



## INTRO:

As you know, we are in a series through the Gospel of John entitled, ***“That You Believe”*** BECAUSE, quite simply, that’s John’s stated hope in having written his gospel. As he says in ***chapter 20 v.31***: *“these (things) - meaning the book - are written so that you may believe Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing have life in his name.”* The two big themes there being eternal life and faith. And if you’ve been with us the last couple of weeks, you know that ***John 4*** - the end of which we’re picking up today - has really dialed in the first of those themes - the theme of faith. With Jesus’ encounter with the woman at the well really being a picture of how faith is BORN in us, while His conversation with His disciples ABOUT that interaction showed us that faith, once born in you, necessarily then sends you out on mission!... TODAY what you’re gonna see, quite simply, how faith GROWS. How REAL, saving, sanctifying Christian faith - the kind of faith that can allow you to live a happy life no matter the brokenness around you - how that faith is **Made**...SO if you’re here this morning and maybe you feel you have no faith, but want it, OR have some faith, but ya feel weak IN IT, or EVEN have a lot of faith, but ya still sense it’s not enough...I believe God has a lot of encouragement in-store for you today...

## TEXT:<sup>1</sup>

SO start with me in **v.46** which says, *“So he - that’s Jesus - came again to Cana in Galilee, where he’d made the water wine.”* So we’re getting a bit of an encore tour here. Jesus going back to the scene of His first miracle. *“And AT Capernaum, it says, there was an official whose son was ill.”* Now, I want you to think about the last couple of chapters SINCE Jesus did that first miracle in Cana. ***What have we seen with respect to those with whom Jesus’s interacted?*** Well, beginning at the wedding, we saw Him do a miracle that really only the catering crew got to experience ***right?*** THEN we saw Jesus head from Cana to Jerusalem and overturn some money-changing tables in the temple; after which, He met with Nicodemus, who you recall, was about as high society as you could get for the time. And then immediately after THAT, He met the Samaritan woman at the well, who in CONTRAST to Nicodemus was a social and moral outcast. Such that FINALLY/HERE, we see Jesus interacting with an *“official.”* Literally, a “basilikos” - a royal official...***So, what’s the pattern?*** Meeting with high-class AND low-class people; educated AND un-educated; those considered elite, but also those who were marginalized. Men AND women... ***What’s the pattern?*** The pattern is: There’s no pattern! Jesus doesn’t care who you are, where you come from, what you look like, what you’ve accomplished...or haven’t; He only cares that you see your need for Him! Cuz honestly, the only people in Scripture you EVER see Jesus NOT giving time to are those who have some kind of ax to grind. Ya know, who aren’t looking to learn from/certainly not depend on Jesus, but rather are looking to trap Him, and basically assert their INdependence FROM Him! Everyone else, Jesus willingly receives.

And so He’s come back to Galilee, and we’re told that this official *“heard”* Jesus was back, and so, *“he went to him and asked him to come down and heal his son, for he was at the point of*

<sup>1</sup> Works Consulted:

- “When Your Faith Is Frail” - 8/9/22 - <https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/larkcast/id1339351918?i=1000575504125>

- “The Making of Faith - Gospel of John, Part 1” - Feb. 10, 1991 - John 4:39–54 - The Timothy Keller Sermon Archive (New York City: Redeemer Presbyterian Church, 2013).

- “The Healing: Seeing Jesus - Jan. 19, 2014 - John 4:46–54 - The Timothy Keller Sermon Archive, 2014–2015 (New York: Redeemer Presbyterian Church, 2014).

*death.*” Now, catch the scene here: John tells us that Jesus has returned to Galilee, at which point this official, whose son is terminally ill, HEARS Jesus is back. ***But let me ask you: Where is he when he hears? Where are he and his son when he gets the news that Jesus is back in Galilee?*** They’re in Capernaum ***right? You see that?***...Capernaum was about 25 miles from Galilee. So when **v.47** says there that this official “*heard Jesus had come to Galilee, (and) WENT to him,*” what we’re to assume is that he literally LEFT his dying son, who coulda passed away at any moment, and WALKED 25 miles to get to Jesus! ***Why?*** Because he’s desperate. He knows this is his last chance, but he’s heard reports about the miracles Jesus can do, presumably from the servants at that wedding in Cana, who it seems haven’t been able to shut their mouths SINCE. And so he goes to Jesus and basically says, “*Jesus I walked 25 miles and I’m begging you to walk 25 back with me and heal my boy!*”

“*So, it says, Jesus said to him, ‘Unless you see signs and wonders you won’t believe.’*” Now admittedly, that sounds a bit harsh ***right? But have you ever noticed how often in Scripture, when people ask Jesus for something, He gives a response that seems almost inappropriate?*** Ya know, like how He responded to his mom at the wedding, “*Woman, it’s not my time.*” Or to Nicodemus, “*Are you the teacher of Israel and yet you don’t understand these things?*” Or even to a degree, with the woman at the well when He exposed her shame in having been married and divorced 5x. ***You ever noticed this?***...Tim Keller says, “*Sometimes, people come to Jesus with perfectly natural requests, and He kind of puts em off. (But the answer to) ‘why’ He does that, is ALWAYS love.*” Cuz what Jesus is doing here is making an observation about, not just this official, but ALL of us - since when He says, “*Unless YOU see signs and wonders YOU won’t believe,*” the word “*you*” there is plural - literally, “*you people,*” “*you all,*” “*youz guys*” if Jesus was from Philly! He’s saying, you and I/humanity has a hard time trusting in Him, that it almost takes getting punched in the face with a sign or a miracle for us to finally take Jesus at His word. ***And can’t you relate?*** “*Jesus, I know you’ve said that sex is to be reserved for marriage between one man and one woman, but could you maybe just give me a sign as to whether or not I should sleep with this guy or that girl. Cuz I really like em.*” Or “*Jesus, I know as a Christ-follower it wouldn’t be good for me to date/certainly not marry a guy or a girl who ISN’T a Christ-follower, but they really do love me. So could you maybe just make things clear?*”...***We do this kind of thing right?***...And so in love, Jesus is not rebuking this father, but rather drawing his attention/ and OURS to the fact that we lack faith, and the faith we do have is frail and fluctuating. He says, “*Unless you see signs and wonders you won’t believe.*”

To which, you see, the father responds, “*Sir, come down before my child dies.*” Translation? “*Jesus, all that about my faith, may be true, but frankly I don’t have time for this.*” See, here’s what this man is missing: He’s missing the fact that with Jesus, His circumstances/“fixing” His circumstances is NOTHING! Cuz remember, in Jesus we’re talking about the One who was “*in the beginning...and was with God...and was God. And through whom all things were made, and without whom nothing was made...the light of men*” as John’s told us. So curing this man’s boy - pardon the pun - but that’s child’s play for Jesus. Like curing a minor rash. What’s HARDER is curing the cancer of disbelief and distrust toward Jesus in both this man’s heart and yours!

And so Jesus says to the father, “*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 em the hour when he began to get better, and they said to him, ‘Yesterday at the seventh hour the fever left him.’*” Now notice: **When does Jesus come through for this father?** When he’s at the end of his rope **right?** When he’s the most desperate is when Jesus doesn’t just come through, but goes over and above and heals the boy...from a distance. Cuz again, this is the God-man we’re talking about. Distance between towns...not an obstacle. **Psalm 104** says that Jesus “*established the earth upon it’s foundations.*” So this? Not a big thing. Cuz remember, the REAL healing Jesus has to do for this guy is NOT physically healing his son, but spiritually healing he and his whole family. For YOU? Not fixing your circumstances - that’s child’s play - but fixing your heart of disbelief from which all your broken circumstances come! And that’s ONLY gonna happen if Jesus can get this father/get YOU to ADMIT your disbelief, and then subsequently ACCEPT Him as the object OF your belief!

