
Before, we get started on tonight's text, I thought I would tell you something else I found out about the whole story of God sending the lions as a plague against the Assyrians when they invaded Israel.

I came to find out that the lion was this huge iconic symbol for the Assyrians. Two lions stood guard over the temple of Ishtar which was their goddess of fertility and war. The Assyrian kings also built statues in the shape of winged lions with human heads to guard their palaces. In addition, military leaders were required to kill a lion by hand in order to get their commission. This relief shows one of their kings conquering a lion.

So it is really ironic that God chose the lion to be the instrument of His plague on the people that Assyria had relocated to Israel. First of all, you have to know that the lions were not native to the land of Israel but were native to Assyria. Second, if these military leaders were such fierce lion killers why were they not able to conquer the invading lions? You see, God was making His presence known. Not only was He going to require them to honor Him and cry out to Him for deliverance, He wanted the King of Assyria to know He was supreme to any god or goddess that they worshiped and that the only reason he is able to have any success in war is because the God of Israel has allowed it and has appointed it. God is the God of the lion as well as every nation on the earth and no one can thwart His purposes.

This is a message that the King of Assyria ultimately had to learn the hard way. In his arrogance, he decided to pursue his military ventures beyond Israel (where God had sent him) and attempt a takeover of Judah in the South. This was during the time that King Hezekiah reigned in Judah. Assyria seized Jerusalem and all seemed hopeless but the King of Assyria made a crucial error, he pitted his gods and his power against the God of the Jews. He mocked the Jews saying that the

gods of no other nation have stood against their power so why do they think the God of the Jews will stand a chance. Big mistake; huge!

King Hezekiah took their taunts and their blasphemies to the Temple of the Lord and he prayed for help. The Lord told Hezekiah not to worry and assured him that the Assyrians will not be successful in their siege. That night an angel of the Lord went out into the camp of the Assyrian army and killed 185,000 troops. When the surviving Assyrians woke up in the morning they were surrounded by nothing but corpses. Just imagine 185,000 dead soldiers. That is 2x the population of Boulder proper and 2/3 the population of the entire Boulder metropolitan statistical area. Can you imagine waking up and practically everywhere you went people were dead. The King of Assyria immediately withdrew in defeat. Never forget the fact that God always reigns supreme and He is sovereign over the nations and over all the affairs of men. The King of Assyria would have been wise to have submitted to His rule and His Word.

Let's read our primary text for tonight's study:

John 4:43-54

At the end of the two days, Jesus went on to Galilee. He himself had said that a prophet is not honored in his own hometown. Yet the Galileans welcomed him, for they had been in Jerusalem at the Passover celebration and had seen everything he did there. As he traveled through Galilee, he came to Cana, where he had turned the water into wine. There was a government official in nearby Capernaum whose son was very sick. When he heard that Jesus had come from Judea to Galilee, he went and begged Jesus to come to Capernaum to heal his son, who was about to die.

Jesus asked, "Will you never believe in me unless you see miraculous signs and wonders?" The official pleaded, "Lord, please come now before my little boy dies." Then Jesus told him, "Go back home. Your son will live!" And the man believed what Jesus said and started home.

While the man was on his way, some of his servants met him with the news that his son was alive and well. He asked them when the boy had begun to get better, and they replied, "Yesterday afternoon at one o'clock his fever suddenly disappeared!" Then the father realized that that was the very time Jesus had told him, "Your son will live." And he and his entire household believed in Jesus. This was the second miraculous sign Jesus did in Galilee after coming from Judea.

When I first read this text and started to study it I was uneasy. I did not really understand how or why this story was placed here by John. After this whole event with the Samaritans it just seemed to be kind of a kludge jump and I was not sure why he did this. So far, what we have seen in this gospel is a very connected story line with a continual message; and to me this just did not fit. So I was praying and praying over the text and God helped me see how this story perfectly connects with everything we have studied so far.

What we have is a story of contrasts. John does not want us to miss what has happened and what is happening. John wants us to see the difference between those who have heard and believed verses those who have seen and refused to believe. He wants us to be shocked over the fact that those who should believe, those who claim to be the true seekers of God actually are the one who refuse to believe. It's not that they have not heard and it's not that they have not seen; they just did not really like what they heard and had seen. This stands in stark contrast

to those Samaritans who were considered by the Jews to be godless and in steeped in paganism; yet, they are the ones who believe based only on what they heard. These contrasts are powerful and still speak to us today in the context of our own immediate surroundings. In addition, this story also brings to light a contrast between the messengers or the evangelists which God sent and highlights the ridiculousness of those who refuse to believe.

