

John 4:46-54

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[0:00] We're in the end of John chapter 4, verses 43 to 54. I think you probably will need a Bible this morning! I think that would be helpful.

If you want to grab one there, just as you come in, do feel free to get up and grab one. Let me read you the last verse. This was now the second sign that Jesus did when he'd come from Judea to Galilee.

Anyway, this story that I'm going to speak on this morning is a sign. John structures his book, this book that we're looking at, around seven signs.

He tells us the miracle and then he tells us what it means so we don't miss the point. And a sign is a significant point to something beyond itself. So, for example, if you wanted to go to Swansea, it's quite possibly the greatest city in the world, but if you wanted to go to Swansea from here, you'd get on to the M4, the magnificent 4.

And you would drive to the end of the M4. The first sign for Swansea, it's a glorious moment when it comes up. It's just when you're past Swindon and you notice the sign.

[1:17] You see, first of all, Bristol, Cardiff, Newport, Swansea. Let's imagine you're driving down the M4 tomorrow and you see the sign.

You're so delighted to see the sign for Swansea. You pull the car into the hard shoulder. You get out and glassy-eyed, you look at the sign. You tell the kids who are slightly terrified on the hard shoulder, get out the car, kids.

And you get your phone out. You say, stand in front of the sign. There's lorries whizzing past at 80 mile per hour. And you say, smile. And then you get your wife to go to the booth to get the sandwiches and the packed lunch out of the car.

And you stand on the bank by the sign and you have a picnic. You stop for an hour eating your lunch by the sign. Amazingly, the police don't turn up.

You get back in the car and you drive on to the next junction. You turn off. You go round the roundabout and you get back on the M4 going the other direction to London.

[2:24] And you go home. That's insane, isn't it? Because the sign is there to tell you this is the way to Swansea.

The sign is not the big thing. The important thing is that you don't get too caught up with the sign. You go to where it's pointing you. And so come with me to the end of John's Gospel.

Where John gives us the reason why he's writing this book. The purpose of the Gospel. And in John 20 verses 30 to 31. He says, These signs, these things are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God.

And that by believing you may have life in his name. That's the reason for this sign. And all the signs. That's the reason why we're studying John's Gospel.

Why we open God's Word on a Sunday morning. Because God wants you to have life in his name. To have eternal life. That is life with God.

[3:28] Knowing God. Knowing God and Jesus Christ whom he has sent. And how do you get that life? You get that life by believing. He wants you to have faith in Jesus Christ.

That's what leads to life. But the question is, what is genuine faith? What is believing? And I think that's the question that John addresses throughout the Gospel. But particularly here.

He records Jesus' words. And Jesus' words tell you what true faith is. And what it involves. And he does that because he wants you. Little old you.

To have life in his name. The man who wrote this Gospel, John. He was with Jesus. He was an eyewitness. He saw Jesus do these things. And then explain them.

He saw Jesus die. And then Jesus rise again. And beat death. And he writes a book about it. So that whoever reads it. And whoever hears it preached.

[4 : 26] May conclude that Jesus is the Christ. The King. The Son of God. Who can give you life. If you believe in him. And so John wants you to walk out that door this morning.

Alive. Some of you walked in here this morning spiritually dead. You may be here for the first time. You may be here for the thousandth time.

It doesn't matter. God wants you to leave going through those doors. Saying, I'm alive. I'm alive because Jesus is my saviour and my king and my lord.

First of all, let's think about what saving faith isn't. What believing isn't. What saving faith isn't. So verse 43. After two days he departed for Galilee. There's two days.

We don't know anything about what happened in them. But Jesus spent it with the Samaritans. We saw them last week charging over the hill to come to Jesus. And verse 44. For Jesus himself had testified that no prophet, no preacher has no honour.

[5 : 35] That a preacher does not have honour in his hometown. So when he came to Galilee, the Galileans believed. They welcomed him. Having seen all that he'd done in Jerusalem at the feast.

For they too had gone to the feast. So these people, they seem to welcome Jesus. They seem really positive about him. And the reason we're told that they welcomed him is because they'd seen everything he'd done at the feast.

