

“Lord God, you have appointed me as a Bishop and Pastor in your Church, but you see how unsuited I am to meet so great and difficult a task. If I had lacked your help, I would have ruined everything long ago. Therefore, I call upon you: I wish to devote my mouth and my heart to you; I shall teach the people. I myself will learn and ponder diligently upon your Word. Use me as your instrument -- but do not forsake me, for if ever I should be on my own, I would easily wreck it all.”

“Sir, I would see Jesus.”

JESUS HEALS AN OFFICIAL'S LITTLE BOY

Gospel – John 4

⁴⁶Jesus came again to Cana in Galilee, where he had turned the water into wine.

In Capernaum, there was a certain royal official whose son was sick. ⁴⁷When this man heard that Jesus had come from Judea into Galilee, he went to him and begged him to come down and heal his son, because his son was about to die.

⁴⁸Jesus told him, “Unless you people see miraculous signs and wonders, you certainly will not believe.”

⁴⁹The royal official said to him, “Lord, come down before my little boy dies.”

⁵⁰“Go,” Jesus told him, “your son is going to live.”

The man believed this word that Jesus spoke to him and left.

⁵¹Already as he was going down, his servants met him with the news that his boy was going to live. ⁵²So he asked them what time his son got better. They told him, “Yesterday at the seventh hour the fever left him.” ⁵³Then the father realized that was the exact time when Jesus had told him, “Your son is going to live.” And he himself and his whole household believed.

⁵⁴This was the second miraculous sign Jesus did after he came from Judea into Galilee.



Have you ever been offered the “dad challenge”? It’s packaged like so, “My dad can beat up your dad.” It’s not really the nicest thing in the world to say, least of all to your dad, who suddenly is in this mortal battle with some other kid’s dad. But if you’ve run out of things to say, dad is often the best example of strength and authority that children know. Who is the “best dad” in the world? You hear the line from time to time, “Dad, you’re the best dad in the world.” It strikes me as odd, because they can’t all be right! If everyone’s dad is the best in the world, we don’t understand the meaning of “best.” Which dad would win the dad national championship? My dad, because he’s the best dad in the world. I’m still pretty sure that at 66 going on 67, my language-teaching, wrestling-coaching dad can still beat up everyone else’s dad in this room.

But isn’t that foolhardy and far-fetched? Someone’s dad must be stronger, bigger, smarter, faster, more skilled, with a better work ethic than my dad. Being the best dad means meeting some elite criteria. *What makes a good father the best father?*

What we have in this morning’s gospel is one of **The Best Dads In The Bible**, if not the best dad. And it’s not for the reason we might suppose; it’s not for the reason he went to visit Jesus. It’s for the result that came of it that makes this man possibly

THE BEST DAD IN THE BIBLE

Result #1. Jesus challenges him

Now you might think first of all this dad was pretty loving for the strength of his heart. He was thinking about the health of his son. He didn’t abandon his children as so many fathers do. Not every dad takes responsibility, but this dad did. Not every dad goes out of his way for his child’s needs, but this

dad searched for the cure. These are virtuous qualities. It's just what a child wants in a dad – and just what mother wants in the father of her children.

Not only that, but this dad was a royal official, a nobleman. This was a sequel to the water-into-wine account; Jesus was in Cana in Galilee, in the north, not too far from Nazareth. The dad was possibly part of King Herod Antipas' court. How many people bearing a noble title or holding the status of nobility is really a good father? Sometimes we hear of the rich and famous, celebrities, and of their children, and you wonder why you never heard of their children until something tragic happens. I was a fan of a professional football player exactly one year younger than me who, a few years ago, turned out to have fifteen children by seven different women. This was highlighted in the news especially when he severely abused one of his sons. Noble people don't always live up to their title, at least not in parenting. But here was a dad who could break that mold and truly be a selfless father.

