

One of the leading coffee manufacturers at the turn of the century was the Frenchman named Rosales. He owned a coffee company in France and was especially selective in buying his coffee beans. Dr. Rosales knew that the greatest single factor in quality coffee was the quality of the bean, so after carefully surveying all available resources, he decided to buy his coffee from one specific location in South America. That meant, of course, that all of his coffee had to be shipped from quite a distance, but it was worth it, because he knew that his company was buying quality. On one particular trip in 1903, his cargo ship ran into a turbulent storm. The experienced captain was able to weather the storm successfully, but he discovered some discouraging news upon his arrival in France. You see, because of the distance involved, the captain had wanted to make optimum use of his ship. So he not only packed the ship's hull full of coffee, but he also had strapped bails of coffee on the deck. The coffee stored within the ship had weathered the storm fine, but the coffee strapped on the deck had been so sprayed by the salt water that it appeared to be ruined. Well, Dr. Rosales definitely was disappointed, but being the frugal businessman that he was, he decided to not let this apparently worthless coffee go to waste. The coffee king had been working for years trying to discover a process to successfully remove caffeine from coffee, and he would use this spoiled coffee for his research rather than wasting perfectly good coffee beans. He had tried so many different ways for so long to remove caffeine from coffee beans and was getting so discouraged. At least this time he wouldn't have the added burden of additional

financial loss over what he had already suffered. Well, you have probably already guessed what happened. As he started to experiment with the salted coffee, it began to react differently than the choice, selected beans. Almost without effort, the caffeine was removed. And out of the tragedy of the storm that had threatened to bring great financial loss to Dr. Rosales, decaffeinated coffee was born which was to make him famous and bring great financial profit to him. He decided to abbreviate the French words for "no caffeine" in naming his newly discovered product, so he called it SANKA.

It is amazing how many times growth and progress come out of trials in life. There will be some great apparent disaster. But then thru perseverance a silver lining will appear on the storm cloud and the ultimate end will reveal great blessing. This not only happens in the physical realm, but it also happens in the spiritual realm as well. In fact, it is such a common pattern that James, the half brother of Jesus Christ, wrote "Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance, and perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete not lacking anything." James 1:2-4.

We come to such an example of this principle this morning as we regard the second miracle of Jesus recorded by the Apostle John. It is a miracle that came out of a great trial. Here was an influential man, a high officer in the royal court. He seemed to have everything in life under control- a prestigious position, plenty of money, a nice family. But then, a great trial hit his household, something that was beyond his control in life. His son became ill, ill to the very point of death.

And if this royal official would have been asked at the point of his greatest despair, he would have cursed his son's illness as a great, black cloud on the horizon of a life going so well. Yet it was this very apparent disaster that would bring the ultimate blessing into this families' life. For because of his son's illness, this royal official would make his way from Capernaum to Cana to seek out a prophet named Jesus. He would not have done so otherwise, but he was forced to because his back was to the wall. And because of his son's illness, this man and his entire family would be introduced to the Messiah, Jesus Christ, who would bring priceless spiritual blessing into their lives.

So it is in our own lives that trials often are the source of great blessing, for our trials bring us to the point of searching out the one who is able to be our source of help in time of need. Faith is like a spiritual muscle. Our physical muscles respond to stress and pressure and become stronger. The worst thing for a muscle is to not be used, to lie dormant. In such a case it atrophies and loses its strength. And just as physical muscles gain strength thru usage, so our faith in the spiritual realm is strengthened thru use.

It is delightful to see this royal official's faith grow and become strong thru this brief miracle account that John gives us. We would like to focus our attention on this progression this morning to encourage our own hearts. For just as this royal official's faith developed thru this seemingly tragic trial that came into his life, so our faith will grow as we respond properly to the difficult situations that God allows into our lives.

1. Notice the first stage of the growth of his faith with me. We will call this

stage “the spark of faith”, for it is certainly the most elemental of the stages. Yet it was a start, for faith began to spark in this official's life.

READ 4:46-47a- "Once more he visited Cana in Galilee, where he had turned the water into wine. And there was a certain royal official whose son lay sick at Capernaum. When this man heard that Jesus had arrived in Galilee from Judea, he went to him."

At this point, this official had not met Jesus personally. But he had heard about Jesus from the testimony of others. Undoubtedly, he had heard reports about Christ's teaching from others, and had heard their evaluation of him as a prophet of God. He likely had heard about the first miracle at Cana which we looked at last time when Jesus turned the water into wine at the wedding feast. And so based upon the testimony of others, this official was drawn to seek Jesus out.