Hold on to that. It's important because it explains something that will surprise us. Verse 46. He came again to Canaan and Galilee. We've heard about that place before. Because that's the place where in chapter 2 Jesus rescued the wedding.

He turned water into wine. He turned water into wine in an instant. That's the first miraculous sign. Don't forget it. So verse 46 continuing.

And at Capernaum there was an official, a civil servant, a noble man whose son was ill. And when this man heard that Jesus had come from Judea to Galilee, he went to him and he asked him to come down and heal his son because his son was at the point of death.

[6 : 45] So here's a man. He works for the king. He's of some importance. He's got responsibility at least. But for all his importance it doesn't stop this tragedy. This disaster.

His son is laying ill. He is close to death. He is dying. He's a desperate father. He travels a long way in those days.

He's about 20 miles on foot from Capernaum to Cana. And he does it because he wants to find this man, Jesus, who he thinks can help. He hears that Jesus has been doing remarkable things like turning water into wine in an instant.

And look what Jesus says to him. Verse 48. So Jesus said to him, unless you see signs and wonders, you will not believe. That is so shocking, isn't it?

Think about the situation. He's heard of the desperate situation back in Capernaum.

[7 : 48] He sees the visible anguish of this man and he says something that seems so insensitive. Jesus, you've failed the counseling course.

Jesus, you are not empathetic like you should be. But I think we need to notice that Jesus is not talking to this man individually. He's talking to the group of people collectively.

And also remember those words that we read in verse 44. Those words that are in brackets. For Jesus himself had testified that a prophet has no honor in his hometown. And that is a theme that we're going to see runs right the way through John's Gospel.

Do you remember how John's Gospel starts? It tells us that the word became flesh. The Lord Jesus came into this world. And what happened to him? What reception was Jesus given?

Chapter 1 verse 11. He came to his own, but his own did not receive him. He came to that which was his own. His own people, the Jewish people. But his own did not receive him.

[8 : 55] His own people abused him the most. So when we read of him coming from Samaria in chapter 4 into his own country, Galilee, where he's welcomed.

Don't be so sure about that. They seem to welcome him. But Jesus knows better, doesn't he? And the words of verse 45, they should ring a bell.

They should remind you of some words that you've read before. Chapter 2 and verse 23. Let's go back there. It says that the Galileans welcomed him because they'd seen all that he'd done in Jerusalem at the Passover feast.

But in chapter 2 verse 23, when he was in Jerusalem at the Passover feast, many believed in his name. They saw the signs that he was doing, but Jesus on his part did not entrust himself to them. Because Jesus knew all people and needed no one to bear witness about man. For he knew himself what was in a man. He didn't need any man's testimony about man because Jesus knew what was in a man.

[10:03] And the people he's addressing in chapter 4 verse 48, Jesus says to them, unless you see signs and wonders, you will not believe.

And the people who come back from Jerusalem, where they'd seen all the signs that Jesus had done, these are the people who in chapter 2 say, we believe in you. But he didn't believe in them. He would not entrust himself to them.

He didn't trust their response. He knows that their belief wasn't worth much because he knows what's inside them. He knows their hearts just like he knows all our hearts.

So he knows that our hearts are selfish, aren't they? He knows that our hearts love self-rule. He knows that our hearts are self-centered and they are opposed to God's rule.

And he knows that he cannot rely on the kind of belief that these people have on him. There's something not quite right about their faith.

[11:12] This is a type of faith that Jesus doesn't want. And that makes sense of Jesus' response in verse 48.

Unless you see signs and wonders, you will not believe. He wants to discourage faith that is purely based on signs. Purely based on miracles.

So let me just say this. If you are a regular viewer of the God channel, that will surprise you, won't it?

Because it seems to me that whenever I click on that channel, that's the emphasis. The emphasis is believe because of what you see. I'll believe when I see a miracle, people say.

But if you are a reader of John's gospel, then what Jesus says will not surprise you. Because as we go through John, we learn from Jesus not to trust belief that is only sign belief, that is only miracles belief.

