

Faith in Jesus Christ

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[0 : 0 0] Thank you for joining us this morning. After Thanksgiving, many of you guys have been away, got back. I think some of us are still away, not here. It looks like most of you made it back in one piece.

I feel like I've been sick for the last two weeks, and so I might get a coughing fit here and there as I preach, so please bear with me as we go. If you've ever seen a spy film or read a spy novel, then you're familiar with that moment when the protagonist discovers that his friend who had befriended him or his lover who had loved him actually did not have any genuine friendship or affection for them, but were merely using them to cook secrets out of them to serve his enemy.

And there's that sense of disappointment and betrayal. Or maybe you've seen reality TV or just people, just public figures around you of women marrying men with power and money and later abandoning them when there's no more power and money to be gained.

Or men marrying beautiful young women, much more beautiful and younger than they, and then later when they get older, discarding them as if they were things to be discarded.

And there's pain in the realization that when people whom you thought loved you or were devoted to you really were actually not after you at all, but were seeking something else.

[1 : 3 4] And frequently that's how many people relate to God. We don't come to God for who he is. We don't love him. We don't seek to worship him, but rather we seek to use him for our purposes.

And God will not stand to be used as a convenience. And that's why Jesus here in this passage teaches us that we must believe in him on his terms as the giver of eternal life.

And this passage teaches us that in two sections. First, it tells us about the belief in signs, what it means to believe in signs. And then secondly, it tells us what it means to believe in Jesus. And read with me verse 43.

It tells us, After the two days, Jesus departed for Galilee. Now this is after two days, meaning the two days he spent among the Samaritans, preaching the gospel, the good news that he came to proclaim, that he's the Messiah, the Savior of the world.

He spent two days with them, and then he departed for Galilee, where his hometown Nazareth is. And Jesus is heading to his hometown, and usually with homecomings, you expect a warm welcome.

[2 : 4 4] You expect to get some rest. You expect to let your burdens down for a week or for a weekend, however long you're going to be home for. And many of us did that this past week.

Hannah and I were home in New York for a couple days to visit Hannah's side of our family. And one day when Hannah was resting in her grandmother's place, at the end of the day she told me, Oh man, that was like the most restful day I've had in months, just because she felt all the burdens were just laid aside, nothing to worry about, just in the home of her grandparents who loved her and raised her.

And that's what we expect. That's what we think of when we think of homecoming. But here with Jesus' homecoming, we are prepared to expect that Jesus is not going to have such a warm welcome.

Because in verse 44, John gives us a parenthetical remark. It says, Jesus himself had testified that a prophet has no honor in his own hometown.

So this kind of foreshadows the kind of welcome he will receive in his hometown. And then so verse 45 continues. So when he came to Galilee, that's his hometown, the Galileans, his townspeople, welcomed him, having seen all that he had done in Jerusalem at the feast, for they too had gone to the feast.

[4 : 04] So if you're following closely at this point, you might be a little confused by this verse. Because you say, well, he says that his hometown of people, Galilee, they welcomed him, right? Well, that's good. They're welcoming him.

They are giving him a warm welcome. So what do you mean that Jesus said that there would be no prophet, has no honor in his own hometown? See, that's not the whole story. Because you have to examine the nature of their welcome.

And that's given in the following clause. It says, Having seen all that he had done in Jerusalem at the feast, for they too had gone to the feast.

So basically, the people of Jesus' hometown had heard of the miraculous works he had done. And they wanted to see the show too, basically is what's going on. And Jesus is critical of this kind of interest, because it's an unhealthy interest.

Because the dependence on signs for your faith often leads to a spurious faith, not an authentic faith, a faith that teeters when it's tested, when it's challenged. And so see the contrast.

[5 : 05] In order to really get that contrast, look at verse 42, which we talked about two weeks ago, the Samaritan's response. Because in verse 42, the Samaritans, the people that are not even Jesus' own people, they say this in verse 42, We know that this, Jesus, is indeed the Savior of the world.

They come to Jesus as a Savior of the world. That's what their profession of faith. But here in Galilee, Jesus' own hometown, there's no such profession of faith. Instead, we see people absorbed in their own needs, in their own problems, seeking to take advantage of Jesus for their purposes.

And that's the meaning of the statement, a prophet has no honor in his own hometown. And you can hear that bitter irony in the verses 43 to 45, because there's a threefold repetition of the word Galilee.

So Galilee is his hometown. So he came to depart it for Galilee. And when he came to Galilee, the Galileans welcomed him, having seen all that he had done in Jerusalem.

The Galileans, his home people, the family and friends he grew up with, they, quote unquote, welcomed him. And for what reason?

