

## **FAITH THAT MAKES A DIFFERENCE** **(John 4:46-54)**

On the first day of class, an elementary school teacher explained all the classroom policies and procedures to her students. She said, “Now, if you need to go to the bathroom, I want you to raise your hand.” One little boy spoke up. With a quizzical look upon his face, he asked, “How’s that gonna help?”

Have you ever heard a preacher say something and you thought to yourself, “How’s that gonna help?” Just maybe, someone you know had that thought when you did your best to encourage them. When people are undergoing difficult, trying stressful times, we say to them, “Have faith in God; place your trust in Jesus; just believe!” Upon hearing that kind of advice, many people wonder to themselves, “How’s that gonna help?”

What I want to impress upon you this morning is that faith—**true** faith, **genuine** faith, **authentic** faith—really does make a difference.

- When we **look with the eyes of faith**, we can see the presence of God in our life and catch a glimpse of His protective angels who are encamped about us.
- When we **listen with the ears of faith**, we can discern our Father’s voice and discover His will for our lives.
- When we **reach out with the hand of faith**, we grab hold of the precious promises of God and catch the life preserver of His assurances that keep us afloat during the storm.
- When we **walk with the feet of faith**, we follow Him obediently, and He keeps us from falling.
- When we **trust with the heart of faith**, He blesses us with His peace, and He replaces our fear with a strong dose of courage.

May God help us to **look** with the **eyes** of faith, to **listen** with the **ears** of faith, to **reach out** with the **hand** of faith, to **walk** with the **feet** of faith, and to **trust** with the **heart** of faith. Why? Because faith really does make a difference.

Several weeks ago, I began a series of messages from the gospel of John. We are drawing one sermon from each of the chapters in that gospel.

John’s gospel is very much unlike the three that precede it. For instance, consider how John deals with the miracles of Jesus. The NT just records 35 specific miracles that Jesus did. Matthew reports 20 of them, Mark 18, Luke 20, and John only 7. John, however, when referring to a specific miracle, he never calls them *miracles*. He refers to them as signs. Today, we come to the second sign that John chose to include in his account of the life and ministry of Christ. We find it in the closing verses of John 4.

Think for a moment. Why does John refer to Christ’s miracles as signs? What is the purpose of a sign? The purpose of a sign is to convey a message. The seven miracles that John included in the book that bears his name proclaim the message that Jesus is exactly who He claimed to be. Jesus is the powerful, authentic Son of God. Jesus performed those miracles not for the purpose of entertaining the multitudes but to demonstrate who

He is. Every miracle Jesus did, He did for one of two reasons: to meet human need or to bring glory to God. In the process, however, a third benefit resulted: others were helped to place their faith in Jesus as Savior and Lord.

This morning, we are going to examine a miracle in which all three occurred: **human need was met; God was glorified, and someone was helped to trust Christ.** The faith of this unnamed man made a difference both in his life and in the life of his family. As we look at this story, I want you to know that faith will make a difference in your life and in the life of your family and in the life of our church.

Look with me at John 4:46-54 . . . While this was the second sign in John's gospel, it was not the second miracle Jesus performed. Notice John 2:23 and 3:2.

Jesus returns to the area of Cana, the location of His first miracle, and while He is there, He does another miracle, another sign. Someone wrote that the first miracle involved the joy of a wedding and the second the sorrow of a family. In the first miracle, Jesus made it possible for the joy of the occasion to continue, but in the second miracle He makes it possible for the sadness of the family to be removed. The first miracle was done because of the obedience of the servants, and the second miracle is performed because of the faith of the father.

Like the man in our story, you and I need a faith that makes a difference. Do we have such a faith? When can it be said that you and I have a faith that makes a difference? What does such a faith look like? The passage we just read answers those very questions.

### **Faith That Makes a Difference Seeks Jesus for Our Needs**

Why should we seek Jesus for our needs? The answer is quite simple—because Jesus **is** our need; He is our greatest need. Do you know that you and I need Jesus? Jesus doesn't need you and me, but we desperately need Jesus. Sadly, many do not recognize their need for Jesus.

I heard about a little girl who said to her mom, "If the stork brings babies, and if Santa Claus brings presents, and if the Lord gives us our daily bread, then why do we keep Daddy around?"

Some wonder why we keep the idea of God around. They argue, "**If** the universe began with a big bang, and **if** all of life is just a matter of evolution, and **if** science can answer the mysteries of life, **why** do we need to hang on to a belief in God?"

Let me say, if those "if" statements were true, the question might be valid. What many fail to see, however, is that to have had a big bang, there had to have been **a Big Banger.** To have life, there had to have been **a Life Giver.** To have mysteries that need solving, there had to be **a Mystery Writer.**

Regardless of what you believe about how God created the universe and life on this planet, the Bible is crystal clear in affirming that God did it. He is the Creator, and He created all life, including your life and mine, with a purpose in mind.

