

THE NOBLEMAN'S FAITH

NO. 1865

A SERMON
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AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

“There was a certain nobleman, whose son was sick at Capernaum. When he heard that Jesus was come out of Judea into Galilee, he went unto him, and besought him that He would come down, and heal his son: for he was at the point of death. Then said Jesus unto him, Except you see signs and wonders, you will not believe. The nobleman said unto him, Sir, come down ere my child die. Jesus said unto him, Go your way; your son lives. And the man believed the word that Jesus had spoken unto him, and he went his way. And as he was now going down, his servants met him, and told him, saying, Your son lives. Then inquired he of them the hour when he began to amend. And they said unto him, yesterday at the seventh hour the fever left him. So the father knew that it was at the same hour in which Jesus said unto him, Your son lives: and he believed, and his whole house.”
John 4:46-53.

THIS narrative illustrates the rise and progress of faith in the soul. While I try to speak of it, I pray that we may experientially follow the track, desiring that such faith may have a rise in our hearts, may make progress in our spirits, and may become even stronger in us than it was in this nobleman. The point, my brethren, is not to hear about these things only, but to have them repeated in your own soul. We want to come to real business, and to make the things of God matters of downright fact to ourselves. Not only to hear about this nobleman from Capernaum, or anybody else, but to see in our own souls the same work of grace as was wrought in them. The same living Christ is here, and His help we as greatly need as ever did this nobleman. May we seek it as he sought it, and find it as he found it! Thus will the Holy Spirit, who inspired the narrative before us, be found writing it over again, not upon the pages of a book, but upon the fleshy tablets of our hearts.

Observe then, at the commencement, that *trouble first of all led this courtly personage to Jesus*. Had he been without trial, he might have lived forgetful of his God and Savior. But sorrow came to his house, and it was God's angel in disguise. It may be, dear friend, that you are in trouble this morning, and if so, I pray that affliction may be the black horse upon which mercy shall ride to your door. It is a sad, sad thing with some men that, the better the Lord deals with them in providence, the worse return they make.

On the other hand, there are hearts that turn to the Lord when He smites them. When they drift into deep waters, when they can scarcely find bread to eat, when sickness attacks their bodies, and especially when their children are smitten, then they begin to think of God, and better things. Blessed is the discipline of the great Father in such a case. It is well for the troubled if their tribulation bruises their heart to repentance, and repentance leads them to seek and find pardon.

The particular form of trial which visited this nobleman was the sickness of his child. He had a little son, whom he dearly loved, and he was down with a deadly fever. The father appears to have been a naturally kind and affectionate person. His servants evidently took a great interest in him, and in the domestic affliction which grieved him, for you observe with what eagerness they came to meet him, to tell him of the recovery of his child.

The father's heart was sadly wounded because his dear boy was at the point of death. No doubt he had tried all the remedies known to the times, had sent for every physician that could be found within miles of Capernaum, and now, having heard of one Jesus of Nazareth, who at Cana had turned water

into wine, and at Jerusalem had done many mighty works, he resorts to Him with eager petition and desperate hope.

He might never have thought of seeking Jesus if it had not been for that dear dying boy. How often does it happen that children, though they are not angels, yet are used to do better work than angels could accomplish, for they sweetly lead their parents to God and heaven! They twine themselves about our hearts, and then, if we see them sicken, and mark their pains, our sympathetic hearts are wrung with anguish, and we cry, "O God, spare my child! Lord, have mercy upon my little one!"

The first prayers that come from many hearts are, under God, fetched forth by grief for little ones most dearly loved. Is it not written, "And a little child shall lead them"? It was so with this man. He was brought to Jesus by trouble, brought to Jesus by anxiety about a child. I have it strongly upon me at this moment that I am speaking to certain persons who are not converted, but they have come here because they are in great sorrow, possibly a dear little one is pining away, and their hearts are crying to God that, if possible, the precious life may be spared. In the house of prayer they feel somewhat comforted, but their hearts are ready to break because of the loss they so much dread. How much I pray our Lord to make this trouble a means of grace!