[6 : 19] Not because they truly knew him, or loved him, but because of the miracles he had performed in Jerusalem. It's as if, you know, Ben Affleck, who grew up in Central Square in Cambridge, comes to town, to hang out with his old friends and family.

And instead of taking any genuine interest in who he is, or the work that he is doing, they simply want to take some selfies with him and score free movie tickets. That's the kind of welcome Jesus is getting in his hometown.

It's a sad fulfillment of what John had told us in the prologue of chapter one, verses 10 to 11, that Jesus was in the world and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him.

He came to his own and his own people did not receive him. Jesus had no honor in his hometown. The Galileans flocked to him to see a show, not to meet their savior.

And so this is the context that you have to have in your background as you look at Jesus' interaction with this official, because that's the spirit in which this government official comes. And he approaches Jesus, but he also has a very pressing personal need.

[7 : 28] In verse 47, it tells us, he went to Jesus and asked him to come down and heal his son, for he was at the point of death. The man had a dire need.

I mean, his son's dying. And his son, it's a serious illness, but he's desperate. And at this point, he's probably despaired of any kind of medical help. So this is his last hope, last chance, Jesus, the wonder worker.

So he comes to Jesus. Please come down and heal my son. But that was the extent of the official's faith. He didn't believe that Jesus was the Messiah, the son of God.

He did not believe that Jesus was the savior of the world. He merely believed that Jesus just might be able to heal his son. And Jesus, seeing right through this, admonishes him in verse 48, unless you see signs and wonders, you will not believe.

But the official is so preoccupied with his own need that Jesus' word just, you know, bounced right off of him, go run right past him, and he goes right back to believe. Believe in what?

[8 : 30] My son is dying. So the official reiterates in verse 49, sir, just come down before my child dies, please. And so notwithstanding the ignorance of the official and his deficient faith, Jesus has compassion on him because he is coming with the dire pressing need.

And even though the official apparently thinks that Jesus has to be physically present in order to heal his son because that's why he keeps saying, come down, please come down. Jesus' power far exceeds the official's imagination.

And he simply tells him in verse 50, Go, your son will live. And John notes that the man believed the word that Jesus spoke to him and went on his way.

The man believed the word that Jesus spoke, meaning the man believed that his son would be healed. So he believed the healing. He believed, in other words, the signs. That's what it looks like to believe in the signs.

And sometimes people, and some of us, we come to Christ out of self-serving purposes in this way. We seek to believe the sign, but not necessarily in Jesus.

[9 : 39] For some, it's a sign of respectability, right? Maybe not so much in New England anymore, but some parts of the country, being a Christian still comes with a badge of respectability. So that's what they come to become, come to Christ for.

They're going to say, well, I'm a Christian. I'm a good Christian man or a good Christian woman. I go to church every week or at least twice a week on Easter and Christmas. That's the badge. And that becomes then for us, for those people, a part of maintaining a social identity rather than coming to Christ for who he is on his terms.

For others, it's a sign of support. Church becomes a sign of support. They want to overcome some kind of personal problem. Maybe they want to get sober. Maybe they want to overcome depression. Maybe they just want to find some people, some friends to be around.

And for these people, then being a Christian and part of a church becomes a way to find affirmation and support so that they can accomplish their personal goals. And for still others, it's the sign of prosperity.

They believe that by coming to Christ, by becoming a Christian and trying to live a Christian life, they believe they can fulfill their part of the bargain in their relationship with God. And so now they could expect God to do good things for them, whether they give them a good job, a good spouse, a children, health, wealth.

[11 : 00] But believing in the signs apart from believing in Jesus is tenuous, as this passage teaches us. Because when being a Christian is no longer a badge of respectability, but of shame and persecution.

When being a Christian doesn't provide the support that you are looking for to achieve your personal goals. When being a Christian doesn't lead to health, wealth, and prosperity. Those who come to Christ only because of the signs will fall away.

And this is the sure test of whether or not we have believed merely in the signs or in Jesus himself on his terms. Ask this question, is the strength of your faith in God, the ardor of your love for God, are they contingent on how well things are going for you?

Hmm. If so, that's an indicator that our faith is not in Christ himself, but in the signs. And Jesus calls us to a faith that is deeper and more secure and exhilarating than that.

So that even when we are mocked and ridiculed for our faith in Christ, even in the midst of abject failure, loneliness, sickness, and poverty, we could stand firm and cling to Christ.

[12 : 13] Because Jesus calls us to believe not just in the signs, but in him as our Savior, as our Lord. So what does it mean then to believe in Jesus? Read verses 51 to 54 with me.

