

Does Jesus Believe in You?

John 2:23-25

I thought after last week's study that I would be ready for us to move on to John 3. I am really looking forward to preaching messages from that great chapter. There we will find Jesus' conversation with Nicodemus about our need to be born again. We will also find the greatest gospel verse that has ever been written, John 3:16.

But as I began to study this week, the Holy Spirit stopped me in my tracks at the end of chapter 2. There we find three verses that serve as a bridge between the events of chapter 2 and what happens in chapter 3. Remember that when the Bible was written it had no chapter divisions or verse designations. They were added later to help us in studying the Bible together—so that we all can know we are looking at the same place in the scripture.

So these verses conclude the stories of Jesus' sign of turning the water into wine and His cleansing of the temple in Jerusalem, but they also introduce us to the encounter with Nicodemus.

As I have reminded almost every week, John's purpose for writing this Gospel was (20:31), **"that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name."** In the prologue (1:1-18), John immediately sets forth the glory of Jesus Christ as the eternal Word, who was with God and was God. He is the source of light and life. We saw in 1:12, **"But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name."**

In 1:50, Nathanael is the first one in this gospel who is said to believe in Jesus. In 2:11, the disciples, who had already believed and followed Jesus, believed again when they saw His glory when He turned the water into wine. In 2:22, John tells us that after Jesus resurrection, **"His disciples remembered that He had said this to them; and they believed the Scripture and the word which Jesus had said."** So John is drawing a portrait of Jesus as the glorious manifestation of God with us, the one in whom everyone should believe for eternal life. The disciples have are examples of early faith and growing faith in Jesus.

And then we read (John 2:23), **"Now when He was in Jerusalem at the Passover, during the feast, many believed in His name when they saw the signs which He did."** We might expect this to be another example of saving faith following the earlier examples that he has given. But instead we read (2:24-25), **"But Jesus did not commit Himself to them, because He knew all men, and had no need that anyone should testify of man, for He knew what was in man."** Why would Jesus refuse to commit Himself to those who believed in Him?

The word translated **"commit"** (2:24, NKJV) is the same Greek verb as **"believed"** (2:23). We might translate it this way, "Many believed in Jesus, but Jesus didn't believe in them." Jesus did not have faith in their faith.

I agree with John Piper, who explains ([He Knew What Was in Man](#)):

What it says, in essence, is that Jesus knows what is in every heart, and so he can see when someone believes in a way that is not really believing. In other words, Jesus' ability to know every heart perfectly leads to the unsettling truth that some belief is not the kind of belief that obtains fellowship with Jesus and eternal life. Some belief is not saving belief.

So while most of us in this room today would probably say, "I believe in Jesus," maybe the more important question we all need to ask today is, "Does Jesus believe in me?"

This morning I want to build this message around the key phrase found in each of these three verses. 1. "Many believed in His name..." (2:23); 2. "Jesus did not commit Himself to them..." (2:24); 3. "He knew what was in man." (2:25).

Jesus knows whether your faith is genuine. Not all faith is saving faith. We need to believe in Jesus in such a way that He believes in us.

I. Faith can be superficial. "Many believed in His name..." (2:23)

23 Now when He was in Jerusalem at the Passover, during the feast, many believed in His name when they saw the signs which He did.

Now, at first glance you might read that and get excited that many people believed in Jesus when they saw the miracles He did in Jerusalem during the feast of Passover.

The disciples may have been initially enthused over the response of the people and then puzzled by Jesus' seemingly aloof response to them: "If He's the Messiah, why doesn't He welcome all of these people who are believing in His name?" Verse 25 gives us the reason: He could see their hearts. He knew that their faith was based on seeing the miracles that He performed, but they weren't repenting of their sins and trusting in Him as their Savior from sin. Their faith wasn't the kind of faith that He could commit Himself to because it was built solely on the miracles that He did.

Now, that's not intended to downplay the power of miracles to impact people and bring them to faith in Christ. Remember, John purposely chose these signs that Jesus did so that we would come to believe Jesus and be saved. However, throughout the Gospel, John makes it clear that it takes more than believing in miracles for a person to be saved.

Seeing the signs that Jesus did and believing in them would be a good start in the process of salvation—but, in and of themselves, miracles are not enough to build saving faith upon.