If Jesus could turn the water into wine, perhaps he could help his son who was dying. The official's concern, of course, at this point was purely for the physical wellbeing of his son. There is no hint that he was coming to Jesus because of any spiritual longing or because of any recognition of spiritual need. But there is no question that the spark of faith was real for it motivated this official to seek Jesus out. And he went quite a ways out of his way to do so. Capernaum, where he lived, was on the Sea of Galilee. Cana was about 20 miles away sitting up in the hills towards the west. So based upon the testimony that he had heard from others about Jesus, this official was willing to make a 20 mile trip, up hill all the way, leaving his son who was at the point of death behind him, just so that he might try to secure the help of this prophet named Jesus. A spark of faith had been ignited

in his heart as he had heard the testimony of others about Jesus.

We must never underestimate the power of our testimonies as we share concerning what Christ has done in our lives with others. Now, remember, these testimonies that the official had heard were not elaborate doctrinal treatises. They were just witness accounts of what Christ had said and done. "He claims to be a prophet" "He turned water into wine at a wedding feast". Yet these testimonies motivated this official to seek out Christ because he had a need. Paul said in Romans 10:17 "Faith comes by hearing." As we share what the Lord is doing in our lives with others, God uses that to initiate a spark of faith in their hearts as they come to that point of need in their own lives. So God used the testimony of others to motivate this official to seek out Jesus to help his son. My son is in dire need, perhaps this prophet can help him.

2. But then the royal official finds Christ. And having met Jesus Christ personally, and having initiated a relationship with him, we see his faith move to a higher level. We will say that his faith became like a "smoldering ember", it began to burn.

READ John 4:47-49

<sup>47</sup> When this man heard that Jesus had arrived in Galilee from Judea, he went to him and begged him to come and heal his son, who was close to death.

JN 4:48 "Unless you people see miraculous signs and wonders," Jesus told him, "you will never believe."

JN 4:49 The royal official said, "Sir, come down before my child dies."

Now the official's faith was not just based upon what he had heard about Jesus,

upon the testimony of others, but now he has met Christ himself. And it is evident that he was impressed with Jesus to the point where he makes his request in faith for the healing of his son. And his faith is strong enough at this point that it can stand up to a mild rebuke. Here he is beseeching Jesus Christ on behalf of his son, and Jesus responds to him saying, "Unless you people see miraculous signs and wonders, you will never believe." Now that statement could be taken as a gentle rebuke, and certainly it was. Here Jesus Christ the son of God had come in human form. In His coming, He had fulfilled over 300 distinct prophecies given throughout the O.T. You would think that if the people really believed that the O.T. was God's Word (which they claimed to believe), that they would have digested it so thoroughly that they would have recognized the coming of the Messiah. After all, the place of his birth had been foretold by Micah, the manner of his birth had been given by Isaiah, the lineage had been handed down by O.T. promises to David, even the time-framework had been foretold by the prophet Daniel. If they would have thoroughly digested all of these clues, they would have realized that Jesus Christ was indeed the Messiah sent from God. But no, what would convince them were the miraculous signs. And so Christ's statement does reveal the weakness of the official's faith. Yet the official accepts the rebuke and goes on. He does not turn away in offense.

Faith that is going to grow into full fruition must be able to continue in spite of offense. It is amazing how many Christians are thwarted in their walk with the Lord because of some offense to their faith. And instead of persevering thru the offense, realizing that their faith can be further strengthened thru their persistence,

they just fold up their tents and give up on their growth in the Lord. They don't feel that the Lord answered a prayer just as they felt that he should; they see a professing Christian who they think is hypocritical in his faith; they have difficulty in maintaining a consistent devotional time in their life; and they give up and quit trying. Not so with this official. He came for a specific purpose- to find help for his son. And when we remember that this miracle occurred almost at the beginning of Christ's ministry, we are even more impressed with this official's faith. It was not as if he had heard of the thousands of people that Jesus had healed, and now he was just believing that Christ could add one more to the list. No, according to what we know, Jesus had not healed anybody yet. He was just beginning his ministry. He had turned the water into wine, but that was a far cry from healing a person who was on his deathbed. So this father was sailing in uncharted waters. Yet he believed to the degree that he was going to stick with it until he got what he came for.

But in spite of his persistence, we still see the marks of tender faith at this point. Yes, he would be willing to admit that his faith is based upon signs and wonders- that's why he is here. And his faith is also limited to the realm of Christ's immediate presence, and the limitations of certain natural elements.

READ 4:49- "Sir, come down before my child dies." If you come personally, and if we can get there before my son dies, then perhaps there might be a chance. The faith is still focused on the physical needs of his son, and is limited to the presence of Christ and the condition that Christ could get to him before death.

3. But now we witness a wonderful process. The official's faith grows from

the spark which had become a glowing ember into a flickering flame. It did so because Christ caused it to stretch.

Notice 4:50-52- READ THESE VERSES

JN 4:50 Jesus replied, "You may go. Your son will live."

The man took Jesus at his word and departed. <sup>51</sup> While he was still on the way, his servants met him with the news that his boy was living. <sup>52</sup> When he inquired as to the time when his son got better, they said to him, "The fever left him yesterday at the seventh hour."

