



## Sermon, Jesus Rewards Faith

Brian D Lima

### Introduction

#### Jesus increases faith.

When I was living in Osaka, Japan, as an English Teacher, I got the opportunity to meet a student, Miwa, who eventually came to faith in Jesus. She told me that just before she heard about Jesus, she had travelled to a famous shrine to pray. She recalled how she and a group of people were not allowed to come close to the shrine because it was considered a holy place. The shrine was set upon a hill and the group gathered below to pray. Miwa admitted that she had been deeply sad about things that were happening in her life so she went to the shrine because it was the only place she thought she could go to for divine help.

She told me that she wasn't really religious so when she prayed she said something like, "I don't know if you exist or can hear me, but I pray that you would help me in my situation." Just after her prayer, Miwa said a gust of wind parted the curtain in front of the shrine and brushed against her face. She wondered if God had given her this as a sign that he answered her prayer. Shortly after this event, she met me and I introduced her to church. There she heard about Jesus and shortly after came to faith in him.

What will today's Scripture passage about Jesus reveal about Miwa's experience? It will reveal that Jesus meets faith even with limited knowledge. It will also show that he doesn't let faith stagnate. He increases faith as well. There is a parable in the Bible that comes to mind that illustrates this.

In chapter nineteen of the book of Luke, Jesus explains the Kingdom of God through the parable of the king who had given his servants a mina (a month's worth of wages according to one commentary) and told them to put the money to good use. When the king returned he asked his servants what they had done with the mina he had given them. One said that he had a return of 10 minas. Another said they had a return of 5. The last servant said they had simply kept the mina and not put it to good use. The enraged king ordered that the mina be taken from this foolish servant and given to the one who had the ten-fold return.

Explaining a principle of the Kingdom of God, Jesus says, "I tell you that to everyone who has, more will be given, but as for the one who has nothing, even what they have will be taken away." The parable teaches a valuable lesson. Jesus searches for those whom the Father is bringing to him. The Father is bringing those who have faith, even if it's only weak. And when people are drawn to Jesus even with a little faith, Jesus meets them at the faith they have and then increases their faith in God and himself.

## Context

Before we unpack our passage, let's remember the context leading up to this passage in John's book. John starts out with this bold statement, which will become a foundational lens for the rest of the book.

### ***John 1:9–13***

*<sup>9</sup>The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world. <sup>10</sup>He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. <sup>11</sup>He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. <sup>12</sup>Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God—<sup>13</sup>children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God.*

John states that all of humanity was created through Jesus. Yet, no one could recognize him. No one would receive him. But the good news was that those that did receive him, those that had even a little faith, would be blessed. This is a foundational truth for our passage because we see in yet another narrative that Jesus enters places (Jerusalem, Bethesda) at special times (Jewish festival and Sabbath) and no one seems to recognize that he is from God. No one seems to notice that Jesus exceeds these special holy places and festivals, these tutors for what God was preparing for them. But there are a few, like this invalid, who had a spark of faith in God; a spark of faith given by the Father. Let us notice what Jesus does with this spark of faith.

### **1.) Jesus Gives Faith**

In John 5:1–9, Jesus enters Jerusalem, the city of the Temple of his Father. And he comes during a Jewish festival, which would have focused Israel on God's provision for His people. Jesus is seen to then approach a pool called Bethesda in which people experienced God's healing power. Jesus approaches many who seek a blessing by God, but one in particular who has faith in God. This one has been an invalid for thirty-eight years and he was lying on the ground unable to approach to pool of Bethesda in order to receive a blessing from God.

Jesus knows that the man has had this condition for a long time. He knows this man is too weak to make it to the pool for the chance of being healed by God. Jesus also knows this man has faith in God. So, he asked him, "Do you want to get well?" It sounds like Jesus' conversation with the Samaritan woman. "Do you want water that would lead to eternal life?" And like the Samaritan woman, the afflicted man misunderstands Jesus. Like the woman who thought Jesus was speaking of water from Joseph's well, the man thinks Jesus is talking about the pool of Bethesda. He says, "I have no one to help me into the pool."

Now, Jesus will build his faith. He says, "Get up! Pick up your mat and walk." And after thirty-eight years of weakness and frailty, the man is instantly healed. He picks up his mat and walks! Now the man knows that there is something, someone, much greater than the pool of Bethesda. God Himself has glorified His power through this man who came to help him when no one else would. And the man who had faith enough in God to try and bring his afflicted body to a pool in Jerusalem for healing, now knows a greater power from God. He now believes in this man who has the power of God to heal. This man would not require the afflicted to come to him for healing, but this man would go out to others who were powerless and make them whole.

