

3/6/11

Series Title: “*John’s Gospel of Jesus: God in Flesh*”

Today’s Title:

“*The Believer’s Persistence of Faith*”

Scripture Reading: John 4:46-54

Text: John 4:49

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

Introduction: (Illustration from Nelson, p.286)

Faith honors God, and God honors faith. A story from the life of missionaries Robert and Mary Moffat illustrates this truth. For 10 years this couple labored faithfully in Bechuanaland (now called Botswana) without one ray of encouragement to brighten their way. They could not report a single convert.

Finally the directors of their mission board began to question the wisdom of continuing the work. The thought of leaving their post, however, brought great grief to this devoted couple, for they felt sure that God was in their labors, and that they would see people turn to Christ in due season. They stayed, and for a year or two longer, darkness seemed to reign.

One day a friend in England sent word to the Moffats that she wanted to mail them a gift and asked what they would like. Trusting that in time the Lord would bless their work, Mrs. Moffat replied, “Send us a communion set; I am sure it will soon be needed.” God honored that dear woman’s faith. The Holy Spirit moved upon the hearts of the villagers, and soon a little group of 6 converts was united to form the first Christian church in that land. The communion set from England was delayed in the mail, but on the very day before the first commemoration of the Lord’s Supper in Bechuanaland, the set arrived.

Premise: *Persistent grace enables persistent faith*

Outline:

I. Persistent Faith Endures Reproof

II. Persistent Faith Embraces Relationship

III. Persistent Faith Experiences Reward

I. PERSISTENT FAITH ENDURES REPROOF

Note: The Greek word for nobleman or official is basilikos, which most likely refers to someone who is officially connected with service to a king. While Herod Antipas was not properly a king at all, yet he was considered as such. This man was mostly likely a Jew since he was included by Jesus with the Jews who eagerly desired to see signs and wonders. It appears that this royal official had heard many reports about the miracle working prophet who had now come up from Judea to the province of Galilee, particularly into the village of Cana which was two and a half miles from Capernaum.

A. He was profiled with Jews who seek signs

v.48 “So Jesus said to him, ‘Unless you see signs and wonders you will not believe.’”

c/w Luke 11:29 “As the crowds increased, Jesus said, ‘This is a wicked generation. It asks for a miraculous sign.’”

c/w Matthew 7:22-23 “Many will say to me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?’ Then I will tell them plainly, ‘I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!’”

- William Hendriksen

Jesus complains that this man, who had already heard (and, perhaps, seen) so much of the Christ, is still standing on the lowest rung of faith’s ladder. His confidence, and that of others like him, has to be constantly fed by signs and wonders. He does not believe in the divine person of Christ nor even in his word if the latter be unaccompanied by a miracle.

When Jesus spoke of signs and wonders, he was not referring to two kinds of supernatural works. Rather, the same deed of power is

sign when it is viewed in one way, and a wonder when it is viewed in another way. A wonder is something startling. The term views the mighty deed not, like sign, from the point of view of the light which it sheds upon the person and work of the Lord, but from the aspect of the effect which it has upon the spectators. These spectators were always looking for something sensational or exciting! So Jesus says, "Unless you see signs and wonders, you will definitely not believe."

- C. Everett Koop, M.D. former Surgeon General of the United States

A surprising number of Christians are convinced God will not be believed unless He makes tumors disappear, causes asthma to go away, and pops eyes into empty sockets. But the gospel is accepted by God-given faith, not by the guarantee that you will never be sick, or, if you are, that you will be miraculously healed. God is the Lord of healing, of growing, of weather, of transportation, and of every other process. Yet people don't expect vegetables without plowing. They don't expect levitation instead of getting in a car and turning a key- even for extraordinarily good and exceptional reasons.

Although God could do all of this, Christian airline pilots do not fly straight into a thunderstorm after asking God for a safe corridor, although He could give them such safety. We do not have public services and ask God to remove all criminals, prostitutes, and pornographers from our midst, although He could do that too. God could eliminate AIDS from our planet. While we pray for a speedy discovery of successful treatment, I must do all I can to employ medical science in its task, as all health care professionals must do....

