

## Believing in Jesus

John 4:39-54

Several years ago a man began attending church, with his wife and children. They were members of the church, as he wife was an earnest believer. He was not a Christian. In fact, he identified himself with some of the most intellectually committed atheists of the day. He knew what the Bible taught, he knew the message of the gospel, and he claimed to know that God did not exist. With some vigor and persistence.

Yet he was appreciative of the church and the kindnesses shown to his family. He wanted to share that experience with them. Month after month, for several years, he attended church and sat under the preaching of the word, and remained an atheist. Yet he was easy to talk to, friendly and engaging. We would sit down for an extended conversation over lunch several times a year. We might talk for two hours or more. And I remember asking him at one point, "What would it take to bring you to Jesus?" What would it take for you to become a Christian?

He wasn't quite ready for that question, but he thought about it carefully. It was a good question to ask, of him, or of anyone non-Christian. Some people have their defenses up, they are filled with seemingly unanswerable questions. Some people seem particularly hardened or insensitive. Some just have no sense of their need, or too much pride to admit their sense of need. And of course, there is nothing that we can do as human beings to make someone believe. For believing itself is a work of God. Saving faith is, as our Confession puts it, a saving grace, "whereby the elect are enabled to believe...[It] is the work of the Spirit of Christ in their hearts."

Our subject this morning is saving faith. Believing in Jesus.

And we see several examples of that faith, in several different cities, actually. In Cana of Galilee. In Samaria. And in Capernaum. And in each case, that faith is very much a work of God, which is made obvious by Jesus' statement about those who would refuse to believe in him, those from his own fatherland, namely Nazareth in southern Galilee. And despite all his glorious self-revelations of the power of God, still Jesus was confident in his own proclamation, "A prophet has no honor in his own country."

That Jesus came from Nazareth, his boyhood home, is part of God's sovereign providence which made certain that Jesus would be rejected there, for we learn about the Jews' opinion of Nazareth in,

John 1:45 Philip found Nathanael and said to him, "We have found Him of whom Moses in the law, and also the prophets, wrote--Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph." 46 And Nathanael said to him, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" Philip said to him, "Come and see."

And so, even as we study the subject of saving faith, we need to start with this point,

### **I. JESUS WAS REJECTED BY HIS OWN PEOPLE.**

And he knew it.

v.43-44

The plain meaning of those words seems to indicate that Jesus intentionally went into Galilee specifically BECAUSE he would not have honor there. The idea may well be that at this very early stage of his ministry, he avoids the occasions when he would be fully recognized and believed upon, for that would have caused the opposition of the Jewish authorities to have escalated

very quickly, prematurely. He is in perfect control of all the circumstances of his own life, and so his early ministry focused on an area where there would not be initial widespread acceptance.

This begins what is often called his great Galilean ministry, lasting about 16 months, from December of the year 27 to April of the year 29. A very large portion of the Gospels of Matthew and Mark is devoted to this Great Galilean Ministry, and a considerable portion of Luke's gospel. John, writing the fourth gospel, apparently presupposes that his readers are acquainted with the contents of the other gospels, and so he limits the description of that time to just two events, this healing in our text today and the multiplication of the loaves in chapter 6.

Jesus makes his bold declaration as he enters Galilee, his "fatherland," his own country.

v.44

There seems to be an obvious, external reason for that rejection in the other gospels, and that is that,

**A. Jesus was rejected by those in Nazareth who wouldn't accept his supernatural origin.**

After all, they knew his mother and father!

Mat.13:53 "Now it came to pass, when Jesus had finished these parables, that He departed from there. 54 And when He had come to His own country, He taught them in their synagogue, so that they were astonished and said, "Where did this Man get this wisdom and these mighty works? 55 "Is this not the carpenter's son? Is not His mother called Mary? And His brothers James, Joses, Simon, and Judas? 56 "And His sisters, are they not all with us? Where then did this Man get all these things?" 57 So they were offended at Him. But Jesus said to them, "A prophet is not without honor except in his own country and in his own

house." 58 Now He did not do many mighty works there because of their unbelief."

