

THE MAN TOOK JESUS AT HIS WORD

John 4:43-54
Key Verse 4:50

⁵⁰ Jesus replied, "You may go. Your son will live." The man took Jesus at his word and departed.

First, "A prophet has no honor in his own country" (43-46). Look at verses 43 and 44. Jesus' mission journey to Samaria was very successful. As Jesus told his disciples, the fields were indeed ripe for harvest. And after serving a great evangelical movement, for two days, Jesus left for Galilee. On the way, Jesus told his disciples that a prophet has no honor in his own country. What does it mean that a prophet has no honor in his own country? In Jerusalem Jesus was honored. In the eyes of the people, suddenly, a devout young Rabbi appeared on the scene, preached powerful messages, and even performed many miracles. In the eyes of the people, Jesus was incredible and great and they believed he was the Promised Messiah. In Samaria, He was honored. And after studying the word of God with Jesus, they confessed, "This man really is the Savior of the world." But in the eyes of those in his hometown, those who had watched him grow up, he was still Joseph's son, the carpenter's boy. Because of their personal knowledge of Jesus, people would not accept him as the Savior of the world. When we accept God's calling and become Bible teachers, people honor us. But when we go home and tell our family members the divine meaning of the word of God, or we try to get them to repent, they say, "That's nice, but can you take out trash?" This is because, in their eyes, we are still their sons and daughters or brothers and sisters, not servants of God; they have known us personally and are not interested in being taught something, divine truth or not. The disciples already experienced an unexpected warm welcome in Samaria. They thought, "Even Samaritans welcome us, then, how much more will our own people?" Maybe a parade will be waiting where people will shout, "Jesus! Jesus!" and Peter and the disciples would wave to the crowds. But when things did not go as they had expected, when they were not welcomed, they would be greatly disappointed. Jesus did not want his disciples to be discouraged too much. So he told them that a prophet has no honor in his own country.

But what was the townspeople's response? Verse 45 shows that surprisingly, the Galileans welcomed them. As Jesus and the disciples entered the city, the crowd cheered and shouted. "Praise Jesus, for all that has been done and said!" and many ran up to him to shake hands, and even some of them bowed to the ground before him. It was a great moment. The disciples must have felt so good, for they were Jesus' people. But the Apostle John, the author, says something interesting in verse 45b, describing the reason for Jesus' welcome as due to the fact that they had seen him performing miraculous signs in Jerusalem during the Passover Feast, indicating that,

despite their welcome, something was still wrong. Their faith was not based in Jesus, but in the one who performed the miracles. They welcomed the one performing miraculous signs and wonders, and they would, no matter who that person was - David Copperfield, Judas Iscariot - they didn't care, it was just exciting. In this book, the Apostle John keeps talking about this, over and over, because faith based on miraculous signs is not considered faith at all. Many people say, "I will believe if God shows me some kind of sign." Or they say, "I will believe if God reveals himself to me." But Jesus does not recognize faith based on signs. In today's passage, Jesus shows us what true faith is, and how we can get it. True faith is faith that believes in God's promise. Even though there is no tangible or visible evidences or signs, yet in our eyes, we still believe in God's promise, which is trust in God, we trust in who He is, we trust in what kind of Person He is, this is faith based on the word of God, and this is genuine faith.

Second, "The man took Jesus at his word" (46-54). Look at verses 46 and 47. ⁴⁶ Once more Jesus visited Cana in Galilee, where he had turned water into wine. And there was a certain royal official whose son lay sick in Capernaum. 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.

The title 'royal official' shows that this man was a man of prestige. His life was really good until he was faced with a serious problem - his son was sick. Imagine how hard this royal official must have struggled to get his son healed, using every possible means at his disposal; he hired royal physicians from all over Capernaum and even alternative medicine practitioners, only to find that nothing and no one could heal his son. The only thing he could do was to watch his son suffer and wait for him to die. How sad and frustrating this was! But when he remembered the man who changed the foot washing water into wine, who opened the eyes of the blind, and who healed the paralytic; he was suddenly excited, saying, "I know what to do, Jesus can heal him!" It was about a 19 mile journey from Capernaum to Cana, around the sea of Galilee. When the royal official heard that Jesus had arrived from Judea, he made his journey directly to Cana. Then, when he met Jesus, despite his social position, he went to Him and begged him to come and heal his son, who was close to death. In order to save his son's life, he forsook his pride, and humbled himself to the point of begging, even though he was most likely an older man than Jesus, and Jesus was much lower on the social ladder. Then, surprisingly, Jesus said to him, "Unless you people see miraculous signs and wonders, you will never believe."