Upon the request of this royal official, Christ puts him into a position where a decision of faith had to be made. In essence, Jesus says, "I am not willing to heal your son on your conditions. But I will tell you what. I am not only going to heal your son but I am also going to help your faith to grow. Go on your way home. Your son will be healed."

Now the official had to make a decision of faith at this point, didn't he? Should he believe Christ's words or should he continue to plead with Christ until Jesus accepted his conditions for healing? The official made the correct choice, and his spark of faith burst into flame.

In order to realize the significance of this man's faith, we need to see a seemingly minor detail brought out in our text.

The time of the miracle is given by the Servants in verse 52. "When he inquired as to the time when his son got better, they said to him, 'the fever left him yesterday at the 7th hour'." We must remember that according to the Jewish day, time started at 6:00 AM and the day closed at 6:00 PM. John, coming from his

strongly Jewish background gives all such designations according to Jewish rather than Roman thinking in his book. Therefore, we know that the boy was healed at 1:00 PM, at the seventh hour. Now in verse 53, the father confirms that this was the exact time when Jesus spoke. "Then the father realized that this was the exact time at which Jesus had said to him, 'Your son will live.'" Now we already know that this royal official is about 20 miles from home. And so John gives us enough details so that we can make a very simple deduction.

The Royal Official was concerned enough for the health of his son to make this 20 mile journey from Capernaum to Cana, a journey which would have taken 10 hours or so. Now this official could have left the presence of Christ at 1:00 PM and made it all the way back to his house later that night just after darkness had fallen over the land if he would have pressed himself to do so. And you would think that with his concern for his son, he would have done just that if he would have had any doubts concerning the word of Christ. Yet quite the opposite occurs.

The servants meet him along the way, the next day, as he is going home. After the boy got better, the servants would have obviously continued to watch him making sure that there wouldn't be a relapse. But then, as the boy makes it all the way thru the night without any sign of a problem, some of the servants feel the liberty to rush after their master with the good news. They meet the official who obviously has stayed somewhere along the way for the night, and they give to him the good news. He is interested in the exact time of the healing. Do you see the increase in this man's faith?

Not only does he believe Christ to the point where he is willing to leave the

presence of Christ with the confidence that his son has been healed. But he is so peaceful in his heart that he is able to stop and rest for the night. His obedience to the word of Christ has now strengthened his faith to the place where he has confidence in Christ's word- not on the basis of someone else's testimony about Christ now, but on the basis of his own personal relationship with Christ.

4. Yes, the official's faith has grown from a spark, to a smoldering ember to a flickering flame. And now we are ready to see it continue to grow into a consuming fire.

READ 4:53.

JN 4:53 Then the father realized that this was the exact time at which Jesus had said to him, "Your son will live." So he and all his household believed.

Having now seen the power of Christ's word, the royal official realizes that indeed this is the Messiah sent from God. He not only is able to meet our physical needs, but he also is able to meet our spiritual needs. And the official leads his whole household in accepting Jesus Christ as their Messiah. Faith moves from the realm of physical sight to that of spiritual sight. Faith moves from the realm of mere physical needs to that of the even more important spiritual needs. And the faith was able to continue to grow because at every level the official was open and willing to obey Christ's words.

One of the great misconceptions about Biblical faith held by many is the one that the faith spoken of in the Bible is some stagnant entity- like a coat that you put on. I mean, after all, when you buy a winter coat at the mall, you don't expect the

coat to grow, you just expect it to sit in the closet until you need to wear it. Then you put it on and use it.

Many Christians have this concept of faith. It's like a coat to be put on and used at the appropriate time.

When you look at the examples of people of faith in the Bible, you soon realize that this concept is far from the truth. Biblical faith is not a stagnant entity- it is a living reality. Anything that is alive has to grow in order to develop to maturity. So it is with Biblical faith. God designed for our faith to continue to get stronger and stronger every day as we grow in the Lord.

Of Abraham, the father of faith, is said these words by the Apostle Paul. "Without weakening in his faith, he faced the fact that his body was as good as dead. . . yet he did not waver thru unbelief regarding the promise of God, but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God being fully persuaded that God had power to do what he had promised." Rom. 4:19-21.

This is the kind of faith that began to grow in the life of this royal official. It started as just a spark, seeking out Christ on the basis of someone else's testimony.

But then it grew into a smoldering ember as he met Christ personally and heard his words. And then it flickered into a flame when he believed Christ's words and accepted his conditions of healing. This acceptance brought a measure of peace in the midst of the anxiety about his son. And the flame of faith became a consuming fire as he and his household accepted Christ's claim as Messiah.

Do we have growing faith? What area is God working in our lives right now?

Are we trusting him and growing daily in our relationship with him?

Jesus Christ is looking for disciples who are on the go for Him. And in order to be on the go, we have to be on the grow.