

BELIEVING IS SEEING
John 4:43-54

22 June 2014

[Note: Preaching is a live event where God meets with His people, and that cannot be reproduced or duplicated. It is unique every time, and indispensable in the life of the Christian and the church. This is not a complete transcript; it is typically about 80% of the actual sermon. Some common abbreviations in these notes are: "NB" = *nota bene*, "note well" / "+" = an illustration / "☒" = an application / "BTW" = By the way / "Cf." = cross-reference / "i.e." = In other words / "b/c" = because / "E.G." = for example.]

Turn to John 4...

Charles Lindbergh, 1927 – the first ever to fly solo across the Atlantic – first man to be in New York one day and Paris the next. – For this accomplishment and others, Lindbergh achieved worldwide fame and great wealth.

What is *less known* about Charles Lindbergh is that five years later, on the evening of 1 March, 1932, their 18 mo. old toddler was kidnapped out of his crib by an intruder on the 2nd floor of their home. – After a 2-month, nationwide search, little Charles Jr's slain body was found a short distance from their home.

All of Lindbergh's fame and money could not bring back his boy. – The whole nation lamented, saying, 'Poor old Lindy. Tonight he's worth \$6,000,000, and he would give every cent of it to have his son back.'

Nothing shatters us quite like seeing our children suffer. – Nothing paralyzes us like the grief of losing a child, hearing that one of your kids was in a serious accident, or watching your child endure a severe illness or life-threatening disease. –

As one father said, 'At such times, your life turns gray. You wander from lab to clinic to doctor feeling like a useless character in a story no one wants to hear, thinking again and again, 'This cannot be happening!''

Children have a sense of immortality about them, yet the tragic fact is, children do die. – Some kids never live to see adulthood. – Just visit a graveyard and take a walk. – Do the maths on the headstones: Born 2001, died, 2010: 9 year old boy. –

One line, four words of information that tell a whole story of heartache and loss. – A life snuffed out in the flower of youth, cut short by death's cruel hand. –

For whom was the first grave ever dug? – For a young man, Abel, slain by his brother Cain.

This dreaded loss of a child is what we encounter next in John 4. – Like Lindbergh, it's another wealthy, influential man, who comes running to Jesus in desperation.

Stand, Read & Pray: often pray either 1:14,16, or 20:31...

Give title... (Yes, you heard it right; you'll see what it means as the story unfolds.)

***FOUR SCENES showing us how Christ confronts & conquers unbelief – by His mighty Word and His great mercy:**

1. vv. 43-45, Unbelief introduced.

v. 43 – Recall v. 3: Jesus was on his way to Galilee before His Samaritan stopover and ministry there.

v. 44 – What? – What kind of reason is *that* for going into Galilee? – Answer: It's the author John's way of saying, 'Get ready, it's not Samaria. Jesus is intentionally going where He is *less honoured*. In the end this will get Him killed – which is why He came.'

But wait, déjà vu – we've heard this before: 1:11 (His "own", i.e., the Jews) – Jesus' kinfolk & countrymen. – They knew Him best, heard His teaching most, saw more of His miracles, watched His sinless life and perfect love. – They should've been the first to honour Him; but they didn't.

Instead, they were shamed by Samaritans, who you'd expect would've been last to honour Jesus. – But instead, what did they do? – Without seeing a single miracle, not one sign or wonder! – Except for?...a changed life, a thirsty woman at the well, transformed by Jesus' living water!

'Here again this recurring pattern in Jesus' ministry: insiders put out, outsiders drawn in.' – Repeat: v. 44...

☒ Beloved, how we must BEWARE of this universal snare (v. 44b), repeated 4x, once in each of the four Gospels....

I.e, 'Familiarity breeds contempt.' – I.e., those you know best you are most tempted to take for granted. – It's a threat to a marriage, a friendship, a family, work, church, or any relationship.

But the most grave danger of all is that we take Jesus for granted. – We become too familiar, too casual and complacent about Christ & His Word. – We start yawning over great truths of the Bible instead of being stunned by them.

Beware of this. – Don't let it happen! – Repeat: v. 44b...

+ One of Aesop's classic fables is about the 'Fox & the Lion'. – The 1st time they meet, the fox is terrified by the lion and won't come near him. – The 2nd time, the fox is nervous and hesitant, but draws closer. – The 3rd time, the fox is completely relaxed, chumming around with the lion like they were old mates. –

Moral to the story? – "...familiarity makes even the most frightening things seem quite harmless."