When I read verse 43-45 I honestly thought that this was a good thing. After all, it is clear that those in Galilee had a radical shift in attitude toward Jesus and were actually starting to warm up to Him and they welcomed Him back to the area. This stands in contrast to a previous time where John makes it clear that they did not take too kindly to Him. Clearly what they saw in Jerusalem really impacted their view of Jesus. If you remember He had that power encounter with the Pharisees where He cleared out the Temple and we are also told He did some miracles during that time. They were present and the whole thing must have been so impressive that they started to soften in their attitude and bitterness toward Jesus. So this is a good thing right? Sure they started off a little hard hearted but this shows that they are slowly changing and willing to adjust their perspective of things.

Well, it may be a good thing but I do not think that is the primary take away from this text; in fact, I think the take away is just the opposite. Let's go back to the story behind John's comment: "Jesus had previously said a prophet is not without honor except in his hometown." Turn to Mark 6.

Mark 6:1-6

Jesus left that part of the country and returned with his disciples to Nazareth, his **hometown**. The next Sabbath he began **teaching** in the synagogue, and **many**

who **heard** him were **amazed**. They asked, "Where did he get all this **wisdom** and the power to **perform** such miracles?" Then they **scoffed**, "He's **just** a carpenter, the son of Mary and the brother of James, Joseph, Judas, and Simon. And his sisters live right here among us." They were **deeply offended** and **refused to believe** in him. Then Jesus told them, "A prophet is honored everywhere except in his own hometown and among his relatives and his own family." And because of their **unbelief**, he couldn't do any mighty miracles among them except to place his hands on a few sick people and heal them. And he was **amazed** at their **unbelief**.

So the Galilean's initial reaction to Jesus was less than friendly and even borderlines on the side of raw hostility. Why do you think they would they be deeply offended over the fact that Jesus taught them with such incredible wisdom and had the power to heal their infirmities? It just does not make any sense. This has always bewildered me. What did He do to deserve this reaction? Was it jealousy? Was it pride? Were they just bad people? After all He spoke with the wisdom of God and they clearly knew He had the power to perform miracles which no ordinary man could do. So what was their problem? It's not like everyday someone comes along who can legitimately heal people. You would think that instead of being all ticked off they would have been a little awe struck. Besides, what's the big deal with the fact that they knew Jesus' family and knew that Jesus was "just" a carpenter?

I am speculating here, but maybe they were offended because they felt ripped off, lied to, deceived, and even betrayed. In their mind, Jesus had been holding back on them. After all, He lived in that community for 30-years and if He had this power all along, why did He not step up and help them out a long time ago. Why

did He let so many people in their little village die or suffer with disease and poverty? Maybe they were thinking of all their friends and family members and each memory just inflamed their anger. Then add the element of human pride and the next thing you know they are scoffing at Jesus in unbelief. Or, then again, maybe they were just bad people.

One thing that is interesting is that this gives us some incredible insight into Jesus' statement in *John 4:34* that He lived only to do the will of the Father. Clearly, the Father did not let Jesus give anyone a preview to His future ministry or even a hint as to who He really was and the power that He had. For years the Father required Jesus to just watch and wait in silence until the time that He had set for Jesus to begin His ministry. This is amazing and powerful. Jesus' submission to the Father's will was not just nice sounding religious talk, it was real and real people were upset and offended by it.

If Jesus is our example, then our life should similarly be marked by seeking and waiting on the Father and doing only what our Father tells us to do. Sometimes that will mean times of wonderful work where we are busy in peoples' lives and experiencing God in amazing ways, but other times it will mean standing alone where your life has seemingly little to no impact on others. Remember, the "to do's" of your life and the "outcomes" of your life are God's to manage; they are not your responsibility. Your responsibility is to abide in Him and stay so close in fellowship with God that you trust Him with your life and you refuse to take the matters of your life into your own hands. This is radical Christianity and if you live this way, believe me, like the Galilean's, people in your life will not be too happy about it. But this is how Jesus lived and as *Ephesians 5:1* says, we are to follow His example in all things.

