

## Your Son Lives

*These Things are Written that You May Believe Series*

**John 4: 43-54**

Pastor Bryan Clark

So if you've ever sat by the bedside of someone you love, and you've watched them slowly dying, you know it *is* a terrible feeling. There's a feeling of helplessness and desperation. There's nothing you can do but ask God to give you a miracle. I think that's especially true when the person who is passing is younger. When someone has lived a full life, there's a certain acceptance that this is the way it is. It's very different when someone is younger. There's a sense in which this person is too young to die, and in those moments you feel so helpless, and all you can do is plead with God to give you a miracle. That's what our story is about this morning, and it's in the midst of that story where we remember something very important that we must remember in those most difficult moments of life.

If you have a Bible, turn with us to John, Chapter 4. Last week, we talked about Jesus in Samaria. Jesus had a conversation with the Samaritan woman that turned into a significant harvest of souls. It's one of the great moments in the early ministry of Jesus. We pick it up then verse 43:

**After the two days He went forth from there into Galilee. For Jesus Himself testified that a prophet has no honor in his own country. So when He came to Galilee, the Galileans received Him, having seen all the things that He did in Jerusalem at the feast; for they themselves also went to the feast.** (\*NASB, John 4:43-45)

We talked about this last week. Down in the south around Jerusalem was Judea. Directly above that to the north is Samaria and above that is Galilee. So Jesus has been in Samaria for two days. There's been a tremendous harvest of souls, and now He moves yet north into Galilee. Verse 44 is the verse that is a bit of a puzzle in that paragraph. **Jesus testified that a prophet has no honor in his own country.** So there's a lot of discussion about what exactly is that referencing? There's somewhere in the neighborhood of ten different positions on the interpretation of that verse. Some people think it's a reference to Judea because Jesus was born in Bethlehem, and Jesus had to leave because of the religious leaders. But that doesn't really make sense because the New Testament doesn't refer to Judea as being Jesus's home country. He was raised in Nazareth; he was a Galilean. We also know that three times in the synoptics—Matthew, Mark, and Luke—they each record the same statement, but all three times are in Galilee. So it isn't just in Judea; it's also in Galilee. The text tells us though that Jesus was received in Galilee. So what does this statement mean? I think the best way to understand it is to go back to John chapter 1, verse 11:

**Jesus came to His own, [the Jews] and His own received Him not.**

If it's a reference to the fact that the nation of Israel struggled to receive their Messiah, in the south in Judea, it was because Jesus was a threat to the religious leaders; in the north, in Galilee, it's because Jesus was from Nazareth. He was one of their own. They struggled to comprehend how Jesus, the neighbor boy, could actually be God in the flesh, the long-awaited Savior of the world. So when John says **He came to Galilee and the Galileans received Him**, it's important to understand that word *received* is a different word than John 1:12—**to the many as received Him**, which means to embrace Him as the Savior. The word *received* in chapter 4 could be better translated *welcomed*. As a matter

of fact, the translators would do us a favor to translate it that way so it's not so confusing. So, when Jesus came to Galilee, they *welcomed* Him. But why they welcomed Him is included in the verse, **...having seen all the things that He did in Jerusalem at the feast; for they themselves also went to the feast.** Now we talked about this. Go back a couple of chapters to chapter 2, verse 23. John says:

**Now when He [Jesus] was in Jerusalem at the Passover, during the feast, many believed in His name, observing His signs which He was doing. But Jesus, on His part, was not entrusting Himself to them, for He knew all men.** (John 2:23-24)

Literally the Greek there is: *the people believed in Jesus, but Jesus did not believe in them*, and we talked about that Jesus was doing miracles, so what were they believing? They were believing the miracles. To put it rather crudely, they were enjoying the show. Who doesn't like a good miracle? So, when they were coming back to Galilee, they welcomed Him. But John quickly says they welcomed Him because they had seen the miracles. They were excited to have him back and put on a show. Who doesn't like a good show? Who doesn't like a miracle? That's contrasted with the Samaritans, while the Judeans and the Galileans were struggling to accept Jesus as the Savior. Notice specifically in verse 42, what was said of the Samaritans to the woman:

**“It is no longer because of what you said [meaning the woman at the well] that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves and know that this one is indeed the Savior of the world.”**

Jesus didn't do a lot of miracles in Samaria. He talked to them. They weren't enjoying the show; they were listening to His words and because of His words, they had come to believe—and it's specifically identified—they believed He had come as the Savior of the world. So, who needs a Savior? Answer: someone who needs saving. This is the concern that Jesus has. It's one thing to believe in the miracles; it's one thing to enjoy the show.