## 2.) Jesus Takes Away Faith

But in John 5:10–13, there are some whose faith in God didn't grow. There were those who limited God's transcendence to an earthly religious practice. A religious practice they themselves were better than most in keeping. For them, faith in God was set. They had decided that the Sabbath was to be kept a specific way and there were to be no changes. For these people, these Jewish leaders, all that God could perform was perfectly known by them. So, these men with no faith in anything but themselves, were astonished to see this healed man carrying his mat! Of course, others there were probably astonished that these leaders seemed to have missed the importance of the miracle in front of them! Why weren't they astonished that the invalid was healed? Instead, they only see that a miracle has happened on a day they had decided was not supposed to happen! God wasn't supposed to be "working" in His Sabbath. The religious leaders are concerned that the religion they have set up has been surpassed.

They believe that the Sabbath should be practiced as they practice it and instead this healed man is breaking their rules. By being healed and walking with his mat, the once afflicted man is undermining the laws and rules these Jewish leaders have set out. The healed man walking with his mat is undermining their religious authority. People are noticing that the Jewish leaders really have no faith at all in God's miraculous power.

And because they have no faith in God, they are not blessed with the opportunity for more faith. They don't get to hear Jesus' words. They don't get to see the miracle he performs. They don't even get his name! When they ask the healed man, "Who is this fellow who told you to pick (your mat) up and walk?" The healed man says he has no idea because Jesus had already left. In fact, the author of John's book says that Jesus "had slipped away into the crowd." Jesus avoided the Jewish leaders because they had no faith. Jesus had come to the pool of Bethesda for the afflicted man; to bless his faith in God with more faith; to show him the power of God in something, someone greater than he had known before. For the Jewish leaders, they have no opportunity to have faith. This opportunity has been removed from them.

## 3.) Jesus Increases Faith

In John 5:14–15, Jesus returns to find the man at the pool of Bethesda to encourage his faith in God through him. He finds the man at the temple where he is most likely thanking God for his healing. You may remember in Matthew 8 the account of when Jesus healed a man of leprosy. When the man was healed, Jesus told him to go the temple and "show yourself to the priest and offer the gift Moses commanded, as a testimony to them." And so we find the man who was once an invalid, at the temple quite possibly to do the same as the man who once had leprosy.

And now the man knows that he was healed by Jesus. The same man of God who cleaned up the courts of the temple by driving out those who made that holy place a market for money. Connecting the man who had healed him with the man that others were calling a man of God, the man's faith grows. He only knew that a man of God had healed him, but now he had a name for that man. He now knew it was the same man of God who had been making of a name for himself as a holy man. People were leaving their lives to follow him and were testifying to his great and miraculous works. Jesus had taken the time to find the man he met at the pool of Bethesda to add to that man's faith. Jesus wasn't satisfied to leave the man with such a limited knowledge of himself and his full work on earth.

Even on this point, Jesus doesn't seem to say everything about what he has come to do. Jesus says, "See, you are well again." No doubt the man is filled with joy and relief. He has suffered and been anxious for over thirty-eight years! His affliction must have felt like such a burden. Did the man think it was his greatest burden? He might have felt that it was! But Jesus then opens the man's eyes to an even greater truth in God's Kingdom. He then says to the man, "Stop sinning or something worse may happen to you." Jesus has revealed to the man that something much worse awaits those who remain in their sin. To be sure, being healed of a physical affliction must have been horrible, but to neglect the sacrifice from heaven for sin was to incur a more terrible end. It was an end for some of the Jewish leaders who didn't receive Jesus but instead looked for ways to stop his ministry.

Faith in God is growing in the man who was once an invalid. Now he knows that no matter how horrible his physical affliction was, God was warning him not to neglect more important matters; the affliction of his soul because of sin. Surely, this was a sobering moment; feeling relief that your body was healed, feeling as if you were whole again, to a deeper awareness of the affliction that remains in your soul. And yet, this man of God, this Jesus who healed him has warned him and prepared him to look for a new "pool" in which to be made clean. No doubt the healed man would have followed closely the words of Jesus throughout his ministry in Israel in order to know how his soul would be healed from sin. Jesus has brought this man of little faith to greater faith. He has done this because his desire is that others would become fully mature in their faith in God; that they would know all of God's will for them.

## **Application**

What is our application for today?

### **1.) Jesus calls us to meet people at the faith they have**

Jesus knew the man at the pool of Bethesda had faith to be healed by God. Jesus knew his Father had given the man this gift. So, Jesus blessed the man's faith by granting him his request to be healed. The man had faith to be healed and Jesus blessed that faith with God's power. It is important to see that Jesus meets people with whatever faith they may have.

