

I. Jesus, the royal official and his dying son

A. John 4:46-54 . . . Therefore He came again to Cana of Galilee where He had made the water wine. And there was a royal official whose son was sick at Capernaum. [47] When he heard that Jesus had come out of Judea into Galilee, he went to Him and was imploring Him to come down and heal his son; for he was at the point of death. [48] So Jesus said to him, "Unless you people see signs and wonders, you simply will not believe." [49] The royal official said to Him, "Sir, come down before my child dies." [50] Jesus said to him, "Go; your son lives." The man believed the word that Jesus spoke to him and started off. [51] As he was now going down, his slaves met him, saying that his son was living. [52] So he inquired of them the hour when he began to get better. Then they said to him, "Yesterday at the seventh hour the fever left him." [53] So the father knew that it was at that hour in which Jesus said to him, "Your son lives"; and he himself believed and his whole household. [54] This is again a second sign that Jesus performed when He had come out of Judea into Galilee.

B. Pray

II. Moving from uncertain faith to settled faith

A. John 4:46b-47 . . . There was a royal official whose son was sick at Capernaum. [47] When he heard that Jesus had come out of Judea into Galilee, he went to Him and was imploring Him to come down and heal his son; for he was at the point of death.

1. In preparation for working our way through this story, I want to make the following four points.

a. First, though John's ultimate purpose in telling this story is to show that Jesus is both human and divine, we can learn much about ourselves – especially about our faith in relation to God.

b. Second, picture your yard, and specifically, picture its boundaries. Whatever is inside the boundaries is godly, and whatever is outside the boundaries is ungodly. As long as you stay within the boundaries, you are living according to God's will and word. But if and when you step outside the boundaries, you are moving from godly living to ungodly living. Please keep this picture in mind as it represents what happens when we move from trust in God to distrust of God in some area or way.

- c. Third, in 1 Timothy 1:5, Paul wrote these words, “The goal of our instruction is love from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith.” As we work through this study today, I urge you to keep in mind that you will love God and those around you only to the degree you trust in God – that is, only to the degree you believe you are safe in His hands. If your trust is partial, your love will be partial – which means the part that isn’t love will include such things as selfishness, defensiveness, ungodly forms of self-protection, pride, a critical spirit, frequent frustration, anger, resentment, bitterness, and hostility. So please keep in mind that you will love God and those around you only to the degree you trust in God.
 - d. Fourth, for the ease of discussing this story and what it teaches us about faith in God, I am going to refer to the royal official as Roy. Therefore, whenever I speak of Roy, I am referring to the royal official who was asking Jesus to heal his dying son.
2. These first two verses set the stage for the rest of the story, and it is in these two verses that we get a picture of how easy it is to believe in God, yet distrust Him at the same time.
- a. For example, Roy’s faith was such that he believed Jesus could heal his dying son. And yet, we see from the story that there are ways and areas where Roy did not trust Jesus.
 - b. Now I know the story does not tell us this directly, yet it is likely that Roy had tried other means of saving his son’s life, but to no avail. And if this is true, then Jesus was Roy’s last hope. In other words, Roy was now desperate because his son was about to die.
 - c. In relation to faith in God, this kind of desperation indicates that Roy had tried trusting in other things first, and it was only after finding them useless that he turned to God for help.
 - d. How often have you tried other means first, only to be disappointed and grow desperate, before turning to God?
 - e. In fairness to Roy, I think we can assume that if he had found those other things useful, he probably would have given thanks to God that they worked, but he would not have trusted in God, from the beginning, in the same way he finally trusted in God.
 - f. Therefore, I am calling this move of desperation on Roy’s part a picture of uncertain faith or partial faith, because it makes God your second or even last choice instead of your first.
3. Now I want to affirm that Roy had a sufficient amount of faith to believe in the power of Jesus to heal his son – and that is a

commendable manifestation of faith on anyone's part. However, we can see from Roy's probable desperation, and from two more examples in these verses, that Roy's faith really was uncertain and partial.

a. For example, when John says Roy was imploring Jesus, it means Roy was begging Jesus.

(1) In other words, Roy was repeating his plea – over and over again – in hopes that his relentless pleading would move Jesus to action.

(2) So here is the picture – though Roy believed Jesus could heal, he did not trust Jesus to do what he believed was right. And as we can see from Roy's pleading, he was certain the only right thing for Jesus to do was to heal his son.

