

027: Quandary of Faith

(based on Sermon #22 in the Life of Christ Series)

Thirty-six separate miracles are recorded in the Gospels, but John's Gospel only recounts seven.

- Why is that? Keep in mind John's stated purpose:
- John 20:30-31 Truly Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name.
- As clarified in the previous study, *the overarching theme of all four Gospels is inheritance in the coming Messianic kingdom, and how to obtain it.*
- The prerequisites for obtaining the inheritance are repenting of sin and living righteously.
- Enablement to live righteously is provided through the gracious gift of God, *eternal life*, which is Jesus living within as a fountain of water, springing up.

Eternal life is received by believing, not by repenting.

- Since John is focusing on eternal life in his gospel, he never mentions the words repent or repentance.
- But his message is not different than the message presented in the Synoptics.
- He is simply emphasizing another aspect of the same message.
- In this study we will begin to see John's purpose in sharing specific miracles for making his point.
- Jesus is about to perform His second miracle, as recorded in John's Gospel.
- But in the transition from His conversation with the woman at the well (4:1-42) and the healing of the

nobleman's son (4:46-54), John inserts some key details (4:43-45).

- John 4:43 Now after the two days He departed from there and went to Galilee.

Jesus stays in Samaria for two days.

- During that time He never performs miracles, because He is ministering to Samaritans, not Jews.
- Signs are for the Jews, not Samaritans (Gentiles).
- That all changes when Jesus returns to Galilee.
- Why does Jesus remain in Samaria two days and return to Cana of Galilee on the third?
- Some explanation is required.
- Remember back to the timing of the wedding feast in Cana when Jesus turned the water into wine.
- That was His first miracle. John works into the narrative the specific timing.
- I gave the details in a previous study, so this will be a brief review.

In John 1:19 the religious leaders send priests to query John the Baptist.

- That is *day one*.
- In 1:29, which is described as "the next day" — *day two* — John the Baptist hails Jesus as the Lamb of God.
- In 1:35, which says, "again, the next day" — *day three* — John again hails Jesus as the Lamb of God.
- In 1:43, described as "the following day" — *day four* — Jesus calls Philip to follow Him as a disciple.
- Then in 2:1 the narrative says, "on the third day" — i.e., the third day after the fourth, or *day seven* — Jesus turns the water to wine at the wedding feast.
- The seventh day symbolizes the Millennium and the Marriage Supper.

Keep in mind that the seven days of creation week each signify one thousand years, according to the apostle Peter, who said:

- “With the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day” (2 Peter 3:8).
- Thus, in the minds of the Jews, God’s plan for man on Earth is six thousand years, followed by a seventh thousand-year period of rest, which is the Lord’s Day, when Jesus will reign on Earth as Messiah.
- That will be a glorious time of rejoicing, as depicted in the prophets.
- The marriage in Cana is a highly appropriate picture of that era of rest.
- No wonder Jesus works a miracle at that particular festive occasion, turning water to wine, symbolizing the millennial kingdom, which is saving the best wine for last, so to speak.

Why are days *five* and *six* not mentioned in the chronology of the wedding feast at Cana of Galilee in the early chapters of John’s Gospel?

- The short answer is, because those days don’t apply to Israel.
- The longer answer is fleshed out in Hosea’s prophecy:
- Hosea 6:1-2 Come, and let us return to the LORD; for He has torn, but He will heal us; He has stricken, but He will bind us up. After two days He will revive us; on the third day He will raise us up, that we may live in His sight.
- *After two days He will revive us.*
- In the grand scheme of John’s seven-day timetable, he leaves out days *five* and *six*, because those are the two days, representing two thousand years, during which God has temporarily set aside His wife Israel while

seeking a bride for His Son amongst the Gentiles (symbolized by Jesus spending two days in Samaria).

- Revival is coming to Israel after the two days, when Jesus Christ returns the second time after the tribulation.

On the third day He will raise us up.

