

Jesus Reveals God's Perfect Love

✦ **Piercing the darkness of sin and unbelief (vv.43-48)**

✦ **Creating faith where and when He wills (vv.49-54)**

In the Name of Jesus, the patient and merciful Son of God, dearly redeemed:

How patient and merciful are you? Sometimes between sleep and wakefulness our subconscious reveals more about us than we want to know. My moment came early Friday morning. The snowstorm kept Cindy and me at the airport. People were coming and going from the family lounge all night. I helped one photographer plug his adapters into the corner near my chair to recharge equipment and cell phones. Asleep at last with my noise cancelling headphones, I was startled about 5:30, by a shape in the corner at my right and someone leaning over the flight attendant sleeping along that wall. Before I realized it, I had slammed the figure at my right into the wall. I was waking up as the flight attendant calmly told the photographer he should have warned me before stepping into my personal space. "My apologies." "No harm," he said and left. How do soldiers cope with PTSD after months of real combat? We were in Israel with security forces, machine guns, but always felt safe. In our own airport?

Today the Almighty says, "***Be holy because I, the LORD your God, am holy.***" And Jesus in our Gospel: "***Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.***" Jesus says, "***The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.***" (Leviticus 19:2; Matthew 5:48 NIV84; 26:41) Are you patient in every situation? Or are you more like millions of apathetic Americans not merciful enough to "***speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves, to defend the cause of the poor and needy***"? (Proverbs 31:8) With Paul we cry out, "***O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!***" (Romans 7:24f) For patience and mercy **Jesus Reveals God's Perfect Love...**

✦ **Piercing the darkness of sin and unbelief (vv.43-48)**

You heard in our text how a royal official begged Jesus to come down to Capernaum and heal his son. You always go down to the Sea of Galilee, about 700 feet below sea level. Jesus had every reason to be impatient. Two weeks ago we heard how some Samaritans heard Jesus' word and believed in Him. They told the woman, "***We no longer believe because of what you said. Now we have heard for ourselves. And we know that this really is the Savior of the world.***" (4:42) The Galilean Jews welcomed Jesus too, but they just wanted miracles, not His message. Jesus had no honor as a prophet in His own country. For them, Jesus was a handy repairman. Get what you need. Close the door. Jesus rebuked them: "***Unless you people see miraculous signs and wonders, you absolutely will not believe.***"

Do we sometimes get stuck on sight too? Sure God has the power, but does He have the love to help you? "Yes!" you say – until you lose your job, your health, the love of you life. Then the hard questions start piling up like snow drifts. "Does God still care? Why does this problem go on and on despite my prayers?" **The darkness of sin and unbelief** can envelope us like a storm on Galilee.

Somehow this royal official had heard about Jesus. Maybe he knew about the wedding at Cana where Jesus changed water into wine. He could have been at the Passover festival in Jerusalem with other Galileans who saw Jesus there. Whatever the reason, he brought his problem to Jesus. He trusted Jesus would not turn him away because of politics. This royal official may have served a wicked king like Herod Antipas who beheaded John the Baptist. Yet when Jesus warns him about looking for miraculous signs and wonders, the man still pleads, "***Lord, come down before my little boy dies.***"

¹ Unless otherwise noted, quotes are from a draft translation by the undersigned for the Wartburg Project – John.

That's a great insight into faith. True faith perseveres until **Jesus Reveals God's Perfect Love**. We are surrounded by **the darkness of sin and unbelief**. Our fellow Christians in Ukraine where my own daughters have dear friends from teaching VBS, suffered violence that enveloped their nation. A female doctor, member of one of our fellowship churches, was treating a victim of the violence when she herself was shot in the neck. We will remember her and all our loved ones in our prayers today. Many people see such violence and blame God for either not loving or being too weak to stop it. They don't realize He will on the Last Day, but then there will be no more opportunity to repent. The Lord's Apostle Peter explains: *"The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance."* (2 Peter 3:9 NIV84) God's patience with us teaches us patience with others. We have the patience to persevere because God never gives up on us. He proves that in the life of Jesus Christ. Even when we come for the wrong reasons or when our impatience should disqualify us, **Jesus Reveals God's Perfect Love...**

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Sometimes I'm astounded how God's solutions are so much better than mine. *"Lord, come down before my little boy dies!"* the man is pleading. But Jesus has a better idea which will direct the man and us away from signs and wonders to trust the power of God's Word. Jesus leads, not down to Capernaum, but up to God's Word: *"Go,"* Jesus told him, *"your son is well."* *"The man believed the Word Jesus spoke to him and left."* That's all God really wants from us. Just believe His Word and live your life. God knows you have family responsibilities; God gave them – God will help you. You need to make a living; God will provide the way. God knows you need love in your life; first let Him fill you with His **Perfect Love by Creating faith where and when He wills**. Love comes softly as surprises from God.

Where did all this happen? We can't say exactly. Tradition back to the 4th Century Byzantines puts Cana on the road between Nazareth and Tiberias on the Galilee shore. We saw a sign there last week. These days, however, almost all the scholars are convinced of another place called "Cana of Galilee" by its residents. It lies back in the hills north of Nazareth. For the exact place we don't need an answer. The most important **where** was the official's heart and home. Jesus won them all over with the **when**. As his servants excitedly shared the news that his son was well, the royal official asked about the exact hour. *"Yesterday at the seventh hour the fever left him,"* they said. The man realized Jesus spoke the Word right then. By the power of God's Word the man himself along with his whole household – all ages, immediate family, servants with their families – *"everyone in his household believed."*

What a beautiful testimony for the power of God's Word! Wherever I go, whether to China or this trip to Istanbul and Israel, **God's Perfect Love is Creating faith when and where He wills**. As Paul wrote to the Colossians: *"All over the world this gospel is bearing fruit and growing, just as it has been doing among you since the day you heard it and understood God's grace in all its truth."* (1:6 NIV84)

We saw that fruit when our guide walked up to us in the Tel Aviv airport with a joyful smile: "Hi, I'm Sam. I'm a Christian." Did you know there are about 6,000 Christian Palestinians living in Jerusalem? Sam and Emad, our driver, can trace their Christian heritage for generations, even centuries back to the Romans or Crusaders. I sadly explained how we Americans hear "Palestinian," and think "terrorist." They were very aware of that. But our Christian Palestinians peacefully confess their faith in Jesus as the Christ of God. For that reason they suffer prejudice and persecution from Jews on one hand and Muslims on the other. In Christ, they teach their children: *"Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous."* (Matthew 5:44f)

Best of all, **Jesus Reveals God's Perfect Love** on the cross. His blood washed away every sin of Christians, Jews, Muslims – all. God does not discriminate; He calls us all to repentant faith in Jesus. **Jesus Reveals God's Perfect Love – Piercing the darkness of sin and unbelief, Creating faith where and when He wills**. Waking or sleeping, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

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New Life Evangelical Lutheran Church
180 County Rd F - Shoreview, MN 55126