[12:17] Wow, Jesus, I'm really impressed with what you're doing. I've seen a miracle. Remember, genuine trust and faith is not based on a never-ending supply of signs and wonders. Jesus is not the genie in the lamp.

Imagine if he was. Imagine you say, I will only trust you, Jesus, if you give what I command.

Imagine saying to Jesus, I will only trust you if you heal me. I will only trust you if you heal them. I will only trust you, Jesus, if you give me that job.

I will only trust you, Jesus, if you give me that husband. If you give me that wife. If you give me that house. If you give me that child. Jesus begins, doesn't he, to become a puppet who dances to my tune, to my agenda.

And if he doesn't do that. If Jesus doesn't do what I want, well then I won't trust him. Unless you see signs and wonders, you'll never believe.

[13:28] So can you see what he's saying to the crowd there? All you're bothered about is miracles. And you're not bothered about the greatest thing of all, which is to know me. It's what the miracles point to.

To me. To have eternal life. They want miracles, but they don't want him. They want the sign, but they don't want the one the sign points to.

If I stop doing the miracles, you will not believe me. Saving faith, genuine faith, is not based on signs and miracles.

It is based on the one the sign points to, Jesus and his word. Which brings me to my second point. What is saving faith? What is saving faith?

Look at verse 49. The official said to him, Sir, come down before my child dies. Jesus said to him, Go, your son will live.

[14:36] Off you go, your son will live. If that was me, if I was that man, I'd say, hang on a minute. I want you to come with me.

I've come all this way to get to you, to bring you back to Capernaum so that you can heal my son. Please do not tell me to go. If you do not come with me, there's no hope for my boy.

But Jesus is saying here, go, your son will live. You don't need my presence physically. You don't need my physical presence.

I give you my word. I promise. Your son lives. And verse 50, the man believed the word that Jesus spoke to him and went on his way.

It's astonishing. The man believed the word that Jesus spoke to him and went on his way, 20 miles back. It would be an overnight trip in those days.

[15:37] But something in the man says, do what he says, believe his word, go. Go home, trust Jesus. It's going to be all right.

I'd love to meet this man. I'd love to talk to him. I wonder whether he had doubts on the way home. It's a 20 mile journey, five miles in.

He takes a break in the service station. He thinks, I should have got him to come. I should have got him to come with me.

Twelve miles in, he's got eight miles to go. It's boiling hot. I should have made Jesus come. I'm going to look so stupid when I get home. And my wife says, where's Jesus? And I say to him, he hasn't come.

But he did give me a promise. A promise. What good is a promise? My son is dying. But that didn't happen, did it? What did happen? Well, it's the seventh hour.

[16:43] And the official's wife is in her home.

And she is desperate. Desperately trying to keep her son's raging temperature down. The house is hot. The boy is on his bed.

He is burning up. The lad is slipping in and out of consciousness. He is close to breath. His breathing is shallow. He's burning up.

The mum is reluctant to leave his bedside. But she runs to the kitchen to try to get some water to try and cool him down. And she goes back to his bedroom. And the bed is empty.

And he's out of his bed. And he's getting dressed. And the mum says to him, what are you doing?

[17:46] He says, I'm going out to play with my friends. And he starts to do kick-ups in the bedroom. She touches his head. He's fine. He's got no temperature. No fever.

He's fit and healthy like that. He says, mum, I'm fine. When she's recovered from the shock, she says, I've got to tell my husband.

He's gone to get Jesus. Jesus doesn't need to come anymore. So she sends the servant off with the good news. And the servant runs up the road. And he meets the official. And he says, verse 51, your son is living.

And they meet him with this wonderful news. Your boy is living. He's back to normal. He is well. When did he get better?

The man asks. Verse 52. And they said to him, yesterday at the seventh hour, the fever left him. One o'clock in the afternoon yesterday. Ah, verse 53.

[18:56] The father knew that was the hour when Jesus had said to him, your son will live. So, and he himself believed and just noticed. Notice, and all his household.

