



John 4:43-54  
So That You May Believe: John  
“Desperate for Jesus”

Rev. Brian North  
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Well, on this Mother’s Day, we come to a passage in our journey through the gospel of John where any mother (or father) can relate to: a sick child, perhaps even deathly sick, and an urgent desire for them to be made well.

When our daughter Hailey was much younger – like up until she was almost 4 years old – she would often wake up at night, clearly in gut-wrenching pain. We had numerous visits with doctors about it, but it was kind of a mystery. Doctors concluded that she was “colicky”, that it was something she’d outgrow, and so forth. But something just didn’t seem right.

After we moved from Salt Lake City to Chehalis, we connected with a pediatric doctor in Olympia who asked an interesting question: “Does it seem to be worse when you’re on vacation?” I remember Gwen and I looked at each other, not expecting that question, pondered it for a moment and responded, “Well, actually: yes.”

So, the doctor wanted to run a test on Hailey to see if she might have an intolerance to fructose – something that occurs naturally in a lot of fruits, but of course is also very prevalent in “vacation foods” such as juices and soda pops as well as chips, marshmallows, and all kinds of other foods, even every day ones where you wouldn’t expect fructose – like some breads....fructose is in these things because of high fructose corn syrup. The results of the test showed that yes, Hailey’s stomach simply didn’t process this stuff very well, and as a result it was very painful for her when she did consume these things with either naturally occurring fructose, (like apples) or processed high fructose corn syrup.

While there is no specific cure for it, and some kids do grow out of their intolerance to it, it was an incredible relief as parents to get the diagnosis. That diagnosis was transformative: We immediately cut fructose from the family diet as much as we possibly could so we could take better care of Hailey and she could start living pain-free and with better sleep at night.

And I'll tell you, in some of those nights before the diagnosis, when she was particularly young and was just crying out in obvious pain in the middle of the night, and we'd go in to her bedroom to hold her and try to comfort her and she'd just be as stiff as a board because she was racked with pain...in those moments as a parent you'd do anything to make your child well. Many of you know exactly what I'm talking about, and in some cases, you've dealt with a lot more severe issues than what Hailey's diagnosis ended up being...but before the diagnosis when you're in the midst of it in the middle of the night and you don't know why this is happening, it's kind of scary. We found ourselves frequently crying out in desperation wanting her to be healed.

Today we're reading about a man who came to Jesus who was in that very same kind of spot. In fact, his child – a son, in this instance – is in even worse condition, what appears to be life-threatening. And the father comes to Jesus out of desperation, but in faith – and it's a faith that grows. Let's turn to John 4:43, as we pick up in the gospel of John there and read through verse 54.

**(John 4:43-54)**

So, after going through Samaria, where he spent a couple days teaching and ministering to the people of the town near the well where he had that conversation with a woman, he goes on through to the region of Galilee, where he was headed all along. This is north of Jerusalem, a few days' walk by foot.

While in the town of Cana, which is where he had earlier been and turned the water into wine at a wedding banquet, he is approached by a government official. **Much as Jesus' conversation at the well with the Samaritan woman was a culturally boundary-pushing thing to do, this has similar issues.** This guy works for the occupying government. He could have been a Roman citizen living there in Israel, or he could have been an Israelite who was working for the Roman government – kind of like Russell Wilson going to play for the Broncos...but even more if he had gone to play for the Patriots or the 49ers. Either way, from the Israelite Jewish perspective, he's working for "the bad guys."

And: **This guy is desperate for Jesus to help him out.** Specifically, he's desperate for Jesus to heal his son. He's travelled a way from Capernaum to get to Cana – typically, in their day, it would have been a journey that required an overnight stay along the way. And in fact, we see that when he meets some of his servants on the way back, it's clear that their meeting is on the second day of his journey back, as they report that the boy had been healed the day before at about 1:00, which was at the same time he'd been talking to Jesus. So, this guy has gone to great length to come to Jesus. It's the beginning of a step of faith, and then Jesus draws him further along in this conversation.

