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John 4:43-54

"BELIEVING IS SEEING"

There is an old saying: "Seeing is believing!" If I see something, then I can believe it. If I don't see it for myself, then I can't believe it.

This is the basis of the modern scientific method. The Dictionary defines "science" as "the observation of facts."

We observe things happening; and, if they happen consistently, we figure that they prove a law of scientific truth. If, every time I throw something up, it falls back down, then I am proving the law of gravity, because I've seen it in operation. "Seeing is believing."

Of course, if seeing is the only way of believing, then it's hard to have religion or faith. In these areas, you are dealing with things which can't always be seen. It's like Hebrews (11:1) says: "Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen."

The man who has to see, in order to believe, has trouble believing in an invisible God. He has trouble in accepting the testimonies of people who lived 1900 years ago, whom he has never been able to meet nor to whom he has never been able to speak...people who said that they saw miraculous acts of God. Yet he cannot be there and see them with his own eyes.

So, people say, "How do you expect me to believe in a God whom I cannot see?" Or "How can I believe in His promises, found in a Book which I can't guarantee to be true?" Or "How do I know that it does any good to pray to Him, when I can't even get an answer by return mail?" It's hard to have faith, when you've been taught that "seeing is believing."

I can sympathize with people's dilemma. But I must point out that God never says "seeing is believing." God always says that "believing is seeing."

If we will only believe, then we will see it come to pass. This is the lesson of faith: "Believing is seeing."

I think that the incident from the life of Jesus, which we read today, should illustrate what I mean. From this story, I learn two important lessons:

I. **SEEING THE POWER OF GOD SHOULD NOT BE NECESSARY FOR BELIEVING.**

Non-believers have always demanded signs, before they would believe. That's what verses 43-48 are talking about.

Jesus had left home and made a trip to another state. When He left home, nobody there believed that He was anything special. It's like He said in vs. 44, "A prophet has no honor in his own country." He grew up there. Everybody knew Him, and it was hard for them to think that He was anything more than the boy, who grew up in the carpenter's shop.

But, when He had visited Samaria and Judea, He had done miraculous things, which made a lot of people think that He was the Messiah, and the very Son of God. So, when He returned home, people were really curious. They wanted to see Him do some signs and miracles for them, too (vs. 45).

This always disappointed our Lord Jesus Christ! That's why it sounds like He was scolding the man, in vs. 48.

This man, who was a court official, had come from 25 miles away to ask Jesus to come back with him and to heal his sick son. And, not knowing whether the man was sincere or just another curiosity-seeker, who was looking for a "miracle show," Jesus questioned him: "Except you see signs and wonders, I guess you won't believe."

Jesus soon learned, however, that this man had a sincere faith. And so, Jesus gladly helped him.

If you read God's Word carefully, you will notice that Jesus always scolded people who had to see signs, in order to believe. This is not the only place that Jesus does it. Read what He said in Matthew 12:38-40: "It is a wicked and adulterous generation that demands a sign," before it will believe.

The only sign (which) God will offer most people is the resurrection of His Son from the dead." There's never been another miracle like that. And that ought to be enough to help anyone become a believer. (By the way, if you need "scientific proof" about the Savior, take a close look at the evidences of His resurrection.)

What Jesus is saying, in both cases, is this: It should not require signs and wonders to make someone a believer. And God offers the same words of loving rebuke and warning today, to those who insist that "seeing is believing."

In fact, in Mark 13:22, Jesus warns that we should beware of false prophets, who will deceive people with visible signs. People swore that Jimmy Jones had healed people and done other miraculous signs, before he led them in a cyanide toast, which ended in the Guyana massacre.

In Matthew 24:24, Christ warns that, during the last days, the Anti-Christ will perform so many signs and wonders that he will "deceive even the elect" of God. Listen, those who opposed the Lord have always been able to counterfeit signs and wonders. So be very careful not to be taken in. No wonder Jesus rebuked the people, who demanded to see before they would believe in Him!

Now I'm not saying that God cannot do miracles. The entire thrust of this sermon will be that He can...IF we first believe.

What I am pointing out is this: seeing God's power, displayed, should not be necessary in order for one to become a believer. The devil can even fake signs and wonders, in order to deceive us. Seeing should not be necessary for believing.

Signs and wonders don't make one a believer, anyway! I often meet people, who can relate miracles which have happened in their lives, in the past. And yet, today, they are no longer walking with God.

I've told you about leading my Uncle Edgar to the Lord, on the day before he died. Would you believe that, when he was 17, he was bitten by a rattlesnake? His arm got black and swelled to the elbow. He was miles from a doctor, up in the mountains. He was a "goner."

But his godly father prayed and anointed him with oil. And the swelling went down. It was a miracle, pure and simple.

But it didn't make Uncle Edgar a believer. In fact, for 50 years, he was the "black sheep" of his family and lived a very sinful life. It was not until 50 years later that he became a believer and put his faith in Christ.

Seeing doesn't necessarily guarantee believing!

Anthony Quinn, the famous movie actor, had a dying mother. He went to Sister Aimee Semple MacPherson, a miracle healer of the past generation. She made a deal with him: "If I heal your mother, will you come and work with me?"

