

Crisis Faith . . . Confident Faith

Wonder-Working Power – Part V

John 4:43-5:14

Introduction

We are currently in the gospel by John, chapter 4. I want to combine the last incident of chapter 4 with the first incident of chapter 5. They both are related to physical healing and they both reveal the power of Christ and the subject of faith.

I also should say that, from this time forward, the religious leaders will seek to kill Jesus Christ for the claim of deity that He has made.

Turn to John, chapter 4, verses 43 through 47.

And 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. He came therefore again to Cana of Galilee where He had made the water wine. And there was a certain 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 requesting Him to come down and heal his son; for he was at the point of death.

I want to point out several things before we go any further.

The first thing is that here is a nobleman of the court coming to a carpenter! This man, of high ranking, came to a man who was considered, by many, to be nothing more than a deluded carpenter. In

spite of the whisperings, the rumors, and the insults, this prominent man came and pleaded to a poor, humble carpenter.

Why? Because this man was experiencing a crisis. And, when you are experiencing a crisis, you will do just about anything.

There are few atheists in emergency rooms. You tend to hear the name of God mentioned in intensive care units.

Now, like most people who come to Christ only during a crises, there is a lack of understanding of what Christ can really do. As with many who come with crisis faith who have some erroneous thinking about what Jesus Christ can do, this man made two mistakes:

- He thought that if Jesus did not come and the boy died, then it was too late for Jesus to help.

Jesus will not address this issue, but there is a second mistake that will be corrected.

- He thought that Jesus would have to be physically present to heal his son.

He does not know that Jesus is master of space and time; His word can command things present and distant; He controls not only His present domain, but he holds the universe together by his word.

The wonderful thing is that Jesus accepts people who come ignorantly and with their crisis faith. If we were God and we saw people coming to us only out of crises, knowing that they may or may not dump us

when it is all over, we would tell them to “take a hike”!

But not Jesus. He does however, challenge the man’s motive and potentially discourage him from asking. Look at verse 48.

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

The word “people,” in this verse, is plural. All of the people, gathered around this scene, were excited about some sensational experience. They want to see a nobleman’s son, from Herod’s court, healed by the carpenter. They want to see another miracle, so “on with the show”. This was quite a rebuke.

Now, if the nobleman had become irritated and petulant; had he grown disgusted with Jesus’ rebuke and walked away, that would have ended it. But, what you discover is that this man’s faith, although brought to the surface by a crisis, is actually genuine. Notice his response in verse 49.

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

The Greek word “Sir” was a title of respect and subordination. This royal official says, in effect, “I know you’re more than a humble carpenter. You are the one with authority!”

Notice, as well, the yearning heart of this man. Earlier, the text informs us that he requested Jesus to heal his son. Here, in verse 49, the word is changed from son to “little child,” “Please help my little boy.”

Then, Jesus responds, in verse 50a.

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

That’s it?!! Just the word of Christ, “He’s healed, you can leave now.”

But notice the issue of faith, in verse 50b.

The man believed the word that Jesus spoke to him, and he started off.

Can you believe that? Do you know that it will be this man whom the Lord alludes to later as having great faith?! Why? Because he will believe the word of the Lord without seeing the immediate result. And again, later, in John, chapter 20, verse 29, to “doubting Thomas”,

Jesus said to him, “Because you have seen Me, have you believed? Blessed are they who did not see, and yet believed.”

Imagine having a special blessing because our faith is not confirmed by sight! Imagine having a special blessing, that even the apostles will never receive, because we believe in Him, whom we have never seen!

The Principles of Living By Faith

The principles of living by faith are:

Faith is believing without seeing

1. Faith is believing without seeing.

Faith is obeying without emotion or feeling

2. Faith is obeying without emotion or feeling.

Faith is walking into a dark room and knowing that, at the right time, God will turn on the light!