Trial was the occasion, the preface to the work of divine grace. We will now proceed to look upon the saving part of it, namely, the faith which was born in this nobleman's heart. We will first spy out *the spark of faith*, then *the smoldering fire of faith*—much heaped over and dampened, so as to be smoke rather than fire. Then, thirdly, we will look upon *the flame of faith*, or faith at last showing itself decidedly. And fourthly, *the conflagration of faith*, when faith at last blazed up in the man, fired his whole nature, and spread to his whole house—"And himself believed, and his whole house." Again, I say, let us try to follow in fact as well as in meditation.

I. I want you carefully to mark THE SPARK OF FAITH, all the while saying—I am going to look and see if I have such a spark of faith, and if I find it, I will prize it much, and pray the Holy Spirit to breathe softly upon it, that it may rise to something more permanent and powerful.

The faith of this nobleman *rested, at the first, entirely upon the report of others*. He lived at Capernaum, down there by the sea, and amongst the newsmongers it was common talk that there had arisen a great prophet who was working great wonders. He himself had never seen Jesus, nor heard Him speak, but he believed the report of others, and he was right in doing so, for they were credible persons.

No doubt many are in the early stages of faith. They have heard friends say that the Lord Jesus receives sinners, that He puts away sin, that He calms the conscience, that He changes the nature, that He hears prayer, that He sustains His people under trouble. These things they have heard from persons of good repute, whom they esteem, and therefore they believe them.

Friend, are you saying to yourself, "I have no doubt it is all true, I wonder whether it ever would be true to me. I am in trouble this morning, will the Lord Jesus help me? I have a present pressure upon my spirit, will prayer to Him relieve me?" You cannot say that you know, from anything you have ever seen of Him, that Jesus would thus bless you, but you infer that He will do so from what friends have told you.

Well, faith often begins in that way. Men believe the report which is brought to them by well-known persons who have experienced the power of divine love, and thus at first, like the Samaritans, they believe because of the woman's report. In future time, they will come to believe because of having heard, and seen, and tasted, and handled, for themselves, but the beginning is good. This faith which comes of a report by others is a spark of true fire. Take care of it. May God grant you grace so to pray about it, that that spark may increase into a flame!

Observe that this faith was such a little faith that *it only concerned the healing of the sick child*. The nobleman did not know that he needed healing in his own heart. He did not perceive his own ignorance of Jesus, and his own blindness to the Messiah. He did not perhaps know that he needed to be born again. Neither did he understand that the Savior could give him spiritual life and light. He had little knowledge of the Savior's spiritual power, and thus his faith had a very narrow range.

What he did believe was that the Lord Jesus, if he would come to his house, could prevent his child from dying of the fever. He had reached as far as that, and such faith as he had, he turned to practical use at once. Friend, you do not as yet know how great my Lord is, and what wonderful things He does for those who put their trust in Him, but you are saying, "Surely He could help me this morning in my present trial, and deliver me out of my present difficulty."

So far, so good. Use what faith you have. Bring before the Lord the trial of the hour. Let me encourage you to do so. If you cannot come to Him for heavenly things, you may, for the present, begin with the sorrows and trials of earth. If you cannot come to Him for an eternal blessing, you may come to Him for a passing favor, and He is ready to hear you. Though your prayer should only be about worldly things, and be nothing more than a merely natural prayer, yet pray it, for "He hears the young ravens when they cry," and I am sure they do not pray spiritual prayers. All that ravens can ask for will be for worms and flies, and yet He hears them, and feeds them, and you, a man, though you may but pray at this time for a very commonplace mercy, one of the slighter blessings, yet you may pray with confidence if you have any faith in the gracious Lord. Though that faith will be only a spark, and nothing more, I would not blow it out, nor will the Lord Jesus do so, for He has said that a smoking flax He will not quench. If you have any desire towards Him, and any degree of faith in Him, let it live, and lead you to the dear Master's feet.

The nobleman's faith was so feeble that *he limited the power of Jesus to His local presence*. Hence his prayer was, "Sir, come down ere my child die." If he could but induce the Lord Jesus to enter the room where the sick child lay, he believed that He would speak to the fever, and the fever would be allayed. But he had no idea that the Lord Jesus Christ could work at the distance of twenty-five miles. He had no notion that the word of the Lord could operate apart from His presence. Still, it was better to have that limited faith than to have none at all.