And I think John has put this here because he wants you and I to see this is real belief. Genuine belief, not just that Jesus is a great miracle worker, which he is, but real belief that he is the promised Christ, the anointed king, the son of God.

His faith is in the one the miracle points to. And so that's our next point.

Saving faith trusts Jesus as the Messiah. Saving faith trusts Jesus as the Messiah or the Christ.

Faith is not something that you drum up to yourself.

Faith is not a natural leaning or gifting that I may have or you may have, but other people might not have. Faith is not an ability that we have just to take a blind leap into the dark.

[20:03] Faith has a concrete object. And it grows and faith grows as we focus on that object. The person of the Lord Jesus Christ. And that's what this man does.

His son was close to death and Jesus says, your son will live. And he takes Jesus at his word. And it happens according to Jesus' word.

And he thinks, who is this who even has the power over death itself? And the conclusion is, he is God's king. And he and his household believe.

I think that is what the first two signs in Galilee. First, the water into wine in Cana. And then Capernaum have led him to conclude that Jesus is the Messiah, the long promised one. He is the sent one.

He is the one who has been promised for centuries. So come back with me to one of the promises. Which tells the people of Israel, what are you to expect when the Messiah arrives?

[21 : 12] So Isaiah 25. Can you come with me? What kind of thing are you going to expect when God comes to save his people? Isaiah chapter 25.

We're going to read from verse 6. Isaiah 25 and verse 6. What kind of thing will you expect from God when he comes to save his people?

When God's king turns up. Verse 6. On this mountain, the Lord of hosts will make for all peoples a feast of rich food.

A feast of well-aged wine. Of rich food full of marrow of aged wine. Sounds good, doesn't it? Sounds like John chapter 2. Great party. Great banquet. But then verse 7. Look what it says. When God turns up.

[22 : 12] When the Messiah turns up. He will swallow up on this mountain. The covering that is cast over all peoples. The veil that is spread over all nations. What will he swallow up? He will swallow up death forever.

Sounds even better, doesn't it? Sounds like John 4. And the Lord God will wipe away tears from all faces.

And the reproach of his people. He will take away from the earth. For the Lord has spoken. It will be said on that day. Behold, this is our God. We have waited for him.

That he might save us. This is the Lord. We have waited for him. Let us be glad and rejoice in his salvation.

So verse 6. The Messiah comes. And we expect a great banquet. The turning of water into wine. Verse 7 and 8.

[23 : 09] The Messiah comes. And what are we to expect? The removal of the shroud of death. The great blanket that covers the whole earth. All peoples. All humanity. And so the saving of that boy in John 4.

From death is significant. Here is the Christ. Here is the promised one. Who has come to remove the result of our sin and rebellion against God. And notice faith as an object.

Verse 9. It is the Lord we are waiting for. It is the Lord we have trusted in. And the man believes in John 4, doesn't he?

He waits for the Lord. He trusts in the Lord. Faith is rooted in the hard, solid facts that Jesus is the Christ. And he comes.

And it grows. As we focus on Jesus. If you are somebody who wouldn't describe themselves as a Christian today. And we talk about faith.

[24 : 07] We are not talking about you kind of forcing something up within yourself. Genuine faith is grounded in solid evidence. And this miracle along with the turning of the water into wine is the hard evidence pointing you to the fact that Jesus is the Messiah.

And he is trustworthy. And he is trustworthy. And that means we have the signs that we need. We don't need any more. People who are not Christians are looking for signs.

But sadly so many Christians are looking for signs. But we don't need any more. The question is will you believe and trust that Jesus is the Christ and trust his word?

He's given you all the signs that you need. The biggest one is the resurrection from the dead. We don't need any more. Finally as I close.

Saving faith takes Jesus at his word. You and I need to remember that this gospel, John's gospel, was written after Jesus was taken up to heaven. It was written to people like you and I who are asking, How can I put my trust in a Christ who I cannot see?

[25 : 21] How can I do that? If I had seen him, if I had spoken with him, if I had followed him like John and the first disciples, well maybe I could believe in him. But how can I trust in him when I cannot see him?

