

## Trusting the Words of the Word

<sup>43</sup> Now after the two days He departed from there and went to Galilee. <sup>44</sup> For Jesus Himself testified that a prophet has no honor in his own country. <sup>45</sup> So when He came to Galilee, the Galileans received Him, having seen all the things He did in Jerusalem at the feast; for they also had gone to the feast. <sup>46</sup> So Jesus came again to Cana of Galilee where He had made the water wine. And there was a certain nobleman whose son was sick at Capernaum. <sup>47</sup> When he heard that Jesus had come out of Judea into Galilee, he went to Him and implored Him to come down and heal his son, for he was at the point of death. <sup>48</sup> Then Jesus said to him, "Unless you *people* see signs and wonders, you will by no means believe." <sup>49</sup> The nobleman said to Him, "Sir, come down before my child dies!" <sup>50</sup> Jesus said to him, "Go your way; your son lives." So the man believed the word that Jesus spoke to him, and he went his way. <sup>51</sup> And as he was now going down, his servants met him and told *him*, saying, "Your son lives!" <sup>52</sup> Then he inquired of them the hour when he got better. And they said to him, "Yesterday at the seventh hour the fever left him." <sup>53</sup> So the father knew that *it* was at the same hour in which Jesus said to him, "Your son lives." And he himself believed, and his whole household. <sup>54</sup> This again *is* the second sign Jesus did when He had come out of Judea into Galilee. (John 4:43–54)

During World War I a very unusual situation occurred. A British captain named Robert Campbell was captured by Germany and became a prisoner of war. His mother became gravely ill while in captivity. He begged to be set free to visit her. In fact, he promised Kaiser Wilhelm II, the German emperor that if he were released to see his mother, he would then return to be imprisoned. Amazingly, the Germans released him, and even more amazingly, he kept his promise. He returned and voluntarily went back to a German prison. That was an age, when a man's word was his bond; when to violate a promise was to lose your very self. Your words were an extension of you, and to promise and then break it was to almost break your own identity. You could trust a promise because of the one making it.

That principle is absolutely essential to the spiritual life. It is indispensable to understanding how the Christian life works. In fact, it is vital to understanding how becoming a Christian works.

We see that very clearly in this passage in John 4, which is all about trusting the words of Jesus. This is a passage that makes it crystal clear whether following Jesus is based on what you can see, or on what you hear. It's vital that we see in this passage not only the power of Jesus' words, but how we are supposed to respond to those words.

As this unfolds, let's watch as the scene unfold for us in three parts, man doing some urgent sign seeking, a Saviour speaking, and then the dramatic result.

### I. The Sign Seeking

<sup>43</sup> Now after the two days He departed from there and went to Galilee. <sup>44</sup> For Jesus Himself testified that a prophet has no honor in his own country. <sup>45</sup> So when He came to Galilee, the Galileans received Him, having seen all the things He did in Jerusalem at the feast; for they also had gone to the feast. <sup>46</sup> So Jesus came again to Cana of Galilee where He had made the water wine.

We pick up the story where we left off, with Jesus staying in the Samaritan town of Sychar for two full days. Having preached and ministered there, it was time to continue the journey north to Galilee, the province that included towns like Nazareth, where Jesus was born, Cana, where He turned water into wine, Bethsaida, where Peter and Andrew were from, and Capernaum, where Peter now lived. Galilee was where Jesus did most of his ministry for 2 ½ years of His total ministry.

So why does John include this statement in verse 44: "For Jesus Himself testified that a prophet has no honor in his own country"? I think this is best understood as relating to Samaria, where he has just been, and where he is leaving. In Samaria, he was received without doing a single miracle, as

best we can tell. There, in the despised, apostate Samaritans, many believed. But now Jesus must return to his home country, where He will not be received the same way. Indeed, it is where people are sign-seekers, not Saviour-seekers.

