
JOHN: THAT YOU MAY BELIEVE

BELIEVING JESUS

A message presented by Pastor Marc Minter
to First Baptist Church of Diana, TX on March 19, 2017

INTRODUCTION

“I believe,” said the little boy. Surrounded by children and North Pole elves, he gripped a sleigh bell in his tightly clenched hand. This was a turning point in the story of a young man who was losing his grip on belief in Santa Claus. While this is a fun fairy tale, far too many Christians use this kind of “belief” as a working definition of the term. What is “belief?” What does it mean to “believe Jesus?” In this message, we will try to unpack the significant point John makes near the beginning of his Gospel. John, after all, is extremely eager to have his reader believe Jesus.

JOHN 2:23-25

23 Now when he was in Jerusalem at the Passover Feast, many believed in his name when they saw the signs that he was doing. 24 But Jesus on his part did not entrust himself to them, because he knew all people 25 and needed no one to bear witness about man, for he himself knew what was in man.

THE POINT I’M AIMING AT TODAY:

Not everyone who ‘believes’ Jesus *believes* Jesus... Are you believing Jesus?

MESSAGE OUTLINE:

- (1) JOHN WANTS HIS READER TO BELIEVE JESUS**
- (2) JOHN WANTS HIS READER TO UNDERSTAND: *NOT ALL BELIEF IS THE SAME***
- (3) JOHN CONSISTENTLY WARNS ABOUT “FALSE BELIEF”**
- (4) ARE YOU (TRULY) BELIEVING JESUS?**

(1) JOHN WANTS HIS READER TO BELIEVE JESUS

- John's use of the word "Believe"
 - Matthew uses the word (root: *pisteuō*) 9 times, Mark uses it 14 times, and Luke does 9 times.
 - John uses the word **85 times!** (Nearly 3 times the *Synoptics* combined)¹
 - John wants us to "believe" through the testimony of others (1:7).
 - John says those who "believe" are called the "children of God" (1:12).
 - John tells us that Jesus' disciples "believed" in Him because they saw His glory (2:11).
 - John cautions and encourages us when he says that it is those who "believe" who will "not perish but have eternal life" (3:15-16).
 - John sobers us by warning, "whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him" (3:36).
 - John records Jesus' rebuke of religious leaders, reminding us too that "belief" begins with an ear for God's word and an eye for God's glory (5:44-47).
 - And, of course, John tells us the whole reason for his Gospel near the end of it:
 - "Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but ***these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name***" (John 20:30-31).

Major Point: John wants his reader – us – to **BELIEVE JESUS!**

¹ A list of each time John used the word "believe" in his Gospel: 1:7; 1:12; 1:50; 2:11; 2:22-24; 3:12; 3:15-16; 3:18; 3:36; 4:21; 4:39; 4:41-42; 4:48; 4:50; 4:53; 5:24; 5:38; 5:44; 5:46-47; 6:29-30; 6:35-36; 6:40; 6:47; 6:64; 6:69; 7:5; 7:31; 7:38-39; 7:48; 8:24; 8:30-31; 8:45-46; 9:18; 9:35-36; 9:38; 10:25-26; 10:37-38; 10:42; 11:15; 11:25-27; 11:40; 11:42; 11:45; 11:48; 12:11; 12:36-39; 12:42; 12:44; 12:46; 13:19; 14:1; 14:10-12; 14:29; 16:9; 16:27; 16:30-31; 17:8; 17:20-21; 19:35; 20:8; 20:25; 20:29; 20:31

(2) JOHN WANTS HIS READER TO UNDERSTAND: *NOT ALL BELIEF IS THE SAME*

- First, John's progression
 - John opens with the goal
 - The pre-existing Word, who is one with the Father and distinct from Him, came into the world (1:1-9); but, the world – even His own people – did not receive Him (1:10-11).
 - However, those who did receive Him, **who believed in His name**, He made them children of God (1:12).
 - Therefore, John's goal is to see his reader **Believe Jesus!**
 - Next, John provides personal testimony from John & John
 - John (the Gospel writer): "**We have seen His glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth**" (1:14).
 - John (the Baptist): "**Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world**" (1:29).
 - Then, John tells us how Jesus' first disciples "believed"
 - After gaining a handful of disciples, Jesus began His earthly ministry by miraculously providing an abundance of quality wine at a wedding feast (2:1-11).
 - The disciples **saw His glory** in this miracle, and John tells us they "**believed in Him**" (2:11).
 - Now, John says another group "believed," but didn't really "believe"
 - Using the same vocabulary, John says "**many believed... when they saw the signs... [Jesus] was doing**" (2:23).
 - But, Jesus did not "**entrust**" (Greek root: *pisteuō*) Himself to them... **Jesus did not believe in them.**
 - John says the reason Jesus did not "**entrust Himself to them**" or "**believe in them**" is that Jesus "**knew what was in man**" (v25).
 - Since John is highly hopeful that his reader will believe Jesus, we want to hear his warning:
 - **Not everyone who 'believes' Jesus believes Jesus**