- National Israel will be healed and restored in the Messianic kingdom, symbolized by Jesus returning to Cana on the third day after two days in Samaria to heal the nobleman's son.
- How remarkable that John uses these miracles to symbolize the timetable of man and Earth and Israel and the Gentiles!
- Perceptive Israelites of Christ’s day should be picking up on the meaning of Christ’s miracles, particularly as they fit into the seven-day schematic, representing the seven thousand years.

How does this apply to the Christian life? Keep in mind John’s objective in writing his Gospel:

- John 20:31 These are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name.
- Of course, John is referring to eternal life.
- But the stunning feature of this life showcased to both Nicodemus (a Jew) and the woman at the well (a Gentile) is that it is continuing life, like a fountain of water, springing up.
- Thus eternal life is abundant life now that, if appropriated, leads to vitality in the coming age.
- In a nutshell, eternal life is the Christ-life, which is always the life of victory and blessing.
- Those believers who are regularly appropriating the abundant life in Christ are filled with the Spirit and,

thereby, displaying the fruit of the Spirit in their lives — love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control (Gal. 5:22-23).

Don't you love to be around a person like that?

- Because they are so heavenly minded, they are of tremendous earthly good.
- How does one step into the abundant life?
- Another way of asking the question is, how does one appropriate eternal life, the provision of Jesus dwelling within?
- The answer in simple: *by faith*. Rom. 5:2 teaches that believers access God's grace by faith.
- And it is only by God's grace that we are enabled to obey.
- Faith for the child of God is continued belief and trust in the Lord, dependence on Him that draws upon His grace to enable you to:
 - a) experience victory over sin and
 - b) respond correctly to trials, pressures, and crises.

Faith is the key to a life that pleases God.

- "Without faith it is impossible to please Him" (Heb. 11:6).
- Yet faith is the very thing that we struggle to understand and apply.
- Jesus knows this, and so He gives us here in John 4 an illustration of what faith is and how it draws upon the grace of God for the enablement to obey God.
- The illustration comes in the form of a lesson on faith that Jesus teaches to a certain nobleman.

John 4:46-50

- 46 So Jesus came again to Cana of Galilee where He had made the water wine. And there was a certain nobleman whose son was sick at Capernaum.

- 47 When he heard that Jesus had come out of Judea into Galilee, he went to Him and implored Him to come down and heal his son, for he was at the point of death.
- 48 Then Jesus said to him, "Unless you people see signs and wonders, you will by no means believe."
- 49 The nobleman said to Him, "Sir, come down before my child dies!"
- 50 Jesus said to him, "Go your way; your son lives."

This nobleman faces a real quandary. Jesus tells the man to go home, because his son lives.

- What should he do? Is Jesus trustworthy?
- Should he do as Jesus says and go home without Jesus, only to find a dying son?
- What a perplexing situation!
- Does this man take heed to what Jesus says to him? Yes, indeed!
- And in so doing, he catapults into a new realm of life, a life of faith that pleases God.
- This nobleman is from the city of Capernaum, which is located on the northwest shore of the Sea of Galilee.
- He is a man of royal personage, perhaps a high-ranking official in the court of Herod Antipas, as some have suggested.

His position is important, for it makes us wonder how a man of his status will interact with Christ.

- Will he place demands on Jesus?
- We know he is desperate —his son is just a little boy, and he is sick unto death.
- In v. 49 he refers to the boy as a *child*.
- The Greek word suggests a young child.
- The father, who obviously loves his son, travels about twenty miles from Capernaum to Cana to meet Jesus.

- That is a two-day journey on foot.
- Jesus teaches this man two truths about faith.

1. Faith makes no demands on God.

- According to v. 47, the man *implores* Jesus to heal his son. the word means “to beg repeatedly and persistently.”
- This nobleman is accustomed to having people jump up to serve him, meeting his every demand and request.
- He is a man of authority and status.
- Although he doesn’t *command* Jesus to come, he essentially *pressures* Him to come.
- If our prayers were to be answered by pressuring or appeasing God, then prayer would cease to be a matter of faith and would become a fleshly effort.

