

Theme: Trading Places

Object: Pictures of a movie star and a famous athlete, a hand full of dollar bills, a sign that says, "Hungry, will work for food."

SLIDE Have you ever wished you could trade places with someone? If you could trade places with anyone you chose, who would you choose?

SLIDE A movie star? **SLIDE** A famous athlete? **SLIDE** Someone with a lot of money? **SLIDE** The homeless person that begs beside the road?

"Wait a minute," you are probably thinking. "Who would dream of changing places with a homeless person who begs beside the road?" Well, it might not be what a person would wish for, but that is exactly what one person got in our Bible lesson today.

Scripture: **SLIDE** **David Radloff** - "Now there was a rich man, and he habitually dressed in purple and fine linen, joyously living in splendor every day. And a poor man named Lazarus was laid at his gate, covered with sores, and longing to be fed with the *crumbs* which were falling from the rich man's table; besides, even the dogs were coming and licking his sores." (Luke 16:19-21 NASB)

SLIDE There once was a rich man, expensively dressed in clothes of the latest fashion. He lived in a beautiful house and ate the very best food. A poor man named Lazarus, all covered with sores, had been put outside the door of the rich man's house. All he wanted was a meal from scraps off the rich man's table. Dogs that passed by him stopped and licked his sores. Do you think the rich man ever offered to share the food from his table? Did he ever stop to offer Lazarus

one of his nice suits of clothes that perhaps was in last year's style? No way! He passed by Lazarus as if he wasn't even there.

Finally, Lazarus died and was carried by angels up into Heaven to be with Abraham. There he enjoyed all of the blessings that he never knew when he was on earth. He knew joy and peace. The rich man also died and was buried. Well, the place where the rich man went was really hot. I am sure you can guess where that was! He was miserable. The rich man looked up into Heaven and saw Abraham with Lazarus standing by his side. He cried out, "Father Abraham, send Lazarus down and let him dip his finger in water to cool my tongue." Abraham answered, "Don't forget that when you were living you had all your good things and Lazarus had nothing. Now he is well cared for and you are in great pain. And besides, there is a deep ditch between us, and no one from either side can cross to the other."

Even though he didn't have very much when he was on earth, Lazarus trusted in God to take care of him. That is what God did. He sent his angels to take Lazarus to Heaven. The rich man, on the other hand, didn't think he needed anyone. He sure didn't need God. He had everything that he needed. At least, that is what he thought.

There is an important lesson to be learned from the story of the rich man and Lazarus. You and I choose where we will place our trust. We can trust in God or we can trust in ourselves. If we put our trust in the wrong thing, we will find ourselves wishing that we could trade places.

Close in prayer

September 29, 2013

John 4:43-54

Sermon #26

Slide Unbelief to Belief

Opening Prayer

This morning we will finish chapter 4 of the Gospel according to John. Apostle John moves us along a path by first considering unbelief, then confronting unbelief and ending with unbelief conquered by saving faith. To build the foundation for this journey we will begin by examining the state of unbelief. John's focus throughout his gospel is on believing by faith. **Slide** The verb πιστεύω *pisteuō* (*pist-yoo'-o*) means to believe or to believe by faith in Christ. This verb appears almost 100 times in John's gospel and is a major theme of his. The opposite of belief is "unbelief" and unbelief is a damning sin by which people are sentenced to hell. All sins are forgiven those who repent and believe in Christ. In chapter 3, verse 18 Jesus says clearly,

Slide "He who believes in (Me) is not judged; he who does not believe (in Me) has been judged already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God." The world at the time of Christ and the majority unto this very day do not believe in Christ as the Son of God. We learn from John later in chapter 16 as Jesus spoke of His sending the Holy Spirit that, **Slide** "when (the Holy Spirit) comes, He will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment; concerning sin, because they do not believe in Me (Jesus)." (John 16:8-9 NASB)

Believing in Jesus as the Christ is salvation and not believing or unbelief is sin and damnation. **Blank**

As we will see in our study this morning there what I have identified as levels of unbelief. All unbelief is sin and all unbelievers are not saved. I want to examine these levels to show the difficulty for a person to move from unbelief to belief. At

the same time, I fully recognize that for a person to move from unbelief to belief in Christ is an act and gift of God Himself. All the gospels describe these levels of unbelief and we will see them in our study this morning.

Slide First, there is unbelief from the lack of exposure. This is unbelief of the prepared and ready heart, a heart just waiting for the revelation of the truth of Christ from God. This is unbelief that is the easiest for one to be moved from unbelief to belief. A person is exposed to the presence of Christ and believes; when John the Baptist pointed out Christ to Andrew and John, as we saw in chapter 1, they immediately followed Jesus even though Jesus had not even spoken to them. Their love for God had prepared them and made them ready.