Man has an in-born need to have purpose in life, and for us to know the real purpose for why we are here, we need to know the Lord. Why should you and I seek the Lord when we are in need? He just happens to be our ultimate need.

The man in our story had another need that drove him to seek Jesus. Look again at vv. 47 & 49. This man heard about the miracles that Jesus had done, and when he heard that Jesus was near, he went in search of Jesus.

- **In matters of life and death**, there is no one more eminently qualified to meet needs related to life-giving than Jesus who is the resurrection and the life.
- **In matters of sickness and health**, there is no one more qualified to help than Jesus who is the Great Physician.
- **In matters of receiving care and guidance**, there is no one more qualified for your case than Jesus who is the Great Shepherd.
- **In matters of sin and lostness**, there is no one more qualified to provide what is needed than Jesus who came to seek and to save the lost.

I don't know what your particular need is, but I do know Jesus can meet your need because ultimately, Jesus is your need. Let your need cause you to seek Jesus. When trials arise, go to Jesus because He will do two things. He will: 1) give **grace for the trial**, and 2) bring **good from the trial**.

The businessman J.C. Penney was once asked, "What's the secret to your success in business and in life?" He replied, "Here's the answer in four words: 'Adversity and Jesus Christ.'"

We need both. We need adversity to make us pliable and moldable, and we need Jesus Christ to shape us, fill us, and empower us.

Do you have a faith that makes a difference? If your faith is not making a difference, you have something other than true, biblical faith. It may be respect. It may be admiration or appreciation. It may be warm thoughts. Let's look at the faith that makes a difference.

### **Faith That Makes a Difference Takes Jesus at His Word**

The man in our story took Jesus at His word. That is exactly what we are told in v. 50. Jesus told the father that his child would live, and the man believed Jesus. He didn't demand proof. He didn't ask for a sign to convince Him that it was so. He simply believed. He took Jesus at His word.

There are several things we need to do to develop and demonstrate belief in Jesus. **First, we need to hear Jesus' word.** The hearing of Jesus' word is necessary to the development of faith. It is God's word that creates faith within our hearts. Paul declared, "Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of God." If you want to grow your faith, dig deeper into the word of God. People of faith are people of the word.

Why do you come to church? Most come to hear something. Some come to church to hear the latest gossip. Some come to hear what the preacher has to say. Some come to hear the music they like. I hope you come to hear what God has to say. We can hear what He has to say as we attend to His word.

That is where Sunday School comes in . . . That is where your own personal reading of Scripture comes in . . .

There is something else we need to do to develop and demonstrate faith. **Second, we need to obey Jesus' word.** That is what the man in our story did. Look again at v. 50. Jesus said, "Go," and so, the man went. If your faith doesn't lead you to be obedient to the Lord, then you don't have true faith. Faith does not consist of coming to church and taking sermon notes as the preacher preaches. Faith is a matter of obeying the word that is preached.

How big is your Bible? If your Bible was condensed to the amount of the Bible you have read in the last two years, how big would your Bible be? If your Bible was only as big as the parts of the Bible that you have obeyed in the last 20 years, how big would your Bible be.

So, first, we hear Jesus' word. Second, we obey Jesus' word. Then **third**, the final thing we need to do to develop and display our faith is, **we need to rest in faith.** It seems that this man did not rush home when Jesus announced his son would live. The journey from Cana to Capernaum was not a terribly long one. It could easily be made in half a day. The father did not leave Jerusalem to go home until the next day. There was no reason to rush home. His mission had been accomplished. Jesus assured him his son would live, and he rested in the certainty of what Jesus promised. On the way home, he was met with the news that his son was well.

We read in Isaiah 28:16, "Whoever believes will not be in haste." Psalm 37:7 teaches, "Rest in the LORD, and wait patiently for Him."

We need to learn to take the Lord at His word. As we do, we will hear His word, obey His word, and rest in His word.

Back before the days of email and instant messaging, I heard about a college freshman who penned a letter to his parents. He wrote, "Dear Mom and Dad, I haven't heard from you in nearly a month. Please send a check so I will know you are all right."

Personally, I like the letter that one Mom wrote to her son who was off at college. Her letter read:

Dear Son:

Just a few lines to let you know that I am still alive. I'm writing this letter slowly because I know that you cannot read very fast.

You won't know the house when you come home . . . we've moved.

About your father . . . he has a lovely new job. He has 500 men under him. He is cutting the grass at the cemetery.

There was a washing machine in the new house when we moved in, but it isn't working too good. Last week I put fourteen shirts into it, pulled the chain, and I haven't seen the shirts since.

