

What Is Faith?

Text: John 4:50b

Suggested Hymns:

395, 352, 321, 161, 159

- 1) An Overview
- 2) Faith is not sight
- 3) Faith removes doubt
- 4) Faith is based upon the promises of God

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is taken from the Gospel reading. Our text is John 4:50b, *So the man believed the word that Jesus spoke to him, and he went his way.* (NKJV)

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

The Bible teaches from cover to cover that we are saved by faith, — not by love, or works of charity, not by fasting and prayer and godly living, but by faith, by faith alone. We read in Ephesians 2:8-9, *⁸ For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, ⁹ not of works, lest anyone should boast.*

To be sure of our salvation, then, we must be sure that we have faith and hence must know for certain what faith really is. We can learn from this text what faith really is. Let us examine our text carefully and see God's answer to the question — *What Is Faith?* May the Lord bless our meditation.

1. An Overview Of The Miracle Jesus Performed

Jesus visited Cana again, the scene of His first miracle in Galilee. Perhaps he visited the newly married couple.

In short, a royal official from Capernaum sought out Jesus. The man's son lay dying in Capernaum, and Jesus represented the only hope for his healing. The official begged Jesus, *"Come, and heal my son."*¹

Clearly, the official knew about or had himself seen some of Jesus' miracles. He was probably among the Jews who had seen what Jesus did in Jerusalem. However, for many of those Jews, Jesus was becoming the Man they could go to

when they needed some wondrous deed. Jesus received little honour as a prophet.

Therefore, when Jesus responded to the official, He included the many Galilean Jews around Him and scolded them. He said, in effect: *“You people are wowed by my works, but you do not know me. You will never believe if you do not get beyond that.”* Indirectly, the rebuke was also an invitation to listen to Jesus and believe.

The royal official still trusted that Jesus could save his child and urged Jesus to come to his home before it was too late. The words may have betrayed a weakness in his trust too, suggesting Jesus had to go to the boy in order to heal him.

But Jesus worked to strengthen the nobleman’s faith. He said simply, **“Go your way; your son lives.”** Jesus did not move from the spot. He did not offer a sign or a wonder. He just gave the man His word.

So the man believed the word that Jesus spoke to him, and he went his way. This incident stands forever as an example of what it means to believe: Take Jesus at His word.

Good news does not wait to be discovered. Before the royal official reached home to see his son, his servants came out to tell him the child was better. The nobleman inquired at what time his son began to recover. Their response confirmed the words and power of Jesus, ***“Yesterday at the seventh hour, the fever left him.”*** The boy was in that moment out of danger. The servants had left him fully recovered.

The father knew that was the very time when Jesus had told him, **“Your son lives.”** No longer a “sign seeker,” the man believed. He shared the message of Jesus with the servants and all his household, and they too believed.

The last time Jesus came from Judea to Galilee, he changed water into wine at Cana. This time, Jesus again came to Cana and performed a miracle.

2. Faith Is Not Sight

Faith is not sight. How often we hear the statement: *Seeing is believing.* But is that statement true? Strictly speaking, it is not true, not even of earthly

things. If you have a grandfather whom you see every day, you do not, strictly speaking, believe that you have a grandfather.

Believing is accepting as true things you do not see, for example, that Sir Edmund Barton was the first Prime Minister of Australia. You do not see that; you accept it on the authority of others.

In spiritual matters seeing is not believing at all. For example, thousands of Jews saw Jesus. But did those thousands believe? By no means. Prophesying of the Jews of Jesus' day, Isaiah says in Isaiah 53:1, ***¹ Who has believed our report? And to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed?²***

Now look at the nobleman in our text. Did he see the things that Jesus said to him, ***"your son lives?"*** Not at all. The son was in Capernaum, where he had left him in a dying condition, while the father was now in Cana.

But the nobleman believed. ***So the man believed the word that Jesus spoke to him, and he went his way.*** And so truly he believed what Jesus said to him that he did not even hurry home to see the marvellous change that he so longed for.

The nobleman actually spent the night somewhere along the way and only reached home on the following day. ***⁵¹ And as he was now going down, his servants met him and told him, saying, "Your son lives!" ⁵² Then he inquired of them the hour when he got better. And they said to him, "Yesterday at the seventh hour the fever left him." ⁵³ So the father knew that it was at the same hour in which Jesus said to him, "Your son lives."***

In spiritual matters believing is not seeing. Seeing is not believing, and believing is not seeing. Believing is accepting Jesus' mere word as very truth.

If believing was seeing, Jesus would not have said to the nobleman, ***"Unless you people see signs and wonders, you will by no means believe."***³ With these words Jesus reproved the man for wanting to see a miracle wrought for him before he would believe.

If seeing was believing, Jesus would not have said to Thomas in John 20:29, ***Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.***" Faith is not sight. Much less is it doubt.

3. Faith Removes Doubt

Someone once said, “*What is faith but the admission of a doubt?*” That person does not stand alone in holding that view. The entire Roman Catholic Church says that faith, or believing, includes an element of doubt.

