

## **Your Son Will Live**

### **John 4:43-54**

**Call:** Ps 27; John 4:23 (adapted)

**Scripture:** John 1:1-5 (ESV)

#### **I. Introduction**

We enter back into John today. Near the end of his Gospel, John explains the reason why he wrote this masterpiece. He says he has written this so that *“we may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and by believing we may have life in his name”* (John 20:31). John writes his Gospel so that we may believe. Those who have never known Jesus may come to believe in him, and those who do believe may deepen their faith through hearing and reading his Gospel. And the result is life, life abundant now and life eternal, forever. That’s the promise. But, what does it mean to believe? What does genuine belief in Jesus look like? What is the nature of authentic faith? Those are the sorts of questions we will explore in today’s text. Let’s pray as we open up the scriptures. Let’s pray.

Father thank you for the gift of your Word. As we open your Word, we invite your Spirit to move in our hearts and transform us this morning. In Jesus name, Amen.

Many times, people forget about the scene we come to today. If you say John 4, people will immediately think of the woman at the well, because of how captivating that story is. But, most people will forget that there is a short scene at the end of chapter 4. This scene is the healing from a distance of an official’s son. To give some context, this scene will complete the first section of John’s narrative. Specifically, it completes the section “From Cana to Cana,” chapters 2-4. We began by visiting Cana for a wedding in chapter 2, where Jesus performed his first sign, turning water into wine. He then went to Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and, now, back to Cana. Jesus’ first missionary journey completes with this text today.

#### **II. The Setting (43-45)**

*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. (ESV)*

##### **A. To Galilee**

If you remember back at the beginning of chapter 4, in verse 3, John said that Jesus left Judea to go to Galilee. But, on his way, he gets “side-tracked.” Out of divine necessity, he *has* to pass through Samaria to meet up with a woman at a well. At the end of that scene, Jesus remained two more days in Samaria. Now, he gets back to his original destination by going to Galilee.

##### **B. No honor?**

And Jesus testifies that a prophet has no honor in his hometown. Verse 44 is an enigmatic aside by John to set up the scene we will explore today. As Jesus returns to his own stomping grounds, he recognizes that the Galileans, although they welcome him, do not have genuine belief in him. They welcome him *only* because of what he had done at the Passover Feast. What did he do there? Well, in chapter 2, we were told that he cleansed the Temple. But, we weren't told specifically what else he did there, although there was an allusion to him performing signs while there.

### III. The Request (46-47)

*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. (ESV)*

#### A. To Cana

Jesus ends up again in Cana. And, we are introduced to an unnamed official from Capernaum who has a son who is very sick, to the point of death. When this official heard that Jesus was nearby, he immediately leaves Capernaum and his son, and goes to Cana to ask Jesus for help. He would have walked close to 25 miles uphill, gaining approximately 1300 feet in elevation.

#### B. The Official

Who is this official? He is most likely *not* of royal blood, but was a member of the royal house of the king, probably Herod Antipas. Herod is not a king, but is treated as one at this time. We are not told whether this official is a gentile or Jew. But, if he is a gentile, then in these chapters, we've moved from Jesus' mission to Nicodemus, a Jew, to a Samaritan woman, and now to a gentile. Jesus is offering new life to the Jews, to the Samaritans, and now to the gentiles. All people. As the Samaritan townspeople said at the end of the last text, Jesus is the "*Savior of the [entire] world.*" For God so loved the entire world, he sent his son (John 3:16).

#### C. The Meeting

Imagine this picture. Here is a royal official, a very important person, probably surrounded by a large group of servants, decked out in his court robes, and meeting a village carpenter. In a reversal of roles, *he* is the one asking for help from Jesus. Assuming Jesus must physically go to his dying son, he begs Jesus to "come down" to do the healing. He would have had to swallow his pride, and humble himself to make such a request. But, the imminent death of a child will compel any parent to go in search of life.

Notice, this is the first time in the Gospel that Jesus is invited into the crisis of death. Jesus had been invited into a crisis at a wedding, now he is invited into the ultimate crisis: death. And, I think John wants us to understand here at the beginning of his Gospel, that Jesus can help in the midst of crises, even the most serious crisis of death.

The desperate request has been made, now we hear Jesus' response, verse 48.

