**TAKE JESUS AT HIS WORD**

October 30, 2016

John 4:43-54

Key Verse 4:50 “‘Go,’ Jesus replied, ‘your son will live.’ The man took Jesus at his word and departed.”

For those of you who are not native speakers, taking someone at his word means to believe his word absolutely. In general we do not take others’ words seriously. Two years ago, when we were going to the summer conference, we were late for dinner. I told others clearly that I will save dinner for them. But my wife did not take my word seriously, and she stopped for dinner on the way, even though I did save dinner. I was disappointed. But I understood. We are not God. We cannot keep our promises all the time. But Jesus is God and he keeps his promises always because he is the same yesterday, today and forever. It is a serious problem if we do not take Jesus at his word, because it means that we do not trust him. Today we want to think about the second miraculous sign that Jesus performed by healing the royal official’s son. The royal official had faith that took Jesus at his word. This kind of faith moves the heart of Jesus. This kind of faith can move mountains. May God help us to take Jesus at his word and experience the power of God very personally like the royal official.

**First**, the Galileans’ miracle-seeking faith. Look at verses 44-45. “Now Jesus himself had pointed out that a prophet has no honor in his own country. When he arrived in Galilee, the Galileans welcomed him. They had seen all that he had done in Jerusalem at the Passover Festival, for they also had been there.” Many Galileans saw that Jesus had performed miracles in Jerusalem (2:23-25). Jesus never performed miracles to show off, but only to plant faith in the hearts of people. The Galileans should have seen Jesus as the Son of God through his many miracles. But when Jesus came back to Galilee from a Samaritan village, the Galileans just expected more miracles.

The main purpose of a miracle is to lead us to believe in God. A miracle should lead us to have faith in God. A miracle must be connected to our faith in God. But if we just seek a miracle for sensationalism or to get what we want, it defeats the original purpose of miracles. This is the main problem of miracle-seeking faith. When Jesus performed a miracle of feeding 5,000 with five loaves and two fish, people should have believed that Jesus is the Son of God. But they were only interested in free bread and demanded Jesus give them more bread. When Jesus talked about bread from heaven, they sensed that Jesus would not give them bread and so began to grumble about him, saying, “Is this not Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know?”

The Galileans were seeking signs from Jesus instead of listening to the gracious word of God through Jesus. So Jesus said, “A prophet has no honor in his own country” (44). When Jesus compared the Samaritans who had listened to his words with learning minds to his own countrymen, he felt sorry that his own countrymen were only miracle-seeking and were living according to their human pride. What is worse, they hated to listen to the word of God. So Jesus felt that the Samaritans honored him, but his hometown people did not honor him. Jesus really wanted his hometown people to listen to the word of God and enter the kingdom of God.

**Second**, the royal official took Jesus at his word (46-50). Though Jesus was not honored by his own countrymen, there was someone who honored him and listened to him. Who was he? Look at verse 46. “Once more he visited Cana in Galilee, where he had turned the water into wine. And there was a certain royal official whose son lay sick at Capernaum.” He was a royal official under Herod Antipas, the ruler of Galilee and Perea. Capernaum was 20 miles away from Cana. The official’s joy was to look at his son and to hear his son calling him, “Daddy.” One day, suddenly, his son got a high fever 40ºC, and was dying. This royal official was a noble man of the time. Such men made their servants run when there was something to be done. But this man came to Jesus personally and humbly pleaded with the son of a carpenter of Nazareth, “Sir, come down before my child dies.” This was his humble prayer before Jesus. He brought his problem to Jesus by faith. Most Galileans did not believe but this man expressed his sincere faith in Jesus and begged Jesus’ help. What did Jesus say to him?

Jesus’ response to the royal official is puzzling, almost disturbing. Look at verse 48. “Unless you people see signs and wonders,’ Jesus told him, ‘you will never believe.’” There was a small crowd of curious bystanders around the royal official, hoping to see Jesus perform a miracle. So Jesus rebuked them for being interested only in his miracles and not taking to heart what these miracles signify. If they have come only to see signs, they will not see one now. The only thing they get is a rebuke. When they heard Jesus say, “Go. Your son will live,” they probably said to themselves, “Yeah, right!” Probably they believed that his words are only intended to get rid of this persistent father, not words of assurance that his son really has been healed. We are not told that anyone accompanied the official to Capernaum, or that anyone other than his own servants came to believe in Jesus. The crowd disperses, and the sign-seekers go away disappointed, and perhaps a little angry.

Jesus’ initial response to the royal official is a bleak statement that people would not believe unless they were supplied with signs and wonders. It was a test to see if this man was earnest. He did that to the Syrophoenican woman, who came to Jesus to beg him to drive the demon out of her daughter. At first, Jesus did not answer a word. When she persisted, Jesus said, “It is not right to take the children’s bread and toss it to their dogs.” (Matthew 15:26) The woman could have been very angry being told that she was a dog, and gone away. But the woman said, “Yes, Lord, but even the dogs under the table eat the children’s crumbs.” She was very persistent for her daughter’s sake. Thus Jesus granted her request. If the official turned away irritably; if he had been too proud to accept a rebuke; if he had given up despairingly on the spot--Jesus would have known that his faith was not real. Look at verse 49. “The royal official said, ‘Sir, come down before my child dies.’” He did not give up, but persisted. Jesus’ words were not intended to turn him away, but to turn him to Jesus in faith.

