

THE RADICAL RABBI: "A RADICAL POWER" (John 4:43-54)

8.2.20

INTRODUCTION

I'm a sports guy (no secret there) so, when I think of power, I often think of it in the context of a moment in some game I saw that absolutely scorched my memory banks. I'm old enough to have seen some great and powerful homerun hitters - Harmon Killebrew of our own Minnesota Twins, who once hit a homerun completely out of Tiger Stadium in Detroit, and was the only player to hit a homerun into the left field upper deck in old Met Stadium in Bloomington (where the Mall of America sits now)- a blast estimated at 520 feet (that's just under a tenth of a mile!). I saw mammoth homeruns from Mickey Mantle of the Yankees and Reggie Jackson when he was with the Oakland A's (who once hit the top of the scoreboard in right-center field at Met Stadium). In their new baseball home at Target Field, I saw Torii Hunter put one in the leftfield third deck (as high as those seats go). And Jim Thome hit a homerun against the Kansas City Royals back in 2011 into the upper deck in right-center field, that is the longest homerun ever hit in the new ballpark - estimated at 490 feet. Amazing how far some of those homerun balls traveled.

Well, today we're going to be talking about another display of long-distance power - in a wonderful sign of who He was provided by our Radical Rabbi. Before we begin, let's **look to the Lord in prayer.**

TEXT (John 4:43-54)

After the two days he left for Galilee - John 4:43.

Now remember when last we left Jesus, He had been spending two days in the Samaritan village of Sychar - at the express invitation of the locals. But that time had now come to an end, so He and His disciples were resuming their journey northward back to their home territory of Galilee. Incidentally, it is just under 50 miles from Sychar in Samaria to Cana in Galilee (2-3 days' journey on foot).

(Now Jesus Himself had pointed out that a prophet has no honor in his own country.) - John 4:44.

It is interesting that John inserts this statement here because, up to this moment in his gospel, Jesus had never mentioned anything like this. But we need to remember that John was writing his gospel sometime around 85-90 AD, many decades after the scenes he is describing, and several decades after Matthew, Mark and Luke had been written. As Jesus is about to begin the Galilean period of His earthly ministry, John is setting the stage for a measure of the response that Jesus will be encountering - events to which John in his writing is looking back upon.

When He arrived in Galilee, the Galileans welcomed Him. They had seen all that He had done in Jerusalem at the Passover Festival, for they also had been there - John

4:45.

This "hometown boy" came back with quite a reputation. After all, while in Jerusalem, John reported that Jesus had performed many "signs," John's signal that Jesus was doing some miraculous things that were making people believe in Him. And of course, it probably didn't bother anyone in Galilee that the Jewish leadership in Jerusalem had had their stuffy, pompous noses tweaked by Jesus' clearing the temple of all the merchants and moneychangers - who most people thought were rip-off artists anyway. So of course, He was welcomed back.

But John had also laid the groundwork for the ultimate rejection of Christ in earlier verses that let us know that, despite outward appearances, people were far more interested in what Jesus could do - particularly for them - and far less in considering who He actually might be.

- 1) In the introductory section of this gospel: ***He (Jesus) was in the world, and though the world was made through Him, the world did not recognize Him. He came to that which was His own, but His own did not receive Him - John 1:10-11.***
- 2) Jesus' viewpoint to the response in Jerusalem: ***Now while He was in Jerusalem at the Passover Festival, many people saw the signs He was performing and believed in His name. But Jesus would not entrust Himself to them, for He knew all people. He did not need any testimony about mankind, for He knew what was in each person - John 2:23-25.***

What is ironic is that the Samaritans - defiled outcasts, according to most Jews - gave Jesus the kind of unconditional welcome that He desired from His own people. To our knowledge, there were no "signs" performed during His time in Sychar; nevertheless, people came to believe in Jesus, as John wrote, ***because of his words - John 4:41a.*** They even told the woman who had initially told them about Jesus: ***"[W]e have heard for ourselves, and we know that this man really is the Savior of the world" - John 4:42b.*** His words were sign and wonder enough.

That means that the "welcome" Jesus is experiencing in Galilee is superficial at best. They seem overjoyed to see Him based on what He has done - the signs, the showy stuff. But in a sense, this is ultimately a rejection of Jesus. Why? Because they are ignoring who He is and thus ignoring what the signs are meant to be telling them. So, they are welcoming Him - but only so far.