Note also that this dad went to the right place; that is, the right person. He *learned* of Jesus and he *turned* to Jesus. He came to Jesus to beg him for a miracle. This is the right attitude. So many people assume it's a bother to God, but this is just what our Savior Jesus invites us to do. He loves it when sinners approach Him first before any other solution.

But these are not the things that rank this dad highly in the Bible. Many people were coming to Jesus for solutions, and for the sole purpose of His power. *The Galileans were starting to get obsessed with Jesus' ability to heal. They were looking for a magician.*

It was a kindling of faith that brought the nobleman to Jesus, but it was a little bit more of a misunderstanding; this dad wanted a doctor. We see movies out there that can demonstrate this. John Q is a good one, with Denzel Washington's character looking for the best health care possible for his son. So he breaks the law, holding himself up in a hospital until he gets help. The desperation and pleading is palpable. *Seeking God's healing makes a good father the best father, doesn't it?* If his dear son is suffering from a fever to the point of death, the best father will want the best healthcare.

But the best father is more than that. One virtue, one quality, we don't want to overlook is that *Jesus challenges the best dads.* ***A good God offers us a challenge, don't you think?*** Think about this. If we all agreed with God on every point, and there was no disagreement to be had, we would take a very utilitarian view of God. ("How can I take advantage of God today?") *If it didn't take anything new to believe in God, he hasn't really bettered our lives.* It would make no sense that He doesn't always heal us, that He isn't always visibly among us, that we aren't already in heaven, and that He would ever describe anything about our sin. Not only has sin twisted our actions, it has twisted our thinking and the way that we think. Due to sin, we understand from God that we have fallen human reason. We work things out in our heads badly. This is why we can't on impulse truly make a decision for God; the sinful mind is enemies with Him (Romans 8:7). Our reason is fallen and our will is naturally in bondage. So the faith of everyone who is a believer needs to be challenged. Faith, which comes in all shapes and sizes, must grow. So it is a good thing when Jesus, the most compassionate person ever, true compassionate God, challenges a dad.

It is true that you have Jesus and you have eternal life by faith, even if that treasure is wrapped in a tattered, dingy cloth. But you still make an effort to keep it and not lose it. A treasure in a tattered cloth is still valuable; but you still need to find something better like a treasure chest for it. Then you would find a safe, eventually get some armed guards, or hire a bank to keep that treasure for you. In the same way, our faith holds onto the treasures of God in heaven, but we still want to improve our hold on those treasures and grow in faith. This comes when Jesus Himself challenges us.

The challenge feels abrupt. Jesus says, "**Unless you people see miraculous signs and wonders ... you will certainly not believe.**" NIV says, "**You will never believe.**" Elsewhere, Jesus says "a

wicked and adulterous generation asks for miracles.” And we are forced to say, *“What’s wrong with asking for healing?”* It sounds like something the best father in the world would do. *Here we should take note that God never promises miraculous signs in our lives.* Those prayers aren’t always according to his will.

It’s not that he can’t help us and heal us miraculously. *The problem with trusting only in miracles is that, as soon as he stops doing them, we would stop trusting in Him.* It does not take great fatherhood to come to Jesus as one of many solutions. It does not take great faith to simply approach Jesus as any other god. It does not do to trust in healing in the here and now. Eternal solutions do not come from trusting Jesus *only as long as we see Him heal.*

Instead, Jesus challenges us to trust his coming more than his healing. Why? Jesus has something greater to give than miracles of healing. He has something better than just shaping our physical bodies. *He has something to give fathers that make them the best dads possible.*

Result #2. Jesus answers him

We can see how persistent, incessant, nonstop prayer pulls at the heart of our Lord. The nobleman’s words were, **“Lord, come down before my LITTLE boy dies.”** He wasn’t fazed by the challenge of Jesus. He didn’t falter or turn back, and he didn’t develop a distrust. Challenged by our Lord, his trust began to run even deeper, and we see that in the man’s constancy of prayer.

