

The Growth of Quiet Faith

John 4:46-54

Introduction

Have you ever been somewhere where it is just pitch black? You can't even see your hand in front of your face.

A few nights ago, Bekah was putting Mira to sleep. When I walked into the room, it was pitch black, and I couldn't see anything. But I knew the layout of the room, I knew Bekah was in there, and I knew all the things in that room, even though I couldn't see.

And that's sometimes a little like faith, isn't it? You can't always see all the answers, and you don't know how everything is going to work out, but you know that God is there, and you know that he is working in that situation.

A couple of weeks back, we went somewhere that had a mirror maze. And what do people tend to do in a mirror maze? Well, as you start to see many reflections, you put your arms out to defend yourself.

I wonder if faith is found somewhere between those two things. Pitch black and being overawed by images. Faith is understanding some of what is happening, without being overawed by multiple reflections. God has given us what we need to see to have faith, not too little and not too much.

Our story today points out to us some distinctives about what faith looks like.

Context

Our passage is found towards the start of the Gospel of John. It is based on the time of Jesus' early ministry. Jesus has been down to Jerusalem at this point, and he has been in the Judean countryside. As we have seen in our passage, this miracle is based in Cana, which is the location of Jesus' first miracle where he turns water into wine.

Both signs are pointing out the miracles of Jesus, the Glory of God and the faith that people are called to have.

Tell the Story

Let's remind ourselves of our passage today. Jesus is back in Cana when a royal official comes to him. He travels 20 miles from Capernaum to get Jesus' help. The likelihood is that this man is a Jewish official of some sort, part of Herod Antipas' staff, the local ruler of the area.

Through word of mouth, people in the Jewish circles would have started to hear rumours of Jesus and some of the miracles he had been performing.

This man came to Jesus in desperation for his ill son. He is suffering from a fever that is likely to lead to his boy's death. So he begs Jesus for help.

Jesus' response in verse 48 is seemingly robust and even harsh, but Jesus is wisely not wanting this moment to be about signs and wonders, but about faith.

So he points out to a large crowd, full of Jewish officials, teachers and important people. That miracles aren't meant to be a show for people, but they are to point people to faith in Jesus.

This moment of teaching then turns back to the desperate man. And Jesus, in the quiet, seeing something of this man's faith, simply tells him to go, 'Your son will live,' he says.

Can you imagine that all this desperate man gets are a few simple words, on which he has to trust?

Well, the man trusts and departs. On his way home, covering this 20-mile journey, with an overnight stop. A servant from his house meets him with news that his boy has been healed.

Being a wise man, he works out the timeline of all that has happened and brings the pieces together. His boy was healed at that moment when Jesus uttered the command that 'your son will live'.

As the father has been through this journey and returns home, he shares the good news, how Jesus had healed his son, and how his whole household turns to believe in Jesus.

A miracle in the quiet, a faith unseen and a belief that grows.

I want to start by reading Psalm 19:1-4 for us. It says this, 'The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands. Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they reveal knowledge. They have no speech, they use no words; no sound is heard from them. Yet their voice goes out into all the earth, their words to the ends of the world.'

Maybe a way we have heard this more recently is found in Romans 1:19-20.

'Since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that people are without excuse.'

All of creation points out there is a God, the world shows it, and the depth of the human soul knows it.

And as we look at the faith seen in this story today, a basis for the faith is found in the depths and quiet of the human heart.

Our world clouds it, our mind often complicates it, and our greed and desire cause us to create barriers to that simple truth.

Many will disagree in the world, but the Bible teaches that at our very core, we have an understanding of God.

This morning, I want to unpack something of faith. Firstly, that Faith is believing in the unseen, secondly, that True faith is often seen in the quietness and lastly, that Faith grows over time.

Faith is believing in the unseen

When you tell someone about church or ask them if they believe in God. What is often the response you get?

I'm not religious. They immediately distinguish between someone who believes, who has faith, as opposed to someone who doesn't.

But the reality is, we are all people of faith.

When you went to sit down as I stood up to start speaking, you had faith that there was a chair below you, that that chair hadn't been tampered with.

When you leave here this morning, you'll have faith that your house is going to be where you left it.

