**From A Distance**

Small Group Discussion, week of March 1

John 4:43-54

**Intro question:**

* Have everyone share about a time when they’ve received an outcome that was different from what they had hoped, yet in retrospect, they can see how it worked out for their good. (Example: “I lost my job, and that forced me to move to a more affordable apartment. Clearly, I didn’t want that to happen, but it allowed me to meet people who would become some of my closest friends.”)
* Transition: In today’s story, we see Jesus answering a man on his own terms, because he has something much better in mind than what the man is initially thinking.

**Read** John 20:30-31 aloud. These are the theme verses of John’s Gospel—they give us the lenses through which to see all of the stories in proper perspective.

* How do you think these verses should inform the way that we read today’s story?

**Read** John 4:43-54 aloud.

**Discuss:**

* Pastor Josh reminded us on Sunday that with narratives (the kind of literature that we find in the Gospels), the author doesn’t always just come out and tell us the point that we are supposed to get. We have to notice details, and ask questions of the story, to arrive at that answer. Discuss some of those details and questions now, before proceeding. Here are suggestions:
  + Why did John record this story, of all the ones he could have picked?
  + What themes seem important? What words show up repeatedly?
  + Are there any difficulties that might point us in the direction we should be thinking?”
* We know very little about the official in the story, but we can gather that he worked for Herod, the Jewish puppet-king who ruled over this region, under the authority of the Roman Empire. Whatever his actual title, this man would have had power, influence, and resources. He likely would never have met Jesus apart from the dire situation in his life (his son being on his deathbed).
  + What leads the man to believe that Jesus might be able to help? (See v. 45, and the location in v. 46a).
  + How does the man humble himself before Jesus?
  + Pastor Josh pointed out that we “live close to death.” In other words, we have a kind of life now that is always lived under the shadow of death—a kind of life that death mars, and eventually takes away. It is this reality that sometimes brings us to recognize our desperate need for Jesus.
  + Is there any such situation in your own story that caused you to seek or depend on Jesus in a new way?
* What do you think of Jesus’ initial remark to the official, in v. 48?
  + In what way was this a test of the man’s faith? What was Jesus pronouncing about the tone of the crowds’ faith in that particular region? (They saw him as a traveling magician, or miracle-worker; they like the spectacle, but weren’t interested in a deeper attachment with Jesus).
  + What kind of “belief” is Jesus talking about here in v. 48? (Remember John 20:30-31).
* In v. 49, the man indicates what he expects Jesus to do. What exactly did he want him to do? Where did he want Jesus to go? (He expected that Jesus had to come with him to his home in Capernaum, an 18-mile journey, in order to heal his son).
* When Jesus responds in v. 50, how does his response differ from what the man had hoped? How is this a test of the man’s faith?
  + Even if you allow that someone can work a miracle of healing, it was completely unheard of that someone could perform this kind of miracle from afar. As far as this official knew, his son could not be healed unless Jesus physically came with him. So when Jesus tells him to go (with Jesus), the man must decide whether to take Jesus at his word, without any evidence of the outcome, or stay and continue begging him to come.
  + What is Jesus subtly implying here about who he is, if he can restore life from a distance? (Refer back to John 1:1-5 if necessary).
  + Pastor Josh pointed out that Jesus works on his own terms, not on ours, as we see him doing with this man. Why did he choose to work in this way with the official? When have you seen him working in your life on his terms, rather than on yours? Are you in any way dealing with that at the present moment?
* In v. 50b, we see the true nature of the man’s faith. What did he do that showed that he trusted Jesus?
* What happens along the way to confirm his belief in Jesus? How does his faith then grow to complete fruition? (v. 53b).
  + Pastor Josh stated that Jesus wanted to do something in this man’s life that was much greater than simply healing his son physically—he wanted to save the whole family spiritually. If you read v. 53b in light of John 20:30-31, what have this man and his family discovered?
* Pastor Josh claimed that in this story and throughout John’s Gospel, we see that Jesus gives the kind of life that death cannot defeat. Quoting Timothy Keller, he said, “Eternal life is a quality of life that we get now, but when we die, it only gets infinitely better.”
  + Discuss this statement. How does this view differ from what many people think of “eternal life?” What is the quality of life that Jesus offers now?
  + Do you feel that you have tapped into that source of abundant, qualitative life that Jesus gives?
* In this story, how would you describe the kind of faith that accesses that eternal life that Jesus gives?
  + In Pastor Josh’s words: **The faith that accesses the kind of life that Jesus gives is the faith that takes Jesus at his word enough to act on it.**
  + Discuss the following: Josh added an important disclaimer. Sometimes we think that we have to muster up enough faith, or a strong enough faith, to really achieve what Jesus wants to give us. But using the analogy of a ladder, he explained that the quality of our faith is not what brings this life—rather it is the quality of the object in which we trust (namely Jesus). Though we may have questions and doubts, if we have just enough faith to act on his word, and place our lives in his hands, he gives us this kind of life that only he can give.
* How would you describe your faith in Jesus at the moment? Is he simply a miracle-worker? Do you have a deeper attachment with him, which trusts him implicitly? Is there any area where you’re having trouble trusting him?
* Is there some area of your life where Jesus is calling you to take a risk and act on his word, or trust him even though you can’t yet see the outcome?
* In John’s Gospel, what is the ultimate story of a Father losing a Son? How does this loss enable something greater to come about? How does that impact the father in John 4? How does it impact the way that you approach Jesus in these areas of risk?

**Prayer**: Spend a few moments sharing about other needs that you currently have. Pray earnestly for one another, especially in the areas where God is calling you to trust him.