

John 4:43-54

Belief

What do you believe in? Now if you are a Christian I would hope that one of the things you say you believe in would be Jesus or God, but whether you are a Christian or Non-Christian there are other things we believe in aren't there? Some stranger things that I have found that people believe in are... **Dowsing** they believe that you can use a rod or stick to find things underground, **flat earthers**, yes they still exist, people who believe that the earth is flat and not a sphere, or one of the weirder ones I found, **Rumpology** – the belief that people's bottoms can be used to gain insight into a persons future. Pretty weird beliefs. Of course there are many more ordinary things we can believe in as well. We may believe in our family, that they will love us, we may believe in our favourite sports team, that they will play well, we may believe that certain things exist like aliens or the Tasmanian Tiger or we may even believe in inanimate objects, that they will do their function. Belief in someone or something changes the way we act. For example if you believe in your favourite sports team you may defend them when others put them down. Or if you believe that the Tasmanian Tiger still lives you may spend lots of time in Tasmania trying to find it. If you believe in a chair you are happy to put your full weight on it. True belief changes the way we act.

Now you may be wondering why I am talking about belief, well in today's passage John once again focuses on belief in Jesus. It's not surprising really that most of the sermons so far have touched on belief, as belief is the reason that John has said he has written his gospel. In Chapter 20 concluding his book John writes; **31 But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name. John 20:31.**

When we say Believe in Jesus we mean we are believing in his authority to do what he says. We are believing in his power to carry through his promises. We are believing that he loves us. We are believing his sacrifice on the cross, his death and resurrection are sufficient for our salvation, If we believe in him.

So some of the questions I want to look at today are What interferes with our belief in Jesus? And how do we increase our belief?

Last week we saw that Jesus was encouraging belief even amongst the Samaritans and after 2 days there Jesus has now made his way back to Galilee.

A **quick geography** lesson, Galilee is where Jesus grew up, in a town called Nazareth. About 15 km north of Nazareth was Cana, where he turned water to wine back in chapter 2 and about 25 km east from Cana was Capernaum where the official with the sick son in this story lives. So Jesus is now leaving Samaria and returning to his homeland in Galilee.

A strange conversation

Before we explore what this passage says about belief, I want to quickly go through the story that we read as there are a number of verses in there that can seem quite strange. Lets go through it together starting with verse 44 and 45. These 2 verses seem a bit strange don't they, like they don't fit together. Jesus seems to point out that he is not honoured by his home town, yet straight away we read that he is welcomed.

That isn't what we expect. They're supposed to not honour him according to verse 44. How can John say, A prophet has no honour in his own country, but in the very next verse say, now they welcome him?

The answer is that the "welcome" is not what it looks like on the outside. There is a kind of welcoming Jesus that has no true honour for Him. It's just an interest in his signs and wonders and not in who he really is. Its like the people who suddenly become friends with the person who wins the lottery. They are not interested in the person only their money. This idea is not new in John's Gospel. It's happened before in John 2.

23 Now while he was in Jerusalem at the Passover Festival, many people saw the signs he was performing and believed in his name. 24 But Jesus would not entrust himself to them, for he knew all people. 25 He did not need any testimony

about mankind, for he knew what was in each person. Jn 2:23–25.

They “believed,” John says, but this was not a kind of faith that accepted Jesus for who he was. It was simply an excitement with his miracles, not what they pointed to, which was his glory as the Son of God, the Saviour of the World.

Another illustration of this kind of superficial “welcoming” of Jesus, is his brothers in John 7 3 Jesus’ brothers said to him, “Leave Galilee and go to Judea, so that your disciples there may see the works you do. 4 No one who wants to become a public figure acts in secret. Since you are doing these things, show yourself to the world.” 5 For even his own brothers did not believe in him. Jn 7:3–5.

His brothers believed he could do miracles. And they were eager for him to show these miracles to the world. But John says in verse 5, they talked like this because “even his brothers did not believe in him.” They think they are receiving him—just like the people in Galilee think they are welcoming Jesus—but they don’t understand him. They don’t see who he really is. And so they don’t honour him—even though they make a big deal of him as a miracle-worker.

That’s what we are seeing in John 4, “They welcomed him.” Yes, but then it says, “They had seen all that he had done in Jerusalem at the Passover Festival, for they also had been

there.” John 4:45. They welcomed him because they had seen works of power in Jerusalem.

This contrasts with how we saw the Samaritans react last week. For them the focus was not on his miracle-working, but on his word. “We have heard for ourselves, and we know that this man really is the Saviour of the world” (John 4:42).

The story then proceeds in Cana in Galilee.

