

“The Progress of Faith”  
John 4:46-54  
(Preached at Trinity, July 25, 2018)

I'm supplying these notes for the benefit of busy pastors who may be engaged in bi-vocational work, feeling the pressure of preparing to preach twice on the Lord's Day while trying to balance full-time secular work as well as caring for their families. While the notes of another man are no substitute for personal study, I pray that these may aid in the process of preparing to preach.

**Disclaimer:** These are the actual notes I bring with me to the pulpit, which I follow loosely. They are not designed for publication. While I try to make every effort to give proper credit to my sources from the pulpit, adequate citations will sometimes be absent from my notes. If anyone feels their intellectual material has been used without adequate citation, please contact me and I'll make immediate correction giving credit.

1. In **Verses 1-3** we read of the tension between Jesus and the Pharisees. This is the tension that would ultimately lead to His arrest and crucifixion—but it was not yet time. The Pharisees were hearing about the popularity of Jesus so to prevent premature division Jesus determined to leave.  
**John 4:3 NAU** - "He left Judea and went away again into Galilee."
2. **Verses 4-43** provide a parenthesis. John records that Jesus purposed to go through Samaria. We can't miss His sovereign prerogative here. He had an eternal appointment with a certain sinful Samaritan woman. God opened her heart and she became convinced that Jesus was the Christ. She then returns to her city and others came to hear this one she was proclaiming. Many of the Samaritans believed.  
**John 4:39-42 NAU** - "From that city many of the Samaritans believed in Him because of the word of the woman who testified, "He told me all the things that I *have done.*" <sup>40</sup> So when the Samaritans came to Jesus, they were asking Him to stay with them; and He stayed there two days. <sup>41</sup> Many more believed because of His word; <sup>42</sup> and they were saying to the woman, "It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves and know that this One is indeed the Savior of the world."
3. As the Samaritans came to Christ they begged Him to remain with them. He agreed to remain for two days.  
**John 4:40 NAU** - "So when the Samaritans came to Jesus, they were asking Him to stay with them; and He stayed there two days."
4. **Verse 43** continues where **Verse 3** left off. As we continue with the remainder of **Chapter 4** we find the beginning of our Lord's Galilean Ministry which lasted about 16 months.  
Matthew and Mark devote much space to covering the Galilean Ministry but John is interested only in recording those events that display the deity of Christ.  
Jesus returns to Cana of Galilee where He had previously attended the wedding and performed His first miracle of changing the water into wine.
5. John records that upon entering Cana of Galilee He was approached by a royal official from Capernaum whose son was sick and at the point of death.
  - A. We are not told the nature of the illness, except in **Verse 52** we are told it involved a fever. We often take for granted the advances in modern medicine. At this time in history there were no hospitals, limited surgical options, and few medicines.
  - B. He came to Jesus begging Him to come and save his child. He was a man of wealth (he had servants) and influence. We should note, however, that his rank and position could not exempt him from tragedy. Sorrow does not play favorites. No one can bribe death. It reminds us of how every man is in need of Christ.

6. The man was desperate. He would do anything to restore his son. He makes the four-hour trip from Capernaum to Cana and began to plead with Jesus to come and heal his son. We read that Jesus has pity upon the man and heals his son – “Go; your son lives.”
7. We find in this brief passage some of the various stages of faith. It is a subject worthy of our examination. Not all faith is genuine, saving faith. But even genuine faith can be weak faith.  
This man advances from a vague, superficial faith, to being fully persuaded about the person of Christ. Simply speaking, he trusted Christ.
8. Even while Jesus was present with His disciples, they often demonstrated weak faith.  
**Matthew 8:23-26 NAU** - "When He got into the boat, His disciples followed Him. <sup>24</sup> And behold, there arose a great storm on the sea, so that the boat was being covered with the waves; but Jesus Himself was asleep. <sup>25</sup> And they came to *Him* and woke Him, saying, "Save *us*, Lord; we are perishing!" <sup>26</sup> He said to them, "Why are you afraid, you men of little faith?" Then He got up and rebuked the winds and the sea, and it became perfectly calm."
9. In this short passage the official came to rest in grace of God – God knows, He cares, He is able. Jesus not only healed the son’s life, He healed the father’s soul and ultimately, all who were in his household.

