

You Actually Dont Need A Sign

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Date: 27 November 2022

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[0 : 0 0] Well, we're going to turn together back to John chapter 4. We're looking at the section that Andy read for us at the end of the chapter. Let me read again, verses 47 to 50. When this man heard that Jesus had come from Judea to Galilee, he went to him and asked him to come down and heal his son, for he was at the point of death. So Jesus said to him, unless you see signs and wonders, you will not believe. The official said to him, Sir, come down before my child dies. Jesus said to him, Go, your son will live. The man believed the word that Jesus spoke to him and went on his way. Now, I'm going to start this morning with what I feel is a slightly embarrassing confession. As you will know, those of you who've been here for the last few weeks will know that throughout the month of November, we have been preaching through John chapter 4. And from the start of the month, for three weeks, we were looking at the amazing encounter that took place between Jesus and the woman at the well. And there's so much that we can learn from that passage. And I hope it was helpful for us all to study that over three weeks together. And back at the start of November, when I saw that we were going to be in November, in John 4 for the whole

November, I was thinking ahead, you know, okay, what will I do for each of the four weeks? And for the three weeks that we were talking about the woman at the well, I looked and I saw, yeah, okay, I think I think I can see quite clearly what I want to say. This is going to be really helpful.

The embarrassing confession is that whilst I was doing that, I also thought, what am I going to say for the last bit? Because when I looked at this bit that Andy read for us this morning, the first thought that came through my mind was, it's just another healing, which in itself is ridiculous because it shows that I've become kind of numbed to the amazing things that Jesus did.

But I guess what I thought was, how is this sermon going to be any different to all the other sermons that you've heard on Jesus's healings? So I'm embarrassed to confess that I wasn't really that sure what I would say, I wasn't sure if there will be that much for us to think about in this section, especially compared to the earlier parts of John. But when I started preparing this section this week, I discovered two things. One, that I'm an idiot, you just said, well, we knew that long ago. The second thing I discovered was that for many people in Carlyway, for many people in here and online today, this is probably the most relevant passage in the whole of John. Now you might be saying, well, how? It's a very different setting, Capernaum in Galilee, whatever even that is, well, we know what it is, but it just seems miles away to us. Very different people and we are not here today expecting to see a miraculous healing for an official's son. So easy to look at this and think, well, I'm not like anybody in this passage, life's not like anything in this passage. Well, don't be so sure. Let me ask you the following questions. In relation to yourself, do you ever think, I really want to be a Christian, but I'm waiting for something to happen. Do you think I think I believe, but I've not had the kind of experiences that other people have had? Have you ever thought, I've heard lots of quite dramatic testimonies, nothing like that's happened to me. Have you ever thought, I can't really pinpoint a moment when I was converted. So in relation to yourself, have you ever thought those things? And in relation to other people, have you ever thought, these people saw a great sign, therefore, they've, they're definitely a lot more spiritual than I am. They experienced revival, therefore, they're definitely going to be better theologians than we are. There was once a time when the spirit was moving in Carl away, those people in those days had something that we don't have. Now, I know that many of you think like that because I've heard you all say it. Those of you who are seeking Jesus, think like that.

You're waiting for something that will be a great sign, a sign or a wonder that will show you that you've been saved. And those of you who are already Christians, you also think like that. You place a great emphasis on a sign or a wonder that you've seen or that you've maybe heard that other people have seen. All of us are drawn to signs. We either long for one to come so that it'll give us

the reassurance that we crave, or we look back at one that's happened either to us or to somebody else, and we kind of draw reassurance from that. And that makes sense in lots of ways. If something remarkable happens, then it's hard to disagree with it. It's powerful, it's convincing, and it can make a huge impression. And it's therefore natural to think that a sign would be really good. In this passage, Jesus is telling us that if you think like that, either as a seeker or as a Christian, if you think like that, then you are wrong. The truth is, you actually don't need a sign. And that's our title for today. Now, you might say to me, be thinking, hang on a second, there's a sign in this passage. And verse 54 said, this is the second sign that Jesus did. So how does this passage tell us that we don't need a sign? Well, that's what I want us to look at today, but we're going to have to look at the passage quite closely. And especially, we need to look at verse 50 and a half. And I'll explain what I mean by that in a wee minute. First of all, let's just go through what happens. Verse 46 to 47, an official comes to Jesus with an immediate and urgent need. His son is dying. Jesus responds to that in verse 48. He says, unless you see signs and wonders, you will not believe. Now, who's Jesus talking to when he says that? If you look, it says, Jesus said to him, unless you see signs and wonders, you'll not believe. And so we think, well, he's talking to the man. Well, this is where we have to remember that the New Testament was written in Greek and not in English. And there are times when the English translation doesn't convey everything clear. And this is a very good example of that, because the two us here are both plural. And if you were reading your Gaelic Bible, you would see it straight away because it says, which we know in Gaelic is because in Gaelic, you've got a single you and a plural you in English, we don't, it's just you, you. That's why we should introduce the word use to the English language, because we in