Slide Second, there is unbelief because of the lack of knowledge. When exposed to the Word of God they move from unbelief to belief. Paul wrote, “[For the Scripture says, ‘WHOEVER BELIEVES IN HIM WILL NOT BE DISAPPOINTED.’ For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all, abounding in riches for all who call on Him; for ‘WHOEVER WILL CALL ON THE NAME OF THE LORD WILL BE SAVED.’ How then will they call on Him in whom they have not believed? **Slide** \[How will they believe in Him whom they have not heard? And how will they hear without a preacher? How will they preach unless they are sent? Just as it is written, ‘How BEAUTIFUL ARE THE FEET OF THOSE WHO BRING GOOD NEWS OF GOOD THINGS!’ ”\]\(#\) \(Romans 14:11-15 NASB\) The Samaritan woman at the well was not impressed by the mere presence of Jesus or His appearance. She had **not** been exposed to the miracle of water-made-into-wine at Cana. To her Jesus was just another Jew who looked down on Samaritans. It was only after she experienced Jesus’ supernatural knowledge of her life and sin, and His declaration that He was the Messiah that she moved from](#)

unbelief to belief. She believed fully for by her words many of the villagers were moved to believe and many moved to seek out Jesus.

Slide Third, there is unbelief due to what a person perceives as a lack of evidence. These people have heard of Christ, but they want evidence that what they have heard is true. The Bible describes these people as those who need to see the works of Christ. Jesus Himself did miracles as proof that He was indeed the Messiah. Although, as we saw in chapter 2, not everyone who witnessed the miracle performed by Christ at Cana were moved from unbelief to belief. Some were moved, but not all. Miracles were enough to convince Nicodemus that Jesus was sent by God in chapter 3 and start him down the path towards saving faith, but these miracles did not in and of themselves bring Nicodemus to saving belief in Christ as the Messiah.

Slide Fourth, is the hardened heart of unbelief and is seen in the religious and self-righteous. These people refuse to believe in Christ and the gospel of grace and no amount of evidence will change their minds. These people will not let the facts change their views. Have you known any such people? During the life of Christ here on earth they understood His teachings, they were aware of His miracles, they knew what the scriptures foretold and how Christ fulfilled these prophecies, and yet, they rejected Jesus. Jesus even warned these people of the consequences of their unbelief, Jesus said, **Slide** "... you will die in your sins; for unless you believe that I am He, you will die in your sins." (John 8:24 NASB) As we observe in the scriptures the Pharisees exemplified this deepest level of unbelief with their self-righteousness. Their blindness and hardness of heart could not have been made clearer than when they said, **Slide** "This man (Jesus) casts out demons only by Beelzebul the ruler of the demons." (Matthew 12:24 NASB) What a totally absurd statement, a statement

and belief that defies logic or the evidence. They believed and acted on the opposite of the truth, saying Jesus was satanic. Such unbelief is the most deadly because these people think they have achieved righteousness, so they continually reject truth and evidence. Jesus makes clear what this unbelief is, Jesus said, **“He who is not with Me is against Me; and he who does not gather with Me scatters. Therefore I say to you, any sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven people, but blasphemy against the Spirit shall not be forgiven. Whoever speaks a word against the Son of Man, it shall be forgiven him; but **Slide** whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit, it shall not be forgiven him, either in this age or in the *age to come.*”**

(Matthew 12:30-32 NASB) The Pharisees spoke against the Holy Spirit calling what was holy, saying it was unholy or of Satan. They were in truth enslaved by their sin of self-righteousness and completely blind to truth. It is easy to identify the leaders and people of false religions that in truth serve Satan, but beware there are those who call themselves “Christian” who teach and believe what is against the scriptures, the gospel of salvation and grace and the biblical Christ. **Blank**

Having come to an understanding of these levels of unbelief we can now begin examining our scripture passage this morning. I have divided the passage into three sections: **Slide** “Unbelief Considered” in verses 43 to 45, **Slide** “Unbelief Confronted” in verses 46 to 49 and **Slide** “Unbelief Conquered” in verses 50 to 54. We begin by reading from God’s holy Word starting at verse 43 to study “Unbelief Considered.” Please turn in your bibles to John 4:43 and read with me, ⁴³ **“After the two days He went forth from there into Galilee. ⁴⁴ For Jesus Himself testified that a prophet has no honor in his own country. ⁴⁵ So when He came to Galilee, the Galileans received Him, having seen all the things that He did in Jerusalem at the feast; for they themselves also went to the feast.”**

