

SEEING IS BELIEVING?

John 4:39-54

OPTICAL ILLUSION

SIGN

Seeing is believing. That's what people often say isn't it.

EYE

Many people are like Thomas who said *"I won't believe it unless I see ..."* I was reminded of this often used phrase a few times this week when I heard of a few people who don't believe in God because they can't see Him or they think that scientists have disproved Him.

One of the things that I've learned about seeing and believing is this:

THE EYE CAN ONLY SEE WHAT IT WANTS TO BELIEVE.

In other words, even if people see something amazing and of God, they will try to discount it as a coincidence, or a freak of nature, or call it a hoax or imagination playing tricks.

JESUS TURNS OUR THINKING ON ITS HEAD

Things start to change in our understanding of God when we start to take Him at His word and embrace what He says and offers us.

BELIEVING IS SEEING.

That's the point about John's Gospel. The second sign John relates looks into this area as Jesus, who has made a trip to Judea and Samaria since the first miracle, returns to where it all started; Cana in Galilee. In that trip to Jerusalem, Jesus had cleansed the temple, done many miracles, met Nicodemus, a sceptic who wanted to know more. Significantly he went to Samaria and met the woman at the well and her fellow Samaritans who embraced what Jesus said enthusiastically even though He didn't do a single miracle there.

VERSE

As Paul says in Romans 10:17 *faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word about Christ.*

Therein lies the difference. The Jews demanded a miracle. I won't believe unless I see... Some did when the miracles came, many – most – just didn't. They loved the stunts, but they saw what they wanted and didn't like what Jesus had to say. Nicodemus, wanted to hear more and after hearing Jesus' words we know he believed. Jesus said something significant about the nature of seeing and believing which I mention here because it's pertinent to this miracle today.

John 3: 3 Jesus answered, "I am telling you the truth: no one can see the Kingdom of God without being born again." 4 "How can a grown man be born again?" Nicodemus asked. "He certainly cannot enter his mother's womb and be born a second time!" 5 "I am telling you the truth," replied Jesus, "that no one can enter the Kingdom of God without being born of water and the Spirit. 6 A person is born physically of human parents, but is born spiritually of the Spirit. 7 Do not be surprised because I tell you that you must all be born again. 8 The wind blows wherever it wishes; you hear the sound it makes, but you do not know where it comes from or where it is going. It is like that with everyone who is born of the Spirit."

VERSE

You can't see the wind, but you can see its power when it blows things over. The picture of the Holy Spirit here is the wind. You may not be able to see God, but you know when He does something. Most significantly you know who God is when He does something to you.

The Samaritans, the race who were related to the Jews but regarded as sub-Jewish, Gentile, regarded as being out of the orbit of God's people, listened to Jesus, believed and found I believe, that experience of God which comes when people start to trust. They didn't look for a sign – they just trusted. And the Wind of God blew into their lives “they told the woman, “we believe now, not because of what you said, but because we ourselves have heard him, and we know that he really is the Saviour of the world.”

CANA MAP

So back Jesus comes to Cana. Now everyone knew who Jesus was. Not only had His first miracle happened there, many had seen what He had done in Jerusalem. Word had got around and we can correctly infer from what Jesus said to the official, that everyone was after seeing a miracle. Jesus said: *“None of you will ever believe unless you see miracles and wonders.”* Why the criticism? Because seeing the stunt is a superficial thing. That's why John gives us Jesus' comment *“Prophets are not respected in their own country.”* Jesus wanted then to hear what God was saying to them by His Spirit, because it was that which would truly change their lives (like it had the Samaritans), but in doing so, it challenged their preconceptions and their lifestyle.” They didn't want to change. All they wanted was confirmation of what they wanted to see and believe.

That's one of the reasons why I believe we see so little of the miraculous today. We know God still does all this stuff because we hear stories form all over the world. But why not here? Because we have to many people who say they won't believe unless they see. God has already said all He wants today and what He expects of us and what He wants to bless us with. We don't need a stunt. We just need to trust and follow Jesus – because all the rest of it flows from that.

How can I say that with confidence? Because of our story today. Here's this man. He's an official from Capernaum. He's probably an official from Herod's government as it was Herod who was the ruling power in Galilee. His son was dying and he heard about Jesus and was desperate for Jesus to heal his son. For all we know he had already had Jewish faith healers to come and pray for the son and probably paid them for it. But he had heard that Jesus was doing real miracles – in Him was real power!

VERSES

We don't know how long it took for the man to get to Jesus. You can imagine what his surprise must have been when he got the reply from Jesus *“None of you will ever believe unless you see miracles and wonders.”*

The man's reply was 49 *“Sir,” replied the official, “come with me before my child dies.”* He was desperate for His child. In a sense I think the reply he gave was intended as *“well I believe you, now come and heal my child.”* In those days Jewish faith healers came to sick to pray over them and collect a fee for doing so. The man believed Jesus could heal the boy, he just wanted Jesus to come and do it.

The reply from Jesus we also know: Jesus said to him, *“Go; your son will live!”* *The man believed Jesus' words and went.*

The thing that defines real faith is when we start to take Jesus at His word and act on it even if we can't see the answer. The man was prepared to walk away because he took Jesus at His word. How do I know that?

The miracle happened at 1pm one day but he didn't get back home until the next day. Now remember, nowhere is very far from anywhere else in Galilee. Cana is 38.2km from Capernaum. That's 23.7 miles. It would take a quick walker 6 hours to get there, which would have got him back to Cana just after dark. If he was a high ranking official he would have had a horse and got there in a couple of hours. If he was low ranking, he would have had a donkey and got there in 3 hours. If he was very low ranking he would have had to walk. But as an anxious parent, wouldn't he have wanted to get home even if that meant he would get there at a late hour?

TO HAVE FAITH IS TO BE SURE OF THE THINGS WE HOPE FOR, TO BE CERTAIN OF THE THINGS WE CANNOT SEE.

Not this guy, he stayed over and went the next day. This was a man of faith who trusted Jesus and was quite happy to do business, or relax and stay over, rather than rush to get home because Jesus had said the boy would live. Now that's faith!

How does this sign challenge us? As with last week's message, we see again how Jesus has power over nature. Just as God created the world by just saying a word; in one phrase Jesus pronounced the boy healed *"your son will live!"*

Jesus often did miracles to people and touched them, but actually this miracle tells us that what heals people isn't what Jesus physically did, but that it was according to His word and will. What Jesus says goes.

And that should be the essence of our faith. What Jesus says, goes, however fantastic or implausible that may seem. He is the King of Kings and Lord of Lords and all creation bows to Him.

The man took a simple step of faith. He went home. He didn't hurry home. He just took his time and when he arrives he finds his faith had been well placed as his son was healed at the very hour Jesus gave the word.

Understand this about God. Here we have a book full of promises. If we seriously pray, we also understand the voice and will of God. If we want to see the power and presence of God, it doesn't start with God doing miracles to try and convince us. He isn't fickle like we are. It starts when we take God at His word and follow Jesus, trusting Him even when like the official, we can't see the answer and can't see the way through.

When we start to believe, when we take those steps of faith, then we will start to see God in everything we do and say. And it's what the Lord wants for each one of us, His people here this morning. He wants to lift us from where we are into a higher place in our relationship with Him, in our worship and in our lives.

Look for the miracles!

God will make a way