

#DONTMISSSTHESIGNS | #PHJW | #ASBCSERMONSERIES



DON'T MISS the Signs

MARCH 12/13

JOHN 4:46-54 NIV

A SERMON SERIES BY REV. DR. HOWARD-JOHN WESLEY | @PastorHJW

Part 2



VILLAGE

@ASBC

MOVING FROM CROWD TO COMMUNITY

Sunday,
Preacher:
Sermon:

March 13, 2022
Rev. Dr. Howard-John Wesley
Don't Miss the Signs - Part 2

CURRICULUM GUIDE



Sermon Summary

The second sign in the Gospel of John occurs when Jesus returns to Cana. He encounters a royal official whose son lies near death. The royal official begs Jesus to come to his home and heal his son. Jesus does not respond in the way that the man anticipates. First, Jesus rebukes the crowd who has seen prior miracles (i.e., the transformation of water into wine in John 2) and still does not believe. And then, he turns to the man and declares that the child, while nowhere near Jesus, will be healed.

Pastor Wesley unpacks this text to profile the contours of mature faith. Using the example of the father in this text, Pastor Wesley points out five aspects of mature faith. Mature, or real, faith: (1) believes that God is able no matter the circumstances, (2) trusts God to answer our prayers even when God does not do so according to our preferences, (3) refuses to be diminished or dimmed even when the answer to our prayers does not arrive in a manner we recognize, (4) helps us to realize we are not our titles or possessions which leaves us standing before Jesus as either a sinner or a sinner saved by grace, and (5) calls us into right relationship with God, requiring us to be in service to others.

Each of these components of mature faith is evident in the life of the royal official, who came before Jesus as a man to beg for the life of his son. This man did not miss the signs. When his son was healed, he connected the dots between what was done, his son healed, and who did it, Jesus. He told his household and they believed. He did not miss the signs. May it be so for us as well.

KEY POINTS

1. The Gospels are each written for a specific audience with a specific agenda. Matthew and Luke wish to underscore the words of Jesus. Mark focuses on the actions of Jesus. The Gospel of John wishes to highlight the identity of Jesus.
2. John calls miracles 'signs'. Miracles are meant to impress us, but signs are meant to divert our attention and to point us toward something else.
3. Sharing a testimony has the power to move others toward a greater understanding of Jesus' ability to bless.
4. Too often, we underestimate the power of our personal shared testimonies.
5. Mature faith is different than young faith. The royal official in this text models for us a mature faith.

Getting To Know You Questions:

1. The Royal Official learned that Jesus was in town, and Pastor Wesley said someone must have been running their mouth about what Jesus had done. Looking back, what has God done that you want to run your mouth about?
2. When was the last time you shared a personal testimony? What was the response of those with whom you shared it? What did you learn about sharing your testimony?
3. In this sermon, we learn that Jesus goes back to Cana, the place where he turned water into wine. Where is your Cana? Where have you observed a miracle? What does this experience mean to you?

Into The Bible Questions:

1. In the course of his interaction with Jesus in John 4, the royal official's titles change. He came to Jesus as a ruler in verse 46 was called just another (hu)man in verse 47 and finally his title was father in verse 49. What titles do you carry? Where in your life do you need to put down titles and just reach out to God as a human in need?
2. Pastor Wesley hypothesizes that Jesus returns to Cana in John 4:46 to see how much the people's faith had grown since he performed the first miracle of turning water into wine. In your walk with Jesus, how has your faith matured? Can you describe a moment when you showed up differently because your faith had matured?
3. This story of the Royal Official's son in John 4:46-48 and the story of the Centurion's servant in Matthew 8:5-13, both show Jesus healing. What other similarities or differences do you see in the two healing accounts, and what can you draw from this comparison?





Life Application Questions:

1. Have you ever been in a situation when your position, privilege, or power were of no help?
 - a. What did that situation teach you about God? About you?
 - b. How did you handle the situation?
 - c. In light of this week's sermon, would you change anything about your prior response?

2. Has God ever answered your prayer in a way that you did not see coming? How did that make you feel?
 - a. How did you handle it?
 - b. Where was the lesson and the blessing of God answering your prayer in that way?
 - c. How has that experience impacted your prayer life?

