

John 4:43-54

What is faith?

Preamble:

Good morning...

Please be patient as we get used to living in a new building.

We are still figuring out traffic flows, coffee, lights, parking, HVAC, sound, and several other things.

Prayer for illumination:

Please join me in prayer....

Sermon introduction:

What is faith?

According to most irreligious people, faith deals with fantasy and fairy tales while science deals with facts and evidence. Faith is the thing you resort to when you run out of evidence.

Richard Dawkins sums up the thoughts of many with these words, “Faith is like a mental illness, a great cop out, the excuse to evade the need to think and evaluate evidence.” (Quoted in Clark, 24)

There are numerous problems with this caricature of faith. I will address these problems in a few weeks during adult Sunday School. But for now, rest assured that this is not the biblical notion of faith.

Sadly, it is not only irreligious people who are confused about faith. Many religious people are equally confused about faith. Many churchgoers think that faith is agreeing to certain facts about Jesus. The thinking goes like this, “As long as I believe that certain things are true, I’m going to heaven, right????” Wrong! The book of James tells us that the demons believe all the facts about Jesus, but they surely don’t possess saving faith.

Religious people and irreligious people are both confused about the nature of faith—one of life’s most important subjects. Which raises a critical question—what is saving faith? It is hard to think of a more relevant question, since saving faith is essential for getting into heaven.

This brings us to John 4:43-54. John 4:43-54 tells the story of a desperate father. In this story, we learn about...

**Faulty faith,
Saving faith,
Growing faith.**

Let’s look at each aspect of faith in detail.

First, faulty faith

Let's look at the man with the faulty faith!

John 4:46–47 (ESV) — 46 So he 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.

Jesus has traveled back to Cana, where he performed his first miracle. Word has spread that he is a miracle worker.

Verse 46 mentions that an “official” from Capernaum has a sick son. The word for official is the word for “royal official.”

Most scholars believe that this man was an official in Herod's court, making him a man of great wealth, influence, and power. This is confirmed in v. 51, where we read about his plurality of servants.

Yet all his wealth, influence, and power can't heal his son. According to verse 47, his son is really sick. How Sick? Verse 47 says that he was “at the point of death.” Surely, this man has used all his resources to hire the best doctors and purchase the best medicine available, but nothing could heal his child.

This father was so desperate that he traveled approximately 20 miles to beg an uneducated itinerant faith healer for mercy.

Verse 47 says that he “asked” Jesus for help. But the word asked is often translated “begged” (NIV84), “implored” (NASB), “pleaded” (CSB). Plus, the original grammar indicates ongoing action. In other words, he kept on begging, and begging, and begging for Jesus to heal his son.

What parent wouldn't do this?

This man's suffering made him desperate!!!

Application:

When we are suffering and desperate, we often turn to Jesus. Why? Everything else has let us down.

This man's wealth, power, and influence could not help his son. At the end of the day, he was forced to rely on Jesus.

When we are really suffering, we quickly realize that money, health, relationships, politics, education, degrees, family, friends, and careers often fail us.

God allows us to experience heart ache and pain to strip away our idols. That may sound cruel, but trust me, it is not. It is mercy!!! God will do whatever it takes to get us to trust him completely. He is not the author of evil, but he uses evil, heartache, and pain to wean us from the things of this world. He is much more interested in our eternal happiness than our temporal happiness.

Don't raise your hands, but how many of you came to Christ because of a personal crisis??? I bet it was many of you.

Maybe you are currently suffering!

God wants to be your sole source of comfort and solace.

He uses all things, including severe trials, to draw us into deeper fellowship with himself.

Back to the man with the faulty faith! How do we know he has faulty faith?

John 4:48 (ESV) — 48 So Jesus said to him, “Unless you see signs and wonders you will not believe.”

This man travels all the way from Capernaum to beg Jesus to heal his sick son, and then Jesus responds with this rebuke, “Unless you see signs and wonders you will never believe.”

Who is Jesus addressing? The father or the crowds? Both! (the word “you” is “you all” in the Greek).

But why the strong rebuke? Apparently, all the crowds care about our signs and wonders.

They are consumers not worshippers.

They are admirers not followers.

They want entertainment, magic tricks, smoke, and mirrors, but not repentance.

They have no clue who Jesus really is, and they don’t seem to care.

Apparently, the desperate father was as guilty as the crowds. He wanted Jesus to perform a miracle (i.e., heal his son), but he had no clue who Jesus was, and he did not seem to care.

This is confirmed by the fact that he thought it was essential for Jesus to come down to Capernaum to heal his boy. Any maybe proximity was essential for a miracle worker, but Jesus was no mere miracle worker, he is the creator of all things.

Application:

The desperate father had faulty faith...

He wanted the benefits of Jesus, but he did not want Jesus.

Maybe this describes some of you this morning. You want the benefit of a moral life, the benefit of feeling forgiven, the benefit of heaven, but you don’t really want Jesus to be lord of your life.

