

**A Growing Faith – John 4:46-54**  
Sermon – Pastor Joe Davis  
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**I. INTRODUCTION**

As we begin our study of Scripture this morning, I want you to think for a moment about a person in your life whom you consider a very trustworthy friend. Choose one person in your mind. Now I want you to think back to the beginning of that friendship and how that trust-filled friendship developed over time. How did you progress from being complete strangers to good friends who deeply trust each other and who are assured of each other's good intentions? What were some of the things that brought about the making of this trust-filled friendship? Isn't it interesting to think about why certain people, usually a very small number for each of us, move from being an acquaintance to someone we feel we can trust with our very lives?

One of my best friends in college was a guy named Todd Adams. I've told you one story about him before. But as I think back to that friendship and how it developed, I remember a few key things that moved us from being just people who knew each other, to being really good friends who trusted each other and enjoyed spending time together. It started out with a point of commonality. When we met and were talking about our backgrounds and experiences, I mentioned that I'd spent some time with my brother in Israel while he had served as a diplomat there. Todd then mentioned that as a Marine he had served in Israel and had been posted at the U.S. Embassy there. He wondered what years my brother had been a diplomat there and if perhaps he had met him?

We soon found out that Todd and my brother had been there at the same time and as I told him my brother's name was Jason Davis, a light bulb came on and he said, "I remember him. I actually busted him one time for accidentally leaving the safe open one night." We laughed and thought that was pretty amazing that he actually knew my brother. And for some reason that small little connection was the start of a good friendship.

But of course, we weren't instantly best friends who trusted each other completely. That deeper friendship and trust developed as we found more things to talk about and had a chance to observe consistency and honesty and willingness to listen and discovered that we enjoyed spending time together. I remember one distinct point when I realized this could actually turn into a really good friendship. I had arrived at Moody Bible Institute chapel with 800 other students and was trying to decide where to sit when I spotted Todd and realized he was looking for me, and when he spotted me he came right over and we sat together at chapel.

Maybe you're the kind of person that people are drawn to and it's common for people to seek you out so they can hang out with you, but this was highly unusual for me...being as quiet as I was and not having a bubbly personality. So for me, to have someone seeking me out specifically to hang out with me out of a crowd of 800 other people, was significant and made me realize Todd and I were going to be good friends. Todd was also trustworthy and he cared about me as a person, and that was the making of good, strong friendship. The next term we became roommates and though eventually his engagement and marriage and then movement to a different part of the country effectively ended our close friendship and communication, I still consider him one of the best friends I've had in my life. And that type of friendship, as you may have noticed, can be quite rare in life.

Well, as we continue to study the life of Jesus today, in John chapter 4, verses 46 to 54, we're going to see the development of a trust-filled friendship take place in very short period of time as one man desperately seeks Jesus out for a one-time favor, but soon is willing to surrender his whole life to him as Jesus shows him who he really is and how willing and able he is to care for this man and his family in the pain-filled circumstances they're facing in life.

If you'll remember, Jesus has just returned to Galilee from Judea, after a 2-day stop in Samaria, where many Samaritans had also surrendered their lives to Jesus through the testimony of the woman at the well and as they spent time with Jesus and listened to his message. And upon arriving in Galilee, we're told that Jesus was proclaiming and teaching a simple, good-news message, saying: ***"The time is fulfilled, the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent and believe in the gospel."*** He was telling people that the opportunity to live the eternal kind of life,

connected with God and empowered to carry out his will on earth, was here like never before. And there was and is only one way to enter this life in God's kingdom: Repent of your sin and believe in the good news Jesus was bringing.

## II. A BOLD AND PERSISTENT ASKING (Vs. 46-49)

So let's pick up the account of Jesus' return to Galilee in verses 46 to 49 of John chapter 4, which I've labeled in your sermon notes: *A Bold and Persistent Asking*.

***46 So [Jesus] came again to Cana in Galilee, where he had made the water wine. And at Capernaum there was an official whose son was ill. 47 When this man heard that Jesus had come from Judea to Galilee, he went to him and asked him to come down and heal his son, FOR he was at the point of death. 48 So Jesus said to him, "Unless you see signs and wonders you will not believe." 49 The official said to him, "Sir, come down before my child dies."***

We see here that Jesus had returned to the town of Cana, the hometown of the disciple, Nathanael, and the place where he had performed his first miraculous sign: *turning water to wine at a wedding*. But while Jesus spent time in Cana, about 20 miles to the northeast in the town of Capernaum, a royal official of the Roman Empire and his family were suffering the pain of watching their son's life slip away. Time was running out for him and all hope of recovery seems to have been lost. Any of you who have lost a child or close friend or family member at a young age can relate to the sadness and pain this family was going through. But there was one last hope. Word had spread throughout Galilee that the miracle-worker, Jesus, had returned to Galilee from Judea and was now in the nearby town of Cana. Perhaps he could be persuaded to travel to Capernaum to save the son's life.

