

Dr. Jerry Nelson

LEADER'S GUIDE

For discussion following the sermon on November 9, 2008

The Healing of the Official's Son

Jesus is the Son of God! In our last passage, the Samaritans believed. There is no recorded account of any miracles of healing performed in Samaria. There is simply the account of Jesus, crossing religious, ethnic, and gender lines, exposing the sin of a despised Samaritan and revealing his deity. The belief of one "insignificant" woman resulted in the belief of an entire town.

In this week's passage, we will watch how a desperate need developed into saving faith. We will consider God's actions of grace and the official's reactions of a developing faith.

Key Points

- A great need combined with wishful thinking
- The determination of desperation
- Fledgling faith
- Saving faith

The official from today's passage knew of Jesus. The stories from the wedding at Cana were undoubtedly fresh in his mind. Miracles tend to lead to faith (however feeble that faith may be). Could a miracle be true for the most desperate need of a father's heart? He had a seemingly hopeless situation that needed immediate attention, and if there was any hope that his son would live, it would be through this miracle-working man.

The official had choices. He didn't have to pursue Jesus. Like many today, He could have discounted the claims of Christ. But he was given a measure of faith to believe. And in this fledgling faith, the Spirit was drawing him into greater trust.

As the story unfolds, we watch his understanding progress as he continues to persevere, even though Jesus did not immediately answer his "prayer request." Instead, Jesus rebukes the crowd for their "faith" that was only as deep as his ability to produce miracles. But this official isn't deterred. It is as if he says, "You can insult me all day long, but come, before my child dies." With that Jesus spoke seven brief words; "You may go. Your son will live". Those life-giving words brought immediate results. We don't know how the official knew his son would live, but with yet another measure of this developing faith, the official takes one more step, this time a step leading to home. The spoken word led to responsive faith. Was this the pinnacle of his conversion experience? It is likely that he *truly* believed when he heard the testimony of his servants, especially when the timing of the healing was revealed. This is probably where he came to saving faith. It is interesting to note that this miracle didn't take place in the presence of Jesus—he didn't even need to be present for the miracle to occur.

Where are you on this journey of faith? Are you being drawn to Jesus with an urgency to believe? Will you stop believing in God if seemingly, he doesn't "produce?" Will you be persistent in your pursuit of God? We have every reason to believe that, if the Spirit is drawing you to saving faith, you will continue on, and at some point in time, you will fall on your knees in a belief and confession in Christ that transforms your life. The official took Jesus at his word. We are challenged to do the same.

Leader's Guide

Personal Preparation

- Where are you on your journey of faith? As a leader, undoubtedly you came to saving faith awhile ago. What were the circumstances that led you from that initial felt need to true saving faith? As you recall these events in your life, take time to thank God for giving you the faith to believe at every turn.

- If you have not already done so, share your faith-story with the rest of your group. Your testimony is important and needs to be heard.

Group Preparation

- We need to continue to provide opportunities for the gospel message to be heard. There may be some in your group that seem like seasoned believers, but if the truth were known, they have never responded in saving faith. Pray that, as the Spirit leads, you will be able to discern the spiritual needs of your group.

- We continue to hear stories of how the Spirit is at work in Small Group ministry. We encourage you to lead in such a way that allows the Spirit of God to move in the hearts of your group. It is a supernatural work that only He can do, and we need to be able to lead and respond accordingly.

Discussion Questions

1. What needs, circumstances, events, and/or people led us to begin our faith journey?
2. As you consider the reasons why people begin to explore Christianity, what do you think are some primary reasons they move from dismissing the claims of Christ to serious consideration of the claims of Christ?
3. What circumstances often lead people to an initial desire to believe? What led you to initially believe?
4. The official came to Jesus with an urgent request: Heal my son. He came wanting to believe that Jesus was capable and hoping he would grant his request. But when he left to return home, on what did he base his “faith?” On what did his household base their faith? Is it the same? (bulletin question)
5. “Miracles cannot compel genuine faith.” Do you agree with this statement? Why or why not? (bulletin question)
6. As you consider the progression of faith, is it possible for people to continue on with fledgling faith without it resulting in saving faith? If so, what prevents them from progressing to further belief?