Which you see is EXACTLY what happens, cuz it says, “*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.*”...But wait a second, I thought the man ALREADY believed. I mean, he came to Jesus in the first place **right?** And then **v.50** says he, “*believed the word that Jesus spoke to him and went on his way.*” But NOW **v.53** says, “*he himself believed, and all his household.*” **So which is it? When did he believe? Was it when he came to Jesus? When He took Jesus at His word? Or was it when he realized Jesus healed his son? Which is it?**... Yes! He believed and is now believing again. Cuz see, what you’re intended to see here is that belief in Jesus/FAITH is something that has a lot of room for failure, gaps...and of course growth...Trusting in Jesus is a PROCESS of moving from one degree of faith IN Jesus to another. That’s why we say here, that success is simply: “*Learning to trust and rest in Christ for every area of life.*” It’s a process... And a process that GENERALLY involves 3 things! Write these down:

**First, It’s A Process That STARTS With Reason:** Ya know a lot of people assume that faith is for those who can’t think intelligently or who’re just in need. And to be sure, Christian faith ABSOLUTELY helps in times of need. And you see that with this official. The time in which he chooses to engage Jesus is during a time of great need **right?** However, you gotta understand 2 things here: **First**, you gotta understand that even though a lot of people like to assume that they don’t have or don’t need faith, the reality is we ALL have faith. The question is simply, “*in what?*” Cuz as GK Chesterton is attributed to have said, “*When people stop believing in God, they don’t believe ‘nothing’; (rather) they begin believing ‘anything.’*”<sup>2</sup> We ALL have faith because as long as you’re human, things are gonna be hidden from you and you’re gonna be limited.<sup>3</sup> After all, scientists tell us that, generally speaking, the human brain is about 46oz, which is the size of you’re average gas-station Big Gulp. BUT they also tell us that at any given

<sup>2</sup> "This quotation actually comes from page 211 of Emile Cammaerts' book *The Laughing Prophets* (1937) in which he quotes Chesterton as having Father Brown say (in "The Oracle of the Dog" from 1923): "It's the first effect of not believing in God that you lose your common sense." Cammaerts then interposes his own analysis between further quotes from Father Brown: "It's drowning all your old rationalism and scepticism, it's coming in like a sea; and the name of it is superstition." The first effect of not believing in God is to believe in anything: 'And a dog is an omen and a cat is a mystery.'"

<sup>3</sup> Insight adapted from quote by John Calvin - "So long as we are pilgrims in the world, faith is implicit, not only because as yet many things are hidden from us, but because, involved in the mists of error, we attain not to all." - John Calvin (1509-1564), *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, III.ii.4

moment we only use about 10% of that - or 4.6oz - which is about the size of a Dixie Cup. So who are we to think that with our Dixie Cup sized brains we'd be able to understand all the mysteries of God and the universe? Part of being human IS having and exercising faith.

But **Second**, you gotta understand: this official's faith wasn't blind or irrational. It was very much based in **reason**; specifically reports he'd heard, weighed out, and chosen to believe about Jesus. Cuz of course, this man woulda never left his dying boy to make a 25 mile trek UNLESS he'd come to believe that the reports about Jesus being able to do miracles, were credible! In other words, he had **REASON** to believe. That's where his faith started. **Look**: If you're gonna not just have faith, but ultimately grow IN your faith, you have to start with the facts/the reports of Jesus, which of course we call, "*The Bible*." Ya gotta study it, pour over it, weigh it out, return TO it, discuss it, get others' perspectives ON it. What you CAN'T do - at least not if you want to grow in your faith - is ignore it. Now, I don't mean to be overly critical here, but some of you/ the reason you're kinda stuck in your faith/sorta in the same place spiritually that you were a year or even 5 years ago is simply cuz you don't dedicate significant time to learning God's word! For some of you, the only REAL Bible study you get is here on Sundays, WHICH MEANS if you had perfect attendance, then at most, you're studying the Bible 4x/mo. If you ate that way, you'd die. So why do you expect your faith to be alive? Ya gotta start with **reason** and THAT starts with dedicating yourself to pouring over God's word. Setting aside a time each day to read through it. If you don't have a Bible, take one of our table Bibles with you today. If ya need a plan for how to read through it, talk to me after. We've got a bunch of great tools that help. And THEN commit to the life of a Missional Family where you can discuss and apply what you're reading IN the Scriptures! **Faith STARTS With Reason!**

**Second, The Making Of Faith Is A Process REFINED By Trouble**: Think precious metals in a fire. Trouble tends to takes whatever faith you have and purify it. I mean I hate to say this, but the setting in which this official went from reaching out to Jesus, to taking Jesus at His word, to ultimately trusting in and sharing Jesus with his household, was one of tremendous suffering. Cuz that's what suffering does. It exposes how UNself-reliant and fragile we actually are. And IN that, causes you to shift your center of gravity, as it were, from yourself/from building your life on things FOR yourself, to someone OUTSIDE yourself. To Jesus!