[7 : 46] Lewis are way ahead of the game. And these two us are us is they're plurals. And that tells us that Jesus isn't just talking to the guy, he's talking to the people around him, to all those who are watching. And the truth is, the man hasn't come looking for a sign at all. And you see that in his magnificent reply, he just says, please come before my child dies. And then in verse 51 to 54, and no, sorry, I jumped ahead of myself, Jesus gives a reply in verse 50. And the man believes and departs. And then in verse 51 to 54, we read about how the man was making his way home. This was by now the next day, he met servants who came to tell him your child is recovering. He says, what time they told him yesterday at, and at the seventh hour, and Jesus and the man knew that's the moment that Jesus spoke to me. And it all fits together. The key thing I want us to focus on though, is verse 50 and a half. Now, what I mean by that is that I want to place ourselves in between verses 50 and 51, right here at what we're going to call verse 50 and a half. At that moment, the man has come to Jesus, and he has asked Jesus to come and heal his son. Jesus doesn't do it, doesn't come, so he doesn't do exactly what the man wants. Instead, Jesus says to the man, go and he assures him that his son will live. And so the man believes Jesus' words and departs, you can see that there, the man believed the word that Jesus spoke to him and went on his way.

Now, I want you to think about that moment. At that moment, I want you to think about the man walking away. He must have spent the night somewhere, and then he continues his journey home, making his way back to where he's come from. In that moment, in that intervening period from when he leaves Jesus to before he has met his servants, in that moment, what's changed? So in terms of what the man knows, in terms of what the man's experienced, in terms of what he can be certain of in regard to his son, what has changed between verse 49, where he comes and says, come and save my son before he dies, and verse 50 and a half, where he's walked away after Jesus' words, what's changed in terms of what his nose experiences and can be certain of what's changed? Nothing. Nothing has changed.

At verse 50 and a half, there was no sign, there was no lightning bolt, no message from his house, no new knowledge about his son's condition, no indication or confirmation at all that his son's health was improving. In other words, at verse 50 and a half, the man had nothing except Jesus' word. And it wasn't until a day later that he found out that what Jesus had said had actually happened. Now, two key questions arise out of this. At what point did the man start believing? So look at the verses there. Where did he start believing? Here. Verse 50. At what point did he get assurance? Down here. Key point is that it's afterwards. It's afterwards. In this case, it was a day later. For other people, it could be much more than a day. The length of time doesn't matter.

[12 : 19] The key thing is the order of events. The man believes what Jesus said, he responds to it, and even though at that moment, nothing has actually changed. As far as he knew, nothing obvious

is different. And it's actually only by responding to what Jesus said that the man actually gets reassurance. If he had said to Jesus, if he'd come to him, said, come to my house and heal my son. And Jesus said, go, your son will live. And he was like, no, no, no, you have to come. You have to come to my house. And he just carried on following Jesus and following Jesus. His servants might never have found him. Or certainly it would have been delayed. His reassurance would have been delayed if he had just kept on looking for a sign. And the key point is that the man believed before he ever saw a sign that would reassure him. And this is what is so incredibly important and incredibly relevant to us all here. The passage shows us that a sign, a wonder, a reassurance, it does not have to happen in order for you to be a believer. You actually don't need a sign. And that means that if you're waiting for one, you are waiting for something that you don't need. In fact, by waiting, you're probably actually delaying the arrival of any assurance that's going to come your way. At verse 50 and a half, the man is a believer, even though nothing obvious has changed.