Look at verse 50a. “‘Go,’ Jesus replied, ‘your son will live.’” Though Jesus said a nice word, how could the official be sure that his son would live? Why did Jesus speak in such a way to the royal official, “Go. Your son will live”? It was to see if he had faith in Jesus’ word. How did he respond? Look at verse 50b. “The royal official took Jesus at his word and departed.” He did not demand to see a miracle but believed in Jesus’ word. This man had wanted Jesus to come and lay his hands on his son and heal him. He had wanted to see his son be healed with his own eyes. Jesus was far from the boy but said, “Your son will live.” People say that seeing is believing. They want to see first before believing. But Jesus wanted him to believe first and see the glory of God. John 20:29 says, “Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.” Jesus wants us to believe without seeing.

Look at verse 50b again. “The man took Jesus at his word and departed.” What is remarkable about this is that the man had asked Jesus to come with him. But when Jesus simply spoke, “Go; your son will live,” he believed and went. He did not complain that Jesus would not come with him. And amazingly, he simply left, believing. I think that in that moment of seeing Jesus speak with authority in spite of his accusations, something awakened in the man. He saw something in Jesus more than a miracle-worker. I am sure that he struggled very hard in his thinking, whether he should insist in bringing Jesus, or taking him at his word and go. But he decided to take Jesus at his word and go.

In one sense, the official’s faith was defective at first. He thought that Jesus would have to be at the boy’s bedside before he could heal him. But through Jesus’ rebuke, his faith grew. He took Jesus at his word and departed. This is indeed amazing faith. He did not have a cell phone and could not call home to verify the status of his son’s condition, “Hello, is my son okay?” But he departed with a peaceful mind because he believed that Jesus healed his son. This is incredible. What is faith? Hebrews 11:1 says, “Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.” Though this man did not see his son healed with his own eyes yet, he was sure that his son was healed. Faith is taking Jesus at his word. Taking Jesus at his word is the beginning of Biblical faith. This kind of faith can move mountains. This kind of faith moves the heart of God.

**Third**, how to take Jesus at his word. When we want to take God at his word or believe the promise of God, we must deny ourselves and honor God’s word a little more than our own idea. We must also curb our sinful pride so that we can listen to his word. Naaman was the commander of the army in Aram, and he had leprosy. According to a Hebrew slave girl’s advice, Naaman visited Elisha, a prophet. General Naaman came with his men to Elisha’s house for healing. But Elisha did not come out to see him. He only sent his servant to deliver the message, “Go, wash yourself seven times in the Jordan, and your flesh will be restored and you will be cleansed” (2Ki 5:10). General Naaman was angry at Elisha’s behavior. He thought that Elisha would come out and wave his hand like a magician. At first, he refused to obey the prophet Elisha. But he battled with himself until he curbed his pride and went to the Jordan river to be cleansed. We can say that taking God at his word or believing the promise of God is a fierce battle in our soul. But we should not avoid this important battle.

When the royal official was on the way home, his servants met him with the news that his boy was living (51). We can almost see the face of this father, the look of relief and joy that comes over him. Then he begins to wonder about these words, “Your son will live.” Had Jesus spoken as a prophet, assuring him that the child will not die, and will get better on his own? Or, did Jesus produce a miraculous “long distance” healing as he spoke, assuring him that the boy would live? Were Jesus’ words meant to just comfort the official, as in “Everything will be OK.” Or did Jesus’ words heal the boy instantly? There is a way to find out. The official asked this question to his servants: “Just exactly what time did my son get better?” They tell him it was at one in the afternoon yesterday. It was precisely the time Jesus said to him, “Your son will live.” It is a miracle indeed, a miracle brought about by Jesus speaking only a word. At that one word, the physical chemistry of a boy’s body changed. The distance did not matter. The boy was 20 miles away in Capernaum. He could have been 15,000 miles away. It would not have mattered. Then the royal official and his whole household believed. He believed that Jesus is the Son of God whose word has power to give life.

When Dr. Samuel Lee came to the USA after a successful ministry in Korea, many people wanted to see him perform a miracle and establish a big ministry overnight. They wanted to see if God was with him. But Dr. Lee took Jesus at his word, “Go and make disciples of all nations…teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.” He focused on one to one Bible study ministry and raising up disciples. At times, it was very hard to see whether God was working. But today we see the glory of God in many sacrificial American shepherds and shepherdesses. Many times, we are tempted to ask God to perform a miracle and establish 120 member ministry overnight. Many times, we are tempted to doubt whether God is with us when students quit one to one Bible study after a while, saying, “There are many ways of serving God. UBF is not the only Christian organization.” Often times, when we go through hardships in our lives, we doubt whether God is with us. But we should take Jesus at his word, “I am with you always, to the very end of the age,” and continue to engage in one to one ministry diligently. Then surely we will see the glory of God.

Today many students think that they need to experience something in order to believe. Sometimes we doubt that anyone would believe through Bible study alone. In fact, students seem to hate the word, “Bible study.” We lament with Jesus, “Unless you people see signs and wonders, you will never believe.” But the royal official gives us hope that even in such a time and place, there are those who believe through God’s word. We do not need to perform miracles. God’s word is enough. Catholic Church before the Reformation preached God’s word in Latin. Only a few people could understand. As a result, people were attracted to worship of saints and sacred objects, and mysticism. But Martin Luther and the Reformers began to translate the Bible into their own languages and many read God’s word and understood. Many souls were harvested. There will be great harvest of souls where the word of God is preached.

In this passage we learn the difference between sign-seeking faith and taking Jesus at his word faith. Jesus performs a miracle in such a way that enhances the official’s faith from “sign-seeking-faith” to “taking-Jesus-at-his-word-faith.” May God help us to curb our pride and take Jesus at his word and experience the power of God.