

## Sunday 8<sup>th</sup> February 2015 AM Faith's progress when you're in trouble – John 4v43-54

### **Title: Faith's progress when you're in trouble – John 4v43-54**

**Purpose:** To see how faith develops in a man who finds himself at wit's end in a domestic crisis.

## **INTRODUCTION**

### Fame & catchphrases

People have often found fame through their catchphrases OR at least had their fame made more concrete. Perhaps some of you might recall the catchphrase "I want you to get up out of your seats" – this was one that was a favourite expression of Billy Graham the crusade evangelist.

And thinking about that phrase it is a good one in the sense that it reminds us that FAITH is \*not\* like a HOBBY!

Today we are going to consider 5 types of faith and I want immediately to mention one of them and that is COUCH FAITH.

Q. I wonder when the last time was that you took a step of faith? You know you left FEAR behind and ventured out to do something that God wanted, in FAITH.

It is too easy for that to be where we are at. Well this morning we are going to look at a man who went through four other stages of faith.

### An interlude

Now if you were here last Sunday morning you will remember that we did **THE STORY OF THE SAMARITAN WOMAN** coming to faith in Jesus by degrees. We saw how **her initial impressions of Jesus slowly increased to better and better ones** until that point when she **encourages her townfolk to start the same process** and perhaps come to the same conclusions that she has.

Remember her words to them:

(John 4 verse 29) "Come, see a man who told me everything I ever did. Could this be the Christ?"

Well, surprising as it may seem, that whole section (about 40 whole verses), is actually what you would call an **INTERLUDE**. The main thread of what's going on has been broken for a moment while the Samaritan episode is told.

So now at Verse 43, where we take up our short 12 verse section, we are picking up the story where we left off. Jesus had left Judea in the South so as to avoid too much unwelcome attention from the Jewish religious authorities and hence he is returning to his homeland back in the North, back in Galilee.

### A key proverb

Now one thing that we notice right at the outset is that John **inserts a very key proverb**.

So we get the whole flow I'll start from Verse 43 and read the opening scene setting verses:

(Verse 43-45) "After the two days he left for Galilee.

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

When he arrived in Galilee, the Galileans welcomed him. They had seen all that he had done in Jerusalem at the Passover Feast, for they also had been there.”

Initially you might think this is rather peculiar, given that having said that he gets no honour from his own people the Jews, he then, in the very next breath, goes on to say that when he arrives in Galilee, the Galileans welcome him.

I think there are a couple of things going on here:

- **FIRST** – John is making a comparison (And an unfavourable one at that) between the Jews and the Samaritans.

The Samaritans were clearly receptive and responsive to Jesus:

- they are good listeners and are willing to have their initial opinions about Jesus changed as he presents evidence to them
- they come to acknowledge that he is the Christ and truly the Saviour of the World.
- they also want more of him asking that he stay on (which he does for two days)

- **SECOND** – John is **letting us know that we should \*not\* just take things at face value.**

Yes, the Jews up North in Galilee do give him a rousing welcome BUT ONLY because they have seen all the miraculous things that he had done at the recent Passover feast down in Jerusalem.

### Get into our story

Well I want to **get into our story** and for this, as ever, we need to try and get to know whatever we can about the person who is going to have a life-changing encounter with Jesus.

At this point let me ask: Q. Do you think that YOU are likely to have a life-changing encounter with Jesus?

And if you are sitting there thinking, well actually I did have one back 6 or 10 or 24 years ago – then still the question remains just as valid: Q. Do you think that YOU are STILL likely to have another life-changing encounter with Jesus?

### Easy to be a spectator

You see the problem is that like many sports today, it is all too possible that we are nothing more than SPECTATORS, armchair players.

We merely SPECTATE and fail to allow:

- the ACTION & the PASSION
- the APPLICATION & the IMPLICATION to really touch us.