You, children of God, when you get to limiting the Holy One of Israel, are guilty of gross sin, but if those who are seeking the Lord, through ignorance and weakness of faith, are found limiting Him, it is far more excusable in them. The Lord Jesus treats it graciously, and removes it by a gentle rebuke. It is not the same thing for a beginner to be weak of faith as for you, who have enjoyed long experience of God's goodness, to fall into mistrust of Him.

Therefore I say to you, in whom the Lord is beginning to work, if you have no more faith than just to say, "The Lord Jesus could heal me if He were here, the Lord would help me, and answer my cry, if He were here"—it is better to have such a faith than to be unbelieving. Your narrow faith limits Him exceedingly, and shuts Him up in a very close place, and therefore you may not expect Him to do many mighty works for you, and yet up to the measure of your faith He will go with you and bless you. As a matter of unpromised sovereign grace, He may even do exceeding abundantly above what you ask or even think.

Therefore I would treat your faith like a little babe. I would nurse it until it can stand alone, and hold out my finger to help it till its tottering steps become firm. We will not blame the babe because it cannot run or leap, but we will cherish it, and urge it to greater strength, to which strength it will come in due time. Our Lord Jesus Christ deserves the largest faith from each one of us. Grieve Him not by suspicions of His ability. Give Him what faith you have, and ask for more.

His faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, though it was only a spark, *yet influenced this nobleman*. It led him to take a considerable journey to find our Lord. From Capernaum he went up the hills to Cana, that he might plead with Jesus. And he went personally. This is the more remarkable because he was a man of rank and position. I do not know whether he was Chuza, Herod's steward. I should not wonder if he was, because we do not hear of any other noble family being on the side of Christ, but we do hear of the wife of Chuza, Herod's steward, as amongst those that ministered to our Lord of their substance. We hear also of Manaen, foster-brother to Herod. It may have been one of these, we do not know, but noblemen were scarce birds in the church in those days, as, indeed, they are now. We naturally expect,

therefore, to hear of such a person as this again, and as we have honorable mention of those two, we are not very rash in conjecturing that this nobleman may have been one of them.

Now noblemen do not, as a rule, think of taking journeys themselves while they have so many servants at their disposal, but this nobleman came himself to Christ, and personally sought Him that He would come and heal his son. If your faith is weak in some respects and yet strong enough in others to drive you personally to Christ, personally to pray to Him, it is faith of an acceptable order. If it leads you to pray to our Lord with all your heart, beseeching Him, then your faith is of the right sort. If it leads you to beseech Christ to have mercy upon you, it is the faith which saves the soul. It may be little as a grain of mustard seed, but its importunity shows that there is pungency in it—it is true mustard.

Dear sir, are you beginning to pray at this time because of sorrow? In the silence of your soul are you crying, “O God, save me today! I have come up to London to see other things, and I have dropped in here this morning—oh, that this may be the day in which I shall be helped out of my trouble, and myself be saved”? If your faith brings you to prayer, it is the acknowledged child of grace, for true-born faith always cries. If your faith helps you to lay hold of Jesus with a resolute grip, saying, “I will not let you go, except you bless me,” it may be little faith, but it is true faith. It is worked in your soul by the Spirit of God, and it will bring a blessing with it. You shall be saved by this faith, to our Lord's glory, and to your own comfort.

I notice that *this man's faith taught him how to pray in the right style*. Notice the argument he used. He sought Him that He would come down and heal his son, for he was at the point of death. He urged no merit, but pleaded the misery of the case. He did not plead that the boy was of noble birth—that would have been very bad pleading with Jesus, nor did he urge that he was a lovely child—that would have been a sorry argument, but he pleaded that he was at the point of death. His extremity was his reason for urgency. The child was at death's door, therefore his father begs that mercy's door may open.