Well, after Sister Aimee's prayer, the mother got well. Anthony Quinn became an advance man and saxophone player for "Sister Aimee," before her own involvement in a morals scandal, which brought her nation-wide ministry to a halt.

Yet today, Anthony Quinn talks and lives like a genuine heathen. He has completely turned from "religion." Which all goes to prove that seeing miracles does not guarantee believing!

I'll be frank to say that I am very concerned about all of the popular wave of religion today, which seems to be based on what people see and feel. It almost intimidates us, who simply "preach the Word," when we are up against "miracle meetings" and services, where people are whooped-up to "feel" things.

I've had people, who would leave here and go to other churches, where they do all these "signs and wonders." These same people tell me that they cannot even agree with the other church's teachings, but the services make them "feel so good."

Listen. We dislike it, when the world says, "If it feels good, do it." But are we not also in danger, when we say: "If it feels good, believe it?"

Now I do not understand all that is going on today, in the name of my Lord. And it is certainly not my place to criticize it. But I still believe the Bible, when it says "Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of God."

So I shall continue to do my best to help the people, who come here, to hear the Word of God, taught simply and realistically. I will still have to emphasize what Jesus said to doubting Thomas (John 20:26-29), "Have you believed because you have seen? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe."

Remember, my friend, seeing the power of God should not necessary for believing! But notice also a second truth...

II. BELIEVING IS ABSOLUTELY NECESSARY FOR SEEING THE POWER OF GOD.

It was not until the man, in this story, was willing to believe Jesus and to go back home, expecting, that he saw that his son had been healed.

By the way, please, never apologize for believing. Never feel self-conscious for "trusting in the unseen Lord." You are not an ignoramus nor "unscientific," if you trust God.

All science is not based on seeing, anyhow. There is a lot of things, which have to be taken on faith. No man has ever seen an atom, nor the protons and neutrons which make up an atom.

Science tells me that this pulpit is not standing still. It is made up of many electrical charges, which are moving around all the time. I can't see it happening. No microscope can.

For years, science taught that what we can see in a microscope was the smallest form of matter. But today, we take the testimony of a dead man, named Einstein, that all this matter is made up of unseen electrical forces. (By the way, the Bible said that 2500 years ago, in Hebrews 11:3: "The things which are seen are not made of things which do appear.")

Most of us can't "see it," for we can't even think like Einstein could. But

we take his word, on faith, and believe in the "theory of relativity." In fact, after Einstein, we threw out all the old science textbooks and wrote new ones.

Do you see? Scientific people believe many things, which they cannot see for themselves.

Yet, when you are a trusting person, you are often treated like you are dumb or "gullible." The smart man is supposed to be skeptical and slow to believe anything! But is this really the way it works?

"Psychology Today," which is anything but a religious publication, ran an article on "Trust and Its Consequences." Dr. Julian Rotter, of the University of Connecticut, researched people who were very trusting and people who were not trusting at all. Try this little true and false quiz on his findings:

True or false? "Trusting persons tend to be more gullible." False, according to the good doctor.

True or false? "Trusting persons tend to have lower I.Q.'s than skeptical people. (False) They have just as high an I.Q.

True or false? "Trusting persons live happier lives than non-trusting persons." (True)

True or false? "Trusting persons tend to be more trustworthy than non-trusting persons." (True) We usually judge other people by ourselves.

True or false? "The trusting person is more likely to fall for the con artist." (False) Studies show that the trusting person is actually less susceptible to a rip-off artist.

Now, these are not the ideas of a religious leader. These are the findings of a scientific researcher. There is nothing, for which to be ashamed nor self-conscious, if you are a trusting person.

And this is especially true, when it comes to trusting what God has said in the Bible. In fact, believing the Word of God is absolutely necessary, if we are ever going to see the power of God, at work in our lives. "Believing is seeing."

Our story points this out. The government official said to Jesus (vs. 49), "Sir, come with me, before my child dies." (I'm not here to put you to a test. I'm here because I believe that you can do something to help, in an impossible situation. Please help me.)

Responding to the man, Jesus told him to go home, and his son would be all right. And the man "believed the word that Jesus had spoken." He "went his way" home. And he saw that his son was made well, at the very hour when Jesus had spoken.

Did you get that sequence? First he believed Jesus' promise; and, because he believed, he saw God's power. Believing is seeing!

Oh, my friend, this is the way of faith. Our faith is the key which unlocks

the door. God waits for us to believe, and then He honors that belief with results.

Believe what God has promised in His Word. Go your way, expecting. And you will see it come to pass.

"He believed the word that Jesus had spoken unto him and he went his way." He acted on his belief. He stepped out on faith. And God responded.

Someone has said that "Faith in action puts God in motion." Apply this truth in so many areas:

Believing is seeing, when it comes to God's SALVATION.

God promised (Romans 10:9-13) "If you will confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus Christ and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead...You will be saved...For whoever calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."

Believe the words, which Jesus has spoken unto you. Believe them enough to call on Him, in prayer, and ask to be saved. Then believe that He has kept His promise, enough to tell others that He has given you eternal life.