Near the end of World War II, members of the Allied forces were often found searching farms and houses for snipers. At one abandoned house, which had been reduced to rubble, searchers found their way into a basement. There, on a crumbling wall, a victim of the Holocaust had scratched a Star of David. Beneath it was written the words, “I believe in the sun, even when it does not shine, I believe in God, even when He does not speak.”

Now look at what occurs next, in verses 51 through 53.

And as he was now going down, his slaves met him, saying that his son was living. So he inquired of them the hour when he began to get better. They said therefore to him, “Yesterday at the seventh hour the fever left him.” 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 man’s crisis faith became confident faith. He believed the Word and even delayed his trip home, so confident was he in the Master’s promise. His confident faith was exchanged for confirmed faith, when the servants arrived. Upon returning home, his confirmed faith became contagious faith, and his entire family believed.

Imagine having a household now converted to following Christ – the family of a nobleman who served with high authority in Herod’s court. He served under Herod Antipas, the son of Herod the Great. Herod the Great was so cruel that he ordered

the execution of children, two years old and under, in the town of Bethlehem, because he, and only he, would own the title, King of the Jews. Imagine a father so vain and cruel that he ordered 1200 prominent Jewish men to be executed, as soon as he himself died of natural causes, so there would be an assurance of weeping in Palestine. Fortunately, the plan was never carried out. Well, his son, Herod Antipas, was the king under whom this nobleman served. Herod Antipas was the king who ordered the execution of John the Baptist. This was not exactly a good position to be in as a Christian!

If anyone had better be quiet instead of speak, it was this nobleman. Yet, he spreads the news throughout his entire household, which, in that day, would have included grown sons and daughters-in-law, or sons-in-law. And, there were some incredible conversions taking place in this prominent home.

Additional Principles of Living By Faith

There are some additional principles of living by faith. Faith is not only believing without seeing, and obeying without emotion or feeling, it is also:

Courageous without restraint

3. Courageous without restraint.

Contagious without restriction

4. Contagious without restriction.

Now, chapter 5 continues the same theme of Christ's power and the human exercising of faith. This time however, we leave the wealthy nobleman and travel to the dredges of society, where helpless people were abandoned, cast away, and forgotten.

First, there is the man who has every possible medical help at his disposal, yet no one can help. Then, there is a man who has absolutely no medical help available – he is poverty stricken and alone. However, in both situations, the men are helpless!

Look at John, chapter 5, verses 1 through 4.

After these things there was a feast of the Jews, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. Now there is in Jerusalem by the sheep gate, a pool, which is called in Hebrew Bethesda, having five porticoes. In these lay a multitude of those who were sick, blind,

lame, and withered, waiting for the moving of the waters; for an angel of the Lord went down at certain seasons into the pool, and stirred up the water; whoever then first, after the stirring up of the water, stepped in was made well from whatever disease with which he was afflicted.

There was a time when critics of scripture argued against the validity of scripture because of this reference to a pool with five porches or roofs. Yet today, the archaeologists have excavated the very pool in question and have discovered, with incredible detail, the ruins of what this pool once was. Yes, near the sheep gate was a pool, divided in half with a large roof and then, with each side section of the pool being covered by two roofs, or porticos.

In the day of Christ, sick people gathered there believing that an angel intermittently stirred up the waters and that, when this happened, the next person to step into the water would be cured. This had become a place of collected human suffering – people attracted by a faint hope of being healed.

Now, in the margin of your Bibles, you may notice that verse 4 seems to be an explanation that was added after the book of John was written. In other words, verse 4 was added later as an attempt to explain verse 7. This is where the man tells the Lord, "I have no man to put me into the pool when the water is stirred up . . .".

All the evangelical scholars, that I researched, agreed that this was indeed an addition to scripture in order to explain verse 7. However, what I personally believe about verse 4 is that the people of Christ's day did indeed believe an angel came to stir the waters and so, from the fourth century on, it has been allowed to remain in the text.

