

John – Jesus Inspires Amazing Faith (SOCC Pulpit Swap)

6/9/24

Good morning! It's so, so good to be here with you this morning! My name is Andy Fish, and I'm the pastor at Popcorn Christian Church in Springville. But before going to Popcorn almost 2 years ago, my family and I had the blessing of attending here at Sherwood Oaks for several years, so it's a great honor and privilege to get to be here with you all this morning.

It's been wonderful to see so many friends here again, and also, to see so many new faces since we left! Wow! It's amazing to see how this church has grown over the last couple years. I'm always hearing about God moving here at Sherwood Oaks...it's such an exciting time to be here.

The reason I'm here this morning to preach is that, a few months ago, Tim and I talked about doing a "Pulpit Swap" - he would go to Popcorn to preach, and I would come here to Sherwood Oaks to preach, since we have ties to both churches. Tim knows most of the Popcorn congregation; in fact, we joke that he's even related to most of them! So it's a sort of homecoming for him to go over there.

And for me to get to come back to Sherwood Oaks Bedford, a place my family and I called home for six years, is a lot of fun. So thank you so much for having us here this morning.

At Popcorn, we're preaching through the book of John, the 4th book in the New Testament, and one of the four gospels. Every book of the Bible is packed full of wisdom and practical application for our lives, and the book of John is no different; through this book, we get insight into how we should live our daily lives as Christians by studying the life of Jesus. What better way to know how to act like Christ than to study what Christ did, right? And one of my favorite things about the book of John is that it's a first-hand account of the life of Jesus Christ.

The author, John the apostle, was one of Jesus' three closest friends on this earth; it seemed like He went nearly everywhere and did everything with Jesus. And so, this is his eyewitness account of what he saw and heard as he spent time with Jesus.

And another thing I love about this book is that it actually has a stated purpose or a stated goal to lead those who read it to believe in Jesus Christ, if you don't already, or to increase your faith, if you're a Christian. John 20: 31 says:

But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

If you were to look this verse up in your Bible, you'd probably see a footnote that says an alternate translation of this verse is:

But these are written that you may continue to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

This book is written so that non-believers might believe in Jesus and have eternal life, and so that believers might continue to believe in Jesus Christ and have eternal life. That's why this book was written.

And the story we're going to look at today from this book, which is the second recorded miracle in the book of John and is known as the healing of the official's son, will help us do just that; if you're not a Christian, this story shows us that Jesus Christ is the Son of God and that you should believe in, and put your trust in, Him. If you're a Christian, and you already believe in Jesus, this story will strengthen and grow your faith in Him. This story is written, as the stated purpose says, so you'll believe in Jesus and continue to believe in Jesus.

In other words, wherever your faith in Jesus Christ is at, here's what I know about this story – it can take your faith to the next level.

And in fact there are three very specific ways we can take our faith in Jesus Christ to the next level, and those are:

- Allow Jesus to stretch your faith
- Take Jesus at His word
- Marvel at the glory of our Savior

If we'll just apply the lessons of this story, it'll take our faith to the next level, and here will be the result - we'll experience more peace in our lives, we'll experience more of the joy that only He can bring, and we'll live more boldly for His glory and His kingdom. And I want that for each and every one of us today.

But before we read today's story, let's pray.

Pray.

Our scripture for today begins with John chapter 4 verse 43...John chapter 4 verse 43. To set the stage, this is during Jesus' public ministry and he's about to leave Samaria to head to Galilee. He's already performed one miracle of turning water to wine which He did at Cana, and people are really impressed by His teaching...but they're not all ready to believe in Him or put their faith in Him. And that's where we pick up now with verse 43 of John 4. Let's read:

⁴³ After the two days he left for Galilee. ⁴⁴ (Now Jesus himself had pointed out that a prophet has no honor in his own country.) ⁴⁵ When he arrived in Galilee, the Galileans welcomed him. They had seen all that he had done in Jerusalem at the Passover Festival, for they also had been there.

⁴⁶ Once more he visited Cana in Galilee, where he had turned the water into wine. And there was a certain royal official whose son lay sick at Capernaum. ⁴⁷ When this man heard that Jesus had arrived in Galilee from Judea, he went to him and begged him to come and heal his son, who was close to death.

⁴⁸ "Unless you people see signs and wonders," Jesus told him, "you will never believe."

⁴⁹ The royal official said, "Sir, come down before my child dies."