And the most bold example of his rejection is recorded in, Luke 4:14 "Then Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit to Galilee, and news of Him went out through all the surrounding region. 15 And He taught in their synagogues, being glorified by all. 16 So He came to Nazareth, where He had been brought up. And as His custom was, He went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and stood up to read. 17 And He was handed the book of the prophet Isaiah. And when He had opened the book, He found the place where it was written: 18 "The Spirit of the LORD is upon Me, Because He has anointed Me To preach the gospel to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, To proclaim liberty to the captives And recovery of sight to the blind, To set at liberty those who are oppressed; 19 To proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD." 20 Then He closed the book, and gave it back to the attendant and sat down. And the eyes of all who were in the synagogue were fixed on Him. 21 And He began to say to them, "Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing." 22 So all bore witness to Him, and marveled at the gracious words which proceeded out of His mouth. And they said, "Is this not Joseph's son?" 23 He said to them, "You will surely say this proverb to Me, 'Physician, heal yourself! Whatever we have heard done in Capernaum, do also here in Your country.'" 24 Then He said, "Assuredly, I say to you, no prophet is accepted in his own country. 25 "But I tell you truly, many widows were in Israel in the days of Elijah, when the heaven was shut up three years and six months, and there was a great famine throughout all the land; 26 "but to none of them was Elijah sent except to Zarephath, in the region of Sidon, to a woman who was a widow. 27 "And many lepers were in Israel in the time of Elisha the prophet, and none of them was cleansed except Naaman the Syrian." 28 So all those in the synagogue, when they heard these things, were filled with

wrath, 29 and rose up and thrust Him out of the city; and they led Him to the brow of the hill on which their city was built, that they might throw Him down over the cliff. 30 Then passing through the midst of them, He went His way.”

Rejection! Why? “He is the carpenter’s son.” “His mother is called Mary.” “His brothers and sisters live here.” “So they were offended at Him”

They were offended at his claim to be God. They were offended at his great claim to be the fulfillment of the prophecy in Isaiah 61, “Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.” That was offensive, for they wouldn’t accept his deity. They wouldn’t accept his supernatural origin. They wouldn’t accept the fullness of his deity. After all, they knew his mother and father. They knew him when he was a little boy. They knew where he was from.

And that rejection at the hands of his own people, in his own hometown, can be broadened to represent the rejection that Jesus experienced as a whole from his own people, Israel. It was the Jews who rejected Jesus. It was the people of Israel, the Old Testament people of God, who rejected the very Messiah which their religion pointed to.

And why? Why did the Jews reject Jesus the Messiah? Very simply.

**B. Jesus was rejected by the Jews as a whole who wouldn’t accept his rule as king.**

And so we read this account of the ultimate betrayal, the ultimate rejection, when the Jews handed Jesus over to Pilate to be crucified on the cross.

John 19:15 But they cried out, "Away with Him, away with Him! Crucify Him!" Pilate said to them, "Shall I crucify your King?" The chief priests answered, "We have no king but Caesar."

You see, Jesus became a stumbling block, for his example of a king is not at all what the people expected. They expected a military conqueror, the reappearance of a king like David, who would defeat all their enemies and lead them into great military triumph.

And Jesus? He was no such man. And so he became a stumbling block. As Paul would write,

1Co 1:23 “We preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Greeks foolishness.”

And Peter would write,

1 Peter 2:7 Therefore, to you who believe, He is precious; but to those who are disobedient, "The stone which the builders rejected Has become the chief cornerstone," 8 and "A stone of stumbling And a rock of offense." They stumble, being disobedient to the word, to which they also were appointed.”

To those who expected Jesus to establish a worldly kingdom, an earthly kingdom, a kingdom identified with one particular nation, he would be a stumbling block. For the kingdom would come, and it did come with Jesus, but,

Luke 17: 20 “...when He was asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, He answered them and said, "The kingdom of God does not come with observation; 21 "nor will they say, `See here!' or `See there!' For indeed, the kingdom of God is within you."

The kingdom would come, not with a military messiah, but with

a suffering servant. And he would be rejected. Jesus was rejected by his own people. But, on the other hand,

## **II. THOSE WHO WOULD HEAR HIS WORD WOULD BELIEVE IN JESUS.**

And to repeat the emphasis of the last couple weeks, there is such a great contrast between those religious and self-righteous Jews who stumbled over what Jesus had to say of himself, and this poor, despised, immoral Samaritan woman. For Jesus' words were not a stumbling block to her. They were the words of life. And she would tell others. As we see,

### **A. The Samaritan woman was a faithful witness of Jesus.**

She went and told her countrymen about Jesus.

We saw that last time.

v.28-30

And what happened as a result of her testimony?

v.39

The men of Samaria heard the word, and by hearing, were saved. Humanly speaking, all because this woman was a faithful witness. And that responsibility to be a faithful witness is ours!

Act 1:8 "But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."

1Pe 3:15 "...sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you."

This Samaritan woman was ready to give an answer, and

unlike the Jews, the people of Samaria were ready to listen.

### **B. The Samaritan people were quick to believe that Jesus was the savior of the world.**

v.40-42

There is such a contrast here between Jesus' reception in Samaria and his reception in his own land of Galilee. Such a great eagerness here. Such a quickness to believe. And such a truthful understanding.

