

Sermon on Act on the Plain Meaning of the Word

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Text:

John 4:46-53 ⁴⁶ 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. ⁴⁷ 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. ⁴⁸ "Unless you people see miraculous signs and wonders," Jesus told him, "you will never believe." ⁴⁹ The royal official said, "Sir, come down before my child dies." ⁵⁰ Jesus replied, "You may go. Your son will live." The man took Jesus at his word and departed. ⁵¹ While he was still on the way, his servants met him with the news that his boy was living. ⁵² When he inquired as to the time when his son got better, they said to him, "The fever left him yesterday at the seventh hour." ⁵³ Then the father realized that this was the exact time at which Jesus had said to him, "Your son will live." So he and all his household believed.

1 Introduction

If you want something done in a government office in Ghana you have to tip them in advance – sometimes called a bribe. You slide the money with forms or press it into the hand of the official when you greet them. Without this tip the officials will keep asking you to come back the next day. If you come from Ghana and you go to Worcester city hall to submit forms with cash hidden in it they will wonder why. All they need is a properly filled form and they will perform your request without unnecessary delays. There is nothing special you have to do other than just respond to the requirements on the form.

In our dealings with God, some people think they have to do something special, something mystical to get results from God. They expect anointed handkerchief, special cream or oil, or some special prophetic revelation. Some pastors have perpetuated those expectations so much so that some people can't believe in the plain application of the Word of God. We had a guest minister whom we instructed that we only anoint with oil for a sick or demonized person. In spite of that conversation while he was ministering he declared the importance of anointing everyone with oil and when he asked me for confirmation I said no. He was so used to doing something mystical for the people that he could not resist the temptation. I have not seen or

heard anyone who has attributed some great success or breakthrough in their life to anointing by oil other than for sickness or demonization.

Our text, however, teaches us that the Royal Official “took Jesus at his word.” That is, he acted on the plain and ordinary meaning of the Word of God. He believed the Word as is, without decorations, without adorning, without mystification, without theologizing, and without spiritualizing. He acted on the plain and ordinary meaning of the Word of God – “You may go. Your son will live.” Beloved, I say this to you as a child of God:

- You may go. Your dying situation will come to life.
- You may go. Your financial problems will disappear.
- You may go. Your health will improve.
- You may go. You will get a job.
- You may go. Your marriage will improve.
- You may go. You will get your breakthrough.

2 There is a pattern of people acting on the plain meaning of the Word to receive their breakthroughs

In scientific analysis, we like to look for patterns and then develop a generalization based on the pattern. If you are selling something and you raise the price, fewer people will buy from you. If you lower the price, more people will buy from you. If we observe this pattern repeatedly we can conclude that the higher the price the lower the amount of buyers and vice versa. Using this type of analysis I have observed some repeated pattern about the Word of God:

- The centurion acted on the plain meaning of the Word and received healing for his servant.
- The ten lepers acted on the plain meaning of the Word and received their healing.
- The cripple at the pool of Siloam acted on the plain meaning of the Word and received his healing.
- The cripple at the gate of Beautiful acted on the plain meaning of the Word and received his healing.

Need I say more?

3 The Royal Official persisted in his request avoiding any hindrances

3.1 The Royal Official had no spiritual baggage to hinder his action on the plain meaning of the Word

This brings us to the story in our text. The Royal Official was probably from the palace of Herod, a gentile. He was most likely not a proselyte or convert. He was not born in the church, not theologically educated, not conversant in or practicing Levitical law. He was not a Pharisee or a Sadducee, a chief priest or a scribe. But he had heard about the power in the spoken word of the man called Jesus. He had this belief that the spoken word of Jesus will solve his problem. Sometimes religious people and spiritual people do not open themselves up to be affected by the plain and ordinary meaning of the Word. Your religiousness or spiritualness may prevent you from acting on the plain and ordinary meaning of the Word. Because of your spirituality, you want more than just the Word. You want theology, doctrine, incantations, mysticism, anointing with oil, or emotional stimulation before you will respond.

3.2 The Royal Official persisted in his request to Jesus

The Royal Official, however, did not have this baggage. So “he went to [Jesus] and begged him to come and heal his son, who was close to death.” The Greek word translated into “begged” implies persistence. It was not just a one time request but he pestered Jesus with his request. Jesus did not answer his request but instead tested his faith and his perseverance when he said, “Unless you people see miraculous signs and wonders, you will never believe.” (John 4:48) The Royal Official did not give up but escalated his request saying, “Sir, come down before my child dies.” (John 4:49) The fact that he called Jesus “Sir” rather than “Rabbi” shows his religious ignorance. But sometimes ignorance is bliss and this made him ready to accept any response from Jesus.

