What's this all about? Why is God letting this happen in my life? What..."

And they're kind of like, "I didn't sign up for this. I don't remember asking for this."

And Peter gives us his wonderful reminder, "Listen, don't be surprised." He doesn't even call it a trial, he calls it a fiery trial. And again, points back to that whole issue of the purification process. You are in the crucible of life many times, aren't you? And what is happening is you are being purified. Your faith is being purified. That's not fun. It stinks. Bad. And I'm not saying stinks "smell wise" it's just, it's just not fun, but God's doing a work.

Listen, what this man is going through, who comes now - his son is near death - this is not fun. And he has come with one thing in mind, and that is to get Jesus, grab Him by the hand and march Him back to Capernaum. To his home where he wants Jesus to lay His hands on his son, and heal him from this fever, and raise him up, and so forth.

But you know - and that would be a miracle, right? And that's what the people came to see; came to see a miracle. Sure hope we don't get disappointed.

But you know even miracles can be a test of faith sometimes. Do you know that miracles aren't a guarantee that somebody's going to respond in faith just because they see a miracle. I'm not opposed to miracles, and I believe God still does miracles, but they're not a guarantee.

I don't know if you remember, Jesus talked a little bit about miracles when He talked about His own resurrection. Let me put this on the screen. It's from Matthew chapter 12, and He began by saying really two very important things. The first thing is He says,

Matthew 12:39-40 (ESV)

But he answered them, "An evil and adulterous generation seeks for a sign, but no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. For just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so the Son of Man will be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth."

"An evil and adulterous generation seeks for a sign, but no sign will be given to it" Why does Jesus call the seeking after a sign an evil sort of thing? Well, because we were never told to seek after signs. We were told to seek after God. Seek the Lord. Now, signs and miracles may come, but that's not why we come, or what we run after. We run after the Lord, right?

But what's the second thing that Jesus says in this? He says, *"no sign is going to be given to this generation except the sign of Jonah."* He calls it *"the sign of the prophet Jonah."* And then He goes on to say, *"For just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so the Son of Man will be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth."*

Now it's interesting, particularly this second statement, Jesus tells us that the sign of Jonah is a connection to His own resurrection. Let me ask you a question, did Jesus do that sign for the people? Did He? That was a miracle, by the way. Did He do it? Yes, He did. Did they believe it? No, they did not. The prevailing attitude of the Jewish people when the tomb was empty was unbelief, okay?

I say all this to just simply underscore the fact that miracles are not a guarantee. If you're praying for someone to come to the Lord or return to the Lord, and you're asking the Lord to do a miracle in their life, I would encourage you also to be praying for their heart - to be able just to see God regardless of whether a miracle takes place. Because it's a heart issue at the end of the day. Because if a heart is hard, a miracle isn't going to make any difference. That person is going to find a way to explain it away.

I mean, think about the Jews who lived for 40 years in the wilderness. How many miracles did they see on a daily basis? You guys aware of the fact that for that entire 40 years while they were in the wilderness, there was a pillar of cloud that guided them by day, and a pillar of fire that guided them by night. Every single morning they woke up and found their cornflakes on the ground. They called it manna. That's a miracle.

You just don't go out and scoop up stuff from the ground and eat it. Well, I hope not. My granddaughter does, but they have to keep taking dirt out of her mouth. She's one of those, she likes to eat it, she's one. She eats dirt. We've got it on video. It's like, "Honey, that's not good," you know.

But they saw it every day. They saw water pouring out of a rock. Imagine all that they saw when Moses went up on the mountain to get the Ten Commandments. The incredible miracles, the trumpet sound that sounded a note

that just kept going. And then they heard the voice of God echoing the Ten Commandments from the top of the mountain. They heard God's voice. You guys aware of that? They heard God speaking the Ten Commandments. It freaked them out so bad, that they told Moses, "Please don't let God talk anymore. You go up and hear from Him. You come back and tell us what He said. If He talks again, we're going to die!"

What was the prevailing attitude after Mount Sinai, unbelief. Moses came down from that mountain and found them in a flesh pot of whatever partying that was going on. Again, the point is pretty clear. Miracles aren't going to do the trick. It is a heart issue that needs to take place. And that's why Jesus said to His people, "you're always just looking for signs and you won't believe anything."