## IV. The Rebuke (48)

48 So Jesus said to him, *“Unless you see signs and wonders you will not believe.”* (ESV)

### A. The Rebuke is to All

And, we are taken aback. Jesus curiously offers a rebuke. It sounds a bit harsh. I wonder what tone he used? Does he sound exasperated when he says it? Does he sound compassionate? Is the comment more of an invitation than a rebuke? We don't know.

But, regardless of tone, it is important to note that both “you” are plural. In other words, Jesus says this, “Unless you [all, with your southern accent] see signs and wonders, you [all] will not believe.” So, Jesus isn't speaking only to the official. He is making a general statement to the entire group of Galileans gathered around this meeting. He probably gestures with his hand to the whole group of people, maybe to all of Galilee. All-you-all Galileans simply want to see signs and wonders like you all saw at the feast.

### B. The Corresponding Comments Elsewhere

And, we recognize that this is not an unusual statement from Jesus. He alludes to the danger of sign-and-wonder faith elsewhere in the Gospels. For instance, in his Sermon on the Mount, he says that not everyone who says to me *“Lord, Lord”* will enter his kingdom. And, many will even do sensational things like prophesying, casting out demons and performing miracles, yet Jesus says he doesn't even know them (Matt 7:21-23). Sensational signs and wonders do not equate to genuine faith. Also, as we already said, back in chapter 2, John alludes to Jesus performing signs at the feast, and people believed in his name because of the signs, yet John says, Jesus *“was not entrusting himself to anyone because he knew what was inside man”* (John 2:23-24).

### C. Dangers of Seeking Signs

So, what is the problem with seeking signs? Well, I think there are two dangers:

1. A preoccupation with signs shifts the focus from Jesus to the sign itself. Remember, especially in John, signs are demonstrations of Jesus life-giving power, but they point to a greater reality, a deeper truth of who Jesus is. So to focus too much on the signs means I'm not focused on the sign-giver, himself. And, Jesus alone is sufficient for us.
2. If I become dependent on signs, I'll want more and more and more signs. But, when the signs stop, I go away. Another way to say it is a sign-and-wonder faith easily becomes a “sunshine faith” (Bruner, 289). When the going is good, I love Jesus. But, when the going gets tough, I leave Jesus. It's like the second soil in Jesus' parable of the soils. The sower spreads seeds on four kinds of soils. The soil is the human heart, the seed is the Word of God and the sower is God or anyone who participates with God in sowing the Word. The first soil the seed falls on is a hard heart where the seed cannot take root. The second is a shallow heart where the Word barely takes root. The third is a cluttered heart where the Word cannot take root because of everything else there. And, the fourth is a fertile heart, where the seed takes root and grows. A “sunshine faith” is like the second heart which is a rocky heart with shallow soil. When the seed is sown there, believing in Jesus is really great for awhile, but when trouble or persecution hits, the person quickly falls away (Matt 13:20-21). That's a sunshine faith. That's a sign-and-

wonder faith. When the going gets tough, this person leaves Jesus, which is why Jesus rebukes this kind of faith.

So, there is no problem with signs and wonders in and of themselves. They are good. It's simply that seeking signs and wonders themselves do not make for genuine faith. It makes for interest in Jesus, like these Galileans, but it doesn't ultimately ground people in genuine faith.

What will the official do now that he has been rebuked? Verse 49.

## **V. The Request Again (49)**

*49 The official said to him, "Sir, come down before my child dies." (ESV)*

### **A. The Official's Humility**

The official, having been tested, repeats his request. If the official was only there for signs and wonders, he would have probably walked away. But he stays, showing profound humility. To be rebuked, not that it was directed only at him, but to be rebuked in front of all his servants, maybe even a small crowd, by a village carpenter, would have required great courage to stay.

### **B. The Official's Persistence**

But, he stays and persists. He asks again in desperation. "Sir, come heal my son." It's like that Samaritan woman staying through her hard conversation with Jesus. And, it's like the wedding at Cana. Mary tells Jesus that the wine has run out, and Jesus responds seemingly harshly: "Woman, what does this have to do with me?" But Mary shows her belief by telling the servants to do what he says. In other words, trust his words.

## **VI. The Word (50)**

*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.*

### **A. Your Son Will Live**

Jesus now pronounces his word: "Go, your son will live." Obviously moved by mercy and compassion, Jesus pronounces a word of command and a word of promise. Go, your son lives and will live.