Chapter 6 reports a similar incident. After Jesus fed the 5,000 with five loaves and two fish, we read (6:14), "**Then those men, when they had seen the sign that Jesus did, said, 'This is truly the Prophet who is to come into the world.'**" "The Prophet" was a term that referred to the Messiah, the Christ (Deut. 18:15). The disciples no doubt thought, "Great! These people get it! They're acknowledging Jesus as the Messiah!" But the next verse says, "**Therefore when Jesus perceived that they were about to come and take Him by force**

to make Him king, He departed again to the mountain by Himself alone.”

Jesus knew that the people superficially believed in Him, but He didn't entrust Himself to them.

A. Superficial faith believes in signs, not the Savior.

Look at verse 23 again. What impressed these people about Jesus? They had seen His authority when He cleared out the merchants and money-changers from the temple. Also verse 23 tells us that during His visit to Jerusalem, Jesus had performed other signs. Maybe some of them had been healed or knew those who had been healed.

Jesus later chided the people of Israel whose faith was so weak and shallow that it constantly had to be bolstered with the supernatural—**“Unless you people see signs and wonders, you will by no means believe,”** (John 4:48).

Any ‘faith’ that is built solely on the supernatural (signs and wonders)—is a shallow faith. God's word is the only sure foundation upon which to build your faith—you simply cannot build a strong faith on some experience of the supernatural. And yet, that is exactly what many people are doing even today.

We see an example of superficial faith in Acts 8. A magician named Simon had built quite a following in Samaria, claiming to be someone great (8:9). When he saw the miracles that God was working through Philip, Simon believed and was baptized. He continued on with Philip, being constantly amazed by the miracles that he saw (8:13). Then, when Peter and John arrived and prayed for the people to receive the Holy Spirit, Simon was impressed. He offered money to the apostles so that he could obtain the same powers. But Peter strongly denounced him (8:20-23), **“Your money perish with you, because you thought that the gift of God could be purchased with money! You have neither part nor portion in this matter, for your heart is not right in the sight of God. Repent therefore of this your wickedness, and pray God if perhaps the thought of your heart may be forgiven you. For I see that you are poisoned by bitterness and bound by iniquity.”** Apparently, Simon's faith was not saving faith.

B. Superficial faith is limited in what it believes about Jesus.

Nicodemus is an example of this. These verses at the end of chapter 2 are closely tied to the story of Nicodemus in chapter 3. John 2:25 emphasizes “man” (used twice) and then in 3:1, we read, “Now there was a man....” Also, 2:23 mentions the signs that Jesus was doing in Jerusalem during the feast, and in 3:2 Nicodemus acknowledges the signs that Jesus was doing. Nicodemus calls Jesus “Rabbi,” acknowledges that He has come from God as a teacher, and that God is with Him (3:2). That is good and all that is true about Jesus. But that is not enough. Jesus knew that Nicodemus' faith was superficial. So Jesus tells him, **“You must be born again,”** (3:7).

Nicodemus didn't understand that Jesus came to impart the new birth or that he even needed the new birth. He didn't understand that Jesus would die as God's

provision for sinners to receive eternal life (3:14-16). While I believe that he later came to faith, at this point his belief in Jesus was limited.

We see the same thing in John 10:31-33, where Jesus' critics acknowledged that He did good works, but they were ready to stone Him for blasphemy, because He made Himself out to be God. They could accept Jesus as a good man, but not as God.

C. Superficial faith may lead to genuine faith.

Believing on the basis of signs (miracles) is better than not believing at all. In John 10:37-38, Jesus tells His Jewish critics, **"If I do not do the works of My Father, do not believe Me; but if I do, though you do not believe Me, believe the works, that you may know and believe that the Father is in Me, and I in Him."**

But believing because of miracles will not result in salvation unless it is accompanied by repentance. Simon the magician believed, but he had not repented of his pride and love of power over the people. So he was not yet saved. In the parable of the sower, it is only the seed that endures and bears fruit that is genuinely saved. (See, also, Matt. 24:13; Rom. 11:22; 1 Cor. 15:2; Col. 1:23; Heb. 3:12-14; 1 John 2:18-19.)