Your sister Mary had a baby this morning. I haven't found out whether it is a boy or girl, so I don't know whether you are an aunt or uncle.

Your Uncle Dick drowned last week in a vat of whiskey at the local brewery. Some of his work mates dived in to save him, but he fought them off bravely. We cremated his body, and it took three days to put out the fire.

Monday it was so windy that one of the chickens laid the same egg four times.

We had a letter yesterday from the undertaker. He said if the last installment isn't paid on your grandmother within seven days, "up she comes."

Your Loving Mother

P.S. I was going to send you \$50.00 but I had already sealed the envelope.

One of the things for which I am extremely grateful is that I didn't have to work to support myself in college. My father paid the bills, and that enabled me to concentrate on studying and getting an education. Each month I would let him know what my expenses were, and he would deposit that sum in my bank account. He said he would take care of the expenses, and he had my checking account number; so, whenever I turned in my expenses, I trusted that he would do as he said he would. I never asked to see a copy of the deposit slip. I never called the bank to see if my dad had really deposited the money or not. He told me he would, and I believed him.

How much more can you trust your heavenly Father to take care of your needs?! He promised He would, and you can take Him at His word.

Faith really does make a difference in our lives. We know it is making a difference when **we seek Jesus for our need**, when **we take Jesus at His word**, and . . .

### **Faith That Makes a Difference Trusts Jesus from the Heart**

Look at v. 53. In v. 50, the man believed Jesus would heal his son while in v. 53 he believed Jesus would save his soul. In v. 50, the man believed in a miracle while in v. 53 he believed in the Messiah. The miracle Jesus performed was a sign; it pointed beyond the miracle to the miracle worker. It is good to believe in miracles; it is better to believe in the miracle worker who is Jesus.

As I said earlier, Jesus never performed a miracle to fascinate and wow the crowds. Jesus did not say, "I have come to work miracles." He did say, "I have come to seek and to save the lost." You see, it is possible to believe in miracles and even be the recipient of a miracle and yet not really believe in Jesus.

Look back at John 2:23-25. Many of the people who observed Jesus perform miracles had head-belief, but they didn't have heart-belief.

Despite what many think, **seeing is not believing**. Far from it. The reverse is true: **Believing is seeing**. If you will believe in Jesus, you will see Him do mighty things in and through your life and also in your family. As we exhibit our faith in Christ, He is going to do great things in and through our church.

I think it is instructive that this man's whole family believed in Jesus. After 40 years of church ministry, I have found this to be true: If the children get active in following the Lord, the parents might get active. If the mother gets active, the possibility for the rest of the family getting active is increased. But if the father gets active in church, almost always, the entire family will follow. Men, your family is going to follow your lead. Make sure you lead them in the right direction. Young men, make sure you stay in church. When you have a family, your wife and children will follow your lead.

Faith really does make a difference. It will make a difference in your life, and it will

make a difference in the life of your family.

One day, Adrian Rogers, the late pastor of the Bellevue Baptist Church in Memphis, Tennessee was visiting a lady in the hospital. As he prayed for her, he heard a lady across the hall cry out, “Come see me, too.” He continued visiting with the lady he came to see, and then again, the lady across the hall called out, “Come see me, too.” Dr. Rogers walked over to meet her. She was an elderly lady, obviously in great pain. It was apparent that she didn’t have much time left.

When she saw Dr. Rogers, she said, “I’m not ready to meet God. Mister, can you help me?”

Dr. Rogers answered confidently, “Yes, Ma’am, I can.” He told her the good news about Jesus’ death on the cross to pay the penalty of sin. He then promised her, “If you will trust Him, He’ll save you.”

She asked, “Will you help me?” Dr. Rogers led her in the sinner’s prayer. She repeated each phrase repenting of her sin and asking Christ into her heart.

When the prayer was over, Dr. Rogers opened his eyes expecting to see the peace of God on the lady’s face. But there was still no peace. The lady said, “I don’t see how just saying that can do any good.”

He replied, “You’re right. Just saying the words won’t do any good at all. It is believing in Christ that saves you. Let’s pray again—and this time, really put your faith in Jesus.”

They bowed their heads again. This time the woman prayed, “Lord, I really trust you.” When Dr. Rogers opened his eyes this time, he saw the peace of God surrounding that lady’s countenance. Her face was shining.

Salvation is not a matter of walking down an aisle; it is not a matter of praying a prayer; it is not a matter of joining a church or getting dunked in a baptistery. It is a matter of trusting Jesus from the heart.

Have you done that? If you have, you know the difference that faith makes. If there has been no difference in your life, then you haven’t truly trusted Christ. Place your faith in Jesus, today and every day, and let him make all the difference in your life. And when He makes a difference, He will use us to make a difference wherever He sends us and however He chooses to use us.