

NOBLEMAN'S SON, NOBLEMAN'S FAITH

This sermon was preached in Shalom Church, Singapore in 2004.

Scripture Reading: **John 4:46-54**

It has to happen. It has now happened. Someone in the family is sick! Who is sick? Not the grandfather. Not the father. But the son. That's uncommon. That's unexpected. We tend to associate sickness with grandparents, or even parents. But seldom with children. Especially this kind of sickness!

What kind of sickness? This is not just a common flu, nor just a persistent cough. This boy is quite sick. If he is living in the 21st century, he would be warded in a hospital. Not any normal ward. Not even the High Dependency Ward. But in the Intensive Care Unit!

Can you imagine the scene? There he lies on the bed, with tubes all over him, with equipment all around him. The nurses come to check his temperature every hour and the doctors come to examine him every 3 hours. The parents are there, looking at all that is happening, with an overwhelming sense of helplessness and despair. The truth is that he could die any time! That's what **verse 47** says.

You can be sure that before he reached this stage, much has already been done for him. Every known doctor in the region has been consulted. Every known or rumoured remedy has been tried. None has worked! The money in the bank account drops rapidly, but the fever hardly drops a mark! Imagine the stress, the anxiety, the desperation!!

Ladies and gentlemen, boys and girls, how real is the scene depicted here in **John 4:46-54**. In such a situation, to whom, to what, will you turn? Will that person fail you? Can that thing sustain you? This man ---- he is called 'a certain nobleman' in **verse 46** --- heard that someone may be able to help, really able to help. His name is Jesus --- Jesus of Nazareth.

He has heard of Jesus turning water into wine at Cana not too long ago. He might also have heard of the many miracles Jesus had performed at Jerusalem and Judea. "*Could Jesus heal my son?*" he wondered. "*If He could turn water into wine, why could He not heal my boy though he be at the point of death?*" he reasoned. "*But would Jesus heal my son?*" he wondered again. "*How would I know, unless I give it a try?*"

So off he goes, travelled a distance of about 20 miles (or more than 32 kilometres) from Capernaum to Cana to look for Jesus. Capernaum is by the Sea of Galilee. Cana is up in the hills. This explains why he later said to Jesus, in **verse 49**, "*Sir, come down before my child dies!*" From Capernaum to Cana --- that's quite a journey for this nobleman to make. He had to travel for over 32 kilometres. Did he do it on foot? He had to climb the hills. And he cannot afford to move slowly. Every minute is precious, he has no time to lose --- '*hurry*' is the key word.

He did not send someone to do it. He did it himself. People of his status are not used to making such journeys. So it must be a tiring and stressful journey for him. Yet none of these are considerations. He must go to Cana, he must get hold of Jesus. Now we come to the middle of **verse 47**. We see only two persons --- the nobleman and Jesus. This is the scene where we shall fix our eyes on.

Move your lens, and fix it, *first*, on the nobleman.

In particular, we want to see him coming to look for Jesus, that is, from **verse 46-49**. What do you see? What can you say about him? Some good things and some not so good ones.

Let's begin with the good things.

I have already mentioned some of them. We see him coming all that distance, more than 32 kilometres, from Capernaum to Cana. We see him coming personally, instead of sending a

servant. A picture of sincerity and humility? Perhaps, though some will say, it is a picture of desperation. Whatever you attribute this to, I think credit must go to the man for making that journey. He did not think that it is too far, too troublesome. He did not wait for Jesus to come to Capernaum. He went to Cana to look for Jesus.

Ask someone living in Singapore to go from Pasir Ris to Boon Lay, and despite the fact that we have the MRT, the LRT, the public buses and taxis, a common reply you will get is: "*Wow, so far!*" But for this nobleman, 32 kilometres is near enough!