Those able to pester God the most would be the ones to get the answers to their prayers.

- But that’s not biblical.
- In fact, it’s pagan.
- That “system” of praying would be like placing demands on God, essentially pressuring Him to act because of man’s aggressiveness.
- Is that faith? Of course not!
- Faith is not pressuring God — as if we could!
- It is depending on God for meeting needs, knowing that He delights to meet the needs

Have you ever told God *how* you want your prayers answered?

- “Lord, I need \$1,000 and I need it before the end of the month, so I can pay my rent and car payment.”
- Isn’t setting a time limit essentially putting demands on God?

- I remember many years ago my wife and I had a big financial need, and we needed it by a certain date or else we would have to go into debt, which we did not think was God’s will, because we had been good stewards of our money.
- We prayed and prayed and prayed, essentially putting demands on God that He had to meet our financial need by a certain date or else we would be out of His will.
- As the deadline drew near, we were convinced that God would meet the need — indeed, He was obligated! — because we had been praying.
- But God did not meet our need by the deadline.
- We had to incur some credit card debt.

I remember being quite puzzled and perplexed by that, and even shaken in my faith, wondering why God had not answered.

- Was it my lack of faith? Not exactly.
- I later learned it was my *misunderstanding* of faith.
- God had to teach me not to make demands on Him and to trust Him even if He did not answer according to my specifications.
- My wife and I continued praying about the need after that, but more out of bewilderment and frustration than anything.
- In a couple of months God provided an amount of money, quite unexpectedly, that not only enabled us to pay off the debt, it also gave us some money in the bank!
- We learned to trust God without making demands as to *how* or *when* He must meet our needs.

In all fairness, this nobleman has a pressing dilemma.

- His son is near death, and medical means cannot help this boy.

- The only One who can save the child is Jesus, by means of a miracle.
- The man knows this, and he is desperate.
- So he pleads for Jesus to come to Capernaum to heal the boy.
- But even in this extreme case Jesus refuses to go, even after repeated asking.
- What can be Christ's purpose in this?
- He is teaching this man that faith makes no demands on God.
- Jesus teaches a second lesson about faith.

2. Faith believes before it sees.

- The world says, "Seeing is believing." God says the opposite: "Believing is seeing." Carnal man wants signs and wonders (miracles) before he will believe.
- John 4:48 Then Jesus said to him, "Unless you people see signs and wonders, you will by no means believe."
- From v. 48, it become obvious that the nobleman represents Israel.
- In teaching the nobleman about faith Jesus is actually teaching Israel about faith.
- Israel did not believe God, even though He had sent His own Son to Earth.
- The nation required continued signs and wonders before they would believe.
- Yet despite the numerous miracles performed by Jesus, they continued to want more.

Do you require "signs" from God before you will believe Him?

- Do you, like Gideon, put out fleeces for God to confirm His will, though it is plainly spelled out in His Word?

- That was Israel's sad state, and it applies to the nobleman too.
- As Jesus was hanging on the cross, the chief priests and scribes mocked and said, "Let the Christ ... descend now from the cross, that we may see and believe" (Mark 15:32).
- Before they would believe, they needed to see something miraculous.
- In John 6:30 the Galileans said unto him, "What sign will You perform then, that we may see it and believe You? What work will You do?"
- They, too, wanted to see before believing.

Even one of Jesus's own disciples had to see before believing.

- In the upper room, Thomas said, "Unless I see in His hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe" (John 20:25).
- There seems to be a pattern amongst carnal men: Seeing must precede believing.
- But with Jesus, it is just the opposite, and He wants us to grasp this truth:
- Believing is seeing.
- When Martha objected to rolling away the stone from the tomb of Lazarus, on account of the fact that he had been dead for several days and was already stinking, Jesus said to her:
- "Did I not say to you that if you would believe you would see the glory of God?" (John 11:40).

In man's thinking, seeing comes before believing, but in God's way of thinking, believing always precedes seeing.

- That is a critical lesson.

