

Sermon Text: John 4:46–54 (ESV)

⁴⁶ So he came again to Cana in Galilee, where he had made the water wine. And at Capernaum there was an official whose son was ill. ⁴⁷ 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. ⁴⁸ So Jesus said to him, “Unless you see signs and wonders you will not believe.” ⁴⁹ The official said to him, “Sir, come down before my child dies.” ⁵⁰ Jesus said to him, “Go; your son will live.” The man believed the word that Jesus spoke to him and went on his way. ⁵¹ As he was going down, his servants met him and told him that his son was recovering. ⁵² 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.” ⁵³ 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. ⁵⁴ This was now the second sign that Jesus did when he had come from Judea to Galilee.

Believe in Jesus, Not in Miracles

“Do you believe in miracles? Yes!” This famous quote was said by sportscaster Al Michaels in the final seconds of the hockey game between the United States and the Soviet Union during the 1980 Winter Olympic Games. Of the six previous Winter Olympic Games, the Soviet Union had won the gold medal in five of them. They had a team of professional players with a lot of experience. The United States’ team, on the other hand, was not only the youngest team that year, but also in the United States’ history. The odds were completely stacked against them, and yet, somehow, the United States managed to win against the Soviet Union in a hockey game that became known as the “Miracle on Ice.”

“Do you believe in miracles?” When Al Michaels asked this question, what he was actually asking was: “Do you believe that miracles can happen?” In answer to that question, most people would say along with him, “Yes!” But there is another meaning that this question can have. It can also mean, “Do you put your faith in miracles?” Unlike the other question, most people would answer this one by saying, “No!” And yet, when it comes to whether or not someone believes in Jesus, more people may put their faith in miracles than they realize.

In verses prior to our reading for today, we read that, during his journey from Judea to Galilee, Jesus stayed in Samaria for two days, after which he departed for Galilee. When he arrived in Galilee, “the Galileans welcomed him, having seen all that he had done in Jerusalem at the feast. For they too had gone to the feast” (verse 45). These Galileans may have welcomed Jesus because they had come to faith in him, or they may have welcomed him because they saw him as a celebrity due to the miracles that he performed while they were celebrating the Passover in Jerusalem. But, if the Galileans did have faith in Jesus, it was because they witnessed him performing the miracles in Jerusalem. And, if this was the case, they didn’t appear to be the only ones who put their faith in Jesus because of his miracles, for when an official “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” (verse 47). How did Jesus respond to all these people who had come to faith in him because of his miracles? He said, “Unless you see signs and wonders you will not believe” (48).

On the surface, this statement seems to be directed at the official. However, in the original Greek, the word *you* is not singular, but plural. Jesus was not addressing this statement to the official alone; he was also addressing it to all the Galileans who were around him. If all these people truly did believe in him, their faith in him was not built on the firm foundation of his promises. They did not hear what was being spoken about Jesus and believe that he was the one that was prophesied about in the Old Testament Scriptures. They did not base their faith on Scripture alone. They based their faith on the miracles that Jesus performed.

The same is still true today. So many people today refuse to believe in Jesus unless they see definitive proof with their own eyes that what Jesus says is true. For some people, that proof comes through archeological and scientific discoveries, but for others, that proof comes through miracles.

Through his Word, Jesus says, “I am the Son of God. I saved you from your sins by my perfect life and innocent death on the cross. Whoever believes in me has eternal life.” The people of this world then respond by saying things, such as, “If Jesus truly is the Son of God, and if he truly wants everyone in the world to be saved, then he should use the miraculous power that he has as the Son of God to make everyone in the world believe in him. He should miraculously appear before everyone in the world and tell them to believe in him. He should make miraculous signs appear everywhere in the world that clearly state the message that he wants everyone in the world to hear. If Jesus did miraculous things like these, then I would believe in him.” Do the people who make these claims actually mean what they say? Some of them might, but many, if not most, are just looking for a reason to justify their unbelief. And yet, we can all too easily become influenced by their way of thinking.

We look at the poverty that is all around us and see people struggling to feed themselves. We hear about natural disasters that rob people of everything they own, if not more than that. We hear about the wars that are taking countless innocent lives. We mourn the deaths of our loved ones, who we wish we could spend more time with. And we look at our own lives and see how we struggle and suffer. We look at all this pain and suffering in the world and are tempted to wonder, along with the people of this world, “If Jesus truly is who he says he is, why is he letting all of this happen? Why isn’t he using his power to give us a miracle?” If we base our faith on miracles, on what we consider to be important proofs that Jesus is who he says he is, the foundation of our faith can easily crumble away if those proofs aren’t made evident to us.

When the official came to Jesus, he may have come to him because his faith was based on his miracles. However, when Jesus said to him, “‘Go; your son will live.’ The [official] believed the word that Jesus spoke to him and went on his way” (verse 50). Something had changed in the

official, a change that was worked by the Holy Spirit. He no longer needed to see the miracle with his own eyes to believe in Jesus. He simply trusted in Jesus' word, and that word came true. As a result, he, along with all his household, had now come to genuine faith in Jesus. They had the comfort of knowing that Jesus had come to take away their sins, and they had a hope for the future that they would all one day get to spend eternity with him in heaven. In the same way, if we base our faith on Jesus' words, his promises, if we turn to his Word in our time of need, then we not only have assurance that what he says is true; we also have comfort and hope for the future.

Whenever we worry about the daily struggles we have to go through, Jesus says, "Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light" (Matthew 11:28–30). When we worry about not being able to provide for ourselves, Jesus says, "[D]o not be anxious, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you" (Matthew 6:31–33). When we worry about dying, Jesus says, "I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die" (John 11:25–26).

How do we know that future life awaits us? We know it through the most comforting words that Jesus has given us: that he loved us so much that he willingly laid down his own life to save us from our sins. As the apostle Paul says, "God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8). And as the apostle John says, "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16).

“Do you believe in miracles?” If we understand this question to mean, “Do you believe that miracles can happen?” then we can confidently answer, “Yes!” There are all of the miracles that Jesus performed during his earthly ministry; there is the miracle of God bringing us all to faith in him; and, of course, there is the greatest miracle of all: Jesus rising again from the dead on the third day after he had died for all of our sins on the cross. However, if we understand this question to mean, “Do you put your faith in miracles?” then we have to say, “No!” because we have someone who is much better than miracles whom we can put our faith in: Jesus, because he has proven to us through his words that we can put our hope in him.