Presumptuous Christian writers claim to know God's intent, such as the author of the book that insists, "God wants you well." Who says so? Why should He want you well when He did not want the apostle Paul well? Paul apparently had a serious eye disease to which he refers in his letters to the young churches. And indeed, Paul asked God to remove his thorn in the flesh several times. But God chose not to do so. Timothy, Paul's protégé, had something in the way of a gastrointestinal complaint. Paul didn't respond with the command "Be healed!" Instead, he told Timothy to stop drinking only water and to drink a little wine!....

That is what God expects of you and me as He asks us to commit our way to Him, to trust Him completely, and to put our future into

His hands. His way may be completely contrary to what we would
page 4
like it to be. But whether it is sickness we are talking about, or in-
firmity, or deformity, or approaching death, God will indeed sanctify
to us our deepest distress.

B. He was regarded as obstinately unbelieving

*“Unless you see signs and wonders, you **will not believe.**”*

c/w Matthew 15:21-28

C. He may have been classified as flaunting his position

v.46a *“And at Capernaum there was an official whose son was ill.”*

- A.W. Pink

“But neither rank nor riches exempt their possessor from the common sorrows of human kind. Naaman was a great man, but he was a leper. So here was a nobleman, yet his son lay at the point of death. The rich have their troubles as well as the poor. Dwellers in palaces are little better off than those who live in cottages. Let Christians beware of setting their hearts on worldly riches....No doubt this nobleman had tried every remedy which money could procure. But money is not almighty. Many invest it with an imaginary value that it is far from possessing. Money cannot purchase happiness, nor can it ensure health. There is just as much sickness among the aristocracy as there is among the common artisans.”

II. PERSISTENT FAITH EMBRACES RELATIONSHIP

A. He was a father who desperately loved his son

(Illustrations from Knight, p.125 and p.126)

In the home of a devout Christian father hung this motto: “But as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.” The motto was most meaning full to the father. He prayed daily that each one of his children would be saved. In time, each child was genuinely converted except the eldest son. He persistently refused to come to Christ. As the father and son sat alone one day in the room where the motto was displayed, the father said, “I cannot and will not be a liar any longer. You are a member of my household. You reject Christ, and will not serve Him. I

must add the following words to the motto: 'Except Henry!' It

page 5

hurts me to do this, my boy, for I dearly love you and yearn for your conversion!" The tender concern of the father so touched the son that he knelt and prayed the following: "God be merciful to me a sinner!" Then the home was unanimously a Christian home.

- poem written by Merrill C. Tenney

*To you, O son of mine, I cannot give
A vast estate of wide and fertile lands;
But I can keep for you, the whilst I live,
Unstained hands.*

*I have no blazoned scutcheon that insures
Your path to eminence and worldly fame;
Longer than empty heraldry endures
A blameless name.*

*I have no treasure chest of gold refined,
No hoarded wealth of clinking, glittering pelf;
I give to you my hand, and heart, and mind –
All of myself.*

*I can exert no mighty influence
To make a place for you in men's affairs;
But lift to God in secret audience
Unceasing prayers.*

*I cannot, though I would, be always near
To guard your steps with the parental rod;
I trust your soul to Him who holds you dear,
Your father's God.*

B. He knew where to go for help

1. He was not embarrassed going to Jesus publicly
2. He freely admitted his total dependency
3. He trusted Jesus' words and acted upon them

III. PERSISTENT FAITH EXPERIENCES REWARD

A. His son was healed

- Albert Barnes

From this miracle we may learn, 1st That Jesus has an intimate knowledge of all things. He knew the case of his son – the extent of his disease – where he was – and thus had the power to heal him. 2nd That Jesus has almighty power. Nothing else could have healed this child. Nor could it be pretended that he did it by any natural means. He was far away from him, and the child knew not the source of the power that healed him. It could not be pretended that there was any collusion or jugglery. The father came in deep anxiety. The servants saw the cure. Jesus was at a distance. Everything in the case bears the mark of being the simple energy of God – put forth with equal ease to heal, whether far or near. Thus he can save the sinner. 3rd. We see the benevolence of Jesus. Ever ready to aid, to heal, or to save, he may be called on at all times, and will never be called on in vain.