- Second, some helpful categories: 1) Stages of Belief & 2) Species of Belief

1. **Stages of Belief** – *Not all 'belief' is the same*

- *Notitia* (knowledge) – the content of what is to be believed
- *Assensus* (agreement) – conviction that the content is true
- *Fiducia* (trust) – the personal trust and reliance

2. **Species of Belief** – *Not all 'belief' is the same*

- Genuine or True 'belief'
 - Jesus says there are “*true worshipers*” (Jn. 4:23)
 - Titus and Timothy are said to be “*true children in the faith*” (Titus 1:4; 1 Tim. 1:2).
 - Peter tells us that “*genuine faith*” endured difficulties and will result in “*praise and glory and honor*” when Christ comes in His final return (1 Pet. 1:7)
 - The author of Hebrews tells us that we may have full assurance of faith if we have a “*true heart*” (Heb. 10:22).
- Spurious or False 'belief'
 - “*false prophets*” seek to associate themselves with the true (Acts 13:6)
 - “*false apostles*” disguised themselves as “servants of righteousness” (2 Cor. 11:13-15)
 - “*false teachers*” teach destructive doctrines (2 Pet. 2:1)
 - and there is a constant warning concerning “*false brothers*” (2 Cor. 11:26; Gal. 2:4; 1 Jn. 3)

Major Point: John wants his reader – us – to TRULY BELIEVE JESUS!

(3) JOHN CONSISTENTLY WARNS ABOUT “FALSE BELIEF”

- John’s warning comes from the *foundational biblical idea of conversion*
 - “*Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come*” (2 Corinthians 5:17).
 - “*Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do [practice] such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires*” (Galatians 5:19–24).
 - The concept is simple:
 - *Those who truly “believe” will be new* (not like they were) *and bear good fruit* (not ‘works of the flesh’).
 - So, what in the world do you do with those who profess belief, but are not ‘new’ and have no ‘fruit?’
- John’s piercing notice: 1 John 3
 - “*3:1a See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are...*”
 - Those who truly believe (‘us’) are NOW: ‘children of God’ born from a loving heavenly Father!
 - “*1b The reason why the world does not know us is that it did not know him [God in Christ]. 2 Beloved, we are God’s children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he [God in Christ] appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is.*”
 - John’s encouragement to the children of God (true believers) is that even though the world (unbelievers) are opposed to them, God in Christ is completing the work of their renewal.
 - They shall see HIM! And they shall be like HIM!

- ***“3 And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure.”***
 - Now John marks out the distinctiveness of the “us” and “we”
 - Everyone who looks forward to seeing Him and being like Him (thus hopes in him) “purifies himself” because God in Christ is pure.
- ***“4 Everyone who makes a practice of sinning also practices lawlessness; sin is lawlessness.”***
 - Unlike “us” and “we” (true believers), the ones who practice sin and lawlessness do not purify themselves.
- ***“5 You know that he [God in Christ] appeared in order to take away sins, and in him [God in Christ] there is no sin. 6 No one who abides in him [God in Christ] keeps on sinning; no one who keeps on sinning has either seen him or known him [God in Christ].”***
 - Because God in Christ removes sin (including but not limited to the punishment for it), no one who truly believes in Him (abides in Him) “keeps on sinning” or “practices sinning” (v4).
- ***“7 Little children, let no one deceive you. Whoever practices righteousness is righteous, as he [God in Christ] is righteous.”***
 - Children (true believers) do not be deceived by those who say they are believers but do not practice righteousness.
 - True believers are children of God, righteous before Him, and these practice righteousness.
- ***“8 Whoever makes a practice of sinning is of the devil, for the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil.”***
 - Those who practice sinning and lawlessness have a father, but it is the devil and not God.
 - God in Christ came to destroy the works of the devil, and it wouldn’t make sense if God were the Father of those who are doing the very things He came to destroy.
- ***“9 No one born of God makes a practice of sinning, for God’s seed abides in him; and he cannot keep on sinning, because he has been born of God.”***
 - “New birth” changes one’s desires, and love for sin is diminished

- ***“10 By this it is evident **who are the children of God**, and **who are the children of the devil: whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is the one who does not love his brother.***”**
- In perfectly clear terms, John tells us at least two things here:
 - One – there is ‘evidence’ to make known who is who
 - Children of God (true believers)
 - Children of the devil (unbelievers)
 - Two – the evidence is both obedience and love
 - Obedience or “practicing righteousness” is the inevitable result of love for God
 - Jesus said, *“If you love me, you will keep my commandments”* (Jn. 14:15).
 - Love for the brethren is the most frequently cited command and evidence for genuine believers in the New Testament
 - 6 times in 1 John (3:10, 14, 16, 17; 4:20, 21)
 - Jesus said, *“By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another”* (Jn 13:35).