And this story answers that question. How do I believe in a Christ when he is physically not there? And that is what Jesus is saying to this man, isn't he?

You don't need my presence. You may go. Your son will live. The answer that the New Testament gives is, I don't have to have the physical presence of Jesus on earth in order to believe in him.

What I need is his word. And I've got that. And you have got that before your very eyes. And what I have to do and what you have to do is to trust that word, to believe his promises and build your whole life on that word.

Jesus gave that official, didn't he, a promise that was absolutely incredible. Unbelievable. Go home. Your son will live. Can you believe, Mr. Royal Official, that when you get back, your son will be well?

[26 : 45] Can you believe that? I give you my word. But you won't have the evidence for that until you get home. The Lord Jesus gives to us this morning amazing promises.

The Lord Jesus, in John's Gospel, gives you promises that are almost too incredible to believe. They're so awesome.

We've seen a couple of them. John 3, verse 16. For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son that whoever believes in him shall not perish, but they'll have eternal life. What a promise that is.

You go to John 5, 24 and 25. Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes in him who has sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life.

Truly, truly, truly, I say to you, an hour is coming and is now here when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God and those who hear will live. Wonderful promises.

[27 : 54] Jesus says to you today, whoever comes to me, I will never drive away. And we hear those promises and then we remember what we're like, don't we?

We remember that we're sinful and that we're unacceptable when it comes to coming to God. We do deserve to perish. We do deserve to be condemned.

We do deserve to be driven away. We do not deserve to be raised up on that last day. And so when Jesus says those words to us, it seems so incredible. If you do believe in me, you will not perish. You will not be judged. You will not be driven away. You will not be condemned. You will be raised up on the last day.

Lord Jesus, it seems incredible that you'd have anything to do with me given my track record. But I'm going to take you at your word. And so I come.

[29 : 05] And that is faith. Believing what seems to be impossible because Jesus has said it. Because it's him who's saying it.

We believe. We trust him. And that's what's happened. At the end of the incident in Samaria that we saw last week, didn't we? In verse 39 of John 4. Those Samaritans, they say, we have come to believe.

And not just because of the testimony of that woman. But we've come to believe his word for ourselves. Not that we've seen for ourselves, but we've heard for ourselves.

That we know this man really is the saviour of the world. That's authentic faith. The faith that Jesus is looking for. Let's picture the scene for a moment.

Many years later, Jesus has died. He's risen. He's ascended to heaven. And he's gone back to heaven. And we're back in that same house in Capernaum. Family now much older.

[30 : 12] It's now the royal official's turn to be close to death. He's on his deathbed. And his son is at his bedside. What do they talk about? Dad, do you remember that miracle that Jesus did all those years ago?

Isn't that fantastic? If only Jesus was here, he would be able to stop your death. Is that what they say? That's not what they say.

Because what John has told us is that they really believed. They knew what the sign pointed to. So on that day when it's the royal official near his deathbed and the son is at his bedside, I imagine what they were saying was, Isn't it wonderful that Jesus is the Christ, the son of God?

Isn't it wonderful that we know him? Isn't it wonderful, Dad, that we have life in his name? Isn't it wonderful that we're not going to perish? Isn't it wonderful that we're not going to be judged?

Isn't it wonderful that we've crossed over from death to life? Isn't it wonderful that God will never drive us away? Isn't it wonderful that he will raise us up on the last day? Isn't it wonderful that we're not going to perish?

[31 : 29] Well, it is wonderful, isn't it? And if you are a believer this morning, don't walk out of those doors this morning thinking it's just another Sunday. You've got life.

Life in Jesus' name. In spite of how difficult and troublesome life might be, Jesus loves you and Jesus lives in you and Jesus is with you and Jesus is coming back for you.

And you've got hope and you've got a purpose and that is bigger and better than anything you will face this week. Anything that comes your way this week, Jesus is bigger and better and his word is bigger and better and his word is trustworthy and reliable.

And if you're not a believer, having heard of the signs that he has done and heard his word, maybe today you will believe and you will today know the joy of having life in his name.