(3) My point here is that Roy's faith was partial in that it was strong in one area yet uncertain or distrusting in another area. He believed in what Jesus could do, but he was not convinced Jesus could be trusted to do what was right, or what needed to be done in this situation.

(4) In my experience, Roy's distrust that Jesus would do the right thing was based on two false assumptions.

(a) First, because Roy assumed he knew what was best in this situation, he believed that if Jesus didn't agree, or if Jesus did not act accordingly, Jesus was the one with the problem.

(b) Second, because Roy believed healing his son was the only right or acceptable solution, he was not open to the possibility that Jesus had a better solution. Therefore, he was not open to putting the situation in Jesus' hands and trusting Him to do what was best.

(5) Therefore, Roy's faith was limited by his wrong thinking, false assumptions, and pride.

b. The final example of uncertain or limited faith is Roy's insistence that Jesus come to his house to heal his son. You see, Roy believed Jesus had to be in his son's presence to heal his son.

(1) Again, I want to affirm that Roy believed Jesus could heal, but he also believed Jesus was limited in what He could do by time and space.

(2) Therefore, Roy was not only pleading with Jesus, he was directing Jesus – that is, he was specifically telling Jesus what Jesus would have to do in order to heal his son.

c. However, Jesus saw the weakness of Roy's compromised faith.

- B. John 4:48 . . . So Jesus said to [Roy], "Unless you people see signs and wonders, you simply will not believe."
1. The first thing to notice in Jesus' response is that He was not only talking to Roy, He was talking to all of us. And is it not true that too many of us, on too many occasions, have to see before we believe?
 2. The second thing to notice is that Jesus was criticizing the kind of faith that is dependent on visible manifestations of God's power or presence rather than only on God's character.
 - a. Jesus made this same point in dealing with Thomas, the disciple who said he would have to see the physical evidence that proved it was Jesus before believing it really was Jesus.
 - b. After showing Himself to Thomas, Jesus pointed out the weakness or uncertainty of a faith that requires outward signs or proof in order to believe.
 3. According to Jesus, strong faith, confident faith, spiritually healthy faith is faith that is anchored in the character of God.
 - a. Why? Because if the character of God is not enough for us to confidently and completely trust Him, then the reality is, we do not believe God is worthy of complete trust – in spite of what He may do, or what our theology says, or what we sing and say during our times of worship.
 - b. When your faith in God is built upon His character, nothing will be able to shake it, because your faith is anchored in that which is unchangeable, ever present, and completely dependable.
- C. John 4:49 . . . The royal official said to Him, "Sir, come down before my child dies."
1. We see in this statement the fact that Roy was not willing to give up on seeking healing for his son. In spite of being rebuked for having a weak faith, he was determined to ask once again for Jesus' help.
 2. But we also see that Roy still believed Jesus was limited by time and space in what He could do. In Roy's thinking, there could be no healing unless Jesus came to where the boy was.
- D. John 4:50 . . . Jesus said to him, "Go; your son lives." The man believed the word that Jesus spoke to him and started off.
1. What a change in Roy's faith – from uncertain and partial to complete, in spite of the fact that Jesus did not do what Roy believed Jesus had to do to heal his son.
 2. Moving on . . .

E. John 4:51-54 . . . As [Roy] was now going down, his slaves met him, saying that his son was living. [52] So he inquired of them the hour when he began to get better. Then they said to him, "Yesterday at the seventh hour the fever left him." [53] So the father knew that it was at that hour in which Jesus said to him, "Your son lives"; and he himself believed and his whole household. [54] This is again a second sign that Jesus performed when He had come out of Judea into Galilee.

1. Now I believe Roy's faith became confident faith when his servants confirmed the time of his son's healing.
2. Truly, our faith should be confident from the beginning of trusting in God – because of His character! However, being human, most of us gain confidence as we see God's faithful love, provision, and protection over time. I suspect it was this way for Roy.

III. Is your faith in God uncertain and limited, or convinced and complete?

A. For the rest of our teaching time, I want you to consider the state or condition of your faith in God. Is your faith uncertain and partial or confident and complete. Is your faith in God based on His character, or is it based on what He has or has not done? Do you believe you are safe in His hands, or are there times and situations when you believe you must take matters into your own hands?

1. As I have already said, strong faith, confident faith, spiritually healthy faith is built on and anchored in the character of God. It is true that the acts of God and the word of God reinforce confident faith, but His character is the basis strong faith.
2. So you might be wondering, what is so important about having convinced and complete faith in God?