Jesus' initial response is about signs and wonders – that this is all people really want to see. This is not the only time we've seen this already here in John. For instance, earlier in John 2:18, the people want a sign of Jesus' authority to do what he's doing. They want to see something magnificent, something astounding. This guy has genuine motivations, however. But maybe the crowd didn't so much. Maybe there was a response there that Jesus picked up on that they just want to see signs and wonders. I say that because verse 48 reads, **“Jesus said to him, ‘Unless you all (plural) see signs and wonders, you all (plural) will not believe’” (John 4:48).** So, Jesus is speaking to him, but at the same time speaking to anyone else there who can hear him, and seems to be addressing their motives.

But the man persists, taking a further step of faith. He again invites Jesus to come to his son before he dies. And then Jesus simply tells him to go on home, and that his son will live. So, he's come to Jesus as a step of faith, like a prayer request where his attitude is “I'll do anything if you'll heal him.” Ever said anything like that to Jesus? “Jesus if you do this thing, I'll believe more than I ever have...Get me this job and I'll tithe 10%; help me pass this test and I'll go on that mission trip...” That's the kind of place where this guy is. But he's shown perseverance in this, and now he takes another step of faith as Jesus doesn't do exactly what he wants, but the guy does what Jesus tells him to do anyway. The guy wanted Jesus to come to his town, and Jesus doesn't do that. He simply tells the guy that his son is healed or will be healed by the time he gets home, while Jesus stays where he is.

And so, the guy takes still another step of faith, trusting that it is as Jesus says it is, and off he goes. You see: **Sometimes Jesus works in ways that we don't fully "get" or understand, and we have to step out in faith and trust.** And sure enough, Jesus shows himself to be trustworthy, and the guy finds out that his son is healed, and it happened just as he was talking with Jesus.

Then, John reports that this guy and his whole household believed because of what they saw. John wraps it up by telling us that this was the second of Jesus' signs, with the first being the turning of water to wine at the wedding earlier on in John 2. After the first one, John tells us that his disciples then believed in him. Now, as a result of this one, we find that this man and his whole household believed. And you may recall from the last couple of Sundays that a significant chunk of a village believed in Jesus – and in that situation it wasn't because of any miraculous signs, but because of Jesus' teaching, because of his words.

**So, John is emphasizing the role of belief, or faith, in Jesus.** He wants us to see that people believed in Jesus right from the get-go, and he wants to share why they believed in him, so that we might also believe in Jesus. Belief in Jesus matters, and John writes this gospel account so we'd come to that realization. That's his desired outcome.

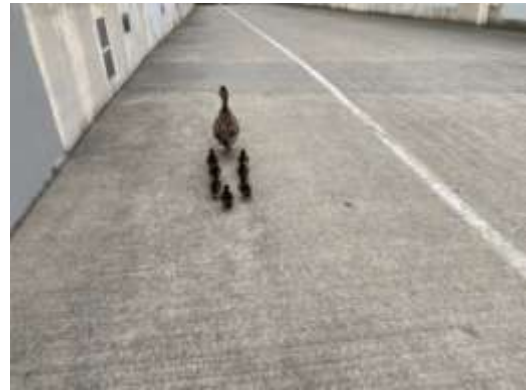
And what we see here is that: There needs to be some kind of recognition of the need for Jesus in a person's life. We especially see that here with this man. He came to Jesus desperate for Jesus to move powerfully in his life, or more specifically, in his son's life. Like any parent who's child is sick, he's willing to do whatever it takes – even take a round-trip three or four day journey on foot to see Jesus so that his son might be healed.

**I wonder if we are that desperate for Jesus and that willing to trust in him?** Do we see the healing that we need, and that Jesus offers? Do we recognize the depth of our brokenness and our frailty and come to Jesus for healing? Do we recognize how our sin – from sexual immorality as we saw with the woman at the well to laziness in our faith because we're so darn comfortable here on the Eastside – do we see how much it separates us from

Jesus, and are we desperate for Jesus to bring healing there, and change our hearts to be in tune with his Word, his will, and his way? And what about if Jesus doesn't work the way we thought he would, or wanted him to? What if rather than him going somewhere with us, he simply sends us out, telling us that all will be ok? That's what he does with this government official. Will we trust him? Is our faith big enough to go where he sends us?