⁵⁰ "Go," Jesus replied, "your son will live."

The man took Jesus at his word and departed. ⁵¹ While he was still on the way, his servants met him with the news that his boy was living. ⁵² When he inquired as to the time when his son got better, they said to him, "Yesterday, at one in the afternoon, the fever left him."

⁵³ Then the father realized that this was the exact time at which Jesus had said to him, "Your son will live." So he and his whole household believed.

⁵⁴ This was the second sign Jesus performed after coming from Judea to Galilee.

Wow! What an incredible story of the grace and the power of Jesus Christ. And, as the story plays out, of growing faith, faith that goes to the next level, for this man, this royal official, as he's identified as.

We're going to examine this story and, as we do, we're going to look at three ways we can take our faith to the next level, as the royal official did. And the first way we can do that is to:

Allow Jesus to stretch your faith

The royal official in this story showed a lot of faith even from the beginning. He had the faith to seek Jesus out, and he had the faith that if he found Jesus, then his son could be healed.

So think about this – this man really put his faith on the line, too...because there was great risk to leaving his son to find Jesus. This would've been about a one day, 20-mile journey to go from his home in Capernaum to where Jesus was in Cana...all the while, his son lays dying. Can you imagine how hard it would be knowing that you might miss your son's final moments on this earth while you're trying to find a man to save him? It took a lot of faith for this man to leave his son and seek Jesus.

And so as he makes the trek and finally gets to Jesus, he begs Him – please, Jesus, come with me! Heal my son! Before he dies! I can only imagine the desperation in this man's voice as he pleads with Jesus, knowing his son's life was on the line.

And Jesus gives him what I think is a surprising answer:

“Unless you people see signs and wonders,” Jesus told him, “you will never believe.”

This response from Jesus might seem strange...why would He say this to a man who's son was about to die? I think the answer is - Jesus wanted to stretch the man's faith.

Jesus won't go with the man, He won't give Him a sign, but merely says – go, your son will live. You believe that I can heal him...but do you believe that I can heal him from 20 miles away? Merely by saying the word? Do you have enough faith to leave here and go back home without confirmation that your son is healed? It's time to put your faith to the test.

Jesus could've went with the man and healed his son, and that would've still been a miracle! But Jesus wasn't only concerned with the physical healing of the man's son, He was also concerned with this family's spiritual healing, and their salvation...so He challenged this royal official to take a step of faith.

It might seem like Jesus was being a little hard on this guy, but it was all for this man's good and God's glory. You could say Jesus wanted him to go from good faith, to great faith, or great faith to amazing faith. And Jesus wants the same for us.

He never wants us to stay in the same place spiritually; He wants us to grow more into His image each and every day. And this comes through challenges, it comes through hardship, it comes through tough times, just like this royal official was experiencing.

The Bible compares the process of God stretching our faith to a father disciplining his children.

This is from Hebrews 12:

⁷ Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as his children. For what children are not disciplined by their father?

but God disciplines us for our good, in order that we may share in his holiness.

¹¹ No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it.

Jesus loves us too much to leave us as we are. When we repent and are baptized, our sins are washed away and we receive eternal life, and that process is complete; but the process of becoming like Jesus is just beginning.

And as a father disciplines his children, so God disciplines us, for our spiritual good and our spiritual growth.

My daughters are three years old, and if you have kids, you know that disciplining them is a required part of parenthood, right? One of my least favorite things in this world is disciplining my girls...but I love them too much not to do it. It's for their good, and I know that it will help them the rest of their lives as they mature as young ladies. We should remember the same about God's disciplining of us!

We shouldn't be offended by it, we should be trained by it!

Give yourself over to His discipline, so that, like the royal official, your faith will be strengthened. Jesus asked him to take a step of faith, and ultimately, it strengthened the man's faith...and I'm sure the man would've said afterward...it was worth it!

You know what? God knows what's best for us...often times, it's not giving us what we ask for. Often times it's doing things the hard way. Often times, it's doing things the long way.

The stretching of our faith might mean God waits to answer our prayer to see if we'll trust Him in the silence of our prayers. Maybe He's going to stretch your faith by saying – you're going to have to wait to see how I'm going to work this out. The father in our story had to wait to find out his son had been healed, right? He had to start the long journey back without seeing his son healed, didn't he? God might ask us to do the same to stretch our faith.

We might endure an illness or disease that God's going to use to draw us closer to Him.

