

# Believing In Jesus

John 6:22-71

**“Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.”**  
(Hebrews 11:1).

Listen to this interesting exchange between Alice in Wonderland and the Queen from Lewis Carroll's *Through the Looking Glass*:

(The queen says) 'Let's consider your age to begin with - how old are you?'

(Alice replies) 'I'm seven and a half exactly.'

'You needn't say "exactly",' the queen remarked: 'I can believe it without that. Now I'll give *you* something to believe. I'm just one hundred and one, five months and a day.'

'I can't believe that!' said Alice.

'Can't you?' the queen said in a pitying tone. 'Try again: draw a long breath, and shut your eyes.'

Alice laughed. 'There's no use trying,' she said: 'one *can't* believe impossible things.'

'I daresay you haven't had much practice,' said the queen. 'When I was your age, I always did it for half an hour a day. Why, sometimes I've believed as many as six impossible things before breakfast.' (Lewis Carroll, *Through the Looking Glass*)

In that humorous passage Lewis Carroll is commenting on the enigma of faith. Why is it that some people manage to believe things that others find utterly incredible? As far as the Queen is concerned it's all a matter of effort. Just hold your breath and shut your eyes. You can believe anything if you try hard enough. But we, like Alice, realize that it isn't that simple. There's a big difference between faith and mere wishful thinking. To fail to understand that is to confuse reality with fantasy. If you have to make yourself believe it then there's probably something wrong.

Yet having said that, many people do believe the impossible. Certainly we Christians appear to, don't we? That God would become a human being and walk on earth. That he would be conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of a virgin. That he healed the sick, raised the dead and did other miraculous signs. That he would be killed but then come back to life three days later. That he ascended into heaven and is coming again.

We might have to excuse Alice for laughing at such an idea wouldn't we? Yet most Christians would argue that they're not forcing themselves to believe. They're not suspending their rational faculties in order to believe all this. No, rather, we believe because of a deep inner conviction that the Christian message is the truth.

Now why is that? It can't just be that we're all gullible. I mean there are plenty of gullible people and even gullible Christians around, I'm sure. But there are plenty of intelligent, reasonable, rational Christians around as well. So why is it that some people believe, while others don't?

At the end of John 6, Jesus speaks some words that show the insight He had into the minds and hearts of His hearers. He says, "*But there are some of you who do not believe.*" And John adds the commentary, "*For Jesus knew from the beginning who they were who did not believe, and who would betray Him ... From that time many of His disciples went back and walked with Him no more.*" (John 6:64,66).

Let's back up a little in John 6 and see if we can find some reasons why some did not believe while others trusted in Jesus.

## **A Why do unbelievers not believe?**

### **1. The Spiritual Nature of Jesus' Message. (6:25-27)**

#### **What caused some of these people to walk away from Jesus and not believe in Him?**

The episode here in John 6 gives us several clues about their unbelief. First, let's understand the context. At the beginning of chapter 6 Jesus feeds over 5000 people with a little boy's lunch (John 6:1-15), an amazing miracle. Now these same people had caught up to Jesus again on the other side of the lake, looking for more to eat. Some of the people recognized what Jesus did as being a sign that Jesus was the new deliverer, like Moses. They thought Jesus was the one who would bring them liberation from the Roman oppression, the way Moses brought deliverance from slavery in Egypt. They thought Jesus would provide food to eat that could sustain an army in battle the way God provided manna in the desert.

Jesus says to them, "***Most assuredly, I say to you, you seek Me, not because you saw the signs, but because you ate of the loaves and were filled. Do not labor for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to everlasting life, which the Son of Man will give you, because God the Father has set His seal on Him.***" (John 6:26-27).

Jesus says that they've got it all wrong. There are two kinds of food: "***Do not work for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures for eternal life.***" There's the bread that nourishes our physical existence, but which is doomed to perish in the end; and there's also bread that nourishes our spiritual existence which is destined to last forever.

The trouble was, these Galileans were materialists. They'd eaten the loaves and had their fill. They saw the economic benefits of following Jesus and had decided they were onto a good thing. But they'd completely missed the spiritual significance of what had happened. They'd seen the *miracle* but they'd missed the *sign*.

