

CHRIST'S PICTURE OF LIFE

John 4:46-53

In its essence life is a mystery. But in its various manifestations, and in the exercise of its natural functions, life is really very simple. Life expresses itself according to its own nature. 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. In the animal world the young learn to look after themselves. They learn to walk, to feed themselves, and to develop their powers without instruction.

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.

Let us, therefore, carefully examine one of the simple narratives of the New Testament, which I have chosen to call "Christ's Picture of 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 not only charmed His hearers by His eloquence, but that He had also 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. This reminds us of the truth of that old Spanish proverb which says, "There is no home without a 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 those who live 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 well-to-do and the educated sin and need a Saviour just as certainly as do the children of the poor and the uneducated. Finances cannot prevent the heart of a father or a mother from bursting with grief when sickness threatens to snatch away a 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 grieved on account of his condition. It makes a tremendous difference when the one who is in a serious condition is your own.

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 them. If parents would only go deeper than that and look after them in their supreme needs, how much more wonderful it would be! If parents would put themselves out for the spiritual welfare of their children, they would be delivered from so many heartaches, and would avoid so many disasters.

If parents were as anxious about the salvation of their children as this nobleman was about the restoration of his child, there would not be many 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. Without delay the man did three commendable things.

1. He went to the Saviour.

So far as we know, he had never seen Christ nor heard Him speak. But, he believed the reports of others about the Saviour, and rightly so because they came from trustworthy people. Trouble in his home caused the man to approach the Saviour. Likely he 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 the man been without a trial, he might have gone on without thinking of the Lord.

Although the nobleman occupied a high position, had great resources, lived in luxury, and had great influence with men, he had come to the time and place when these things could not meet his need. Riches and grandeur did not have any power to stem the progress of disease and death. After others could not effect a cure, he turned to Christ in the hope that He might be able to restore the health of his child.

It is always good when trouble leads a person to the Lord instead of away from Him. It will always do one or the other. What a pity that so many will not turn to the Lord except as a last resort! When life gets out of control people automatically turn to God for help. When disease gets beyond the reach of medical skill, then people will think about and turn to the Great Physician. Even though this man had servants to do his bidding, he did not send any of them to Christ, but he went in person to make his own request.

2. He told his troubles to the Saviour.

As long as things went well with the nobleman, he had not felt any need of Christ. But when trouble came, he found that Christ was the only one who could help him. Having heard that Christ had healed others, in his extremity this devoted father decided to approach Him and see if He would help him by healing his dear dying boy. His anxiety about his child brought him to Christ. How often children are a means of bringing 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 it is when people realize that there is not any help for them except in Christ! When the nobleman had made the journey of approximately twenty-five miles to seek the help of the Saviour, he urged the Lord Jesus to come to his home and heal his son who was about to die. In substance he said, "I must have Thy ministration, or my son will die."

He seemed to think 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 Christ to His physical presence. Hence, his request was, "Sir, come down ere my child die." Seemingly he thought that if Christ did not come immediately it would be too late. 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 request, and that was the fact that he dictated to Christ as to how He should help him.

II. The Response.

1. Christ tested the faith of the nobleman.

Instead of giving the man an answer which might have consoled him, Christ mildly rebuked the anguished father for the littleness of his faith by saying, "Except ye see 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 known his wants and leaving to Christ the manner in which they were to be supplied. In substance Christ 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. Christ 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 Christ 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 Christ Jesus, and he believed the word that Christ had spoken to him. He took Christ 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 Christ 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 Christ 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 Christ 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 need and want 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.