

John 4:43-54

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Date: 01 February 2026

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[0 : 00] We've been thinking over these last few Sunday evenings about the question, what does it mean to meet God? And to think about this, we've looked at the encounters that Jesus has had with the various people in John 2, 3, and 4.

However, we've looked at what it means for the one who was God and is God to come face to face with ordinary human people.

And we've seen these various figures do that. And what Jesus has made clear is that as He has come into the world, He has done that in order to bring true cleansing from sin and true joy.

Chapter 2. He's come to bring true birth. Chapter 3. And He has done that in order to bring out of us true worship.

So that last week, the first bit of chapter 4 with His encounter with the Samaritan woman. He has promised, He has offered these things. Cleansing, joy, forgiveness, salvation, new birth, new life.

[1 : 09] And this evening, in the encounter that Paul read for us, we see how it is that we get involved. See, we're back where this section started in Cana in Galilee.

See that there in verse 46. And that marker, mention of Cana in Galilee, is a bookend. We should think of this section, this section we've been in over these few weeks as a literary unit.

And Jesus is telling us this evening how it is that we receive the cleansing of new birth, how it is we can engage in the true worship that He has called us to offer.

And we see what that means in this exchange with this official and His Son who is dying. And the answer is true faith.

If He's come to bring true joy, true cleansing, true birth, and He wants true worship, how do we get involved? The answer is true faith. If anyone will receive these things that He has promised, if we will be given any of these gifts, they will only come by faith.

[2 : 23] Now, I've noticed that people in our culture will talk about the idea of faith really quite freely. I was recently asked by the son of a friend of mine if I would take his wedding. The couple aren't part of a church, and I'm the only Christian minister that they know.

So, he texted me out of the blue and asked me if I would help him with this. And he said, to be honest, you're the only minister I know. So, it was in a category of one, that's why I was invited. I met with him to discuss what this was going to entail. And we talked a bit about our relationship and about marriage and things like that. And I asked the question, well, you want me to give you a Christian wedding?

What do you think of Christianity? What do you think of the Lord Jesus Christ? And they both paused and looked at each other. And then she spoke up and said, I've never thought about that. My faith is strong. I definitely believe. I'm just not sure what it means. I mean, I'm definitely a person of faith. What do you think of Christianity?

[3 : 28] What do you think of the Lord Jesus? Well, it's not altogether clear. And plenty of my unbelieving friends would say similar things. Very happy to talk about possessing faith. Very happy to say that faith is part of their life.

But when pushed on the object of that faith or the substance of that faith, well, let's move quickly on. And, of course, there's a Christian version of this as well, where faith is talked about in a kind of abstract way.

I was talking to a pastor who kept saying in the course of our conversation, well, such and such a person, he has faith. Another person, well, he's very open to faith. When we talk about faith and so on and so on, and I'm thinking, which faith?

Faith in what? Faith in whom? We can talk about faith in the abstract. We can say that we are a person of faith, but actually, it's what that faith is in.

It's the nature of that faith that actually really matters. There are all kinds of things that we can believe in. And if we're entrusting our lives to those things, lots of them may be a total waste of time. [4 : 34] So, it's really important that we understand that the faith that we possess is a faith that actually does something, connects us to something or someone. And that is what Jesus is concerned with in this section this evening.

He explains what he's looking for. And he starts by exposing the wrong kind of approach to him. And then he holds up the kind of faith that takes hold of the good things that he has offered in these chapters.

So, first, let's look at the wrong approach. Here's the wrong approach to Jesus. Point number one, Jesus on my terms. Jesus on my terms.

And we would call that selfish faith. That's what's going on at the start of verse 43. After two days, he departed for Galilee. For Jesus himself had testified that a prophet has no honor in his own hometown.

So, when he came to Galilee, the Galileans welcomed him, having seen all that he had done in Jerusalem at the feast. For they too had gone to the feast. So, he came again to Cana in Galilee where he had made the water wine.

[5 : 40] The Samaritan woman we saw last time had seen that he was a prophet. Do you remember? Sir, I can see you are a prophet. She knew that he spoke for God. She listened and she responded to him. But look at verse 44.

He's not received that way back in Galilee among his own. Among his own people. It says in verse 45 that they welcomed him. But what's striking there is that this is the only time in the New Testament that that word is used.

And it isn't John's usual word for being accepted or well received. So, what's going on here is that they say, yeah, come into our town. You're welcome here.

Come on in. But they don't welcome him for who he is. We're told that their interest comes from having seen what he had done in Jerusalem at the feast.

Chapter 2, verse 23. When he was in Jerusalem at the Passover feast, many believed in his name when they saw the signs that he was doing. Plus, of course, they will know about the wine miracle the last time he was in town.

[6 : 42] What's happening is they're welcoming him as a sign giver. But nothing more important than that. Yes, come and do the things that we ask you to do. The miraculous, the impressive.