B. His servants witnessed Jesus' power and compassion in his own life

- Borden of Yale (heir of the vast Borden milk empire)

Note: Borden was a multi-millionaire who gave away vast amounts of money for the sake of serving Christ around the world. He died at the age of 25 in Cairo, Egypt of cerebral meningitis. Listen to the testimony of Dr. Zwemer:

"I never saw a man come to Egypt with eyes more open to see the kingdom of God. Other men come to see the dead Pharaohs, to study history or join the great company of tourists all over the land, never once lifting their eyes to see the fields "white unto harvest." Borden had not been in Cairo two weeks before he organized the students of the theological seminary to attempt a house-to-house canvass with Christian literature for the whole city with its eight hundred thousand people.

Here was a man with the frame of an athlete, the mind of a scholar, the grasp of a theologian as regards God's truth, and the heart of a

little child, full of faith and love; a man who was so tender in the relations of home-life that our children used to nestle upon his knee as if they had known him for years – and he a comparative stranger.

page 7

Knowing that he had to learn Chinese, he came to Cairo to perfect himself in Arabic. Some people shrink from the foreign field, questioning, "Could I learn the language?" Here was a man who deliberately set before himself the task of learning not one but two of the most difficult languages in the world, before entering upon his life-work of declaring the unsearchable riches of Christ to Chinese Mohammedans.

At Yale, at Princeton, in Cairo we see him digging deep, thinking deep, and studying hard....He did not import doubts to the Orient, he imported his great convictions of the eternal truth of God....When he lived in Cairo he was a friend to the Coptic Christians and the Armenian Christians. He was a brother to the American missionaries. He attended the Scotch church and the American church, and at the last all sorts and conditions of Christians met together to do him honour.

C. He and his family believed

Note the prior faith the official had before he and his family had seen the results:

v.50 *"Jesus said to him, 'Go, your son will live.' The man believed the word that Jesus spoke to him and went on his way."*

- John Owen

"Men love to trust God (as they profess) for what they have in their hands, in possession, or what lies in an easy view; place their desires afar off, carry their accomplishment behind the clouds out of their sight, interpose difficulties and perplexities – their hearts are instantly sick. They cannot wait for God; they do not trust Him, nor ever did. Would you have the presence of God with you? Learn to wait quietly for the salvation you expect from Him."

Conclusion: (Illustration from Nelson, p.825)

On an autumn day nearly 200 years ago, Ray Palmer met his friend Lowell Mason on a busy Boston street. Mason was a

collector and publisher of hymns, and he asked Palmer if he

page 8

had recently seen any good religious verse. Palmer thought a moment, then pulled out a little book in which he jotted down his own thoughts and poems. He showed Mason a particular poem he had earlier written as a personal prayer to the Lord.

Palmer, a theology student in his early twenties, had a passion for the Lord, and as he showed Mason his poem he recalled the night, two years previously, when he had sat alone at his desk on an early winter's evening and wept over the words he'd written. To him, this was a sacred text conveying the craving of his life, uttering his deepest prayer to the Lord, and he showed it to his friend hesitantly.

Mason, reading the lines, was immediately moved. Ducking into a store together, the words were copied and Mason put the copy in his pocket. Arriving home, he was so deeply touched by Palmer's verses that he immediately set them to music.

Two days later the two men chanced to meet again. "Mr. Palmer," Mason said, "you may leave many years and do many good things, but I think you will be best-known to posterity as the author of "My Faith Looks Up to Thee."

Mason was right.

The words that had so moved the two men include this stanza which has worded the prayers of several generations of Christians since:

*May Thy rich grace impart
Strength to my fainting heart,
My zeal inspire;
As Thou hast died for me,
O may my love to Thee,
Pure, warm, and changeless be,
A living fire!*

Premise: *Persistent grace enables persistent faith*