Another thing commendable about him can be found in **verse 48 & 49**. **Verse 48** is a rebuke from Jesus. **Verse 49** is the nobleman's response to the rebuke. He took it. He did not take offence. Instead, he pleaded with Jesus all the more intensely. "*Sir, come down before my child dies!*" No attempt to defend himself, no attempt to justify himself. Only an intense cry from the deepest of his heart: *Please have mercy*. I say it is commendable, because there are people who can be offended very easily. "*Ah, I come and ask for help, and He rebuked me. Forget it! What's the big deal about Jesus! I mean, I am a nobleman, you know. How dare this carpenter rebuke me!*" This could be the response of some other noblemen, but not this nobleman. He accepted it, he did not argue with it. He asked for nothing but mercy.

Now, what about the not-so-commendable things about him?

First of all, he is interested in Jesus only as a miracle worker. His son was near death. He heard that Jesus could heal, that He has performed some stupendous miracles. That's all he knows about Jesus, that's all he thinks of Jesus --- a miracle-worker. Jesus is of course a miracle worker, but He is more than that. His miracles are not meant to be wonders --- to astound and awe the people who witness it.

His miracles are meant to be signs --- to point the people to who He is. He is the Saviour of sinners. His mission is to save sinners from their sins, to bring sinners into the family of God, to give sinners eternal life. Not just to heal the sick or turn water into wine!

At this point in time, the nobleman just does not see this. All he sees and knows is Jesus the miracle-worker. Of course, what drives him to come and look for Jesus is not a deep conviction of his sins, but a great desperation over his son's condition. What he wants is temporal blessing --- meaning for his son. Not spiritual, eternal blessing --- forgiveness of his sins.

Next, his idea of Jesus' ability is quite limited. He says to Jesus, "*Come to Capernaum. Come to my home, and heal my son.*" His idea is: *Jesus must be physically present, else it is no good.* He is very much bound up in time and space. Honestly, which one of us aren't? Not only that, but I have read some Christians criticising him on another count. "*Did you hear what he says in verse 49?*" they asked. He asked Jesus to come and heal his son before he dies. Yes, he believes Jesus can heal his son, despite his desperate condition. But he does not believe that Jesus can raise his son from the dead, should he die. That is why he placed a time limit there. He says, "*Come, before he dies!*"

I am not sure if this is a fair criticism. I think it is only natural for the nobleman, in his physical, mental, emotional and spiritual state then, to say as he did. The truth is, when you have a closer look at him, you can most definitely find things to criticise him for.

That's the nobleman --- a mixture of good and not-so-good. And that's us --- a mixture of good and not-so-good! How many of us can say that all our motives in seeking Jesus are absolutely pure? How

many of us are totally clear, with no confusion whatsoever, about who Jesus is and what He can do? How many of us always ask the right and proper thing from Jesus? Like the nobleman, we could be seeking Jesus because some physical, earthly need. Maybe it is domestic problem, health problem, or workplace problem. We did not come for spiritual blessings. We come for earthly blessings. What would Jesus say about that?

It is now time to move your lens, and fix it on Jesus.

What do you see? What can you say? First of all, we see Jesus engaging him. Jesus did not ignore him. Nor did Jesus tell him to go away, sort out his confusion and then come back and take a test. If he scores 50 and above, ok he can talk to Jesus. Else, take the test again! No, Jesus engages him. You say, "*What kind of an engagement is it?*" What so good about it, because Jesus actually rebuked him? Yes, it is true it is a rebuke. But warm rebuke is better than cold silence! At least it shows that Jesus did not dismiss him. At least it shows that Jesus is concerned for him. Isn't this true for you and of you? Unless you are concern for that person, unless you want to do good to him, would you rebuke him? This man came seeking only earthly, physical blessings from Jesus. This man came thinking of Jesus solely as miracle-worker. Jesus did not dismiss him. Instead, Jesus wants him to move from that to something higher and better!

Thank you, Jesus! Because this is so much hope and comfort for you and me. How gentle a Saviour He is! Like what was said in the Old Testament Scriptures, a bruised reed He will not break. The reed is bruised, it is not perfect. Instead of breaking it, He seeks to make it whole once more! This is how He treats ignorant, confused, fumbling sinners like us! He does not require absolute clarity of thought and He does not demand perfection, before He will have anything to do with us. At our level, where we are, He engages us. Not allow us to remain there, but with the aim of bringing us to a higher and better level. I say, thank you Jesus. Thank Jesus that He is such a gentle Saviour!

