

“A Progression of Faith” (Part 2)
August 11, 2013
Text: John 4:50-54

Even though faith is a gift of the H.S., in some people’s hearts it develops gradually over time until it becomes true/saving faith.

In the text of Scripture we are currently studying, it happened that way in the heart of a nobleman, who served as a royal official to a king.

When his young boy became so sick that death hung over his bed like a dark/ominous shadow, the nobleman went in search of Jesus, who had earned a reputation as a miracle-worker. The nobleman was driven, by love for his child, to seek whatever means of healing he could find.

In Jn 4:43-54, there is a progression of faith in the nobleman’s heart from its lowest form (faith based on what he had heard about Jesus’ ability to work miracles) to faith in its highest form (faith in Jesus Himself as the Savior of his soul).

Last time we saw the first 3 stages in the progression of the nobleman’s faith=>

Stage 1) Faith in Jesus’ fame as a miracle-worker (the least commendable basis for faith)

The nobleman had a false expectation about how X would work a miracle to heal his son=> that He would come

to his house, do some wondrous deed, & heal the boy.

Jesus had chided him for this, saying, “*Unless you people see signs and wonders, you simply will not believe.*”

Still today some people have false expectations about what they’d experience if X saved their souls.

* They’ve been told it involves unusual experiences/phenomena.

* Others have simply conjured up such ideas in their own minds.

So they mistakenly believe something spectacular would happen, if they ever actually became born again.

This might include feelings of ecstasy or despair, dreams, or even out-of-body experiences.

In reality, Jesus usually saves souls w/o such phenomena, and often w/o their even experiencing any sort of extraordinary feelings.

Most of those He saves just quietly exercise simple faith in Him as Savior/Lord, & find eternal life for their souls.

Stage 2) Faith in Jesus based on the nobleman’s love for his son.

This represented a step beyond the nobleman’s original faith at stage 1, but it was still fairly weak faith in Jesus Himself.

It was a stronger form of his faith in X as

miracle-worker, driven by love for his son.

As we saw last time, he was open to this deeper faith in X, because he wanted/needed to believe, that what he'd heard about Jesus' power to work miracles, was actually true.

He had no other hope for his boy's survival.

He was like Peter, who, when Jesus asked if he & the other disciples wanted to leave Him, said, "*Lord, to whom shall we go?*"

I.e., there's no one else who does what You do, and says the kinds of things You say.

The nobleman was also like the Gentile woman who asked Jesus to heal her demonized daughter, saying "*Lord, help me.*"

Jesus replied, "*It is not good to take the **children's** bread [a reference to the Jews] and throw it to the **dogs** [a reference to Gentiles like her].*"

The woman responded very humbly=> "*Yes, Lord; but even the dogs feed on the crumbs which fall from their master's table*" (Matt 15:25-27).

May each of us have such faith in Jesus, that even if He were to rebuke us, we could-not/would-not leave Him, knowing that He is our souls' only hope.

Stage 3) Faith in Jesus based on the nobleman's fear that his son was about to die.

This again is a step beyond stage 2 faith in terms of its intensity, but it doesn't yet reach the level of soul-saving faith, because it is faith in X's power, not in X Himself.

The nobleman pleaded w/ Jesus, "*Sir, come down before my child dies.*"

Even at this 3rd stage of growth in the nobleman's faith, he was still asking Jesus to come down to his house. He simply couldn't believe that our Lord was capable of healing his son at long distance, never even having seen the boy.

His faith was very limited, but it was very intense at this point.

That was because it was driven by his fatherly love.

This should teach us to never stop pouring out our hearts to the Lord when we are gripped by anxiety, because Jesus responded to the nobleman's anxiety, and saved his son's life.

With regard to us as Xns, Paul put it like this in

Phil 4=> "*Be **anxious** for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. / And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, shall guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus*" (4:6-7),

Each of these advances in the nobleman's faith manifested an incremental increase in its growth toward becoming saving faith.

Today we will consider the last 4 stages of growth in the nobleman's faith=>

- * Committed faith
- * Confirmed faith
- * Climactic faith
- * Conflagration faith.

***Stage 4) Committed Faith (a commitment to believe based on X's own words)**

True faith of any kind involves a commitment.

When you pop the tab, & drink the Coke out of a can, you are committing yourself to the belief that whatever is in that can, is not going to be harmful to you.

You may never even see the liquid itself, & you know nothing about the person who made up that batch=> Whether/not he wore a hairnet, whether he washed his hands or wore gloves, whether he came to work w/ a cold or a hangover, or was on drugs.

* Driving your car into an intersection is another commitment of your very life, to the assumption that cross traffic has a red light, even though you may not be able to actually see it. I.e., that the machine which changes the lights is working properly, even though those machines can malfunction just as the machine we're driving do.