We might just look at our life and say, ok God, I don't understand where I'm at in life. I don't understand how you're working right now, or I don't see you working at all...I don't feel like this is how things are supposed to be. And God's saying – you're right where I want you to be; this is a work in progress; this is part of the journey of growing your faith.

Whatever hardship we face, let's remember – God does this because He loves us, as a Father loves His child, and He does this while never leaving us or forsaking us; He'll be with us every step of the way. He wants what's best for us, and that's never staying in the same place spiritually...it's always stretching our faith.

It won't be comfortable, but it is what's best for us!

The first way to take our faith to the next level is – allow Jesus to stretch your faith.

The next way to take our faith to the next level is – take Jesus at His Word.

One of my favorite verses in this story is verse 50. After Jesus tells the man to go, that his son will live, stretching the man's faith, this is what it says:

The man took Jesus at his word and departed.

I think there are a couple ways this man demonstrated his faith with this response.

The first is simply:

- Believing what Jesus said

Jesus told the man – “your son will live.” That was all this man needed to hear. He didn’t ask Jesus to explain how his son would live, He didn’t say – “give me a sign before I leave that this is going to happen”; no, none of that. Jesus said it, and he took Jesus at His word.

I want us to think about the power, yet simplicity, in that statement. He took Jesus at His word.

What if we did the same thing with what Jesus has said to us, throughout the Bible? What if we did the same and took Jesus at His Word? Let me give you some examples.

Jesus said – don’t worry, I’ll take care of you (Matthew 6: 25 – 34)

Ok Jesus, you said not to worry, and that settles the matter...I’m not going to worry. That’s it. I’m going to live a life free of anxiety and worry. I’m taking You at Your Word.

Jesus said – don’t fear, your salvation is secure in me (John 10: 28 & 29)

Ok, I’ve got nothing to fear. No one can take me away from Jesus, I’m safe and secure in Him. He said so, and that’s it. If my soul is safe in Him, then I’m living life fearlessly. I’m taking Jesus at His word.

Jesus said – be hopeful, all things are possible (Matthew 19: 26)

When things look bleak, when there seems to be no hope, God can work miracles...even the healing of someone near death. All things are possible. I’m taking Jesus at His word.

How different would our lives be if we just believed Jesus for what He said and took it at face value? Wow! I think that would change everything.

Taking Jesus at His word means, one, believing what Jesus said...and it also means:

- Obeying Him in faith

Jesus told the man to go, and it simply says “the man departed.” He left. Jesus told him to go, and he went. There was a level of obedience that accompanied his faith. He put his trust in Jesus into practice.

Obedience for us will look different depending on the circumstances of our lives.

It might mean making a career change that allows us to serve the Lord to a greater capacity, even though it comes with a huge pay cut.

It might mean giving to those in need in a way that stretches us financially.

It might mean teaching a Bible study or leading a class when we don't feel like we're qualified.

No matter what the situation, we should believe what Jesus said, and then act on that faith in obedience to Him.

Sometimes even the "go" from Jesus won't be clear, and we'll second guess whether or not He's actually telling us to "go!" But through prayer, meditating on God's word, and ask for His guidance, we have peace knowing He's leading us where He wants us to go.

I'm reminded of what Abraham did when we left his homeland for a land God would show him. He had no idea where it was or when he'd get there, but God said go, and he went. He put his faith into practice. And that's what this royal official did as well.

It's living like the old hymn that says – "tis so sweet to trust in Jesus, just to take Him at His word...just to rest upon His promise, just to know, 'Thus sayeth the Lord.'" May we all live as this old hymn says.

Now, let's pause for a second. You might be thinking about all we've said so far, you might say – I just don't think I can do it. I just don't think I can view a difficulty in life as a way to grow my faith. I just don't think I can take Jesus at His Word. My faith just isn't there yet.

I understand – this can be challenging to do. But I think the key to starting to unlock this greater faith and this greater belief in Jesus is **held in the final way we're going to look at to take our faith to the next level, and that is:**

Marvel at the glory of our Savior

The royal official in our story got an amazing answer to His request...I'm not going to heal your son how you've asked; I'm going to do it in an even more amazing way. I'm going to do it just by saying the word. And the man and his whole household believed and gave Jesus the glory for doing that.

And as we think about these signs that Jesus is performing as recorded here in scripture, that's really what they're about – recognizing the glory of Jesus.