**One reason many fail to believe is that they are so stuck in the material that they refuse to see the spiritual.** This is especially true in 21<sup>st</sup> century America. Let's face it, we're probably more materialistic now than the people of Galilee were in Jesus' day. We certainly have more material. Today people spend so much time, effort and energy working for material needs and wants that they neglect their spiritual needs. Some will follow Jesus as long it pays off in this world, but they walk away if it doesn't get them ahead in the rat race.

So Jesus' words come to us today with renewed urgency, (6:27): "***Do not labor for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to everlasting life, which the Son of Man will give you, because God the Father has set His seal on Him.***"

Jesus' mission and message are essentially spiritual, not material. **And some people simply will not move beyond the material.** Do you remember what Jesus said to Satan during the first of his temptations in the desert? "***Man shall not live by bread alone,***" or "Human beings don't need just physical bread." There's far more to life than our material needs.

Yet there are still those who disagree; who argue that such an idea is just a way of seducing the masses; of stopping them from worrying about their real state of existence. Marx claimed that religion (especially Christianity) was the opiate of the masses, something

to keep the poor happy and ignorant of the economic oppression under which they live. But according to Jesus the opposite is true. **It's actually materialism that's the narcotic, which deadens us to our spiritual state.**

Just listen to our politicians some time. They'll tell you that all that matters is our economic well-being. Remember the slogan, "It's the economy, stupid!" And it seems to be true doesn't it? As long as we're acquiring the latest gadget, the newest car, the toys we enjoy, we don't seem to think about the spiritual side of life. Not, that is, until we realize what a spiral we're in: where our latest purchase is never quite enough, where the appetite for more becomes insatiable, where our buying becomes a substitute for satisfying what's really a hunger for something else—for significance, for acceptance, for love, for a relationship with the living God.

A second reason that people fail to believe in Jesus is

## **2. The Gracious Nature of Jesus' Offer. (6:28-33)**

Jesus had just told them about, "**everlasting life, which the Son of Man will give you.**" (John 6:27). He offered a gift. They offered to pay for it. They responded with the question, "**What shall we do, that we may work the works of God?**" And in asking that question they demonstrate their world view. **They think that eternal life is all about what I do, about my works.**

A church had a yard sale. Well, it was actually a storage room giveaway. The pastor said, "We didn't really sell anything. We had so much stuff that it took up too much space. Also, we wanted to reach out to the community. As people came up we told them, 'Everything is free! Take as much home as you can. We want you to have it.' People responded in curious ways. Many were noticeably uncomfortable. Some didn't come thinking there was a catch. Others refused to leave without paying. Others, after much convincing, finally took the stuff to their cars, not believing their good fortune. And I thought to myself, 'That's pretty much the way people are about God's grace.' **We insist on paying or working for it.**"

The idea that God's love comes to us free of charge, no strings attached, seems to go against every instinct of humanity. That's what religions are all about. The Buddhist eight-fold path, the Hindu doctrine of Karma, the Jewish covenant, and the Muslim code of law—each of these offers a way to earn approval. Only Christianity dares to make God's love unconditional (Philip Yancey, *What's So Amazing about Grace?*).

John Stott writes of man trying to justify himself by works, "It is the religion of the man-in-the-street today. Indeed, it is the fundamental principle of every religious and moral system in the world except New Testament Christianity. It is popular because it is flattering. It tells a man that if he will only pull his socks up a bit higher and try a bit harder, he will succeed in winning his own salvation. But it is a fearful delusion. It is the biggest lie of the biggest liar the world has ever known, the devil, whom Jesus called 'the father of lies.' Nobody has ever been justified by the works of the law, for the simple reason that nobody has ever perfectly kept the law."