One pastor rightly warned— *"There are those who seek miraculous proof that Jesus is real and that He loves them. They search for physical, material, or financial verification of His reality. But theirs is a flimsy, faulty faith built upon a sandbar foundation because, as we will see, Jesus is not committed to those who demand a sign. You see, the problem with signs is that they're never enough. If you base your faith upon signs, you'll always be upset by the one that didn't happen—the prayer that wasn't answered, the healing that didn't come, the payment that didn't arrive. That is why our faith must be built and based not upon what Jesus does, but upon who He is. Who He is as revealed in the Word. That is why Paul says faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of God (Romans 10:17). It's the Word pointing to the Person of Jesus Christ that produces genuine faith."*

Many of us initially believed in Jesus with a fairly shallow or superficial faith. We trusted Him because we wanted healing or success or something other than salvation from sin. But to go on and develop into genuine saving faith, you have to see yourself as the Bible portrays you and see Christ for who He is.

So, when verse 23 says, **"Many believed in His name"**—it is not necessarily talking about saving faith. They believed He was a great healer and a great miracle worker—but not necessarily a great Savior from sin and Lord over all.

Now in verse 24 we see that,

II. Saving faith means a relationship with Jesus. "Jesus did not commit Himself to them..." (2:24)

As I pointed out, the words "believed" in John 2:23 and "commit" in John 2:24 are from the same Greek word. These people believed in Jesus, but He did not

believe in them—He didn't have faith in their faith, because He knew their hearts, and He knew they were "unsaved believers"!

So, what does it mean for Jesus to believe in you, or to entrust Himself to you? It has to do with a personal relationship. Trust is at the heart of all relationships. If you don't trust someone, you will not be close to him. For Jesus to entrust Himself to you, He must trust you.

But how can He do that when we are untrustworthy sinners? First, there has to be the new birth where He imparts new life to us through the Holy Spirit. That is why Jesus tells Nicodemus in the next chapter, **"You must be born again,"** (3:7). Only God can change our evil, sinful hearts. Jesus did not entrust Himself to these superficial believers because He did not see their faith as the work of God stemming from the new birth.

Then, we need to walk in obedience to Him. In John 14:23 Jesus says, **"If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him."** The Lord entrusts Himself to those who obey Him and it is only those who have been born again who are able to obey Him from the heart (Rom. 6:17).

Some of the most soul-penetrating verses in the New Testament are Jesus' words in Matthew 7:21-23: **"Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. Many will say to Me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!'"** These people professed faith in Jesus. They called Him "Lord." They were even involved in impressive ministries. But Jesus didn't know them personally. Their disobedience showed that although they "believed" in Jesus, He didn't believe in them. At the final judgment, Christ's evaluation of us will be the determinative factor.

And that is the point of verse 25,

III. Jesus knows if your faith is saving faith. "He knew what was in man." (2:25)

The reason that Jesus didn't entrust Himself to these "believers" was that He knew what was in their hearts.

In 1 Samuel 16:7, the Lord tells Samuel, **"For the LORD does not see as man sees; for man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart."** Solomon prays (1 Kings 8:39b), **"for You alone know the hearts of all the sons of men."** Jer. 17:10 says, **"I, the LORD, search the heart, / test the mind, Even to give every man according to his ways, According to the fruit of his doings."** (Also, see 1 Chron. 28:9; Ps. 139:1-18, 23-24; Heb. 4:13.) So when John tells us that Jesus knew all men and knew what was in man, it is a witness to His deity. Only God can do that. Jesus could peer beneath the surface and evaluate the thoughts and motives of hearts. We see this truth throughout the Gospel. Jesus knew Nathanael (1:47-48) He knows that Nicodemus needs a

new birth (3:7). He knew all out the woman at the well and her sin (4:17-19, 29). He knew what people were thinking and what they were intending to do (6:15, 64; 16:30; 21:17; Luke 16:15).

Jesus knows all about you as well. He knows if your faith is genuine. He knows if you have saving faith superficial faith. You may be able to fool people in the church, or your family and friends. You may even be able to fool yourself into thinking you are a Christian. But you cannot fool Jesus. He knows your heart. And the good news is that even though He knows you completely, He loves you extravagantly. He loved you so much that He went to the cross and died for your sins. He offers you the free gift of eternal life, a relationship with Him now and forever.

You receive that gift by repenting of your sin and believing in Jesus. He gives you a new birth so that your heart can believe and be saved.

My aim in this message is, I hope, the same as John's aim for including these verses in his Gospel: to get us all to believe in Jesus in such a way that He believes in us. Or, in Paul's words (2 Cor. 13:5), **"Examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Do you not know yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you?—unless indeed you are disqualified."**

Does your faith pass the Jesus test?