- Jesus is not being heartless to this man.
- Obviously, a miracle will need to be done by Christ in order for this boy to be healed.
- But Jesus wants this man (and all Israel) to know that true faith believes *before* the healing.
- The response of the nobleman leaves us wondering whether he has grasped what Jesus is trying to teach him:
- 49 The nobleman said to Him, “Sir, come down before my child dies!”

To drive the point home, Jesus resorts to desperate measures.

- He creates a quandary of faith for this man that will make him or break him. Here’s the quandary:
- 50 Jesus said to him, “Go your way; your son lives.”
- The nobleman must demonstrate by his actions whether he has learned the two lessons about faith that Jesus has just taught him.
- In one statement, Jesus takes this man’s demands and his need to see before believing and turns it on its head.
- This man’s world is now upside down. For Christ has just told him to go on home; his son lives.
- This is a big dilemma for the nobleman, a quandary of faith.
- If he refuses to return home without bringing Jesus, he will demonstrate a heart of unbelief and the boy will not be healed.
- But, on the other hand, if he obeys the instructions of Jesus, he has no assurance that his dying boy will recover.

No logic can solve this dilemma.

- The man must simply choose.

- Will he believe Jesus and do as the Master says, or not?
- Again, this is in a huge quandary, a real predicament for the nobleman.
- Thankfully, the latter half of v. 50 says that he chooses to believe Jesus and head on home.
- This man has learned two critical truths about faith that we all need to learn.
- He learns that faith makes no demands on God, and that believing precedes seeing.
- As a result of his faith-filled decision, as he is making the two-day journey home, his servants meet him along the way with good news — his son has recovered and lives!

The man wants to know at what hour the boy’s condition had changed for the better.

- They pinpoint it at the very time that Jesus had spoken the word of healing.
- The nobleman knows this is no mere coincidence.
- John records in the end of the story that the man believes along with his entire household.
- This is what God wants for all Israel.
- It is not coincidental that Jesus performs this miracle on the seventh day (or, in another manner of looking at it, *after two days ... on the third day*), for it signifies national healing when Christ returns and ascends to His millennial throne.
- Do you believe Jesus in all things?

A modern example of faith is the late Dr. Walter Wilson (1881-1969), a medical doctor who learned to trust God in everything.

- Whenever Dr. Wilson would come upon some temptation, he would say a brief prayer in his mind, and then consider it answered.

- For instance, when confronted with impure thoughts, he would cry out, “Thy purity, Lord.”
- Then he would believe that God had already answered the prayer, and he would go on in victory.
- When tempted with a wrongful response in anger, he would cry out, “Thy patience and kindness, Lord.”
- He believed God gave him what he needed in that very moment and experienced instant victory.
- When tempted to worry about a need, he would cry out, “Thy provision, Lord.”
- Then He would believe that God had already provided.
- He followed this template of believing God in myriad ways.

You can also cry out to God, based on His promises, and trust Him for whatever you need in your time of temptation.

- When tempted to fear rather than confess Christ, you can cry out, “Thy boldness, Lord.”
- When tempted to lash back at someone who has spoken harshly to you, you can cry out, “Thy love, Lord.”
- When in the presence of danger, you can cry out, “Thy protection, Lord.”
- When tempted to respond in pride, you can cry out, “Thy humility, Lord.”
- When lonely, cry out, “Thy presence, Lord.”
- By the way, throughout the day, whether tempted or not, you can cry out, “Thy filling, Lord.”
- He delights in filling you with all the fullness of God.

Never think of these brief prayers as mantras to superstitiously ward off evil.

- Rather, believe that in so praying you are appropriating God’s grace instantaneously in a time of need.

- Believe that God has already answered the prayer, and you will enter the realm of victorious, abundant living.
- Don’t wait for a feeling or some sign from heaven.
- Consider the prayer answered, for such prayers are always aligned with the will of God.
- Believing must precede seeing the victory won!
- God sometimes allows quandaries of faith in our lives so we will learn to trust Him more.
- I challenge you to THINK ON THESE THINGS!