So that was the previous encounter that Jesus had with those in Galilee. But this time, having worked through their anger, they actually welcomed Jesus because of what they saw in Jerusalem at Passover. John is very careful in His word choice. Notice that John makes a point about their willingness to welcome Him because of what they saw (the power encounter He had with the Pharisees and the miracles He performed during that time). This is to stand in stark contrast to the immediately preceding verses where the Samaritans believed because of what they heard. The Samaritans are the key to fully understanding these verses. The reason John gave us this story is to compare and contrast those in Galilee with those in Samaria.

John 4:39-42

Many Samaritans from the village believed in Jesus because the woman **had said**, "He told me everything I ever did!" When they came out to see him, they **begged** him to stay in their village. So he stayed for two days, long enough for many more to **hear** his message and believe. Then they said to the woman, "Now we **believe**, not just because of what you told us, but because we have **heard** him ourselves. Now we **know** that he is indeed the **Savior** of the world."

So let's start with the contrasts. Jesus first went to the Jews in Galilee and they flat out rejected Him despite acknowledging His great wisdom and power to work miracles. They heard, they saw, and refused to believe. The Samaritans, on the other hand, believed just by hearing Him speak. There was no indication that Jesus performed any miracles or displayed any super natural power in Samaria, but still they believed that He was the Savior of the world based on His words alone. In fact, what is astonishing is that many believed before they even talked to Jesus just

because of what the woman had said. Try and fathom that; many believed based solely on the testimony of an immoral woman whom they had collectively stigmatized and exiled. This is crazy when you compare the messenger that God sent to the Jews. First of all they were sent a man and not a woman. Culturally, this is huge. They were also sent the son of a priest, a holy man, John the Baptist; yet, few believed based only on His testimony. John had also been busy at his job for a while letting people know that the kingdom of God was at hand. He was sent by God to prepare the hearts of the people and lead them in repentance. John's profile, his calling, and his ongoing ministry were impressive. Contrast that with this Samaritan woman who was nothing to her people and yet her testimony that one afternoon led to a huge revival in the village of Sychar because they were willing to believe based on what they heard.

Also, that word many is impressive when you consider that the Jews not only had the witness of John the Baptist but they also had the testimony of the Father on the day that Jesus was baptized. Can you imagine? They heard God speak and say: "You are my beloved Son, and I am fully pleased with you." Yet, consider that even after all of that testimony only two of John's followers left to follow Jesus—only two (Andrew, Peter's brother and the unnamed disciple, which is presumably the Apostle John). What a contrast to those in Sychar who streamed out of the village to go and meet Jesus.

Notice also that the Samaritans begged Jesus to stay with them—they begged Him. Yet, the most those in Galilee could muster up was a welcome. Jesus also stayed only 2-days in Samaria, but that was long enough for many more to hear and believe and declare that He was the Savior of the World because they heard His words. We don't find the Jews begging Jesus to stay with them and teach them the truth. They want to see more signs before they will believe. 2-days in Samaria

and we see a revival, Jesus spent most of His 3-years of ministry going through Galilee and Jerusalem and still most of the people refused to believe. The contrast is unbelievable.

This whole dynamic got me thinking about the message God has shown us about walking in the Spirit of God and understanding how to live from the *New Creation* verses the *Old Man*. For those of you who do not understand what I mean by those terms, the *New Creation* is simply a reference to that part of our being that God has birthed new in us when we gave our hearts to Jesus. It is the dwelling place of the Holy Spirit and is the very mark of true Christianity. You can go to church all you want, you can even be a Bible expert, but unless the Holy Spirit of God has taken up residence in your being, in this *New Creation*, the Bible says that you are not a Christian at all (**Romans 8:9**). For some that may be hard to hear, but it is for this reason that true Christianity is not a *religion*, but it is an opportunity to be in relationship with the living God through the presence of the Holy Spirit. It is what distinguishes us and marks us as belonging only to God—as being His children. Our *Old Man* is simply a reference to our sinful nature or our flesh. That part of us which is irreparably broken and stands in continual opposition to God.

So when I talk about walking by faith in the Spirit and learning to live from the *New Creation*, I am talking about letting God have such control and domination over your life that your sinful nature, your *Old Man*, is muted and has little ability to influence and direct your life. By the way, this may seem like a new message because of the terms I use to explain it but it is not; it is the core of New Testament teaching. And believe it or not there are others out there who are teaching it.

