

I Met Jesus: a Desperate Dad and a Paralytic Man

John 4:46 - 5:18

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Steve DeWitt

People describe being in the military or at war in different ways. One I have heard is, *Hours of boredom punctuated by moments of sheer terror*. That seems to fit. Life is like that. The day-to-day of life follows a certain rhythm; a routine. The hum-drum of day-to-day living whispers to us that this is the way it will always be. Then suddenly something happens. Something shocks us. Something knocks us over the head and we find ourselves forced to decide if what we say we believe is actually what we believe. Our faith is tested and its true value is revealed.

For this message I'm calling those, "must have faith" moments. My faith either activates to trust God when I don't know the outcome, or its absence is revealed. As a pastor I often see people in these moments. *I lost my job. I lost my spouse. I lost my health. I lost my adult child's affection. I lost my financial security. I lost my friend*. You may be in such a time right now. Something important to you is in danger. You can't see where it's going. Your default setting is worry or anger. You are in a faith crisis. Your faith is either going to activate trust and obedience to God in spite of the circumstances or not. It's a must have faith moment.

Today we meet two men whose lives intersected with Jesus. They both were in crisis. One was sudden and traumatic. The other was a long term trial. In both cases, their response to Jesus revealed the true nature of their faith. Our text today is John 4:46-54 and also 5:1-18. I want to read the chapter 4 text to begin.

"So [Jesus] came again to Cana in Galilee, where he had made the water wine. And at Capernaum there was an official whose son was ill. When this man heard that Jesus had come from Judea to Galilee, he went to him and asked him to come down and heal his son, for he was at the point of death. So Jesus said to him, "Unless you see signs and wonders you will not believe." The official said to him, "Sir, come down before my child dies." (John 4:46-49)

The Desperate Dad (John 4:46-54)

He was from Capernaum

This is significant because Jesus is in Cana, 25 miles away. Think about the distance from here to Chesterton.

He was a government official

He worked for Herod.

He was a dad whose little boy was dying

His son had a severe fever of some kind. It was so bad that it was obvious to everyone that he was nearly gone.

So let's put this together in the story. Jesus left Samaria and went the rest of the way to Cana. Cana was important because it is where He performed the first miracle. At a wedding he instantly turned huge vats of water into wine. That will make you famous and popular in any town including our own. Sometime later, Jesus returns to Galilee. I can see the townspeople, "Jesus is coming – quick! Go fill the tub with water!" According to John, this was the only miracle Jesus had performed at this point in the story.

Back to the dad. He lives in Capernaum, 25 miles from Cana. After Jesus turned the water to wine, word spread about it all the way to Capernaum. This man was a government official. He was in the know. A miracle in Galilee was big news. He heard about it and probably thought, *Hmm...that's interesting*. He probably thought little else of it. Time passed. He was a relatively new father. He had a son. At some point, his son took ill.

Those of you who are parents, you know what it is like when your child is sick. I see the Facebook posts, "Up all night with puking child...yay!" When the illness turns more serious, parents feel a deeper level of burden. They love their child and they want him or her to be healthy and safe. Parents haven't changed. This dad felt the same. No doubt they had tried all the remedies available to them at the time. As a government official, he had connections. There were doctors back then (Luke being an example) and the doctors had been called in, but to no avail. His son grew weaker and weaker.

Can you feel his growing desperation? The boy wasn't getting better, he was getting worse. The doctors couldn't do anything. Time was against him. What could he do?

Somewhere in the recesses of his mind, he remembered hearing about some guy in Cana who had turned water into wine. That's all he knew. We read the story and we do so from the perspective of everything else we know about Jesus. Many of us grew up singing, "He's able, he's able, I know he is able, I know my Lord is able to carry me through. He heals the brokenhearted. Sets the captive free. Makes the lame to walk again. Causes the blind to see. He's able..."

We read the story and think, *Of course he went to Cana, Jesus was the healer*. Jesus heals the boy. Everything's fine. Cue the sunset and happy music. This dad didn't know that. He likely didn't even know Jesus was in Cana. It was simply the last thing he'd heard about him. He was in Cana. All he knows is that Jesus turned water into wine. How do you get from miracle wine-maker to miracle child-healer? If He can do the one, maybe He can do the other.