7. In Luke 8, which is the parable of the sower? What is the importance of the Word (v. 8:15)? What is the importance of the spoken words of Jesus (John 4:50)? What is the relationship of the Word to faith today?

8. What is the “general call” of God in the gospel? (Mark 16:15) Does everyone respond positively to the “general call” of God in the gospel? (John 6:64-66)

9. What is the “effective call of God in the gospel? (Ephesians 2:8-9; John 6:37) *(The “effective call” of God is the work of the Holy Spirit whereby, convincing us of our sin and misery, enlightening our minds in the knowledge of Christ and renewing our wills, he both persuades and enables us to embrace Jesus Christ as he is offered in the Gospel.)*

10. Why is it important to remember that faith is a work of God?

11. What is **our** responsibility in that work of God?

“FAITH” as both the duty of people and the gift of God.

Is a human being responsible for that of which he is incapable?
Read Spurgeon’s response:

“Inasmuch as the gospel command, “Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved,” is addressed by divine authority to every creature, it is the duty of every man so to do. What saith John: *“This is his commandment, That we should believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ,”* and our Lord himself assures us, “He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only-begotten Son of God.”

“I know there are some who will deny this, and deny it upon the ground that man has not the spiritual ability to believe in Jesus, to which I reply that it is altogether an error to imagine that the measure of the sinners moral ability is the measure of his duty. There are many things which men ought to do which they have now lost the moral and spiritual, though not the physical, power to do. A man ought to be chaste, but if he has been so long immoral that he cannot restrain his passions, he is not thereby free from the obligation. It is the duty of a debtor to pay his debts, but if he has been such a spendthrift that he has brought himself into hopeless poverty, he is not exonerated from his debts thereby. Every man ought to believe that which is true, but if his mind has become so depraved that he loves a lie and will not receive the truth, is he thereby excused? If the law of God is to be lowered according to the moral condition of sinners, you would have a law graduated upon a sliding-scale to suit the degrees of human sinfulness; in fact, the worst man would be under the least law, and become

consequently the least guilty. God's requirements would be a variable quantity, and, in truth, we should be under no rule at all. The command of Christ stands good however bad men may be, and when he commands all men everywhere to repent, they are bound to repent, whether their sinfulness renders it impossible for them to be willing to so or not. In every case it is man's duty to do what God bids him.

“At the same time, this faith, wherever it exists, is in every case, without exception, the gift of God and the work of the Holy Spirit. Never yet did a man believe in Jesus with the faith here intended, except the Holy Spirit led him to do so. He has wrought all our works in us, and our faith too. Faith is too celestial a grace to spring up in human nature till it is renewed: faith is in every believer "the gift of God." You will say to me, "Are these two things consistent?" I reply, "Certainly, for they are both true." "How consistent?" say you. "How inconsistent?" say I, and you shall have as much difficulty to prove them inconsistent as I to prove them consistent. Experience makes them consistent, if theory does not. Men are convinced by the Holy Spirit of sin—"of sin," saith Christ, "because they believe not on me;" here is one of the truths; but the selfsame hearts are taught the same Spirit that faith is of the operation of God. (Col. ii. 2) Brethren be willing to see both sides of the shield of truth. Rise above the babyhood which cannot believe two doctrines until it sees the connecting link. Have you not two eyes, man? Must you needs put one of them out in order to see clearly? Is it impossible to you to use a spiritual stereoscope, and look at two views of truth until they melt into one, and that one becomes more real and actual because it is made up of two? Many men refuse to see more than one side of a doctrine, and persistently fight against anything which is not on its very surface consistent

with their own idea. In the present case I do not find it difficult to believe faith to be at the same time the duty of man and the gift of God; and if others cannot accept the two truths, I am not responsible for their rejection of them; my duty is performed when I have honestly borne witness to them.”

Faith and Regeneration by C.H. Spurgeon A Sermon (No. 979)
Delivered on Lord's-day Morning, March 5th, 1871 At the Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington