

The Greatest Story (Part 40):

Do You Believe In Jesus?

John 3

Memory Verses: John 3:16-17

MANUSCRIPT

Introduction (Me, We, & the Struggle)

Over the past four weeks we have been looking at Jesus Christ; the long awaited Messiah who has come to save the world of their sins and the wrath of God. Four weeks ago we saw in Zechariah & Malachi that the King was most assuredly Coming. Three weeks ago we saw through the lineage of Jesus in Mathew that the King had most assuredly Come at last and that he was in the lineage of Abraham and David... he was a historical figure and he was the Messiah. Two weeks ago we took a more in-depth study of Jesus in the Gospel of Mark as we refuted modern day Judaism's claims that Jesus is not the Christ. What we found was that if Jesus isn't the Christ then the Christ isn't coming. And last week we studied portions of Luke's Gospel in order to determine the cost of following Jesus as the Christ. Salvation is free but a life lived after Christ will most assuredly cost us our families, our dreams, and our very lives. If you find that following Jesus doesn't cost you anything then you probably aren't following Jesus.

This week we are going to look at perhaps the most popular chapter of the New Testament and the most popular verse of the Bible as we ponder all of the evidence we've gathered up to this point and ask the question... Do you Believe in Jesus?

Do you Believe in Jesus? On the surface it seems like such an easy question right? Especially if you have grown up in church and have heard about Jesus for as long as you can remember. It's almost an answer that doesn't even need to be thought about. For instance; when you are asked if you believe in Jesus; many of us don't stop to think of the historical evidence for his actual existence. So sure, I believe he existed. Or for instance; we don't stop to think of what it means to believe in him rather than to believe about him. These two things are extremely different. One says I have a book knowledge of plausible information which I can deduce as logical. The other says I truly know him, converse with him, depend up on him, and worship him with my life as he desires.

An old story illustrates this difference clearly. There was a man at Niagara Falls who had a tight rope set up from one end of the falls to the other. A large crowd had gathered to see him achieve wondrous feats as he would walk the tight rope forwards and backwards. After a couple of trips across he grabbed a wheel barrow. He yelled to the crowd... do you

believe I can take this across and back safely? They screamed... we believe we believe... and he proceeded across as he took it back and forth. The crowds were going nuts... They'd never seen anything like it. He then yelled to the crowd... do you believe I can do it with someone in the wheel barrow? The crowd yelled we believe we believe. And then he asked a question... who will volunteer? No one lifted their hands. You see there is a difference in believing someone and placing your belief in someone.

What makes the difference? What draws someone from merely a belief based on a logical conclusion to a belief that causes them to lose their old life for a new one in Christ? What takes someone from believing to BE LIVING? You see the word **Believe is two root words BE & LIVING**. Belief was never meant to be some information you just determined was factual... rather belief is meant to be something you put the weight of your life behind.

You ever sing the kids song... **if you're happy and you know it?** Let's see. "If you're happy and you know it clap your hands... etc. So... **If You Believe in Jesus and You Know It Then Your Life Will Surely Show It.**

So turn with me over to **John chapter 3** and let's see what it truly means to believe in Jesus. My hope this morning is that perhaps we have someone here today who has held a long standing intellectual belief of Christ in their minds... but that has never transferred to a belief in Christ their hearts... today is the day to make that transformation.

Teaching (Expand on the Problem, God)

The first thing we will see here is that... **If You Believe In Jesus You Must Be Born Again.** Let's read **John 3:1-12**. Here we meet a character called Nicodemus. He's a pharisee, part of the religious elite and a group that is opposed to the movement surrounding Jesus. He comes to Jesus at night because he doesn't want any of his other pharisee friends to know his feelings towards this rebel rouser. It took a great deal of courage for Nicodemus to befriend Christ.

Another thing we learn here about Nicodemus is that he thinks Christ is a great teacher. Here Nicodemus has logically deduced that there is something to this Jesus that his other friends either don't see or have outright denied. One could say that Nicodemus has a head knowledge concerning Christ... he's a great teacher.

But Jesus tells him... it's not enough to consider me a great teacher... "I am something much more than that." He's letting Nicodemus know that his head knowledge concerning himself must become a heart knowledge. Jesus tells him: because of your understanding of scripture and your openness to me you can see some of God, but your eyes are still mostly closed. Look at **verse 4-5** again. In order to see all of God you must be "Born Again." Nicodemus, understandably so, struggles with the analogy.