### So our man

So our man is introduced there in Verse 46 as “a certain royal official”. The most likely scenario, assuming he wasn't some sort of nobleman, was that he worked for **Herod the Tetrarch** (that is **Herod Antipas**) who was the governor of Galilee and another area known as Perea.

This is the most likely scenario and so putting that into our own language, our man today is a **CIVIL SERVANT**.

And in the UK, according to the Office of National Statistics (the ONS) – we have not too many short of ½ a million of

them.

And I now want to take you through the FOUR STAGES of FAITH or BELIEF, that John shows to us by way of this life-changing encounter with Jesus.

And the FIRST type of faith is what I'm calling:

## #1 – A CRISIS FAITH

We are told what the crisis was for this Civil Servant – basically his son was lying sick in Capernaum (there on the Northern shore of the Sea of Galilee), some 20 or so miles away from Cana where Jesus was.

(And you might remember Cana – that was where the 2<sup>nd</sup> encounter we did was located at that Wedding where Jesus turned water into wine and thus displayed his glory. It was there that the disciples of Jesus first began to put their faith in Jesus).

(It does make you wonder whether Jesus is going back there because he wants to fan back into flame some of the earlier work that was achieved through his first visit there – and that was exactly the approach that Paul and Barnabus took regarding the missionary journeys that they would revisit the churches and the disciples that they had made on the earlier journeys to strengthen them.)

Now, having been sick for a while, this son has a turn for the worse and is now at death's door.

Coinciding with this sudden turn for the worse is the news that Jesus has now arrived just a mere day's journey away.

**Verse 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."

### A couple of wrong assumptions

Now looking at this man's request, very polite and humble as it is, there are a couple of understandable yet FLAWED ASSUMPTIONS:

- FIRST – that Jesus would HAVE to be present back there in Capernaum if his son is to be healed.
- SECOND – that if Jesus does not come quickly, and the son dies, then it will be too late.

You can't help but be reminded of that rather similar situation with Jairus and his daughter who was similarly sick and on the point of death – he comes to beg Jesus and Jesus starts out on his way but stops to attend to a woman who has been suffering with bleeding and while he delays, word comes to Jairus that his daughter is in fact dead and that he should no longer bother the Teacher. Well to this Jesus simply tells Jairus not to be afraid and then he goes and raises her from death with 2 Aramaic words "Talitha Kuom" which translating them to English would render something along the lines of "Honey, get up" or perhaps "Wakey wakey sweetheart."

But in this particular case Jesus appears to confront the man rather ABRUPTLY:

**Verse 48** "Unless **YOU** people see miraculous signs and wonders," Jesus told him, "**YOU** will never believe."

### Abrupt with the Samaritan woman

You may recall that we had something a little bit similar with the Samaritan woman story last Sunday – Jesus is conversing with her happily enough when he suddenly, out of nowhere, changes the subject and simply says:

(Verse 16) “Go, call your husband and come back.”

And we said that this was \*not\* really Jesus just lacking in a bit of tenderness or tact \*but\* rather him just bringing the conversation around to the nub or the crux of the matter.

The man with the boy who suffered with seizures

Perhaps you have come across that story straight after the Transfiguration of Jesus where the disciples cannot cast out a demon from a boy and then Jesus says there in Mark 9. The boy’s father (just like this civil servant) asks for help and Jesus replies:

(Mark 9 Verse 19) “O unbelieving generation,” Jesus replied, “how long shall I stay with you? How long shall I put up with you? Bring the boy to me.”

REALLY – WHENEVER IT MIGHT SEEM AS THOUGH JESUS IS BEING A LITTLE BIT **BRUSQUE OR ABRUPT** – WHAT YOU SHOULD INSTEAD SEE IS THAT **RIGHT HERE WE ARE BEING GIVEN A \*BIG CLUE\*** to something that is important for us to be aware of.

So back to our story when Jesus says:

Verse 48 “Unless **YOU** people see miraculous signs and wonders,” Jesus told him, “**YOU** will never believe.”