Usually, when people begged him to come and help them, Jesus went. When Jairus asked him to come and heal his daughter, Jesus went with him right away. When a Roman centurion asked him to heal one of his servants, Jesus said, "I will go and heal him (Mar 8:7)." But this time, his response

sounded cold; this man just walked 19 miles to see Jesus and even begged him, but Jesus said, “Unless you people see miraculous signs and wonders, you will never believe.” We can see that Jesus refused to go with him, and was not happy with the kind of faith the people had, even if they welcomed him. The truth was that if someone else did the same miracles, they would accept that person also. Jesus was not happy with this. So, even though this man begged him, Jesus was not pleased with him at all.

“Unless you people see miraculous signs and wonders, you will never believe.” How much Jesus wants to be trusted as good and loving! But people keep saying, “Why don’t you give me this and that?” Unless Jesus blesses them with what they desire, they never truly believe. How much Jesus wants to be trusted, because he knows the good plans he has for them! But people keep saying, “If I do not live for myself, then, who will?” How much Jesus wants us to have faith in him! In His goodness! In His faithfulness, reliability and trustworthiness! He is so loving and caring! You are always on his heart and the apple of his eye. He has a good plan for you. So, put your trust in him and you will not be put to shame. Jesus says in John 20:29, “...blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.”

The man did not give up though; he begged Jesus again, saying, “Sir, come down before my child dies.” But Jesus told him, “You may go. Your son will live.” Jesus did not go with him, but instead, gave him his words, words of promise, and challenged him to go home with only his words. Jesus challenged him to believe in his words of promise and live by them. Here we learn the kind of faith Jesus wants us to have. Jesus wants us to believe in his words of promise and go on. Having faith in Jesus means to go with his words and live by them, not by signs. We have all heard that the Bible is the book of God’s promises. It consists of the Old Testament and the New Testament. The word, ‘Testament’ means “covenant,” or “contract,” where God offers his promises to people, saying, “If you do this, I will do that for you.” Those who believe God’s promises, they enter into a binding contract with G, obeying what He says and living that way. When Abraham was still an idol worshiper, God offered him this contract, saying, “If you leave and go to the land I will show you, I will bless you and you will be a blessing and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.” Because Abraham believed that God would keep his promises, he did what God asked him to do - he left his country, his people, and his father’s household and went to the land God would show him - as a result, he went through many ups and downs. But whenever he had faith that God would keep his promises, he was happy and thankful, and built an altar. But whenever he looked at the reality and saw that God’s promises were not yet fulfilled, he let his heart be consumed with doubt and he was troubled and depressed; then, God saw that he lacked faith, so God visited him and encouraged him to believe that he would really keep his promises, making him into a great nation, then, Abraham’s faith was restored and he was thankful again - he went through these ups and downs for years. Then, at one point,

God commanded him not to look down at the reality, not to count the losses any longer, but look up at the heavens and count the stars, saying, "So shall your offspring be." Indeed, Abraham's life in God was the life of holding on to God's promises. Through this struggle, he came to know God personally and finally, he came to have absolute trust in God that whatever God said to him, he believed, and whatever God commanded him to do, he obeyed - logical or illogical, understandable or not, he didn't care; he trusted in God. When Abraham's son Isaac faced a serious financial crisis he planned to leave the Promised Land, he would go down to Egypt to get a job to support his family. But God appeared to him and offered him a contract, saying, "If you stay in this land, I will bless you." Isaac accepted God's word and stayed in the Promised Land - even though there was no tangible guarantee, like a job or future security, but he stayed there, because he believed that, as God had promised, God would bless him; because he believed in God's promise, he stayed there, enduring the financial difficulties. And so he didn't go through many ups and downs, because he had learned from his father's struggle; he remained faithful to God's command; then, at the right time, God poured out blessings upon Isaac, so that he became exceedingly wealthy. Jesus offered this contract to Simon and Andrew, saying, "Come, follow me, and I will make you fishers of men." They believed in Jesus' promise, accepted his offer, and left everything behind - their own dreams and future plans, and followed Jesus. Then, their struggle of living according to Jesus' words changed them completely - they became history makers, bringing real blessing to the whole world. Of course, they went through many ups and downs, as Jesus' disciples - there were pains and sorrows, but they indeed enjoyed a blessed life - one blessing after another. This is the meaning of having faith in God - you believe what he says because you trust him, the one who gave you his promise. We leave, go, stay, and do whatever God asks us to do, because we believe in Him: His goodness, faithfulness, and his almighty power; he is in control. Having faith in God means to believe in what he says and thus, live by it, no matter how things look, because we believe that He will do what He says and that everything will go according to His will. Now the world is so competitive, and survival seems the most important issue for all college students. But amazingly, Jesus says, "The pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well (Mt 6:32,33)." Jesus wants us to believe in him; he wants us to put our absolute trust in him, which means we accept his words of promise and live by them, practically pursuing and serving His kingdom work. That's the kind of faith he wants us to have - very practical and real, not something vague, or conceptual as many people treat them.