When you, my friend, are taught by grace to pray aright, you will urge those facts which reveal your own danger and distress, and not those which would make you appear rich and righteous. Remember how David prayed. “Lord,” he said, “pardon my iniquity, for it is great.” That is evangelical pleading. Most men would have said, “Lord, pardon my iniquity, for it was excusable, and by no means reached to the heinousness of my fellow men.” David knew better. His cry is, “Pardon my iniquity, for it is great.”

Plead with God, poor sinner, the greatness of your necessity, the direness of your need. Say that you are at the point of death, say that the matter about which you plead is a matter of life and death. This will be an argument calculated to move the heart of infinite compassion. Any tint of goodness that your pride would tempt you to throw into the picture would spoil it. Lay on the black colors thick and three-fold. Plead with God for His mercy's sake, for mercy is the only attribute which you can hopefully address while you are a sinner unforgiven. You cannot ask the Lord to bless you because of any desert or merit you have, for you have no trace of any such thing, but you will be wise to plead your necessities. Cry, “O God, have mercy upon me, for I need mercy!” State your child's case, and say, “For he is at the point of death.” This is the key which opens the door of mercy.

Do you follow me, dear hearers, you that are not yet converted? Is there, at any rate, in you some desire to come to the Lord Jesus Christ, though it is only because a temporal trouble is pressing you sorely? A horse does not need a dozen spurs to make it run. The one which now wounds your flank is sharp enough, and it is plunged in so deep that you must feel it. Yield to it, lest there should be need of whip as well as spur to make you stir. If you are the Lord's chosen, you will have to come, and the more readily you do so the better will it be for you.

Come at once. Be you not as the horse or as the mule, which have no understanding, but come to Jesus while He gently draws. Though it is with such a feeble faith that you fear it is rather unbelief than faith, yet draw nigh to Him. Come just as you are, and look up to Jesus, and pray, for in that prayer shall lie the hope, nay, the certainty of relief. The great heart of Jesus will feel your prayer, and say, “Go in peace.”

II. Thus we have seen faith in the spark. We will now look at THE FIRE OF FAITH, struggling to maintain itself, and gradually increasing. Let us see how the fire smolders, and the heap begins to smoke, and thus betrays the inner fire.

This man's faith was true as far as it went. That is a great thing to say. He stood before the Savior resolved not to go away from Him. His only hope for his child's life was in this great Prophet of Nazareth, and therefore he did not intend to leave Him till his request was granted. He does not at first get the answer that he wants, but he perseveres, and pleads on. This showed that his faith had heart and vitality in it. It was no whim, nor sudden impulse, but a real persuasion of the power of Jesus to heal. What a mercy to be delivered from all sham faith! Better to have little faith, and that faith real, than to possess a great creed, and give the Lord Jesus no hearty credit. Tell me, my hearer, have you any real practical faith in the Lord Jesus?

His faith was true as far as it went, but *it was hindered by a desire for signs and wonders.* Our Lord therefore gently chided him, saying, "Except you see signs and wonders, you will not believe." Now I know that many of you believe that the Lord Jesus can save, but you have fixed in your mind the way in which He must do it. You have been reading certain religious biographies, and you find that such a man was driven to despair, had horrible thoughts, and so on, therefore you settle it in your minds that you must have similar horrors, or you will be lost. You lay it down as a program that you must be saved in that way, or not at all. Is this right? Is this wise? Do you mean to dictate to the Lord?

Perhaps you have read or heard that certain eminent persons were converted through singular dreams, or by remarkable movements of providence, and you say to yourself, "Something equally singular must happen to me, or I will not believe in the Lord Jesus." In this you err like the nobleman. He expected the Savior to come down to the house, and perform some act peculiar to His prophetic office. In fact, this nobleman is the New Testament reproduction of Naaman in the Old Testament.

You remember how Naaman said, "Behold, I thought, he would surely come out to me, and stand, and call on the Lord His God, and strike his hand over the place, and recover the leper"? Naaman had planned it all in his own mind, and had no doubt arranged a very proper and artistic performance, and therefore, when the prophet simply said, "Go and wash in the Jordan seven times," he could not receive so simple and bald a Gospel. It was too commonplace, too free from ritual.