Now, for our purposes, this is also sort of a threshold we will be crossing. Up to now, John has been pretty much our only source of material on Christ's initial ministry. But now, as He returns to Galilee, the other gospels - Matthew, Mark and Luke - will begin contributing their perspectives, which are initiated by Christ's arrival in Galilee, where His ministry will remain for quite a while. So, as He begins to minister in His home province, we find these words to describe those first days from a couple of the other

gospels:

- 1) *Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God "The time has come," He said "The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!" - Mark 1:14-15.*
- 2) *Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit, and news about Him spread through the whole countryside. He was teaching in their synagogues, and everyone praised Him - Luke 4:14-15.*

Once more He visited Cana in Galilee, where He had turned the water into wine. And there was a certain royal official whose son lay sick at Capernaum. When this man heard that Jesus had arrived in Galilee from Judea, he went to Him and begged Him to come and heal his son, who was close to death - John 4:46-47.

Once again Jesus was in Cana, just a few miles north of His hometown of Nazareth. He had been here before: This was where He had changed the water to wine at a wedding. And, of course, Cana was the hometown of Christ's disciple Nathanael.

But as the news spread that Jesus was in Cana, something happened which happened quite often during Christ's ministry - somebody made a long journey just to have the opportunity of meeting with Jesus in the hope that He would do something for them that was desperately needed. In this case, it was a royal official who apparently was head quartered in Capernaum. Being a "royal official" probably means that he worked in the administration of Herod Antipas, one of the sons of the infamous Herod the Great. When this anonymous official heard that Jesus was in the area, he left immediately to find Him, undertaking a journey of about 16 miles - just a bit shorter than getting from Redwood Falls to Vesta, MN. But as all of us who are parents know, we would take any journey, no matter how far or how long, for the sake of our kids. Likewise, for this royal official, making this journey to Jesus is a no-brainer. So, upon arriving and finding Him, he begs Jesus to come with him back to Capernaum to heal his son, who is critically ill with a fever, so much so that the father fears it is terminal.

"Unless you people see signs and wonders," Jesus told him, "you will never believe" - John 4:48.

Now the "you" in Christ's statement - "you people" - is plural, indicating Jesus is addressing not just this man but also the crowd inevitably present at that moment. And even though this man appears to have shown an apparent faith in Him, Jesus detects more the idea of, "My son is sick; I'll try anything - even this guy." But Jesus is also upset by the more prevalent general attitude that He somehow has to prove Himself - with signs and wonders - before people will actually place their trust in Him. Just His word, even His presence, though having proved to be more than enough so recently in Samaria, was apparently not enough here. Now what Jesus is looking for is a trust that will look to Him as the answer for everything, for life itself - every moment, every situation - not just moments of desperation.

The royal official said, "Sir, come down before my child dies" - John 4:49.

Notice something: Even though in human terms this official likely would have authority

over Jesus, in this moment, this man places himself under Christ's authority. He addresses Jesus as "sir." The Greek word here is KURIOS - Lord. But when used in this sense, it is an address that both renders dignity and recognizes authority in the person who is being addressed. In this official's eyes, this Nazarene is more than just a man.

"Go," Jesus replied, "your son will live." The man took Jesus at His word and departed. While he was still on the way, his servants met him with the news that his boy was living. When he inquired as to the time when his son got better, they said to him, "Yesterday, at one in the afternoon, the fever left him." Then the father realized that this was the exact time at which Jesus had said to him, "Your son will live." So he and his whole household believed. This was the second sign Jesus performed after coming from Judea to Galilee - John 4:50-54.

Jesus is initially challenging this man with this proposition: Jesus gives His word that his son will live. The man had at first hoped to bring Jesus from Cana to Capernaum to physically come to the aid of his son. So basically, Jesus is saying: You believed that My power would be enough to make a difference in Capernaum. Are you willing to believe that My power is enough to make a difference here and now, from here in Cana? And John tells us the father's decision: ***The man took Jesus at His word and departed - John 4:50b***, his departing showing his faith in what Jesus had said.

And then, it's such a small, subtle, almost invisible matter, but it's very cool. Notice in the NIV that, when the father meets up with his servants, he asks as to the time that "his son got better." But, in the Greek, this same sentence reads that the father asked as to the time when his son began to get better - literally, "began to amend." The father's assumption is that the process of healing began at the pronouncing of Jesus' word. But then he finds out from his servants that, at the exact, precise time that Jesus declared his son healed, he was in fact, completely healed - no process, just immediate restoration to health.

This certainly showed the power, even at a distance, that Jesus commanded. But in addition to that, how Jesus responded, particularly His words to the man, is actually a very quiet revealing and declaration of His divinity, reflecting the words of God Himself as spoken through the prophet Isaiah: ***"What I have said, that I will bring about; what I have planned, that I will do" - Isaiah 46:11b***. That's exactly what happened here: Jesus said what would happen – “your son will live” - and then brought it about; what He planned, He did. And a son was restored to his health and his father.