B. If we start with Adam and Eve, and work our way through the stories of the OT, we get a clear picture of the troubles and evils that distrust of God brings upon those who even partially distrust God.

1. For example, Adam and Eve believed in God – we know this because they were afraid to face God after they disobeyed Him. And yet, in spite of their faith in God, Eve did not believe He was perfectly good. And she did not believe all that He said was true or would come true.
 - a. So she ate the fruit from the forbidden tree, not just because it was good for food and a delight to the eyes, but also because she believed God was preventing her from having what was rightfully hers to enjoy, and because she believed God would not really kill her for disobeying Him. So in her unbelief, Eve stepped outside

- God's boundaries and did what she believed was best or safest or most rewarding in that situation.
- b. However, in partially distrusting God's goodness and God's word, Eve brought a number of troubles, pain, suffering, and evils upon herself, her children, and the world.
2. And Eve was not alone in her distrust. Adam also ate from the tree, and this shows that he did not believe God could be enough for Him – that is, that he could be fully satisfied and perfectly happy with God alone. Adam believed he had to have Eve, and so he stepped outside God's boundaries and did what he believed was the most satisfying and fulfilling in that situation.
 3. We see this same story of unbelief leading to troubles, evil, pain, and suffering in numerous other OT stories. But I will give you just one more.
 - a. Abraham and Sarah showed great faith in God in a number of situations. However, Sarah did not trust God enough to wait for Him to fulfill His promise of a son. So she urged Abraham to step outside God's boundaries and produce a son through Hagar.
 - b. Of course, we see even in our own day what a mess their unbelief made of things – even though their unbelief was only partial.
- C. The truth that I want to convey here is simply this: Any amount of unbelief in God's character, goodness, wisdom, will, word, and ways, will sooner or later take you outside God's boundaries of godliness and involve you in some aspect of selfishness and sin – which in turn will result in increased troubles and sorrow, because as the scripture says, "What we sow we will also reap."
1. Think about it this way: in whatever area or way you distrust God,
 - a. Your distrust will motivate you to take matters into your own hands (as Abraham and Sarah did in seeking to get a son),
 - b. and your distrust will motivate you to step outside God's boundaries of godliness (as Adam and Eve did in seeking the knowledge they believed God was denying them),
 - c. and once you step outside God's boundaries, the only other options for living life that you have, are the ways and practices of the world, the devil, and your flesh.
 2. The truth is, all ungodly anger, bitterness, resentment, abusive and unkind speech, unforgiveness, the unwillingness to resolve conflict and reconcile a relationship, trying to force or manipulate other adults into doing what you want, all sexual immorality, greed, covetousness,

- envy, discontent, anxiety, irrational and foolish fears, ungodly self-protection, hostility, returning evil for evil, and every other such thing can be traced back to unbelief in God in some area or way.
3. Therefore, whenever and wherever you distrust God, you will fall back to trusting in the one you trust the most after God – which is you, yourself. And when you reject trust in God for self-trust, you will look past God and go outside His boundaries of godliness for solutions to the matter at hand.
 - a. This is why the writer of Hebrews says, “Take care, brethren, that there not be in any one of you an evil, unbelieving heart that falls away from the living God” (Hebrews 3:12).
 - b. You may have enough faith to not fall away completely, but wherever you allow unbelief to enter into your life, you are falling away from God in some way and to some degree.
 - c. As the Bible says, four times, “The righteous man shall live by faith” (Hab 2:4; Rom 1:17; Gal 3:11; Heb 10:38).

IV. Conclusion

- A. At the beginning of today’s study I read 1 Timothy 1:5, and asked you to keep in mind that you will love God and those around you only to the degree you trust in God – that is, only to the degree you believe you are safe in His hands.
 1. Wherever you feel unsafe, you will stop loving according to the standard of godly love. You will take matters into your own hands, step outside God’s boundaries, and go into a self-protective mode that expresses itself in ungodly, unloving, and therefore relationship damaging ways.
 2. Therefore, if you want to discover unbelief in yourself, start by examining your relationships, and your treatment of others when their behavior threatens your sense of well-being or peace or comfort or happiness.
 3. And if you discover unbelief, repent, and build your faith on the character of God – to the point of being convinced you are safe in His hands regardless of how others behave or treat you.
- B. We have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer you and I who live, but Christ lives in us; and the life which we now live in the flesh we live by faith in the Son of God, who loves us and gave Himself up for us. (Galatians 2:20)