We live our whole lives by constantly making such assumptions, committing ourselves to them, & acting on them.

Anyone who thinks he doesn't live by faith ignores the fact that he's constantly making such faith-commitments.

The nobleman in our text knowingly made a commitment to faith—in the truthfulness/reliability of Jesus' words.

[Verse 50]=> *“Jesus said to him, ‘Go; your son lives.’ The man believed the word that Jesus spoke to him and started off.”*

This was a great act of commitment to faith in Jesus' words.

X had not gone to Capernaum as the nobleman had asked.

He, in His sovereign omnipotence/omniscience had fully & instantly healed this child, whom He had never seen.

He did it on His own terms, sight unseen, simply speaking out of existence whatever virus/bacteria had caused the fever/illness.

The nobleman had just said in the verse before this=>

“Sir, come down [to Capernaum] before my child dies.”

He had thought it necessary to somehow get Jesus down to his house in Capernaum in order to save his son's life.

Now he has abandoned that incorrect belief, trusted Jesus' words, committed himself to believing that X had healed his son, & left for home in spite of the fact that Jesus was still 16 miles away from Capernaum.

He did so w/o repeating his request that X accompany him.

This was the moment of truth, when the man decided to trust Jesus, rather than his own preconceived ideas.

He couldn't see his son, so he had no direct evidence of his healing.

But he decided nonetheless to simply believe the Lord, to take Him at His word, and not to ask for anything more.

He (unlike most Galileans) did not require signs and wonders before he would believe in Jesus' power.

He made the right decision & committed himself to it, not knowing by any means other than his faith, that his son's life/death struggle was over, & through Jesus' power, he was saved from death.

He stood upon his infantile faith gained in stages 1 thru 3, & rose by God's grace, to a higher level of faith.

Notice too, that the nobleman acted obediently, based on his commitment to believe Jesus' words.

Jesus had given him a command—“*Go!*”—and off he went.

He responded, believing that when Jesus said “*your child lives,*” it was absolutely true—reliably true.

If he hadn't really believed it, he would have stayed there w/ Jesus, kept begging him to come to Capernaum, or looked for some sort of sign that the miracle had occurred, & that he could now go home confidently.

But “*Your son lives*” was enough for him.

At this point, the nobleman's faith had matured a bit, so that it was now based on Jesus' words alone.

At one time his faith had been based only on Jesus' reputation as a miracle-worker—but no longer, He had grown past that. Nor did he still wait for a sign before he believed.

Jesus had said, "*Go, your son lives,*" and so he went, expecting to find his son alive when he got home.

He couldn't yet see it w/ his eyes, but he could see it in his mind, by his faith.

Allow me to ask you a few questions=> Can you implicitly believe Jesus & His words like that, w/o setting up any other conditions by which He must 1st prove Himself to you?

Can you simply trust His word for it, w/o insisting that He assure you of your salvation, by giving you certain signs/feelings?

You know that His Word says He died on the cross to atone for the sins of those who believe in Him.

That God forgives/forgets those people's sins.

Can you simply believe that, and stop saying to God,

"Make me feel this, & then I will believe it."

Is His Word sufficient for you?

Can you accept it, & go your way, as the nobleman did?

Can you assume that Jesus has saved you, & behave as if you know it to be true (as the nobleman did)?

Can you rejoice by faith in your salvation, saying w/i yourself, “Jesus said, ‘He who believes on Me has eternal life’; I believe on Him, so I must have eternal life”?

Can you say w/i yourself=> “My assurance that I am saved is in the fact that I’ve believed on Jesus as He told me to.

“So I will no longer seek some sort of feeling or sign from God, but will trust wholly on X’s word, & what I know to be my own obedience to it?”

Can you commit your own heart to believing Jesus’ words w/ regard to your soul’s life, just as the nobleman did w/ regard to his son’s life?

***Stage 5) Confirmed Faith**

[Verse 51]=> “*As he [the nobleman] was now going down [back to his home in Capernaum], his slaves met him, saying that his son was living.*”

The boy had been close to death, and everyone had feared that he would be dead, soon.

But the nobleman’s servants met him on the road, & told him that his son had experienced a full/instantaneous/astounding miracle of recovery/healing.

The nobleman’s slaves had been amazed, and couldn’t wait to tell their master about it.

So they'd struck out toward Cana, met him on the road, and delighted in giving him the wonderful news, prob. each one of them talking excitedly over all the others.

[Verse 52]=> "*So he inquired of them the hour when he began to get better. Then they said to him, 'Yesterday at the seventh hour the fever left him'*" [it just abruptly left].