I. At first the man had a weak, superficial faith

A. The ruler was impressed over the miracles of Jesus

1. Perhaps he was at Jerusalem during the Passover  
**John 2:23-24 NAU** - "Now when He was in Jerusalem at the Passover, during the feast, many believed in His name, observing His signs which He was doing. <sup>24</sup> But Jesus, on His part, was not entrusting Himself to them, for He knew all men,"
2. This would be consistent with our Lord’s words to him  
**John 4:48 NAU** - "So Jesus said to him, "Unless you *people* see signs and wonders, you *simply* will not believe."
3. To his credit, he looked to Christ. He had wealth and authority, yet he brought his need to Christ. But people try many things when they are desperate.

I had a good friend in high school dying from a brain tumor. His mother took him to Katheryn Kuhlman a faith healer in the 1960’s. Joni Erikson Tada also went to her.

B. His faith was faulty on at least three fronts:

1. First, he presumed Jesus had to be present in order to heal his son—in contrast to the faith of the centurion:  
**Luke 7:7 NAU** - "I did not even consider myself worthy to come to You, but *just* say the word, and my servant will be healed."
2. Second, he presumed that Jesus’ power did not extend beyond death.  
**John 4:49 NAU** - "The royal official said to Him, "Sir, come down before my child dies."

We can contrast this with the faith of Martha after Lazarus died:

**John 11:20-22 NAU** - "Martha therefore, when she heard that Jesus was coming, went to meet Him, but Mary stayed at the house. <sup>21</sup> Martha then said to Jesus, "Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died. <sup>22</sup> "Even now I know that whatever You ask of God, God will give You."

3. Third, he was among those whose faith was dependent upon what could be seen and heard. Genuine faith is quite different.

**Hebrews 11:1 NAU** - "Now faith is the assurance of *things* hoped for, the conviction of things not seen."

Jesus issues a strong rebuke.

**John 4:48 NAU** - "Unless you *people* see signs and wonders, you *simply* will not believe."

C. His faith was weak, but it would not be turned away

1. Jesus rebukes him, but he continues to seek Christ

**John 4:48-49 NAU** - "So Jesus said to him, "Unless you *people* see signs and wonders, you *simply* will not believe." <sup>49</sup> The royal official said to Him, "Sir, come down before my child dies."

2. He responds with - "Sir, come down before my child dies."

The word for "Sir" is κύριε which is the vocative form of κύριος. He is a nobleman and yet refers to Christ as "Lord."

3. Genuine faith is a persevering faith

**Hebrews 11:6 NAU** - "And without faith it is impossible to please *Him*, for he who comes to God must believe that He is and *that* He is a rewarder of those who seek Him."

4. There were some whom Jesus rebuked who became infuriated and turned away. Others, however, continued to pursue Christ.

**Matthew 15:22-28 NAU** - "And a Canaanite woman from that region came out and *began* to cry out, saying, "Have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David; my daughter is cruelly demon-possessed." <sup>23</sup> But He did not answer her a word. And His disciples came and implored Him, saying, "Send her away, because she keeps shouting at us." <sup>24</sup> But He answered and said, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." <sup>25</sup> But she came and *began* to bow down before Him, saying, "Lord, help me!" <sup>26</sup> And He answered and said, "It is not good to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs." <sup>27</sup> But she said, "Yes, Lord; but even the dogs feed on the crumbs which fall from their masters' table." <sup>28</sup> Then Jesus said to her, "O woman, your faith is great; it shall be done for you as you wish." And her daughter was healed at once."

II. This man's faith rested upon the Word of Jesus

A. At first, he only had a vague hope in Christ. He was willing to try anything for the sake of his son. But his faith began to rest upon the Word of Christ

**John 4:50 NAU** - "The man believed the word that Jesus spoke to him" –

1. His faith matured from relying upon the seen to trusting in the unseen.
2. Genuine faith rests upon the Word of Christ

**Romans 10:17 NAU** - "So faith *comes* from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ."

3. This is the same thing we saw in **Verses 41-42**

**John 4:41-42 NAU** - "Many more believed because of His word; <sup>42</sup> and they were saying to the woman, "It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves and know that this One is indeed the Savior of the world."