So the desperate father, believing the reports about Jesus and his miraculous powers, traveled in haste to Cana to find this Jesus. And when he found him, he asked him to stop what he was doing and travel 20 miles with him back down to Capernaum to heal his son, whom he described as about to die at any moment. This was a pretty bold request, if you think about it. It wasn't just, "Here's my son, can you touch him and make him well?" It was, "Can you stop what you're doing here and take a 3 or 4 day detour to come heal my son?" I mean, surely,

this was not the only person on a death bed in Galilee at this moment in time. People die every day. Can't you hear his friends saying, "Don't bother the teacher, he has important things to do and there's no way he can travel to every place in Galilee whenever someone is dying." But whatever people may have said, a loving father whose son is dying will do whatever it takes to save his life.

Well, Jesus has an interesting initial response to the man's request. He says: **"Unless you see signs and wonders you will not believe."** At first look seems like a criticism of the man asking for a miracle, but in the Greek we find that the "you's" in this sentence are plural. A better translation might be: **"Unless you people see signs and wonders you will not believe."** So Jesus is making this statement to the royal official, but it's really directed to all the people he's been interacting with in his ministry so far. It's like a general description of what Jesus was dealing with every day as he shared his good news. And notice that Jesus doesn't say, "You CANNOT believe without signs and wonders;" but instead, "You WILL NOT believe." In other words, he's highlighting the hard-heartedness of people and their stubborn refusal to believe in spite of all the evidence already given. Though Jesus was speaking godly words with authority and living his life in the most godly of ways and had even performed multiple miraculous signs already, hard-hearted people continued to test him, asking him to prove himself over and over again with more miracles before they would believe.

The majority of the Jewish religious leaders, who should have been the quickest to identify the Messiah and believe in him, were actually the worst offenders in this stubborn refusal to believe. It wasn't that they couldn't believe in him, but instead that they wouldn't believe in him because of their own selfish desires and purposes. They were enjoying the power and status they held in Jewish society, and a humble belief in Jesus would have changed all that and turned their world upside down. Though it would have been so good for them and they would have found great freedom and joy and purpose in their new life in the kingdom of God, yet they couldn't let go their worldly desires, their false gods, and so they refused to humbly repent and believe. Oh, they made it out to be an issue of not being ABLE to believe in Jesus, but in reality it was about not WANTING to believe in Jesus because they wanted other things much more.

And these people who stubbornly refused to believe in Jesus despite all the evidence already given, kept asking Jesus to perform more miraculous signs to

prove to them personally that he is who he says he is. It was a really a delay tactic, an attempt to excuse themselves from having to believe in Jesus until he really proved it to them personally by fulfilling their personal demands. In asking for more signs and wonders, what they were really doing was ***asking to test*** instead of ***asking with trust***. They were putting God to the test in their asking, something that had been done repeatedly in Israel's history with very negative results. Jesus himself, in his temptation by the devil, had quoted the Old Testament Scripture that prohibited putting God to the test. And Jesus, later in his ministry, called it an evil generation that puts God to the test by continuing to ask him to prove himself by signs and wonders.

You see, the truth is, God's given us more than enough evidence already for us to believe in him. And continuing to ask for his miraculous work *with the purpose of testing him* is a great evil that ignores all he has done already and withholds belief until he answers our beck and call...in other words, until we're in charge and he does our bidding. That's the opposite of the way life works in God's kingdom. Remember, God's in charge in his kingdom and his power works in us when we seek him and trust him and allow him to set the course. In God's kingdom, the asking for his power and wisdom and miraculous work is to be done with trust that he's there, he hears, and will make the best decision about whether this is the right time for a miracle or not. It's trust that God has the power to perform the miracle, but also trust with whatever he decides is best for the current situation. This is asking with trust as opposed to asking to test.

And what we see in our passage today is that the royal official was not asking to test, but was asking with trust. He was not in any way asking Jesus to prove himself by performing a miracle on demand, but was instead coming to Jesus with trust in his power and just pleading with him to save the son he loved so deeply. And this is revealed as he moves beyond Jesus' initial response and continues to beg Jesus to come heal his son before it's too late. *Jesus, I'm not asking you to prove yourself. I know you have the power to perform this miracle, and I'm just begging you to do it please for the sake of my son.* And what the man was soon to find out is that the power of God working through Jesus and available to those ask with trust, is so much more powerful than he had ever imagined.