Getting back to my point, I believe we will find that as God takes this message of walking by faith in the Spirit of God outside of our little community, those who have been somewhat disenfranchised within the *religion* of Christianity or who

have long been disillusioned with its methods and results are going to much more readily embrace this message than are those who define their life by the *religion*. I think, absent an unbelievable work of the Holy Spirit, those who are beholden to the *religion* of Christianity will largely refuse to believe the truth by hearing it alone. They have so much invested in the *religion*: family tradition, hours upon hours of involvement, relationships, careers, and so on. Thus, their willingness to be open to, much less adopt, this message will be more dependent upon their seeing the contrast. In other words, when they see and experience those who walk in the Spirit supernaturally bearing the fruits of the Spirit, I believe (or hope) that they will desire the same kind of relationship with God. But make no mistake; they will have a massive battle on their hands as they try to wrestle free from the bulwark of religion that has been entrenched in their heart and minds. It is likely that they will respond similar to those in Galilee.

Which is why I think it is interesting that God chose Boulder as a place to center this message. Think about it, in a lot of ways Boulder is very similar to Samaria. It has a very strong spiritual heritage, and still remains an intensely spiritual place, but those in this community have been, without question, disillusioned with the *religion* of Christianity and have for the most part walked away from it. As a result, they have turned to so many other avenues as an attempt to find some truth for their life or to have any kind of real experience with God. And, as you know, those in Boulder try very hard and have picked a little of this and a little of that and have smashed and merged together so many spiritual ideas and practices all because they still have not found what they are looking for. But I believe that, like the Samaritans, deep seeded in their conscience is a passion for God that is hungry and ready for truth—truth that will bear the fruit of love and peace. I am praying that, similar to what happened in the village of Sychar, God will use each of you to

bring His message of freedom, hope, love, and peace to those in Boulder and I pray that they will believe based on what they hear and that many will come and experience intimacy with God.

Like the disciples, however, we need to lift up our eyes and see what God is doing right around us with the people that we come into contact with day-in and day-out. I believe that God has been preparing a harvest and He wants us to be part of this marvelous work.

Now, as we move on in the text, the story of this government official and the healing of his son is really just a reiteration of the contrasts which John wants us to understand: the contrast between hearing and seeing, between believing and refusing to believe. But in this story the contrast is between those in Galilee and this government official.

John 4:46-48

As he traveled through Galilee, he came to Cana, where he had turned the water into wine. There was a government official in nearby Capernaum whose son was very sick. When he heard that Jesus had come from Judea to Galilee, he went and begged Jesus to come to Capernaum to heal his son, who was about to die. Jesus asked, "Will you never believe in me unless you see miraculous signs and wonders?"

So Jesus is traveling through this area, which is the region where He grew up, and He lands at this little town of Cana where He performed His first public miracle. This government official, like the Samaritans of Sychar, came out of his village and begged Jesus to come to his home. Further, like the Samaritans who

believed that Jesus was the Savior of the world this man is convinced that Jesus can save his son. So far so good, this man seems different than the other Galileans. So why does Jesus respond to this man in a way that seems so hostile?

We have to understand His audience. Jesus was communicating a powerful lesson not just to this official but to all the Jews who “welcomed” Him. Do you really need to see? Do I really need to go there? Can’t you just believe that I Am! Can’t you just ask trusting that I am the Savior of the world? You have heard my words, why do you need to see me do anything? Don’t you yet understand that all I need to do is say the word, for everything I say always comes to fruition?

John 4:49-50

The official pleaded, "Lord, please come now before my little boy dies." Then Jesus told him, "Go back home. Your son will live!" And the man believed what Jesus said and started home.

This man was still not tracking with where Jesus was going and we find that He is still pleading with the Lord. But Jesus is not going to accommodate either His wrong belief or unbelief. Jesus is not going to bend to this man’s will. Instead, He is going to demand that this Jew, like the Samaritans before him, would make the choice to believe because of what He said, not because of what He does.

Jesus makes His point and then turns to this man and tells him to just go home and said that his son will live. He gave the word! Like the woman at the well who set down her jar and ran to the village, this man yielded his demands believing that Jesus words alone had the power to give life. Notice that this official did not ask

for assurances and he did not double back to ask again if his son would really live. He believed Jesus' word and he kept on walking.