Jesus stayed for two days in the Samaritan village at their request and then continues His journey to Galilee. This small revival was a foreshadow of what was coming after Jesus resurrection in Acts chapter 1. The Samaritans were an example of level three movement from unbelief to belief. The Samaritans fully came to believe that Jesus is the “[Savior of the world.](#)” We read in verse 42 the villagers said, “[we ourselves have heard Jesus and we know that this is indeed the Christ, the Savior of the World.](#)” However, we also know from the scriptures that the “good news” or gospel of the kingdom was to be first taken to and given to the Jews. Jesus says in Luke, **Slide** “[repentance for forgiveness of sins would be proclaimed in His name to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem.](#)” (Luke 24:47 NASB). **Blank** Jesus then continues his journey on to Galilee. Verse 44 has often been used in ways not consistent with the context of the passage. “[For Jesus Himself testified that a prophet has no honor in his own country.](#)” What this statement is about is that it contrasts Jesus’ acceptance by the Samaritans and His general rejection by His own Jewish people. The conjuncture at the beginning of verse 44, the word “For” indicates verse 44 is tied to 43 and is then the reason for Jesus’ travel to Galilee. Jesus went to Galilee, his home region, the area where He was raised, knowing He would receive a cold reception, especially in Nazareth, but despite this some would hear and believe and be saved. It is those who moved from unbelief to belief who would honor Jesus as the Christ – level 2 unbelief moving to belief, while the majority would remain in level 4 unbelief. I know what you might be thinking about this point in time. Verse 45 says, “[So when He \(Jesus\) came to Galilee, the Galileans received Him, having seen all the things that He did in Jerusalem at the feast; for they themselves also went to the feast.](#)” You are thinking on one hand they did not honor Jesus and then on the other hand they received Him. We already addressed verse 44 now lets examine 45. The fact that they received Jesus does not mean they

believed savingly in Him as the long awaited Messiah. Again we must look at the first word in the verse, the word “so” and it refers back to verse 44 and confirms that they did not honor Him for only some came to believe in Jesus as the Messiah. So on the contrary the Galileans having, as verse 45 says, “*having seen all the things that He did in Jerusalem at the feast*” welcomed Jesus merely as a miracle worker. The Galileans in general were curiosity seekers eagerly hoping to see another performance of the miracle worker doing sensational feats. John is writing with a sense of irony – the Galileans reception of Jesus was not genuine, but shallow and superficial.

Moving from Unbelief Considered to our next section of scripture we examine it from the viewpoint of **Slide** Unbelief Confronted. Please follow along as I read verses 46 to 49, ⁴⁶ *Therefore He came again to Cana of Galilee where He had made the water wine. And there was a royal official whose son was sick at Capernaum.* ⁴⁷ *When he heard that Jesus had come out of Judea into Galilee, he went to Him and was imploring Him to come down and heal his son; for he was at the point of death.* ⁴⁸ *So Jesus said to him, ‘Unless you people see signs and wonders, you simply will not believe.’* ⁴⁹ *The royal official said to Him, ‘Sir, come down before my child dies.’ ”*

This royal official encounters Jesus in Cana where Jesus had performed His first miracle. So this meeting has its own irony, for at the location of the first miracle the royal official fails to show true faith in Jesus’ ability to do the miracle of saving his son because of His supernatural and divine nature – the people just wanted to see another spectacular feat. The word “Therefore” introduces the story of the royal official and presents this man as representative of the vast majority of the Galileans who saw Jesus, not as the messiah, but a miracle worker – like Miracle Max in the Princes Bride for the child was only “mostly dead”. These people live on level 3 of unbelief.

This royal official was most likely in the service of Herod Antipas, tetrarch of Galilee from 4 BC to 39 AD. Antipas was a son of Herod the Great, who ruled Palestine at the time of Christ's birth. After his father Herod the Great died, Antipas was made ruler or tetrarch of Galilee. Rome denied Antipas the royal title of King, a title that Antipas wanted and preferred being called by and he over became commonly referred to as King. **Slide** We know this in part from the dialog in Matthew chapter 14 where John the Baptist is arrested and Herodias, the former wife of Herod's brother Philip and now his wife has her daughter dance before Antipas and demand John's head. Now, back to our story of the royal official in John chapter 4. **Blank**

Urgent need had compelled this man to journey to Cana to see Christ. His **son was sick at Capernaum**, which lay about 16 to 18 miles away at the north end of the Sea of Galilee. The royal official had heard that Jesus, a miracle worker, was traveling to Cana and he sought Him out. When he found Jesus he began **"imploring Him to come down and heal his son; for he was at the point of death."** The word "imploring" used here means to repeatedly beg. So he would not give up begging Jesus for help. **Slide** We need to see the scene here; this royal official swallows his pride and begs for help from a carpenter's son who seems to have little material wealth and no real status. At this point the official's faith is based on desperation. His hope and belief in Jesus was not driven by his desire for salvation for his own soul or that of his son, but purely by his desperate desire for his son not to die.