### III. A MIRACLE GRANTED AND BELIEVED (V. 50)

Let's read verse 50: *A Miracle Granted and Believed:*

***50 Jesus said to him, "Go; your son will live." The man believed the word that Jesus spoke to him and went on his way.***

Wow! The royal official had up to this point thought Jesus would have to literally come down to Capernaum to perform the miracle. Now it turns out that Jesus, the Son of God, can perform a life-saving miracle with just a word or thought 20 miles away from the person who needs the healing. That's the power of God in action! ***"Your son will live,"*** just like that. Done! Your believing request is granted. And isn't it interesting that the royal official simply takes Jesus at his word and goes on his way? Jesus says to, ***"Go,"*** and the man simply goes on his way without asking for clarification or double-checking to make sure Jesus doesn't actually need to come down. He simply believes Jesus and shows it by what he does from there.

We see here a glimpse into the steps of this man's growing faith in Jesus. He'd heard about Jesus and his miracles from others and believed the stories were true. Based on this initial belief he had approached Jesus believing he had the power to heal his son if he would just travel down to Capernaum and touch him. Now he had had personal contact with Jesus and found out that Jesus actually cared about his personal situation and pain and was willing to tangibly help, in this case saving the life of his son. Personal relationship and friendship had begun. He had also discovered that Jesus claimed to have more power than the man had ever imagined: *power to heal someone with just a word or thought from many miles away.* And his faith grew to believe that Jesus really could do this. And the reality of this growing faith in Jesus was revealed by his willingness to take actions based on what he believed to be true about Jesus. We know we've really believed something when we're willing to base our life choices and actions on what we say we believe. And that's what this man did as he accepted Jesus at his word and went on his way back to Capernaum.

#### IV. A SHARED BELIEF SPREADS BELIEF (Vs. 51-54)

But this man's faith in Jesus was not done growing yet, as we'll see in verses 51 through 54, which I've labeled in your notes: *A Shared Belief Spreads Belief*:

***51 As he was going down, his servants met him and told him that his son was recovering. 52 So he asked them the hour when he began to get better, and they said to him, "Yesterday at the seventh hour the fever left him." 53 The father knew that was the hour when Jesus had said to him, "Your son will live." And he himself believed, and all his household. 54 This was now the second sign that Jesus did when he had come from Judea to Galilee.***

We saw already that this man was not withholding belief in Jesus until he found out for sure if the miracle had really happened. Already he had believed and went on his way. But we see a great blossoming of his faith here so that it not only grew stronger within him, but also spread beyond himself to other people. As his servants met him on the way with good news that his son was going to live, the man verified that the turnaround had happened at exactly the time Jesus had said, "Your son will live." 1:00 pm of the previous day was the very moment Jesus had spoken these words and was the same moment when the fever had suddenly left his son.

And notice that the man didn't keep this information to himself. He didn't worry about the skeptics...whether people would make fun of him for believing such a miracle could be possible, or if they would insist on a natural explanation for what had happened. Instead he openly shared his belief in Jesus and what he had done and told everybody about it. And what happened? Not only did he believe, but his entire household soon placed their faith in Jesus Christ. We're reminded again that openly sharing our belief in Christ and what God has done for us personally is what God uses to grow belief within other people. If we keep it quietly to ourselves, others miss out on an opportunity to experience new life through belief in Christ.

This man had undergone such a great transformation in a very short period of time: *from believing secondhand information about Jesus to beginning a personal, trust-filled friendship, to full surrender of both he and his whole*

*household to Jesus as the life-giving Son of God.* And John reports that this was the second sign Jesus had done in Galilee with the purpose of confirming that he really is the Son of God. Jesus provided many signs witnessed firsthand by thousands of people during his public ministry. There is no shortage of evidence that Jesus is who really said he is, and history confirms it. He wouldn't perform signs on demand for those who wanted to test him and put him at their beck and call, but he happily performed countless signs available for all to see as the Holy Spirit directed him. And now every person is given the choice to believe or not to believe. May God give us each the grace to see Jesus as he is, to desire him with our whole hearts more than the things of the world, and to surrender to him completely in simple belief and trust, entering that true life connected with him in God's kingdom.

