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Sunday Morning Service
Series: John
Community Baptist Church
643 S. Suber Road
Greer, SC 29650
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JESUS SIGNS AFFIRM HIS WORDS John 4:43-54

Once I was engaged in conversation with a man who claimed to be a Christian. But as we talked, he confessed that he struggled to believe the extreme statements of the Bible. So I started with Genesis. “Do you believe that God created all things in six literal days?” “No,” he replied, “That’s pretty fantastic.” “How about the universal flood?” “No, that’s scientifically impossible.” “What about Jesus being born of a virgin.” “No, that probably means He was born of a young woman.” By this point I was really questioning this man’s faith. So I asked the big one. “Do you believe that Jesus was who He claimed to be?” “Sure,” the man said, “I believe that Jesus was the most wonderful man who ever lived, a man who always did good things.” “Yes, He was, but that isn’t who or what He claimed to be.” The man seemed perplexed. “Then who did He claim to be?” he asked. “Jesus said that He was God.” “No,” the man retorted, “that is really impossible.”

This poor deluded fellow might have considered himself to be a Christian, but that would only be in the sense that the term is used in modern American culture. A real follower of Christ believes everything that Jesus said according to the Bible record. John reminded us that the Bible does not record every word or deed of Christ’s ministry (20:30). But John and the other writers of the gospel accounts wrote these things about Jesus so that we would believe He is who He claimed to be.

In the account before us today, we learn about a fellow who was some kind of government official who lived in Capernaum. He had a little son who was sick unto death. He traveled from Capernaum up to Cana because he heard that Jesus was there, and he believed that

Jesus could heal his child. Jesus put the man to the test regarding genuine faith. The man passed the test. It is the same test all sinners must take. Either we believe Jesus’ words or we don’t. He is the authority—period! He has the words of life (John 6:68). If we choose not to believe Him, we are hopelessly lost for eternity. If we choose to put our faith in our own conclusions, our own wisdom, our own feelings, we will be lost forever.

Because this man believed Jesus’ words, people in his sphere of influence also believed Jesus. This text presents an important challenge for us to believe Jesus implicitly not only for our own benefit but for the benefit of those we influence.

Back to the Place of Miracle (4:43-46a).

In the ongoing story of Jesus’ ministry on earth, we learn that at this point He and the disciples returned to people who would not show Him honor (vv.43-44). This is a study in contrasts because, in Samaria, Jesus had been honored. Then, *after the two days he departed for Galilee (v.43)*. Near the city of Sychar in Samaria, Jesus had opened the eyes of a sinful woman to the wonder of salvation, the living spring that satisfies. The woman quickly went to share what she had learned with people in the town. The town’s people believed what Jesus said and begged Him to stay and continue to teach them.

An important lesson from that narrative reminds us that when a person really believes Jesus’ words, he or she develops a hunger for more of His words. That being true, you will have a hard time convincing me that you really believe Jesus if you have no desire to read the Bible which is His words.

After teaching the spiritually hungry people for a couple of days, Jesus and the disciples left for Galilee—a place populated by “their kind of people.” For the past two or three days Jesus (in particular) had been ministering among the unacceptable Samaritans. They were outcasts to the Jews because their forefathers had intermarried with the Gentiles. Now, Jesus and the disciples were going “home,” that is, to the place or region where Jesus and most of the disciples had grown up.

At that juncture, Jesus taught an important principle. *For Jesus himself had testified that a prophet has no honor in his own*

hometown (v.44). This was a common proverb even as it still is in our age. However, it applied very specifically to Jesus. We know that at a time after this event Jesus taught at the synagogue in His hometown of Nazareth. When the people heard Him, they were astonished at His teaching. But, rather than believe Him and embrace what He taught, Jesus' hometown people criticized Him and said, "*Where did this man get this wisdom and these mighty works? Is not this the carpenter's son? Is not his mother called Mary? And are not his brothers James and Joseph and Simon and Judas? And are not all his sisters with us? Where then did this man get all these things?*" (Matthew 13:54b-56).