And the key thing is that he trusted Jesus's word. At verse 50 and a half, no sign, no healing, no confirmation, no obvious change, but Jesus's word was enough. And that's the key question for every single one of us. Is Jesus's word enough? Is Jesus's word enough for you as a Christian? Many of you are Christians. Is Jesus's word enough for you as a Christian? Now, your instinct might be to say, well, yes, of course it is. And especially in our church, because we believe in the authority of Scripture. Well, yes, but for so many Christians over the centuries, it has often been the case that Jesus's word isn't enough. So for some, Jesus's word needs to be accompanied by church traditions. That can happen in hundreds of ways. It can happen through added rituals that churches have added over the centuries. It can be through added requirements and expectations that we create ourselves. Or it can just be through an insistence that we do things the way we've always done them and that things never change. For other people, Jesus's word needs to be accompanied by experience.

And that again can happen in lots of different ways. In some other church traditions, there's a big emphasis on spiritual gifts, especially on speaking in tongues. And it's like that experience has to happen in order to kind of accompany Jesus's word. In our tradition, we don't have that emphasis, but we have our emphasis of our own. Especially, you know, a desire for something remarkable to happen. The obvious example is a dramatic conversion, you know, like just this massively unbelievable experience in terms of a conversion. We so often look for that sort of thing. So often that's the sort of thing that people talk about and that gets portrayed as normal. But it can apply to other things as well, when it's like, what job are you going to do? Who are you going to marry? Where are you going to live? So often we look for like a sign, a mystical sign that's going to tell us what God's will is in these situations. And so for many of us, Jesus's word has to be accompanied by experience. But for others, and maybe this is the most subtle one today, Jesus's word needs to be accompanied by results. So if we're doing something as a church and there's results, everyone think that's the right thing to do. They're doing it well. He's a good minister. They're a good church. Everyone's happy. If the results don't come, then we easily give up. We think, well, we're, this isn't doing right. This isn't worth it. What's the point? And that especially applies in evangelism. If we don't get results, we tend to think, well, this isn't going to work. What's the point? We've tried that. And yet Jesus's command to go out with the gospel has absolutely no results based clauses attached to it whatsoever. He never says go and carry on going as long as you get these results. He never says that. He says go. And if Jesus tells us to do something, his word has got to be enough. And that's why we go out and we keep on going and keep on going and keep on going. Jesus's word has got to be enough for us as Christians. Is Jesus's word enough for you as a seeker? And this is so crucial for so many of you and for so many people in our island communities.

[18:02] I know that those of you here who are seekers, I know that you want to be saved. And I know that you believe that Jesus died for you. And I know that you love him. I also know that you feel like you don't know enough. And that you're not what you wish you were. And that you don't feel like you're good enough. Or that you're ready. And so often when we feel like that, we conclude that we just need that extra something that is going to give the confirmation that we're looking for.

A sudden change, an unexpected event, a dramatic conversion. So many people think, I need that. But do you see the problem with that kind of thinking? If you say, I need that in terms of a dramatic event or whatever, if you say, I need that, then you are saying that Jesus's word is not enough. Jesus's promise to you is that whoever believes in him will be saved. John's great aim in this gospel is that we will believe in Jesus and come to have eternal life in him. And so we need to listen to

Jesus and to trust him. And yet so often, we actually want Jesus to listen to us. We want him to give the sign that we think that we need. We want him to give the confirmation that we've put in place as this essential aspect of becoming a Christian. And yet when this official came to Jesus and when this official had his expectations and said, please come to my house, Jesus says, I'm not going. He didn't actually do what the man asked him to do in terms of going to his house.

It's telling us that Jesus doesn't work on our terms. He doesn't do things on our terms and he won't be squeezed into the expectations that we make for him. He didn't go with the man, he did something better. He gave him his word. He spoke and the man believed and that was all that the man needed. And it is all that you need as well. And this is where I want to ask you, are you at verse 50 and a half?

Are you at verse 50 and a half? You must answer that question in your mind. So you've got nothing that comes after verse 50 and a half. You've got no sign, no magnificent confirmation, no elaborate testimony, no nothing. But you do believe what Jesus says. I do believe that it's true. And I want to be a Christian, but I don't have the rest of the stuff. So are you at the point where you can say, I believe what Jesus is saying? I believe it's true. I believe that he died for my sins. I believe that it's only through him that I can be saved. I believe that I don't deserve any of it, but I know that he is gracious.

[21 : 30] I believe all of that, but I haven't seen a sign. I haven't got a big thing to say about Jesus. I haven't got a big thing to hold on to. There's a lot of things that don't feel very different.

