



SERMON TITLE: Believing is Seeing  
SCRIPTURE: John 4:3-54

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PASTOR: Charlie Boyd

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"These things are written that you might believe that Jesus is the Christ" (John 20:31). This is how John concludes his own biography of Jesus. He wanted the young, the old, the sick, the well, the despairing, the hopeful, the skeptics, the faithful, and whoever reads his account of Jesus to believe and trust him more fully. But what did John want them to believe? He wanted them to believe that Jesus alone brought eternal life into the present, broken world. And for all who enter this eternal life with God right now, we—like John—are exiles. For all who enter a relationship with Jesus, we will very likely be marginalized and dismissed because we follow him. So, what does it mean to believe? And how do we mature in believing? What does it mean to remain faithful to God when the pressure is on? These are the things that John will help us explore by showing us the glory and beauty of Jesus.

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As Christians, we are told to "live by faith and not by sight" (2 Corinthians 5:7). But faith is not natural for us. *For a follower of Jesus*, it is not natural for us to rest our entire past, present, and future on someone we cannot hear, see, or touch. *Doubt* is natural. *Fear* is natural. *Worry* is natural. *Envy* is natural. *Trying to figure out what's coming next* is natural. *Trusting our own strength and wisdom* is natural. *Seeing, then believing*, is natural, but faith is not natural for us. So by his grace, God works to turn baby believers into mature people of faith. *But how does God do that work? How does God grow us into people of great faith?* Today's story gives us the answers to those questions. This whole passage is about *belief*. The word *believe* shows up again and again. This story teaches us four things about the nature of true faith and how God works in our lives to grow us into people with a strong faith. We will see that *true faith is a seeking faith, an acting faith, a knowing faith, and a contagious faith*.

But before John moves his Gospel story forward, he transitions us *from* the last story about the Samaritan woman and how the people of Sychar had come to believe in Jesus as the Savior of the world *to* the next story about the healing of the nobleman's son (read 4:43-44). Why does John tell us about Jesus saying he received no honor in his homeland of Galilee, but then say the Galileans welcomed him? Well, he also says here that the Galileans had been at the feast in Jerusalem and they had seen Jesus perform signs and wonders there (read 2:23).

We are not given the details, but clearly Jesus worked miracles at the feast and we're told that many people believed. But 2:24 tells us that Jesus did not entrust himself to those believers because he knew (*my paraphrase*) that they were believing in him simply because of the miracles. They did not have a true, saving faith. They had nothing more than a sign-faith. So here in chapter 4, John is saying that the people of Galilee welcomed him because they—like the people in Jerusalem—had a sign-faith rather than a true, saving faith. It does not honor Jesus to want the miraculous things he can do more than wanting him. Hold that thought because it's going to make sense out of something else Jesus is about to say.

So, there are four aspects of a true faith.

**#1 — True faith is a seeking faith (Read 4:46-47).** ...Faith begins when it is motivated by a need. We need God's help. We sense that there is something inside us that's not satisfied—that there's someone, this Jesus, who is worth seeking out to discover whether or not he is capable of bringing us out of the pain we so often experience in our lives. A seeking faith is a thinking faith. Scripture doesn't present faith as "blind faith" or a "leap in the dark." We do "walk by faith and not by sight" but that doesn't mean we "walk by faith and not by thinking." This nobleman had a seeking, *thinking* faith. He had seen or heard what Jesus had done. He had seen or heard that Jesus had some kind of special power, and when he laid his hands on people, they were healed. And he *reasoned* in his *mind*—"If Jesus could do that for others, then he could do that for my son." His seeking faith was first informed by thinking about what he knew about Jesus and that is always the case. So, what does it mean to "walk by faith and not by sight?" It means, *as you walk by faith in what you know is true, you stick with what the truth is and you don't let your feelings and your fears control you*—that's faith. *We walk by*

*faith, not by sight.* We live by what we know, *not by* what we *see*, *not by appearances*, *not by* how we *feel* in the moment. We walk by faith in what we know is true. True faith is a seeking faith but faith is more than seeking.

#2 — Truth faith is an acting faith (Read 4:48-50). When the man asked Jesus to come back to his home and heal his son, Jesus says, “Unless you see signs and wonders, you will not believe.” This seems harsh, and it is, but the “you” is plural. “Unless *you people* see signs and wonders....” He’s talking to the Galilean crowd who welcomed him and he’s rebuking them because they were still seeking signs. They were hoping to see more of what they had seen when they were at the feast in Jerusalem (v. 45).

