

INTRODUCTION

A lexophile is someone who loves words. Each year The New York Times has a lexophile competition and invites people to submit funny statements made by the strategic use of words. Here are ten of the winning statements. Warning: Some of these are groaners, but that's while I love them.

1. I've been reading a book about anti-gravity. I just can't put it down.
2. When you get a bladder infection, urine trouble.
3. When chemists die, they barium.
4. I stayed up all night to see where the sun went, and then it dawned on me.
5. I changed my wireless headphones' name to Titanic. It's syncing now.
6. England has no kidney bank, but it does have a Liverpool.
7. I know a guy who's addicted to drinking brake fluid, but he says he can stop any time.
8. A dentist and a manicurist got married but they fought tooth and nail.
9. A bicycle can't stand alone because it's just two tired.
10. The guy who fell onto an upholstery machine last week is now fully recovered.

There are many important words in the Bible. And one of the most important words is FAITH. We live in a world where people say, "Seeing is believing." But in the Bible, we find that the opposite is true. Faith means Believing is Seeing. In this message we are going to study an episode in the ministry of Jesus where a man exercises great faith.

If you recall when we started this series last May, I told you that John organized his story of Jesus around seven signs, or miracles. The first sign was changing water into wine in John 2. The miracle we will examine today is the second sign.

John 4:43-54. After two days he left there for Galilee. (Jesus himself had testified that a prophet has no honor in his own country.) When they entered Galilee, the Galileans welcomed him because they had seen everything he did in Jerusalem during the festival. For they also had gone to the festival.

He went again to Cana of Galilee, where he had turned the water into wine. There was a certain royal official whose son was ill at Capernaum. When this man heard that Jesus had come from Judea into Galilee, he went to him and pleaded with him to come down and heal his son, since he was about to die.

Jesus told him, "Unless you people see signs and wonders, you will not believe."

"Sir," the official said to him, "come down before my boy dies."

"Go," Jesus told him, "your son will live." The man believed what Jesus said to him and departed.

While he was still going down, his servants met him saying that his boy was alive. He asked them at what time he got better. "Yesterday at one in the afternoon the fever left him," they answered. The father realized this was the very hour at which Jesus had told him, "Your son will live." So he himself believed, along with his whole household.

Now this was also the second sign Jesus performed after he came from Judea to Galilee.

In our American economy, the U.S. dollar is our currency of exchange. But in Heaven's economy, faith is the currency. In Matthew 9:29 Jesus said to a blind man, "Let it be done for you according to your faith." He didn't say "let it be done for you according to your fortune, or according to your feelings, or according to your family." And contrary to what most people think, He didn't say, "Be it done for you according to your F.A.T.E." He said, "Be it done for you according to your faith."

Years ago I read a little poem that says: Doubt sees obstacles; faith sees the way. Doubt sees the darkest night; faith sees the day. Doubt dreads to take a step, faith soars on high. Doubt questions, "Who believes?" Faith answers, "I!"

In this message, I want to share with you three levels of faith.

I. SHALLOW FAITH: "I'll believe when I see some sign."

Jesus told him, "Unless you people see signs and wonders, you will never believe." (John 4:48 CSB) When Jesus returned to Galilee His presence created a stir. They had heard about some of the miracles He had performed in Jerusalem. And they wanted Him to do some more miracles. Now, you may be a little confused because I just pointed out that there are seven signs, or miracles highlighted in the Gospel According to John. Yet, it seems as if Jesus is resisting the idea of performing signs and wonders to a skeptical crowd.

There is a difference between demanding a sign, and Jesus willingly offering a sign. The idea of requiring Jesus to perform a miracle in order for people to believe, doesn't produce real faith. It only produces a short, shallow, superficial faith.

In Matthew 12 Jesus said that a crooked and depraved generation demands a sign. So finally Jesus said, "Okay, you want a sign? The only sign I'm going to give you is the sign of Jonah. "As Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of a huge fish, so the Son of Man will be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth." (Matthew 12:40 NIV) So Jesus was crucified and laid in the heart of the earth for three days. And then, "Boom!" He came forth alive and said, "Here's your sign." But still the Jewish leaders didn't believe Him.

We still live in a generation of miracle-mongers. They demand some signs or wonder from God. They want emotions. They want dreams. They want icicles going up and down their spine and angels playing tic-tac-toe on their ribs.

In 1977 Maria Rubio, a resident of New Mexico, was frying a tortilla for her husband's breakfast. Suddenly, she saw a thumb-sized burn mark on the tortilla that looked like the face of Jesus. She took it to her priest, who blessed it and she set it up in a shrine in her home. Over the years, thousands of people traveled to her home in Southwestern New Mexico to worship and leave flowers there. Sadly, after thirty years, in 2007, the tortilla finally dried up and broke apart. That's just one of thousands of similar stories where people have sought to find a sign for God's existence.