-----Stop here and move on to Application (pg 10)-----

- ***“11 For this is the message that **you** have heard from the beginning, that **we** should love one another. 12 **We** should not be like Cain, who was of **the evil one** and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his own deeds were evil and his brother’s righteous. 13 Do not be surprised, **brothers**, that **the world** hates **you**.”***
- John compares ‘the world’ (unbelievers) with Cain, who hated his brother precisely because Abel was ‘righteous.’
- John says that the unbelievers will have the same animosity toward all true Christians, since they too will act righteously and attract hostility for doing so.

- *“14 **We** know that **we** have passed out of death into life, because **we** love the brothers. **Whoever** does not love abides in death. 15 **Everyone** who hates **his** brother is a murderer, and **you** know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in **him**.”*
 - Once again, love for the brethren is a bold dividing line between true believers and unbelievers. The divide could not be clearer.
- *“16 By this **we** know love, that **he [God in Christ]** laid down **his** life for **us**, and **we** ought to lay down **our** lives for the **brothers**.”*
 - Christ serves as the example, and those who truly know and love Christ act in accordance with Him.
- *“17 But if **anyone** has the world’s goods and sees **his** brother in need, yet closes **his** heart against him, how does God’s love abide in **him**?”*
 - A very practical and piercing observation... love for God will inevitably manifest itself in love for the brethren.
- *“18 **Little children**, let **us** not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth.”*
 - The idea is not to present to ways of ‘loving,’ but to show that ‘word’ and ‘talk’ only is not love. True love is demonstrated in deed - action.
- *“19 By this **we** shall know that **we** are of the truth and reassure **our** heart before **him [God]**; 20 for whenever **our** heart condemns **us**, **God** is greater than **our** heart, and **he** knows everything.”*
 - This is a clear indication that we not only may but should reassure our doubting heart by considering our deeds of true love.
 - We should not presume to pit this teaching against the doctrine of *salvation by faith alone*, nor should we imagine that the two are mutually exclusive.

- *“21 Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence before God; 22 and whatever we ask we receive from him, because we keep his commandments and do what pleases him. 23 And this is his commandment, that we believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ and love one another, just as he has commanded us. 24 Whoever keeps his commandments abides in God, and God in him. And by this we know that he abides in us, by the Spirit whom he has given us.”*
 - John combines confident prayer, obedient living, and soul assurance here.
 - Confident prayer: True believers can and should be confident to approach God in prayer, since they may be confident that God is their heavenly Father – not their condemning Judge.
 - Obedient living: Believing Jesus Christ, living according to His commands, and loving the brethren are all features of true belief. One cannot do these apart from or before genuine conversion (regeneration), and one will inevitably do these as a consequence of genuine conversion.
 - Soul assurance: Genuine belief is preserved and it perseveres. God gives His Spirit to all His children, and these are permanently adopted into His family. If one recognizes the evidences of genuine belief, he/she may rest in the assurance that such genuine belief does not come and go.

Major Point: Not everyone who ‘believes’ Jesus *believes* Jesus

APPLICATION

(4) ARE YOU (TRULY) BELIEVING JESUS?

- In which Stage of Belief are you?
 - Do you know the content of what you should believe – the Gospel?
 - Do you agree that the Gospel is true?
 - Do you trust yourself to Christ's person and work? Do you rely completely upon Him?
- Which Species of Belief do you have?
 - Do you believe a false content?
 - Do you only profess to believe?

Major Point: Not everyone who 'believes' Jesus *believes* Jesus...

Are you believing Jesus?

SUGGESTED RESOURCES:

Faith Defined by R.C. Sproul

<http://www.ligonier.org/learn/devotionals/faith-defined/>

Saving Faith by John MacArthur

<https://www.gty.org/library/sermons-library/80-169/Saving-Faith>

He Knew What Was In Man by John Piper

<http://www.desiringgod.org/messages/he-knew-what-was-in-man>