3.3 You should also persist in prayer like the Royal Official

You should model your attitude in prayer after this man. You must be persistent, persevere, never give up, and hold on to your faith. One of our sisters was about to deliver prematurely at 22 weeks. The doctors advised her to abort because no baby born at 22 weeks has been normal in the history of the hospital. At 26 weeks the baby would have a chance but the

baby was coming out. She decided she will trust God and we all began to pray. Today, she has a nice, healthy baby boy that has confounded the doctors and broken their record. She was persistent and trusted the plain meaning of the Word of God that says in **Mark 9:23**, “Everything is possible for him who believes” and in **Mark 10:27**, “With man this is impossible, but not with God; all things are possible with God.” We prayed and prayed and prayed. You must understand when you pray to God that he is the God who makes a way where there is no way. He is the God who opens doors that have been shut. He is the God who takes over where the doctors give up. He is the God who makes water to come out of a rock and so can turn your barren situation into a fruitful situation. He is “the God who gives life to the dead and calls things that are not as though they were.” (Romans 4:17) When you go to him, you have to hold on tenaciously to his garment until you get what you want from him.

4 The Royal Official accepted the plain response of Jesus

4.1 Jesus responded positively without any mysticism

In response to the pestering by the Royal Official, Jesus responded saying, “You may go. Your son will live.” Beloved, I say this to you again as a child of God:

- You may go. Your dying situation will come to life.
- You may go. Your financial problems will disappear.
- You may go. Your health will improve.
- You may go. You will get a job.
- You may go. Your marriage will improve.
- You may go. You will get your breakthrough.

“You may go. Your son will live.” It sounds great to you now, but think of that response for a moment. What a response! The Royal Official’s son was dying but Jesus didn’t have it in him to go visit him, anoint him, and pray some dangerous prayers for him. If you were the Royal Official you will leave the church of Jesus! People have left this church for a variety of reasons. If you think of today’s church then Jesus’ statement was a capital blunder – a dying child and he does not bother to visit and pray for him.

4.2 The Royal Official acted on the plain and ordinary meaning of the Word

The Royal Official, however, took Jesus' response in an uncharacteristic way. Our text says, "The man took Jesus at his word and departed." He accepted the plain and ordinary meaning of the Word. He acted on the plain and ordinary meaning of the Word of God. He believed the Word as is, without decorations, without adorning, without mystification, without theologizing, and without spiritualizing. He acted on the plain and ordinary meaning of the Word of God – "You may go. Your son will live." Beloved, I say this again to you as a child of God:

- You may go. Your dying situation will come to life.
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- You may go. You will get your breakthrough.

So, the Royal Official left from Cana to go back down the hilly road to Capernaum, a distance of about 13 miles, fully accepting Jesus' word without question, without doubt, without worry, or without second guessing. So also you must take the plain and ordinary meaning of the Word and act upon it:

- When the Bible says, "God works for the good of those who love him and have been called according to his purpose," you must take the plain and ordinary meaning of the Word and act upon it.
- When the Bible says, "he one who trusts in him will never be put to shame," (Romans 9:33) you must take the plain and ordinary meaning of the Word and act upon it.
- When the Bible says, "The Lord will rescue me from every evil attack," (2 Timothy 4:18) you must take the plain and ordinary meaning of the Word and act upon it.
- When the Bible says, "The name of the LORD is a strong tower; the righteous run to it and are safe," (Proverbs 18:10) you must take the plain and ordinary meaning of the Word and act upon it.
- When the Bible says, "I have given you authority to trample on snakes and scorpions and to overcome all the power of the enemy; nothing will harm you," (Luke 10:19) you must take the plain and ordinary meaning of the Word and act upon it.

5 The Royal Official's attitude toward the Word gave him his breakthrough

5.1 The Royal Official connected his son's healing immediately to Jesus' response

Our text tells us that, "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, 'The fever left him yesterday at the seventh hour.'" (John 4:51-52) The Royal Official's inquiry shows that he still had on his mind what Jesus told him. His faith in the plain and ordinary meaning of the Word made him suspect that the healing was connected to Jesus' statement. And by his calculation our text says he "realized that this was the exact time at which Jesus had said to him, 'Your son will live.'"

5.2 Don't treat responses to your prayer as happenstance

People tend to dismiss coincidences as happenstance. They do not attribute them to God's actions. Sometimes you are praying for something and then when something peculiar occurs you forget to attribute it to God. Rather you say, "The doctors did it; UMass Memorial has good cardiac care. If it wasn't for that he will be gone!" Or you assume the way you conducted yourself, your charisma, and your intelligence is what got you the job. The Royal Official, however, did not have this dismissive attitude of God's involvement. In fact, he attributed the healing and its timing directly to Jesus' statement. He acted on the plain and ordinary meaning of the Word to get his breakthrough.

6 Conclusion

There is a pattern of people acting on the plain meaning of the Word to receive their breakthroughs. The Royal Official had no spiritual baggage to hinder his action on the plain meaning of the Word. He persisted in his request to Jesus. You should also persist in prayer like the Royal Official. Jesus responded positively without any mysticism. The Royal Official acted on the plain and ordinary meaning of the Word. His attitude toward the Word gave him his

breakthrough. He connected his son's healing immediately to Jesus' response. Don't treat responses to your prayer as happenstance. Begin to act on the plain and ordinary meaning of the Word of God in order to receive your breakthrough.