We need to see that Jesus is not simply addressing this man – we know this because the **YOU’s** in the verse **ARE PLURAL AND NOT SINGULAR**. Jesus is making a shrewd comment about the people of his homeland, the people of his own race, the Jews.

The man not put off

Now we have to say that this man, despite Jesus fully justified rebuke to his own people because of them being just like spectators who clamor for signs and wonders, does not give up.

Give him his due – he does have persistence and is not going to give up by way of taking offense at Jesus’ words.

Verse 49 “The royal official (or as we are imagining, the Civil Servant) said, ‘Sir, come down before my child dies.’”

The question for us is: Q. Whether or not we will be offended by the sharp truthfulness of Jesus’ words?

It is not that they are unloving words, just that they are quite SHARP and TO THE POINT.

We all know, from our own experience, the number of times that we have lost our rag simply because someone (usually someone close to us) told us a bit too much of the truth. We fly off the handle and get very angry BUT deep-down we know that they are only telling the truth really.

Q. Are you angry with God because he is telling you a bit too much of the truth?

Well this man starts off with what I’m calling CRISIS FAITH – this is a faith that is brought about by a crisis HOWEVER that said it doesn’t mean that it is completely false – this man is not going to be put off and he realises he has no choice but to maintain his faith intact and not be put off by having the scale of his faith challenged.

I want to move on from a **“CRISIS FAITH”** to the next level – what I am calling **#2**:

## #2 – A “CALM FAITH”

### Clearly has some level of faith

Jesus clearly assesses and knows this CIVIL SERVANT. He sees the faith that is in him and he realizes that he is not one without any faith at all.

He is rather like that other man we mentioned before whose son was similarly not far from death and who said to Jesus in desperation “I do believe, help my unbelief”.

And so because of this tiny mustard seed worth of faith, incredible things can happen.

It really is so encouraging – you may also feel, well I do believe (at least a certain amount) – but I know I’m not completely there – I know I still have a lot of unanswered questions and I still have quite a lot of fears of what will happen if I do become a Christian and take faith seriously.

### You may go

Well Jesus simply now says to the CIVIL SERVANT – Verse 50 “You may go. Your son will live.”

So simple.

And yet –

Q. I wonder how you would take it?

Q. Would this be welcome news as far as you are concerned?

it is something that is truly a test of faith – put yourself in his shoes – what would you actually do?:

- He might have been thinking: “Errh – Is that it?”  
(A bit like Naaman, the Syrian, when he went to Elisha in 2 Kings 5, to get healed of his leprosy and he fully expected him to perhaps wave his hand over the spot – but actually he doesn’t even invite him inside but just tells him to go to a certain river a day’s journey away and have a wash and it will be done!!)
- He might have been thinking: “What is my wife going to say when I get back and I don’t have Jesus and my son is still lying in the bed and is just the same.”

“Isn’t she going to say or SHOUT INCREDIBLY LOUDLY – what did you just take NO FOR AN ANSWER? You should have stood your ground and not let him get away with fobbing you off so easily.

You know the problem with you is that your just too happy to do what anyone tells you – I suppose if he’d told you to stand in the corner and face it, you’d have probably done it!!”

Clearly, whatever was in his mind when he first hears Jesus response to his request, he decides to receive them without question and do precisely as he says.

Q. Now why do I say that this is, if you like, the next rung up the faith ladder?

Well a couple of reasons:

- ONE – because it says that he believed (or as the NIV puts it “took him at his word”).

- BUT ALSO – because of a little fact that Verse 52 gives us where we learn at what hour this all took place: “the fever left him at the seventh hour... the father realized that this was the exact time at which Jesus had said to him, ‘Your son will live’”

Now when we have time given us in the NT we have to ask which system of time is being used. One possibility is that it was the official Roman system of time reckoning which was used in certain legal or official situations and that was from midnight to midday. Alternatively it was the much more commonly used Jewish system which was from Dawn to Dusk i.e. 6am to 6pm.