But Jesus was not entrusting himself to these Galileans either. Again, believing in Jesus simply because he can do amazing things does not *honor* him. There is a difference between amazement and faith—between being amazed by Jesus’ miracles and truly believing in Jesus. Paul Tripp writes: “There is a significant, yes, even profound difference between amazement and faith. God will not leave us in a state of amazement. He works by grace to craft us into people of *settled, hopeful, courageous, active, celebratory, God-glorifying* faith.” That’s what God is doing with this man. So Jesus does not do what the man asks him to do. He simply says, “Go home, your son will live.” And the man is *not put off* by the rebuke, nor does he deny it. His faith is tested, and he continues to press in even though what Jesus tells him to do makes absolutely no sense to him.

C.S. Lewis defines faith this way: “[Faith is] the quality of maintaining a belief which you determine to be true in the face of circumstances that would tempt you to abandon it.” Again, notice that Jesus gave him no sign *and* Jesus did not do what he asked him to do. And by the way, neither was there a public sign given to the sign-seeking Galileans. Only a few people would ever know what Jesus was about to do for this man.

Jesus just gives him his word: “*Go your way. Your son has been healed,*” and the man turns and goes. He takes Jesus at his word—that’s a faith that acts. Faith is never about having faith in faith. It’s about trusting that the object of your faith is strong enough and sure enough to hold you up, and you act on that. And the way God works in our lives to craft us into people of great faith is that sometimes, he doesn’t do things the way we think he should. If Jesus was your genie and he granted your every wish there’s no faith in that. *And what is more*, Jesus would not be honored by that. No. *What honors Jesus*—what causes Jesus to entrust himself to you—is a faith that seeks *him* and takes him at his word even when it doesn’t make any sense...even when it seems like God’s ignoring your request. In times like that, you trust him anyway. You walk and act by faith and not by sight.

#3 — True faith is a knowing faith (Read 4:51-54). The father acts in faith in Jesus’ promise to heal his son and as he is returning home, he is met by his servants who tell him that his son has recovered. The father asks, “What time did he start to recover?” and he learned that it was at the very same time when Jesus said, “Your son will live.” Now he *knows* that Jesus is more than a hands-on miracle worker. He now *knows* that Jesus’ word carries the power and authority to transform lives. He knows Jesus has the kind of power that whatever he speaks will be done. That is what this “second sign” is all about. It’s not about the miracle, as great as that was. The “sign” that points to Jesus being the Messiah, the Son of God and Savior of the world, is that Jesus is like no other. He speaks and it is so.

#4 — True faith is a contagious faith (Read 5:53b). The father had come to know Jesus personally, and now, because of his faith-story, his family comes to believe in Jesus as well. Like the Samaritan woman in the previous story, his faith becomes contagious. *Is your faith a true, saving faith? Is it a life-transforming faith? Is it a faith that propels you to passionately pursue life and mission with Jesus?* If not, could it be because—all too often—you need to “see in order to believe.” Jesus calls you to “believe in order to see.” What does that mean for you in the middle of all your busyness this week?

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#### Discussion Starters:

- On a scale from 1-10, how would you rate the quality of your faith? Why did you pick that number?
- Think back to when you first trusted Jesus as your Savior. What motivated you to begin seeking and thinking that you needed to put your faith in him?
- Why must a seeking faith also be a thinking faith? What did the apostle Paul mean when he said: “We walk by faith and not by sight (2 Corinthians 5:7)?”

- Read C. S. Lewis' definition of faith (above in question 2). What kinds of circumstances tempt you to abandon your faith or not act in faith?
- When was the last time you had to act in faith without having all the blanks filled in? Tell the story, give enough details to reveal the struggle you actually felt at that time.
- Jesus did not grant the nobleman's request to come back home with him and heal his son. In fact, his response to the man seems pretty harsh. If a new believer read this passage in the devotional and was bothered by it, how would you explain what's going on in the story?
- What do you think: If Jesus was like a genie and granted your every wish, would that grow your faith or diminish your faith? ...What kind of things does God use to deepen our faith?
- How has trusting God through times of uncertainty grown your faith so that you know God more personally?
- What kinds of things work against us having a more "contagious" faith? What kind of things feed a contagious faith?