

COME DOWN BEFORE MY CHILD DIES

(Faith Steps Leading Us To Saving Faith For Ourselves And Our Household)

John 4:46-54 – on Jesus' Second Sign -- Pastor Richard P. Carlson

All four of the Gospels, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John are about Jesus encounters and what, how, and why He did what He did. Ecuadorian missionary, John Howell, Jr. put it this way. “It is encouraging and enlightening to examine the lives of men and women in the life of Jesus and observe His method of dealing with them...and to see in His work, it is always too big for us to accomplish in our own strength. Our response to the prompting of Jesus will always reveal our true relationship with Him. We will either trust and obey Him by stepping out by faith and joining Him, or we will halt, and not go any further in obedience to His leading. How tragic it is when we choose to do nothing. What is your response to God? Do we argue with Him? Do we drag our feet? Do we make excuses and use diversion tactics? When God shows us what He wants to do, it will be something only God can do. We will not be able to stand back and take the credit for it. We can only bow with humble hearts and give praise to Him and say, I saw God do it!”

This past week, I have had the joy of praying with a number of people to receive Jesus, even with Dan Zorn, as we made our pastor-elder calls. Carl F.H. Henry, the first editor of Christianity Today magazine, once said, “The Gospel is only Good News if it gets there in time.” How true that is! There is always the issue of timing, and time, when we are testifying, teaching, and preaching the Gospel. There is something in our text today that is so pitiful and poignant about this official telling Jesus, “Sir, come down before my child dies.” Some people think faith is only a head matter. William Temple, an English theologian (1881-1944) once said, “Faith is not only the assent of our minds to doctrinal propositions: it is the commitment of our whole selves into the hands of a faithful Creator and merciful Redeemer.”

Lots of times people criticize the way we witness and tell us how we ought to evangelize. More often than not, those people who criticize our witnessing techniques are not evangelizing or witnessing themselves. D.L. Moody said, “I like my way of doing evangelism better than your way of not doing evangelism.” William Carey is well known for saying “Expect great things from God. Attempt great things for God.” Is that biblical? Yes, it is! Ephesians 3:20-21 gives us the foundation for William Carey’s words: “Now to Him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us (the same power that raised Christ from the dead — Eph 1:19), to Him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen.

Today, in our text at the end of John 4, we encounter the GPS location of Jesus, after He traveled from Jerusalem after cleansing the temple there. Jesus traveled with His disciples to northeast Judea where His disciples were baptizing. Then headed for Galilee, Jesus went through Samaria, where He stopped and disclosed His Messiahship to the woman at the well and then to all the people of Sychar. Now in John 4:46, we read, “So, Jesus came again to Cana of Galilee, where He had made the water wine.”

Nearby to Cana, in the city of Capernaum by the Sea of Galilee, we read in John 4:47-48 that there was an official whose son was ill, and this royal officer heard that Jesus had made it from Judea to Galilee. This man walked the 16+ miles over hilly terrain to find Jesus. The Greek word used for official is **basilikos**, which can mean a king, a petty officer, or a royal official. This man was an official in Galilee under Herod Antipas, the son of Herod the Great. For such a high ranking official in the court of Herod Antipas to come walking to Jesus is no small happening. This man had a dying son. As we follow his journey, from Capernaum to Cana and back home, 32+miles, this official made faith steps that all of us need to make if we are to become overcomers in our daily lives. What are these six faith steps?

FAITH BEGINS WITH REALIZING OUR DEEP, PERSONAL NEED (I.) Notice John 4:46b. We read, “And at Capernaum, there was an official whose son was ill.” It is strange to think about, but true. Had this sickness not happened in this royal officer’s son, we might never see him in Heaven someday. Faith began for this official with his realization of his son’s dire need. Paul helps us in Romans 8:28 telling us, “And we know that for those who love God, all things work together for good, for those who are called according to His purpose.” God mightily uses sickness, in millions of peoples’ lives, to cause them to cry out in faith to Him. We should neither blame God for our sickness, nor should we ignore that everything that happens to any of us, God has either permitted or okayed. God is sovereign. God used this deathly sickness of this son to reach his dad for Jesus and then all of that royal family. I am amazed how often God is blamed and maligned for the sickness not only of unbelievers, but of born-again believers. John Wesley was walking with a deeply troubled man one day who told him that he doubted the goodness of God. John Wesley, led by the Holy Spirit seized the moment. Seeing a cow looking over a stone wall, he asked the man, “Why is that cow looking over that stone wall?” The man had no answer. John Wesley said, “I’ll tell you why. It’s because that cow can’t see through the stone wall. And that’s what you need to do with your stone wall of trouble. Quit looking at it. In faith, lift your eyes up to Jesus and look over the wall.” Many believers and unbelievers never look up to God in faith until we they hit a wall and they see no way through. Secondly,

FAITH CONTINUES WHEN WE GO TO JESUS AND ASK FOR HELP (II.)