There's so much that I don't know. There's so much that I need to learn. I believe, but I don't have much else. If that's how you feel, then you are at verse 50 and a half. That's exactly where you are. And so I'm asking the question again, are you at verse 50 and a half? And if you are, what are you? What are you at verse 50 and a half? Well, there's a very important theological term that describes a person at verse 50 and a half, and I want to give it to you. If you are at verse 50 and a half, then you are a Christian.

Because you believe. Now your reaction might be, no, I can't be. I can't be. I can't be. I don't have anything to kind of really confirm that or hold on to it. When did this man start believing? There. Before verse 50 and a half. That's when he became a believer. That's when he became a Christian at verse 50 and a half, believing Jesus's words was all that he had and it was all he needed. And it's all that you need as well. Assurance will come later. Maybe a day, maybe a month, maybe a year. And the truth is, assurance doesn't come in a big bang moment. It comes bit by bit and it goes through highs and lows. And as we all follow Jesus, there are times when we feel assured and confident. There's other times when we doubt and struggle and we think, I don't even know if I'm sure about any of this.

I don't know if I am a Christian or not. And there's some magnificent teaching about this in the Westminster Confession of Faith. You might be thinking Westminster Confession of Faith, oh man, that's really heavy. But I've just noticed that clock stopped at eight o'clock. That means I've got four hours left in this sermon. I'll have to look to this side. I have eight minutes left, not four hours. Westminster Confession of Faith, you might think, oh man, that's really heavy. Well, there's a chapter in the Westminster Confession of Faith about assurance. I'm not going to read the whole thing. I'm just going to highlight two things. It says here in paragraph three of chapter 18 that assurance, in terms of getting assurance, a true believer may wait long and conflict with many difficulties before he is a partaker of it. And even when it does come, it is without extraordinary revelation.

[25 : 04] Now, I think that that is utterly magnificent. 400 years ago, the greatest theologians that this country could produce got together and spent, I think, about four years writing this document.

And in it, they said that we wobble. We struggle as Christians. But it doesn't mean that you're not one.

And you don't need an extraordinary revelation to be a true believer. And in the next paragraph, it talks about how our assurance can sometimes be shaken, sometimes diminished, sometimes intermittent. And there's lots of different reasons why that can happen. In fact, I think I can say from my own experience that the people who have the biggest conversion experiences are often the ones who have the biggest wobbles later on. And some of the steadiest Christians I've ever met are the ones who've got pretty much next to nothing to say about their testimony, apart from, I believed and followed Jesus. And yeah, that's what I do.

That's their testimony. And yet they're so steady. And it's not one or the other. But I'm just trying to say that a massive event, a fireball explosion, it's not a guarantee of anything. And it's not necessary. The key thing that we've got to recognize is that Jesus' word is enough. [26 : 34] Believing His promise is enough to save you as a Christian. It's enough to make you a Christian. It's enough to make you a member of this church. It's enough for you to become a wonderful witness to others. It's enough to give you eternal life, believing His word. That's it. His word is enough.

And that belief will start out basic, simple, and from there it grows. There's something magnificent in this passage here. It says in verse 50 that the man believed Jesus, he became a believer, even though he had nothing much else to go on. Then later on, later on, after his son was healed, what did the man do? He believed and all of his household.

And the great emphasis there is that he started believing and he had a tiny basic faith. And then as his journey went on, he was encouraged and he believed more. That's John's great purpose in the gospel that we'd believe and that we would keep on believing. And that's the experience for us all. We believe. And there's so much we don't know. There's so much we have to learn. But over time, we're growing, we're learning, we're believing more. We're a witness to others.

As we take steps forward, we get the assurance and encouragement that we need. And so for anybody here who is there at verse 50 and a half, if you think, I believe, but I don't have anything else, then I'm going to ask you to do something. I'm going to ask you to text me or email me and say, I'm at verse 50 and a half. And I'm not joking. I want you to do that. And I will be raging if I don't get a text or a message or an email, because I know that there's people here at verse 50 and a half. And I want you to tell me, and then we can chat about it. And we'll go on together as brothers and sisters in the Lord. Is Jesus's word enough for you as a seeker?

Third question. It's just very brief. Is Jesus's word enough for you as a skeptic? So I don't know if anybody here is a skeptic, but somebody might be or somebody might be watching online who is a skeptic. And it's okay if you are. I like skeptics as long as you are thinking skeptic. I don't like kind of mindless skeptics because that's just stupidity. Or same as mindless Christianity is a stupidity. Anyway, I'm digressing. I don't mind if you're a skeptic. If you're a skeptic, then the chances are Jesus's word is not enough for you. And that's consistent with your position.