The next verse in that text reveals that the people took offense at Jesus, (Matthew 13:57a). *But Jesus said to them, "A prophet is not without honor except in his hometown and in his own household"* (Matthew 13:57). Therefore, Jesus was not surprised that the people did not honor Him appropriately when He arrived in Galilee after being in Judea and Samaria.

We naturally expect that the term *hometown* would refer to Nazareth. However, the term is broad enough to include the whole area called Galilee, by which Jesus and the disciples were identified. In light of the breadth of the meaning of this word, we might consider that the term *hometown* could include the whole nation or race of people called Israel. That idea fits well with John's opening words in the Gospel. He came to His own, and His own people did not receive Him (John 1:11). Indeed the world belongs to the Creator. Jesus is the Creator (Col. 1:16-17). Therefore, everyone in the world throughout history is rightfully "His own." He comes to us still, but do we receive Him? Do we treat Him with the honor He deserves? Neither did the people in His own hometown area honor Him.

Having recorded Jesus' assessment that they were going to a place where the people would not honor Him appropriately, John then wrote that the people in Galilee welcomed Jesus (vv.45-46a). Does this not seem like a direct contradiction with what John wrote in the last verse? Let's consider what the "welcoming" was all about.

These people were familiar with Jesus' power, having witnessed some of His works in the past. For example, some of them had been in Jerusalem where they observed the miraculous signs He did. John wrote, *So when he came to Galilee, the Galileans welcomed him,*

having seen all that he had done in Jerusalem at the feast. For they too had gone to the feast (v.45). We need to understand the hidden irony in this statement. Jesus took His ministry away from the area around Jerusalem and in Judea. From the outset He had met resistance and unbelief from those Jewish people. But didn't John tell us previously that many people saw the signs (miracles) of Jesus and **believed** (2:23)? Yes, but Jesus did not buy into their "faith" because He knew they did not accept Him as their Savior but only as a worker of miracles. His response? *But Jesus on his part did not entrust himself to them, because he knew all people and needed no one to bear witness about man, for he himself knew what was in man* (John 2:24-25).

Jesus left the Judean countryside and went to Samaria, the land of the outcasts, where He received the embrace of full and genuine faith (4:39-42). Now He comes to people in the area around His hometown. These people had been in Jerusalem when Jesus was there doing miracles. They had seen His signs. Would they not then be the very people who believed in Jesus as a miracle worker? Yes, but they were also people who Jesus knew really did not accept Him as Messiah by faith.

At the same time, there were among the people where Jesus went in Galilee those who would have remembered the miracle of the water turned to wine. *So he came again to Cana in Galilee, where he had made the water wine* (v.46a). For a reason not stated, Jesus went to Cana. It is significant that this was the location of His first miracle. The focus of this story, so far, is on people who are only able to connect Jesus with the supernatural, other-earthly, exciting, unusual, and para-normal events. Things like that are always attractive to the human nature that is sunk in sin. Jesus did miracles for the express purpose of grabbing the attention of sinful people. But the ultimate goal was to force people to admit that He was God in the flesh and, therefore, their Savior. Most people did not have that kind of faith.

Nor do most people still develop genuine faith in response to the spectacular or unusual or unexpected things. Humans do gravitate to the para-normal. Observe how the "news" rags, television programming, even so-called news reporting attempts to make the simplest events sound huge, exciting, fearful, or just attention-getting. How sad that religionists have capitalized on this same methodology

(or even deception) for years. As a result, peddlers who abandon doctrines of the gospel deceive the gullible by creating bigger, better, louder, more exciting, more appealing ministry (Rom. 16:17-18).

Because the people in Galilee were of the nature to respond to the supernatural, they welcomed Jesus for the wrong reason. Did they welcome Jesus? Yes. However, these people were only interested in being spectators of the stupendous or recipients of miraculous favors. They would be like folks who welcome the circus to town. The idea of humbling themselves before their Creator, confessing their sins, and embracing Jesus of Nazareth as their Savior was not part of their plan.