Notice John 4:47. “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.” Faith that asks for help is not unique, saving faith, unless we turn to Jesus. For this official, he saw Jesus as his and his son’s only hope and help. When we know it’s up to God alone, and we turn to Jesus for a miracle, that’s the moment our beginning faith moves forward. This official seeing death for his son as imminent, had to do something quickly. As a royal officer, he had many servants at his command who could have gone to Jesus, but no one would beat his pace as this official walked, ran, cried, and came to Jesus. This official probably was among many miracle-seeking Jews in Cana, where Jesus had turned water into wine. His need was urgent. We miss it in English, but the Greek shows this father persisted in his request for Jesus to come down and heal his son; for he was at the point of death" This official began to beg Jesus and kept it up. The Greek verb for

ask is in the Greek imperfect tense, which mean he kept on begging Jesus to come to his home and heal his son. This officer was accustomed to giving and receiving commands. He was accustomed to being in charge of government affairs and having things done for him. This official was begging Jesus to help and to go with him back to Capernaum to heal his son. What I want us to see is that when sickness is involved, we all learn the ground is level at the foot of the cross, at the feet of Jesus. There's no demanding, commanding, or twisting of Jesus' arm to help us. This royal official was no different from blind Bartimaeus outside Jericho's walls crying out, "Jesus, thou Son of David, have mercy on me." Thirdly,

FAITH PROVED TRUE REFUSING TO GIVE UP WHEN CHALLENGED (III.)

Notice John 4:48. "So, Jesus said to him, "Unless you see signs and wonders, you will not believe." Whatever Jesus saw in this man's faith, whether it was deficient or whether Jesus knew his faith needed tested, Jesus tested his faith. In John 2:23, Jesus saw many of the signs and wonders seeking crowd of Jews, and though they believed, Jesus did not entrust Himself to them, because He knew all people and He needed no one to bear witness to Him about man, for He knew what was in man. Jesus knew many people stopped with signs and wonders, without trusting Him as Savior, Lord, Christ, Messiah. Jesus certainly had a deep concern for this dying boy's physical health, but Jesus saw deeper. Jesus wanted to do more than heal the boy from impending death. He wanted to forgive this official's sins and to heal him and save him from sin. So, Jesus seeing this man amongst what was always, a crowd of signs and wonders seeking crowd, He said some testy and difficult words to this royal official—words hard to hear. These words were a lament of Jesus, in many ways, a lament at the spiritual condition of multitudes that sought Him. Jesus' words offered this official a place among the sign-seeking Jews. Whether this official was a Jew or a Gentile, Jesus said, "Unless you see signs and wonders, you will not believe."

This test and lament of Jesus was His reflection of the attitude of the Jewish people toward Him, as people who had to see and seek evidence/signs before they would believe Him. Jesus saw many of them as insincere and shallow in real faith. They wanted to see "signs" or miracles that pointed to God's glory before they would believe. The Greek scholar, A. T. Robertson once said, "Jesus' words pictured "the stubborn refusal of people to believe in Him without miracles." Most of them were saying, in essence, "Give us miraculous signs and then we will believe." That's not how Jesus works. Jesus calls us to come and follow Him, and then He gives the evidence of who He is to us, over and over throughout our lives. Jesus is not after our reaction to one of His signs. He commands us to take Him at His word and obey Him. Most of the people in the crowds were lacking in any real faith or deep commitment to Christ. They were only looking for sensationalism, like Herod, wanting to see a sign. What was Jesus calling for in this test? He was seeking a faith to believe in Him and His Word without a visible sign. Was Jesus refusing to heal this dying boy? No! But Jesus was calling for a real, persistent faith. If this man would have been offended, if he had turned away irritably, too proud to accept Jesus' rebuke, that test would have been failed by this official. Jesus always finds a way to make sure we are in dead earnest, for only then will God reward our faith

with help and healing. James 5:16b, tells us, “The effectual, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much, as it is working.” This man was facing a crisis situation and he wasn’t after what the crowd longed to see. His son was at the point of death. His situation was out of his control. He did not have any available resources to resolve the crisis. All human help had been exhausted. His son "was at the point of death." This official passed the test. He did not become defensive with Jesus. His faith was growing, in spite of the test. If this official had been unwilling to listen to Jesus’ rebuke, and then given up in despair, it would have been clear his faith was not real. A man must be in earnest and by faith turn to Jesus for help before that help comes.