You see, when you press a bit, you see that their welcome for him is based on what he can do for them. It's based on what they can get from him. Not really for who he is.

One commentator says their welcome is drenched in self-interest. And then initially, it looks like this official in verse 46 is on this same self-interest train.

Verse 46. 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.

Concerned initially, I want you to do what I want you to do for me. And in a sense, let's be honest, who can blame him? There is nothing a father wouldn't try if his little boy is dying.

[7 : 43] Nothing. But we need to see that there's more going on here than a father trying to get a miracle worker to save his son. Look at verse 48. The tense of these pronouns is important when it says, The you there, both times, is plural.

So, Jesus is speaking to the man, but he's also speaking past him to the Galilean crowd around him. The crowd that we've been told want Jesus on their terms. A crowd that Jesus makes clear don't want Jesus for who he is, but for who they want him to be.

The Jesus that will give them what they ask. And Jesus rebukes this kind of faith, this selfish faith, which is really no faith at all. Now, Jesus here is not talking about the sort of weak or fluctuating faith that we so often experience.

We have good days and bad, if we're honest with ourselves. There are times we all want to say, I believe, help my unbelief. And we mustn't forget that Jesus says elsewhere that all he requires is faith the size of a mustard seed.

It is not the size of our faith that matters to him. It is the object. The challenge that he's laying out here is about what motivates our faith.

[9 : 18] And therefore, where our faith is really placed. The Galileans here are spectators. They're not in the arena. They're looking on. They're not truly believing. Their attitude was, yeah, you're

welcome here as long as you will do things for me.

You're welcome here, Jesus, as long as you will do things for me. Now, we see that everywhere in our culture.

The most crass expression of that that you see in the church is the so-called prosperity gospel. I will come to God in order that he makes me rich. I will come to God in order that he will make me healthy.

The prayer is, God, if you do this for me, then I will do dot, dot, dot. It's a conditional prayer. This is how you think.

If your heart says, I will come to God if he gives me what I want. If that is your heart, you don't want God. You want what God can give you. And you use God to get the thing that you really worship.

[10:26] You see that? I was talking to Paul last week about that great Mrs. Merton sketch. Don't know if you remember it back in the day, Mrs. Merton, when she had Debbie McGee on the show.

Debbie McGee, for those of you that are about 35 and under, she was the wife of a much older, much shorter wig-wearing magician called Paul Daniels.

He was a TV superstar. And Mrs. Merton starts her interview by saying, Tell me, tell me what first attracted you to the millionaire Paul Daniels. It's the same kind of thing.

Tell me, Jerry Hall. Tell me, Nicole Kidman, whoever it is. What attracted you to the billionaire Rupert Murdoch? We can have the same sort of approach to God. I'm here for my best life now, and I want what he can give me.

I don't really want him. So this is the question we need to ask ourselves. Do you want a Christ who gives you the life that you want?

[11:31] A kind of cosmic sugar daddy. A spiritual Rupert Murdoch who's going to give you everything that you want in the here and now. And you kind of take him on those terms.

There are things that you want from me, and I'll put up with those in order to get the thing that I really want. Or do you want a Christ who was with God and is God?

The creator and sustainer of everything. A Christ who does what he does, and we worship him no matter what. Because in his infinite kindness, he has cleansed us from our sin, he has given us new birth to eternal life, and he satisfies our deepest longings for God.

The things that he gives us we do not deserve. We don't come looking for them. We come for him, and he gives us those things in the process. Is your faith in Jesus for what you can get out of the relationship in temporal terms?

That is, is your faith in Jesus for what you can get in the present on the basis of the things of this world, the Jesus of Joel Osteen? Maybe you can have a more spiritual version, a bit more like the Galileans.

[12:42] Your faith demands supernatural experience. I'll come to you if you give me these supernatural spiritual experiences. Unless you see signs and wonders, you will not believe. Or will you ask yourself, have you put your faith in him because he is God the Son?

And he is worthy. And the truth is you are astonished that he allows you into a relationship with him. See, you can't actually have Jesus on your terms.

He rebukes the Galileans for thinking that they can. We need a different approach. So here's our second point. If the first point is Jesus on my terms, selfish faith, the second point is Jesus on his terms.

And we might call that Christian faith. And that's actually the approach of the official. So this man, a better translation here would be royal official.

That's what the Greek word implies, or states actually. He's likely a high-ranking official to Herod Antipas, who wasn't actually a king, but thought of himself that way. And therefore, he would have called his officials royal officials.

[13:51] Either way, this man is a high-profile political figure. And he has asked Jesus to heal his son. Jesus, we've just heard, has issued the rebuke to the crowd. And then verse 49, the official said to him, Sir, come down before my child dies.