John tells us earlier in scripture that these things recorded about Jesus in this book are a testament to His grace and His glory. John says this in chapter 1 verse 14:

The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

The glory of Jesus Christ is revealed to us right here in scripture, in the healing of his man's son. And it's revealed to us over and over again as we see healing and the blessings in our lives and the lives of those around us. But the question is - are we recognizing His glory in those situations?

Or are we allowing the amazing blessings that Jesus Christ gives us to become too familiar? I think that's a trap we can fall into.

I wanna point us back to verse 44, which helped set the stage for this healing by Jesus after His arrival in Galilee, and the scripture said:

(Now Jesus himself had pointed out that a prophet has no honor in his own country.)

The people from Jesus' hometown knew Him too well...isn't this Mary's son? We know this guy...He used to build tables, didn't He? We've known Him since He was a kid! A baby, even, born in a stable.

They'd been around Him too long, known Him too well...or so they thought. There's an old saying that "familiarity breeds contempt." That just means when we get used to something, or comfortable with it, we tend to look down on it, not give it the respect it deserves, not appreciate it like we should...or in this case, Him, not it.

For Christians who've been Christians for years, or decades, I think this is one of the most dangerous traps there is. I'm at risk of this, too, let me tell you – I was baptized 25 years ago. I've heard the stories of Jesus since I was my daughters' age. And when you've known Jesus, and heard about His miracles, and even seen them happen in your own life, for that long, there's a tremendous risk that this familiarity with Jesus will breed contempt for Him in our lives and we'll miss out on His glory.

And here's what that can look like when we read a story like the one we had today – we see that Jesus performed an amazing miracle, and we're not impressed anymore. We don't get excited about Jesus saving the life of this young boy.

It's amazing to see this man's faith in the story, and learn from him, but don't miss the miracle here! Don't miss the real star of the show here, Jesus Christ! Don't miss out on His glory! Seeing His glory is the best way to grow your faith...it's the key to unlocking greater faith.

Jesus Christ spoke the word, and the boy who was knocking on death's door suddenly came alive again. When all hope was lost, at the darkest hour, when all looked bleak, Jesus Christ came in and saved the day!

Jesus Christ, the Savior of all those who put their trust in Him, is so worthy of complete and total faith in Him, isn't He?

The reason we can get through hard times and have our faith stretched and not break, and the reason we can **take Jesus at His Word**, is because we've seen His glory! **Don't miss it!** Don't read past it! Don't let it become "old hat" for you!

When you read these stories of Jesus' signs, stop to reflect on and marvel at the glory of our Savior.

And when you see a miracle in your life...or any blessing, something as simple as a day with your family, or something as powerful as a family member being healed of an illness, or getting a promotion at work, whatever it might be...don't miss Jesus' glory in that, and remember to give Him the praise He deserves!

And let's stretch our faith here, let's take this to the next level – when Jesus convicts us of our sin and calls us out of it...let's thank Him for His grace.

When we're going through a hard time...let's remember His compassion for us.

If we wake up tomorrow...hopefully we do...let's praise Him for giving us more time on this earth.

And most of all, when we think about what Jesus Christ did on the cross for us...let's marvel at His glory and His grace.

This story of the royal official reminds me of another story of Father and Son. It reminds me of a story of a Son who was near death, and a Father Who wanted to heal His Son, wanted to save Him, just as this man's son was healed in the story...but in the story I'm reminded of, the Father had to let the Son die. He had to give His Son up to death. Oh how heartbroken the Father must've been to see His Son die!

But the Son would not stay in the grave...He'd rise again on the third day, victorious, once for all, so that all who believe in Him would be saved!

That story is the good news of Jesus Christ, this is the gospel message...may we never become too familiar with it to have gratitude down to the depths of our hearts and souls for what Jesus Christ did for us...we've seen His glory, full of grace and truth, and most of all, it looks like an empty tomb!

I hope this story of the healing of the official's son has encouraged you to believe, or continue believing, that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name, just as the purpose statement of this book says.

If you're a Christian this morning, I hope this miracle by Jesus has rekindled or strengthened your faith in Him, encouraged you to step outside your comfort zone, to take Him at His word, and to marvel at His glory.

And if you've never repented and been baptized, and accepted Jesus Christ as your Lord, then I submit this evidence to you of the glory of the Son of God, of His gospel message, and simply say – you've seen His glory, now believe! Come forward and make Him your Savior!

Come forward now as we stand and sing.