This official wrongly assumes, unlike the centurion in Luke chapter 7 and the woman in Mark chapter 7, that Jesus needs to be physically with his son to heal him. This official also wrongly assumes Jesus' power is limited; that Jesus might be able to save his son while he is yet alive, but would not be able to raise his son from the dead. The official is fearful for his son who is at the point of death and once he

crosses the threshold from life to death he will be gone forever. It was these two false assumptions that was driving him to insist that Jesus go to his son straight away. Unlike the rich young ruler in Mark chapter 10 this official was not seeking spiritual truth, but was driven by emotional need.

So at this point Jesus issues a stern rebuke saying, *“Unless you people see signs and wonders, you simply will not believe.”* This rebuke is not just aimed at the official but the Galileans in general for Jesus uses the term *people*. Jesus is saying your faith is in miracles, not in the Son of God, you want to believe in miracles out of your desperation. The official ignores Jesus rebuke and continues to beg, *“come down before my child dies.”* Here the official uses the word “child” instead of “son”, this is an endearing term. His faith, if we can label it that, complied with his desperation will not let him give up begging. The Lord has pity and Jesus’ desires to draw the official into a higher level of faith, He graciously performs the miracle. Jesus healed the child, but He, as the Great Physician, also healed the father spiritually as we will soon see. **Blank**

Slide Jesus “Conquers Unbelief” in the royal official. Please follow me as I read the end of our story and scripture passage, beginning in verse 50. ⁵⁰ *“Jesus said to him, ‘Go; your son lives.’ The man believed the word that Jesus spoke to him and started off. ⁵¹ As he was now going down, his slaves met him, saying that his son was living. ⁵² So he inquired of them the hour when he began to get better. Then they said to him, ‘Yesterday at the seventh hour the fever left him.’ ⁵³ So the father knew that it was at that hour in which Jesus said to him, ‘Your son lives’; and he himself believed and his whole household. ⁵⁴ This is again a second sign that Jesus performed when He had come out of Judea into Galilee.”*

Instead of agreeing to return to Capernaum with the royal official as he was begging Jesus to do, Jesus simply says to the official, **“Go; your son lives.”** We know from verses 52 and 53 that at this very moment the child is healed. But, even though at this point the official has no confirmation of his son’s healing **“the man believed the word that Jesus spoke to him and started off.”** The word of Jesus moved this official from the third level of unbelief of having to see miracles to the second, which is to believe the words of Jesus. Without any proof that his son was healed he takes Jesus at His word **and started off** for home.

Here we deal with another supposed problem with this story. Capernaum is 16 to 18 miles downhill from Cana. Travel time by foot would be about 5 to 7 hours or so. Some say what is wrong with this official that it would take him a day to get back to his son – so the story cannot be true. Lets examine this problem. When the official meets his servants on the road they tell him that his son was healed yesterday around 1 pm or early afternoon. We know that in Jewish custom that the day ended at sundown. This means that the official met his servants after sundown and possibly after midnight. So the official did not go shopping or sight seeing on his way back to Capernaum. However, on the other hand if he believed Jesus as the text indicates he would not have had to be in a great hurry. He may have even tarried in Cana to hear more from Jesus before leaving for home because he believed the words of Jesus. Now that we have solved the problem perceived by nitpicking nay sayers, we will move on.

When the official met his servants - his son’s recovery and the time of his healing is confirmed to be at the very time Jesus had said to him, **“Your son lives”**. When the official hears this - his transformation from unbelief to belief is complete. We know his belief is genuine because the second half of verse 53 says, **“he himself believed and his whole household.”** John uses the term **“whole household”** which includes

not only his wife and other children, but also all who live in the house - meaning other relatives and all the servants. If Herod Antipas knew of this salvation of one of his officials, he certainly would not have been happy. We will see how he behaves later in John's gospel.

We conclude chapter 4 with verse 54, [“This is again a second sign that Jesus performed when He had come out of Judea into Galilee.”](#) This act of healing the official's son is the second of eight major signs that the Apostle John records as proof that Jesus is the Messiah. Interestingly, both these first two major signs or miracles were performed in Galilee. However, let me be clear this second miracle was not the second of all of Jesus' signs and miracles for we know He did these in Jerusalem as well. John uses this major sign because it clearly shows the movement of the royal official from unbelief to belief.

This is how genuine faith is – we see the outward change in a person's life because of the inward change that the Holy Spirit has done.

John has written about an event with the royal official that took place in Galilee and Paul wrote to the Galatians, those people who lived in Galilee as well. I close this morning by quoting the Apostle Paul, if you would turn in your bibles to Galatians chapter 5 beginning in verse 22, [Slide](#) [“The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. Now those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit. Let us not become boastful, challenging one another, envying one another.”](#) (Galatians 5:22-26 NASB) My brothers and sisters may we live lives that show faith in Jesus in the ways Paul wrote of – let us live for Jesus in all we are and all we do.

Close in prayer.

