



First Baptist Church At The Villages

Jesus: Seeing & Believing • Healing an Official's Son • John 4:46-54 •

For Use By Groups 3/1 through 3/7/2020

MAIN POINT

Jesus' compassion leads us to trust Him—not because of His signs, but because of His goodness.

INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

Share a time when you've prayed that God would heal someone. What happened?

How did this challenge or change your faith?

All throughout the Bible, God is described as compassionate. He cares deeply for His people. But many struggle to believe this. When we have difficult circumstances arise, when we lose a job, when we or a loved one gets horribly sick—sometimes it's hard to believe that God really is as compassionate as He says He is. But God's Word is trustworthy. When God says He is compassionate, He really is. In Jesus' second sign in John's Gospel, we see God's compassion on full display—not so we can respond by being impressed, but by trusting fully in Him.

UNDERSTANDING

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

| Have a volunteer read John 4:46-48.

In the passages leading up this incident, Jesus turned water into wine at a wedding in a Cana, and shared the gospel with both a religious leader and a social outcast. In this passage, Jesus was approached by a man from an entirely different part of the social sphere: a Roman official.

What would make the official think Jesus could heal his son?

What misconceptions did he have about Jesus' power to heal?

How would you describe the belief he had at this point?

When Jesus told the official, "Unless you see signs and wonders you will not believe," He was saying something important. The official believed that Jesus could perform wonders, and that seems to be what His faith was in. He didn't trust Jesus, but only His power. Likewise, many may see the signs and wonders Jesus performed and marvel, but not direct their amazement toward the One performing the wonders.

Read Matthew 12:39 and Matthew 16:4. What's your reaction to Jesus' calling those who seek after signs as being part of an evil and adulterous generation?

What's the danger in seeking after signs, but not the One who performs them?

How do Jesus' words challenge you personally?

Jesus' words challenge us as much today as they did His original hearers. Signs and wonders are not bad in and of themselves—Jesus used signs and wonders to reveal Himself to His people. Many throughout His ministry and the ministry of the apostles came to faith in part because of miraculous deeds. But we are not to put our trust in the miracle—that trust belongs to God. We seek Him, not what He can do for us. And this was what the official would learn as well.

| Have another volunteer read John 4:49-50.

How is the man's faith different at this point in the conversation than it was when the conversation with Jesus began?

There's a definite shift in the official. He had become desperate. He wanted His son to be saved from death. He was undoubtedly a man of means—medical assistance would not have been an issue for him. But whatever options he'd tried to bring healing to his son had failed. Jesus had become his only hope.

Does Jesus want us to see Him as our only hope? Why?

When performing His first sign, Jesus was reluctant to act. Was Jesus reluctant to heal the official's son?

Read verse 50 again. What is important about the way Jesus responded to the official?

Jesus was not sending the man away begrudgingly. God delights in answering the prayers of His people. Jesus spoke here with a confidence that comes not with knowing something would happen, but being the One who caused it to happen.

Verse 50 says the man believed the word that Jesus spoke. What does that tell us about where he was putting his faith?

| Have another volunteer read John 4:51-54.

Why was the time the boy began to improve of significance to the father? How might that fact have affected his faith?

How is the man's faith different at this point than it was when he started his journey to bring Jesus to his son?

When the man left Jesus, he was trusting His word was true. When he returned home to the news that his son was better, he did something peculiar: he didn't immediately rejoice in the good news. Instead, he asked when he got better. When he heard the time, he saw his faith had been validated.

Why would the man's household become believers?

This story doesn't end simply on the good news of the official's son being made well. The entire household put their trust in Jesus! And an important truth is revealed in their faith: the gospel is for everyone who trusts in Him. There is no one who is excluded, no people group, no social class, no one. The gospel is for everyone, and that is the greatest act of compassion God could ever have shown us.

APPLICATION

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

Remembering the times when God has acted on our behalf is so important to our faith. It reminds us that God is faithful at all times, even when we can't see what He's doing, and it encourages us to believe His Word, no matter what.

What experiences can you recall that have helped your faith to grow?

What are one or two practical ways you can help yourself grow in your trust for the Lord?

PRAYER

Thank God for revealing His compassion in the healing of the official's son and for the greatest act of compassion of all—Jesus' death and resurrection, giving new life to all who trust in Him.

COMMENTARY

| John 4:46-54.

4:46–50a. On this return to Galilee, Jesus also visited Cana (bypassing Nazareth), the location of the water-to-wine miracle recorded in chapter 2. There he encountered a request for help from a royal official who served in the court of Herod Antipas, the tetrarch of Galilee. Some interpreters suggest the man could have been a Gentile centurion, but perhaps not since Jesus directed his early ministry exclusively to Jews. This official had made the journey of twenty-five miles on the basis of Jesus' reputation.

