

Sermon: Tale of two beliefs

Text: John 4:43-54

Introduction:

You can read the bible your whole life and still learn something new every day. It is so rich. I can read the same text over and over again and see something that I didn't see before. God illuminates our eyes to the truth of his word through the power of his spirit and he encourages us and challenges every time we come to hear from his word. And so, it is worth reading it all the time. It is worth studying God's word to hear what he has to say to us.

Tonight, I want to look at chapter 4 in its entirety, and the reason I want to do that is because of verses 43-45. If you remember from the last 2 weeks, we have looked at the story of Jesus and the Samaritan woman and how through the encounter with Jesus, a revival happened in Samaria. God used an unlikely woman to bring people to come know Jesus Christ as the saviour of the world. Jesus deliberately went pass Samaria to do that and now he's come back to Galilee. Verse 43 tells us that, *"⁴³ After the two days he departed for Galilee."* The people of Sychar remember, invited him to stay with them and spoke his word to them. There is no sign here. No miracles, the focus is on his word that they believed. V42, *"We have heard him for ourselves, and we know that this is indeed the Savior of the world"*. After you read verse 43, you could jump straight to verse 46 which tells us that he meets an official who has a son who was ill. It would make sense if you just read 43 and then 46, but God in his sovereignty through John inserted verses 44-45. And it is an interesting few verses.

"⁴³ After the two days he departed for Galilee. ⁴⁴ (For Jesus himself had testified that a prophet has no honor in his own hometown.) ⁴⁵ So when he came to Galilee, the Galileans welcomed him, having seen all that he had done in Jerusalem at the feast. For they too had gone to the feast."

Notice in verse 44. NIV says, "Now Jesus himself had pointed out that a prophet has no honor in his own country." That is a bad translation because there is a deliberate "FOR". ESV correctly has the for. It is an interesting verse because if you read verse 44 it says that Jesus has no honour in his own home town and because of that he goes to Galilee. He has no honour and therefore he goes there. That makes no sense from a human perspective and so the NIV just says "Now". In the same way in verse 45, NIV begins with a "When", when it should be a therefore, or so. It is a conjunction that draws a conclusion, connecting the two verses together logically. Because Jesus is rejected, because Jesus has no honour he deliberately goes there. John inserts this to tell us that Jesus is going somewhere he is less honoured than in Samaria. That's important to note because when we read the whole chapter we are going to get a contrast. Although in verse 45, it says the Galileans welcomed him, it doesn't mean it positively. V43-45 must be negative statement. The Galileans welcoming were not real welcoming. It was dishonour. V 44 says that there is no honour in his own hometown. In Matthew 13:57 and Mark 6:4, Jesus says the same thing except adds "in his own household" and "relatives". We could say, familiarity breeds contempt.

Although they saw his miracles, they welcomed him not because he was the saviour of the world, but because he was a miracle worker. Their welcoming was shallow and conditional; they were only interested in his miracles. If you go down to v48 he speaks negatively about peoples' faith, saying unless you see signs and wonders, you will not believe. In other words, they were interested in the works of Christ without any care about the person of Christ. They were interested in what Christ can offer them, without any of the appropriate responses. They were interested in the means and not the ends. And so, what we see here when we look at the chapter 4 in its entirety is that There are 2 types of belief. There is a belief which honours Christ, and a belief which dishonours Christ. The belief which dishonours Christ can even welcome Jesus. But it is not a faith/belief which honours him. It is a belief which wants Jesus for something self-centred, rather Christ-centred glory. It is not a faith which recognises sin and a need for the "Savior of the world". It is a belief which rejected the message and the person, and wants signs and miracles for themselves.

The belief which honours Christ, believes in the message of Christ, it believes in his word and submits to him. It is a belief which is seeking after the word of Christ, the living water and bread of life. It is belief because he is the way, the truth and the life. It is a belief which is transformative. It is belief which changes lives. It is a belief which sees the glory of the one and only son of God, and thus leads to submission to him.