We all live in a world of faith. People often say, There isn't enough evidence for God, it's too big a leap of faith.

But the reality is that life is just a big concept of faith. From the smallest to the biggest thing, we all have faith. We make decisions of logic and order about what we put our faith in, but it's still faith.

And here in verse 47, this royal official holds on to this little glimmer of faith, which is built into all of us, into something new. Something he has heard of but never seen. Jesus.

There are only a couple of times that Jesus healed over a great distance. Matthew 8 and Luke 7 point out the same story of a Centurion's servant being healed over a distance, and here, we see a royal official's son being healed.

There are 20 miles or so between Capernaum, where the sick son lay and where his father had ventured to see Jesus in Cana.

This healing involved a faith that grows. When the father hears Jesus' initial response to his request in verse 48, the abrupt nature of it may have disheartened him. But Jesus seemingly gave a public response and personal response to the man.

Verse 50 'The man took Jesus at his word.' There's a lot of power in that statement.

This man, with little evidence, except rumour, is begging as he arrives at Jesus. He wants an instant answer and a miracle, he wants Jesus to come with him. But all Jesus gives him is his word. The man must have faith that Jesus' word is enough.

He must be willing to trust in something he can't see the full evidence for.

It's like the wifi in our home; most of us don't really know how it works, we can't see it, we can't feel it, we just have a little blinking light that informs us that we can connect to the internet.

Sometimes faith is best experienced in the unseen.

Hebrews 11:1 says 'Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see.'

We started by touching on this idea of the general revelation of God. All of humanity has been given the evidence that God exists through his creation.

And the royal official 'took Jesus at his word'.

Our world tells us that you should always be sceptical until you have enough evidence, until it lines up best with you, until you want to decide on something.

The world demands that the Bible be a scientific textbook. But God has given us the exact right evidence to bring us to faith. He isn't a scientist who convinces you through an experiment to come to him. He is a Father holding out arms of grace that you may put your faith in. His word outlines all you need to know about him. Small, unseen faith, a seed of faith big enough to move mountains.

True Faith is often seen in the Quiet

Faith is what Jesus wants everyone to see in this passage. And he uses this moment to challenge those who are most opposed to faith in Jesus.

And here he points out something important in verse 48. 'Unless you people see signs and wonders, you will never believe.'

Jesus' response is given in the plural, 'You people'. He responds to the crowds around the man. They want to see another show, they want to see the action. They want belief based on the signs and wonders.

Jesus does the opposite of elaborating on this healing. He makes it subtle and quiet.

Jesus' words are powerful, he simply says 'Your son will live.' And that's the focus we should look to, the word of God is powerful, we don't need and shouldn't be looking for signs and wonders to confirm what has been laid in front of us.

A sign and wonders-based faith can be a really dangerous thing. It has resulted in a lot of people being hurt.

We may often assign this kind of faith to what may be called the prosperity gospel today.

How can a faith based on signs and wonders hurt us and others?

Firstly, it can hurt people if they don't see the signs for themselves.

I was in a church that was more charismatic in its thinking, and I remember being in a worship evening, and many folks were speaking in tongues. And I left there feeling that I wasn't special enough, chosen, important, as I hadn't spoken in tongues.

Taken further, the faith based on these signs and wonders leads many to think, I'd see more of the miracles if I had enough faith. And when someone starts to think it's their faith that determines the outcome of things, we can be reinforced in thinking that either I'm not important enough or that God doesn't love me enough.

If I only had more faith, I'd survive this financial burden, if I had enough faith, I could be healed or restored in my relationship.

The glitz and the glam of searching for miracles rather than God often leave a huge emptiness.

And do you know one thing, looking to signs and wonders to confirm our faith is actually building a faith that is based on our reward. Instead, we should look to a faith that simply seeks God's will and his glory.

That's a warning that most of us are pretty aware of.

But let's bring it into our world for a moment.

Has anyone come across the TV show *How I Met Your Mother*? It's trash TV, really, but there's a couple in the show called Marshall and Lily, and they are thinking about having a baby, and they say, We will let the world give us a sign, They wait till they see a doppelgänger of each member of their friendship group, as a sign.

Do we wait for a specific sign before we start to live faithfully for God in a certain area of life?