Once Jesus is back in Galilee, He experiences some hospitality. But John quickly tells you why they showed Him hospitality. Thousands of Galileans were down in Jerusalem for the Passover feast, and they saw the miracles He did in Jerusalem. They are also back home, and they know Jesus is actually one of them, a Galilean. They are eager for Him to do in Galilee what He did down there. They extend offers of hospitality, which would have included lodging, food, places to stay and preach and teach.

He comes again to Cana, the site of the wedding where He changed water into wine.

And there was a certain nobleman whose son was sick at Capernaum. <sup>47</sup> When he heard that Jesus had come out of Judea into Galilee, he went to Him and implored Him to come down and heal his son, for he was at the point of death.

While he is there, an important man from Capernaum has a problem. Capernaum, was about 29 kilometres to the east of Cana, was an important trading city. In fact, Capernaum sat on something known as the Via Maris, an international highway that linked Africa, Asia and Europe. If you wanted to be in a city where plenty of international visitors might come across you, Capernaum was the place. Jesus eventually makes it his headquarters while in Galilee.

So, as you would expect, there were wealthy and powerful people living there. One of them was an official. The word for *nobleman* is related to the word for ruler or king, it means “royal one” so he was probably an official connected to Herod Antipas. Luke 8 mentions the name of Herod's steward as Chuza, and says his wife Joanna gave financially to Jesus' ministry, but we don't know if there is a connection. This man lived in Capernaum.

His son was at the point of death, we read, and the man, who no doubt had money enough to hire physicians and doctors, had run out of options. He now realises there is only one person now who can help him. So he gets in his chariot, and with his retinue, goes to Cana to find Jesus. When he finds him, he begs Jesus to get into his chariot and come back with him to Capernaum, and there do something, anything, one of those miraculous things that He did down in Jerusalem. He assumes that Jesus must be there for this miracle to take place.

## II. The Saviour Speaking

Now Jesus responds in a way that seems strange to our ears, “Unless you *people* see signs and wonders, you will by no means believe.”

What does He mean? Is He rebuking the royal official? Is He rebuking the people of Galilee? The people of Israel? Probably all of them. The point is, too many people's faith is attached to the visual, to experiences, to signs. Jesus is not commending people for this. He is saying it is a flaw, a failing, a deficiency that people seem to only believe after seeing something. Rather like when Thomas would only believe if he had seen Jesus with the scars and wounds of crucifixion. And when he finally did, Jesus said, “<sup>29</sup>Jesus said to him, “Thomas, because you have seen Me, you have believed. Blessed *are* those who have not seen and *yet* have believed.” (John 20:29) It's something we have already seen in this Gospel: people are sign-seekers, not Saviour-seekers.

But in the midst of this rebuke, the man is consumed with his son's sickness. Every moment that

goes by, his son is closer to death, every moment they don't get on that chariot and ride at a furious pace, he risks having his son slip away just before Jesus could get to him.

So he begs, "Sir, come down before my child dies!"

Yes, yes, whatever you say about faith is true, but please come down and lay hands on my son and make him live. The word he uses for my child is a word we would use for affection, "my little one", in Afrikaans "my kleintjie", it's a word of tenderness, of love, of affection.

But now Jesus imposes a stiff test on the man.

Jesus said to him, "Go your way; your son lives.

Now, for this sign-seeking generation, Jesus says to the man, I'm not coming down. Get back on your chariot, ride back to Capernaum, your son is healed.

Well, what should he do with that? It's a few-hour journey back to Capernaum. Maybe he should just insist. "No, please, Jesus, just make sure, and come and lay hands on him." Maybe he should insist on better medical attention. "Jesus, you haven't even seen my boy, you don't know what's wrong with him. Don't you think you should at least come and take a look at him?"

Maybe he should come up with something manipulative. "It will be far more glorious for your reputation if you come and do something spectacular in Capernaum. There are people waiting for you to come back with me. If he just gets better, then you won't get the credit or the fame."

