

The Gospel of John

Lesson 7: Healing the Official's Son -- John 4:43-54

He is a man used to giving orders. As a royal official, probably attached to Herod's court, he has servants who jump at his word and resources most people can only dream of. But none of it matters now, because his son is dying, and there is nothing his rank or his money can do about it. So he does something a man like him would normally never do. He travels some twenty miles from Capernaum up to Cana, finds this traveling preacher from Nazareth, and begs. The verb John uses is strong. He pleads, this important man, that Jesus would come down and heal his boy before it is too late.

Jesus's first response sounds almost cold. "Unless you see signs and wonders you will not believe." It is not aimed only at this man but at a whole crowd that wanted spectacle more than they wanted the Savior. And here is where the story turns on a single, quiet act of faith. The official does not argue theology. He simply repeats his plea: "Sir, come down before my child dies." And Jesus, who could have come down, instead gives him something harder to hold onto than a miracle he can watch. He says, "Go; your son will live." No touch. No journey to Capernaum. No proof. Just a word, and a choice: will this man believe it?

He does. John records it with beautiful simplicity: "The man believed the word that Jesus spoke to him and went on his way." He turns around and starts the long walk home with nothing in his hands but a promise. He cannot see his son. He cannot verify that anything has happened. He has only the word of Jesus, and he stakes his deepest hope on it. That is what faith looks like when the miracle is invisible, when all you have is what Jesus said and the long road home to walk it out. The next day his servants meet him with the news, and when he asks the hour the boy began to recover, it is the exact hour Jesus spoke.

This is the second sign in John's Gospel, and it teaches us something the first one could not. At Cana, water became wine and everyone could see it. Here, a boy is healed twenty miles away, and the only thing the father can hold is a word. Most of us will live most of our lives in that second kind of story, walking the long road home with nothing but the promise of Christ. Read this account and let it grow your confidence in the simple, staggering truth that the word of Jesus is enough.

Group Discussion: Jesus told the official, "Unless you see signs and wonders you will not believe" (v. 48), exposing a faith that depends on spectacle. Why do you think we so often want God to prove Himself with the dramatic, and what is the difference between faith in signs and faith in Christ Himself?

Personal Reflection: The official had to walk twenty miles home holding nothing but the word of Jesus (v. 50). Where in your life are you being asked to trust a promise of God that you cannot yet see fulfilled, and how are you handling that long road home?

Read John 4:43–54

Study Questions

1. Jesus said, “Unless you see signs and wonders you will not believe” (v. 48). What is the danger of a faith that depends on seeing the spectacular, and what kind of faith does Jesus desire instead?
2. The official’s desperation drove him to travel and beg for help (vv. 46–47). What desperate need has driven you to Christ, and what did you learn about Him in that place of need?
3. Jesus healed the boy with only a word spoken from a distance (vv. 50, 53). What does this teach us about the power and authority of Jesus’ word?
4. The text says, “The man believed the word that Jesus spoke to him and went on his way” (v. 50). Where is God asking you to act on His word before you can see the outcome, and what is holding you back?
5. The official came asking Jesus to “come down” and heal his son, but Jesus chose to heal without going (vv. 49–50). What does it teach us that Jesus answered the man’s real need in a way different from what he asked or expected?
6. The man took Jesus at His word and started home with nothing visible to hold onto. When have you found it hardest to trust God when there was no evidence yet, and what helped you keep walking?
7. When the official learned the boy recovered “at the seventh hour,” the exact time Jesus spoke, his whole household believed (vv. 52–53). How does the precise fulfillment of Jesus’ word strengthen the case that He is who He claims to be?
8. The official’s faith grew in stages, from desperate request, to trusting the word, to full belief with his household (vv. 47, 50, 53). How have you seen your own faith grow in stages, and where is it growing now?
9. This is called “the second sign” Jesus did (v. 54), and like the first it pointed beyond itself to His identity. Putting this sign together with the changing of water into wine, what is John building in his readers about who Jesus is and why we should believe in Him?
10. Look back over this account of faith that walked home on a promise. What is one specific way Jesus is forming you to trust His word more fully, even when you cannot yet see the result?

Now or Later

Reflect on these passages: Hebrews 11:1–6, faith as the assurance of things hoped for and not seen; Psalm 107:19–20, God sending out His word and healing His people; Romans 4:18–21, Abraham believing the promise against all appearances; Matthew 8:5–13, the centurion who trusted Jesus’ word from a distance; 2 Corinthians 5:7, walking by faith and not by sight.