History will show that as Jesus did more and more miracles, the crowds got larger and larger and larger. But when Jesus started to talk about counting the cost—what it means to follow Me, what it means to need a Savior and face your sin—the crowds got smaller and smaller and smaller. So the contrast is with the Samaritans, who understood Him to be the Savior, with the Galileans who were enjoying the show, but had no real sense of who Jesus was as the Savior of the world. This continues to be a huge problem today. If there are signs and wonders, you can draw a crowd. Who doesn't want to see a good show? Who doesn't need a miracle? People often say things like, “I'm not religious; I'm spiritual,” or they have their own idea of the Jesus they want to pursue, and it's the Jesus that does a miracle. It's the Jesus that's there when they need help. A lot of people pray, but they pray to a God of their own definition. They want God on their terms to come to the rescue when they need Him, but don't talk to me about sin! Don't talk to me about forgiveness. Don't talk to me about morality. I don't want to hear that. I just want Jesus on my terms. So that's the same thing that's happening with the Galileans. Then Jesus understands if that doesn't change, they will not receive salvation. So that's the problem. John then records the story that follows to illustrate this problem. Verse 46:

**Therefore [so therefore, in light of that previous paragraph, in light of that problem] He came again to Cana of Galilee, where he had made the water wine.**

So Cana is in the hills; it's five to six miles from Nazareth. This was the first public miracle—the first sign as John calls it—when Jesus went to the wedding feast and turned the water to wine. If you remember when we studied that story, I suggested that it's more than just providing wine for the wedding feast. There was a symbolism as Jesus took the ritual, cleansing water and turned it into wine—wine representing His own blood. There was an imagery that Jesus was going to take that which was merely ritualistic in the first covenant to be the fulfillment to usher in the new covenant. We're told in that story that the new wine was better quality than the old wine. But when we talked about that, we reminded ourselves that that change from the water to the wine is not going to come easily. So, since that time, Jesus went to Jerusalem, to the Passover feast, which was symbolic of what He had come to do as the Lamb of God. You remember that's then where He goes to the temple and He turns over the tables and He identifies Himself as the new Temple. The temple will not be a building; the Temple will be a person; He identified Himself as the fulfillment of the temple.

Next he has a conversation with Nicodemus, a Pharisee, a self-righteous leader in Israel. I think Nicodemus was very sincere when he came to Jesus, but he struggled to understand how it could be possible that his own religious self-righteousness could not make him right before God, when Jesus was insistent, “That won't do it. You have to be born again.” John the Baptist identified his baptism was merely a ritual cleansing, but only Jesus could change someone from the inside out. That's what He was trying to explain to Nicodemus. He goes to Samaria, and there He has a conversation with a woman that had no self-righteousness; she had nothing to offer. Her only hope was the grace of God, and Jesus explained to her, “If I just give you water, you'll be thirsty again tomorrow, but if I give you *living water* that will bubble up from within, it will satisfy your thirsty soul forever.” That's where there was this great harvest of righteousness in Samaria. So now Jesus is back to Cana, and we are reminded again this transition from water to wine, the ushering in of the new covenant, this acceptance of Jesus as the fulfillment of the promise, is not going to come easily...