Did you notice that Jesus completely ignores the man's comments about the stirring of the waters? Now, just what is going on here at this pool?!

Thanks to the pagan archeologists, who often uncover the truth but refuse to believe it, we now know where the pool was. Its name has emerged in the Dead Sea Scrolls. Its location is, to this day, clearly marked. Underneath this huge pool was a stream, which evidently, periodically bubbled up and disturbed the water. The people, blind in their superstition, believed that this was an angel and that the first person in the water was healed.

It was common, in the days of Christ, for people to believe that water was inhabited by spiritual forces, good and bad.

When Persian King Xerxes came to the Stryomon river, his magicians offered white horses, as sacrifices to the gods of the river, before his army dared to cross.

Lucullus, the Roman general, offered a bull to the River Euphrates before he crossed.

Even today, in southeast Africa, some of the Bantu tribes believe that rivers are inhabited by evil spirits which must be satisfied with handfuls of corn before crossing.

In Central Africa, they will not rescue a man carried away by a river because they believe that the spirits have taken him.

So, in Jesus day, there was the common superstition that the subterranean stream that fed these twin pools was inhabited by an angel who would periodically stir the water.

Now, the point of this and the reason I have taken time to answer the question about verse 4, even though no one asked me, is that I want you to see Jesus as He walks into an area that is huge – a twin pool with five different roof structures – filled with helpless people who are what?? A multitude of people who are exercising great faith in the wrong thing!!

I have seen pictures of thousands of Indian worshipers bathing in the supposedly sacred, yet filthy water of the Ganges River in Calcutta, even though, a mile or two up the river, sewage was being dumped into the water.

Every commentator, that I researched, made a spiritual point of this gathering of people. They all said that this is a picture of humanity. This is humanity that is lost, weak, blind, helpless, placing their faith in any number of things – whether it is New Age faith in crystals being able to emit spiritual energy, or faith in a Guru's teaching, or faith in the inherent goodness of man, or faith in good works, or faith in personal effort to achieve oneness with God.

Great faith? Yes! Oh, but my friend, it is possible to have great faith in thin ice and fall through and drown; it is possible to have little faith in thick ice and walk safely across a frozen lake.

The issue of true faith is not its amount, but its object

5. This leads us to the next principle of living by faith, which is that the issue of true faith is not its amount, but its object!

So, what does Jesus do? Look at verse 5.

And a certain man was there, who had been thirty-eight years in his sickness.

Imagine that – at thirty-eight years, this man's problem had become a way of life. No one had ever helped him. In fact, he had been unable to convince anyone else to help him. He was paralyzed and his hope for healing lay just out of reach.

I think of the legend of Tantalus, who was cursed by the gods to live a perpetual life of hunger and thirst. When he stopped to drink, the water would recede from his lips. When he reached for some fruit hanging from a branch, the branch would sway beyond his reach. Tantalus lived a life of never being able to satisfy his deepest longings.

His Greek name has given us the English word "tantalizing". You want something desperately, yet it is always just beyond your reach, tantalizing you.

Solomon wrote, in Proverbs, chapter 13, verse 12,

Hope deferred makes the heart sick . . .

Among all those who wanted to be healed, Jesus found the one man who could not help himself.

Now, note the brief conversation in verse 14.

Afterward Jesus found him in the temple, and said to him, "Behold, you have become well; do not sin anymore, so that nothing worse may befall you."

Authentic faith will transform your life

6. This gives us one further principle of living by faith, and that is authentic faith will develop and transform your life.

If you have genuine faith in Christ and His Word, it will change the nature of the way you talk, the ambition in the way you work, the motivation in the way you dress; it will transform all aspects of your life.

Faith works!! Faith is not something added to your life, faith becomes the way you live. As Habakkuk tells us, in chapter 2, verse 4b, in the King James Version,

The just shall live by faith.

This manuscript is from a sermon preached on 1/16/1994 by Stephen Davey.

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