The scene is set as we are reminded about Jesus previous visit to Cana where he turned water into wine. This was where John (2:11) said that it was the first of the signs through which Jesus revealed his glory. And given John's links what follows as the second sign, so we should again expect to see Jesus glory revealed. John wants to encourage true belief by revealing who Jesus really is.

And onto the scene comes a royal official. Jesus is now famous enough from what happened in Jerusalem and possibly even what happened in Cana previously that this official has heard about Jesus power. So he comes and begs Jesus to come and heal his son.

Here we see the first of the potentially strange responses in this dialogue. Instead of Jesus saying, not a problem, I will heal your son as we might expect. He says “Unless you people see signs and wonders you will never believe.” Jesus instead of agreeing, rebukes the people there. Jesus is

concerned that too much focus is being put on his miracles and not on himself. Just to point out that the "you" that Jesus says is not singular, its not just the official he is speaking to, it is plural. It is the crowd around him. Like he did in chapter 2, Jesus rebukes the people for focusing too much on the miracles and not enough on himself. If you remember back to Emily's sermon, the point of miracles is to point towards Jesus Glory. They are a sign to Jesus and are not intended to be the focus themselves.

So what does the official say, how does he take this apparent rejection by Jesus? After all he is a man of power, does he take offense? Is he someone who is just seeking a miracle or will he see what the miracles point to? The official ends up simply repeating his request and doesn't comment on Jesus rebuke.

Jesus doesn't then make anything more of his rebuke and without any further words agrees to his request. Well sort of. Instead of going down with the official to Capernaum, Jesus instead says Go, your son will live. Jesus is seeing if the man will put his faith into action. He agrees to help, but without any more proof than Jesus word, the crowd must have wondered what the official would do next. Would he take him at his word? Would he beg some more? or would he order Jesus to help? What would you have done in response to Jesus' words? I would have wanted at least some assurance from Jesus.

And this is where we see the faith this man has, This royal official takes Jesus at his word, he believes and departs.

And here we see the difference in belief that Jesus wants to see. What is the difference between a faith that is motivated just by miracles and stronger faith? We see it here as the man trusts Jesus word and obeys.

We get further confirmation that the official believes when he hears the time his son got better. And even more than that, his whole household believes.

So having gone through the story what is the main point of this passage? What does John want to achieve through writing this? John wants us to believe and I think as part of helping us believe John shows us 2 things;

- He shows us what can interfere with us believing
- He gives us a greater understanding of who Jesus is

What interferes with us believing

Verse 44 tells us what stood in the way of a true understanding of Jesus and a true belief in him: “a prophet has no honour in his own country.” There is something about being part of Jesus’ own country that can hinder faith. Now none of us is part of Jesus’ hometown. So you may think this doesn’t apply to us. But the same things that made it hard for his own people to receive him and honour him, those same

things may be in us today. What are some of those things? Well I think there are 3.

First, is the problem of **pride**. A kind of inherited sense of importance. The people could say that this great miracle worker grew up in their town. They want him to do miracles not because it brings glory to him, but because it increases their glory, to make their town greater. They don't feel the need for his grace. His power and fame feeds their pride. And so they don't honour him for who he is, even though it might look like they are when they ask him to do miracles.

I think this is something that we can still struggle with today. It can keep us from knowing the real Jesus. We can be associated with a church, or a person, or a ministry in a way that starts to feed our pride. The size of a big church, the success of a ministry starts becoming more about us rather than Jesus. We can want something to be successful not for the sake of Jesus but for how it makes us look and feel. And it can seem justifiable because it's a christian activity. We begin to want this Christian thing to go well not for Jesus, but for us. And when that happens, we are misleading ourselves about who Jesus is and what Jesus wants. Jesus has done all the work in saving us, its only by his grace that we are saved. We should be proud for Jesus not for ourselves.

A second feeling that may be in us even though we are not part of Jesus' hometown is a sense of **entitlement**. They would say, he is from our town, then of course we should be

saved. We may say, I was born into a Christian family, or I go to church each week, or I am generally a good person who gives money to the poor. These things are indeed part of being a Christian, part of being of Jesus country, but these things shouldn't lead to feelings of entitlement.

Unfortunately I know sometimes these thoughts creep in. But if you ever start to feel entitled to being saved by Jesus, you are not following Jesus. We will not honour him for who he is if we slip into this way of thinking. It starts to put the emphasis on what we do and not what Jesus has done and again we lose sight of who Jesus is, the saviour of the world.

And third is a sense of **over-familiarity** with Jesus. They would say, This man is one of us. We know his mother and his brothers. He has always been so ordinary. How can he be what he claims to be? That same thought can be in us today in a slightly different way: We are so familiar with the Bible, and with Jesus, and with Christianity. We start to lose the wonder of who Jesus is, the thankfulness that he died on the cross. He becomes too familiar.