But don't demand to see or feel something. Just believe what Jesus has promised, and you will eventually "see" the difference and "feel" the joy of salvation.

A dear lady came to me, recently. Over 20 years ago, she had called on the Lord to save her. But relatives, who got saved later, kept telling her of the "signs and wonders," which they had seen after they were saved. They acted like these signs proved to them that they were really saved. They fell over backwards and did this and that, under what they called "the power of God."

Since she never saw nor felt such things in her life, she began to wonder if maybe she had not been saved.

I turned to God's promise, where He said that He would save anyone, who called on Him. I kept asking her, "Is God a liar? (I John 5:10). Can you trust Him to keep His promise? Are any signs, which you may see or feel, as reliable as His promises?"

Finally, she made up her mind to believe Him, and she went on her way, knowing that she was saved. Believing is seeing!

And I'd be willing to lay you odds that most of those relatives, who had seen all the signs and wonders, may not be so gung-ho any more. When you rely on signs, in order to keep your faith pumped-up, it gets hard to find a miracle which tops the last one.

Also, "believing is seeing," when it comes to God's SUPERNATURAL POWER.

The man in the story "went on his way, believing." When he got home, he saw the supernatural healing of his son.

If you and I will believe the Word, which God has spoken, and go on our way, trusting Him to keep His promise, we will see the impossible accomplished. "All things are possible to him that believes" (Mark 9:23).

The relocation of McGregor Baptist Church should have taught us that lesson. People said "It's impossible to build education and worship facilities, larger than you have, and to totally relocate, at the same time." People said, "They'll never pull this one off." Other people said, "No one will move way out there."

But God promised to "supply all of our needs" (Phil. 4:13). And even our most intense critics had to agree that we really needed more space. So, thank God, the majority of His people said, "Let's believe God and go our way forward."

Well, we believed. And we have seen "the impossible dream" come true.

Since then, the property has been enlarged six-fold. Two more buildings have been added. And we hope to have it completely-paid-for within the next three months! Believing is seeing!

Friend, we've seen God do the impossible. But we were not allowed to see it first. We had to believe and to step out on that belief, first. Believing leads to seeing--not vice-versa!!!

Believing is seeing also, when it comes to God's SWEET PROVIDENCE.

God has promised (Rom. 8:28) that "All things, which happen to us, will work together for our good, if we love Him and are trying to fit into His plans."

We do not always see how a lot of things can be good. Some things, which happen, look awful. They tempt us to get bitter or defeated. But, if we stop looking and start believing what God has spoken to us, and if we "go our way," we will eventually see that it was for our own good that it happened.

The year was 1912, and the scene was Scotland. A Mr. Clark was preparing to immigrate, with his wife and nine children, to begin a new life in the United States. After months of planning, everything was finally arranged. They booked passage on a sleek new liner, which would take them across the Atlantic to the shores of New York and the new world.

Leaving for one of his last days of work, Mr. Clark said to his wife, "Thank God we booked our reservations a month ago. I hear that there is no more room on any ships for several months." Mrs. Clark agreed, as she continued to pack up the belongings of her family and tried to keep control of her nine excited children.

With only seven days left, before they set sail, there was a lot to do. But, as always, the little boy, Samuel, continued to give the busy mother problems, as

he ran off to play with stray neighborhood dogs. Mrs. Clark warned, "Samuel, one day a dog is going to bite you, and you'll learn your lesson the hard way."

However, Samuel didn't pay any attention to her warnings. Just a few hours later, he ran into the house with his hand bleeding. He had been bitten by a dog.

"Oh," said Mrs. Clark, "with all this work to do, now I have to call the doctor."

The doctor proceeded to neatly patch up the nasty dog bite and then reached into his case for a long yellow piece of paper. "What is that?" questioned Mrs. Clark. "It's a rule here in Scotland that, if you are bitten by a dog, you have to be quarantined for fourteen day."

"But that's impossible," said the mother. "We set sail for America in seven days."

"I'm sorry. The law is the law," said the doctor, as he left the yellow quarantine notice, tacked up on the front door.

Mr. Clark returned home, enthusiastically counting the days until they could set sail, only to find the yellow notice, tacked on his front door. He was irate at Samuel and angry at God. "How could God let something like this happen?"

Seven days later, the ship sailed without them. Mr. Clark's bitterness grew, as he watched the sleek, safe, and supposedly unsinkable ship, leaving the harbor. How he had looked forward to taking his family to America on that ship, called the Titanic.

Three days later, Mr. Clark was embracing his little boy, with the dog-bitten hand, and thanking God for saving their lives. The Titanic had gone down. And had it not been for Samuel's dog bite, the entire family would have gone down with it.

We don't usually see how God keeps His promise, that "all things will work together for good," in a mere three days. But we will eventually.

Believe this word, which Jesus has spoken to you. And "go your way." Believing is seeing.!

This morning, I invite you, my friend, to become "a believer"... to take the Words of God and to trust Him, to do what He said. I assure you that you will see the results of that simple faith.

But do not insist on seeing, first. Do not be looking here and there for proof, before you believe. Don't insist that "seeing is believing."

God does not work that way. God insists that "believing is seeing!"