Many persons, by their mental prejudices, would bind down the Lord of mercy to such and such a way of saving them, but our Lord will not be thus laid under constraint, why should He? He will save whom He wills, and He will save as He wills. His Gospel is not, "Suffer so much horror and despair, and live," but, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you shall be saved." He comes to many, and calls them effectually by the soft whispers of His love. They do but trust Him, and they enter into immediate rest. With little striking feeling, either horrible or ecstatic, they quietly exercise a child-like confidence in their crucified Lord and they find eternal life. Why should it not be so with you? Why should you keep yourself out of comfort by laying down a program, and demanding that the free Spirit should pay attention to it? Let Him save you as He wills. Away with foolish prejudices!

Yet this is to be said of the nobleman's faith, *it could endure a rebuff.* Think of the Master only saying to this poor anguished father, "Except you see signs and wonders, you will not believe." It was sadly true, but it sounded honestly sharp. Oh, the dear lips of Jesus, they are always like lilies, dropping sweet-smelling myrrh! Myrrh, you know, is bitter to the taste, and there was a seeming bitterness about this speech to the nobleman, yet the father did not give up his suit, and turn on his heel, and say, "He treats me harshly." He said within himself, "to whom should I go?" and therefore he went not away.

He was like that woman for whom the Lord's lips dropped a far more pungent morsel of myrrh, as He said, "It is not meet to take the children's bread, and to cast it to dogs." Yet she found a sweet smell in that myrrh, and perfumed her prayer with it as she said, "Truth, Lord, yet the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their masters' table."

This man answered our Lord by still greater importunity. He would not go away, not he. Oh, dear heart, may you have such faith in Christ that, though He should rebuke you, you will not leave Him!

Jesus is your only hope, therefore do not turn away from Him. Imitate Bunyan when he spoke words to this effect—"I was driven to such straits that I must of necessity go to Jesus, and if He had met me with a drawn sword in His hand, I would sooner have thrown myself upon the edge of His sword than have gone away from Him, for I knew Him to be my last hope." O soul, cling to your Lord, come what may!

Then see *how passionately this man pleaded*. He cried, "Sir, come down ere my child die," as much as if he had said, "Lord, do not question me just now about my faith. O my Lord, I pray you do not think of me at all, but heal my dear child, or he will be dead! He was at the point of death when I left him. Do hasten down and save him." Limited was that faith, for he still asks Christ to come down, and seems to think it essential that our Lord should make a journey to Capernaum to work the cure. But note how intense, how eager, how persevering was his pleading. If His faith failed in breadth, it excelled in force. Dear anxious friend, keep close to the example now before us. Pray and pray again, hold on and hold out, cry on and cry out, never cease till the Lord of love grants you an answer of peace.

III. We come to a higher stage, and watch THE FLAME OF FAITH.

The spark increased as a smoldering fire, and now the fire reveals itself in flame. Observe that Jesus said to the petitioner, "Go your way, your son lives." And the man truly believed, and went his way.

Here note that *he believed the word of Jesus over the head of all his former prejudices*. He had thought only that Christ could heal if He came down to Capernaum, but now He believes, though Jesus remains where He is, and only speaks the word.

Friend, will you, at this moment, believe the Lord Jesus Christ on His bare word? Without laying down any rules as to how He will save you, will you trust Him? You have prescribed dark convictions, or vivid dreams, or strange sensations, will you cease from such folly? Will you believe in Jesus Christ as He is revealed in the Scriptures? Will you believe that He can and will save you now upon your simple trust?

Have you not heard of His passion, and death upon the cross for the guilty? Have you not heard it said that all manner of sin and of iniquity shall be forgiven unto men if they believe in Him? Do you not know that he that believes in Him has everlasting life? Will you have done with your nonsense about "Come down, and save me," or, "Make me feel this, and I will believe You"? Will you believe in Him now, despite all your former thoughts, and pretensions, and desires, and just say, "I will trust my soul with Christ, believing that He can save me"? You shall be saved as surely as you do thus trust.