It says that a Christian may not be sure of his final salvation. He may and should hope for salvation, but not with that sure hope that the Bible teaches; rather with a hope which may or may not be realised, just as we hope, for example, that we shall have fine weather tomorrow.

Rome says that it would be arrogant in a Christian to be sure of his salvation, that in true humility he must leave the matter in doubt until he dies or until Judgement Day comes.⁴

Now, that certainly was not the sort of faith this nobleman had. He would not have spent the night in a tavern, sleeping soundly, it would seem, and have gone home in such leisurely fashion had he believed in this manner, “*Perhaps my son lives, perhaps not. Perhaps Jesus’ statement will prove true, perhaps not. I surely hope my son lives; but — but — what am I going to do if he dies?*”

Instead, faith accepts Jesus’ word as true, not as possibly of being true, nor yet as probably true, but as absolutely true, true beyond a shadow of a doubt. Faith is not the admission of a doubt. It is quite the opposite; it is certainty.

It is true that is frequently assailed or attacked by doubt. But if faith were of the very nature of doubt, then faith, when assailed, would be its own assailant.

Faith is not sight. Much less is it doubt. Faith is conviction, faith is assurance, faith is certainty.

4. Faith Is Based Upon The Promises Of God

God tells us in Hebrews 11:1 that *faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.*

Job says in Job 19:25-27, ²⁵ *For I know that my Redeemer lives, And He shall stand at last on the earth;* ²⁶ *And after my skin is destroyed, this I know, That in my flesh I shall see God,* ²⁷ *Whom I shall see for myself, And my eyes shall behold, and not another. How my heart yearns within me!* There is no “element of doubt” in Job’s faith!

St. Paul says of Abraham, who is called the father of all believers,^{5 18} *who, contrary to hope, in hope believed, so that he became the father of many*

nations, according to what was spoken, “So shall your descendants be.”¹⁹ And not being weak in faith, he did not consider his own body, already dead (since he was about a hundred years old), and the deadness of Sarah’s womb.

²⁰ He did not waver at the promise of God through unbelief, but was strengthened in faith, giving glory to God,²¹ and being fully convinced that what [God] had promised He was also able to perform.⁶

And of himself Paul says in 2 Timothy 1:12, *¹² For this reason I also suffer these things; nevertheless I am not ashamed, for I know whom I have believed and am persuaded that [God] is able to keep what I have committed to Him until that Day.*

And the author of Hebrews exhorts his fellow-Christians,⁷ *²² let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.²³ Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful.* Surely faith is conviction, assurance, and certainty.

What is the believer sure of? The believer in Christ is now sure he has the forgiveness of sins. We read in Matthew 9:2, *² Then behold, they brought to Him a paralytic lying on a bed. When Jesus saw their faith, He said to the paralytic, “Son, be of good cheer; your sins are forgiven you.”*

The believer in Christ is also now sure that he will have eternal bliss in heaven, as we learnt from the Job text before. And also from 1 John 3:2, *² Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.*

What is this faith based upon? It is not based upon the believer’s feelings, nor upon what he has seen, but upon the promises of God. We read in Hebrews 10:23, *²³ Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful.* And our text says, *So the man believed the word that Jesus spoke to him, and he went his way.*

How is such faith produced? It is produced and created by the sure Word of God. The nobleman heard the word of Jesus, and closing his eyes to what he saw — namely the dying son he had left behind, the refusal of Jesus to go with him

and let him see the miracle which he so much desired, — closing his eyes to all of this, he trusted in the word of Jesus alone. That produced faith in him. We read in Romans 10:17, ¹⁷ *So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.*

How is such faith preserved in the believer? Faith is preserved by the Word of God, both the audible Word and the visible Word as we heard in Romans 10:17. Not only in its first beginnings, but faith always comes by hearing. Let us be sure and diligent hearers of the Word of God and frequent guests at the Lord's Table.

So let us summarise. The nobleman believed the word that Jesus spoke to him and went his way, his way home. Likewise we must believe our Saviour's Word and go our way — home, to our heavenly home, all undaunted by what we see or feel while on the way.

A pastor sat at the bedside of a dying parishioner. He said, *"You may pass away tonight. If you do, are you sure you will go to heaven?"* She replied *"Oh, I feel that way."*

Then the Pastor replied, *"What if in half an hour from now you do not feel that way? What if you feel that God is angry with you? And what if you die then? You must not base your hopes of heaven on your changing feelings; you must base them on Jesus' unchanging Word."*

Let us close with the words of the hymnist which we sang earlier⁸

Faint not nor fear, His arms are near;
He changeth not, and thou art dear;
Only believe, and thou shalt see
That Christ is all in all to thee. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep our hearts and minds, in Christ Jesus. Amen.

¹ John 4:46-54

² See also Romans 10:16

³ John 4:46

⁴ See the Decrees and Canons of the Council of Trent, Session VI, Canon XVI.

⁵ Romans 4:11

⁶ Romans 4:18-21

⁷ Hebrews 10:22-23

⁸ Hymn 352