

“Go, Your Son Will Live”

John 4:43-54

Key Verse: 50

“Go,’ Jesus replied, ‘your son will live.’ The man took Jesus at his word and departed.”

In John’s gospel there are seven signs that Jesus performs. John purposely selected these signs among many (Jn 20:30-31). These signs point to Jesus as the Messiah and the Son of God who gives life in his name to all who believe in him. The first sign revealed his glory as the Son of God who has transforming power to change people into new creations. In today’s passage John records Jesus’ second sign. What is the meaning of Jesus’ second sign? Many people seek signs and wonders in order to solve their problems when facing difficulty. In the time of Judges, when the Israelites faced the enemy in battle, they carried the ark of God onto the battlefield hoping that it would give them power to win victory. They wanted to use God for their own purpose without listening to what God wanted them to do. This was the problem of the Galileans, and it is our problem too. It is easy to try to use God to obtain a miracle instead of listening to what he wants us to do. We can call this “miracle-seeking” faith rooted in our easygoing desire. For example, instead of studying hard for our final exams, we may expect good grades by a miracle. Or we may wish for a promotion without doing excellent work. We also may expect unusual success in our ministry, without wholehearted devotion. We hope to lose weight without diet or exercise. This way of thinking is understandable as a human being. But it is dangerous. We need to know why Jesus wants us to listen to his word rather than seek signs and wonders.

First, “Unless you people see signs and wonders...” (43-49). As we studied last time, Jesus’ visit to Samaria sparked a great revival among the people. The Jews had thought that Samaritans were least likely to be saved because of their idol worship and pluralistic culture. We cannot find any hint that Jesus performed a miracle in Samaria. But when the Samaritans heard Jesus’ word, they believed it. The word of Jesus changed an incorrigible woman and an entire village of Samaritans, who confessed that Jesus really is the Savior of the world. The word of Jesus has great power to give life to dead souls. A great revival came through the word of Jesus alone. Historically, great revivals have come through the word of God. The First Great Awakening was sparked by the word of God spoken through Jonathan Edwards, George Whitefield and others. The Second Great Awakening arose when revivalists like Charles Finney proclaimed God’s word in the power of the Spirit. Revival sprang up later as D.L. Moody, Billy Sunday and Billy Graham

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preached the word of God. Where there is the word of God, great revival has come. On the other hand when there is no word of God, people tend to seek miracles.

After the great revival in Samaria, Jesus and his disciples left for Galilee full of joy and vision. At this time of spiritual high, Jesus wanted to help his disciples prepare for a different experience. So Jesus pointed out that a prophet has no honor in his own country (44). This phrase is recorded in the synoptic gospels, where Jesus said it after being rejected in his hometown (Mt 13:57; Mk 6:4; Lk 4:24). Here Jesus says it before entering Galilee. Jesus knew that the atmosphere in Galilee would be different from that of Samaria. He had a sense of problem about the Galileans' faith and wanted to help them from a shepherd's heart. When Jesus arrived in Galilee, the Galileans welcomed him. They might have put up banners and posters saying, “Welcome Jesus!” This welcome was not based on their personal relationship with him, but on the basis of the miracles he had done in Jerusalem at the Passover Festival (45). In chapter two John mentions that many people in Jerusalem saw the miraculous signs he was performing and believed in his name. But Jesus would not entrust himself to them (2:23-24). Why was it such a problem that they believed based on miracles? It means they did not want to know Jesus personally, but only receive some benefit from him. They had no root. In times of trouble or persecution, they would fall away like seeds in rocky soil which spring up quickly, and then wither and die just as fast (Mk 4:17).

Once more Jesus visited Cana in Galilee, where he had turned water into wine (46a). There was a certain royal official whose son lay sick at Capernaum (46b), which was about 25 miles east of Cana. According to the ESV study note, he was probably a Gentile centurion, possibly in the service of Herod Antipas. His son was close to death. Usually any father would be most desperate to help his son at such a time. The royal official must have tried any and every doctor, but there was no one who could help him. At this critical moment, he heard that Jesus had arrived from Judea. It was really good news for him, like a ray of sunlight shining into his dark heart. Surely, the name of Jesus is good news for anyone. Jesus is hope to the hopeless, joy to the sorrowful, liveliness to the depressed, strength to the weary, meaning to the meaningless, victory to the defeated, and life to the dead. The royal official went to Jesus as fast as he could. As soon as he arrived, he begged Jesus to come and heal his son, saying, “Please, please come!” Jesus was full of compassion. Whenever a sick or needy person came for help, Jesus extended God's mercy right away. Yet this time Jesus did not show mercy immediately. Instead, Jesus said, **“Unless you people see signs and wonders, you will never believe”** (48). The royal official was desperate, so he begged once