Don't let this happen in your relationship with Jesus, the Lion of Judah, the majestic Son of God. – May He never become harmless and tame in your eyes!...

[But HOW do we fight against over-familiarity with Christ? – By making full use of His means of grace in our lives – the four listed in our Declaration of Faith, "the local church, Scripture, prayer and daily obedience". –

NO Christian who embraces those four means of grace in sincere faith and diligent effort will be ensnared by overfamiliarity with Christ. – Disregard and boredom with Christ is always the fruit of *unbelief*.

True faith drives out overfamiliarity and spiritual complacency, as we're about to see in this story. – True faith breeds fresh wonder and awe at the person and work of Christ, and the mind-blowing truths of His Word!]

v. 45 – But wait: We just read that Jesus would not be honoured in this region?! – Is this a contradiction?...

NO: It's a confirmation, and further illustration, of what John already told us: 2:23-25 (same "feast" referred to here in 4:45)...

So again here: WHY were these Galileans receiving Him? – Because of His Word? – Because of the great revival that just happened in Samaria, where the whole city of Sychar was turned upside down by Christ? – Nope.

v. 45b – An unwelcome welcome. – A dishonourable reception. – It appeared they were rolling out the red carpet, but it turns out just to be red plastic.

They welcomed Jesus, NOT as Saviour of sinners, not as 'Lamb of God who takes away our sins', Who removes our guilt. –

No, they were just a fan club, FB friends. – Miracle-hunters, sign-seekers, wonder-worshippers. – Exactly what Jesus is about to rebuke them for in v. 48...

Who needs a true Messiah when you can just have a miracle-worker to fix your life and take away your problems?...

NB, the contrast to what the Samaritan believers based their faith upon: vv. 39, 41, 42 – 3x, emphasis is only on "hearing" the word, not on seeing proof....

☒ Here again (vv. 44ff) is that recurring theme in John's Gospel – of unsaved believers – pretend Christians who have a superficial, shallow faith, an imitation of the real thing.

Beloved, beware: *A short-lived interest in Christ is NOT the same as a long-term devotion to Him!* – Recall Jesus' parable of the soils.

All the soils were NOT the same. – All who claim to receive Christ are not the same. Only 1 of the four soils proved to have a true, lasting faith.

As we're about to see in this story, Christ wants true disciples. Those who will take Him at His Word, not demand a sign. – *Those who will commit to His message, not just be curious about His miracles.*

2. vv. 46-49, Unbelief mixed with belief.

v. 46 – Seems that Jesus had family or close friends there, so this was a favourite stopover, and now a famous site of Jesus' first miracle at a wedding.

v. 46b, a royal official = KJV, a “nobleman”, or lit., “king’s man”. – This guy was on Herod’s payroll, serving in the king’s courts. – A man of great influence, power, and wealth. – By anyone’s standards, this man had it all, including access to the best doctors & medical care of the day. –

YET it was all in vain. – Nothing had worked for his sick boy; his ailing son kept getting worse. – Death was knocking at their door:

v. 47 – His boy had contracted a fever; his father had watched his life slowly drain away. – The colour had faded from that young face. The light in his eyes began to grow dim. – By this point, the boy may have even lapsed into a coma. –

This royal family was about to walk through the valley of the shadow of death. – No wonder we read here that this miserable father was (v. 47b) “imploring, begging, pleading” with Jesus. – Nothing could relieve him, nothing. – The end seemed inevitable.

☒ In our materialistic age, we must remember: There are many things money & power cannot buy. – No amount of wealth or status can bring you real peace and security. – No amount of income or influence can buy you eternal life or living hope or true joy.

~ Says one preacher: *Money can buy a king-sized bed, but it cannot buy sleep! Money can buy a great house, but it cannot buy a home! Money can buy a companion, but it cannot buy a close friend! Money can buy books, but it cannot buy brains! Money can buy a church building, but it cannot buy entrance into heaven!* (K. Hughes)

☒ Another lesson for us here: Pain is a teacher. – Would this royal official, this successful man, have ever bothered to run to Jesus if his son only had a scraped knee or a runny nose? – Never! – It takes real pain & heartache to get our attention.

Pain is an inescapable fact of life in a fallen world. – Job 5:7, from a man who knew suffering all too well: “Man is born to trouble as surely as sparks fly upward.” – Regardless of our station in life, trouble, sorrow, and death come to all! –

But that’s often what God uses to draw us to Himself.

~ C.S. Lewis, “We can ignore our pleasures [but not our pain]. God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our consciences, but shouts in our pains. It is [God’s] megaphone to rouse a deaf world.”