Where can we find persistence like this in our talks with God? Even if we discover, as James says, that God doesn’t answer because we ask with wrong motives, or, as Paul says, we do not know how to pray. Isn’t that discouraging? Not if we bear in mind that Jesus tells us how to pray boldly in a very frequently prayed prayer. Jesus tells us to recognize God as “Our Father.” What a promise! The Creator of the universe in all His majesty is ours, and He is Father. Not only that, but He has sent Jesus as His Son to be our brother. Persistence comes from the very promises of our God, our Father, who was compelled in His love to seek and save us.

Already as the man’s faith deepened, Jesus was giving him things. He hadn’t resolved the dad’s problem of his son’s sickness. But Jesus gave the man something basic that would serve him the rest of his life. Jesus gave the nobleman a faith not just in the word he had heard about Him. *Jesus gave him a faith in his Word.*

Simply because Jesus said it, there was more for this man’s family.

- Jesus gave him a faith independent of miracles.
- Jesus gave him a faith that endures all the worst problems.
- Jesus gave him a faith that shares with his whole household, an infectious faith.

Simply because Jesus said it, Lazarus came to full health in John 11. Simply because Jesus said it, Peter’s bedridden mother-in-law stood up and began to wait on the disciples in Mark 1. Simply because Jesus said it, and at exactly the same time, the little boy, the son of a nobleman, was healed. The nobleman spreads his full-grown, fatherly faith as soon as he understands what has happened. Simply because Jesus said it, there was more for this man’s family.

What more can Jesus do for you fathers? *What can Jesus do for your family?* Jesus has given you things, and you have looked to Jesus for answers. You have gone to Him in prayer. On the other hand, I wonder if fathers always remember how good it is to be challenged by Jesus – that when God works to change us by His Word, it is actually something to be embraced. It’s part of what makes God real, and not just a mascot or a magician. It’s part of His eternal nature to face us down when we think we have it all figured out or when we want our sin to stand. There’s Jesus in His Word, challenging us. Second, Jesus still has things to give your family, answers to your prayers, help and aid for challenging times. Pray continually on His promises, and search His Scriptures for those

answers. Third, Jesus can do this from a long distance, miles away. Even if you don't feel as though Jesus is right beside you as promised, you can know He is not limited by distance. He comes to meet you even now, even when distanced by your sins. Even when a good dad does bad, Jesus works for you no matter how far you fear you have fallen.

There was once a Lutheran theologian named Philipp Spener. He wasn't the greatest theologian (a little bit mystic, a tad pietistic); but he comes with some good stories, as well. Turned out Spener had a very badly-behaved son. Spener had such a hard time with that boy, he didn't know what to do. After a long time, the son got sick. For a number of weeks the son lay almost mute and motionless. The son couldn't speak, but his brow furrowed like there were great internal conflicts. After those weeks, all at once he threw up his hands, and from his belly he shouted out, "*The prayers of my father surround me like mountains!*" The power of his sickness broke, his internal conflicts ceased, and he was rescued bodily and spiritually from his suffering. He was a different person. You might call it God's challenge and God's answer.

Dads, may your faith influence your children. When your children are acting up, may you be challenged and answered. When you learn about God's power and promises to your children, and when you see God's hand at play in the lives of your children, may your whole household believe. May your "prayers surround" your sons and daughters "like mountains."

For when you rejoice in Jesus, His challenges and His answers, *you're in good company, dads*. On a different day, Jesus Himself was challenged with the prospect of the whole world's sins. He grappled with His own Father in Gethsemane. Jesus answered His own Father in the affirmative. If it was the Father's will, Jesus asked the cup be passed from Him. But knowing that the perfect life of God-made-man was God's work of salvation; knowing that carrying and dying on the cross of our sins was the eternal medicine for sinners; knowing what must be done, Jesus followed His Father's will. So when you are challenged by God's words; when you grapple with God's Law and God's Gospel; when you search the heart and mind of God in the Bible for answers; you are in good company. You are the example of Christ Jesus to your family. By faith in God the Father and in His Son, you are much like the best dad in the Bible. Amen.