John 4:42 "...We ourselves have heard Him and we know that this is indeed the Christ, the Savior of the world."

Jesus was the savior, the savior of the world. That means that they understood that they were sinners in need of a savior. And knowing that, understanding that, they were quick to embrace Jesus.

So what's the difference? Well, the Jews, who thought so highly of themselves, would not humble themselves to recognize their need for a savior. And the Samaritans, so thoroughly rejected by other men, immediately sensed their spiritual poverty.

I am reminded of those words written to the church at Laodicea,

Rev. 3: 17 "Because you say, 'I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing' --and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked--18 "I counsel you to buy from Me gold refined in the fire, that you may be rich; and white garments, that you may be clothed, that the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed; and anoint your eyes with eye salve, that you may see."

You who are rich, you who think you are rich, Jesus says, "I counsel you to buy from Me gold refined in the fire, that you may be rich." For actually, Jesus says, you are not rich. "You are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked."

And so we must be willing to tell that bad news to the world in which we live. You are not rich. "You are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked." And those who agree with that evaluation, and only those, are prepared to accept the truth of Jesus Christ as he is offered in the gospel. Those who accept the fact that they are wretched are those who are ready to hear and to believe the message of salvation as it is found in Scripture.

Those who would hear his word would believe in Jesus, and those who would hear his word are those who are willing to admit their poverty.

Then we move into Galilee.  
v.43

Here is that great Galilean ministry I mentioned earlier. Here we read about Jesus' second miracle. The first miracle was at the wedding, when he turned the water into wine. And now he heals the son of a nobleman.

Little by little, with increasing disclosure throughout the advancing years of his earthly ministry, Jesus reveals his power, the power of God himself. And here in Galilee, where he would be rejected, here he has the opportunity to begin to reveal that supernatural power without the threat of provoking a strong retaliation from the Jewish leaders.

So he reveals his power. And we see that,

### **III. THOSE WHO WOULD PERSONALLY EXPERIENCE HIS SUPERNATURAL POWER WOULD BELIEVE IN JESUS.**

But actually, what we find, is a word of rebuke, to those who wouldn't believe unless they experienced his supernatural power themselves.

v.48

There is a strong rebuke in that. The seeking after signs, the seeking after displays of supernatural power, is a bad thing, a wicked thing, if you are unwilling to believe. In fact, to those who won't believe unless they see a sign, Jesus becomes a stumbling block. Indeed, we read in,

Mat. 12: 38 "Then some of the scribes and Pharisees answered, saying, "Teacher, we want to see a sign from You." 39 But He answered and said to them, "An evil and adulterous generation seeks after a sign, and no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. 40 "For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth."

Similarly,

Mat. 16:1 "Then the Pharisees and Sadducees came, and testing Him asked that He would show them a sign from heaven. 2 He answered and said to them, "When it is evening you say, 'It will be fair weather, for the sky is red'; 3 "and in the morning, 'It will be foul weather today, for the sky is red and threatening.' Hypocrites! You know how to discern the face of the sky, but you cannot discern the signs of the times. 4 "A wicked and adulterous generation seeks after a sign, and no sign shall be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah." And He left them and departed.

I think it is proper to say that what we see in our text is

inadequate faith. Insufficient faith. And therefore no faith at all.

For,

**A. Jesus rebukes those who marvel at his miraculous power without the fullness of faith.**

He was certainly marveled at. His power was certainly marveled at. But he responds with a rebuke to the Galileans, v.43-45

They received him, yes. But the implication is that they received him without the fullness of faith. It doesn't say that they believed in him unto salvation. Just that they saw his works in Jerusalem, and received him outwardly.

Then there is the occasion of the nobleman's son.  
v.46-47

And Jesus' rebuke, at that point, seems incredibly insensitive, at the very least.

v.48

Here is a man whose son is sick, nearly unto death. And he comes to Jesus for help. And he gets rebuked. Why? There is evidently a lack of the fullness of faith. There is a lack of God-centered, God-honoring devotion and love. There is only a selfish wish for help, help that would seem to come in a sort of magical or superstitious way.

On the surface, there are several ways in which we can see that this man's faith was less than full. First, was the need for Jesus to come to Capernaum, as if his power wasn't sufficient to act unless he actually met the boy. And second, that Jesus' power was restricted to this boy's life. That is, Jesus could help him get better if he was sick, but that he couldn't do anything for

him if he died.

And so Jesus rebukes the people for seeking to see and experience miracles, when their hearts were not ready to believe.  
v.48

Jesus speaks that same rebuke to Thomas, after his resurrection, though the rebuke is gentle and merciful.