And so with that, I want to tease out the belief that **Dishonours** then the belief which **Honours** and then I want to look at the story of Jesus healing an official's son as a case study with 2 points of how you can honour Christ in your belief.

Belief that dishonours

If you go back to chapter 2, Jesus performs his first sign at the wedding of Cana, water into wine. He cleanses the temple and speaks of his resurrection. At the end of that chapter it tells us in 2:23, that *"he was in Jerusalem at the Passover Feast, many believed in his name when they saw the signs that he was doing."* At first glance it looks like a positive thing. Just like in verse 45 which says they welcome him. Many believed in his name when they saw his signs! When they saw his miracles they were amazed! But in verse 24-25, *"But Jesus on his part did not entrust himself to them, because he knew all people ²⁵ and needed no one to bear witness about man, for he himself knew what was in man."* The ESV translates Jesus response as not entrusting himself to them. The word used here is actually the same word used about the people. It is the same word as believe. And so we are meant to see the sad reality, many believed in Jesus but he did not believe in them. He knew where their heart was. They were interested in what they can get from Jesus and not his message or himself. This will be a common issue that takes place as we continue to look at the ministry of Jesus. Receiving Jesus is not necessarily the same as accepting his message and who he is.

If you turn with me to chapter 6, Jesus feeds 5000. After people eat, v14-15 says, *"When the people saw the sign that he had done, they said, "This is indeed the Prophet who is to come into the world!" ¹⁵ Perceiving then that they were about to come and take him by force to make him king, Jesus withdrew again to the mountain by himself."* It looks like they have received him. But they wanted to make him king for their own agenda. Jesus withdrew

himself. They have missed the point. There were a majority of Jews who believed that the messiah was going to be a military king. He was going to free them from the Roman empire and bring glory back to the people of God just like in the days of David and Solomon. But that's not the point. If you look down at verse 24-26 it says, *"²⁴ So when the crowd saw that Jesus was not there, nor his disciples, they themselves got into the boats and went to Capernaum, seeking Jesus.²⁵ When they found him on the other side of the sea, they said to him, "Rabbi, when did you come here?"²⁶ Jesus answered them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, you are seeking me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves."*

They waited for Jesus, they sought after Jesus and it all looks so great, but Jesus says to them that they are seeking him not because they saw his glory through his signs but because they ate the bread. They wanted the experience of the signs and wonders. They wanted what could benefit them. And in verse 30, even though they just saw a sign and experienced it for themselves, they still ask Jesus to do more. They want more miracles, evidently not because they actually wanted to believe. *"³⁰ So they said to him, "Then what sign do you do, that we may see and believe you? What work do you perform?"*. Show us signs. Hang on... Jesus just fed 5000 with 5 loaves and 2 fish. I am not sure about you but that is not much food.

It is so sad, because when we read the ministry of Jesus, Jesus continues to serve and love his own people yet they continue to reject him. They believe in his miracles, but they don't believe him with an honour he deserves. In 4:46 it mentions deliberately, *"So he came again to Cana in Galilee, where he had made the water wine"*. It is the place where he had done his first sign, yet there was a lack of belief which honoured him.

Belief that dishonours Christ comes to Jesus because of what he can give for selfish reason, and selfish reasons alone.

Belief that honours on the other hand

Looks to Jesus because of who he is. It is a belief which trusts in him. It is a belief which doesn't need signs and wonders although they can encourage and should encourage. The story of the Samaritan woman at the well and the Samaritans at Sychar give us a contrast. The Samaritan woman believed because of the encounter that she had with Jesus. Remember she left her water jar because of Jesus' word and she tells everyone about Jesus. Even if her faith is little. The people at the town encourages us because they believed in Jesus because of the woman's testimony first, and then it says that *"many more believed because of his word"* in verse 41 and in verse 42, *"it is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is indeed the saviour of the world"*. They weren't looking for miracles and signs. They encountered Jesus and listened to his word and believed. They believed in him and recognised that they need a saviour and this is the saviour of the world. An unlikely people group believed because they heard his word and took it as truth. Belief that honours listens to Jesus' word as truth. Or if you go back to chapter 2 in the wedding of Cana, after the sign it says that *"This, the first of his signs, Jesus did at Cana in Galilee, and manifested his glory. And his disciples believed."* (2:11). The signs that Jesus performs manifests his glory. It reveals the glory of the one and