Notice the verbs as John draws a picture of a desperate man. He heard that Jesus had arrived, and he went to him and begged him. The word describes repeated and persistent pleas. Desperate faith drove him to Jesus and also drove him to his knees.

The Lord's words shock us as they must have shocked the royal official. He did not address the desperate man but spoke in the plural (you) to the crowd, accusing them of wanting only more signs and wonders. But faith built only on the spectacular is not biblical faith. Perhaps Jesus drew a contrast here between the Samaritans in Sychar who believed because of his message and the Jews in Cana who were interested only in physical miracles.

Before we look at the faith factor, let us clarify a couple of common misunderstandings in this passage. The royal official of John 4 should not be confused with the centurion of Matthew 8 and Luke 7. The town was the same (Capernaum), but in the Synoptics we read about a dying slave rather than a dying son. Many scholars argue that all the Gospel writers drew from a common source and changed the flavor of the story. But John took great pains to establish his eyewitness account and also, writing much later, had opportunity to review all the Synoptic accounts while preparing his own.

Another pointed issue is the phrase signs and wonders which has taken on immense popularity in our day. John generally used the word signs (*semia*), but this is the only appearance of wonders (*terrata*). Borchert writes, "In the ancient world miracles and acts of power were linked to the presence of the miracle worker, but here the healer refused to be present. The story, therefore, is an important illustration of the purpose for which John wrote the Gospel." And

again, “Jesus is clearly portrayed in the Gospel as one who seeks to lead persons through stages of inadequate believing to satisfactory believing even if it means denying the person or request” (Borchert, p. 220).

Jesus did not say you may go as the NIV translates. The word go is imperative, so the man has been commanded by the Savior of the world with a promise of life for his son. But if he left, according to his way of thinking, he would leave behind his one chance for help. Jesus demanded that his faith be desperate enough to trust his word, not just his visible works.

Wonders may produce awe, but words produce faith. Remember John’s theme: Believing is seeing. Our modern society assumes everything must be tested by science, explained with logic, or personally experienced. When it passes those tests, it can be identified as reality. But the writer of Hebrews said, “Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see” (11:1).

This story is so dramatically human because it is so like life. Any of us who has failed or flunked, been fired or flattened can understand desperate faith. In my view of the passage, Jesus did not criticize the royal official but rather the Galileans who gathered around because they had seen all that He had done in Jerusalem at the Passover Feast.

4:50b–54. The man obeyed, persisted, and received the promise of a miracle. Most notable in this section of chapter 4 is the phrase that appears at the end of verse 50: The man took Jesus at his word. This kind of faith God constantly rewarded in the New Testament, and particularly in the Gospels. The total trust that Jesus will do what he has promised, a response to the Savior, culminates in faith-behavior—actually doing what Jesus says to do.

Apparently it was too late in the day to begin the trip back to Capernaum, but the next day the royal official set out to cover the twenty-five miles. We can only imagine the anxiety of that seemingly endless trip, but the servants brought the good news before he arrived home. The father asked about the timing of the child’s recovery, and his faith was confirmed. Vague and impersonal faith became specific and personal faith. The word believed has no direct or indirect object in verse 53, so we assume the royal official and all his household exhibited intentional faith in Jesus’ person, his deity, and his messianic claims.

Not only did the royal official himself believe, but he shared the entire experience with his family. The concept of “household salvation” is certainly not uncommon in the New Testament, and we are reminded here of the Philippian jailer in Acts 16. Let us keep a good balance here. While recognizing the strong influence of the major male member of a household in first-century Middle Eastern culture, we must also acknowledge that everyone in the house knew how sick the

boy was as well as when and why he recovered. In fact, the faith of the members of the household, not having spoken with Jesus as their master did, represents the kind of faith John describes throughout this Gospel.

John did not record any other witnessing done by this man, but the story obviously got back to him so it could be included in the Gospel. A very private miraculous sign moved a petty politician from desperate faith to deliberate faith. Jesus came to save us from sin. But he does not want us to trust him just because we are desperate and have no other choices. He wants us to believe in his word and trust him with every part of our lives.

In a classic work published almost a hundred years ago, Archbishop Trench describes the growth of the nobleman's faith: "But did he not believe already? Was not this healing itself a gracious reward of his faith? Yes, he believed that particular word of the Lord's; but this is something more, the entering into the number of Christ's disciples, the yielding of himself to Him as to the promised Messiah. Of admitting that he already truly believed, there may be indicated here a strengthening and augmenting of his faith. For faith may be true, and yet most capable of this increase."