The next thing this man did to prove the sincerity of his faith was that *he at once obeyed Christ*. Jesus said to him, "Go your way," that is, "Go home"—"your son lives." If the man had not believed the word, he would have lingered there, and kept on pleading, and looking for favorable signs, but as he has believed, he is satisfied with the word of the Lord, and goes his way without another word. "Your son lives" is enough for him.

Many of you have said, when you have heard the Gospel preached, "You tell us to believe in Christ, but we will continue in prayer." That is not what the Gospel commands you. Do I hear you say, "I shall continue to read my Bible, and attend the means of grace"? That is not the precept of the Savior. Are you not satisfied with His word? Will you not take that word, and go your way? If you believe in Him, you will go your way in peace, you will believe that He has saved you, and act as if you knew it to be true. You will joy and rejoice in the fact that you are saved.

You will not stop to cavil, and to question, and to follow after all kinds of religious experiences and feelings, but you will exclaim, "He tells me to believe Him, and I believe Him. He says, 'He that believes on me has everlasting life' and I do believe in Him, and therefore I have everlasting life. I may not feel any peculiar emotion, but I have eternal life. Whether I see my salvation or not I am saved. It is written, 'Look unto me, and be you saved, all you ends of the earth.' Lord, I have looked, and I am saved. My reason for believing it is that You have said it. I have done as You have bidden me, and You will keep Your promise." This mode of reasoning is due to the Lord Jesus. He deserves to be taken at His word, and trusted in real earnest.

Now, the nobleman's faith has flamed up indeed. He believes not upon mere report, but upon the word of Jesus. He does not wait for a sign, but he hears the word, and on that word he hangs his confidence. Jesus said, "Your son lives; go your way," and he goes his way, that he may find his son alive. O seeking soul, may God, the Holy Spirit, bring you to this state at once, that you may now say, "O Lord, I will wait no longer for any sort of feeling, or evidence, or sign, but on the word Your blood has sealed I will trust my everlasting all, for I do now accept Your promise, and since I believe it, I will go my way in peace."

Still, I am bound to say concerning this man's faith at this stage that *it still fell somewhat short of what it might have been*. It was a great thing for him to have come so far, but he had farther yet to go. He expected less than he might have expected, and therefore, when he saw his servants, he asked them when the dear child began to amend. He was overjoyed when they virtually said, "He never did begin to amend, the fever left him all at once—at the seventh hour he recovered."

You see he expected a gradual restoration. He looked for the ordinary course of nature, but here was a miraculous work. He received far more than he reckoned on. How little we know of Christ, and how little we believe in Him even when we do trust Him! We measure His boundless treasure by our scanty purses. Yet the faith that saves is not always full-grown, there is room for us to believe more, and to expect more of our blessed Lord. Oh, that we would do so!

But one thing I want to mention here, though I do not quite understand it, perhaps you can make it out. *The father traveled with the leisure of confidence*. It was about twenty-five or thirty miles to Capernaum, and I have no doubt the good man started off directly as the Master said, "Go your way." No doubt he would go at once in obedience to such a command, and make progress on the road home. But we read that the servants met him. Did they start as soon as the child was cured? If so, they might meet him half-way, or thereabouts.

It was uphill—say, therefore, that they came ten miles, and that fifteen, or even twenty, remained for the nobleman to travel. The servants said, "Yesterday at the seventh hour the fever left him." The seventh hour was about one o'clock in the day, and that day was "yesterday." I know that the day closed at set of sun, yet one would hardly talk of "yesterday" without a night between. Did he take fifteen or sixteen hours for that part journey? If so, he did not travel with any excessive speed.

It is true that twenty-five miles was a good day's journey for a camel, for in the East the roads are execrable, but still it does seem to me that the happy father moved with the ease of a believer rather than with the hurry of an anxious parent. A nobleman's usual progress through the villages was slow, and he did not alter the usual pace, because he would not even seem to hurry now that his mind was believingly at rest. He felt quite sure that his son was all right, and therefore the fever of anxiety left the father, even as the fever had left his child.