I'm really not making fun of those people. We are by nature, skeptical people and our fallen nature wants to find something tangible so we can say, "Seeing is believing."

They say, "Confession is good for the soul—but it's bad for the reputation." I have confession to make. When I was in high school, I was really seeking the Lord. One night I was standing on the shore at Lake Jackson, which was a large natural lake in the middle of our little town. The moon was shining on the water, and I was praying. I said, "Lord, I really want to SEE you. Will you just appear a moment for me? I even looked at the reflection of the moon on the ripples of the water and tried to conjure up some human shape. I said, "Please, Jesus, let me see you just once and I will never doubt." And do you know what happened? Nothing. Have any of you ever done anything like that? Be honest. I've confessed. But even though I've never seen Jesus with my natural eyes, I have seen Him a million times with my eyes of faith.

And of course, I believe God is a God of might and miracles. He can do anything. For instance, if He wanted to He could cause each one of us to levitate right out of our seats and float in the air for ten seconds, then gently set us back down.

And if that happened people would be Facebooking, Instagramming, and Tweeting away. People in East Texas would start flocking to our worship services. Next Sunday, there wouldn't be an empty seat anywhere. You think parking is difficult now! We'd have twenty thousand people show up next week. But within a few weeks, if God didn't perform another magic trick, they'd all be gone. That's shallow faith. There's another level of faith I would call:

II. DESPERATE FAITH: "I'll believe if God will help me in a crisis."

We read in our text, "Sir," the official said to him, "come down before my boy dies." (John 4:49 CSB)

We meet a man who is called a royal official from Capernaum. We don't know his name, but it probably meant that he was a member of Herod's family or court. He had heard about the miracle of turning water into wine that Jesus had performed in Cana. So he traveled the twenty miles up the steep hill from the shore of the Sea of Galilee to Cana. He was desperate for a miracle because his son was dying. He begs Jesus to come back down to the lake and heal his dying son.

There's nothing wrong with his request. In fact, we all often call on God out of a sense of desperation. I've said many times that God meets us at the POTD—the point of total

desperation. And we learn that this official's faith is perfected as he ends up believing in Jesus as we'll see in the next stage.

But let's pause here at this point and talk about people who only remain at this level of desperate faith. Years ago, during the time of the first two world wars, this kind of faith was called foxhole faith. There was a saying, "There are no atheists in a foxhole." It's the story of the soldier in the heat of battle with the bullets whizzing by and mortar shells exploding. He cries out to God in desperation, "God, I'm not a praying man, but if you will just help me survive this battle, and this war, I will be faithful to attend church and to serve you."

Some men who survived kept that promise to God and others didn't. Sadly, there are some people who never call on God until they come to a place of crisis. You might have prayed a similar prayer in the past. When you faced a financial crisis, did you say, "God if you will just help me out of this mess, then I'll serve you for the rest of my life." Or maybe someone you love is sick and dying, and you said, "God if you will just heal my loved one, I will serve you for the rest of life." As I said, "There's nothing wrong with that kind of prayer unless you are thinking in terms of trying to bribe God with an offer of faithfulness.

Some people keep Jesus on a shelf like an Aladdin's Lamp. And they only reach out for Him when they are in trouble and need a magic genie to appear.

But Jesus wants to be worshipped as Lord, not used like an Aladdin's Lamp. He doesn't want us to only seek Him when we're in a jam. Any parent can identify with this. What if you had a teenage son who only spoke to you when he wanted money or needed the car? And that may be the case in some dysfunctional families but we all know that isn't the ideal communication. Instead, we all long to have a son who says, "Dad, I love you because you're such an awesome father." Or "Mom, I love you because you are an amazing mother."

But there is a better level of faith than shallow faith or desperate faith. God wants you to have saving faith.

III. SAVING FAITH: I take God at His Word.

"Go," Jesus told him, "your son will live." The man believed what Jesus said to him and departed. (John 4:50 CSB) The Lord will meet us at our point of desperation but that's just the beginning. The royal official arrived with the intention of taking Jesus with him back to his home in Capernaum. But Jesus presents a faith challenge to the worried dad. He says, "Trust me. Go home. Your son will live." He was challenging the official to believe without seeing a sign. The official faced a choice. Would he take Jesus at His word, or would he continue to try to persuade Jesus to go with him? And the official chose faith. He didn't argue. He didn't plead. He just started back down the hill toward the lake and to his home.

Do you want to have saving faith? In this episode we can easily trace the three steps to saving faith.

A. Hear God's Word

Jesus spoke to the official. He said, "your son will live, go your way." The official arrived by saying, "You come with me." Jesus said, "No, you go back home." The official didn't argue or plead. Faith doesn't make demands of God.

