

SERIES: Gospel of John: Seeing is Believing?  
 SERMON: *From faith to Faith*  
 SCRIPTURE: John 4:43-54  
 SPEAKER: Pastor Josh Black  
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**John 4:43-54 (ESV)**

<sup>43</sup>After the two days he departed for Galilee. <sup>44</sup>(For Jesus himself had testified that a prophet has no honor in his own home town.) <sup>45</sup>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.

<sup>46</sup>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. <sup>47</sup>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. <sup>48</sup>So Jesus said to him, “Unless you see signs and wonders you will not believe.” <sup>49</sup>The official said to him, “Sir, come down before my child dies.” <sup>50</sup>Jesus said to him, “Go; your son will live.” The man believed the word that Jesus spoke to him and went on his way. <sup>51</sup>As he was going down, his servants met him and told him that his son was recovering. <sup>52</sup>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.” <sup>53</sup>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. <sup>54</sup>This was now the second sign that Jesus did when he had come from Judea to Galilee.

***Reverse of the Curse?***

“It is said that human beings can live for 40 days without food, four days without water and four minutes without air. But we cannot live for four seconds without hope.”<sup>1</sup> While it may be a little dramatic to say that we cannot live for four seconds without hope, I think the point is still worth considering. In this world we desire hope in order to live. And so we all by nature put faith in something. The question is not whether or not we have faith or how strong our faith is. Most people have some degree of faith in something. The question is what is our faith in? And does the object of our faith provide lasting hope?

There have been a number of articles on Steve Jobs, the founder of Apple computers, since his death earlier this month. I read one this week from the WSJ and found it very interesting. The article is by Andy Crouch, a Christian writer and an editor-at-large for *Christianity Today*. I want to read some of the article for you.

“Steve Jobs was extraordinary in countless ways – as a designer, an innovator, a...leader. But his most singular quality was his ability to articulate a perfectly secular form of hope. Nothing exemplifies that ability more than Apple’s early logo, which slapped a rainbow on the very archetype of human fallenness and failure – the bitten fruit – and turned it into a sign of promise and progress.” We don’t know if Jobs intended his logo to carry as much meaning as Crouch says it did, but it serves to illustrate his point.

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<sup>1</sup> Andy Crouch. “Steve Jobs: The Secular Prophet.”

Crouch continues, "...technology promises to relieve us of the burden of being merely human, of being finite creatures in a harsh and unyielding world... All technology implicitly promises to reverse the curse, easing the burden of creaturely existence."

I don't share this article with you to demonize Steve Jobs or Apple computers. I love technology and especially love my iPad (which indeed eases the burden of my creaturely existence). However, I do tend to agree that we are enamored with any technology that seems to promise a reverse of the curse.

Whether it is a gadget that makes our toilsome life a little easier or more enjoyable or a medical breakthrough that perpetuates our lives, eases our pain, or slows down the signs of aging, we are drawn to things that promise to reverse the curse. That is the case now and it has always been the case. I think that is one of the reasons people were so enamored with Jesus' miracles, especially his miracles of healing.

But does faith in technologies or miracles really provide hope; do they in fact reverse the curse? Crouch continues, "Upon close inspection, this [secular] gospel offers no hope... In the face of tragedy and evil – the kind of tragedy that cuts off lives not just at 56 years old but at 5 or 6, the kind of evil bent on eradicating whole tribes and nations from the earth – it is strangely [powerless]." If the 20<sup>th</sup> Century taught us anything, it is that human progress is powerless in the face of evil.

I would go so far as to say that even faith in Jesus' miracles is powerless in the face of the curse. Think about it. All of the people Jesus healed, even Lazarus whom he raised from the dead, all eventually died. The Bible tells us that the wages of sin is death. The curse, which is the penalty of sin, still has its day even in the presence of the greatest technologies, including Jesus' healings of sick people. So does faith in these things really provide hope?

Jesus chides the crowds who only believe he can perform miracles and he does so for a good reason. Belief that Jesus is a miracle worker won't fix the fundamental problems we face in our lives, the problems of sin and death. Our greatest problem is not solved by a medical miracle. Our greatest need is forgiveness of sins and eternal life. That will only come through faith that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God.

As I think about hope I think of at least two kinds of hope. One is the hope that you'll get through whatever trouble you're facing in this life. Another is a hope that transcends this life.

**Sermon in a sentence:** True hope comes only from faith that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God.

There are two types of faith in John, signs-faith<sup>2</sup> and saving-faith. Signs-faith is belief that Jesus is a miracle worker. Saving-faith is faith that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. In our time this morning we will explore two ways John presents these two types of faith.