John 20:24 Now Thomas, called the Twin, one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. 25 The other disciples therefore said to him, "We have seen the Lord." So he said to them, "Unless I see in His hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe." 26 And after eight days His disciples were again inside, and Thomas with them. Jesus came, the doors being shut, and stood in the midst, and said, "Peace to you!" 27 Then He said to Thomas, "Reach your finger here, and look at My hands; and reach your hand here, and put it into My side. Do not be unbelieving, but believing." 28 And Thomas answered and said to Him, "My Lord and my God!" 29 Jesus said to him, "Thomas, because you have seen Me, you have believed. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."

"Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed." Blessed are those who believe for the sake of believing, who haven't seen with their eyes, but are just as sure all the same, for "faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen." As the NIV translates that verse, Hebrews 11:1, faith is being "certain of what we do not see." Blessed are those who have such faith.

But then what do we read in John 20? "Thomas, because you have seen Me, you have believed. Blessed are those who have

not seen and yet have believed.” But the very next verse,

John 20:30 “And truly Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book; 31 but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name.”

The signs are given that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ. And that believing, you may have life in his name. But they are not given to those who were merely curious, to those whose faith was inadequate, who would not understand and believe what Jesus would say. And so Jesus would rebuke those who marvel at his miraculous power, but don’t wish to honor Jesus with the fullness of faith.

But despite his rebuke, Jesus is still willing to help this nobleman from Capernaum. And he does so because the man is desperately seeking Jesus’ help. Indeed, I believe this man’s faith grows even as he hears Jesus’ rebuke.

v.49-50

**B. The nobleman believed because he was in desperate straits.**

And that, of course, is precisely where the Lord puts us sometimes, so that we will learn to believe. Desperation does prompt faith, because you have no ability and no opportunity to solve your own problems. You are helpless.

And desperate straits make for good praying, for when all else fails, when man is stripped of all his ability to provide for himself, he will instinctually turn to God. That is, unless his heart is fully hardened.

Many a man will turn to God when the circumstances of his life become unbearable. Such as this nobleman, whose little boy was near to death. Still, please recognize God’s beautiful grace and wonderful mercy in this account. He rebukes this man, albeit somewhat gently, for the search after miraculous signs and wonders. And then he performs the very wonder which this man so desperately sought after. “Go your way; your son lives.”

Jesus didn’t have to come down to the boy’s house and heal him. He didn’t have to do anything except speak, speak the word of his power. “Your son lives.” And the man believed the word that Jesus spoke to him, and he went his way.

And what did he find?

v.51-54

The point is very important here. Jesus’ ability to perform miracles does not depend upon anything in us. And yet, Jesus determines to perform miracles only in the context of faith.

**C. Jesus reveals his power in the presence of faith.**

Jesus heals this young boy only after giving opportunity for his father to exercise faith. You see, the man believed before he saw the boy. He believed his son was healed even before he saw him, and so Jesus, the object of his faith, receives all the glory.

The simple truth is that God does not perform his supernatural acts unless there is the presence of faith. He can, if he wants to, for his power is not limited by us or hindered in the least by our unbelief. But he chooses not to. He chooses not to display his miraculous power unless there is faith.

We see that many times in Scripture,

I read earlier about Jesus in Nazareth,  
Mat.13:58 “Now He did not do many mighty works there because of their unbelief.”

Likewise, Jesus often says in performing a miracle, “Your faith has made you well.” The point is, he reveals his power, his miraculous power, in the presence of faith. And he withholds his power in the absence of faith.

So what about us? What about you? Can you, by faith, move that mountain?

Now, lets not get trapped by a hyperactive commitment to literalism when a figure of speech is obvious. Don't forget that Jesus is making his point with intentionally exaggerated language. The point is not, how poor in faith we must be because we can't move that mountain just by believing it to be so. The point is not the false simplistic teaching of the name-it-and-claim-it teachers, that present God as a celestial slot machine, and if you would just put in your quarter and pull the lever, out will come your riches.

No, it's far deeper than that. But the principle is made so abundantly clear by Jesus' words. You must pray with faith. “If you have faith as a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, ‘Move from here to there,’ and it will move; and nothing will be impossible for you.”

Or in the words of,

Mat. 21:21 “Assuredly, I say to you, if you have faith and do not doubt, you will not only do what was done to the fig tree, but also if you say to this mountain, ‘Be removed and be cast into the sea,’ it will be done. 22 “And whatever things you ask in prayer, believing, you will receive.”

Mat.7:7 “Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. 8 “For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened.”

So when you pray, pray with that confidence. Pray with faith, the faith by which you are convinced that nothing is impossible for God. Pray for things that are absolutely impossible, impossible, that is, unless God supernaturally intervenes.

Pray for impossible things, pray with faith because you believe in Jesus. And nothing is impossible with God.