

The Life of Christ Demonstrated - the Importance of First-step Faith.

And said unto the woman, Now we believe, not because of thy saying: for we have heard him ourselves, and know that this is indeed the Christ, the Saviour of the world. John 4:42.

John has presented a drama in these narratives. That drama is the struggle that goes on within the heart of the sinner. On one hand, as an enemy of God the sinner is prone to reject Christ as Savior. On the other hand, the call of the Gospel is made strong by the Holy Spirit. The Gospel is, after all, good news and as such is attractive to the sinner. So we see this two-way struggle - an apparently small one in the case of the Samaritans. They brushed aside the fantastic claim (make that sign) of the woman and, upon hearing Christ, Himself, accepted Him as *Savior of the world* - their Savior.

This introduces an very important concept of first-time acceptance of the Gospel. The acceptance may be weak or may be strong, but nevertheless that first time response is skillfully dealt with in the hands of the Master.

...Who hath ears to hear, let him hear. [10] And the disciples came, and said unto him, Why speakest thou unto them in parables? [11] He answered and said unto them, Because it is given unto you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not given. [12] For whosoever hath, to him shall be given, and he shall have more abundance: but whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken away even that he hath. Matt. 13:9b - 12.

The context in this passage is this: Jesus had just told a parable that completely went over the heads of those around Him. The reason for this was the unbelieving Jews who did not understand the parables just dismissed them as meaningless and went their way. The disciples, on the other hand, had the spark of spiritual curiosity and asked the Lord to explain the meaning of the parables. We will see that there is a pattern in the way the Lord delivers the Gospel to those around Him. That of peaking interest with the view of followup on the part of the listener. Did you catch the inference that the parables in themselves were not told to make a teaching easy? Rather, the Jews were told the parables to peak spiritual curiosity *and* a step of faith in accepting the authoritative teaching of Jesus - not an easy task for the Jews of the day with their traditional convoluted, rationalistic thinking. What the Jews did in rejecting Jesus' authoritative teaching was to reject Him outright and in doing so lost what little spiritual illumination the Holy Spirit had given them altogether. Their first-time opportunity was gone - forever. Please note His condemnation of the Jews' lack of first-time acceptance: **"...but whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken away even that he hath."** What they had was a spark of understanding *that was given to them* by the Holy Spirit in the quest of calling them unto the Lord. Tragically, they fell into the "ditch" of their rationalistic unbelief and as a result - a terrible condemnation, indeed - they were condemned to remain in that "ditch" and lost the Holy Spirit - illumination forever! A

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terrible indictment, indeed. We just do not know when unbelief takes its eternal toll in the heart of the sinner - it's not up to us to determine it either. It's just a fact of the condition of the heart of the sinner and the sovereign will of the Lord to move on and work on the heart of sinners. However, there are other times when the Holy Spirit will strive with a sinner's heart for years - even decades until he finally is won over the call of the Gospel. However, the challenge is clear for the sinner to: **“Seek ye the LORD while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near: [7] Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the LORD, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.”** Isaiah 55:6, 7. The tragedy of our account in Matthew 13 is that the Jews *knew* this passage from Isaiah and yet they, in their stubbornness, still rejected Jesus' call unto Himself. Let's look at John 4 and 5 and note two examples of first-time faith that had happy endings.

The First-time Faith of the Nobleman.

So Jesus came again into Cana of Galilee, where he made the water wine. And there was a certain nobleman, whose son was sick at Capernaum. [47] When he heard that Jesus was come out of Judaea into Galilee, he went unto him, and besought him that he would come down, and heal his son: for he was at the point of death. [48] Then said Jesus unto him, Except ye see signs and wonders, ye will not believe. [49] The nobleman saith unto him, Sir, come down ere my child die. John 4:46 - 49.

This was a desperate call by the nobleman. He had heard of Jesus' first miracle - the turning of the water into wine. Indeed, he may have been at that very wedding and witnessed Jesus' first miracle. This was certainly not a stellar example of strong faith (for example the faith of the Centurion of Matt. 8:5 - 13). However, it was a glimmer of faith and he persisted even after being challenged by Jesus that he was just “tricking” Him into doing another sign. He persisted his plaintive request: **“...Sir, come down ere my child die.”** The Lord uses any and all circumstances to bring sinners to Himself - even gravely ill children of parents. Would this nobleman have sought out the Lord if his child had not been gravely ill? Perhaps not, but we know from the context that he was already mulling over in his mind the possibility that this was the Messiah, even though it was not directly stated, the results certainly pointed to that inclination.

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So we see a progression of a glimmer of response to the call of the Gospel given to this man - his child falls gravely ill and his inclination, given his already spiritual curiosity, was to go to the Lord and seek resolution to his calamity. Certainly not a classic in soul-winning but the Lord was ready with the remedy. After the nobleman's heartfelt response the Lord gives him his request but with a requirement of faith:

Jesus saith unto him, Go thy way; thy son liveth. And the man believed the word that Jesus had spoken unto him, and he went his way. John 4:50.