On another occasion it was a Gentile centurion actually making this suggestion. He said to Jesus, "No, you don't need to physically come to my house, and I'm not worthy for you to come in. Just say the word, make the command, and with your authority, my servant will be healed." And you might remember that Jesus said He had not seen that kind of faith in all of Israel.

That was true, because here the man wanted Jesus to come down, but here Jesus now subjects him to the kind of faith which the Roman centurion displayed on his own.

Well, the man chose faith.

So the man believed the word that Jesus spoke to him, and he went his way.

There was great risk in what he did. What if Jesus wasn't able to heal at a distance? What if Jesus didn't get it right every time? What if Jesus needed to touch people to heal them and was just being unwilling in this case? But in the end, he made the right conclusion: the kind of man who can heal anyone by just touching them, can heal anyone by just speaking. The kind of man who can do the supernatural is likely not hindered by the problem of distance.

Jesus had now given Him a promise: "Your son lives." All he now has is a statement, a promise a word from the mouth of Jesus, that he is either going to go on or not.

Throughout the Bible, God wants people to believe Him based upon His Word, not based upon what they have seen. God gives people promises verbally, and desires loyalty and obedience and trust based upon that verbal promise. He has the power to do magnificent overwhelmingly impressive signs, but instead He speaks. Often He speaks through rather unimpressive-looking human vessels. Moses, who was not a good speaker. Samuel, was was not impressive enough to be king. Elisha, whom children mocked for having a bald head. Finally Jesus, whom Isaiah says did

not have a remarkable appearance. He simply speaks words through them. He is the God of the Word, verbal communication. Throughout Scripture God expresses His determination to be known as the God who keeps His words. He wants to be known as the God who means what He says, says only what He means, and wants to be trusted solely on the basis of His nature as the truthful, faithful, God.

Why? Because, trusting what someone says, is trusting their character, trusting their person, their integrity. If you believe me simply because I promise you something, you have given me one of the greatest compliments possible. You have said, David's character is trustworthy. He said he would do it, and based on how he keeps His word, I believe he will. If you make a backup plan, if you ask someone besides me to also do what I said I would do, and if you do part of it yourself, then you didn't really trust my word.

Trusting in what you can see or have seen is very different to trusting in the Word. Trusting what you have seen, is merely attaching yourself to something impressive. "I've seen some things that impressed me, and based on that, I am banking on more of the same". You're convinced by externals, not by internals. Your trust is in your estimate of someone's power, not your confidence in their character.

Imagine marriage ceremonies were sealed based on signs, and not on word. Imagine the ceremony said, "Groom, does your bride appear to you to be the woman you will take as your lawfully wedded wife, someone who will be faithful to you, till death do you part?" "And bride, does your groom seem to you to be a husband faithful to you till death? Then, based upon your observations of one another, I do now pronounce you man and wife."

We don't seal covenant based on signs. We seal them based on word, promise, vow. And word, promise, vow is based on the truthful nature of the one making the vow.

Why should God not wow us with the purely visual? Why should He not write His name in the sky, send volcanic signs to verify what He has done? Because the louder the sign, the less people are listening to what you are saying, and even less to who is saying it. Because the more visually overwhelming the sign, the more people forget who made the sign and why. Do people look up at exploding fireworks and say, "Oooh, I wonder who made these? Aaah, what company in China made that one? Wow, I wonder how many people they employ and if they're happy?"

Signs and wonder *can* point you to their source, but they can also simply fixate you on the sign. A visual demonstration of power *can* show you who God is, but only if it leads you to His words. For it is in God's words that God's character resides.

For that reason, Paul tells us the origin of faith: <sup>17</sup> So then faith *comes* by hearing, and hearing by the word of God. (Romans 10:17)

Faith does not come by seeing, for what is seen is no longer faith. Faith is the evidence of things not seen. Faith is trust, and trust is in a Person, and a Person's character and promises.

This man chose to trust in Christ's words.

### **III. The Son's Healing**

And as he was now going down, his servants met him and told *him*, saying, "Your son lives!"