**...and there was a royal official whose son was sick at Capernaum. When he heard that Jesus had come out of Judea into Galilee, he went to Him and was imploring *Him*, [begging Him] to come down and heal his son; for he was at the point of death.** (Vs. 46b-47)

This **royal official** means he was a part of the administration of Herod Antipas. Herod Antipas was a tetrarch, or we would say a governor of Galilee. This official was in Capernaum. Capernaum was about twenty miles from Cana, down on the Sea of Galilee. So to go from Capernaum all the way up to Cana would have been a twenty mile journey up into the hills. His son is sick and he's dying. Basically the text says he was pleading with Jesus to, “Do something or my son is going to die!” This royal official would have been a person of significant influence, a person of significant means, but in that moment, it doesn't matter how much power you have. It doesn't matter how much money you have. Your son is dying and you're helpless to do anything about it. He hears Jesus is in Cana and he comes and he begs him to, “Do something before my son dies!” You can feel the desperation in his voice. Jesus' response to him is odd. As a matter of fact, we would say initially it seems like it completely lacks sensitivity. Verse 48:

**So Jesus said to him, “Unless you people see signs and wonders, you *simply* will not believe.”**

Now imagine this father, whose son is dying. It doesn't matter if we go back 4000 years, if we go back 2000 years, or we're talking about today, one thing people have in common is: parents love their children and watching a child die is gut-wrenching. And so he pours out his heart to Jesus—and in

that moment, what he needed was compassion. What he didn't need was a lecture, and that's what makes Jesus' response so odd. So, we need to understand more fully what's going on here.

What Jesus says there—the pronouns are plural—so Jesus isn't just talking to the royal official; He's talking to the crowd. Perhaps this official found some people, asked them where Jesus was, told Him what was going on, and a crowd gathered; perhaps there was already a crowd. One can imagine that people were saying to Jesus, “Let's see if you can do this.” You know, “Give us a show. Let's see what you've got,” and Jesus is responding to them. Again, you have to run this through the grid that they were following Jesus for the miracles. They wanted to see the show; who doesn't need a miracle? But what Jesus understood is that He had not come to earth to put on a show. He had come to earth to be the Savior of the world.

In John chapter 1, John makes some audacious claims about who Jesus is—that Jesus was actually the eternal Creator of the universe, who had taken on human flesh to fulfill the promise, to make a way of salvation. But John did not say, “Just believe me.” What John said is, “I am going to give you evidence after evidence after evidence to validate the claim that Jesus is indeed God in the flesh.” Jesus did miracles to validate His claim to be God in the flesh, the long-awaited Messiah. If these people did not get beyond just enjoying the show and come to understand who He was as the Savior of the world, they would not experience the salvation that God had to offer. Stop and think about this. The miracles that Jesus did on earth were temporary solutions. When He fed the 5000, the next day the 5000 were hungry again. This is what He said to the woman at the well, “If I just give you water, tomorrow you'll be thirsty again.” The lame were made to walk; the blind were made to see; the deaf were made to hear. They were amazing moments, but they were temporary moments because these people would still go on and have heartache. They would have pain; they would have suffering, and all of them would eventually die. They were just temporary miracles to make life a little bit easier on earth. Mostly they were to validate Jesus' claim to be the Savior of the world. So that's what Jesus is saying. “If you don't get beyond that, to understand who I am, you have no hope.” Jesus then sees this as a teachable moment to try to help the people understand His concern. Verse 49:

**The royal official said to him, “Sir, come down before my child dies.”**

Now this is a man that's probably used to getting what he wants. This is the imperative. He's commanding Jesus, “Do what you're told.” It's respectful, but he expects Jesus to do what He's told. It's also interesting he goes from describing his child as his son, to a much more tender word, **child**. Essentially what he's saying is, “Jesus, You have to come down, or my little boy is going to die. So Jesus responds to him. Verse 50:

**Jesus said to him, “Go; your son lives.”**

Now, think about this. If you're the father, is it possible that Jesus can heal your son from twenty miles away? Is that really possible, or is this just a brush off? Is this Jesus saying, “You know, get lost.” By the time he goes twenty miles down, finds out he's not healed, he's probably not going to come back. He won't know where Jesus is. In his mind, he's got to be processing, “Is this really true or not?” But this is the whole point Jesus was wanting him to understand. “You have to listen to Me and believe I tell the truth.” If you remember, this is the same conversation with Nicodemus. He was telling Nicodemus, “I've been to heaven; I've come to earth. I know what I'm talking about. You have to listen to Me and trust Me. You must be born again.” They have to listen to the words of Jesus, like the Samaritans did. Whatever this official saw in Jesus in that moment, with what I would consider

remarkable faith, he believed Him. He believed that somehow Jesus had the power from twenty miles away to heal his son.