~ J.C. Ryle writes: *Affliction is one of God’s medicines. ...Health is a great blessing, but sanctified disease is a greater [one]. ...Thousands at the last day will testify with the psalmist, and the official, ‘It is good for me that I was afflicted, that I might learn Your statutes’ (Ps. 119:71).”*

...Let us beware of murmuring in the time of trouble. ...There are no lessons so useful as those learned in the school of affliction. There is no commentary that opens up the Bible so much as sickness and sorrow. ...The resurrection morning will prove that many of the losses of God’s people were in reality eternal gains.
(cf. Heb. 12:11; Rom. 5:3-4; Jm. 1:2-4; 1 Pet. 1:6-7, etc.)

So this nobleman, and his entire family, was in great pain over his dying son. – By now they'd probably heard of Jesus' earlier miracle over in Cana, turning water into wine at the wedding. – Cana was about 30kms away from Capernaum.

Imagine the hope in this official's heart when he heard that Jesus was back in the area: 'Can it be? That Healer from Nazareth? I have no other hope. I will go to Him at once!' – Off he raced to Cana, probably on horseback (being a privileged man).

But only to receive this bizarre response from Jesus upon arrival:

v. 48 – Ouch, so much for getting any sympathy! – Expect a hug, and instead you get a slap in the face?! – YET there is great grace in these words, and much mercy.

+ In C. S. Lewis's autobiography *Surprised by Joy*, he relates how he was brought kicking and struggling into the kingdom of God, his eyes darting every which way for an escape. – Then he writes, "The hardness of God is kinder than the softness of men."

NB, Jesus is not just speaking to this one man. – "You" is plural, "you people, you all". – Jesus is speaking to this man as a representative of the masses, the unbelieving crowds. – 1 Cor. 1:22, "the Jews demand a sign". – Sensationalism. – Spiritual voyeurs, demanding another peek.

v. 48 here removes all doubt about the kind of welcome described back in v. 45. – It was a very shallow, superficial welcome.

We saw this in John 2; we'll see it again in Jn. 6 & Jn. 7. – These religious masses, they don't love God; they just want to use Him. – For them, Scripture is never enough for them. – Jesus' doctrine doesn't satisfy. – They gotta see the stuff, they always want more fireworks.

"A wicked and adulterous generation seeks a sign," said Jesus. – "O foolish men and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken!", he to the two disciples on the Emmaus Road.

Repeat: v. 48...

☒ This one verse could be the headline or cover story for most of Christianity today. – All our faith healers and TV evangelists and prosperity preachers and megachurches & big crusades, all plaguing Africa & destroying Jesus' Church. –

ALL built on this one thing: obsession with miracles, lust for signs & wonders, demanding that God prove Himself to us on our terms – all driven by wretched unbelief that fails to take Christ at His Word.

+ 'Miracles, miracles, get your miracles! Popcorn, popcorn, get your popcorn over here! Hot dogs, hot dogs, get your hot dogs over here. Don't miss the latest miracle! Purchase your tickets & come check out the latest religious sideshow.'

Repeat: v. 48...

+ We all know of people who go to faith healers without the slightest interest in the things of God. – We see sports stars, celebrities, etc., that fly to Nigeria to visit T.B. Joshua or whomever – all for one thing: to get their healing, or just to see a good show. – That’s it, nothing else. (cf. Herod, Lk. 23:8)

WHY then is Jesus so blunt with this man? – Because He is testing him (nb, v. 48, Jesus said “to him”). – He wants to see if this man would be any different from the unbelieving crowds:

Would this desperate father take Christ at His Word, or would he demand a miracle on the spot? – Would this man only use Christ, or would he come to know Christ and hear His word?

Would this man trust and submit to the Lord Jesus and His timing, and His way of working? – Or would it cause him to stumble and fall away like the rest?...

+ Same thing Jesus did in Mark 7 with the Gentile, Syrophenecian woman. – Her daughter was demonised and she begged Jesus to heal her. – But all Jesus said was that he couldn’t throw His bread to the dogs, i.e., the Gentiles! – He was testing the sincerity of her faith. –

To which she gave her gutsy, bold reply, “Yes, Lord, but even the dogs under the table feed on the children’s crumbs!” – After which, Jesus healed her daughter.


So it is with the royal official here in v. 48....

+ Kind of like the first day (or week!) of rugby practice or army boot camp or 1st year accounting – sifting out the men from the boys, finding out who is determined & committed...