Anxious minds, even when they believe, are in a hurry to see, but this good man was so sure he would not allow parental love to make him act as if the shadow of a doubt remained. It is written, "He that believes shall not make haste," and in him it was literally fulfilled. He journeyed on in such style as a member of the royal household would be expected to travel in accompanied by a fitting retinue, and thus all saw that his mind was at ease about his son.

I like this consecrated restfulness. It befits a solid faith. I want you all, when you believe in Jesus Christ, to believe right up to the hilt. Give Him not a half faith, but a whole faith, whether about a child, or about yourself, believe in earnest. Say, "'Let God be true, but every man a liar.' On His bare word my soul reposes. I will 'rest in the LORD, and wait patiently for him.' What though no amazing joys flash through my spirit? God has said, 'He that believes on me has everlasting life,' and therefore I have everlasting life. What if I do not rise up, and dance for joy? Yet will I sit still, and sing within my soul, because God has visited His believing servant. I will wait until high joys shall come to me, but meanwhile I will trust, and not be afraid."

Dear hearer, are you accompanying me in all this? Are you ready in this manner to exercise a substantial, restful confidence in Jesus?

IV. So far the nobleman's faith has grown, but now we shall see it become THE CONFLAGRATION OF FAITH.

As he went home, his servants met him with good news. In the quietude of his faith he was exceedingly delighted when they said, "Your son lives." The message came upon him like the echo of the word of Jesus. "I heard that," said he, "yesterday, at the seventh hour, for then Jesus said, 'Your son lives.' Another day has come, and behold, my servants salute me with the same word, 'Your son lives.'" The repetition must have astonished him.

I often notice about the preaching of the Word, how the sentences strike you as to their very words when God blesses them. People say to me, "You said, sir, the same thing that we were talking of when we were on the road. You described our cases even to our thoughts, and you mentioned certain expressions which had been used in our conversation, surely God was speaking through you." Yes, it is often so, Christ's own words find many echoes from the mouths of His commissioned servants. The Lord's providence rules words as well as deeds, and makes men say the right words without their knowing why they say them. God is so graciously omnipresent that all things reveal Him when they are bidden to do so.

Now the nobleman's faith is *confirmed by the answer to his prayers*. His experience has come in to the aid of his faith. He believes in a more assured sense than he did before. He has proved the truth of the Lord's Word, and therefore he knows and is persuaded that He is Lord and God. The faith of a sinner coming to Christ is one thing, the faith of a man who has come to Christ, and has obtained the blessing, is another and stronger matter. The first faith, the simpler faith, is that which saves, but the further faith is that which brings comfort, and joy, and strength into the spirit.

"My prayer is heard," he said, and then he spoke to the servants, and *after inquiry his faith was sustained by each detail*. He cried, "Tell me all about it—when was it?" When they replied, "At the seventh hour the fever left him," he remembered that at that very moment, when over there above the hills at Cana, the Lord Jesus Christ had said, "Go your way; your son lives." The more he studied the case the more wonderful it became. The details were singularly confirmatory of his confidence, and by their means he rose to a clearer and firmer faith.

Brethren, how many such confirmations some of us have had! Doubters attempt to argue with us about the simplicities of the Gospel, and they want to fight with us upon their own ground of mere speculative reasoning. Dear sir, this is hardly fair to us. Our own ground is of quite another kind. We are not strangers to the business of faith, but adepts in it and you ought to allow something for our personal experience of the faithfulness of the Lord our God.

We have a thousand treasured memories of happy details which we cannot tell you. We do not call you swine, but at the same time we dare not throw our pearls before you. We have a host of things laid by, but we cannot repeat them, for to us they are too sacred. Thus we are not able to use those reasons which to our own hearts are the most convincing. We have other arguments than those which we choose to bandy in open court. Be not surprised if we seem obstinate, you do not know how intensely sure we are.

You cannot argue us out of our secret consciousness. You might as well try to argue our eyes out of their sockets. We know, and are sure, for we have seen, and heard, and tasted, and handled of the good Word of the Lord. Certain things are so intertwined with our lives that we are anchored by them. "Coincidences," you say. Ah well! Say what you please, to us they are other than to you! Our soul has cried out, time after time, "This is the finger of God." A man who has been helped out of a very severe trouble cannot forget his deliverer. Do you reply, "You were fortunate to get out of it."? O sir, this seems a very cold-blooded remark!