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<sup>2</sup> Craig Keener. *The Gospel of John: A Commentary*.

## **SIGNS-FAITH IS NOT SAVING-FAITH. (43-49)**

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### ***A prophet has no honor in his own home town.***

Look at verse 43. “*After the two days [Jesus] departed for Galilee.*” In verses 39-42 we are told that the Samaritans believed in Jesus (saving-faith); they received him even though they weren’t Jews. But now Jesus leaves this unlikely place of success to go to his own people. John intends to show a contrast between the Samaritans and his own people in Galilee.

We see this contrast in John’s editorial comment in verse 44. “*(For Jesus himself had testified that a prophet has no honor in his own home town.)*” This is reminiscent of 1:11, “*he came to his own, and his own people did not receive him.*”

Jesus doesn’t expect to be received in his own hometown the way that he was by the Samaritans, but then we’re told in verse 45, “*...when he came to Galilee, the Galileans welcomed him...*” This seems to be a contradiction to verse 44 where he said “*a prophet has no honor in his own home town.*” But it is not a contradiction. There’s a reason they welcome him.

“*...the Galileans welcomed him, having seen all that he had done in Jerusalem at the feast. For they too had gone to the feast.*” They welcomed him because of the signs. They believed Jesus was a miracle worker. That was exciting to them and so they welcomed him and gathered around him as a miracle worker, but they didn’t welcome him or honor him as the Christ the Son of the living God.

### ***Jesus did not believe them. (2:23-25)***

Pastor Jeremy talked about this a few weeks ago in his sermon on the second half of chapter 2. Let’s look again at 2:23-25. “*Now when he was in Jerusalem at the Passover Feast, many believed (pisteuō) in his name when they saw the signs that he was doing. But Jesus on his part did not entrust (pisteuō) 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.*”

That word “entrust” in Greek is the same word for “believe” (*pisteuō*). So, you could say, they believed in his name because of the signs, but Jesus didn’t *believe* that they believed. (Remember Jeremy’s illustration about Bronco fans?) Or in other words, they believed he was a miracle worker, but they didn’t really believe that he was the Christ, the Son of God.

Remember the main objective in the book of John in 20:30-31. “*Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.*”

The whole point of the signs is to point to the greater reality of who Jesus is – he is the Christ the Son of God. And if anyone believes this greater reality they have eternal life.

Signs-faith is not saving-faith. You can believe a lot of things about Jesus and not have eternal life. You can believe that Jesus walked this earth 2000 years ago and not have eternal life. You can believe that Jesus was a miracle worker and not have eternal life. You can believe the fact

that that Jesus was died on a Roman cross and not have eternal life. You can even believe the resurrection happened and not have eternal life. After all we are told in James that even the demons believe – and shudder (2:19).

Remember faith is not the issue – everyone has some sort of faith in something. The issue is the object of your faith. Merely believing in Jesus is insufficient. Those who have eternal life believe something very specific about Jesus. You must believe that Jesus is the Christ the Son of God; the Savior of the world who died *for your sins* and was raised from the dead *to conquer death*. And in order to believe that Jesus died for your sins and was raised from the dead you have to also believe that you need salvation from for your sins and eternal death. Any old belief in Jesus won't save and it won't provide true hope. True hope comes only from saving-faith that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. Signs-faith is not saving-faith.

### *Signs-faith in a time of need.*

The Galileans only had signs-faith, but what about the official who comes to Jesus in verse 46? What kind of faith did he have? Was it simply signs-faith, or did he have saving-faith? Well we know from verse 47 that he at least had signs-faith. After all he was a very powerful man who humbled himself and made a day-trip to ask Jesus for help with his sick son.

This official probably worked for Herod and had access to great resources. But his power and resources were apparently not sufficient to help his son. Verse 47 tells us his son *was at the point of death*. The official was desperate. He was at the end of his rope. He came to realize that there are some things in this life you can't earn. There are some things that money and power can't provide. Money can buy you a big house, but it can't buy you a home; it can buy you a king-size bed, but it can't buy you sleep; it can buy you many companions, but it can't buy you a true friend.<sup>3</sup> Or as the Beatles song says "I'll buy you a diamond ring my friend if it makes you feel alright... money can't buy me love." Money can buy all kinds of medical treatment, but, at the end of the day, money couldn't buy life for this official's son.<sup>4</sup> And he came to realize this reality, so he travels 15 miles from Capernaum to Cana one morning to ask Jesus for help.