If you are a child of God today, it started by you hearing the Word of God. Someone told you that all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. Then someone told you that the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life in Jesus Christ. Then someone told you that as many as received him, he gave the power to become children of God, even to those who believe on his name. Somewhere in your past you heard this amazing promise: God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son that whoever believes in Him will not perish, but have eternal life.

And the more you saturate your soul in the Word of God, the more that God will bless you. In this Word you find all the promises of God. Some people talk about a name and claim it faith. But you can't claim it until God has named it. According to Romans 10:17, faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God.

B. Believe God's Word

It actually says in verse 50 that the official *believed* what Jesus told him. If you are going to express saving faith you must believe what God tells you in His word.

I've met people through the years who said something like this: "Oh, I just can't have faith." They are wrong. Because everyone expresses some kind of faith every day. We all exercise faith every time we drive across a bridge; we trust the designer and builder of that bridge. Whenever we sit in a chair, or take a pill, or eat a meal, we are exercising faith. For a Christian, it's not that we have a different faith; it is the OBJECT of our faith that sets us apart. When you drive across a bridge or sit in a chair you trust something you can see. When we trust God we trust Someone we can't see with our naked eye but He is more real than the things we can see with our physical eyes.

Do you take God at His Word? This book is full of promises, but you can only claim them by faith. If your attitude is "I'll believe it when I see it" you'll never see it or receive it.

What if you had a child and you said, "Son/Daughter, I just deposited \$1,000 in a bank account in your name." What if your child said, "Well, I don't want to take your word for it. I want to see the deposit slip. Or I won't believe it until I go online and see that the money is there." It's as if your child is calling you a liar. 1 John 5:10, "The one who does not believe God has made him a liar, because he has not believed in the testimony God has given about his son." Step one of saving faith is hearing God's Word. Step two is believing God's Word.

C. Obey God's Word.

Now there's a time element in the story that you might miss. The royal officer was on his way home the next day when his servants met him. They said, "Your son was healed instantly at 1:00 YESTERDAY afternoon." The royal officer confirmed that was the exact moment Jesus had said, "Your son shall live."

Now, if you had a sick son twenty miles away and Jesus said, "Go home, your son will live." What would you do? You could walk there in about six hours or you could be there in two hours by chariot. A royal officer would have been in a chariot. But instead of leaving that day, it's 24 hours later when he meets the servants with the good news.

So what's up with that? He had so much faith in the words of Jesus, that he didn't rush home right away. Perhaps he spent the night in Cana and started back the next day. He was resting in the promise of Jesus. And the Bible says when he got home he believed and all his household believed. You say, "Wait a minute, I thought he already believed." In Cana, he believed in Jesus for a miracle. When he got home and saw his son he ran and hugged him. He hugged his wife and children and said, "I want to tell you about Jesus. He's more than a miracle worker, He is the Messiah!" And his entire household believed in Jesus. What rejoicing there must have been. This was a double miracle. There was the miracle of healing at a distance, and there was the miracle of salvation that took place in that entire home.

Obedience is the true mark of faith. Are you willing to obey the Lord, even when you don't understand WHY you should do a certain thing? Jesus told him, "Go home. Your son is alive." The officer obeyed the Lord enough to spend the night and then head home as the Lord directed him.

So do you have shallow faith? Do you have desperate faith? God wants you to have saving faith. Have you heard God's Word? Do you Believe God's Word? Will you obey God's Word? Someone said you only believe as much of God's Word as you obey.

CONCLUSION

If you were to ask me, "Pastor, what book can I read to deepen my faith?" I would suggest that you read *The Cost of Discipleship* by Dietrich Bonhoeffer. In this book he wrote: "Faith is only real where there is obedience, never without it, and faith only becomes faith in the act of obedience."

Bonhoeffer was a pastor in Germany when Hitler rose to power. But Bonhoeffer saw the demonic spirit at work, so he was part of a group of pastors who opposed Hitler. He visited the United States and could have stayed and been safe during the war, but he returned to his congregation. He believed Hitler was the antichrist that he was part of an underground Nazi resistance movement. He was involved with one of many plots of assassinate Hitler. That's radical obedience. The plot failed and Bonhoeffer was arrested and thrown into a prison camp. For two years he suffered in the prison camp and used that time to write. Days before the Allies captured the prison camp, he was taken out early one morning and hung. His last words were "This is the end. But for me, it is the beginning of life." He understood that there is no faith

without obedience. The world says, "Seeing is Believing." But God says, "Believing is seeing."
How will you live?

OUTLINE

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STEPS TO SAVING FAITH:

- A. Hear God's Word
- B. Believe God's Word
- C. Obey God's Word

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For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes



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