Now I know you might be thinking, "*Is this why I'm experiencing certain pain or suffering? You mean to tell me that God has to send trouble into my life to get me to trust Him? That seems REALLY harsh and unloving.*" But Friend, what you have to understand is: It's actually INCREDIBLY loving! Because anything that you build your life on that's NOT Jesus is merely a sandcastle...with the tide coming in. Jesus said as much when He said in His very famous **Sermon on the Mount**, "*Everyone who hears these words of mine and does NOT do them will be like a foolish man who built his house on sand. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell, and great was the fall of it.*" Jesus lovingly allows you to experience trouble, pain, just discomfort, to keep you from building your purpose, your identity, your security, your LIFE on things that're ultimately gonna collapse, which is ANYTHING except Him, as evidenced by His resurrection!

And so, if I could get practical here, the key in those seasons of suffering is to actually look beyond your suffering. To - like this official heard Jesus say, *“Go; your son will live,”* and he took Him at His word/looked beyond everything His feelings and situation were likely telling him, to simply what JESUS had told him - YOU, likewise, have to look beyond your suffering TO what Jesus has said to YOU IN your suffering! Things like: *“There’s no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus;”* *“I’ll never leave or forsake you;”* *“My grace is sufficient for you, my power is made perfect in your weakness;”* *“Do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God.”*<sup>4</sup> Friend, let your pain be as fire is to metal - something that **refines** and ultimately grows your faith.

Then Finally, **The Making Of Faith Is A Process that STARTS With Reason, is REFINED By Trouble...and ENDS With Love For Jesus:** Cuz see there in **v.48** when Jesus says, *“Unless you (people) see signs and wonders you will not believe;”* what He’s saying is that the natural tendency of our hearts is NOT to love Jesus for Jesus, but to love Jesus for the benefits we think we can get FROM Jesus. That’s really the whole point of everything He’s doing here with this official - trying to get him to see that the journey of faith - reasoning through the reports about Jesus, coming to Jesus in your time of need, even struggling to take Jesus at His word - is ALL a journey of moving from simply loving the gift, to loving the gift-giver...In other words, it’s the journey of a REAL relationship. Cuz we all know this, when you first fall in love, don’t you have to admit that INITIALLY what causes you to love that person is all the things they do for ya and how they make ya feel? Of course! But don’t we ALSO know that for that relationship to grow and be healthy over the long-term, ya have to move past loving em for what they DO for you, to actually loving them for who they ARE **right?** Cuz imagine how you’d feel if you were dating/married to someone and you found out that they only loved you for your money or cuz you helped em advance in their career. You’d be devastated **right?** How much more must Jesus feel that, given that He didn’t just give you life, but gave HIS life to bring you back into relationship with Him?...If you want a relationship to grow/certainly a faith-relationship with Jesus, you gotta move past simply loving what Jesus can do for you...to actually loving Jesus.

But Friend, here’s the thing: Jesus is so committed to that becoming a reality for you that HE took the first step: to love you even when you didn’t deserve it. Cuz that’s what this official realized **right?** He comes to Jesus/basically to use Jesus, but then upon returning home, finds that Jesus nevertheless loved him enough to heal his son. In other words, he found that Jesus loved Him even when he didn’t deserve it! Which is WHY, it says, *“he believed and all his household.”* He saw the proof of JUST how much Jesus loved Him, such that He then returned love and trust TO Him...Friends, that’s how it works. And even more for you and me who don’t just have the proof of a few “healed” circumstances, but the hindsight of the Cross! Cuz who else, as evidence BY the Cross, would, when you get Him, blesses you to the uttermost, and when you fail him, forgives you to the depths. Only Jesus! Only Jesus is worth giving your life’s trust to! Trust Him for every area of your life!...**Let’s Pray...**

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<sup>4</sup> Romans 8:1; Hebrews 13:5; 2 Corinthians 12:9; Isaiah 41:10