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more, **“Sir, come down before my child dies”** (49). He threw himself upon Jesus’ mercy without reservation. Though he was a royal official, he was really humble before Jesus. This great humility came from his burning love for his son. When we have such love for our children or Bible students we can humbly ask Jesus’ mercy as this father did. Lord, grant us such burning love in our hearts!

Why did Jesus say, **“Unless you people see signs and wonders, you will never believe”**? The Galileans were the most privileged people because Jesus had made his home among them. They could hear his words, and witness his miracles. They had more reasons to believe in Jesus than the Samaritans did. However, their faith was quite inferior. Their hearts were hardened. They were not interested in knowing Jesus, but only in getting some benefit from him. The content of their faith was more superstitious than relational belief in Jesus. Out of deep concern, Jesus wanted to raise awareness that there was something wrong so they might learn to put their faith in him and receive life in his name. In the course of helping a father save his son, Jesus taught the faith he wants us to have.

Second, the man took Jesus at his word (50-54). When the royal official pleaded again for his help, what did Jesus say? Look at verse 50a. **“Go,’ Jesus replied, ‘your son will live.’”** This is a great promise. It is also a command that requires obedience. Only those who obey the command will receive the blessing. But obedience is not easy. In the time of the prophet Elisha there was a general in Aram named Naaman. He was a valiant soldier, and highly regarded. He had fame and honor and wealth. Yet he had leprosy, which was incurable and fatal at that time. Despite his success, leprosy deprived him of all joy and happiness. In his desperation, he heard the testimony of an Israelite slave girl, and was inspired to seek healing from a man of God. So he went to Israel and finally arrived at Elisha’s house. He expected to be greeted with honor by Elisha and to see him put on a vivid display of God’s power to heal him. But Elisha did not even come to see him. Instead, he sent a messenger with instructions for Naaman to go and wash seven times in the Jordan River, promising that he would be cleansed. It was a great promise and the requirement was not difficult. However, when Naaman heard it, he was very upset and went off in a rage. His pride was terribly offended. This is the main reason that obedience is so difficult. But by the help of his servants Naaman curbed his pride and obeyed. Then he was healed.

There are numerous promises of God in the Bible. John 3:16 says, **“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish, but have eternal life.”** Jesus promises that whoever

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believes in him shall have eternal life. John 5:24 says, **“Whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be judged, but has crossed over from death to life.”** Jesus promises that whoever hears his word and just believes in him has eternal life and will not be judged. In Matthew 6:33 Jesus says, **“But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.”** When we seek Jesus first, everything we need will be provided for us. God’s blessing is like a huge deposit in a bank. Only those who have a valid pin number can access it. This pin number is faith, which implies to trust and obey.

To trust and obey sounds simple, but it was not easy. The royal official was desperate; his son had almost died. When people are very desperate they easily become irrational. Though he had traveled a great distance to see Jesus, all Jesus gave him was a simple word, **“Go, your son will live.”** It was hard to believe Jesus’ word. For one thing, it was too simple. And for another thing, he could have doubted Jesus’ love because Jesus did not take the time to go with him. Or he could have doubted the power of Jesus’ word because the distance was too far. This was a great test for the man. What did he do? He took Jesus at his word and departed (50b). His faith is amazing. How could he have such faith? It was because Jesus’ word worked in his heart, and he believed the power of Jesus’ word. Jesus’ words have power to give life. Hebrews 4:12 says, **“For the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.”** The word of Jesus works in our hearts when we respond with faith. We can understand through the clapping of hands. God’s power is like one hand clapping until we respond with faith. Our faith, like the other hand, makes possible a clapping sound. In order to respond to Jesus’ word with obedience, we need to make a decision of faith. One time Jesus said to Peter, **“Put out into deep water, and let down the nets for a catch”** (Lk 5:4). Peter had worked hard all night and did not catch anything. He was tired; it was not the right time or place to catch fish. Yet Peter decided to obey Jesus’ words, even when it did not make sense. He said, **“Because you say so, I will let down the nets”** (Lk 5:5). Then he caught such a large number of fish that his boat began to sink.