## V. APPLICATION AND CONCLUSION

As we begin to wrap up today, I want to just reflect briefly on what I'd like to call: *Loving Jesus Observations*. One of my hopes and purposes in studying the life of Christ in the gospels is that we would more and more truly see Jesus as he is and come to love him deeply through what we see. Jesus said, ***"If you've seen me, you've seen the Father."*** So to know what Jesus is like is to know, in human terms we all understand, what God is like. And I can say without a doubt, that the more we get to know Jesus as he really is, the more we're going to love him and want to take up his way of living life...which is what life in the kingdom of God looks like. It's a life where we take up the yoke of Jesus...where we get into yoke with him and discover that his way of living life is the way to rest for our souls. And the foundation of life in God's kingdom is experiencing Jesus' love for us personally and learning to love him and desire him as he is.

So what are a few *Loving Jesus Observations* we can make today from our study? First, Jesus shows us in these verses that he's willing to listen and respond to anyone who approaches him in humility and simple faith. No matter who you are you can come to him this way at any time and he will listen to you and respond with new spiritual life and practical help for your challenges. He says to all: ***"Come to me, all you who labor and are heavy-laden and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly of heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."***

We don't come demanding our way or trying to force our will upon Jesus, but we come humbly, willing to follow his ways and trusting him to meet our needs in his way and in his timing. He'll never turn us away when we come to him this way and will be ready to listen and provide us with what we really need. And in friendship with Jesus, we'll find the best and most trustworthy friend we could ever have...one who cares about us personally and seeks us continually with a desire to be with us and work always for our good.

Secondly, God's power displayed in the life of Jesus through his dependence on the Spirit, is awesome and beyond what we've even comprehended so far. Nothing is too difficult for him and the same power he relied upon, the power of the Holy Spirit, dwells within all of us who have trusted Christ as our Savior and Lord and is available to meet our needs and empower us for accomplishing God's will and living life like Jesus lived his life...the eternal kind of life that looks so different from the world and it's ways. We really can live our lives *the way Jesus would live our lives if he were we* (Dallas Willard). This is God's intention for all of his children. May we come to truly believe that and begin growing in actual Christlikeness...becoming totally different from the people around us who don't know Christ!

Thirdly, Jesus is deeply sympathetic to the pain and struggles we face in our lives. He knew and felt the pain this official was experiencing at the death of his son and in this case was willing to turn the impending death to an extension of life for the son. Jesus later shed tears when he witnessed the pain Mary and Martha were experiencing when their brother Lazarus had died. Does he always stop people from dying when we ask or bring people back from the dead? No. But he does hurt with us and walk with us through pain and suffering and he never leaves our side. And he does sometimes choose to bring miraculous healing when we ask boldly and persistently with trust in whatever he decides. Jesus knows more than anyone else what it's like to hurt and suffer and he never leaves us alone to handle it by ourselves. He's there experiencing it with us and ready to provide us what we need **for all endurance and patience with joy**, as we look forward to that day to come when there will be no more death and dying, tears or pain. Come, Lord Jesus!

And now, two more applications I'd like to review as we close. First, let's remember that as we live our lives with Jesus, he invites us to live lives of asking...asking him for daily bread, for power to accomplish his will, for wisdom to make godly choices, for miracles to display his glory. But as we ask, let's learn the secret of asking with trust, versus asking to test. If you think about it, asking to test is asking based on *unbelief*...asking that forgets what God has done for us already and what he is doing for us right now...asking that ignores all the evidence around us and in Scripture and in the lives of other believers...asking that demands that God prove himself over and over again before we'll believe. In contrast, asking with trust is asking that rests in the great evidence God has already given us, that remembers all that God has already done for us, and that doesn't try to force our will on God, accepting whatever his answer is to our requests: *yes, no, or perhaps, not yet*. Asking with trust is the way of life in God's kingdom and it's the path to rest and peace and to witnessing the power of God at work in his people.

If you find yourself today being a person who WILL NOT believe in Jesus...who's continuing to ask him to prove himself before you'll trust him and surrender to him...who's perhaps desiring the things of the world more than God...May I suggest a simple prayer of honesty: *Jesus, I'm attached to the things of this world. Please show me how empty they are and how infinitely better you are. Release the hold the world and my sin has on me, so that I desire you and am ready to simply trust you and surrender to you and your good purposes for my life. I need you to do this within me.* God will respond to this prayer prayed in honesty and will give you what you need.

And finally, as we close, let's open our mouths about the hope we have in Christ and what God has done for us. Many of us have been quiet too long about our faith in Christ. We haven't opened our mouths about it unless someone pries it out of us. But as we continue seeing in our study of the gospels, God's kingdom, God's field, only grows when we're willing to plant seeds and water them, and we do that by opening our mouths about Jesus Christ and his good news of eternal life through repentance and belief in him. Letting others know we believe it and living our lives by it will be used by God to bring them to saving faith in Christ as well.