It says, As he was going down, his servants met him and told him that his son was recovering. So he asked them the hour when he began to get better. And they said to him, Yesterday at the seventh hour the fever left him.

The father knew that was the hour when Jesus had said to him, Your son will live. And he himself believed and all his household. This was now the second sign that Jesus did when he had come from Judea to Galilee.

So as the official is going back down to his house after Jesus assured him, Your son will live. His servants come up to meet him and they're so excited to share the news that his son is actually recovering. The fever broke.

He's finally on the mend. And the official asks some questions and then ascertains that the very hour when Jesus said, Your son will live was a time when his son started to heal.

[13 : 22] And because of that it says in verse 53, The official himself believed and all his household. Now this is a, it might be a little unusual for you to hear the last phrase, all his household, because we live in such an individual as the culture.

We make decisions for ourselves. But this is a culture where the fiber of community and family run much thicker and deeper than it does in our society. So often when the head of the household, for example, here like the official made a decision, it became a collective decision that the family owned together.

And so they came to faith together as a family. And here, note the contrast. In verse 50, it says the man believed the word that Jesus had spoke. So he at that time believed in the son, but now he says he simply believes in verse 53.

The implication is that he came from his faith in the signs and has progressed rightly and appropriately to faith in Jesus himself as the promised Messiah, the Savior of the world.

Before he believed in the signs only, but now he believes in Jesus. And what exactly does it mean to believe in Jesus? And in order to determine that, we need to figure out what this sign is that John is talking about.

[14 : 36] Because a sign points to something. So let's say we were taking a road trip to California and you come across the first highway sign that says California maybe says 300 miles away. And then you go, oh great, California.

And you take a picture in front of it and then you drive back home. No, of course you wouldn't do that. That's not California. That's just a sign. But the sign always points to a reality beyond itself. So in the same way, so what is the sign?

The sign is the healing of the son, official son. What does the sign point to? And it's the second sign John tells us. The first sign was the turning of water into wine at Cana, at the wedding feast.

And by filling the purification jars, the jars for purification with wine, Jesus indicated that he's the promised Messiah who fulfills the laws and the requirements of purification and atonement.

And now with the second sign, Jesus heals a dying son. And through that sign indicates that he is the promised Messiah who imparts eternal life.

[15 : 37] And we see that in the repetition of the word live, it's mentioned three times in this passage. In verse 50, Jesus says to the official, your son will live.

Verse 51, the servants tell the official his son was recovering. It's actually the exact same word, even the same tense. And it's, it's, it's, you could really translate it, your son is now living.

So it's the same word. And then again, in verse 53, the word is used again as the official recalls what Jesus said, your son will live. Again, live life. That's the sign, that the sign is pointing to Jesus' ability to give life.

And not just physical life, but eternal life. Because he has said earlier to the Samaritans in verse 14, that the water that I will give will become a spring of water welling up to eternal life.

The main concern of this passage is not the healing of the official son, the physical healing, but the reality that it points to, namely that Jesus revives, who revives the sick, can also impart eternal life, bring dead souls to life again.

[16 : 47] And that's why it's not enough to believe in just the signs. We have to believe in Jesus on his terms as the giver of eternal life. And this might seem a little harsh at first for Jesus to interact with this official in this way, but we have to recognize that, you know, even though physical physical death is significant, all men and women are appointed to die once.

eternal death, however, God intends for us to avoid. He wants us to seek eternal life. It's not an inevitable reality.

And yet, so many of us spend a lifetime denying or delaying the inevitable certainty of physical death while doing nothing to avert the fearful prospect of eternal death. And so this, Jesus is rightly bringing this rebuke to bring attention to what is most important.

And in his brilliant book, *School Tape Letters*, C.S. Lewis imagines this series of letter exchanges, dialogues between School Tape, Uncle School Tape, and his nephew, Wormwood.

And School Tape's a senior devil who is advising through these letters this junior devil, Wormwood, about how to inspire his human subject, which they call patient, to help, successfully to help.

[18 : 10] And in one revealing interchange, the senior devil, Scrute, rebukes Wormwood for his, what he calls his novice preoccupation with physical death.

And this is what he says. It's slightly lengthy, but follow along with me. It's very intriguing. When I told you not to fill your letters with rubbish about the war, I meant, of course, that I did not want to have your rather infantile rhapsodies about the death of men and the destruction of cities.

Insofar as the war really concerns the spiritual state of the patient, I naturally want full reports. And on this aspect, you seem singularly obtuse. Thus, you tell me with glee that there is reason to expect heavy air raids on the town where the creature lives.