NB, of course miracles have a place in Scripture. – The Gospels & the Book of Acts show that God uses signs & wonders to authenticate Jesus and the apostles, to create a platform for people to hear the word (2 Cor. 12:12; Heb. 2:4, etc.). – God also uses miracles to strengthen the faith of His people at times. –

But never, never are miracles normal. – Never are they a prerequisite for true faith, a precondition for trusting Christ or getting saved. – Most of the saints in the OT became believers without seeing ANY miracles. –

John the Baptist performed zero miracles, but many believed. Jesus in Samaria (last week, Jn. 4) performed no miracles, yet many were saved. – ALL they had was God’s Word. – ALL they needed was God’s Word.

 Remember: *No amount of miracles can produce genuine faith! – A faith built only on miracles is a false faith.*

+ Luke 16, parable of Lazarus and the rich man – rich man in Hades, begging for God to send back a man from the dead to warn his brothers. –

But heaven’s answer is, “If they do not listen to Moses & the prophets, they *will not be persuaded* even if someone rises from the dead.”

Repeat: v. 48...

~ M. Henry, "Christ first shows him his sin and weakness, to prepare him for mercy, and then grants his request. Those whom Christ intends to honour with His favour, He first humbles with His frowns." – For Christ to be the Comforter, He must first convince.

v. 49 – Is this man hard of hearing? – Did Jesus' rebuke go right over his head?! – Apparently so.

BUT we can't fault his dogged determination. – And NB, this royal official didn't try to pull rank on Jesus and say, 'Now listen here, Mr. Nazarene, Mr. Carpenter Man! This boy of mine has royal blood, and you'd better fix things right now.'

No, this government official honours Jesus, "Sir/Lord...."

But then he gets this totally unexpected answer from Jesus:

v. 50a – The man's request was both denied & granted at the same time! – Jesus says essentially, 'No, I'm not coming. But you won't be needing My visit anyway! Sorted, problem solved, already, right now, by My word.'

3. v. 50, Unbelief defeated.

v. 50b – What a change!: from a panicking man, to a believing man; from desperation to rest, from anxiety to assurance. – Imagine what the bystanders were thinking?!, 'Who's in charge here? This govt. bigwig, or this Nazarene healer?'

NB, the man obeyed Jesus without question. – He believed and he went. – He didn't insist on seeing the miracle. – He didn't complain that Jesus would not come with him. – Amazingly, he simply left, "believing".

It seems that *at that moment* of seeing Jesus speak so sovereignly, so powerfully & authoritatively – right then & there the man had a saving look at the glory of God's Son. –

At that point, in response to Jesus' spoken word, something awakened in that man. He no longer saw Jesus as just another miracle-worker....

NB, here was the greater miracle! – Not healing his son, but healing his faith. – Not overcoming his son's illness, but overcoming his unbelief!...

☒ Jesus' word is as good as His presence! – Jesus spoke, and it was done. – He commanded, and illness fled.

Jesus could have been 15,000 miles away. It would not have mattered. When Jesus speaks with authority, there are no spatial limitations to his power....

A dying boy healed with a word, over distance, at once. Such is the power of Jesus. Grace and power. Mercy and might.

☒ What an enormous comfort, to take Christ at His Word! – Says one old writer: *Whoever by faith has laid hold on some word of Christ, has got his feet upon a rock. What Christ has said, He is able to do; and what He has undertaken, He will never fail to make good.*

The sinner who has really reposed his soul on the word of the Lord Jesus is safe to all eternity. He could not be safer if he saw the Book of Life and his own name written on it. If Christ has said, “Him that comes to Me, I will in nowise cast out,” and our hearts can testify, “I have come”, we need not doubt that we are saved.

☒ People say, ‘Seeing is believing’. – I.e., ‘I must have concrete evidence and visible proof before I will believe.’ – ‘Seeing is believing.’ – UNTIL you open your Bible. – Until you read stories like this and learn what this nobleman learned – that ‘Believing is Seeing’.

Even though there were some 30 kms between them, in his mind’s eye he “saw” his little boy well and healthy again.

Scripture tells us the relationship of faith and sight. – Jesus says in John 8:56, “Your Father Abraham rejoiced at the thought of seeing my day.” – By faith in God’s promise, Abraham “saw” the day of the gospel.

Turn to Heb. 11...

Heb. 11:13, “All these people were still living by faith when they died. They did not receive the things promised; they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance. And they admitted that they were aliens and strangers on earth.”

By faith they “saw” the promises!

