

CHRIST'S PICTURE OF REAL LIFE

John 4:46-53

Life, any kind of life, every kind of life, in its essence is a mystery. No one knows what it is. But life in its various manifestations, and in the exercise of its natural functions, is really very simple. The trees and the shrubs may be guided, but they do not need an instructor to tell them how to put forth their leaves; nor the flowers how to unfold their buds. Life finds its natural expression, and expresses itself according to its own nature.

It is the folly of man that he complicates that which God would make simple. Life is simple from the standpoint that it is not difficult to learn to walk, to learn to use our hands, to learn to play, and to learn to work a little. Would it not be surprising, therefore, if the God Who has made life so simple did not make the way of salvation equally simple? Yet it is the tendency of human folly to make the simple complex, and the complex more complex still. The Bible has within it such depths as the profoundest intellect has never fathomed, and such heights as the most daring imagination has never reached. Yet the Word of God comes to us in such simple speech, and is so framed that even little children can understand the Word of Life and be saved.

Let us, therefore, carefully examine one of the simple narratives of the New Testament, which we choose to call "Christ's Picture of Real Life", and which illustrates in striking fashion the principle of saving faith.

I. The Request.

A certain nobleman, who lived in Capernaum, had heard about a celebrated prophet and preacher who was continually going through the cities of Galilee and Judea. He had been told that this mighty preacher did not merely charm His hearers by His eloquence, but that He had won the hearts of many by the benevolent miracles which He had performed as a confirmation of His mission.

It came to pass that this nobleman was in trouble. He was a man of some position and prominence, and yet that did not keep him from knowing what it was to be in trouble. That reminds us of the truth of that old Spanish proverb which says, "There is no home without its hush." So, the rich have their troubles and afflictions as well as the poor and the obscure. Never suppose that the rich do not have any cares. The dwellers in palaces often sleep more uneasily than dwellers in cottages. Money may shut out debt and rags, but not disease and death. The rich and the prominent are subject to the ravages of sickness even as others. The children of the wealthy and the educated sin and need a Saviour even as the children of the poor and the illiterate. Wealth has no power to prevent the heart of a father or a mother from bursting with grief when sickness threatens to snatch away a tender loved one, or when sin seizes a son or daughter and strangles hope in the hearts of the loved ones.

This nobleman's particular trouble was the illness of his son. His child was at the point of death, and the father's heart was stirred with grievous concern for his boy. Perhaps a passer-by in the narrow street saw the shadows crossing the window, and gave the matter but a heedless thought because sickness was so commonplace. But it makes a tremendous difference which side of the window one is on at a time like that.

It is an easy matter for those who have passed through a similar experience to imagine the anxiety in that sickroom. Can't you visualize the mother as she sat by the bedside, watching the little sufferer, stroking his hair, and

bathing his fevered lips? Nearby stood the father. Even though he was a steward in the king's palace, his wealth and influence were unavailing then and there. It is always a touching sight to see a manifestation of parents' love for their children, concern for their children, and watchfulness over their children. If parents, who love their children and would die for them, would only go deeper than that, and look after them in their supreme needs, how blessed it would be! If parents would put themselves out for the spiritual welfare of their children, then how many the heartaches from which they would be delivered, and how many disasters they would miss!

If parents were as anxious about the salvation of their children as this father was about the restoration of his child, there would be but few unsaved children. As a rule, parents are far more concerned about the physical health of their children than they are about their spiritual health.

In the hour of his great need, this nobleman recalled that somebody had told him that Christ Jesus had come out of Judea into Galilee. This indicates that somebody had been talking. There were no such means of spreading information in those days as we enjoy today. News was spread by oral communication. People talked about the Saviour, and somebody had carried the news that He had returned to the scene of His first miracle in Cana. I wonder if any of us advertise Christ as widely as we might.

Concerning the conduct of this nobleman in connection with his request, three things are commendable.

1. He went to the Saviour!

He had never seen Christ nor heard Him speak. But, he believed the reports of others, and rightly so because they came from trustworthy people. Trouble had entered his home and caused him to go to the Saviour. He likely would not have thought of going to the Saviour if his son, whom he loved so dearly, had not been at the point of death. Had he been without a trial, he might have lived entirely forgetful of the Saviour.

Although he occupied a high position, had great wealth, lived in luxury, and had great influence with men, he had come upon a day when all these things failed him. Riches and grandeur had no power to stem the progress of disease and death. He had consulted every physician within his reach, but not one of them gave him any encouragement. After all other physicians had failed to effect a cure, he turned to Jesus because he thought of Him as a wonderful Healer, one who might be able to restore the health of his child. In his helplessness he turned to Christ.

It is always good when trouble leads a person to the Lord instead of away from Him. It will always do one of these two things. What a pity that so many will not turn to the Lord except as a last resort! When life gets out of control people often automatically turn to God. When disease gets beyond the reach of medical skill, then people remember the Great Physician.

In spite of the fact that he occupied a prominent position, and had servants in abundance to wait upon him and to do his bidding, he did not send any of them to Jesus, but he went himself, and he made his own request.

2. He told his troubles to the Saviour.

When all went well with the nobleman, he did not feel any need of Christ.

But when trouble came, he found there wasn't anyone except Christ who could help him. He did not know that Jesus could or would do anything for him. He had merely heard that he had healed others, so in his extremity he decided to approach Him and see if He would help him by healing his dear dying boy. He was brought to Jesus by anxiety about his child. How often does it happen that children sweetly lead their parents to God and to heaven! In his hour of need, this loving father told his troubles to the Saviour.