This is a crying example of something I have complained about already, your readiness to forget the main point in your immediate enjoyment of human suffering. Do you not know that bombs kill men?

Or do you not realize that the patient's death at this moment is precisely what we want to avoid? He has escaped the worldly friends with whom you try to entangle him.

[19 : 21] He has fallen in love with the very Christian woman and is temporarily immune from your attacks on his chastity. And the various methods of corrupting his spiritual life, which we have been trying, are so far unsuccessful.

At the present moment, as the full impact of the war draws nearer and his worldly hopes take a proportionally lower place in his mind, full of his defense work, full of the girl, forced to attend to his neighbors more than he has ever done before and liken it more than he expected, taken out of himself, as the humans say, and daily increasing in conscious dependence on the enemy, that's God, he will almost certainly be lost to us if he is killed tonight.

This is so obvious that I'm ashamed to write it. I sometimes wonder if you young fiends are not kept out on temptation duty too long at a time, if you are not in some danger of becoming infected by the sentiments and values of the humans among whom you work.

They, of course, do tend to regard death as the prime evil and survival as the greatest good, but that is because we have taught them to do so.

Do not let us be infected by our own propaganda. Like a dumb eagle fluttering about among the chickens, not knowing that it can soar into the sky and fly, often we are living creatures made for eternity but living as if this life were all there is.

[20 : 53] What are your daily and weekly preoccupations? What are you living for? Let us not be so consumed with finding our niche here in this world, finding our place in this life that we forget the fact that this world is not our home.

Are you suffering? Are you disappointed or depressed with the way things have turned out in your life? Then remember that our suffering here in this life is light and momentary compared to the eternal glory that we will experience in God.

Place your hope there and not here. Are you happy with your lot on earth? You enjoy a good reputation in a wide circle of friends and admirers.

You have a meaningful job that keeps you useful and productive. don't forget that this life is short and inconsequential compared to the eternal life that awaits you.

Where does the weight of your priorities lie? Are your thoughts, words, and actions governed by and constrained by the concerns for this life or eternal life?

[22 : 08] Brothers and sisters, let's not cheapen Christ to be some wonder worker and settle for the trinkets of this life when we can believe in Him as a Savior of the world and a giver of eternal life and we can devote all our heart, soul, mind, and strength to Him.

And now, if we're honest with ourselves at this point, you admit that this is difficult to do. Because most of the time this life feels so real and eternal life seems so hypothetical.

This life is all too close and eternal life seems all too distant. The material seems more significant. The immaterial seems insignificant.

But the only way we can come to grips with the reality and value of eternal life is by looking at the costly price God the Father paid to be able to offer eternal life to us.

You see, Jesus here can declare to this official, your son will live. Because, ultimately, God the Father had decreed, my son will die.

[23 : 28] All of us have sinned against the Holy God and by doing so we have become separated from Him alienated from Him who is the source of life and that naturally and appropriately leads to death.

Eternal death. Yet, instead of leaving us there without any recourse, God the Father sends His perfect, sinless Son to die in our stead so that we sinful men and women can live.

eternal life. That's the price God pays for eternal life. And if you have not yet believed in Jesus Himself, then I urge you that Jesus is the only one who can grant this eternal life because He won it for us by dying and our stead.

And eternal life, Jesus is not a means to an end. Eternal life is union with Christ. Eternal life is fellowship with God the Father. Eternal life is being filled with the Spirit of God.

Eternal life is that life in the triune God. It's union with Him. So, Jesus is not a means to an end. Jesus is the end. He is the source of eternal life.

[24 : 43] So, come to Him. And if you already believe in Jesus, then I urge you with us together, fight every day to believe the good news of Jesus Christ.

Every morning when you wake up and every night when you go to bed and throughout the day, believe in Jesus as the giver of eternal life on His terms. Remember the price He paid because it's only by remembering how costly eternal life was we can know how precious it is.

And then the weight of our priorities shifts, reorients us, and enables us to live in light of eternal life, in obedience.

Let me read a verse out of my one of my favorite hymns that captures this complete devotion to God, coming to Jesus on His terms.

The song is called Jesus, I my cross have taken. It goes, verse, verse, Jesus, I my cross have taken all to leave and follow Thee.

[25 : 52] Destitute, despised, forsaken, thou from hence my all shall be. Perish every fond ambition, all I've sought or hoped or known, yet how rich is my condition.

God and heaven are still my own. that's the life, the Christian life that Jesus calls us to. Give all to follow Him, come to Him as the giver of eternal life today.

Let's pray. Amen.