This is so powerful. This is what God desires of us – He wants us to hear His Word, believe and then take action. This is what births true faith – actively believing the truth found in the Word of God. It is not enough to just hear and it is not enough to say we believe. We are to demonstrate by our choices that we really do believe. We are not to confuse coming to Jesus while demanding Him to do things the way we want them done with walking by faith in the Spirit of God in submission to His Word. Those are two entirely different things and they stand in stark contrast with each other.

Many of us get caught in this religious delusion. We read our bibles, we go to church, we pray, and our lives are filled with many “Christian” activities, but we continue to beg God to do things our way. Again, coming to Jesus, while demanding our own will, is not synonymous with true faith. True faith requires us to yield our lives to His care and relinquish control of our will to His.

If we were brutally honest, none of us here has done a very good job of managing our own lives and we have no ability to control what happens around us and to us. Yet, we still act as if we are well suited to guide and direct our own lives as if we have the wisdom to know what to do and when to do it. And just the thought of relinquishing control to some intangible “God” causes us to become paralyzed with fear.

This was true for me when I started my journey of learning what it means to walk by faith in the Spirit of God. I was terrified to let God be in control. I said I trusted Him, after all He is God, but honestly, my choices proved that I trusted myself more. This is the reason why I held a death grip on the control of my life. I wanted God to first prove Himself to me (as if His dying on the cross and forgiving

me from all my sins was not proof enough). I demanded more, I wanted a sign. I wanted to know that He was going to have goodness and blessing for my life and that He was going to lead it according to what I thought was best according to my definition of good. Honestly, I really did not like His definition of good. I felt that many of the paths that He had led me down were not the best path and I thought He could have done a better job at directing my life. So in my foolishness and ignorance, I held on and wrestled with God for control of my life.

But like this man, and the Samaritan woman at the well, God was not going to placate me and let me stand in my unbelief and wrong belief. He demanded, and continues to demand, that I acknowledge my true place in life: I am not God; He is. He is the “I Am” which makes me the “am not”! Thus, I need to continually bow my will to His will. I need to listen to His words and believe and stop demanding Him to prove Himself to me. I need to let His Word have its rightful *authority* in my life such that I choose to follow what He says, even if I don’t necessarily like it. I need to believe Him when He told me that He loves me and everything that He has allowed in my life has been an expression of His love.

This is what Jesus desires of you. Like my experience, I know that many of you are in the midst of a similar struggle, white knuckling your relationship with God. You love Him, you want to experience Him, but you don’t like His methods and His ways. You believe they are simply too narrow and you don’t like the fact that they do not leave any room for your personal concessions. Well, simply stated, God wants all of you, period! And He wants you to choose to believe the truth and take the easier path to knowing and enjoying God. He wants you to be like this government official or the Samaritans and not like the unbelieving Galileans or the King of Assyria who refused to believe the truth and lived to regret it.

John 4:51-54

While the man was on his way, some of his servants met him with the news that his son was alive and well. He asked them when the boy had begun to get better, and they replied, "Yesterday afternoon at one o'clock his fever suddenly disappeared!" Then the father realized that that was the very time Jesus had told him, "Your son will live." And he and his entire household believed in Jesus. This was the second miraculous sign Jesus did in Galilee after coming from Judea.

These verses are so comforting. Jesus' words will always triumph. He will always do exactly as He says. If He has ever made you a promise, you can trust in the fact that He will do for you exactly what He said. It may take some time since all things must be done according to the Father's timing, but it will come to be. This is a truth you can rest in.

To close this passage, John moves us away from contrasts to similarities. What happens when a person experiences true faith? Others follow. In the case of the woman at the well, many in her village believed. In the case of this government official, his entire household believed in Jesus. I believe that if you grow in this regard and start trusting God with your life, and learn to live only to do the will of the Father, others will follow you. They will want what you have. You will get to be a part of helping believers and unbelievers turn their hearts to Jesus and experience true life. Let me tell you, that is an experience you will always savor, like a bite of your favorite desert. It is amazing when God uses you in other people's lives and I pray that each of you get that privilege.

Romans 10:17

So faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ.

I pray that each of you will choose to believe based on hearing alone for God will always be God and will always do exactly as He has said. He is worthy of our trust, He is worthy of our worship, and He is always trustworthy. So please stop the wrestling match, stop demanding God to do it your way, stop begging for a sign, and yield your will to His and experience the effect of true faith as it works in and through your life.

Let's Pray