3. After watching the new Batman movie, Pastor Wesley describes his son's excitement to share how good it was with his friends. What makes it easier to share the secular things we love? What keeps us from sharing our faith with others?

4. In this story, Jesus does not go with the Royal Official, even though that is what he asks. Jesus simply says, "Go; your son will live."
 - a. What do you think the trip back home was like for the father?
 - b. If Jesus asked you to go back home in faith, without answering your prayer on the spot, what would you have done?

5. Are there practices you have that help you to wait for God to answer your prayers?
 - a. How hard is it for you to wait for God to respond to your prayers?

6. Have you ever prayed for a healing miracle for yourself or someone else?
 - a. If your prayer was or was not answered, how did that affect your walk with Jesus?



"Can I Push It?"

1. The sermon established that a mature faith relates not only to our relationship with God, but also encompasses the responsibility we have to others. As a Christian body, how are we called "to transform the world" by being in service to others and not giving in to being conformed to the world?
 - a. What does this look like in your immediate circle and the world beyond?
 - b. If we are called to deliver service outside of our own communities even when they are in need of help, how do we faithfully serve?
2. Pastor Wesley suggests that Jesus went back to Cana to see if the faith of the people had grown. Do you feel your faith has grown in this season of Covid and racial tension?
3. This sermon pushes us to think about how our faith should show up in the way we treat others. Pastor Wesley describes it as "righteousness without rude." Where do you see yourself showing up as more "rude" than righteous? What does this sermon inspire you to do differently?
4. Pastor Wesley suggests the simplicity with which John's Gospel describes a dying child does not adequately express the pain of a parent in that situation. The Gospel seems absent sufficient comfort for the father's anguish. When we, as Christians, address the bereaved, do we provide sufficient comfort?
 - a. What are the mistakes we make when we seek to comfort the bereaved?
 - b. Have you had an experience of being comforted poorly or well?
 - c. What did you learn from that experience?



Activity:

1. Faith Continuum

- a. Think of a time when you had faith the size of a mustard seed. Complete the sentence, "When I was a babe in Christ..."
- b. Think of a time when you had faith the size of a mustard tree. Complete the sentence, "Now that I am more mature in Christ..."
- c. Share your two sentences with the group.

2. Pastor Wesley says that real faith makes one see their responsibility to others. Think of someone who you'd rather avoid, such as a co-worker with whom you have conflict who needs a word of encouragement or help with an assignment, or maybe an unhoused neighbor who needs you to do more than pray. Share with the group how you will help alleviate that need within the next 30 days.

Spirit Work:

1. The Royal Official was willing to beg Jesus for what he needed. He placed himself in a vulnerable space where he was humbled. Have you ever been in such a space? What did you learn? How did this experience change you? What do you know about yourself now, that you did not know then?
2. What if instead of measuring our maturity in terms of what we do, or do not do, we measure our faith in terms of our awareness of God's love, grace, and mercy? During this week, take a moment to consider the new ways you have become aware of God's love, grace or mercy. Share how God has shown up for you.

ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS: MARRIED COUPLES

1. In this story, while his son is dying, his father, Jesus, and the household shows up for the son. How has your spouse supported you when you need it most? How do you show up for each other in the hard times?
2. In this story, the Royal Official is brave enough to make a request to Jesus. He does not water down the request, but asks Jesus to come before his child dies. Is there a request that you have for Jesus concerning your marriage that you do not want to water down? If so, please share with your spouse privately.

3. In the sermon, Pastor reminds us that we have been saved by grace. God's grace has broken into our lives and changed us. As a spouse, how do you extend grace toward one another? How has the presence of or absence of grace impacted your marriage?

ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS: YOUNG ADULTS

1. Pastor Wesley says that you can't stay at 'Jesus wept' forever. This has nothing to do with age but with maturity. Where have you been able to demonstrate a faith that has nothing to do with your age but with your trust and belief in God?
2. In this sermon we learn that sometimes "we over complicate the process and underestimate the power" of sharing our testimony. Whose testimony has benefitted you at this point in your young adult journey, and how?
3. Pastor Wesley describes the difference between "beginning faith" that says "I'll believe it when I see it," and mature faith that says "I'll believe it even if I haven't." How would you describe your faith right now? Who are the people in your life that model "mature faith" and what are you learning from them?
4. Who you are impacts how you read a text. Pastor Wesley suggests that being a parent changes how one encounters and understands this text. How does being a young adult influence how you read and interpret this biblical passage?

ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS: PARENTS

1. Pastor Wesley notes that John must have not been a parent because he describes the child's sickness too simply. Being a parent causes you to see the world differently. How do you see the world differently, now that you are a parent? What do you understand now that you did not understand before?
2. In this sermon, we learn that sometimes "we overcomplicate the process and underestimate the power" of sharing our testimony. Whose testimony has benefited you at this point in your parenting journey, and how?
3. Pastor Wesley describes the difference between "beginning faith" that says "I'll believe it when I see it," and mature faith that says "I'll believe it even if I haven't seen it." How would you describe your faith right now? Who are the people/parents in your life that model "mature faith" and what are you learning from them? Who are the people you place before your children who you believe have mature faith?

ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS: WOMEN

1. As a woman in the United States, where has your faith been tested the most? How has your faith grown the most? Share with the group a testimony of how your faith helped you stand in strength as a woman.
 - a. If you are a woman of color, how might your answer to this question shift?
 - b. How might other experiences of being marginalized impact your faith journey with God?

2. As women we are often considered to be the nurturers and caretakers, not only in our households but also in our communities. As society seems to become less “we” and more “me”, has your perspective on how you care for strangers or those not connected to you changed? Does your faith challenge you to still take responsibility in caring for others?

3. This story chronicles the Royal Official’s plea to Jesus for his son. Interestingly, the child’s mother is not featured in the story. While we praise the father’s righteousness in the story, where can we imagine the women’s role in this story? How have you seen women helping bring about healing in your own life?

4. The Gospel of John uses the language of signs to describe miracles that point our attention in a direction. Are there “God moments” or miracles that have occurred in your life that pointed your attention in a particular direction? If so, please share the sign and to what it pointed you.

ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS: MEN

1. In this sermon, we realize that the faith of this one man blessed a whole household. Does this story remind you of other men in your life? Does it remind you of aspects of your life? Are there any lessons from the Royal Official that you want to draw into your own life?

2. How does the sermon’s example of a man with mature faith contrast with how you traditionally define manhood and masculinity? How do the Royal Official’s actions of running and begging resonate in your body? How do you approach growing your faith despite the pressures of the world?

3. In this sermon, we learn that sometimes “we overcomplicate the process and underestimate the power” of sharing our testimony. Whose testimony has benefitted you at this point in your faith journey, and how?

ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS: RETURNING CITIZEN

1. In John 4:47, the Bible says that the Royal Official hears that Jesus is back in town. In your experience, what is it like for you to go back to places you have not been in a while? If you have returned to a place after an absence what, if anything, has changed about the place? What, if anything, has changed about you?
2. Jesus has already performed one miracle in Cana. In John 4:48, it seems that Jesus rebukes the crowd for needing additional miracles to believe. Do you need new miracles in your life to continue to believe in Jesus? What allows you to believe in Jesus?
3. In this story, we learn that the “Royal Official” becomes just “father”. What do you think made the author switch from Royal Official to father? Have your titles switched in your life? How have you seen titles or labels get in the way of how we treat each other?
4. Pastor Wesley cites John 4:50 as one of the most informational and inspirational scriptures. Read it again. What part of that verse speaks to you the most for your life right now?

Additional Resources

1. For more information on why the Sundays in Lent are not included in the 40 days please go to the following site. <https://www.umc.org/en/content/ask-the-umc-what-is-lent-and-why-does-it-last-forty-days>
2. The Seven Signs in the Gospel of John.
 - a. Changing water into wine at Cana in John 2:1-11
 - b. Healing the royal official's son in Capernaum in John 4:46-54
 - c. Healing the paralytic at Bethesda in John 5:1-15
 - d. Feeding the 5000 in John 6:5-14
 - e. Jesus walking on water in John 6:16-24
 - f. Healing the man blind from birth in John 9:1-7
 - g. The raising of Lazarus in John 11:1-45