But look at the interaction in verses 48-49. "*So Jesus said to him, 'Unless you see signs and wonders you will not believe.'* *The official said to him, 'Sir, come down before my child dies.'*" Jesus' response to the man's request doesn't seem very compassionate; it actually seems insensitive. This man's son is dying and Jesus throws cold water in his face. But this cold water is full of grace, as we will see.<sup>5</sup>

C.S. Lewis has said that the hardness of God is softer than the softness of men.<sup>6</sup> Kent Hughes says that the words of Jesus here are "surgically merciful" words. Jesus *is* saying to the man, "you have signs-faith, but you don't have saving-faith,"<sup>7</sup> but Jesus words are designed to lead

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<sup>3</sup> Kent Hughes. "Growing Faith."

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> The word "you," in verse 48, is plural. So, Jesus is not just addressing the official. He's speaking to the Galileans who are gathered, but he is surely addressing the official as well.

him to saving-faith. The problem with this man's faith was that it was focused on the wrong thing; it was focused on the miracle, not on Jesus.<sup>8</sup>

Some of you may be thinking at this point that signs-faith is bad and saving-faith is good. But that's not the point I'm trying to make and that is not what Jesus is saying. What this text is saying is that signs-faith is insufficient. The reason Jesus did signs and wonders was so that people would see past the signs to the significance of the signs.

How many of you have ever prayed a prayer like this. "God if you will provide a job for me, I'll work really hard." "If you do \_\_\_\_\_, I'll do \_\_\_\_\_." Or as the country singer Billy Joe Shaver prays, "If I give my soul to Jesus will she take me back again." Now, there's nothing wrong with asking God for a job or asking God to restore your marriage or restore your health. But these prayers do not exhibit the type of faith that saves. And the reason for that is they are focused merely on what God can do for you right now and what you will do for God. Saving-faith on the other hand focuses on the person of Jesus and what he has already done in history and promises to do in the future. Saving-faith looks past what God can do for us to alleviate our temporary problems and looks to what God has done for us to save us from our fundamental problems of sin and death.

In the book of John, God wants us to see past the signs to the significance of the signs. He wants us to see past the sign of turning water into wine to the significance of the sign – Jesus is the Messiah who brings a new covenant in his blood and provides forgiveness of sins. And he wants us to see past the sign of healing this boy to the significance of the sign.

At first the official fails to see that Jesus is able to give so much more than what he is asking for.<sup>9</sup> He asks for healing for his son, but fails to see that Jesus is able to provide healing for our sick souls because he is the Son of God (cf. 5:24). This is not unlike the woman at the well who asked Jesus to give her a perpetual source of water, so she wouldn't have to come to the well anymore in shame (4:15). She asks for something so much less than what Jesus is able to give; he's able to give the living water of eternal life (4:14).

Jesus knows that the solution to this man's problem is not a medical miracle; he needs so much more. And so, Jesus presses on with the man. At the end of verse 49 this official has mere signs-faith. But what follows in verses 50-54 show us that signs-faith can lead to saving-faith.

### **SIGNS-FAITH CAN LEAD TO SAVING-FAITH. (50-54)**

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In verse 49 the man wants Jesus to come down to Capernaum to heal his son. The man has signs-faith. But Jesus stretches his faith in verse 50a. "*Jesus said to him, 'Go; your son will live.'*" This official had no categories for long-distance healing. But something changes in the man; there is progression. Look at verse 50b. "*The man believed the word that Jesus spoke to him and went on his way.*" This is a development in the man's faith; he sees Jesus differently; he takes Jesus at his word and goes.

<sup>8</sup> Kent Hughes. "Growing Faith."

<sup>9</sup> Mike Bullmore. "Compassion, Power, and the Birth of Faith."

Now look again at verse 51-53 for the full progression. *“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, and all his household.*

The text doesn't tell us explicitly that the man believed Jesus was the Christ, the Son of God and that by believing obtained life in his name. But the Gospel of John only presents two types of faith, signs-faith and saving-faith. Which of the two do you think are being described in verse 53? There seems to be a progression in this man. I'm convinced he goes from having signs-faith to having saving-faith, and thus eternal life. He goes from seeing Jesus as a mere miracle worker to seeing Jesus as his Savior.

So, signs-faith is not saving faith, but it can lead to saving-faith. As I thought about this truth I remembered my friend Mike Reynolds' testimony. His story illustrates this point so well. He's agreed to come and share it with you this morning.