When Jesus said, "You may go. Your son will live," what change could the official see? Nothing! There was nothing tangible yet. If, at that very moment, dark clouds covered the sky, and thunder and lightning occurred around Jesus, probably, he would consider it a sign from heaven and could go

to his son. But when Jesus said so, nothing happened; the sky was still blue and beautiful birds were chirping as normal. If Jesus offered a sincere prayer to God for his son, lifting his hands and proclaiming to the sky, he would be comforted; but Jesus did not pray for him out loud - no performance. Jesus only gave him his words of promise, calmly saying - your son will live. With this, Jesus sent him home. Now, the official had to decide whether he would really trust in Jesus or not. And at the risk of his own son's life, he was challenged to trust. Would he decide to put his trust in Jesus at the risk of his son's life? Or would he refuse and cling to Jesus' feet, begging and crying for him to come to his house? How did he respond to Jesus' challenge? Look at verse 50. Let's read this verse together:

⁵⁰ Jesus replied, "You may go. Your son will live." The man took Jesus at his word and departed.

It says, "The man took Jesus at his word and departed." Wow! He boldly accepted Jesus' challenge and decided to put his trust in him. Usually, in this kind of situation, a father would never take such a chance; all fathers want a guarantee of 100%, with regard to their children. They say, "I understand, but I really need you to come with me, right now." It was obvious that Jesus' voice was not loud enough for his son to hear from 19 miles away. It was obvious that no human, no great miracle performer, could do what Jesus was suggesting. But still, he decided to put his trust in Jesus; so he took Jesus at his word and departed. He decided to believe that what Jesus said would come true. When Jesus said, "You may go. Your son will live," he believed it, even though his son never heard what Jesus said. He believed that things would be done according to what Jesus said - your son will live. He took Jesus at his word and departed. What does it mean to believe in Jesus? It means to take Jesus at his word and depart.

But, even though he took Jesus' words, his journey was not easy. He started his journey by believing in Jesus' promise, but his journey was not a five minute walk. It was a 19 mile long journey, on foot, which took, in those days, more than a whole day. For the first 5 or 10 minutes, he believed and so he was thankful. But 30 minutes later, his heart was consumed with doubt. "What if?" "What if?" When he thought about what he was doing, logically, he was so scared. He asked himself, "What am I doing? This is crazy." He was confused. Probably, he thought about going back to Jesus and begging him again, but this time offering him money; in order to secure his son's life. When he tried to put his trust in Jesus' words, his heart became a real battle ground - no sign, no evidence, and no tangible fruit. For five minutes, he believed and was thankful; but in the next five minutes, he doubted and was confused; then, the next five minutes, he was scared and almost cried out for fear that his son would die. One moment he was confident, and in another he was in deep agony; later he was scared again. But amazingly, somehow, no matter what was going on in his heart, he kept making progress, on his journey.

Despite all the terrible things that were going on in his heart and mind, which were like torture, he kept on his journey. That was the expression of his faith. Even though he was so scared, so confused, still he did not go back, but somehow continued on in his journey, because he still held onto Jesus' promise.