The word for life here is *zoe*, the life of God, suggesting that when Jesus speaks his Word, this son is given not only more physical life, but also, spiritual life. Which means that even if the Father goes back down to Capernaum and his son has physically died, he still has eternal life. As Jesus says, "*Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live*" (John 11:25). This official is requesting Jesus restore his son's physical health so he can live more physical life, but Jesus gives him more than he asks for. He gives him the life that his son will never lose when his son physically dies at 22 or 42 or 62 or 82. He had been given eternal life.

## **B. The Official Believes**

The official, for his part, believes the Word and obeys the Word. Jesus' powerful word engenders faith and obedience. Not knowing whether anything happened, not seeing any result, the official believes and obeys. He believes the Word and goes. This is genuine belief. This man lives out the definition of faith from Hebrews 11: *"Faith is the assurance in what we hope for, the conviction of things not seen"* (Hebrews 11:1). Over against the signs and wonders faith of his fellow Galileans, this man moves into genuine faith. In doing so, this man followed in the path of the Samaritans. The Samaritans came to faith without any sign. They say to the woman, *"we believe the Word that you spoke... [but ultimately] because of the Word [He spoke]"* (4:39, 41). And, this story illustrates that truth. Hearing the promises of Jesus and placing your trust in His Word is true faith.

And, unlike that second soil, there is a perseverance aspect to genuine faith. This man persevered through a test. Jesus had tested him with a rebuke, but the man persisted. So, this might also be called rainy weather faith over against sunshine faith. Rainy weather faith is the faith that perseveres when the going gets tough. And, the truth is that the going will get tough. Our faith will be tested. In the journey of faith, there are "times of streams of living water, but there are also times of desert" (Ringma, 222). Life is challenging. There is simply no utopia. And, faith is tested in the storms of life.

We are in especially challenging times right now, aren't we? Plus I know many of you are going through difficult personal storms right now. Rainy weather faith hangs on through the storms of life. Rainy weather faith keeps holding on, keeps hanging on, keeps hoping, keeps asking. This is to be like the official who demonstrates genuine faith. He keeps asking, hearing, then trusts and obeys.

## **VII. The Report (51-54)**

*51 As he was going down, his servants met him and told him that his son was recovering [lit. living]. 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. (ESV)*

### **A. The Father**

As the official heads down to Capernaum, he discovers from his servants that his son is living, and he began recovering when Jesus spoke the Word. Out of mercy and compassion, Jesus simply spoke the Word and it happened. John had told us back in the prologue that *"in Jesus was life, and this life was the light of all humanity"* (John 1:4). Jesus demonstrates it right here, in giving life to the son of this desperate father.

### **B. The Word**

Jesus heals from a distance with just a word.

Words have power. Think about it in our own lives. Words shape reality. A pastor saying, “I now pronounce you husband and wife.” Those are powerful words that shape the future. A judge saying, “not guilty” are powerful words that shape the future. Even the written word carries great power. As we all know, the written word on things like social media can destroy a person so easily.

If our words carry this much power, think about the Word. His words transform the world. They simply accomplish what he says.

“Be clean,” Jesus says to a leper and the leper is cleansed.

“Be still” and the sea calms.

“Be gone” and the demons fly out.

“Lazarus come forth” and a dead man walks out of a grave.

Of course, his words have transforming power because this is the creator God talking. *[1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.](#)* (John 1:1). This is why we can throw our weight on his Word, his promises, his exhortations. This is the Creator of the world talking. His words not only inform, they transform reality. They don’t just shape reality, they transform reality. They transform our lives.

“I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst” (John 6:35).

“I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me” (John 14:6).

“In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world” (John 16:33).

We can trust the Word and His words. We can throw our entire lives upon the Word and his Words. At PBCC, we are devoted to the Word and His Words. His Word not only informs, it transforms. His words work! When he speaks, things happen!

### **C. The Household Believes**

At the end of this scene, we see this father do the same thing as the Samaritan woman. He can’t keep it in. Could you? He shares his story with his entire household, and they all believe. Another aspect to genuine faith is that it’s contagious! Genuine faith bears fruit!