They were like so many religious people today who truly believe that God has a wonderful plan for their lives if they would only pray some kind of prayer to Jesus. Then they look forward to better jobs, better health, better relationships, and more money because they agreed to have God on their side. Do they believe that Jesus of Nazareth is God? No. Did they confess their sins against Him and fully identify with His cross of shame? Why would they want to do that? Do they really have confidence about facing the eternal Judge on judgment day? No, they only hope things will work out. Such people do not understand the purpose of Jesus' ministry.

Jesus Intended That His Work Would Validate His Words (vv.46b-54).

In that setting of an open-armed welcome for all the wrong reasons, a man believed Jesus' words (vv.46b-50). There came to Jesus an important man who sought out help (vv.46b-47). He was an official who lived in Capernaum and he had a sick son. *And at Capernaum there was an official whose son was ill (v.46b)*. The term *official* reveals that this man was some kind of government official in the employ of King Herod Antipas. Common sense tells us that he was probably not a devoutly religious person if he occupied that kind of position. However, it is likely that he was a Jew because he lived in the town of Capernaum. Though he had a certain amount of authority and probably the financial means to pay for his son's medical expenses, he didn't have many options in that day. The ER or an exigent medical office were not invented yet. Besides those

limitations (or maybe because of those limitations), this child had a terminal illness.

This official went to see Jesus. *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 (v.47)*. Somehow the important man heard that Jesus was in Cana. Immediately the man set out on the day's journey (18-20 miles) uphill to Cana. He procured an audience with Jesus and begged Him to come to his house (a long day's journey away) and heal his terminally ill son. The text reveals that this urging was a strong request. At the same time we might conclude, in light of this man's position of authority, that his strong request could have sounded like a command or demand.

That is similar to the attitudes of people who, being in control of their lives, virtually command Jesus to be their Savior. If the Savior is someone or something we add to life according to our desires and pleasures, we will command him like he is a magical genie who we expect to be there when we need him and who we expect to answer our three wishes. Jesus is no genie. He is King of kings and Lord of lords, and our eternal Judge or Savior.

Therefore, in response to the man's strong request, Jesus tested the man's faith (vv.48-50). He implied that the man was interested only in miracles. *So Jesus said to him, "Unless you see signs and wonders you will not believe" (v.48)*. That was indeed the case for most of the Galileans who followed Jesus for a time. A very interesting fact is that the pronoun "you" is in the plural. This means that Jesus accused, not just the man but, the Galileans as a whole of being interested only in signs. He avowed that their faith was rooted in the spectacular. They really did not want a Savior, a Master who bought them with His own blood. They wanted a miracle worker.

What do we suppose happens when the Lord is so unkind as to question a person's sincerity? Sometimes, His penetrating insight causes the needy person to assess his attitude, desire, purpose in asking. So too when Jesus speaks to us through the Bible and accuses us of wanting His blessing for the wrong reasons, we should be humbled and brought into right fellowship with Him. At times Jesus' words ought to cause us to doubt the sincerity of our faith. Such as, *"Examine yourselves, to see whether you are in the faith. Test*

yourselves. Or do you not realize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you?—unless indeed you fail to meet the test!” (2 Cor. 13:5). The only acceptable answer is that we trust His word alone. We must respond like Peter did, “*Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life” (John 6:68).*

Jesus’ penetrating words caused the official to see the seriousness of his request. His request was legitimate, but he was wholly at the mercy of Jesus. In response to Jesus’ test, the man proved to have genuine faith. *The official said to him, “Sir, come down before my child dies” (v.49).* It was not an issue of Jesus doing something spectacular for him. Rather, this was the expression of a pressing need. That is the kind of prayer Jesus always hears. The expression of your desire to have a good and pleasant life, an easy path to walk, plenty of goods laid up so you can take your ease will fall on deaf ears. Conversely, the plea, “Lord be merciful to me” will receive a response from the kind and benevolent Creator.

The man expressed his dire dependance on Christ. The Savior responded to the man’s need and the man believed Jesus’ words. At the man’s plea, *Jesus said to him, “Go; your son will live.” The man believed the word that Jesus spoke to him and went on his way (v.50).* That was a very simple reply. Essentially Jesus said, “Go home, I have met your need.” The man believed and went on his way. Jesus’ words were sufficient. The guy wasn’t there to see a miracle. He was desperate to have a need met, he asked Jesus to meet the need, Jesus said that He would, and that was good enough for him. With no tangible evidence that anything had changed, the man headed for home believing the word that Jesus spoke. He was a bit like the citizens of Sychar who believed in Jesus because of the word He spoke to them (4:42).