Q Now you might say – well who cares about that?

Well, hold your thinking for a bit:

- we know the man makes his way home, but if it was under the **Roman official reckoning**, then this would make the time of the healing **7pm** and thus that he probably started out early the next day and that was why he met up with the servants coming the other direction with the good news.

However, if it was the more commonly used **Jewish system**, then this would be **1pm** when Jesus gave the man his answer. And under that scenario, we are left wondering: Q. Why it was that the man did not get home the same day making it unnecessary for the servants to set out to find him?

Perhaps, the man was so CONFIDENT in the word that Jesus spoke, that he had complete peace as to the outcome and so was no longer in a hurry to depart. (Though of course we know he did depart).

Where the text says: “he believed the word Jesus spoke to him” – the construction of that word is such that it is a once for all completed action – it is a little bit like – HE BELIEVED HIM PERIOD or HE BELIEVED LOCK STOCK AND BARREL.

Ok the man starts out with a **“CRISIS FAITH”**, now it has become a **“CALM FAITH”**.

The rung up the faith ladder - #3:

### #3 – A “CONFIRMED FAITH”

Verse 51-53 “While he was still on the way, his servants met him with the news that his boy was living. When he inquired as to the time when his son got better, they said to him, ‘The fever left him yesterday at the seventh hour.’ Then the father realized that this was the exact time at which Jesus had said to him, ‘Your son will live....’

Q. Don’t you think it gracious the way Jesus causes things to happen here?

Q. What if the man had got home and the lad gradually got better and better – would the CIVIL SERVANT have been strengthened and encouraged in his new found faith OR would he have perhaps started doubting and saying to himself: “Well maybe my son was about to get better anyway – it just didn’t look like it”.

Jesus makes sure that this man’s CHILD-LIKE faith gets an early CONFIRMATION so that it is properly strengthened and made like CONCRETE.

### #4 – A “CONTAGIOUS FAITH”

The last thing comes at the end and that is that when people get truly and wonderfully saved – they don’t tend to

simple internalise it as something rather personal and private.

Q. Remember what happened with the Samaritan woman? She left her water jar where it was and immediately went on an evangelist hunt seeking out her townfolk to let them hear the news:

“Come and see a man who told me everything I ever did. Q. Could this be the Christ?”

It is wonderful to see that this faith very quickly spreads from him to the rest of his household (and naturally we don't know if that was just small or whether big), but the point is that he felt compelled to share everything that had happened.

For all of us, a good indicator of GENUINE FAITH is that of the desire to SHARE THAT FAITH – as we read of the apostles when they were urged to speak no more about Jesus they responded:

Acts 4 verse 20 “...we cannot stop speaking about what we have seen and heard.”

I can imagine that he would have gladly recounted every single detail, every feeling he had gone through on his short journey to faith through a thoroughly life-changing encounter with Jesus.

## CONCLUSION

Let me conclude – in a moment we are going to sing a hymn and if I played you the tune you might easily think it was written in the 1800's, but actually it was written at the end of the 1960's – it is by Bill & Gloria Gaither and it is called:

“God sent his son they called him Jesus”

The Chorus starts like this: “Because he lives I can face tomorrow, because he lives all fear is gone...”

And for our civil servant at the beginning – before meeting Jesus – the “he lives” part would have been a reference to his son BUT through some very small and progressive steps of faith that won out over fear, the “he lives” is now a reference to Jesus.

The story of the hymn is very interesting because the authors lived during a very unsettling time with the Vietnam war and many other things and one day coming out of his office block Bill saw some newly laid pavement with tarmac and he spotted one single blade of grass poking through to the sunlight. This reminded him that there is always hope despite harsh and hostile surroundings.

Q. So where are you today?

- you have COUCH FAITH
- maybe it is CRISIS FAITH
- or CALM FAITH
- perhaps now CONFIRMED FAITH
- or best of all, of course, CONTAGIOUS FAITH

Let us pray - AMEN