There is another reason that the royal official could have such great faith. It was because he knew the nature of authority. When someone in authority speaks, their words have executive power. My daughter Rebekah, who just finished her bachelor’s and master’s in linguistics at Northwestern, explained to me that this is an illocutionary act. Such words are not mere descriptors, but they carry power in

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them. For example, when President Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation, his words themselves were the authority to set slaves free. When Jesus said, **“Your son will live,”** life was imparted by Jesus’ words to the man's son. Here we can remember the centurion’s faith. He said to Jesus, **“Just say the word and my servant will be healed”** (Lk 7:7). Then he explained the reason he could believe this, saying, **“For I myself am a man under authority, with soldiers under me. I tell this one ‘Go’ and he goes; and that one ‘Come’ and he comes. I say to my servant ‘Do this’ and he does it.”** When Jesus heard this he was amazed and commended his great faith.

What happened when the royal official took Jesus at his word and departed? While he was still on the way, his servants met him with the news that his boy was living (51). What good news! Most people might have forgotten what Jesus said, and rushed right home to see their son. But this man paid more attention to Jesus than to his son. He inquired as to the time when his son was healed. The servants told him, **“Yesterday at one in the afternoon, the fever left him”** (52). Then the father realized that this was the exact time at which Jesus had said to him, **“Your son will live.”** He realized that his son was healed as the direct result of Jesus’ words. He told his family members what happened. When they heard his story, they too believed that Jesus healed the boy. Their household became a place where Jesus was honored as Lord.

When we review this event in detail, we find the growth in faith of the royal official. After hearing about Jesus, probably based on Jesus’ first miraculous sign, he came to Jesus with faith. His faith was tested when Jesus told him **“Go, your son will live.”** It was possible to fail at this moment, by falling into doubt or fear and refusing to obey Jesus’ word. But the royal official overcame this temptation with faith. He took Jesus at his word and simply obeyed. Then his faith took deeper root in Jesus and his word. His faith sprouted and grew and bore fruit. His relationship with Jesus became intimate and strong. Jesus wanted all of the people of Galilee to be like this man. This was the meaning of the second sign that Jesus performed.

In this passage we learn about the power of Jesus’ word. Jesus himself is the word of God (Jn 1:14). The word of God has power to give life. But it works in us only when we respond with faith. When we believe, the word of God changes us and makes us a new creation. Many UBF members can testify how specific words of God have worked in our hearts and lives to help us grow in faith and to be more like Jesus.

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While preparing this message, I remembered how Matthew 6:33 has worked in my life. Nine months and three days after Deborah and I married by faith, our first daughter Sarah was born. As an intern shepherd at the time, I received very meager financial support and we were often hungry. One day in particular there was no baby milk in the refrigerator and we were running out of diapers and both my wife and I had not eaten. As I was pulling weeds in the church parking lot, a sense of sorrow overwhelmed me. I wondered why I had to be so poor, and a teardrop rolled down my cheek. Then I felt Jesus stand beside me and say, **“But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.”** Jesus’ word moved my heart, and I decided to trust Jesus and to keep seeking first his kingdom and righteousness by faith. Then assurance came into my heart that everything would be okay. Nothing changed outwardly, but I experienced peace and rest in my soul. Later that evening, when I went home, I found that a close friend had visited and filled our refrigerator with food. And since that time, I have experienced God’s faithful provision in many ways. Faith in Jesus’ promise in Matthew 6:33 enabled me to devote my life to Jesus as a pastor until now. And last month the little girl who was crying for milk almost 27 years ago graduated from the Feinberg school of Medicine at Northwestern and became a medical doctor. I still don’t have any money stored up in a bank account. But I do have a very clear testimony that Jesus has faithfully kept his promise to me. And through this I have come to know him and trust him more and more. But I cannot coast along on what has happened in the past. I must put into practice every day faith in Matthew 6:33. Please pray for me. And this week, let’s all share in our fellowships how the word of God has worked in our hearts and lives through faith.

In this passage we learn that Jesus wants us to take him at his word. Then we can experience the power of his word, take root in him and grow in a very personal relationship which enables us to bear good fruit. Let’s take Jesus at his word.