Well, the other thing you got to remember is that Satan can counterfeit signs and wonders. And that's a reminder we all have to keep at the forefront. Jesus talked about the fact that during the great tribulation, those sorts of counterfeit miracles would be on the rise. Let me show you Matthew 24:

Matthew 24:24 (ESV)

For false Christs and false prophets will arise and perform great signs and wonders, so as to lead astray, if possible, even the elect.

And the elect refers to the Jews who will be there during the great tribulation.

So, after Jesus made this statement to this man, and to all the other people about their running after miracles, and seeking after miracles, the father, as we see in verse 49, understandably, repeats his plea to Jesus, saying to Him, "*Sir, come down (please) before my child dies.*" And at this point, he's not an official anymore. He's just a dad. And every parent in this room knows what that's all about. When your child is suffering, you will do anything to alleviate that suffering. Nothing's going to stop him.

But you can see from what he's saying that he wants Jesus to come with him. And I love the response of Jesus in verse 50. And we're just going to look at the first part of verse 50 to begin with. Jesus said to him, "*Go, your son will live.*" Now that's important that we see that. And I want you to think about this for just a minute. Because I want to repeat to you again that this man came to Cana from Capernaum to get Jesus to physically follow him back to his home. And now Jesus is responding to that plea by saying, "No. You go."

Now, He's not saying, I'm not going to heal your son, or your son won't be healed. In fact, He goes on to say, "*your son will live.*" But by doing that, by

sending this man home, without Him, but with just a promise, He is putting this man in a situation where he's going to have to deal with a "crisis of faith." At least that's what I call it. And a "crisis of faith" is when you are forced into a place where there's really very few options that you have remaining. In fact, your only real options are to just simply take God at His Word, and that's hard sometimes, or just give up and go home and that's it.

But God has put you strategically in this place. You don't really like being there necessarily, but that's where you are, and you have those choices ahead of you. I can either believe God and go with it, or I can just leave and walk away disappointed and be bitter and mad at God for the rest of my life. And believe me, sometimes people take the second option.

In fact, that moment of decision is seen in other passages of the Bible. I think about the rich young ruler who was also brought to a moment of decision, a "crisis of faith." "Are you willing to take all that you have, sell it, give the money to the poor and come follow Me?" Well that takes faith and that man turned away; walked away very sad. (Mark 10:27; Matthew 19:21) He came to that moment of decision, came to that "crisis of faith" and he turned away. And some people do, some people turn away. And you know, that's sad.

But this man, this father had a very different response. And the second part of verse 50 says it all. It says, look with me here, the man believed the word that Jesus spoke to him (you might underline that or highlight it in your Bible) *and went on his way.* So he came to that crisis of faith and he decided that I'm not getting everything that I wanted from the standpoint that I wanted Jesus to come. I wanted Him to come with me to Capernaum. He's not giving me that, but He is giving me a promise. And so here's my choice: am I going to take Him at His Word, take that promise and go with it, or am I going to stay here and either keep trying to beg Him to come or just give up altogether, or whatever the thing?

And I have to kind of wonder if it was an easy decision for this father or a hard decision. And I mean, I question that sincerely as a dad. I remember when my kids got sick, never to this degree, obviously, but I remember just being beside myself with distress praying for them. And I wonder if this was hard because he had come with that goal of bringing Jesus back.

And I don't know about you, but I have a hard time changing plans midstream. I don't know if you're like that, but when I get something in my head, I'm going to go there, I'm going to grab Jesus by the hand, and I'm going to bring Him back to Capernaum, that's what I'm going to do. And I've got 20 miles to just kind of

recite all this. And then I get there and there's a different plan. I'm frustrated immediately, and I have to kind of wonder if he was going through any of this.

Here he is, he's on his way back home now. He didn't get what he wanted from the standpoint of Jesus returning, but he's got a promise. That's all he's got. The question is, is that enough? Is that enough?

Because you see this whole thing goes against every fiber of our being as human beings. What I mean by that is that we want to see and then believe. That's what we want. Have you ever heard someone ever say that? "I'll believe it when I see it."