How can one be born again in the flesh. Jesus clarifies... being Born Again is not a physical matter but a spiritual matter. Being born physically is a matter of the flesh... being born spiritually is a matter of faith. Just as you can't see the wind but you believe it is there you must also believe in the spirit the things that can't necessarily be seen with human eyes. Jesus reemphasizes this point where in **verse 12** Jesus tells him... your understanding of God up to this point has been on "earthly things." Things such as logic, rationale, empirical evidence, and the tradition of your fathers. But it must shift to an understanding of heavenly things, and the only way to do that is through a new spiritual birth. **Believing in Jesus takes setting aside empirical evidence for spiritual faith.** So the question remains... "is your mind open enough to see what can't be seen?" If you believe in Jesus it should be obvious that you are open to spiritual and supernatural things. **If You Believe in Jesus and You Know It Then Your Life Will Surely Show It.**

Secondly we see here that... **If You Believe In Jesus You Will Look And Live .** Let's look at **John 3:13 -18**. Jesus continues his discourse with Nicodemus: if you can consider seeing beyond the physical realm and having faith in the spiritual then the next step is to place your faith in me; Jesus as the Messiah. Nicodemus didn't seem too shook by this. Something tells me that he was already of the mindset that Jesus might be the Christ and was wanting Jesus to explain it further... to give him the final pitch. Well here it is. If you want to see God then you can only see God through the Messiah; the only one who can impart heavenly wisdom because he is the only one who has come from heaven.

In order to be Born Again you must place your faith in the Messiah. But what does it mean to believe in the Messiah? Jesus points Nicodemus to a story that he would know very well as a pharisee. Look at **vs14-15**. Here we get to the crux of the situation and it starts with a story in the book of Numbers about snakes. Let's turn over to **Numbers 21:4-9** and read this story. The Israelites complain, they are punished with killer snakes, they pray for redemption, God gives them an interesting solution; the snake on the pole. If they would look... just look at the serpent on the stick they would be spared the deadly venom of the snakes and be saved. All they had to do to be saved was determine to put their faith in God, to believe his words, and then do something as ridiculous as look at a bronze serpent on a pole.

And Jesus says, just like in that story... the Messiah; me, will have to be lifted up on a pole... and just like in that story everyone who looks on me will be saved. This is God's plan of redemption that has been in the works since before the foundation of the world. And as if Jesus hasn't been explicit enough he makes this abundantly clear starting in verses

16-18. So let's recap... in the garden we sinned, we were stuck in the wilderness of our sinfulness and a desolate and cursed state. The snakes of God's wrath were coming to destroy us and there was nothing we could do to stop them. But God so loved the world and so God made a way by taking his son and laying the sin of the world on him and raising him up on the cross so that if anyone would "look" (believe) upon him with their lives they would be saved. I always wondered why a snake on the pole. Why would that be the imagery of salvation in Numbers 21? I mean snakes were killing them and now a snake is their object of salvation... I didn't make sense. That was until I thought of the sin that was laid on the shoulders of Christ. The reason it was a snake on the pole was because when Christ was lifted up on the cross he was covered in the sin and wrath of God that was due us. We were to look upon the one who took our sin and the wrath of God in our place and see his sacrifice as sufficient for the payment of our sins. Those who chose not to look will be bitten and die (condemned) but those who believe and look will live.

Do you understand? Believing in Jesus means that you trust in his salvation so much so that you are completely dependent up on him and are willing to look to him for your salvation. It takes a desperate and desolate person to admit their damned state and look to the cross of Christ as their salvation. Believing means looking to Christ as if your life depended on it... because it does! So look and live! **A spiritual belief in Christ is a simple as seeing him as your sole means of salvation through his sacrifice on the cross and then throwing your life upon his mercy in desperate faith.**

And this changes who you are. When you look to Christ for your salvation you stop looking at anything else. You stop trusting in any other means as your lifeline. You realize that religion will not save you, nor good works, nor baptism, nor your name and date in the bible, or the assurance of your family. Nothing saves except a complete faith in the salvation of Christ and your life will reflect that. **If You Believe in Jesus and You Know It Then Your Life Will Surely Show It.**

Lastly... **If You Believe In Jesus You Will Repent & Obey.** In **John 3:19-21** Jesus ends his conversation with Nicodemus speaking about light and darkness. Those who have believed willingly step into the light because they desire to be transformed, those who have not believed truly continue to operate in darkness as to hide their sins. Jesus is Nicodemus to a new reality... that if you have truly believed in Jesus as the Messiah and placed your faith in his sacrifice as the redemption of your sins then your life must be transformed to reflect this. Look specifically at verses **20-21**. Believing in Jesus means repenting of your past sin and walking in the light.