B. This is the essence of our faith

1. Saving faith is not just a vague belief of what God has done for others. Saving faith is confidence in what God has said He will do for you.
2. The man came believing that Christ had to personally come to Capernaum. He left with just the Word of Christ, but that was sufficient. He didn't argue, "No, but you must come"! He simply took Christ at His Word.
3. Saving faith is confidence in God's Word  
Saving faith is confidence that God's promises cannot and will not fail.
4. Faith is not credulity. Credulity is the willingness to believe something without any evidence whatsoever. This isn't Christianity at all!  
What is our source of evidence?  
It is the Word of God.  
What does the Word of God tell us about God, about man, about sin, about the Gospel? What does the Word of God tell us about the promises of God?

III. His faith was increased by his experience of grace

A. The more we walk with Christ the greater confidence we have in Him

1. We call this the experience of faith.

John Calvin – "Experience and practice increase our knowledge, which we will not have from simply reading the Word of God. For example, when God tells us that he wants to be our Father, we receive it and do not doubt that he will make us feel the reality. However, we have only the mere doctrine, and we must add faith to what God proposes. Therefore, whenever God has spoken to us, we ought to be persuaded and resolved that his Word is infallible truth. Nevertheless, we may not have experienced how he wants to help us, how he cares for us and is our Father, in order to keep us safe. We may not have felt it. Well, if he sends us afflictions and then, after we have called on him, he shows his mercy towards us, and the outcome proves that our resting on his promises was not in vain, this is how God confirms our knowledge in actual experience."<sup>1</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Calvin, John, *Sermons on 2 Samuel*, (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1992) page 201.

2. The disciples three-year journey with Christ was a continual lesson in faith. They progressed from “O ye of little faith” to men of mighty faith that turned the world upside down. All but one would lay down his life for the sake of the Gospel.
  3. After hearing the word of Christ this official turned and went back the 20 miles to Capernaum with nothing more than the Word of Christ that the child would live.
    - a. The text tells us twice that the man believed – **Verses 50, 53**
    - b. In **V. 50** he believed that what Jesus said was true. But he had not yet experienced it.
  4. Upon seeing the reality of Christ’s words his faith was confirmed.
    - a. John wrote in **Chapter 20**  
**John 20:30-31 NAU** - "Therefore many other signs Jesus also performed in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; <sup>31</sup> but these have been written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name."
    - b. This resulted in his witness to others what he had experienced. This resulted in the salvation of his entire household.
  5. This was consistent with the woman at the well  
**John 4:28-29 NAU** - "So the woman left her waterpot, and went into the city and said to the men, <sup>29</sup> "Come, see a man who told me all the things that I *have* done; this is not the Christ, is it?"
- B. As we continue in the Christian life our faith is increased more and more
1. Matthew Henry: “It is good to furnish ourselves with all the corroborating proofs and evidences that may be, to strengthen our faith in the word of Christ, that it may grow up to *a full assurance*. The diligent comparison of the works of Christ with his word will be of great use to us for the confirming of our faith.” <sup>2</sup>
  2. As we experience Christ’s presence, His tender mercies and precious comforts, His works of grace, our faith is strengthened.
  3. We see His work in the lives of others and profit from their testimony.
  4. And we press on. Our perseverance is powerful evidence of His grace in us.

#### Conclusion:

1. Saving faith does not have to be a mighty faith, just a faith that trusts in the word of Christ.
2. But as we walk the Christian journey, our faith is increased more and more in full assurance of the mighty power of God. John would later write:  
**1 John 5:13 NAU** - "These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know that you have eternal life."

---

<sup>2</sup> Matthew Henry, *Matthew Henry’s Commentary on the Whole Bible: Complete and Unabridged in One Volume*, (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1994), 1941.