3. He sought the help of the Saviour.

How fortunate people are when they realize that there is no help for them anywhere except in the Lord Jesus Christ! When the nobleman went to the Saviour, he urged Him to come down and to heal his son who was about to die. In substance, he said, "I must have Thy ministration, or my son will die."

He seems to have thought that nothing less than the Lord's physical presence could render the needed service. His faith was so feeble that he limited the power of Jesus to His local presence. Hence, his request was "Sir, come down ere my child die." Seemingly he thought that if Jesus did not come quickly He would come too late. His request implied, "If there is any chance for my boy, come down ere he die." If he could only induce the Lord 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 some twenty-five miles. Still, it was better to have that limited faith than to have none at all. In his earnest appeal to the Master, he urged no merit because of his rank or position, but he simply plead the misery of the case. His extremity was his reason for urgency. Because the child was at death's door, the father begged that mercy's door might be opened. But there was a weakness in his appeal, and that was the fact that he dictated to Jesus how He should help him.

II. The Response.

1. Jesus tested the faith of the nobleman.

Our Lord had to bring him to the position where there would be nothing left but a genuine faith in the Lord and His Word. Instead of giving the man an answer which might have consoled him, Jesus rebuked this poor anguished father for the littleness of his faith by saying, "Except ye see the signs and wonders, ye will not believe." This reproof was not intended for the nobleman only, but also for the Galileans, who demanded miracles as the sole ground of faith. It was sadly true, but at the same time rather sharp.

He made a mistake by not making his wants and leaving to Christ the manner in which they were to be supplied. In substance Jesus said, "Why, man, won't it take signs and wonders before you will believe?" "If I will heal your boy, won't you consent for Me to heal him in My way?" "If I will show mercy unto your boy, won't you let Me show it in My own way, without any advice or counsel or direction at all from you?"

2. Jesus gave a command to the nobleman.

Instead of the man's turning away offended, he exclaimed in soul-moving terms, "Sir, come down ere my child die." He thus earnestly importuned the

Lord to come and to heal his son. There was something in the tone of the voice, in the majestic presence, as well as in what Jesus said, which went to the man's heart and gave him faith.

Christ looked upon him with an eye of ineffable benevolence, and said to him, "Go thy way; thy son liveth." He did not go down. He did not show him any miracle. He gave him a definite command and a verbal promise. He did not offer him any other assurance except His own simple word, "Go thy way; thy son liveth."

III. The Result.

1. The nobleman believed and obeyed the Saviour.

There came to him a sense of confidence in Jesus, and he believed the word that Jesus had spoken to him. He took Jesus at His word. The word of the Master was enough for him. He believed that his request had been granted, although he had not perceived the gift. The very essence of faith is taking Christ at His word. Believing, he did exactly as he was told, which is something that all of us ought to do. Contentedly and cheerfully, and without any hesitation whatever, he left Jesus and started home. He retired quietly, with a heart that was overflowing with gratitude. True faith always issues in obedience.

2. The Saviour healed the boy.

Believing that the Saviour had cured his child, the father evidently got a good night's rest before starting on the homeward journey. Because of his delay in arriving home, his wife quite likely became uneasy about him. Perhaps she said, "Why does husband stay away so long? He, of course, does not know that our boy is well." Calling his servants, she said, "Go up to Cana, and tell husband the joyful news."

As he was going down the road home, and was approaching Capernaum, he saw some of his servants approaching with joyful haste. He had the confidence that his son was healed. He was of the opinion that the servants had been sent out by his faithful wife to reassure him. But he said nothing to them. Impatient because of his delay in speaking, the servants said, "Master, thy son liveth." In the quietude of his faith he was delighted exceedingly when they said, "Thy son liveth." They did not know Jesus had spoken that sentence, but having seen the change, they uttered His very words. Their statement naturally confirmed the faith of the nobleman. However, he did not manifest any surprise. It was just as he had expected.

He said to them, "Tell me all about it. When did it happen? At what hour did he begin to mend?" In effect they said to him, "Really, it did not begin, but it just happened." They said, "Yesterday at the seventh hour the fever left him." Thus he learned that it was the very hour when Jesus said, "Go thy way; thy son liveth." Having discovered that his faith and his obedience were thus vindicated, he surrendered completely.

This father had discovered that Christ was an impartial and omnipotent Saviour. For that reason no case was too hard for Him. He had approached the Saviour with fear and trembling, but he went away from Him in boldness and confidence. He went to Him in distress, but he went back to his home joyful. Something had taken place within him that made him a different

person and completely revolutionized his life.

3. The household of the nobleman believed on the Saviour.

Not only did this father believe on the Saviour, but all his household believed on Him when they saw and fully realized what the Lord had done for them. That was certainly a great thing to restore the lad to health, but it was a far greater deed to open his father's eyes. Of all the marvels in the world, there is none comparable with the deliverance of a soul from spiritual and eternal death. Blessed sickness indeed when God uses it as a sermon to bring an entire household to a saving knowledge of Christ!

Let me speak this closing word to each of you who needs and wants the help of Christ. To every one of you who wants to be saved, let me assure you that Jesus Christ is willing and able to save you. Since He wants to save you, won't you let Him save you in His way? He will never save you any other way. You must come to the point where you will say: "Yes, Lord Jesus, I give up. I fully trust Thee. I here and now accept Thee as my Saviour. Save me in Thine own way." Trust Him fully as your Saviour and Lord, and He will forgive and save you.