Heb. 11:27, speaking of Moses: “By faith he left Egypt, not fearing the king’s anger; he persevered because he saw Him who is invisible.”

Moses’ faith enabled him to see the unseen. – He saw God by faith.

Back to the start of this chapter: Heb. 11:1, 6...

☒ I.e., Faith sees the unseen! – Believing is seeing! – On the basis of Jesus’ word, that nobleman saw his little boy healthy and well — the color back in his cheeks — in his mother’s arms. – He believed with such conviction that the Scripture records (v. 50b), “The man took Jesus at his word and departed.”

~ Augustine: “Faith is to believe what you do not see; the reward of this faith is to see what you believe.” & “Do not seek to understand in order to believe, but believe that thou mayest understand.”

+ Thomas (Mr. ‘Seeing is Believing’), John 20, ...‘blessed are you who, not seeing, believe’, i.e., ‘Believing is Seeing’!... Thus the whole point of John’s Gospel: 20:30-31...

[~ K. Hughes: *Unbelief robs the Church of its power. We can add new programs until we do not have enough hours in the day to administrate them or enough bulletin inserts to advertise them. But without a believing expectancy in Christ and His power, nothing will come of it.*]

4. vv. 51-54, Belief is developed.

v. 51 – They couldn't wait to tell him the great news!

v. 52 – Wait, “yesterday”?! – 7th hour by Jewish clock = 1pm. – By horseback, he could've been home by 5pm. – But he only gets home the next day?!...

How could you delay such a trip, with your own son's life hanging in the balance?! – We don't know. – Perhaps work, perhaps other interruptions or obstacles? – Perhaps more time with Jesus, his newfound Lord & Teacher, sitting at His feet now as a true disciple?!...

All we know is he believed. – Even during such an agonising delay!...

v. 53a – I love to picture him doing the maths in his head, as his face begins to light up!

+ ‘Had a horrific night, boy slipped into a coma at about 2nd hour of the day (8am), I jumped on my horse, bolted for Cana to find Jesus, arrived just after Noon (6th hour), fought through the crowds, found Jesus, spoke to Him, and....!

3x now, “Your son lives”! – The three best words this man could've ever heard!

☒ Three words every Christian parent longs to hear most of all about their child's spiritual health....! – But the same Son of God, by His same mighty word and great mercy, can do it today!...(His Word has regenerating, converting power! Jn. 1:18; 1 Pet. 1:22-25, etc.)

v. 53b – An outburst of faith in Capernaum on that day, in that home!

Again like last week, the gospel is personal, but not private! You cannot keep it to yourself. – Just imagine this story through the eyes of his wife, his servants, his children old enough to understand...

~ One old preacher said, ‘When a man becomes a Christian, even his dog & cat ought to be the better for it!’ – it ought to affect your whole household – making you a better husband, father, neighbour, worker, etc.

+ As we see in Acts – cf. 16:31, but we often cut off the last phrase! Listen again!...

What a promise! – Do we believe it?... (cf. Acts 2:39; 10:2; 11:14; 16:15,31; 18:8)

☒ Tonight's sermon: ‘How Not To Lose the Next Generation’. – Cf. also in Gen. 18:19 (in today's reading!)

v. 54 – This cannot mean that He performed only two signs, for we know that John has been very selective (John 2:23; 3:2; 20:30-31) in the signs he has chosen to record. It is the second of his “selected signs,” employed to bring men and women to faith in Jesus as the promised Savior.

1st sign, Jesus power over time (no aging required); now, Jesus' power over distance/ space (contra. all the ways that distance hinders & prevents us)....

...another glimpse at the Messiah, Son of God, Saviour of the world. – By His sheer command, by His very word, He can bring life out of death, safety out of danger, healing out of disease, salvation out of lostness.

CONCL. – Review points...

~ John Bunyan illustrates true faith, “I was driven to such straits that I must of necessity go to Jesus; and if he had met me with a drawn sword in his hand, I would sooner have thrown myself upon the edge of his sword than have gone away from him; for I knew him to be my last hope.”

+ One pastor describes: *One of the most moving conversions I have ever witness in 20 yrs of ministry was that of an old man in his 80s. He had been born into a Christian family but since his teens had been running away from God. He afterwards said that all through those 60 yrs of running away from God, he was always conscious of God's pursuit of him. It reached the point that for a period of 2 yrs., he became more and more conscious of his sin & guilt before God. Finally, he said, he could bear it no more. 'I got down on my knees and begged the Lord to save me!'*

PRAY