***God needed to fix me: Mike Reynolds' testimony.***

*Thank you for the opportunity to share my testimony. Just the fact that I am up here would surprise most of my friends I ran around with in high school and college. You see, I grew up with the belief that if you tried harder, you would succeed. Growing up in a smaller town, I could achieve all I wanted to if I only put in the time, tried harder, pushed the limits.*

*Success in athletics and academics brought with it many great memories, taught me many things about myself, and in many aspects formed who I was as a young man. But my successes made me believe that life is one big game, a competition if you will. This view “worked for me “until March 4<sup>th</sup> 2000. That's when the tables turned.*

*My beautiful wife Christie had just given birth to our first daughter Isabelle. What should have been a time of celebration was instead chaos coupled with helplessness. Izzy was in trouble and I was powerless to help. She was struggling for breath. The longer I watched, the worse her health became. Doctors hurried around her little body trying “fix” what was wrong. They rushed her down to the intensive care unit where they frantically tried to slow her heart down. I would have moved mountains to help, but I didn't know how. For once in my life, I couldn't 'fix' it.*

*I was powerless. I needed help. I'd grown up attending church. I knew about God. But I didn't KNOW God. The more I thought about this, the more I knew I needed his help. So in Room 5147 of St. Francis hospital, I awkwardly cried out to him. “God, if you could please heal Izzy, I promise to follow you and do whatever you want”. Reflecting back on this moment in my life, I'm certain God was waiting for these words to come out of my mouth.*

*God indeed “helped me out”. Izzy went home with us about a week later and has never relapsed back into this abnormal heart rhythm. In my opinion, this was a miracle. It wasn’t me or the doctors that saved Izzy that night, but God himself. I believe that. And God used this moment to change me. God used this experience to spoon feed me a supersize portion of humility and grace that only he can provide. He helped me to see my need for him.*

*From that day forward I wanted to learn more about God. I now had a hunger for understanding who God is. He had opened up my eyes to an entirely different world. One that’s not me-focused, but others-focused and God-focused.*

*You see, God granted me a new clarity in life. I finally realized that something was wrong with me. I am a sinner, and I couldn’t “fix” the sin in my life. Not if I tried harder, prayed more, or even did all the right things. I needed God to “fix” me, just as he had “fixed” Izzy on the day of her birth. I needed a miracle.*

*I needed a Savior. I was not saved that night in March of 2000, but that is the exact moment my reliance on God’s provision began. God used this miracle in my life to lead me to the point of saving-faith. I have since then placed my faith in the fact that Jesus Christ died for my sins and rose from the dead. God has saved me and given me eternal life.*

I think Mike’s testimony demonstrates and summarizes what has been said so far; signs-faith is not saving faith, but signs-faith can lead to saving-faith. Faith that provides lasting hope is faith in the person of Jesus, not faith in what we can get from him.

***Your grace still amazes me.***

As we close I think it is important to acknowledge the fact that we are not given a promise that our problems in this life will be fixed. God is powerful and *able* to fix our problems in this life (all things are possible for those who call upon his name), but he doesn’t promise he *will* fix all of our problems in this life, as Curt said two weeks ago. The child will not always be healed. The suffering won’t always stop, in this life. Faith that God *will* give us relief from our problems in the here and now is insufficient; it won’t provide lasting hope. In fact, faith that God will give us relief from our present problems will ultimately disappoint us.

True hope comes from believing in a person and the promises God does give us. We must believe in the person of Jesus Christ, who died for our sins and rose from the dead. Jesus is powerful and compassionate, but his power and compassion are seen most emphatically in the provision of eternal life for sinners.

The official was undoubtedly blown away by Jesus’ power and compassion on his son’s behalf, but I suspect he was even more blown away by the power and compassion shown in providing eternal life.<sup>10</sup> What are you blown away by? Do you have a “what have you done for me lately” approach to God? Does it take the report of God answering some amazing prayer request to amaze you? Or are you still amazed by the gospel. You know it is a miracle every time God

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<sup>10</sup> Mike Bullmore. “Compassion, Power, and the Birth of Faith.”

saves a sinner, as Mike's testimony illustrates. Are you amazed by that? Does his grace still amaze you or are you looking for a sign?

Jesus' signs of healing point to a day when there will be no more sickness and no more death for those who believe. That is an amazing promise. But that is a promise we can't see with our eyes. Jesus is the resurrection and the life – those who believe in him will live even though they die (11:25). That's an amazing promise. But that's a promise we can't see with our eyes. But if we believe in this promise we will have hope that is beyond the circumstances in this life.

**Hebrews 11:1** (ESV)

*Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.*

**John 20:29** (ESV)

*Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.*

Signs-faith doesn't save us and it doesn't give us lasting hope, but the signs point to the one who can save us and give us hope. Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. *"He came to his own and his own people did not receive him. But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God."* (1:11-12)

Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and be saved.

**Benediction:**

**Romans 15:13** (ESV)

May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope.

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