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This is the first step towards this man's saving faith. His actions certainly go against the grain of common Jewish thinking. Jesus was direct in His teaching. He had authority in His demeanor and for the most part, the Jews resented that. Not this man. He was obedient in faith and returned home:

And as he was now going down, his servants met him, and told him, saying, Thy son liveth. [52] Then enquired he of them the hour when he began to amend. And they said unto him, Yesterday at the seventh hour the fever left him. [53] So the father knew that it was at the same hour, in the which Jesus said unto him, Thy son liveth: and himself believed, and his whole house. John 4:51 - 53.

Now the rationalistic mind of the man kicks in (finally!). When his servants told him that his son's fever was gone, he asked when it happened - the same time that Jesus had commanded him to return home because his son was going to be well. Here is how Jewish rationalism *should* work. He put two and two together and come to the conclusion that Jesus was, indeed the coming Messiah and not only did he believe but he evangelized his whole house and they all believed. Certainly he remembered the passage from Isaiah 35: [3] **"Strengthen ye the weak hands, and confirm the feeble knees. [4] Say to them that are of a fearful heart, Be strong, fear not: behold, your God will come with vengeance, even God with a recompence; he will come and save you. [5] Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped. [6] Then shall the lame man leap as an hart, and the tongue of the dumb sing: for in the wilderness shall waters break out, and streams in the desert."**

The Weak Faith of the Impotent Man.

Let's turn to John chapter 5.

And a certain man was there, which had an infirmity thirty and eight years. [6] When Jesus saw him lie, and knew that he had been now a long time in that case, he saith unto him, Wilt thou be made whole? John 5:5, 6.

For the sake of the lesson I will not go into the details of the pool that was near the sheep market - the point for us to zero in on was the hopeless condition of this man and his persistence for hoping for a cure. This man had been unable to get around for 38 years. His hope was a false one - the stirring of the waters of the pool by an angel was at least fanciful. Lenski calls this popular tradition superstitious but there the man was sick and hopeless in his quest for a cure. Jesus seeks him out among the multitude that was there and asks him if he wanted to be well. What follows is an interesting insight into the man's situation. Towns made an interesting chart called "Excuses by th Pool." I offer it for your edification.¹ Please note the excuses and wonder at the idea that Jesus will go to great lengths to seek out the lost *in spite of their "baggage" of false conceptions of the real answer for their sinful condition.*

¹ THE GOSPEL OF JOHN BELIEVE AND LIVE, Elmer Towns, page 49.

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Excuses by the Pool (John 5:7)

His Excuses	Our Excuses
<i>I have no man</i> "	<i>"There is no one around to help me" - dependence upon people rather than God.</i>
<i>"When the water is stirred up"</i>	<i>"The conditions are not just right for a miracle" - dependence on circumstances rather than God.</i>
<i>"To put me in the pool"</i>	<i>"This is the wrong place to expect God to do a miracle" - limiting God to work only in certain Geographic areas.</i>
<i>"While I am coming, another steps down before me"</i>	<i>"Somebody always seems to be getting in my way or hindering the situation" - blaming others for past failures rather than focusing on present possibilities.</i>
<i>"Now it was the Sabbath" (5:9)</i>	<i>"He did great miracles" - limiting God to having only worked during a particular period in the past.</i>

Please let's not limit these excuses to the performance of miracles - let us include the opportunity for salvation. This man had many excuses why he was failing in his quest for wholeness. He had imposed upon himself limits for God's solution. God can do the impossible - in ways we cannot imagine. Let us remember that when we are sharing the Gospel with others - *especially with family members*. They may have excuses why they cannot come to that all important decision for Christ but remember that we can ask the impossible - we can ask that Jesus can brush aside the imposed limitations and affect the "cure" for sin. Let's go on to the exciting result of Jesus' response to the man's excuses:

Jesus saith unto him, Rise, take up thy bed, and walk. [9] And immediately the man was made whole, and took up his bed, and walked: and on the same day was the sabbath. John 5:8, 9.

Have you noticed that Jesus is direct in His evangelism? Sure it doesn't say that the man "believed" in Christ as Lord - he did obey after being healed - no small point here because he was about to take upon himself the stigma of working on the Sabbath - it mattered not to him. He obeyed Christ, picked up his bed and walked away healed and a very grateful

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man. The command by Christ to "sin no more" is an interesting one but implies that the man did just in his lifestyle as a converted man. We do not know the specifics of the man's total response because we are carried immediately to the flap by the religious leaders because this miracle was performed on the Sabbath - a totally bizarre response to what should have been a wonderful "bath qal" pointing to the authority of Jesus work but, tragically, just fed fuel to the fire that Jesus had done work on the Sabbath. We'll cover that next time, Lord willing. The point here is that we should not limit the Lord in His ways of bring all sinners to Himself. He has the authority and the means to bring the sinner to Himself no matter what the circumstances are.