Gods provided all we need to step out in faith.

Much like the royal official, he wasn't given a big sign; he was simply given God's word, 'go, your son will live'. Do we have faith in that response to God's word without anything else added?

Faith grows over time

It's quite common now for people to want to get their 15 minutes of fame. And people often do the craziest or silliest things to achieve it.

It's very much the opposite of doing something that will stand the test of time.

Time is very much the guiding force to make something grow or fail.

When Satya Nadella became CEO of Microsoft in 2014, the company was seen as a fading giant—still powerful, but losing relevance. Internally, the culture was competitive, rigid, and resistant to change. Nadella didn't come in with a loud overhaul. Instead, he led with quiet humility and a focus on empathy. He listened, he took into account many factors and subtly grew in his effectiveness and understanding.

In our story, I think we see a subtle and logical growth of faith from this royal official.

He must have first heard about Jesus and the miracles he had performed. Then, in his time of need, he seeks out Jesus in verse 46, begging for his help with a small sense of faith.

Verse 48 may have momentarily been disheartening for the royal official. Does Jesus' response mean he won't help him?

He thinks he must get Jesus to come with him in verse 49. But Jesus subtly offers his response instead in verse 50.

This led to the man's next moment and growth in faith. He had to take Jesus at his word and listen.

With no firm evidence, he departs and grows in faith.

Verses 51-53 show us the interaction with his servant, who confirms his son is healed. After putting the puzzle together of how and when this happens. The man's faith takes a leap of joy.

He eventually returns home to his healed son and to his family, and they all respond to God with a fullness of faith.

You see, Faith grows over time. Whether you are at the point of enquiring or reaching out for Jesus for the first time, or whether you have been following Jesus for many years.

Our faith grows over time, different moments mould us, test us and grow us to have a deeper faith and understanding, just like this royal official.

For this man, Faith was taught through a great hardship, which is often the case. Faith is often subtly grown and requires being humble and accepting Jesus' word as truth.

Application

So, what can we learn about Faith that we can take into our own lives today?

I have a couple of points for those who know Jesus already, and something for those who may not.

Firstly, know that faith is often unseen and quiet. Faith, on one hand, is simple, but on the other, can be very difficult. But often the most godly of faiths reflects the example of Jesus is quiet and unseen.

I had a dear friend called Rene who passed away last year. She was a midwife in her late 80s, never married or had children. She had the simplest faith, she was always praying, asking after our girls, would encourage me, and would write cards.

Her faith was quiet and unseen, but it was bold and strong. Are we going to be faithful in the quiet and steadfast in the unseen with our faith?

Secondly, I just want to point to verse 50, *'the man took Jesus at his word'*. We are blessed with the full revelation of scripture, the Bible is God's word. Are we going to take the Bible in full, the parts we love, the parts that are difficult in our day and age and the parts we don't understand? Our challenge is to be people of the book. Let scripture guide our lives.

And lastly, do you need to step out in faith if we haven't done so before?

In the 1850s, Charles Blondin became world-famous for walking across a tightrope stretched over Niagara Falls—1,100 feet long, 160 feet above the raging water. He did it repeatedly, with different twists: blindfolded, on stilts, even stopping to cook an omelette mid-rope.

One day, Blondin showed up with a wheelbarrow. He walked it across and back effortlessly. The crowd was amazed.

Then he turned to the crowd and asked, “Do you believe I can carry a person across in this wheelbarrow?”

Everyone shouted, “Yes! We believe!” Then Blondin asked for a volunteer. The crowd went silent.

No one stepped forward—except one man: Harry Colcord, Blondin’s manager.

But instead of getting in the wheelbarrow, Harry climbed on Blondin’s back.

Blondin told him:

“Look up, Harry. You are no longer Colcord, you are Blondin. Until I clear this place, be a part of me, mind, body and soul. If I sway, sway with me. Do not attempt to balance on your own.”

With Harry on his back, Blondin crossed the tightrope above Niagara Falls—and made it safely to the other side.

Harry has seen Blondin’s skills and stepped out in faith. He let control go to the one who had the skills, knowledge and trusted him.

Are you willing to do that with Jesus?