This last Monday evening our dog, Waverly, started barking like crazy as she looked out the living room window. It's a regular occurrence – she's a serious alarm dog and warns us anytime someone walks by our house...like little old ladies taking their toy poodles or their grandkids for walks. Our dog apparently thinks they're a threat to our very existence and lets the whole world know.

Anyway, our dog was going nuts at the window and I looked out to see what had her attention, and sure enough, there was a serious threat and I'm so glad she let us know about it: A mama duck was walking up the sidewalk with 7 babies in tow. Here's a **picture**:



Total menace to society, right? Well, to make a long story short, first Gwen, and then I got roped in as well...we ended up following the ducks. Because they were clearly not where they belonged. And it became clear that they wanted to get to the other side of 405. The duck kept trying to go under a chain-link fence, with 405 on the other side. There are a few water sources on the other side of 405. But the mama duck did not know that she could not cross 405. Fortunately, there is a bridge that is a foot bridge and emergency service vehicle bridge – it crosses 405 at NE 100<sup>th</sup> St. And on the east side of 405 is Forbes lake, that's almost next to our church here, and another little pond a few blocks further north.

So, this mama duck was desperate to get her babies to water. It was clear. And yet, she had no idea how to get where she needed to be. How she ever got on our side of the freeway is kind of a mystery to begin with. So, like a sheepdog ushering sheep in a certain direction, Gwen and I carefully ushered

this duck and her babies out of the park near our house and next to 405, across the bridge (that's where the photo is taken), down the ramp the fire trucks use to get on the bridge, and onto Slater Avenue. And though we tried to get them to one of the ponds a couple blocks up the street, the mama made a beeline for a little creek that was closer by, and immediately waded in and started swimming upstream, and all 7 ducklings followed right along.

It just kind of felt like a metaphor for how Jesus works with us. We're desperate for something – water, food, healing...we've seen all three of those in the past few Sundays now – and **Jesus can meet the need, but it may not always look how we expect it.** So, using this duck situation as a metaphor: it's like the duck and its ducklings is us, and I was Jesus. I know, that's a scary thought and we won't stick with this metaphor much longer, trust me...but I was like Jesus to the duck, answering it's desperate prayer. (Believe me, it quacked and the ducklings "cheeped" and in my translation from "duck" to English, it was all a desperate plea and prayer for help.) But the answer I gave probably didn't happen the way the duck anticipated. But it's prayer was answered.

By the way, the original plan Gwen hatched to help the ducks would have been even more out of the box: She wanted to take our hard plastic kiddie pool that's like 10 inches tall and four feet in diameter, and somehow capture the ducklings, put them in it, then put it in the car and drive them to a pond, with the mama duck either also in the car because of course she would have flown in after them, or have her following along while we drove. I was like, "We are *not* putting wild ducks – even baby ones – in our car."

**So: Are we desperate for Jesus and his help the way that duck was for water and our help, or as this Roman official was for his son's healing and the help of Jesus?** This is what faith is, really. It's coming to Jesus, and trusting that he will take care of us. Sometimes he doesn't do it the way we expect him to – like a doctor asking if a stomach pain is worse when you're on vacation, like a human ushering ducks over the freeway, like Jesus telling this man to go home on his own, rather than Jesus going with him. But Jesus knows what's best for us, and how to handle things. In fact, that's how it is with the cross of Christ and the empty tomb. Jesus provides a solution for us

to be right with God, for the debt of our sin to be cancelled...but we just want something to drink or eat. **Jesus takes care of us more deeply and more eternally than we tend to be focused on.**

So, I don't know what all of your needs are that you might bring to Jesus. For any of us, there can be a whole host of them. I invite you to bring those things to him, seeking him out, and then going and trusting that Jesus has it taken care of, even if it doesn't look quite how you expected. And what you'll find, is that he'll take care of you in ways you don't even know need taking care of. Trust in Jesus, put your faith in him, and he will be faithful now and into eternity. Let's pray...Amen.