only son of God. It shows the awesome power of God in this fallen and broken world. It shows how great and mighty God is. And the disciples by God's grace could see it, and they believed. Or if you look at the example of John the Baptist, his belief was grounded on the fact that Jesus is the lamb of God who would take away the sins of the world. In Chapter 3 he saw Jesus as the bridegroom worthy of all honour. He is the one who must increase. 3:30 He is the one speaks the truth of God and is eternally beloved by the father. 3:34-35. Belief that honours recognises Jesus as who he is. And worships him for who he is. It is a belief which trusts in him because his word is objectively true. He is the definition of truth.

A very different type of belief than the belief which looks to Jesus for signs and wonders for their own good. A very different type of belief which says, "I must increase, and Jesus must decrease". Belief that honours uplifts Jesus. It trusts in his word. It looks to him as the saviour of the world.

Jesus and the Royal Official:

Now, when you come to v46-54, we are encountered with a challenge. Do you have a faith, a belief which honours Christ for who he is, or do you have a faith, a belief which dishonours him. Do you want Jesus because he can give you things and that's the end of the story or do you worship him as the saviour of the world regardless of whether or not he blesses you?

If you look at verses 46-54 with me right now. Verse 46 tells us he has come back to Cana in Galilee where there was the wedding and he meets at Capernaum an official whose son was ill. The Greek word here used for the official is usually used in reference to someone in service to the king. Literally a royal officer. If you remember, the king-like figure over Galilee was Herod Antipas. He was evil. He had married his brother's wife and put John the Baptist to death. Some think that he is probably a gentile and therefore Jesus shows that he has come to save both the Jews, the Samaritans and the Gentiles, but maybe that would be reading into it too much. Nevertheless, this is a man which has connection to royalty yet he comes to Jesus. He has heard what he has done and obviously believes that Jesus can heal his sick son who in verse 47 is at the point of death.

In verse 48 Jesus says to him, "*Unless you see signs and wonders you will not believe.*". He is not just talking to him. You can't see it in the English but the "you" is plural. That's why NIV translates it as *you people*. Jesus is talking to his own people and the royal official and bringing judgement. You have a belief which dishonours. Now at this point Jesus could be bringing judgement to the royal official, or he could be testing him. I think it is more likely that he is testing him.

In Mark 7, there is the story of the Syrophenician woman's faith. In Mark 7:25 it tells us that there is a woman whose daughter had an unclean spirit. The woman begged Jesus to cast out the demon. V27-30, "²⁷ And he said to her, "Let the children be fed first, for it is not right to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs."²⁸ But she answered him, "Yes,

Lord; yet even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs.”²⁹ And he said to her, “For this statement you may go your way; the demon has left your daughter.”³⁰ And she went home and found the child lying in bed and the demon gone.”

She correctly responds in faith. And Jesus healed. And in the same way, the Royal official responded to Jesus’ challenge and judgement. If you were the royal official and Jesus said that you only believe because of signs and wonders what would you say? When someone makes a judgement upon me, whether it is true or not, I might be defensive. I might be discouraged. I might give up.

Verse 49 tells us what the Royal official does, *“The official said to him, “Sir, come down before my child dies.””* He still asks Jesus. He knows he is able. And he is desperate. It is not a bad thing to run to God because you know that he is the only one who is able. And by God’s grace and love, Jesus says in verse 50, *“Go; your son will live”*. Now you might think great. But if you were in the royal official’s position would you be satisfied with Jesus’ response. You have just asked Jesus to come down to heal your child who is about to die, to follow you back home, and Jesus says go back, go your son will live, how would you respond?