The time of the healing is not clear to us.

"*The seventh hour*" would have been 1:00 P.M. by Jewish time.

On the other hand, it would have been 7:00 P.M. by Roman time.

Which time it was, I'm not sure, but this I do know=>

- 1) By the time the nobleman & his slaves met each other on the road, they were referring to the day of the miraculous healing as "*yesterday.*"
- 2) The nobleman knew his son had been healed at exactly the same time X had said he was healed—the 7th hour (whether 1:00/7:00).
- 3) The healing had not occurred as the nobleman expected. He had assumed his son's fever would gradually subside, as nature took its course, and then he would slowly begin to regain his strength & to feel better.

But what the slaves had seen was an instant/complete healing, which had suddenly caused the child to

spring out of bed, & start acting like himself
once again—a normal/energetic boy.

Everyone was prob. Telling him to slow down lest he
suffer a relapse.

**It was a wonderful thing that the nobleman's faith had come
so far, but it was still growing stronger, being now
confirmed as it was, by the facts reported to him by his
servants.**

He was still experiencing amazement at Jesus' power to heal, far
& beyond his expectations.

God's grace had been much greater than he had anticipated.

He was learning that it was simply impossible to overestimate
the Lord, or to have too much faith in His power.

But that is the essence of what makes such a miracle a
divine miracle.

[Verse 53]=> *“So the father knew that it was at the hour in
which Jesus said to him, ‘Your son lives’;”*

This was the confirmation of the nobleman's faith.

He was now a believer in Jesus' word, if not in Jesus Himself.

And yet he was still discovering new horizons of
X's infinite glory/goodness/power.

His faith continued to grow stronger, as he kept receiving
more from his Lord than he had ever expected.

We can relate to this nobleman, can't we?

He didn't get what he had asked for, because Jesus didn't come w/ him to Capernaum.

But what he got was far grander.

That's often the story of our lives as well.

God's Word tells us to do certain things & live in certain ways, so we do, & then we watch for the results/blessings.

We do see results, but not necessarily the ones we expected.

But as we reflect on those results, we realize how short-sighted our expectations had been, & how gracious & wise our Lord has been, in response to our need and our obedience.

The ultimate result is that our faith is confirmed by practical experience.

And we, like the nobleman, keep discovering how little we know of Jesus, & how undersized our faith in Him actually is.

The faith that first saves is rarely full-grown, and has plenty of room for growth/expansion, until we finally/fully rest our souls on Jesus' Word, not on our own feelings.

Until we can do what David tells us to do in Psa 37:7=>

"Rest in the Lord and wait patiently for Him."

Until our hearts are so fully/finally fixed on the truth that God is true *"though every man be found a liar"*

(Rom 3:4) that nothing can shake our confidence in Him/His-grace/His-power.

***Stage 6) Climactic Faith**

[Verse 53b]=> “*and he himself **believed***”

Before now, the nobleman believed that Jesus’ words were reliable; now he believes in Jesus Himself.

In verse 50, he had believed in Jesus’ specific promise=>

“Your son lives.”

But his belief now in verse 53 is something beyond that.

His faith has become climactic faith, like that of the

Samaritans=>

He believes Jesus is the X, that He is the Savior of men,

& that He is the Son of God.

I.e., he has believed in Jesus unto his own salvation.

Beyond all that, he has, by his faith, formed a personal & loving relationship w/ X, seeking to know Him, not just to use His healing power.

The nobleman had earlier committed himself to believing/trusting

that Jesus’ promise of healing for his son was true;

His trust had been confirmed when the servants reported that the boy had been healed.

He knew that Jesus had fulfilled His promise;

But now the nobleman’s faith reached the climactic level of saving faith in X Himself, & he was born again.

Reflecting on all that Jesus had done for him, he embraced
Him by faith.

**This is something that only believers have experienced;
something to which nonbelievers could never relate.**

They are baffled by our tenacious hold on such faith, because
they don't understand how intensely sure we are of it.

They only know that they cannot argue us out of it.

We have seen/heard/felt/tasted/handled the good Word of
God and the power/joys of the age to come.

They would look at Jesus' promise, and the actual healing of the
boy, & they would call it all a lucky coincidence.

But to us it's something very different—something
wonderful.

We see no coincidence in the fact that X spoke the words,
& the boy was instantly healed at exactly that same
moment.

We can only say to them, "If you had experienced what we have,
you too would acknowledge that what has happened in our
hearts is all the work of Jesus' hand."

We have to believe it, because the change in our lives has
convinced us that God's Spirit is at work w/i us.

***Stage 7) Conflagration Faith**

A conflagration is a fire that spreads & grows large.