I mean, that was the theme of Thomas, you'll remember. The one disciple who wasn't there on resurrection evening. And when he was told Jesus was raised from the dead, "I'll believe it when I see it." (John 20:25) Well, that's the prevailing thought of human beings. We look at Thomas and we don't look down our nose at him. We go, "Yeah, that's - that's me." That's the human condition. That's the human attitude, "I'll believe it when I see it."

So you see, this goes against every fiber of our humanity, for Jesus to say, "Go. Here, I'm going to give you a promise. You take that and you go back home (that, you know, that whole long 20 miles, back to your town,) and your son will live. That's all I'm going to do, that's all you're going to get from Me. I mean, it's enough, but I know it's not what you came for - the total package," you know.

Hey, this is God's kingdom guys. In the world they want to see to believe, in God's kingdom, you have to believe to see. It's inverted. It's upside down. Maybe you've ever heard of it, of God's kingdom as the "upside down kingdom." It's not in the Bible, but it's called that for a good reason. Most of the principles and so forth of the Bible are contrary to the world in which we live. And so God's kingdom is upside down related to the kingdom of man. You want to see, then believe. First believe.

And the last few verses of this passage bear out the fact that his faith was rewarded. It says in verse 51 that, as he was going down, making his way back to Capernaum, his servants met him and told him that his son was recovering, and so he asked him, he said, "Well, about what time was it when you started to see that recovery?"

He said, "Well, let's see it was around yesterday, about one o'clock in the afternoon." (that would be the seventh hour) And the man started thinking about

it. He said, you know what, that's exactly when Jesus said, "*Go, your son will live.*"

And we're told in verse 53 that not only did the man himself believe, but all his household as well. And so what he did, what we see in this very simple story in the Bible, is that this man acted on the promise. He acted on the promise alone and saw the blessing that came from simply stepping out in faith and taking Jesus at His Word. Let me show you an important passage from Hebrews 11.

Hebrews 11:6 (ESV)

And without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him.

"...without faith, it is impossible to please him, (God) for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists (First of all) and that he (also) rewards those who seek him." By faith, we seek Him, right? Not miracles, we seek Him. He is a rewarder of those who seek Him. He is pleased when we act on His Word. But it really boils down to this, are you willing to simply take the Word alone? Is that enough? Are you willing to step out with just the Word and run with it? And if you do, you're going to see like this man, spiritual breakthroughs, you're going to see miracles and things like that.

And the reason is because God is committed to His Word. He's committed to the promises that He has given throughout His Word. His character demands it. Let me show you a passage related to His character from numbers chapter 23. It says,

Numbers 23:19 (ESV)

God is not a man, that he should lie, or a son of man, that he should change his mind. Has he said, and will he not do it? Or has he spoken, and will he not fulfill it?

And of course those are rhetorical questions, and of course God is going to be true to His Word.

Romans 10:11(ESV)

For the Scripture says, "Everyone who believes in him will not be put to shame."

And then in Romans chapter 10 we're told, that *"...the scripture* reminds us that, *"Everyone who believes in him, (that means puts their faith in Him, trusts) in him will not be put to shame."* And so here's the question that I have for you,

does the Lord have you in a crisis of faith? Has He taken away all of your other options?

Because you know, in those early stages of when we go through trials and difficulties, we will often try to come up with our own solutions, right? I've done that many times. And I'm guessing you do too. And so we'll try those. We'll try our own things, our own ways of solving or resolving the issue or making it better, or whatever the case might be. Whether it's your marriage or your home, or your finances or your health or whatever - whatever you're facing, whatever.

We'll do what we can, and then we'll get to that point where nothing works, and God just literally takes away all the other options and He says, "Okay, here it is, you got Me, or you can give up. You can believe My Word. You can just trust what I say, that I will never leave you, never forsake you, never abandon you."

And there you go. We're at that same place that this father was at that day. Are we going to take Him at His Word, or are we going to give up and just say, "Well, didn't work out the way I thought."

Sometimes we get our plans so stuck in our head that when God changes the plan slightly, we think He's being unfaithful. He's not being unfaithful. He's testing your faith. He's testing to see if you're going to continue to believe even when it doesn't happen exactly according to your plan, and that's the important part.