He meets his servants that saw the son's recovery, and wanted to alert their master that the emergency was over. So they had got into chariots and headed over to Cana. He meets them on the

way. They tell him words which are a word-for-word repetition of what Jesus had said, “Your son lives.”

But he has now been on the road for a while since Jesus spoke those words. He was not there to see what the servants saw: the almost sudden and miraculous recovery of the boy: his colour, his strength, his vitality returning almost instantaneously, as if he'd been merely sleeping. He likely knows, but wants to know more: when did this happen?

<sup>52</sup> Then he inquired of them the hour when he got better. And they said to him, “Yesterday at the seventh hour the fever left him.”

The seventh hour, by Jewish reckoning would have been 1pm. After resting his animals, he may have returned and only reached these messengers after sunset, which by Jewish reckoning is already a new day. They tell him that it was at 1pm in the afternoon.

<sup>53</sup> So the father knew that *it was* at the same hour in which Jesus said to him, “Your son lives.” And he himself believed, and his whole household.

Now he knows that there was an exact correspondence between the moment Jesus said that his son was well, and the moment when the servants saw it. He knows that when Jesus spoke the word, the deed was done. And at that moment, the man trusted His word for something in the present, something he would only see in the future. But now, as he hears this, he must trust in Jesus' word in the past. He must trust that it was Jesus' word.

After all, he could have explained it some other way. “It is just a lucky coincidence. He was going to get better anyway. Actually, he was already mending when I was on my way to Jesus. There's no way to prove that what Jesus said and my son's healing happened at exactly the same time.”

He could have chosen unbelief on the front end, when Jesus told him his son was healed. He could have chosen unbelief on the back end, when he found out that his son was healed. But he chose to do that thing which God desires from every human heart: to trust in God's character, by trusting in His words. Trust in the kind of God He is by regarding God's promises as being as reliable as He is.

But now his initial trust in what Jesus had said became a deeper trust in the full Person of Jesus Christ.

And he himself believed, and his whole household.

Now he witnesses to his whole household, which meant his wife and children, and his servants and employees and extended relatives. He now speaks to them about the One who could heal with His Word if you just believed His Word. He speaks of the trustworthiness of Messiah, of His love, of His goodness.

<sup>54</sup> This again *is* the second sign Jesus did when He had come out of Judea into Galilee.

This doesn't mean the second miracle ever. It means the second sign in Galilee, and likely the second of the seven that John is gathering as proof that Jesus is the Christ.

Now there is a way that this incident is played out in your life and mine every day. We might not have dying relatives needing urgent care. But all of us face pain, trials, problems, difficulties, sickness, poverty, danger. We face the limits and evils of a fallen world. Into these problems we are called to trust someone or something. Many trust in their money, in their ingenuity, in their

experience, in their family, in their government. But Scripture keeps telling us to trust in the living God. Why and how we should trust Him is given in His words to us, His promises, His statements about Himself, His stated plans, His commitments He makes to His people.

And to that call to trust we may do two things. We may say, “But what sign do You give me that I should trust in Your words? What will You show me that will warrant me taking You at Your word? What thing will You put before my eyes that I might see You are powerful and real and able so that I might be able to trust Your words?”

Or we may say, “You have said it, I trust it, for Your saying it always settles it.”

That is the case when God says “I will forgive your sins, if you turn from them and trust in My provision of My Son Jesus Christ.” That is the case when God says, “I will turn every evil in your life to good, to make you like My Son, if you love Me and are one of Mine.”

Are God's words enough when He says, “If you seek first My kingdom, all these things of food and clothing will be added to you.”? Are they enough when He says, “Nothing in present or future, nor creature, no angel can separate you from My love.” Are God's words enough when He says, “I will deliver you, provide for you, protect you, make sense of your life, reward you in eternity.” Are His words good enough for you because of who He is?

A. W. Tozer: “True faith rests upon the character of God and asks no further proof than the moral perfections of the One who cannot lie.”