## **VIII. Reflections**

### **A. The “Already, Not Yet”**

So, what do we do? What does it mean for us today to go to Jesus in genuine faith with our needs, like this father? And, it might be helpful to first explain the context that we are living in, in this period of history. We live in a great tension inherent in Jesus’ Words, because we are living in the in-between time. We live in the “already, not yet” time of history, which means we live in this great tension. Jesus has come with his healing Words to restore this broken world and to restore our broken lives. His restoration is “already” present in some form here and

now. But, it is “not yet” in the final form it will be in at the culmination of history. Jesus has “already” come which means some of his healing is “already” here. But, it is “not yet” completely here, which means, we are still looking forward to that great time when he will come again and heal everything and wipe every tear from our eyes. What a glorious day that will be! But, until then, we live in this great tension of the in-between time, the “already, not yet” time.

## **B. Our Requests**

So, given this great tension and our current place in history, what does it mean for us today to go to Jesus in genuine faith with our needs? I have five takeaways for us this morning:

1. **Run to Jesus.** Just run to him. Even if it is only a sign that you saw, go to him. This father is extraordinary, isn't he? Don't you just love him? He runs a marathon up hill to get to Jesus. So, we run to Jesus in our need.
2. **Ask boldly and expectantly.** Most people want to calculate their requests to God. They want to ask in a right way to please God. Don't worry about that. Just ask what you want. “I want my son to live.” And keep asking boldly, persistently, expectantly. Keep asking, seeking and knocking. In other words, pray with abandonment!
3. **Recognize he may not respond the way you want.** And, recognize you may go about your day-to-day life without him responding the way you want or expect.
4. **Trust and obey what he says.** You do whatever he says, even if it doesn't make sense.  
“Jesus, come down and heal my son.”  
“Go home.”  
“What? But, Jesus, you didn't hear me.”  
“No, I heard you. Go home your son lives.”

You trust his words which issues in obedience, trust that issues in simple obedience. As Bonhoeffer says, “Only the believing obey, only the obedient believe” (Bonhoeffer, 34). Obedience is the only appropriate response to Jesus' Words. Obviously, for us today, it goes without saying that we need to be soaking in Scripture to know his Words.

5. **You leave to him the right to do what he decides to do.** In humility, like this father, you recognize that he is God and you are not. You leave him the right to do what he decides to do. And, if he doesn't act the way you want, recognize it is not because of a supposed lack of faith. The Gospel writers carefully insist that faith itself is not the cause of miracles. God is the cause of miracles. As David Crump says, “Every possibility for the miraculous is grounded solely in the character of God as the merciful Creator” (Crump, 45). So, we ask in the humility of faith as this father did, then trust God's wisdom and goodness to do what he will do.

I know this is difficult stuff. As I said, there is great tension here. And, so, I think it'd be good to close with some reflection time. As I've been talking, maybe you've been thinking about your needs or some needs of your family or friends. So, let's take a short moment to raise some of these needs to the Lord. Here is the kind of prayer that might help us:

*Lord Jesus,  
You are the Savior of the World and restorer of brokenness,  
We do not pretend to tell you how to run your world,  
But, because you are the Savior and great restorer,  
You invite us to run to you with all of our needs,  
Will you please come down and heal and restore and make right in [this situation]. (Adapted from Johnson, 22).*

## **IX. Conclusion**

Hopefully that prayer will help you as you move through these challenging times. Let me now close with this. In this text, Jesus' words that the son "lives" are repeated three times. This repetition helps focus our attention on Jesus and his life-giving Words. But, also, the official, by the end of the story, is called "father." Could it be that John wants us to hear an echo of another Father and another Son? I think so. Because at the end of this story, Jesus, the Son of the heavenly Father, goes through death and comes out the other side and "lives" today. Yes, Jesus can help with the ultimate crisis of death because he actually conquered it! The Son of the heavenly Father is alive today! May you genuinely *"believe in this one, the Living Son of God, and by believing have life in his name"* (John 20:31). Amen.

## **X. Benediction**

Now receive this benediction:

As you go, blessed are you who believe without seeing,  
May you continue to run to Jesus in your needs,

And may He bless you and keep you.

May He make His face to shine upon you and be gracious to you.

May He lift up His countenance to you and give you a peace that passes all understanding. Amen. Have a great week!



## **Resources**

Bonhoeffer, Dietrich, *The Cost of Discipleship*

Bruner, Dale, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary*

Crump, David, *Knocking on Heaven's Door*

Johnson, Darrell, *Preaching the Gospel According to John* (Regent College Course)

Johnson, Darrell, *Jesus the Healer*

Klink, Edward, *John (Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the NT)*

Ringma, Charles, *Hear the Ancient Wisdom (Devotional)*