By comparison, we remember that the last time Jesus did a miracle in Cana (which was His first miracle) the people were convinced of Jesus’ authority by what they could see and taste. In this case, there was no such evidence—only the word of the Savior—and that was sufficient.

Is it not true that we are too much like the Galileans? We have little doubt that Jesus is a mighty, majestic authority. But His word alone is not sufficient for us. We are too much like Gideon with his fleece. We hesitate to do the will of our Master unless He gives us a

special sign or opens a door of opportunity so wide that we have no choice but to go through it. People want to know all things for a certainty, well in advance, before they will trust Jesus’ words. Sinners often claim that they will not trust Jesus to save them from their sins until they can fully understand and explain who Jesus is, why He had to die, and if indeed He rose from the dead. That is not faith; it’s a calculated risk. Faith takes Jesus at His word and proves it by starting down the road of the Master’s will.

Not only was the boy healed as Jesus had promised, but, more important, the man’s circle of influence believed Jesus (vv.51-54). The truth strengthened His own faith (vv.51-54a). *As he was going down, his servants met him and told him that his son was recovering. 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.” The father knew that was the hour when Jesus had said to him, “Your son will live.” And he himself believed.*

As the believer walked down the road toward home, he learned that his child was recovering. A servant came up the road to meet him as he was going back down to Capernaum. The servant told the official that his son began recovering the day before at 1:00 p.m. The believer realized that his child began to recover the moment Jesus spoke the word. At that point, the father became a real believer (v.53). Does that mean that he really was not a believer before, even though the text says that he was?

This picture of progressive faith is common throughout the Gospel accounts. For example, the disciples believed the moment they met Jesus, and yet He often accused them of having little faith. The masses of people believed Jesus, but only a few stuck with Him until they believed fully in Him. The process seems to go something like this at times: 1) Believing that this man from Galilee was a miracle worker and teacher. 2) Believing that this man was the promised Messiah. 3) Believing that this man was the Savior from sin (Savior of the world). 4) Believing that this man was God! 5) Believing that this God is my Savior from sin.

That is not to conclude that every person experienced each step in this “faith” process until they became born again. Rather some came to complete faith in Jesus Christ as God the Savior right away, while others progressed through various steps to full belief. So it

appears that this man who took Jesus at His word had his genuine faith firmly fixed or increased.

What happens when a sinner comes to grips with the veracity of Jesus' words and trusts His word wholly for salvation? People in the man's household shared his faith (v.54b). The words, *and all his household*, are few but important. They reveal that everyone in the official's household came face-to-face with the testimony of Jesus' trustworthy words. This included the immediate, if not extended, family members (depending on who lived at the house or compound). This included servants and slaves. According to the text, everyone in that large group believed something regarding Jesus of Nazareth. Surely several, if not all, the members of the household placed saving faith in the Lamb who takes away the sin of the world.

How often does a sinner's regeneration cause others to place their trust in Jesus? It appears from the Bible evidence that this should be the norm. We would have to assume that if this cause and effect is expected, the sinner's life would have been radically transformed in order to influence others to trust Jesus.

The closing words of this text are somewhat difficult to understand. *This was now the second sign that Jesus did when he had come from Judea to Galilee.* The simple explanation is that this was the second of the eight signs that John included in his Gospel account as verification of Jesus' power and divinity. We know that Jesus had done other signs while in Jerusalem (4:45).

The important question we must answer is, "Is your faith resting in Jesus' signs and wonders, or is your faith built on Jesus' words?" Is your faith built on what you are able to do, to think, to believe, or do you rest in the Word of God? We must arrive at Peter's conclusion in order to have genuine faith. Contrasted to amazing experiences and visions Peter said, *And we have something more sure, the prophetic word, to which you will do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts (2 Peter 1:19).*