With no other alternatives and all hope fading, he decides to walk the equivalent of a marathon to Cana. A man in our church is doing this today. He's running the Chicago marathon...basically twice. Fifty miles. The same distance as this dad. It was a fifty mile round trip. There was no Nike engineered footwear. No water booths along the way. Why go so far? For his son. I'd like to think every dad here would do the same. Off he goes.

He arrived in Cana, found Jesus *and asked him to come down and heal his son, for he was at the point of death*. (Verse 47)

What I want you to realize is that the man asks Jesus to walk with him (come down) all the way back to Capernaum. Why? It stands to reason that if Jesus is going to heal his son, He has to be there to do it. See him. Touch him. He needs to be at least in the same room, right? His "must have faith" moment has arrived.

Jesus said to him, "Go; your son will live." (Verse 50)

Imagine the look on this man's face. Jesus is his last hope. His assumption for the 25 mile walk was that he had to convince Jesus to walk back with him to Capernaum. Jesus makes it clear that He's not going. But He tells the dad to go. To leave Jesus is to leave the only hope he has. But to stay would be to go against what Jesus has said. He is confronted with whether or not Jesus could speak healing into a boy two counties over. Can He say it in Cana and it be true in Capernaum? Making wine is one thing, but who could do this? Who is this Jesus?

Do you find yourself in this kind of a dilemma today? Life has you in a crisis moment where you either believe what God says in His Word for real or you don't. Must have faith moments are when we have to obey God in the dark. We are standing in Cana, but our hearts are in Capernaum. We read the promise in Cana, but we wonder if it's true in Capernaum. The man can't call and find out. He can't send a quick text before leaving Jesus. Is God calling you to trust Him in Cana without knowing what awaits you in Capernaum?

These are the hardest times, aren't they? We want to know in advance how it's going to work out. IF I do what you say and head for Capernaum, what am I going to find? But this is the essence of faith, *"Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen."* (Hebrews 11:1) This is where the dad is at. Do I beg Jesus to come? Offer him money? Drag him? Or do I believe that the man who turned water into wine can turn a sick boy into a healthy one by simply speaking? It's a must have faith moment.

The man believed the word that Jesus spoke to him and went on his way. 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." (John 4:50-54, emphasis added)

The Paralytic Man (John 5:1-18)

Quickly I want to move into chapter 5 and the story of another man. I won't spend as much time on this, but it tells the same faith paradigm.

"After this there was a feast of the Jews, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. Now there is in Jerusalem by the Sheep Gate a pool, in Aramaic called Bethesda, which has five roofed colonnades. In these lay a multitude of invalids—blind, lame, and paralyzed. (John 5:1-3)

Imagine the scene at the famous Bethesda pool. Around the pool is a collection of people with the worst diseases of the day. Blind. Lame. Paralyzed. Why? There was a superstitious belief that when the waters of this pool stirred, the first one in was healed. There are many natural explanations for water stirring. But when you are desperate to be healed and all you have is the legend of the stirring of the waters at Bethesda's pool, guess where you would go. The story focuses on one man in particular.

One man was there who had been an invalid for thirty-eight years. (John 5:5)

Can you imagine? He was unable to move his legs for 38 years. Who knows how long he'd been sitting by this pool waiting; hoping for healing? I don't want to overstate this, but realize what this meant as he sat there day after day. He couldn't move anywhere to use a bathroom. His bodily functions are all over him. His look. His clothes. His smell. Along with

everyone around him, they are all clinging to a superstitious hope. Who goes to a place like this? Why would Jesus go? I think He had someone there He wanted to meet.

When Jesus saw him lying there and knew that he had already been there a long time, he said to him, "Do you want to be healed?" The sick man answered him, "Sir, I have no one to put me into the pool when the water is stirred up, and while I am going another steps down before me." Jesus said to him, "Get up, take up your bed, and walk." And at once the man was healed, and he took up his bed and walked. (John 5:6-9)

Jesus' question seems too obvious. Of course he wanted to be healed. Why was he there? Why had he been there all these years? Being healed was the goal of his life. To walk was a fantasy almost beyond belief. He lived in a day when walking was necessary to function in society. They didn't have motorized wheelchairs and specialized equipment. If you couldn't walk, you couldn't function. If you couldn't walk, you didn't have the dignity of normal life. This was his life for 38 years. He also had no one to get him into the pool. We see in this his relational loneliness. There was no family there. No friends there. Probably long abandoned by them. Further, everyone around him is in competition with him to get into the water. No one cared for him personally. No one was there to come to his aid.