Instead Jesus says to come by faith. *Jesus answered and said to them, "**This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He sent.**"* (John 6:29). Believe in Him, it sounds too easy for some. They want to work for it, to earn it. But you cannot earn a gift, that is the nature of a gift. An old Middle Eastern story shows the futility of salvation by works:

A man was traveling on his donkey when he came upon a small fuzzy object lying in the road. He dismounted to look more closely and found a sparrow lying on its back

with its scrawny legs thrust skyward. At first he thought the bird was dead, but close investigation proved it to be very much alive. The man asked the sparrow if he was all right. The sparrow replied, "Yes." The man said, "What are you doing lying on your back with your legs pointed toward the sky?" The sparrow responded that he had heard a rumor that the sky was falling. The man replied, "You surely don't think you're going to hold the sky up with those two scrawny legs, do you?" The sparrow replied, "**One does the best he can.**"

The little bird's futile works were obvious. In the same way, man's condition is so desperate that his works are no more effective than a bird's legs in the air trying to hold up the sky. No one will ever be saved by works.

Believe. So easy a child can do it. So hard the wisest stumble over it. The humble receive it. The proud refuse it.

**Have you seen people who refuse to believe because they are trying to earn God's favor?**

A The third reason some find it hard to believe is because of

### **3. The Supernatural Nature of Jesus' Claims. (6:34-48)**

In the gospel accounts Jesus makes some astounding claims. In John 5 there is a long discourse between Jesus and the religious leaders in which Jesus claims over and over to have come from God, indeed to be the Son of God. And again, in John 6, he is claiming a uniquely divine origin.

Now if I claimed to have come from God and to be the unique Son of God, you would probably lock me up. It's the sort of thing you expect to hear in a mental hospital: from people who have lost touch with reality. But that is just what Jesus claims. In the space of a mere 7 verses, from 34 to 40, Jesus uses the words 'I' or 'me' or 'my' 17 times. His claim is for a divine ministry: "*I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.*" (John 6:35); a divine origin: "***I have come down from heaven;***" (6:38); a divine mission: "***I have come to do the will of him who sent me;***" (6:38); divine power: "***I will raise him up at the last day,***" (6:40),

Jesus says he has come to satisfy our hunger, as both the giver and the gift. "***For the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world. . . . I am the bread of life.***" (John 6:33-35). Jesus has come to satisfy the most important need of human beings: the need to fill the spiritual void caused by sin. **Do you know that hunger?** It's a profound hunger that only God can satisfy.

But his listeners couldn't swallow that. After all, they thought they knew Jesus. And they said, "***Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How is it then that He says, 'I have come down from heaven'?***" They'd seen him grow up. They'd bought furniture from his father. They'd eaten with his family. How could he claim to have come down from heaven? That's ridiculous! He may have a strange ability to heal people, even to produce food in unexplainable ways, he might be able to do amazing miracles, but it's another thing to claim to *be* a miracle. That's a bit unbelievable wouldn't you say? Yet that is his claim.

Of course it's still his claim today and it's still an obstacle to faith for many today. You see, we're so intent on understanding our world, of being able to judge for ourselves what's true

and what isn't that we find it hard to accept someone who claims to come from heaven and to be so beyond our understanding.

**Jesus made greater claims for himself than any major religious figure, before or since.** In the Bible we clearly see Jesus as supernatural by all the miracles he did. And we clearly see Jesus making claims to be the Son of God, to be sent from heaven, to be the only way to God, to have come back from the dead, and to be equal with God.

You owe it to yourself to consider them with as objective and sincere a mindset as you can. I can testify that if you do you will not be disappointed. I have found Jesus to be the loving and just Savior and Lord that he claims to be. He also claims he will be our eternal judge concerning eternal punishment or eternal life. ***"And this is the will of Him who sent Me, that everyone who sees the Son and believes in Him may have everlasting life; and I will raise him up at the last day."*** (John 6:40).

**The only way to discount these claims is to discredit the biblical accounts.** Of course that is what many try to do. If I can call into question the accuracy of the biblical record then I don't really have to deal with the supernatural claims of Jesus. And if Jesus is not who he claims to be in the Bible, then I don't have to deal with his claims on my life either.

**Do you take the supernatural claims of Jesus seriously?**

A fourth reason why some did not believe is:

#### **4. The Scandalous Nature of the Cross.** (John 6:49-58)

Jesus takes the idea of the bread that comes down from heaven and uses it to describe what he is soon to do on the cross. That is, he's about to give up his life in order to bring life to others. All through this passage Jesus tells us how to receive eternal life. He repeats himself over and over again. In 6:29 he says: ***"This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He sent."*** And in 6:35, ***"I am the bread of life. He who comes to Me shall never hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst."*** In 6:40: ***"And this is the will of Him who sent Me, that everyone who sees the Son and believes in Him may have everlasting life; and I will raise him up at the last day."*** And then in 6:47 ***"Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me has everlasting life."***

What do all those verses have in common? Believe, believe, believe. The way to eternal life is to believe in Jesus.