We need to guard against these three things in our own lives. The first two (pride and a sense of entitlement) minimize Jesus grace. And the third (over-familiarity) minimizes his power. And when we lose sight of either Jesus grace or power it makes it harder for us to believe. If we start to think its about us rather than grace then we will stop seeing the need to believe in Jesus. If we lose sight of his power then we

may start losing belief that he can save us. It will start distorting our view of who Jesus truly is. So how do we overcome this? How do we increase our belief?

How do we increase our belief?

When talking about belief or faith, I think one of the more common thoughts from Christians is that they wish they had more. In fact its a question that the disciples of Jesus raised themselves in Luke 17. They ask Jesus to increase their faith. Jesus response is not what we might expect. He tells them that all they need is faith as small as a mustard seed, one of the smallest known seeds in the middle east at the time.

How can that be? When believing at times seems so hard, how can Jesus say we need such little faith. Well, Jesus was trying to show that the most important thing about faith is not how much of it you have, but the thing you have faith in,. It's Jesus we need to trust in, not ourselves. We see that in todays story. The man started with little faith, but Jesus still healed the boy.

So why do we talk about increasing our belief or faith if all we need to have is a small amount?

Let me give you an illustration. At my old job I used to fly quite a bit around the world and when I travelled I often travelled with another person from work. But we were both very different flyers. I was fine with flying she was not. I remember one particular time when we boarded a plane and

we knew there was going to be some turbulence it had been a long trip and we were both tired. I remember waking up not long into the flight to find her gripping the armrests with a very worried look on her face not sleeping at all. In an effort to make conversation, I remember saying to her I can't believe they didn't do the normal safety message at the beginning of the flight especially given how bumpy it was. She looked at me with a bit of disgust and said they did do it, I had just been asleep for it.

You see I had a large amount of belief that the plane would get me to our destination, while she only had a little. But you know what, it didn't matter how much faith we both had, we both got to the destination because it wasn't about us, it was about the plane. It's the same with Jesus saving us. It's not the amount of our faith that makes the difference it's who we believe in.

So you may be thinking that still doesn't answer your question about more belief? What difference does it make? Well although both my work colleague and I got to our destination we had a very different journey. My belief in the plane didn't change the outcome but it did mean I had a lot less stressful trip. I think it is the same with our Christian lives. The more we believe in Jesus the less stressed we can be with our lives. Now I am not saying the more we believe the less problems we will face. It's just the more fully we believe in Jesus the more confident we are that his promises

will hold true, that everything will work together for our good.

I know for me as I have grown as a Christian my attitude has changed. Early on in my working life when I was looking for a job, I used to get very stressed about whether I would find a job, would it be the right job, would it be what God wanted for me? While now as I am looking for work I am a lot more calm. I have got an increased trust in Jesus, that no matter where I end up in life, God will use me as he sees fit. Increased belief, increased trust changes the way I live.

Let me clarify again, my increased belief is not a measure of how good I am, what it reflects is my greater understanding of who I have my belief in. Reading the bible, attending church, talking to other Christians has increased my appreciation for the wonderful person that Jesus is.

And that's what John wants to show here. He wants to show how the miracles, the signs can point to who Jesus really is, can show his grace and power.

Lets have a quick look at how this miracle shows these 2 characteristics of Jesus.

John shows that Jesus is gracious. Despite being surrounded by a crowd who are focused on his miracles and not him and that the man requesting the miracle may well have worked for the evil king Herod, Jesus still heals the man's son. Jesus is gracious. But if the man had focused on his pride or his

entitlement as an official he would miss the grace, he would have thought he deserved it, but instead he heard Jesus word and believed.

And John wants us to see not only the grace of the healing, but the power of it. The boy was dying and Jesus power meant that all he needed to do was speak a few words and the boy was healed. Not only that the boy was 25 km away in Capernaum and it was immediate. John draws special attention to that. John says in verse 53, Then the father realized that this was the exact time at which Jesus had said to him, "Your son will live." At the very moment Jesus spoke, it was done. Jesus showed amazing power, but the danger is if we become too familiar with Jesus we can lose an appreciation of that power.

This miracle reveals to us who Jesus really is, it shows his grace and power. It allows us to increase our trust in him, to know that he is the one who wants to save us by his grace and has the power to do it. In knowing Jesus better, our belief in him will increase.

In our passage today, we see a man hearing Jesus words and believing in them. He goes home, trusting that his boy would be healed. May we go home wanting to know Jesus more, to hear his words and believe in him.

May God remove all wrongful pride, all false entitlement, all blinding familiarity, and reveal to us the glory of the grace and power of Jesus. Amen.