In the case of the nobleman, his faith spread to others in his
household like a conflagration of fire.

[Verse 53b]=> “*he himself believed and his whole household.*”

The nobleman had now believed in Jesus in the fullest sense.

Not only as a healer, but also as a prophet, as the Lord God, and
as his own Savior from sin.

**What followed was a wonderful spreading of his faith to
others, over whom he exercised influence.**

* When he arrived home, his wife undoubtedly met him at the
door with tears of joy/gratitude, because their son was
alive/well.

He had fully recovered, & was acting like his normal self.

All their plans for his future had been put on hold while he
was sick, but now they could safely start making
plans once again.

The man’s wife had been devastated by having to watch the
fever rack/ravage her son’s body, and seeing the life
slowly seep out of him.

She must have listened w/ avid interest as her husband
described his meeting with Jesus, & what He’d said
about their son living.

She might have commented on what a wonderful Person
this Jesus must be, if He had the power to speak life
back into their child, and to do so from such a
distance.

Having never seen Jesus, but knowing only what her husband had told her about Him, she herself believed in Him, and she too became saved.

* The little boy was prob. skipping about merrily.

You seldom feel as healthy as you do right after recovering from an illness.

The father explained to him just how sick he'd been, and how close to death, when a Man called Jesus said "*Your son lives,*" & he had been made well instantly. Even a youngster like this boy can believe w/ saving faith. And he had good reason to do so, having felt the power of Jesus, work directly w/i his own body.

* The servants too believed in Jesus as the nobleman described for them his conversation w/ our Lord.

They had watched fearfully as the child's health deteriorated, & they too must have keenly sensed their own total helplessness to stop this tragedy, of the boy's dying.

They may have pictured w/ dread in their minds the terrible scene in which the father would be told about his son's death once he returned from Cana.

How would he take it?

Would bitterness replace his normal kindness, & would they become its victims, due to his reaction to his son's death?

None of that mattered now, because the son was alive/well.
They too placed their faith in Jesus, based on what the
nobleman had said about Him.

**Thus a spark of faith which had begun w/ the father's
hearing about Jesus the miracle-worker, had
smoldered/grown into a fire as he committed himself to
believing Jesus' words.**

Then the fire had expanded into a living faith that had
saved the man's soul.

And now it was a conflagration, spreading from person to
person, in this joyous household, due to Jesus' grace
& power, having saved the nobleman's son.

John concludes w/ a summary of this section in=>

[Verse 54]=> *“This is again a second sign that Jesus
performed [in Galilee; He had performed other
miracles in Judea] when He had come out of Judea
into Galilee.”*

Jesus had shown Himself to be the Son of God through His
miracle-working power.

He had given the people of His own time, & of our
time, every reason to believe in Him, and to
love Him.

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Text: John 4:50-54

Last time we saw the first three stages in the progression of the nobleman’s faith...

*1. Faith in Jesus’ [10 fame] as a miracle-worker

Jn 4:48

*2. Faith in Jesus based on the nobleman’s [10 love] for his son

Jn 6:68; Matt 15:25-27

*3. Faith in Jesus based on the nobleman’s [10 fear] that his son was about to die.

Jn 4:49; Phil 4:6-7

Today we will consider the last four stages of growth in the nobleman’s faith...

***Stage 4—Committed Faith**

4. The nobleman in our text knowingly made a commitment to faith in the truthfulness and reliability of Jesus’ [12 words].

[Verse 50]

5. This was the moment of truth when the man decided to trust Jesus rather than his [8 own] preconceived ideas.

6. At one time his faith had been based on Jesus’ reputation as a miracle-worker, but no longer; nor did he still wait for a [10 sign] before he believed.

7. Can you say, “My assurance that I am saved is in the fact that I have believed on Jesus as He told me to; so I will no longer seek some sort of [16 feeling] or sign from God”?

***Stage 5—Confirmed Faith**

[Verse 51]

[Verse 52]

8. The nobleman's faith had come far, but it was still growing stronger being confirmed by the [12 facts] reported to him by his servants.

[Verse 53]

Psa 37:7; Rom 3:4

***Stage 6—Climactic Faith**

[Verse 53b]

9. Before now the nobleman believed that Jesus' words were reliable; now he believes in Jesus [16 Himself].
10. This is something that only believers have experienced; something to which nonbelievers could [12 never] relate.

***Stage 7—Conflagration Faith**

[Verse 53b-c]

11. The nobleman had now believed in Jesus in the fullest sense; what followed was a wonderful [12 spread] of his faith to others.
12. A spark of faith which had begun with the father's hearing about Jesus, had smoldered and grown into a fire; and now it was a conflagration, spreading from person to person, in this [14 joyous] household.