If you had been where I have been, and experienced what I have experienced, you would own that the Lord stretched out His hand, and saved His servant. You would have the same solemn conviction as I have that God was there, working out salvation. I know that I cannot create those convictions in you by telling you my story. If you are determined not to believe, you will not accept my testimony, but will

think me a deluded person, though I am no more apt to be deluded than you are. However, whether you are inclined to believe or to disbelieve, I am in no such hesitation. I am forced to believe, for the more carefully I examine my life, the more I am convinced that God must have been at work with me and for me.

At the same moment that Christ said, "Your son lives," the nobleman's son did live. The same word that Jesus used to the father was used also by the servants who had been thirty miles away, and therefore, the father felt that something more than human had crossed his path. Do you wonder at it? Besides, that dear boy, whom he found sound and well, was a potent argument. You could not argue the happy father out of a faith which had brought him such joy. The child was at the point of death till faith received the word of the Lord Jesus, and then the fever fled. The father must believe—would you have him doubt?

Strengthened in his faith by his experience, after having believed the bare word of Jesus, the good man now sees that word fulfilled, and *he believes in Jesus in the fullest sense*. Believes for everything, for his body, and for his soul, for all that he is, and for all that he has. From that day forth he becomes a disciple of the Lord Jesus. He follows Him, not as a Healer only, nor as a Prophet only, or as a Savior only, but as his Lord and his God. His hope, his trust, and his confidence are fixed upon Jesus as the true Messiah.

What follows is so natural, and yet so joyous, that I pray it may be true to all of you—his family also believes. When he gets home, his wife meets him. Oh, the delight that sparkles in that woman's eyes! "The dear boy is well," she said, "He is as well as ever he was in his life. He did not need to lie in bed for weeks to recover his strength after the weakening influence of the fever, but the fever is all gone, and the boy is well. Oh, my dear husband, what a wonderful Being this must be who has heard your prayers, and at all that distance has spoken our child into health! I believe in Him, husband, I believe in Him." I am sure she would speak in that fashion. The same processes which had been working in her husband had been working in her.

Now, think of the little boy. Here he comes, so happy and cheerful, and his father tells him all about his fever, and his going to see that wonderful Prophet at Cana, and how He said, "Your son lives." The little boy cries, "Father, I believe in Jesus. He is the Son of God." Nobody doubts the dear child's faith, he was not too young to be healed, and he is not too young to believe. He had enjoyed a special experience, more personal than even that of his father and mother. He had felt the power of Jesus, and it was no marvel that he believed.

Meanwhile, the father is rejoicing to find that he will not be a solitary believer, for there are his wife and boy also confessing their faith. But we are not at the end of the matter, for the servants standing around exclaim, "Master, we cannot help believing in Jesus, also, for we watched the dear child, and saw him recover, and the power which healed him must have been divine." One and all, they emulate their master's faith in Jesus.

"I sat up with the dear boy," says the old nurse, "I would not go to sleep, for I felt that if I did sleep I might find him dead when I awoke. I watched him, and just at the seventh hour I saw a delightful change come over him, and the fever left him." "Glory be to Jesus!" shouted the old woman, "I never saw or heard of such a thing. It is the finger of God." All the other servants were of the same mind. Happy household!

There was a grand baptism soon after, when they all went to confess their faith in Jesus. Not only was the child cured, but the whole household was cured. The father did not know, when he went pleading about his boy, that he himself needed to be saved. The mother, also, probably thought only of her son, but now salvation has come to the whole family, and the fever of sin and unbelief is gone away with the other fever. May the Lord work such a wonder as that in all our houses!

If any of you are groaning under a burden of grief, I trust you will be so relieved that, when you tell your wife of it, she will believe in Jesus too. May the dear child of your care believe in Jesus while yet a

child, and may all who belong to your domestic circle also belong to the divine Lord! Grant, at this time, Your servant's desire, O Lord Jesus, for Your glory's sake! Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—JOHN 4:28-54

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—406, 603, 595

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