So now we get to 6:51 and Jesus starts talking about us eating his flesh. He says, ***"I am the living bread which came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread that I shall give is My flesh, which I shall give for the life of the world."*** If the way to eternal life is to believe in Jesus, and he now says, ***"If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread that I shall give is My flesh,"*** it's fairly clear that eating his flesh has to do with believing in what he's done with his flesh: that is, his death on the cross; his flesh given for the life of the world.

Again his hearers take offence at this language. In 6:52, ***The Jews therefore quarreled among themselves, saying, "How can this Man give us His flesh to eat?"*** The thought of eating his flesh is enough to turn them off completely. But Jesus takes the metaphor even further: he says that his flesh and blood are real food and real drink (6:55). They're such that if you partake of them you'll partake of Christ himself (6:56). To eat of this food is to partake in the life that the Father gives to the Son (6:57).

Well, I guess we can understand how hard this was for Jesus hearers to understand. Even his disciples begin to complain what a hard saying this is (6:60,61). So Jesus responds, in 6:62: "**What then if you should see the Son of Man ascend where He was before?**" There would come a time when an even more amazing thing would happen. Not only would Jesus be killed on a cross, but he'd rise from death and ascend again to the Father in heaven. Then their faith would really be tested and even having seen all that, there would still be some who wouldn't believe.

So we see here 4 reasons why people fail to believe in Jesus: 1. The spiritual nature of his message. 2. The gracious nature of his offer. 3. The supernaturalism of his claims. And, 4. The scandal of the cross.

But there were those who did believe. And that leaves us with the question

## **B Why do some people believe?**

I think there are two reasons given in the passage.

### **1. Believing is A Gift from God.**

Three times in this section we're told the same thing:

John 6:37 "**All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will by no means cast out.**;"

Jn 6:44 "**No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up at the last day.**."

John 6:65: "**Therefore I have said to you that no one can come to Me unless it has been granted to him by My Father.**"

At first glance we don't like the idea that our coming to Christ, our believing, is the work of God. We'd prefer to think that we can solve our own problems, make our own choices, muster up our own faith. There's an independence of mind in us that rebels at the thought that God does it all for us. Yet that's the message of the gospel. Everything to do with our salvation comes from God. God gives it. We receive it. Salvation is a gift.

This truth has brought me great assurance. Think about how well you do in keeping to God's will for your life. How good are you at overcoming those bad habits? How often do you find yourself regretting your words or your actions? If you were left entirely to your own devices how long do you think you'd continue to be a follower of Christ? For most of us I fear it wouldn't be too long. No, we need God's help all along the way and that's no less true at the start of the journey as half way through or at the end. So isn't it wonderful that it's God who calls us to himself and that Jesus promises that anyone who comes to him will never be cast out?

But for those with an independent frame of mind, there is another side to this.

### **2. What alternative is there?**

Look at v 67: Then **Jesus said to the twelve, "Do you also want to go away?" But Simon Peter answered Him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life.**

There is a rational response to Jesus that says 'What alternative is there? Where else would we go? With Jesus we find the words of eternal life. Anywhere else we look there is only death.'

This expression of faith on the disciples' shows that the faith they express isn't just blind faith. Rather it's rational faith that comes about because of the work of God in their hearts. It's rational faith that comes about as the Spirit takes the words of God (6:63, 68) and sets them to work in our hearts to bring eternal life. As Jesus says in 6:45 the disciples are those who have listened to God and so come to Jesus in faith.

The choice is the same today as it was 2000 years ago. Do you believe in Jesus or not? Will you come to him or will you reject him? If you're one who's still deciding, then ask God to open your eyes so you can see the truth about Jesus and come to belief in him. Ask him to feed you with living bread that endures to eternal life. If you already believe in Jesus then make sure you're spending time with God's word so God can continue to feed your faith in Jesus so you too will live with him forever.