I know this man has some faith, regardless of how big it is, he believed the word that Jesus spoke to him and went on his way. He went back literally empty handed. His son’s life is on the line and he goes back. I am not sure about you, but that is faith. We find out that as he was going down, his servants meet him, his son is healed and he finds out that his son was healed the moment he had talked to Jesus. Verse 53, ⁵³ The father knew that was the hour when Jesus had said to him, “Your son will live.” It tells us that he himself believed, and all his household. His faith increased and his household believed.

I want to draw your attention to two things about a belief which honours in this little story. 2 applications which must happen

1. **Believe that God’s word is truth**- Just like in the story of the Samaritan woman and the people in her town, the royal official believed in Jesus’ word. There is an emphasis and contrast between what Jesus says and what happens to him. He believes his word. He hasn’t seen the miracle, but he trusts. He hopes in Jesus. He takes Jesus to be truthful. Verse 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.”. And just like the woman at the well, he went on his way. He left, trusting in what he says. And that teaches us something about faith, faith that honours responds to Jesus because he is truth. What he says is objective truth and worth listening to. If you believe that Jesus’ word is truth, it brings stability and assurance into your life. We live in a world which is surrounded by lies. Lots of fake news. You never know what you can believe now on the news. There is a lot of deception and it seems like the only way to get things done, is to deceive. It is to lie. People say white lies are okay. People believe that there is no such thing as objective truth because it is better for them when truth is subjective. People love to accept things when they want to, and deny everything which doesn’t fit into their plans and life. Thanks be to God that he can’t lie and he is

faithful. Thanks be to God that he is truth. And you need to believe that and respond to that walk by faith just like the royal official. Today you might have a decision you need to make, maybe it is in regards to work, to family, to friends, to church, whatever it is. And you might know what God has to say about it and you have not made that step of faith. If you know that God's word is true then you should bet your life on it. In fact, if God's word is truth, then is vitally important for you to read God's word. Do you read your bible daily? God speaks truth and life in his word and you can't hear it if you are not actively seeking him.

2. **Believe because of the Glory of God revealed in his Son Jesus-** I noted that in the first sign, Jesus manifested his glory and his disciples believed. In a similar way, the royal official saw the signs and believed. He grew in his faith in response to Jesus' signs. Signs and wonders don't necessarily bring in faith, that is evident for those who have belief which dishonours. I remember in High School my friends would always say that they would be a Christian if they saw a miracle. I know they might not because I read the word and know that many don't after seeing. There is apologetic value in Jesus' miracle. Jesus' signs and miracles authenticate his message and his identity. Even Nicodemus recognised that Jesus is only able to do what he does if he is from God. Jesus can encourage people in their faith by revealing his glory through his signs and in this case he did. Although we don't see signs and wonders in the same way as the time of Christ, we can read his word and it reveals to us how awesome he is. Can you see his glory in this story? Jesus is gracious by healing a child who is about to die. He didn't need to do that. He heals the son of a man who serves the evil Herod. But God is gracious and gave it to him even though he knew that he was surrounded by people who had belief which dishonoured him. That is a glorious thing. God is so loving and great. But even more, did you notice how powerful Jesus is. Jesus doesn't need to come to the son to heal. He says the word and supernaturally he heals a sick son who is miles away instantly. With one word, within a second he brings life. His power is immediate. And if you think about the cross, Jesus the person son of God died for your sins and he rose again. How marvellous and how gracious is he for doing that for you. "Amazing love! how can it be, That Thou, my God, shouldst die for me"

A tale of two beliefs. A belief which honours and a belief which dishonours. Maybe tonight you have come to Jesus for things. You have worshipped what he can give you rather than worshipping the person of Christ. Today believe him because he is truth and that he is the glorious son of God, the saviour of the world. Amen.