[29 : 21] But if that's the case, if that's the case, if you're skeptical of what Jesus teaches, then the question you have to consider is this. Whose word is enough for you? Because I'm 100% certain that you will have certain people in your life whose words you will consider to be enough.

Because if you look at the culture around us, it's full of people who behave and think like that. People for whom, yes, there's certain people and their word is enough. So for some, it's a politician. If they say it, that's enough. Others, it's a writer, like either author, blogger, whatever. If they say it, it's enough. For some people, it's a celebrity, sports person. If they say it, it's enough. Maybe it's a person that you're in love with. If they say it, it's enough. Maybe it's someone in your family or a friend. Or maybe it's even yourself.

Whoever it is, why is their word enough? That's what you've got to think about if you're a skeptic.

[30 : 32] Last thing we need to notice, well, that's what we need to do is we have to come back to an issue that I highlighted at the start. My title today has been, you actually don't need a sign. And then Jesus spoils my title by telling us, well, John spoils whatever, saying this is the sign that he did.

And so how do we, what does that mean for everything that we've been saying? The fact that, you know, I'm saying you don't need a sign and yet the passage ends with it saying this is a sign. The point I'm trying to emphasize is that at verse 50 and a half, faith comes before the sign.

The sign came after, and it was a great encouragement when it came, but faith came first. And the key thing is that the sign served to validate Jesus's words. That's one of the functions of miracles. They are to demonstrate that Jesus's words are true. And Jesus himself explains this later on in John. He says, do you not believe that I'm in the Father and the Father's in me? The words that I tell you, do you not speak, I do not speak of my own authority, but my Father who dwells in me does his work, believe me that I'm in my Father, I'm in the Father and the Father is in me, or else believe on account of the works themselves. And you see Jesus's argument there, he's saying, what I say is true. But if you don't believe it, then look at the works because they validate what I'm saying. And that's the pattern you have. Jesus's word is what's key and the miracles serve to authenticate that message. Now that's crucial because it's telling us that the signs are the servants, the word is the master. The signs serve the message, they authenticate Jesus's word.

And so often we get that the wrong way round. We think Jesus's promise to save me, Jesus's word, we think that will be true if I see a sign. As though Jesus's word is subordinate to the sign, the sign's the important thing. And if the sign comes, then the word is true. That's the wrong way round. It is the wrong way round. The word is true. The word is master. The word is what matters.

[32 : 54] The sign simply serves to authenticate that message. And that means that the signs are helpful, but they are not essential. They're not needed. It's like the difference between a wedding ring and a wife. When you get married, the ring is the sign and the wife is the thing that matters.

And so if I came home every night, God, well not that I go out to work, but you know what I mean, if I came, supposedly I had a normal job and I came home after work, God afterwards I was like, oh ring, I kissed my ring when I got home, gave my ring a hug, so nice to see you ring, oh it's just wonderful to have this ring in my life. I'm so glad I've got you because it means that I'm married.

What would you think of me? You think that guy's weird. Maybe you think that anyway.

Okay. What matters is my wife. And actually, she's still my wife whether I have a ring or not.

And that's the pattern that's so important. The sign is just a help that may come, may not come, doesn't actually matter. And the best example of what I'm trying to say comes later in John's Gospel with the words that we read at the very start about Thomas. The other disciples said to him, we've seen the Lord, but he said, unless I see his hands, in his hands, the mark of the nails and place my finger into the mark of the nails and place my hand into his side, I'll never believe.

In other words, unless I see a sign, I'm not believing. Eight days later, his disciples were inside again, Thomas was with them. Although the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, peace be with you. Then he said to Thomas, put your finger here and see my hands and put out your hand and place it in my side. Do not disbelieve, but believe. Thomas answered him, my Lord and my God. Jesus said to him, have you believed because you've seen me?

[34 : 45] Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed. In other words, blessed are those who realize that they don't actually need a sign. So often, we think that our faith needs to be confirmed by a sign. It's not true. It's Jesus's word that gets confirmed by the sign. And what we need to do is listen to what he says, to trust him and to rest on every promise that he's made.

You need to write these words on your heart. You actually don't need a sign. You just need to trust Jesus, which many of you, all of you who are at verse 50 and a half, all of you already do. You just trust him, follow him. Amen. Let's pray.