What we have here is this man pushing back. He's persisting with Jesus. Without regard for his reputation, without regard for what Jesus might say to him, he pushes back. The Sir here is actually Lord, the word Lord, a term that an inferior would use to address a superior.

He's being humble. He's coming back, and he's saying, Lord, I'm actually not just asking for healing. I'm asking because I know that you're the Messiah. And what I want us to see as his exchange with

this official unfolds, as Jesus' exchange with this official unfolds, the official embodies for us what true faith looks like.

If you want to be a Christian, this is what is required of you. This is what faith, Christian faith, looks like. There are three elements that I want to highlight. The first is this. He trusts Jesus alone can give life.

He trusts that Jesus alone can give life. He's saying, there are people here who want you to perform for them. There are people here who want you on their terms. But verse 49, Lord, come down before my child dies.

[15:20] He is making it clear that he believes that Jesus is the only one with the power to save his boy. The language there, my child, it's my dear little boy. It is a term of the deepest endearment.

And as he comes to him, it is an expression of complete dependence. Do you see, he makes no claim on why Jesus should heal his boy.

No demands why he is owed this in any way. It is just a plea. Lord, come down before my child dies. Many ways, it's a prayer.

It is the prayer of the father of a dying boy. He is crying out, trusting that Jesus will put things right because he knows that only Jesus can. If you and I want the eternal life that is held out in chapter 3, if we want the living water that alone will satisfy, in chapter 4, there is only one source.

The same Lord Jesus. We saw last week with the Samaritan woman that everyone who drinks of the water of our culture, the water that our culture says we're all about and will satisfy and will bring joy and happiness, whether it's money, sex, or power, or some version thereof.

[16:45] Whoever drinks of that water will thirst again. You can pour as much of those things as you can get hold of into a human soul and they simply vanish because they cannot bring us eternal life.

That only comes through Jesus. And true faith, Christian faith requires us to trust Him and nothing else. That's the first thing this official shows us.

He trusts Jesus alone can give life. The second thing he does is he trusts Jesus' word. He trusts Jesus' word. Verse 50, the official said to him, Sir, come down before my child dies.

Jesus said to him, Go, your son will live. The man believed the word that Jesus spoke to him and went on his way. The official makes his request. Jesus responds by promising that his son will live. Literally, it is your son lives. And what does the man do? He believes. The narrative is really specific. John is careful to ensure here that we know that the grounds of this man's believing are the word that Jesus spoke.

[17:55] There is no sign. There is no wonder. There is no miracle to observe. There is no burning bush. There is nothing like that. There was actually nothing to see. The official believes the word of the eternal word.

He trusted in who he is. He trusted in what he said he would do. That is the essence of true faith, taking him at his word. We today, we're not promised the miracles, but we do have Christ's word. And to take him at his word is a non-negotiable for a Christian. We receive what he says as the word of the eternal Son of God and we do what he tells us.

Now to be clear, taking him at his word extends beyond the bits in red in the Gospels. He takes the Old Testament. Jesus takes the Old Testament as God's authoritative word. You know those times when he said, have you not read in Moses?

And the rest of the New Testament expounds what he says. Taking Jesus' word is about taking the whole of Scripture seriously. But, even if we do stick to what Jesus said, the words that he uses in the Gospels, or even what he has said in these encounters that we've been looking at over these Sunday evenings, in these couple of chapters that we have, even if we were to take him at his word, on that basis, our lives should be transformed.

[19:20] If you trust that Jesus has come to bring joy through the cleansing of your sins, it changes how you view yourself. It changes all of the negative self-talk that you run around in your head.

If you believe that Jesus has come to bring joy through cleansing you from your sins, guilt is taken away. It has no place in your life. Shame has been dissolved.

If Jesus says, you are clean, and you are free to experience joy, that is true freedom. It changes your experience in the present.

If you trust that you have new birth, new birth that reaches into eternity, not on the basis of your behavior or your performance, but on the basis of the grace of Christ. It reframes everything.

Glory lies open before you. Whatever your experience in the present is, glory lies open before you. And however long you've got between now, this moment, this evening, and when you step across into eternity, all that lies ahead of you is good.

[20 : 33] However difficult it is now, the future is bright. It also means that you don't need to claw and grasp and strive for everything in the present because something better lies ahead in the future.

You can let things go. You don't need to sweat the small stuff. If this life is all there is, probably best to sweat the small stuff because you might miss out.

But if this life actually is going to come to an end physically at some point, but then glory lies open before you, well, you can forgive as you have been forgiven.

you can let things go. You can live as a free person. Our culture is obsessed with all kinds of things that simply enslave us.

You've got to have this. You're enslaved to that desire. You've got to have that. You're enslaved to that. You've got to make sure that you get justice in this moment because of what you've experienced. Imagine if you could just let them all go.