And then the purpose of what John refers to as "signs" bears fruit: As a result of this display of both power and compassion for his situation, and understanding all the dynamics involved, this official - and his household - understood just who Jesus was, and they responded with the faith for which Christ was seeking: Not just hope for a moment, but surrender to a loving God who could be with them and provide for them in each and every moment, no matter the circumstances. This became a household of faith and of true worship, responding to who Jesus truly was, exactly the reason for

which John testified that he wrote his gospel: *that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in His name - John 20:31.*

APPLICATION

So, 2,000 years later, what's in this story for us? Let's consider these things:

First, notice how "quiet" these initial signs have been - at least in terms of immediate audience (besides Jesus, of course). Turning the water into wine was done with the knowledge of the servants who obeyed Jesus and then, maybe, Jesus' mother and the disciples. This healing of the official's son was actually a long- distance miracle that was not even completely understood until the man upon his return home was able to get filled in on the details from his servants to understand the magnitude of his son's recovery. Clearly, even in the style of these "signs," Jesus is seeking to impact people with the power of His word. The Samaritans in Sychar certainly came to understand that. Jesus is designing these initial "signs" in John's gospel so that His works do not overshadow the words that present them.

Second, notice the progression of faith that this man exercised:

- 1) First, he made a long journey simply to get to Jesus, perhaps out of the desperation born of "I'll try anything to help my son," but also recognizing that there may be some help available from this Jesus guy. His faith, minimal as it may have been at this time, looked like something.
- 2) Second, after he heard from Jesus that his son would live, *[t]he man took Jesus at His word and departed - John 4:50b.* His faith had grown to the point that because Jesus said it, that settled it- and he could believe it. Again, his faith looked like something.
- 3) And last, as he realized that Jesus' word had in fact been trustworthy, that formed the foundation for his entire household becoming believers. And the "sign" that Jesus had performed achieved its purpose: *that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in His name - John 20:31.* In this case, mission accomplished! It also points out the fact that, as we exercise our faith, it becomes stronger and more impacting, not only on our lives, but on the lives of others.

Third, even though it's early in our study of this "radical rabbi," notice how the "signs" that Christ has so graciously displayed have displayed His sovereignty as King of kings and Lord of lords:

- 1) His changing of water to wine shows His power over nature.
- 2) Today's story of healing an illness from a distance shows His power over space and distance. Jesus will continue to show us that He is complete ruler over any constraints that would put limits on human beings. He is beyond anything of this world.

Fourth, we live in a world of tangible practicality, maybe best summarized by the words: "Seeing is believing." But the Bible vehemently disagrees. Remember the story of the disciple Thomas? Days after witnessing the crucifixion of Jesus, the other disciples had all told him that they had actually seen Him - risen and alive! His response? "You guys are nuts!" They kept insisting. Finally he told them: ***"Unless I see the nail marks in His hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe"*** - Thomas, John 20:25b.

So, what happens? A week later Thomas is with the disciples, behind the locked doors of the house in which they were staying - and guess who appears? Thomas is dumbfounded. Jesus walks right up to him, obviously aware of what he had said a week ago and confronts him with the truth: ***"Put your finger here; see My hands. Reach out your hand and put it into My side. Stop doubting and believe"***- Jesus Christ, John 20:27. I have this picture of Thomas, in a mix of shame at his lack of faith as well as a surge of repentance and joy at the truth, falling to his knees as he exclaimed: ***"My Lord and my God!"*** - Thomas, John 20:28b. But then come the key words for our purposes today: ***"Because you have seen Me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed"*** - Jesus Christ, John 20:29. That is the faith this father exercised - believing not because of what he saw, but because of the words of Jesus that he heard. And because it was Christ's words, it was enough. His faith looked like something!

The apostle Paul very neatly summarized the Christian life in this regard; writing his second letter to the Corinthian Christians, he said: ***[W]e live by faith, not by sight - Paul, II Corinthians 5:7***. That's why Paul encouraged those Christians earlier in that same letter: ***[W]e fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal - Paul, II Corinthians 4:18***. That's exactly what this dad did. Fixing his "eyes" on Christ's healing words was the only "fix" he needed.