This man's inner struggle reveals very well our life of faith. Having faith in Jesus means to take Jesus at his word and depart – we live by his word because we believe that what he says will come true. We have faith in Jesus, and with this faith, we journey through this world, living according to God's word. Sometimes, our faith is so strong that we utter bold words confidently, saying, "God really loves me. I will give my life to God to do with whatever he wants." But sometimes, our faith is so weakened by life in this world, experiencing so many different kinds of challenges, such as loss of a job, painful failures, suffering from physical ailments or even broken families. Our faith, sometimes, seems so small and we feel like we are going through the valley of the shadow of death. But despite all these terrible things that are going on inwardly and outwardly, somehow, we keep on our journey to the kingdom of God; we continue to obey God, still holding onto Jesus' words of promise, sometimes, being happy, sometimes with many tears. This is the expression of our faith in Jesus Christ. Even though we are so terrified by life's challenges, in this world, still we confess that nothing, whether blessing or hardship, persecution or great fruitfulness, even poverty and danger, nothing can separate us from Christ Jesus our Lord. Maybe, you may feel so weak in spirit, maybe, you are discouraged by many difficulties and challenges, which you are experiencing in your life, maybe you are afraid because it seems you have no tangible fruit after years, but still you are making progress in your journey to your Father's house, and as long as you hold onto your faith in Jesus Christ, this will always be the case. As long as you believe in Jesus, you are on your way, and you are winning, no matter how things appear. This time, we are determined to hold on to his words of promise. "Come, follow me, and I will make you fishers of men." "Leave your country, your people and your father's household, and I will bless you." "Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well." "Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you the crown of life." God's promises are great and wonderful. Like this official, we will take Jesus at his word and live by it, believing that what he says will really come true. Even though there is no visible evidence or sign, still we go on, living by faith in Jesus alone. God says in Hebrews, "But my righteous one will live by faith. And if he shrinks back, I will not be pleased with him (10:38)." We must not be the ones who shrink back, despite challenges and difficulties; instead, we must be the ones who go on, continually so as to be saved by absolute faith in God. By this faith, so many people of God have overcome the world and served God's will powerfully in their generation. And by this faith we will be victorious as Jesus wants us to be. Do you trust Him? Will you take Jesus, only at his word? Amen!

What was the result of this man's struggle of faith? Look at verses 51 through 53. While he was still on his way, his servants met him with the news that his boy was living. What great news it must have been; like music to his ears! His son was alive! Praise God! But at that time, instead of indulging in the joy and happiness that this news brought, the royal official asked his servants about the time when his son got better. Why?! He really wanted to see if it was a natural healing or if it was the result of Jesus' words. At this point, if we rewind back to his 19 mile journey, while he was traveling back home to Capernaum, Jesus' words, "Your son will live" were circulating in his heart and mind, and the question came, "If this works, who is this Jesus of Nazareth?" This constantly knocked at the door of his heart. The servants 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." Then, his faith in Jesus became concrete, and he and all those in his household believed. Originally, he did not know Jesus at all, but only regarded him as a physician with miraculous healing powers. What he wanted was for Jesus to help him, to come to his house, in person, and heal his son miraculously. Then, if Jesus did come and save his son, he would say to Jesus, "Thank you," and present him with a large gift of money. But when he took Jesus at his word, even at so much risk, like his son's life, he experienced Jesus and His divine power, and his eyes were opened to see who Jesus is, the Son of God. Now, no matter what anybody said about Jesus, to him Jesus was the Son of God, the Savior of the world. Through this, salvation came, not only to himself, but to his son, and to his whole household. This was the fruit of genuine faith in Jesus' words. This was now the second miraculous sign that Jesus performed, having come from Judea to Galilee.

This struggle of holding onto Jesus' words, and putting them into practice is not easy; sometimes, it is scary, and sometimes, we experience terrible losses or sorrows on the way; sometimes, we are tired and feel like giving up, but at the end of this struggle, we will see the fulfillment of the word of God, and we will truly be satisfied and happy. Then, no matter what, we will have no regret about how we have lived our life, or how we have used our time and resources. With the promise of God, with God's vision, we started our mission life, which is a journey like we saw in this passage. If we keep our faith and live by God's word, surely we will see God's promises coming true in our life, we will come to know Jesus, and we will be satisfied, like a spring of water welling up to eternal life. Remember, the ultimate end of our struggle of faith is to receive a rich welcome into the kingdom of God, where we will see the great reward God has stored up for us from the beginning of our life of faith.