[21 : 38] Well, you can if you're a Christian. It reframes everything. And when you know and trust that Jesus connects you to a spring of living water that bubbles up from within despite what's going on at ground level, that's what springs do.

You can build whatever you like on top of a spring and it will eventually crumble because the spring, you can't stop it. It just comes up and keeps coming.

You can build the heaviest big things on top of them. You can build a massive construction. It will eventually fall down. Whatever is going on at the top, that water will find its way up.

That is why Jesus uses the language of a spring of living water that will come up from within. When you trust that that is yours in Christ, the gray and the dreary and the painful and the sad, even the heartbreaking, all of those things are given a new perspective because you know those things are temporary.

You know that the Lord has entrusted them to you, yes, for a time and however hard they are, that spring cannot be thwarted and one day everything sad will come untrue.

[22 : 57] ! True faith trusts Jesus' word even when we can't see the outcome, even when our prayers go unanswered, even, and this is especially relevant in these days, even when it is culturally costly to take them at His word.

So let me say to you, what does Scripture say? Do that. Believe that. Order your life around that. You say, well, I can't do that.

What will people think? Don't let the opinions of others keep you from the life of eternity. So, the official goes on Jesus' command to His son, servants come with the good news.

Verse 51, see the good news? His son was alive, not recovering, actually, it says that he was alive. Actually, literally, it says, his son lives.

He wants to double-check when exactly that change in his son happened and he asks him and it was just at the point the previous day when Jesus had said he lives. In that moment, his faith is confirmed and he takes the next natural step, which is the third element of true faith.

[24 : 08] The first is that he trusts that Jesus alone can give life. Second, that he trusts Jesus' word. And thirdly, verse 53, he trusts his family to Jesus.

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. His household. See, we're not told how this happened.

Either he told them about Jesus saving the boy and they put their faith in him or more likely, I think, as the father of the family, he then leads them in the things of Christ. I met Jesus.

He is Lord of heaven and earth. From this day forward, this is now a Christian household. The flow of the passage takes us to that point. The figure goes, do you notice this? The figure goes from being described, first of all, as a royal official, verse 46 and 49.

He's then the man in verse 50 and then he's the father in verse 53. And it is as a father that he leads his family in the things of Christ.

[25 : 15] If a husband gets converted to Christ, he would tell his wife that the home is now Christian and it will be led along Christian lines. Can't convert his wife, of course, but the home and any children that they have will now be led according to God's word.

That's what it means to lead as a Christian husband and father. If a wife is converted, it is different. She doesn't lead, but she does use her influence in a Christian way. 1 Peter 3 gives you the pattern for this.

If the gospel comes in to a family, it changes everything and that family is ordered accordingly. And as the text draws our attention to the man's status as a father to this son, this is an outworking of the covenantal relationship in the Christian home.

The promise of salvation in the Lord Jesus is for you and your children. And fathers are to raise their children to trust Him in the same way that they do. And did you notice this is not graduate Christianity?

It's one of the first things He does after believing Himself. Of course, we know that it's God who saves anyone. We've just seen that true faith requires us to trust that Jesus alone can give life.

[26 : 27] But we need to see that the main way that God grants this life is through families and the raising of Christian children. If you are a Christian dad, as you trust Jesus for life yourself, as you trust His word, trust your family to Him as well.

Lead the home spiritually. Model trusting Jesus' word. Pray with and for your family. That is how your household will exude the aroma of Christ.

So when we come to Jesus on His terms, not selfishly, but on His terms, as He demands us to, it will mean trusting Him for life, trusting His word, and trusting our families to Him.

And we can hear that and we can think, that sounds pretty demanding. That sounds pretty tough. But I want, as we close, I want to tell you that you can do it. You can do it.

Yes, the culture is pushing the other way. If you're going to trust Jesus in this way, you're going to have to walk against the tide. But you can do it. But you can do it. You can do it. You can do it because Jesus has gone ahead of you.

[27 : 39] See, come back to that carefully constructed move that the text makes from royal official to man to father of a son. You see, as we see that move in the text, we are supposed to hear the echo of another father and his son and another death that was followed by a resurrection to life.

You see, the life that we trust Jesus for has been won for us through his death and resurrection. He is the life. He's the way. He's the truth.

But he is the life. And so, we have life in him. It is as we trust him that we receive the life that is his.

And the word that we trust for this life is the word of our Savior who went to these lengths for us.

The word that we trust is the word of a Savior who lived the life that we should have lived, who died the death that we should have died, and who was raised to life that when we trust him, we are trusting the one who is life himself.

And what this means is we can confidently trust ourselves and our families and anything else for that matter to him because he has loved us to this degree. We love him because he first loved us.

[29 : 00] And we can love him only because he first loved us. And that means that true faith, the faith that we're called to here, is always a response to this immeasurable grace.

And that is a grace that changes everything. Let's pray. Amen.