**The man believed** [Notice specifically the word *believed*.] **the word that Jesus spoke to him and started off. As he was now going down, his slaves met him, saying that his son was living.** [Almost the exact same words as *your son lives*.] **So he inquired of them the hour when he began to get better? Then they said to him, “Yesterday at the seventh hour** [That would be one o'clock in the afternoon.] **the fever left him.** (Vs. 50b-52)

So the father believes, and he starts back down the hill. Now there are details missing. Maybe he had to spend the night somewhere; we don't really know. We just know the next day he headed down; the slaves are heading up. They meet somewhere along the way and the slaves give him the word, “Your son lives.” So he wants to know, “Was this just a coincidence or did Jesus actually do this?” So he inquires, “Exactly at what time?” Essentially what he says is, “What time did the boy start to get better?” To which the slaves respond, “He did not start to get better; at one o'clock the fever left, and he was healed.” They're saying it was a moment in time and in that moment, the official knew that Jesus had healed his son. Verse 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. This is again a second sign that Jesus performed when He had come out of Judea into Galilee.** (Vs. 53-54)

So what did the man believe? What did his household believe? It wasn't that they just believed that the son was healed. They believed! They believed that Jesus was the Messiah! Like the Samaritans, they had experienced a miracle and they believe the words of Jesus. They believed that Jesus is the One, and John identifies that this is now the second sign—miracle—that's happened in Galilee.

So we remind ourselves this morning, Jesus did not come just to do signs. Jesus did not come just to put on a show. All of the miracles Jesus did were nothing more than temporary relief in a difficult world. It is wonderful that Jesus healed the man's son who was dying. But the boy will still die. The 5000 were fed, but the next day they were hungry again. There were people healed of diseases and all kinds of ailments, but they all eventually die. It's not the ultimate solution. It was Jesus giving people a glimpse of the world to come, when things will be made right. But more than that, it was a validation that Jesus had come to do the ultimate miracle.

How is it possible for sinful men and women? How is it possible for a sinful, immoral Samaritan woman to stand right before a holy God? That would take the greatest miracle of all. Jesus understood that if you don't move through the signs and understand who I am and what I came to do, you're going to miss the whole point. Because at the end of the story, that's the only miracle that ultimately matters.

The first twenty-three years of my life I prayed for a miracle. I never knew my dad, other than in a bed. My dad was totally blind, and he lived in excruciating pain twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, week after week, month after month, year after year. I cannot tell you how many times I begged God for a miracle. “Do something; do *something!*” So many wonderful, godly, caring people joined us in our prayer for a miracle. There was a biography written about my dad's life that was published in 1979. I think it's a book that has helped lots of people. But I always think, when I see that book, there was still one more chapter to be written. The book was published in 1979. My dad died in 1982, and the last chapter was the worst of all. Not only did we not get our miracle, it just got

more gruesome. It got more difficult to watch, until his death in 1982. There was one final chapter that was the worst chapter of all. There would be no miracle.

Years ago I had an administrative assistant by the name of Sue. Sue was a kind, capable, caring, faithful woman. She wasn't just my administrative assistant. She was my friend. Sue was diagnosed with cancer. Sue fought a long, courageous battle, never losing faith that God could do the impossible. So many godly people, faithful, caring people joined us in a prayer for a miracle. But we didn't get our miracle, and Sue passed.

My next administrative assistant was Melanie. Melanie was married to John. I was actually sitting with John in the auditorium at the light board when he was programming—I think for Christmas—when he got the call from the doctor that said, “It's cancer!” John fought a courageous battle, and so many godly, faithful people prayed for a miracle, but there was no miracle, and John passed.

I think of Skip, who fought so hard. At that time his daughter Taylor was on our staff, and so many of us were praying for a miracle. When Skip understood there were no more treatments, we prayed together for a miracle. So many godly people, praying for a miracle, but the miracle never came, and Skip passed.

I think of little Jack—eight years old—who was dying of cancer. This kid had remarkable faith and courage. He trusted in Jesus with all his heart. So many people prayed for a miracle. I think I personally prayed for a miracle every day for thirty days in a row. “God, this is a child! This is an eight-year-old child. You have to give as a miracle.” But there was no miracle, and little Jack died.