In Alpha, we get the opportunity to meet people where they are at. Alpha is built on a principle of giving guests the space and time to work out and express exactly what they think about Jesus, meaning in life and God's Holy Spirit. When we ask questions, we can sense the Spirit urging us to listen intently so that we might meet people exactly where they are at. We do this because the Spirit desires to grow faith that is already there!

One night we were having a discussion about why bad things happen in the world. Someone asked why God didn't answer the prayers of Christians. We all discussed the issue a bit and one of our guests interrupted to say something like, "People are responsible for bad things. We mess things up! If God kept answering everyone's prayers by solving the problem, humans would keep messing things up and then keep asking God to clean up their mess." This reply came from someone who said very little when we first started Alpha. Now she often defends God and His Word! Just as Jesus met the faith of the man at the pool of Bethesda, he continues to meet people around us today through us!

## **2.) Jesus calls us to avoid people who merely want to oppose faith**

This is a tough issue for us. It's difficult to withhold help to others. We think we would be judging others if we don't engage them when they confront or challenge us. And yet, we see Jesus avoiding the Jewish leaders, slipping out from the crowd. We should remember Jesus telling his disciples to avoid those cities that would not welcome or listen to their testimonies about Jesus (Matthew 10:14). Why? Because, Jesus said, the fields are ripe with those that do have faith and are ready to receive even greater faith.

It is embarrassing the number of times I've stopped giving and sharing with others because of resistance from others. Isn't that why we sometimes study the Bible as much as we do? Are we studying because we want to do what it says or are we studying to completely rid ourselves of doubt so we would have confidence again in speaking to others? If it's the later reason, it's likely we're still not sharing with others because we're reading to convince ourselves not submit to God's Spirit and call.

We have to avoid those who do not "welcome" our testimony, who don't yet have faith. Our hope is that they would eventually come to faith, even the smallest amount. But there is so many around us that are open to us and our beliefs. There are people whose faith would grow through our faith as we engage with them. We have to avoid those who would detract us from the ripe harvest of souls waiting to be blessed with a more mature faith.

Paul summarized the importance, even beauty of sharing our faith. He said, "How...can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? And how can anyone preach unless they are sent? As it is written: 'How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!'" (Romans 10:14–15).

## **3.) Jesus calls us to increase faith**

Jesus' last words to the man suffering from a disability was to "stop sinning or something worse may happen to him." There is something much worse than being physically impaired or challenged. Being separated from our Heavenly Father is humanity's greatest affliction. Christ calls us to follow him in meeting the needs of people around us and throughout the world. We must encourage one another in our faith to follow him in those efforts. How will our knowledge of Jesus, how will our maturity in Jesus grow if we ignore the pain and affliction around us. Thank the Lord for giving us gifts in our church who would encourage us to engage in these needs as we ought.

And through today's account of Jesus, we know that our giving and sharing will not stop with just physical matters. Jesus is also calling us to follow him as he teaches others their spiritual afflictions before God. We know the Spirit was given to us so that He would glorify the Son in us. Later, in John's book, Jesus says of the Spirit, "He will glorify me because it is from me that he will receive what he will make known to you" (John 16:14). Eternal life in Christ is to be glorified because in him we are all forgiven our sin and granted the right to become God's own redeemed children.

If Jesus is giving to the Spirit gifts and power in order that we might know him more fully so that we might reach maturity in him, then we must know that Jesus is calling us to follow him to serve the physical and spiritual needs of those around us. Where there is hunger we will sense his call to follow

him in feeding others. But we will also sense his call to follow him in pointing them to Jesus himself, the true bread from heaven that sustains souls for eternity.

## **Conclusion**

**1.) Jesus gives faith, so... Jesus calls us to follow him in meeting people at the faith they have.**

**2.) Jesus takes away faith, so... Jesus calls us to follow him in avoiding people who merely want to oppose faith.**

**3.) Jesus increases faith, so... Jesus calls us to follow him in increasing faith in others.**

*Let us pray,*

*Heavenly Father, help us with our faith! If we are not growing into maturity in Jesus, if we're not learning more about him, then we know that our faith is weak and immature. We know that it is not your intent that we would remain so. Your desire, as shown in your Son, is our full maturity in Jesus; fully living out his life, fully living out what it means to be a child of God. Today, we submit to this truth and power. In all that we do today and this week, may You be glorified through Your Son, by the power of Your Holy Spirit.*

*Amen!*