I am reminded of Jesus having a similar test with another person, clearly a Gentile woman, a Syro-Phoenician woman. We read in Matthew 15:21-28, “And Jesus went away from there and withdrew to the district of Tyre and Sidon. And behold, a Canaanite woman from that region came out and was crying, “Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David; my daughter is severely oppressed by a demon.” But He did not answer her a word. And his disciples came and begged him, saying, “Send her away, for she is crying out after us.” He answered, “I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.” But she came and knelt before him, saying, “Lord, help me.” And He answered, “It is not right to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs.” She said, “Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table.” Then Jesus answered her, “O woman, great is your faith! Be it done for you as you desire.” And her daughter was healed instantly.” Real, true faith is a tested faith. Fourthly,

FAITH REACHED OUT REQUESTING DIVINE MERCY AS THE ONLY HOPE

(IV.) Notice John 4:49, “The official said to Him, “Sir, come down before my child dies.” This official now pled with Jesus with all that was in him, in faith, His words were touching ,and they touched Jesus’ heart, “Sir, come down before my child dies.” This official knew all he had left was to plead for mercy to Jesus. There was no appeal to Jesus about the strength of his faith. This official knew his only hope was appealing for mercy. Did the official ignore Jesus’ tender rebuke? No, I believe Jesus’ rebuke hit the bullseye. This official’s heart was all wrapped up in the condition of his little boy. But this official now was not telling Jesus what or how to do anything. The chips were down, and all he could do was to throw himself totally on the mercy of God. Soon this official was about to find out as the psalmist David cried out in the wilderness of Judea in Psalm 63:3-4, “Because Your steadfast love is better than life, my lips will praise you. So, I will bless you as long as I live; in Your Name I will lift up my hands.” Fifthly,

FAITH RESTED IN JESUS’ WORD AS ALL THE ASSURANCE NEEDED

(V.) Notice John 4: 50-53a. “Jesus said to him, “Go, your son will live.” The man believed the word that Jesus spoke to him and went on his way. 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.” What better proof that this official heard Jesus’

rebuke and took it to heart, than for him to know and acknowledge the miracle had happened without any outward sign. It may seem to you so little to go on—just the word of Jesus, but I see a man at the seventh hour in Cana—about 1 PM, by Jewish time reckoning, but 7 PM by Roman reckoning. This official's faith had found a resting place. He apparently decided to spend the evening in Cana, and then get up early to make the 16-mile journey the next day, unless the official knew a small spot where a few people lived in route. It was too far to walk back to Capernaum that day, and walking at night was dangerous. There are only hills between the two cities. If you are desperate about a dying son, resting now seems unnatural.

This man's faith had found a resting place in Jesus and His Word. True faith holds on to the Word of God, like a drowning man, clutches to a life-preserver. This official accepted the truth of Jesus' word that his son would live, without seeing a miracle. It was no longer a matter of miles—of 16 long miles for Jesus to come, but a matter of faith in Jesus' word. That's all it takes when we have faith, "Go, your son will live." That's enough without one syllable more. Impending death has changed to happy, thankful, joyful life. Remember what Jesus said to Thomas, "Blessed are those that have not seen and yet have believed." Notice the official left the next day, and as his reward for faith, somewhere along the journey, his servants met him and told him his son was recovering. Notice John 4:52, as he asked them when his son's high fever broke, and they said, "Yesterday, at the seventh hour, the fever left him." This official knew that was the same hour Jesus said, "Your son will live." What a faith journey! This father had delayed leaving for home until sunup. Distance and time were no longer a question. Sixthly,

FAITH RESPONDED IN PERSONAL COMMITMENT WITH HIS FAMILY

(VI.) Notice John 4:53b-54. "And he himself believed, and all his household. This was now the second sign that Jesus did when He had come from Judea to Galilee." We read the official believed, and so did all his household. Why? First of all, because he took Jesus, God the Son, at His Word. But then there is the sign Jesus gave this official as he was part-way home to Capernaum. How did the man know Jesus had healed his son, and that it wasn't just coincidental or a fluke? The timing was perfect. Jesus' timing always is perfect. The boy did not begin to mend; he was healed immediately—the fever broke. The father was curious about the time when it happened. "So he inquired of them the hour when he began to get better." The response of his slaves, "Yesterday at 7 PM (Roman time, 1 PM Jewish) the fever left him." It left him immediately when Jesus said to the man, "Your son lives!" Jesus healed the boy! It was no accident, or chance occurrence. His timing is always perfect. Perhaps the father thought the healing would be gradual when he asked what time he "began to improve or when did he begin to get better." However, the servants reported a complete, instant recovery from a distance.

This official not only believed in Jesus, but when the daddy in the family believes, so often the wife and children follow. Glory! This official surrendered to Jesus. We'll see him in heaven. O Lord, give us such a faith that begins with our desperate need, that God supplies. May our joyful faith turn to overwhelming love that our family sees and believes with us. God give us such a faith today. Amen.