This point is enforced in the last part of the chapter. After the account of Nicodemus the chapter shifts to John the Baptist in **John 3:22-36** where a

couple of his disciples are concerned that Jesus is baptizing. They were worried that Jesus' movement was gaining more momentum than their own movement and that Jesus was now stealing all of John's thunder. You were here first, he's taking your gig, aren't you mad? John answers with this... in **vs 30**. He must increase but I must decrease. John is showing us that a genuine belief in Christ means that first you are repentant and then you are humble. One who truly believes in Jesus willing humbles themselves for the sake of Christ's glory. It's no longer about you... it's all about him. **Believing in Christ means all eyes on him!** Believing in Christ means never stealing Christ's thunder again! Everything must point to him.

In **vs33-34** John reminds us that if you receive the testimony of Jesus then you affirm your belief in God... cause Jesus is God. Then in **vs36** we see these words "whoever does not obey will face the wrath of God." Earlier in the chapter we saw that whoever does not believe... but now John the Baptist says, "whoever does not obey." The point is made abundantly clear here and there is no more denying it... **you can't have belief without obedience.** You can't be a follower without following. You can't be a disciple without preaching, serving, and living everyday in service to your Lord. It's simple... those who truly believe will change their whole lives around that belief. They look born again – they look like they have new life – they are completely transformed. They follow a "way" that is outlined in the word. The not only claim Jesus as Lord but they live as though he is their Lord. **If You Believe in Jesus and You Know It Then Your Life Will Surely Show It**

Application (Resolution, You)

The bottom line is that you can't just say you believe. There is a funny scene from my favorite TV show; the office where the manager and main character Michael Scott runs out of money. One of the office workers tells him to declare bankruptcy and all of his problems will be solved. So he goes out into the office and yells at the top of his lungs "I Declare Bankruptcy." The point is... saying you declare bankruptcy doesn't mean anything.... it's just words. And saying you believe in Jesus without actually believing doesn't mean anything! You see... Belief without spiritual faith is nothing. Belief without dependence upon his salvation is nothing. Belief without obedience is nothing. It's a head knowledge that has no effectual transforming power.

How many of us in here would be honest with ourselves today knowing that this is life or death! Do you truly believe? Does your life exhibit a strong spiritual faith in the unseen or are you a "i have to see it to believe it" kind of person? Does your life exhibit a strong dependency upon the blood of Christ for the remission of your sins or do you still try to

work for your salvation by religion and good works? Does your life look like the life of a believer as outlined in the word... are you obedient to Jesus or just a Christian in name only? Do you really believe in Jesus? If not, today is the day of salvation!

Conclusion

Let me tell you a story about a guy named Jerry. Jerry was a pastor of a medium sized traditional church for 15 years. He preached well meaning sermons that were more inspirational than challenging. The congregation loved that... and they loved him. The church always had a revival in the fall and this year they invited a new evangelist that had spoke at a few other churches in the area. The evangelist came in and spoke a message very much like this one today. A message on how some can claim to believe in Jesus but not really believe. The crowd was stunned. How dare the preacher tell them that they aren't saved. They were faithful church attenders, deacons, Sunday school teachers, and leaders. They were all in their Sunday best and never cursed or drank. How dare he... But then as the pianist played the reflection hymn one person rose up and went to the altar and put his faith in Christ. It was Jerry the Pastor. He had believed of Jesus but he had never placed his belief in Jesus.

If Jerry, a preacher, could be saved... then perhaps someone in here needs to place their belief in Christ this morning... no matter if you've been in church your whole life, been a deacon, a Sunday school teacher, or even a pastor. Today is the day of salvation!