OK; now fast forward to us, here and now, today. If we are going to claim to be a people of faith, we need to understand exactly what we mean when we talk about "believing in God" or "trusting in Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior." What are we saying? Maybe better said, what are we acknowledging? Just this: By saying that we place our "faith" in God through Jesus Christ, we are acknowledging that:

- 1) God is love. He is the Creator of love and the Master of love; nobody does it better. That means that everything that comes along our path is coming from a God who loves us completely, absolutely - and perfectly.
- 2) God is infinitely beyond us. If we could understand everything about God, He wouldn't be God - and He certainly wouldn't be worthy of the praise and adoration He commands. That ultimately means that all His ways are perfect and all His outcomes are perfect. Our lack of understanding has absolutely no bearing on what God does. He doesn't need our understanding. He doesn't need

our opinion. What we may view or experience as suffering or difficulty is merely God working out His perfect plans, plans that result in His honor and glory. Taking something out of our lives that may translate as loss to us is simply God's unfolding plan for Him.

- 3) God's word is perfect. His commandments could never be improved and are worthy of complete obedience. We may view them at different times as awkward or difficult but, because God's word is perfect, obeying His word will always have the best outcome. Obedience is the only way to live that matters.
- 4) God works outside of space and time. He doesn't own a watch, and He wouldn't use one if He did. He operates His perfect timing on His perfect schedule, not ours.
- 5) God's resources have been distributed perfectly, as He sees fit. Everything we have comes from Him, and we are not missing one thing that He sees as necessary for our lives. The quantity and quality of our assets (or lack thereof) have been determined by God to be the best complement to accompany His plans for our lives.
- 6) God's answers to prayer are always perfect. By acknowledging this, it is critical that we also acknowledge that "no" or "not yet" or "I have a better idea" are as much an answer from God as is "yes."
- 7) God's sovereignty, His rule, is not only completely perfect but completely perfect in every area of life. He never overlooks or forgets. He never misses. He never plans something that doesn't work out. He rules over every literal second of our lives - every moment of every day from our first moment of our first day.
- 8) God's "senses" are perfect. He sees everything that happens. He hears everything that is said. He even knows every thought and every intention of our hearts. Nobody gets away with anything anytime anywhere because nobody exists for any of their moments outside of the view of God.
- 9) God's forgiveness is perfect - no sin left behind; no sin overlooked. The blood of Jesus Christ was applied to every sin, regardless of size, regardless of impact. When Jesus Christ died, Satan's fate as a complete loser was sealed. He will never be more than a complete loser - with telling God's people lies as his only weapon.

The best demonstration of such a faith? Living out Christ's words: "***[A]part from me you can do nothing***" - ***Jesus Christ, John 15:5b***. What does that mean? "Embracing my helplessness," knowing there is absolutely not one thing I can do apart from God through Jesus Christ. He sustains me, He keeps me. Even the faith to believe in all He is and all He does and all He has promised to do is supplied by Him. Life is truly all about God - and flat-out impossible without him!

The Greek word for "believe" means "to be persuaded of, to place confidence in, to trust, and therefore to live our lives in reliance upon that belief. For Christians, the life of faith,

the life we say we "believe," is very simply letting God be God - His plans, His purposes, His outcomes, His desires. Faith is so completely acknowledging God's sovereign, perfect rule over every area of our lives that we can quite literally rest in the perfect peace of a mind "stayed on" or "steadfast in" Him. And our acknowledging all of these things is the only way that we can live our lives in the "hammock," living a life of complete and perfect peace because we trust that God is in control of everything - He is "holding the ends." We have been offered that life, as Paul said, where we can live ***anxious for nothing*** - ***Paul, Philippians 4:6 (NASB)***. And anxious for "nothing" is precisely what Paul meant. It's what we can know. And in this day and age, that kind of faith is something that the world is desperate to see, and know, too.

CONCLUSION

At the end of the study guide, you'll find this question: "How have you seen your faith in God through Jesus Christ grow and strengthen? In what circumstances is faith still a struggle for you?" One of the goals that I have for us as a church body is that we would grow more and more comfortable both with sharing how we are growing and getting stronger - that can be a huge encouragement to others - and, maybe even more importantly, where we are struggling. This is what family does. This is what Christian brothers and sisters do. We come alongside each other - to pray, to encourage, to walk together. As you consider those questions, consider somebody with whom you could share those things. Obviously I am always available - for all of you.

But the bottom line is this: We've been talking recently about the idea of, when it comes to Jesus Christ, "He must increase, but we must decrease." One measure of His increasing and our decreasing, one measure of our increasing reliance on Him and the lessening of reliance on ourselves: Being quicker to finding the hammock, resting in the awareness that, no matter the issue or the moment or the challenge, on behalf of His Father, Jesus is wanting to let us know: "I got this!" Do we believe that?

We want to be a church that is growing in that kind of faith, growing in our assurance in the word of God through His Son, that we can trust and live and have our being in complete and total confidence in all of God's words and promises. Of all the ways that we can grow as a body of believers, let's make growing in that kind of faith our priority. I'm pretty sure it's God's priority for us as well! Let's pray!