About four and a half weeks ago we sat down for Bible study with Msn John and he said that Seniors would be giving Sunday messages on John's Gospel. The first thing I thought was, oh my, I am so busy and I have school coming up on top of everything. I did not say anything, because I wanted to see

what passage I would receive, and I was trying not to be discouraging. I came to find that Msn John had wanted me to give the passage on John 4a, but during the discussions, before his desire was made known, someone else enthusiastically volunteered for that passage (inside I wished that I could have the same enthusiasm, but I only calculated). So, this was good news, to me, because of full time work; and due to my apprenticeship I have 40 hours of classes every eight weeks, with a lot of homework due each time. But amazingly, this passage would place my time way outside of that concern. God is good! However, then Msn John asked each of us to prepare the message and testimony that weekend, the one following this discussion, right before my classes were due. However, I got injured at work, that week, so I had Friday off, which no one else knew, and I could spend time working on this message, time that I would not normally have had.

I say all this because today's passage says that the man took Jesus at his word, not at his sign, help, or by any beforehand knowledge. In the message I was reminded of Abraham who took God at his word, but had many ups and downs. I know how his story goes, because it is history. But, as I look back through his life, God had everything already planned out; it is easy for me to see this, now. There was no danger for Abraham, but to Abraham, at the time, life looked to him as if it was dangerous, just as looks to me, many times. Likewise, to me, especially because of this life, a life of faith, it often looks like, or it feels like I am in danger, even because of God. At that time I want to complain, I want signs, I want to refuse and protect myself; and often I find that I have a very bad attitude toward the things God wants me to do. Some times I am so physically and emotionally bombarded that I want to sleep, I feel depressed, because God's things cause me, like Abraham, to want to be in my tent saying, "Woe is me, nobody knows my sorrow." This is how I have felt many times, but then as I was preparing this message, I could see Jesus' disapproval of those who wanted miraculous signs. They wanted something tangible, now, and so they did not want to trust in Jesus. I see that I often do not want to trust in Jesus, but just complain and I desire others to have pity on me. But then I see that Jesus wanted the people to trust in him; he wants me to trust in him so his good plan can be realized in my life. But I often do not want to trust in him. I want the difficulty to stop on its own or I want God to intervene instead of going the distance myself, through working out trust in him to its conclusion, where I can receive training and at the end, as Abraham did on the mountain with Isaac, I can meet him more personally, more personally than before. Again, I want something now, because I don't want to make the struggle to remember what I know about him and actively put my trust in him.

Through this passage, I see that when I do this I put more trust in myself and my ability to protect and take care of my life, and I don't make the journey as Jesus wants, therefore I end up forgoing the benefits He has in mind. Then, I am not free to do what God asks, to obey him (living out this covenant), which

causes me to be locked into doing just religious things. But I now see that this also keeps me from his blessings, and even deeper fellowship with him, as I struggle to obey and act without knowing all the details, even while having a good attitude; it forces me to trust in him more. I know God's plan for me is good (that's what the Bible says, and I am a Bible teacher). I have seen many aspects of this work its way out, already. I have a beautiful marriage, because I married by faith, when I did not see anything tangible. I have two beautiful daughters, even though one of them almost suffocated after birth and the other was born with severe physical problems. I have a good job, even though when I got married I did not and had no prospects of a good career. I see that when I have trusted in God first, without signs or tangible evidences, and when I have done this with only his words and knowing the person behind them, my life has turned out better than I could have hoped, and I have come to see him more in the process. However, I see how, even after all this, I still want to turn back toward my natural inclinations, controlling or trying to control my life, so that I will not have too many problems; I try to protect myself instead of taking Jesus at his word. But I see in this passage that Jesus says, "Unless you people see miraculous signs and wonders, you will never believe." Jesus is frustrated when people do not struggle to trust in him, because he knows that only when I trust in him, will my life go the way he has planned, from the beginning to the end. Only then, his will be done in my life. Only then can he change me, as he did Peter, from a lowly fisherman to a fisher of men for the benefit of all human history. Or like the Apostle John, from an angry young man, Jesus nick-named a son of thunder, to the Apostle of Love. Surely Jesus' plan for me is so glorious, but I naturally only want signs. Instead, Jesus wants me to trust in him more so that I will understand the life that results when I really believe and have faith in him.

One Word: The Man Took Jesus At His Word And Departed