Then one day a fellow walks up to him and asks a question, *"Do you want to be healed?" Umm...I'm sitting here by the pool, am I not? Yes. A thousand times yes. Thirty-eight years yes. But I can't get into the water.*

Jesus replies, *Get up, take up your bed, and walk.* It's his must have faith moment. Hmm...He could have said, *"Nice try. I've had other well intentioned people say the same thing. I've tried to move these legs a million times. They don't work. That pool is my only hope."* But he didn't. He took Jesus at His word. He heard. He believed. That faith activated and caused him to do something. He obeyed. And he walked. His situation was different from the desperate dad, but his faith did the same thing. It trusted in the word of Jesus and acted on it.

Important Theme in John - Faith Believes Without Seeing

The best example of this is after Jesus' resurrection and the disciple named Thomas (John 20:24-29). When Jesus first appeared to the disciples after His resurrection, Thomas wasn't there.

So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord." But he said to them, "Unless I see in his hands the mark of the nails, and place my finger into the mark of the nails, and place my hand into his side, I will never believe." (John 20:25)

We see in Thomas the natural man, our natural selves without faith. Finish this statement: *I have to see it...to believe it.* But it doesn't work that way, does it? God regularly puts us in situations where we can't see the outcome and where we have to trust God for what will happen. *Faith believes without seeing.* The ultimate example of this is Thomas at the end of this gospel.

"Eight days later, his disciples were inside again, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side. Do not disbelieve, but believe." Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!" Jesus said to him, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed." (John 20:26-29)

This last verse always strikes me because I think Jesus is talking about me –those who have not seen and yet have believed. To trust in Jesus’ most fundamental claim to be the Savior of the world requires me to believe in someone and something that my eyes have never personally seen. I didn’t see Him die. I didn’t see Him after his resurrection. Yet, I believe. Not irrationally, but faith always requires me to believe in the dark; to trust when I cannot see.

Why does God require such a faith?

Examples of this in the Bible are too many to list. *Abraham, go to a land I will show to you. Abraham went. Noah, it’s going to rain. “What’s rain?” Build a boat. Joshua, walk around Jericho seven times and yell loud. “What?” Esther said, “I am going into the court of the king and if I die, I die.”* On and on it goes. What’s the commonality? Living by faith requires me to activate my faith into obedience even when I don’t know what will happen. Living by faith requires me to leave Cana and head for Capernaum trusting that my son will be healed.

God is glorified by us when we trust Him in the dark, when we cannot see the outcome; when we don’t know what will happen. We need to see these moments for what they are – must have faith moments! God is testing my faith. He has me right where He wants me.

I had a conversation with a woman facing a trial. She didn’t know what would happen. She wasn’t sure she wanted to go through with what God’s Word called for. I had the privilege of sharing with her. *Do you trust him for your eternity? Oh yes. That he will take care of you beyond the grave? Oh yes. If you can trust him for that, can you trust him for this trial? Hmm....*

We celebrate that saving faith is a gift from God as Ephesians 2:8-9 tells us, *not a result of works, so that no one may boast.* What we miss is that walking by faith is the same faith applied to the lesser challenges we face. When our life is in crisis, when our child is sick, when we are desperate, these are the moments when our confidence in God’s ability to save us in the future also believes God can save or sustain us in our present. A desperate dad and a paralytic man show us what that looks like.

Can you follow their example? Can you stand in your Cana and believe God’s in control in your Capernaum? *Yes, but I’d like to call Capernaum just to make sure.* We all would, but then that wouldn’t require faith, would it? Faith is the confidence of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. It’s the “not seeing” which glorifies God as we rely on His ability to sustain us.

Who is the Real Star Here?

Finally, the star in this show isn’t the dad and isn’t the paralytic. Let’s not miss the wonder here. Jesus puts on quite the power display here. He speaks and far away a boy is healed. He speaks and paralyzed legs suddenly can walk. These and all his other miracles authenticated His claim to be the Son of God. His word is that powerful.

He spoke and galaxies were created. He spoke and our beautiful world suddenly existed. Someday He will speak again. His voice will summon the dead from the grave. He will speak and Satan will be defeated. He will speak and judge the nations.

Making wine was no big deal when compared to healing a boy, raising the dead, culminating human history. John begins his gospel with the wonder, *In the beginning was the Word*.

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