Or you say, “Jesus just get me out of this jam (fix my marriage, provide for my family, help me raise my kids, help me pass this test, help me not get fired) but don’t tell me how to live my life...”

This is faulty faith...

Furthermore, the desperate father did not understand the identity of Jesus!!!

He thought that Jesus had to be present in Capernaum to heal, not realizing that Jesus is the creator.

The desperate father thought that Jesus was primarily a miracle worker, not the son of God. He totally underestimated Jesus’ power.

Don’t we do this??? We think, “Jesus can’t help me raise these kids, Jesus can’t save my wayward child, Jesus can’t heal this disease, Jesus can’t fix my marriage, Jesus can’t reconcile this relationship, etc...”

Many people in our culture have a similar view of Jesus. He was a good man, a miracle worker, a wise sage, but not God almighty!!!

In this story we learn that Jesus is the divine, unique, one and only son of God, equal with the father and the Spirit and the only source of salvation.

There is no indication yet that this man is a Christian at this point. But that is about to change, which brings us to the second point.

First, faulty faith!

Second, saving faith!

What is saving faith?

Saving faith takes God at his word!

John 4:48–49 (ESV) — 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.”

The nobleman did not waste time arguing with Jesus. He said, “Sir, come down before my child dies!” (v. 49). He is saying: “Jesus, I don’t want to get involved in discussions about theology or the intricacies of saving faith. Please come and heal my son. That’s all I ask.”

50a Jesus said to him, “Go; your son will live.”....

The man begs and pleads for Jesus to come to Capernaum to heal his son. But Jesus refuses to go. Why? He wants to prove to this man who he really is.

Jesus is the creator!

He does not have to go to Capernaum, to perform miracles.

He does not get all hot, sweaty, and tired when he casts out demons.

He does not have to take off his jacket and do jumping jacks to warm up before he raises the dead.

He does not have to fast and pray for days before he turns water into wine.

He created the universe out of nothing by the power of his word!

He can heal this boy from anywhere. He can fix your problems from anywhere.

He merely had to speak the words, or think the words, and the man’s son would be healed. Jesus is not a mere mortal; Jesus is God almighty, the creator of all things.

Don’t miss this, somewhere between verses 49 and 50 this man moved from faulty faith to saving faith.

He went from thinking, “Jesus, you need to be in Capernaum to heal my son” to thinking, “Jesus you can stay right here to heal my son.”

Listen to verse 50 again....

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.

This is amazing, the desperate father goes from frantically begging Jesus to come, to calmly leaving Jesus at Cana. Why? He believes the word that Jesus spoke. He said, “Jesus, if you say you can heal my son from here I believe it.”

The only thing Jesus gave this man was his word... that is it.

Saving faith takes God at his word!!!

Application:

Said another way, a Christian is someone who takes God at his word!!!!

What is God's word? The Bible is God's word, the whole Bible, not just the words of Christ in red. Christians need to have this issue settled in their minds.

When God's word says... God created the universe out of nothing, saving faith says, "ok."

When God's word says... we need to forgive our enemies, saving faith says, "ok."

When God's word says... Marriage is between one man and one woman for life, saving faith says, "I believe it."

When God's word says... Jesus Christ is the only way to God, saving faith says, "I believe it."

When God's word says... I'm working all things for your good, saving faith says, "I believe it."

When God's word says... give your money away and watch God provide, saving faith says, "I will."

When God's word says... the way to life is to take up one's cross and serve, saving faith says, "Ok"

Saving faith takes God at his word. Saving faith believes what God says.... Really believes it.

This is the essence of real faith.

Are you taking God at his word? You must know the Word first...

Are there parts of the Bible you are embarrassed of or don't want to believe? This is not taking God at his word.

Are you a red-letter Christian? This is not taking God at his word.

Are we willing to take God at his word, no matter how much it costs???

Saving faith takes God at his word! In addition...

Saving faith acts!

John 4:50 (ESV) — 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.

Earlier this man begged and pleaded for Jesus to come to Capernaum. He practically grabbed him by the cloak and dragged him to his house. But something changed...

Jesus says, "Go; your son will live." And the text says, the man "went on his way."

In other words, he calms down, stops pleading, and he obeys Jesus' command to go. In other words, he acts.

Saving faith always acts...

The father believed the words of Jesus so much that he obeyed Christ command to "Go." He turns and makes plans to leave. It took an immense amount of faith to leave without Jesus, having no assurances, but he had turned the corner. He walked back to Capernaum by faith.

Saving faith acts...

Illustration:

We use the word amazing far too much!

On June 30th, 1859, the French dare devil named Charles Blondin, also known as the Great Blondin, did something truly amazing.

He walked across the Niagara Falls on a Manila rope wearing *with no safety harness*. Because his high wire was a 1,300-foot stretch of rope, the great Blondin walked downhill to the middle, some fifty feet below where he began, and back uphill to the end.

Any minor mistake meant sure death!!!