You know, whenever we talk about faith, I always have to take at least a little time to address the excesses that we've seen in the faith community, or I should say just in the larger body of Christ. Because when Sue and I really first started walking with the Lord, we got connected with the church in Montana that was very faith centric. And what I mean by that is, they had kind of bought into, what I now kind of refer to as the "hyper faith movement," or "the ultra faith movement," or whatever you want to call it, "word faith movement."

Which essentially reduces God to a genie or a vending machine. And what I mean by that is, they'll tell you if you just determine what it is you want, and then you apply the right amount of faith, and God is obligated to give you what you want. Because it is your word. You speak it. You speak that word and it becomes a reality through faith. And essentially reduces God to a vending machine. You put in your coins, hit the button, and out comes your prize. And it's very convenient because if people don't get what they want, they simply say, "Well, you didn't have enough faith."

And so they reduce it to these very simple terms. Completely takes away God's sovereignty, wisdom, and just His Fatherhood over your life. If you've walked with the Lord long enough, you probably know by now that there were things that you've asked Him for that He didn't give you, that you are now glad about. You can look back upon your life and you can say, "Man, am I glad God didn't answer that prayer the way I wanted Him to!"

And it wasn't for a lack of faith. It was because your God knows best. He loves you, He's sovereign, and He can see the end from the beginning, and the beginning from the end. And He knows how things are going to affect you. And so at times, He will respond to your prayer with, no. And it's not because you lacked faith, it's because you lacked wisdom and insight. Which He has and He knows best.

Here's the point, are you going to trust Him to know best even when you get disappointed? That brothers and sisters in Jesus, is where faith really, really takes shape. When I pray for something and it doesn't happen the way I want it to happen, am I still going to trust God? Am I still going to say, "You are the God who oversees, who knows, who loves. You are still good. You are still faithful. You are still loving. And I believe that You will never leave me nor forsake me."

And I'm not going to doubt my salvation. I'm not going to doubt Your goodness. And I'm not going to get angry. I'm going to wait on the Lord. I'm going to wait on You! Not necessarily for what I've asked for, but for just whatever You're going to bring. Because I believe. I believe what Your Word says when it says that all things work together for the good of those that love Him and are called according to His purpose (Romans 8:28). I believe that. And that's enough.

Guys just like this father, many of us are walking down a road with less than what we asked for, but we've got His Word, we've got His promise. And the question is, is that enough? God has brought you to that crisis of faith, what are you going to do?

This is a test of the emergency faith system. This is only a test. Aren't you glad you don't have that tone to deal with for two years? (tone sound) Remember that? Some of you guys are old enough. God tests our faith. He tests our faith from time to time. How will you do? Is His Word enough?

Let's stand together. We'll pray about that. And I want to pray specifically for those of you who are going through a test of faith right now. Some of you are coming out of a test of faith. Some of you're just going into it. Some of you are

in the middle of it. Some of you might be even getting a breather right now. Praise God. You can pray for those who are in the middle of it.

But these tests, they come and they go and they will happen throughout the course of our life. It's just the reality of our lives, of living in a fallen world, living with a sinful nature, living with all the things that we do. There will be tests to our faith. Is God's Word enough?

Father God, I just want to pray this morning for those who are going through a time of testing. And, Lord, I just pray for them and just stand with them, Lord God, in this difficult season.

And I pray, My Father God, that Your Word would be enough. That they would just do a deep dive into the Bible during this season of their life, and they would just fill up on what Your Word has to say. That they would learn more about Your character, Your faithfulness, Your goodness, Your mercy, Your tenderness, Your compassion, Your patience.

And that, Lord, having brought those things close to their heart they would be comforted in their faith to stand, to stand with the promise, holding fast to the promise of Your word, the promise of Your faithfulness, the promise of Your goodness, no matter what.

Lord, I thank You for these reminders today, and I just pray, Lord, for Your Holy Spirit to continue to speak to us and teach us about Your loving kindness that will never fail us as we trust in You. For we ask these things in the name of Jesus our Savior, and all God's people say it together, amen.

God bless you. Have a good rest of your Sunday. Drive safely.