

A Miracle in Absentia John 4:43-54

Tom Landry was the Hall-of-Fame football coach of the Dallas Cowboys. He once said, "My job as a coach is to make men do what they don't want to do, in order to achieve what they really want to achieve." In John 4, Jesus was that kind of leader as well. Sometimes blunt, sometimes confrontational, but always loving to give what was needed to have saving faith.

This story takes place in Galilee, a place not always receptive to Jesus. He even states that "a prophet has no honor in his own country" (4:44). Where the other gospels use this statement to reflect Jesus being rejected in Galilee (Mt. 13:57; Mk. 6:4; Lk.4:24), John uses it to give us a time when Jesus is received well in Galilee.

Word has gotten all the way to Capernaum that Jesus is back in town. A nameless and worried father hears the news and rushed 20 miles away on a road that climbed over 1,300 feet, to Cana because his feverishly sick boy is dying. While most translations call him a "royal official", in the original text, he is literally a "king's man" a member of Herod's court. None of that matters to this dad, as he pleads for healing for his boy.

Jesus' response is unexpected (v.48). But Jesus is not speaking about the man, but to the people, who like many today, seek the "sizzle" but miss the "steak." Jesus looked for people to trust and follow Him in real faith, rather than just for the miracles. Jesus' response is encouraging the man to have the kind of faith, that's not dependent on signs and wonders, but the truer and richer faith that trusts God even without them. Jesus desired to do something even greater than heal this man's son. He wanted to transform the life of the father and coach him toward a more durable faith.

In his desperation, the dad won't be deterred (v.49). His faith has led him to leave his son to seek out Jesus, but it's not a fully formed faith as he begs Jesus to return with him to Capernaum to heal the boy. But Jesus says (original text), "You may go. Your son is living." Jesus answers the man's prayer while giving him the opportunity to believe at a deeper level of faith. His message to the man is, "Don't just believe what I can do for your son. Believe in who I am."

This is a miracle in absentia. There are miracles in this miracle. A sick boy is healed, but the desperate faith of a panicked dad, is replaced by true belief. The man takes Jesus at his word without seeing the proof. He believed before he even saw or knew.

While heading home, he runs headlong into his servants who share the good news he already knows. His son has been healed. Exactly at 1 PM, the day before when he heard Jesus speak the promise that his son lives. Even twenty miles away, his son gets better with a personal visit from Jesus. Jesus grants life by the power of His word.

The man's belief had collateral blessings. His entire household, family, and servants, believed in Jesus. They represent more of what Jesus said in the preceding story about a ripe harvest. Jesus is doing the work the Father sent Him to do and is nourished by His obedience. The miracle is not the destination, the harvest is.

Just like Landry said, the job of a coach to make us do what we don't want to do to achieve a larger goal. And what larger goal is there in life than to grow our belief in Jesus and bring others with us?

4 Questions:

1. Someone once said, "Seeing is believing." When did you have to take Jesus at His word and how did it grow your faith?
2. What is the difference in believing in Jesus and believing Jesus?
3. Read Hebrews 11:1, Galatians 2:8-10, Romans 10:8-13, 1 John 2:1-11 and Galatians 5:16-25. What are some vital steps in real faith and where are you in your faith journey?
4. How does this sign reveal the glory of God and confirm Jesus' identity?