I think of Amy who at one time worked for us. Amy was my friend. Amy fought with as much courage and faith as anyone I've ever seen. A remarkable attitude, long, hard battle with cancer. So many wonderful, caring, godly people prayed so hard for a miracle but there was no miracle and in June, she went to be with Jesus.

Some of you know this past Labor Day weekend our son-in-law Travis entered the ER with end-stage liver failure, and we prayed all through the month of September, every single day. Our family, along with so many good, faithful, godly people prayed, “God, give us a miracle. He's too young to die; he's too young!” But we didn't get our miracle. At the end of September, Travis went to be with Jesus, and at first I thought, “We didn't get our miracle,” and then again, “Yes, we did.”

We didn't get our temporary miracle for any of those. But for every single one of those situations, to have had a healing, would we have loved that? Yes! Would I ask for it again? Absolutely! But if God gave them that miracle, they would still someday die, and it would still be painful and gut-wrenching when they die. It's just a temporary fix; that's all we were asking for. But the ultimate miracle is, “How is it possible for sinful men and women to stand right before a holy God?” That's the miracle of all miracles, and for every one of those situations, we did get our miracle!

If all you think about is this life and all that matters is this life, it's easy to get caught up in that and get discouraged and, “God doesn't listen; He doesn't care. He doesn't answer prayers. We didn't get our miracle.” But you have to go back and process, “We're asking for a *temporary* miracle, because those people still eventually have to die.” But what matters most is not this life; what matters most is the life to come. How is it possible that sinful men and women could stand right before a holy God both now and forever? It's a miracle! It's a miracle of God's grace, that God Himself would take on

human flesh and ultimately pay the price for our sin, to offer salvation freely as a gift to those who receive it.

Like other families in the room, Thanksgiving was different this year. There was an empty chair. Is it painful? It's really painful! Does it hurt? It hurts a lot, but we remember the story is not over. Death does not win for those that are in Christ. This story is not over. The parting is a temporary parting, and the best is yet to come. Paul says we grieve but we do not grieve as those who have no hope. One day there will be another gathering at a banqueting table in the new heaven and the new earth, in the presence of Jesus, and there will be no empty chairs there. Travis will be there. My dad will be there. Skip will be there. Jack will be there, Amy will be there. Sue will be there. We will be gathered together in a place where there will be no more tears...no more sorrows...no more goodbyes. It will be the place our souls have always longed for. We will realize in that moment, we did not get our temporary miracles, but we got the ultimate miracle that will matter forever, and in that moment we will know, without a doubt, we are finally, finally home, all made possible because Jesus offers His salvation freely as a gift to anyone who chooses to receive it.

*Our Father, there are many here this morning who know the pain; they feel the grief. Death is real and it's painful, but, God, help us to remember in the midst of our grief, the hope of the gospel. That this is but a temporary parting, and the best is yet to come. And, Lord, all that is made possible because of what we celebrate at Christmas time—that You sent Your Son to be the Savior of the world. Lord, may we believe that that is true. In Jesus' name, Amen.*

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**Opening Discussion**

1. How would you describe religion? What do you think people mean today when they say they are not religious but they're spiritual?
  
2. What is the difference between people who say they "believe" in God or Jesus but don't see their need for a Savior? What are they "believing?"

**Bible Study**

1. Read John 4:43-54. Do a quick review of what John has recorded since Jesus left Cana after He turned the water to wine. Do you see any themes emerging?
  
2. Why do you think the people in Samaria were so ready to receive Jesus as Savior but not the people in his "own country?" Compare John 1:9-13.
  
3. Compare Jesus' words in John 4:48 with John 2:23-25. What were people attracted to with Jesus and how is that different than receiving Him as Savior? How might these same dynamics play out in today's culture?
  
4. Why do you think Jesus healed the official's child? What was the result?
  
5. People were excited about the miracles of Jesus but the reality was that the people that were healed by Jesus would still someday get sick again or die. To use the woman at the well language they would thirst again. What did Jesus really want the people to understand? See John 3:36.