The Great Blondin performed his feat not once, but several times over the course of two summers. Every time he tried something more dangerous and daring. He crossed on a bicycle, on stilts, and in the pitch black of night. Once he pushed a stove on a wheelbarrow across the rope.

Towards the end of the second summer, a crowd of 10,000 gathered to watch the Great Blondin. He asked the crowd if they believed if he could carry a man on his shoulders across Niagara Falls. The crowd responded with a roar of affirmation. He retorted, "Who then will climb on my back." No one moved.

Many had faith that he could carry someone else across the raging falls, but they were not willing to climb onto his shoulders. They believed that he could do it, but they were not willing to trust him personally.

Eventually, Harry Colcord, Blondin's promoter climbed on his shoulders and Blondin walked across the rope to the other side. Colcord said it was the most terrifying 30 minutes of his life. (The Book of amazing stories, 13-15)

Harry Colcord had a faith that acted. This is saving faith. Saving faith is more than intellectual agreement, saving faith acts.

Application:

Saving faith says, "I'm going to stop sleeping with my boyfriend/girlfriend because I believe what the Bible says about sexual ethics."

Saving faith says, "I'm going to respect and honor my parents because I believe what the Bible says about this subject."

Saving faith says, "I'm going to read my Bible and pray because I really believe that God will meet me."

Saving faith always acts...

James 2:17–18 (ESV) — 17 So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead. 18 But someone will say, “You have faith and I have works.” Show me your faith apart from your works, and I will show you my faith by my works.

We are not saved by our actions, but... explain...

What actions have you taken since deciding to follow Jesus?
What has changed in your life since you decided to follow Jesus?
How have you been inconvenienced?

If putting your faith in Jesus has led to no change, you have not put your faith in Jesus.

Once we step out in faith and obey, our faith grows, which brings us to the third point...

Faulty faith
Saving faith

Third, growing faith

John 4:51–54 (ESV) — 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.

Verse 53 says, “And he himself believed.” This seems a little odd since we are told in verse 50 that he already believed.

What is happening? In verse 50, we are told that he believed Jesus’ word. This was probably the moment he expressed saving faith.

The next day, on the way back to Capernaum, he meets his servants. They say to him, “your son is recovering.” He asks them, “when did it happen?” They say, “At 1pm yesterday.” Then he realizes that 1pm was the exact moment when Jesus said, “your son will live.”

Amazing!!!

He stepped out in faith the day before. He trusted God! And now, one day later, he has seen the proof that God answered his prayer. What is happening? His faith is growing. He is beginning to get a bigger sense of who Jesus is.

He is a brand-new disciple for sure, but he is already growing in faith, based on the evidence of answered prayer.

When we step out in faith and watch God provide, our faith grows!!!

Illustration:

Around 2000 BC God appeared to a pagan named Abram.

God said, “Abram, I want you to leave your homeland.”

Abram probably said, “I have a few questions... first, which God are you? Second, you want me to just start walking??? Third, do you really want me to leave all my friends, my career, my customs, my religion, and my possessions? And by the way, where am I going?”

God said, “Yes, start walking, I will show you where to go. Don’t worry about the details. Trust me, I will take care of you.”

Abram probably said, “But my friends will think I’m nuts...”

God said, “Trust me...”

Amazingly, Abram believed God and then watched God provide over and over and over again.

Each time Abraham stepped out in faith his faith grew even stronger.

Many years later, God gives Abraham the ultimate faith test. God asks Abraham to sacrifice his own son on an altar.

This was the son of promise.

This son was crucial for the fulfillment of all the promises God already made to Abraham.

But when the time finally came, Abraham lifted the knife to sacrifice his son and just before he brought the knife down into Isaac’s chest, God stayed his hand.

Abraham’s faith was so strong, that he believed that God would raise his son from the dead to fulfill his promises.

Where did he get this amazing faith? It came from years and years of believing greater and greater promises.

His faith muscle had been strengthened over the years...

Application:

Our faith grows as we step out in faith!!! Sometimes stepping out in faith is scary.

God, if I become a Christian, I can’t do the things I used to do.

God, if I tell my friends about Jesus, they may not like me.

God, if I tell the truth to this customer, I may lose this sale.

God, if I give away lots of money, I may not have money to buy that new car.

God, if I break up with this non-Christian, I may be single the rest of my life.

God, if I discipline my child, my child may not like me.

But every time we step out in faith, we are building our faith muscles...

How specifically does God want you to step out in faith this week? If you don't step out in faith and do something scary, your faith will never grow.

Conclusion:

Faulty faith

Saving faith

Growing faith

A desperate father moved from faulty faith to growing faith.

Jesus promised to heal this man's son. The father believed him, and his faith grew.

Jesus promises to do so much more for us. Jesus promises to forgive all our sins, adopt us into his family, work all things for our good, and heal our bodies when he returns.

And he gave us a reason to believe these promises by rising from the dead. Let's pray...