Having seen the gentleness of Jesus, we must now see His power. Look at **verse 50**. What did Jesus say? He did not say, "*Your son will live!*" or "*Your son is going to live!*" He says, "*Your son lives!*" It is not a word of prediction. It is a word of power! We know, from **verses 51-53**, that when Jesus said those 3 words, 32 kilometres away at Capernaum, that boy was healed immediately! Not gradually, but immediately, which is how **verse 52** should be understood. He did not say anything to the boy. He did not do anything to the boy. He did not order anyone to do anything. In fact, He was 32 kilometres away. Yet a three-word pronouncement --- *Your son lives* --- is enough to bring that boy from the gates of death and make him stand and jump as if he was never sick!! Oh the power of Jesus! Can you do it? I ask: Can anyone on earth do a thing like this? But Jesus has done it! What does this tell us about Jesus? One thing: **HE IS GOD!**

My dear friends, be very careful how you treat this Jesus! He is not just man. He is God. Not a puny, impotent god created by the imagination of man! But the Almighty God!! How foolish to reject Him, to rebel against Him, to be at war with Him!

We have seen that He is also very gentle! A gentle and a powerful God! How unique!! No where, in no other religions do you find such a combination! The gods of man are either gentle but powerless, or powerful and cruel. Here is Jesus, the true and living God, and He is gentle and powerful. Happy are you, if you believe and worship Him! Indeed, Christians, you are happy people --- the most happy and the only happy people on earth.

Oh never, never forget who Jesus is. Always remember the two truths conveyed about Jesus from this miracle. He is gentle. He is powerful.

Are you struggling with some thorny issues at the moment? Domestic issues? Issues with children? Issues at work? Issues of health? There are people who had suggested that these issues are

too small to bother Jesus with, that they are way beneath Him to care about them. Nothing can be further from the truth! If the nitty-gritty of life cannot be brought to your Jesus, then He is not the Jesus of the Bible! He cares! And He is very, very gentle as He deals with us. Yes, we should be concerned about our spiritual life, our walk with God, our evangelism, our Christian service. He will bring us there. But He will not dismiss us, just because we are at the moment so overwhelmed and surrounded by these so-called 'unspiritual' matters. Nothing can be too trivial, if it concerns you, you whom He loves so much as to die on the Cross for. And remember too, nothing is too difficult for Him.

As we have observed, distance is no issue for Him. And it is no issue for Him in relation to our struggles! Yes, physically He is in heaven, but He is just as able to handle the issue with a word, like He did here. Christians, go to your Lord. Christians, trust your Master. All you need to do is to do what this nobleman did in **verse 50**. He believed the word that Jesus spoke to him, and he went his way. Believe your God, Christians, and rest in Him.

Why have you come today? It could be for a great variety of reasons. You have seen someone coming to Jesus for one reason. To seek medical healing for his son. Jesus did not ignore him, did not turn him away, despite his many errors and weaknesses. Jesus led him step by step, from a vague faith in **verse 47**, to a clearer faith in **verse 50**, and finally to real saving faith in **verse 53**. It is not good enough just to know these things. You must see to it that it is repeated in your very own life! Real saving faith is the goal, my friends. This miracle was done as a sign, to point this nobleman and his family, as well as to point you to Jesus. That you may see and know that Jesus is God, that Jesus is the appointed Saviour of sinners. That you may come to believe in Him, to bow your knees to Him, to say to Him, "My Lord and my God." Here is Someone who has turned water into wine earlier, and now healed a dying boy when the medical world has given up hope. Here is Someone who can perform a great miracle on the spot, as well as from a distance. He is none other than God, the Creator of the universe, and your Creator. Oh bow your knees to Him, now and always!