

Believing in Jesus as Messiah

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Date: 25 March 2018

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[0 : 00] Gracious Heavenly Father, we do thank you for your word, the Bible. We thank you that you continue to speak to us through it and that you tell us how you want us to live in response to what you've done for us in Christ.

So, Father, please help us to understand your word today and to live our lives by it, we pray. In Jesus' name, Amen. Well, there's a pretty famous story about a man called Jean Francis, otherwise known as Charles Blondin.

Preachers have used this guy before, it's my turn today. It was June 30th, 1859, and a large crowd had gathered at Niagara Falls to see this man, Blondin, walk across a 300-metre-long tightrope above the falls.

And he did. So, this is him on the next slide with nice tights. But that's an actual photo of Charles Blondin walking across. And in the following months, he not only walked the tightrope, he also balanced a chair and a table on the tightrope and then sat down on the chair.

And so, that's him there having a drink in the middle of Niagara Falls. He crossed the falls subsequently in the following weeks in a potato sack, then a wheelbarrow. He blindfolded himself and he even apparently went across on stilts.

[1 : 19] I don't know how you do that, but apparently he did. And one time, he took a small portable cooker onto the tightrope and actually cooked a meal while balancing above the falls.

A month later, the crowds again gathered. A month later, for Blondin had promised to carry someone across the falls with him. And so, everyone was buzzing with excitement.

And he was standing at the edge of the falls and he yelled out to the crowd, do you want to see me carry someone across the falls? And the crowd responded, yes, we do. Then he said, do you believe I can do it?

And the crowd responded, yes, we do. And then he said, who will volunteer? And the crowd...

Despite all the evidence that Blondin could do it, all the signs that he had already given them, despite them saying they believed, they didn't believe enough to put their lives in his hands.

In the end, Blondin forced his assistant, Harry Colcord, to do it. So, on the next slide, that was a mock example for the newspaper. But on the next slide is the actual event. He wasn't wearing his top hat in that one.

[2 : 33] Otherwise, I think it would blow it off. And apparently, the Prince of Wales was visiting for this event. And after seeing Blondin go across the falls, he actually asked Blondin, never do that again, please.

But the point of the story is that there's believing and there's really believing. So much so that you put your life in his hands.

And this is what John wants us to do when it comes to Jesus. John's aim for us in our passage today is that, the same of his whole book, really, that we might really believe Jesus is the Messiah, God's anointed King, and so put our lives in his hands.

But given this is our last look at John for this year, let me summarise where we've come from. Now, do you remember John's purpose statement? It's been on the slide every week, but I'll go to the next slide and it's there more fully. John writes, Jesus performed many other signs, miraculous signs, in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book.

But these are written, this is why I've written, says John, that you may believe, what? Well, believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing, you may have life in his name.

[3 : 49] Now, notice there are four parts to this purpose statement, aren't there? There are the signs, the believing, Jesus as Messiah, and life.

And each week, John has shown us those four parts of his purpose statement. But sometimes he emphasises one part more than others.

This is especially true for chapters two to four, which John has kind of grouped together. You see, when he did the first sign of turning water into wine, in chapter two, verse 11, John says, this was the first sign Jesus did in Cana of Galilee.

And in our passage today, in chapter four, we're back in Cana. And John says, this is now the second sign Jesus has done in Cana. He's done lots of other ones in Jerusalem and so on, but this is one and two.

And they're the only two signs that John numbers in his whole book. And by numbering them one and two, he kind of joins and bookends those chapters, groups them together.

[4 : 54] And as we look at these chapters together on the back of your outline, you can actually see each part of John's purpose statement is present. I'm not going to go through that now. It's something that you can look through in more detail later.

But the gray or the shaded boxes are the part that he particularly focuses on each passage. And so chapter two, when he turned the water into wine, we were told that it revealed his glory as God, who brings new wine of God's kingdom.

And in our passage today, I actually think what he's focusing on is really believing, as opposed to just saying we believe.

And if I'm right, you can see with the gray shaded boxes, there's this progression from chapter two to four, where we move from who Jesus is, to the life he gives, to the nature of belief, where to have in his name.

And so that's what we're looking at today. John highlights the nature of belief, where to have, firstly, by showing us the superficial belief of the Galileans, and then the genuine belief of the royal official.

[6 : 01] So at point one in your outline, verse 43 in your Bibles, have a look there in your Bibles. After the two days that he spent with the Samaritans, he left for Galilee.

Now, Jesus himself had pointed out that a prophet has no honor in his home country. When he arrived in Galilee, the Galileans welcomed him. They had seen all that he had done in Jerusalem and at the Passover festival, for they also had been there.

And so Jesus goes north to his home country of Galilee. And in verse 44, we're told that he won't receive a warm welcome, because he's not going to be honored in his hometown.

But that doesn't really make sense, because what happens in the very next verse of verse 45?

Verse 44, he's not going to be honored, not going to be welcome. But then verse 45, he did receive a warm welcome.

It's a bit odd, isn't it? Until we realize that John is helping us to interpret their welcome. It's like John is giving us a heads up, that their welcome is actually superficial.

[7 : 11] And will not last. Why? Well, because they don't really believe in Jesus as Messiah. Their belief is superficial.

I remember last year going to a training day with a whole lot of other newly appointed vicars. And at this stage, I didn't know anyone particularly well.

And I remember at the beginning of day, this guy came up to me and gave me a really enthusiastic welcome. It was really nice. And so I thought I'd catch up with him at lunchtime, build a bit of collegiality and all that.

But when I said, oh, can I join you for lunch? She replied, oh, I'm catching up with my friends and we're not really looking for others to join us. Sorry. I said, okay, and sat by myself.

No, I didn't. I just went and talked to someone else. But it was pretty clear that his earlier welcome was superficial. I mean, now I understand there was a desire to catch up with friends and me being there would have changed the dynamics and so on.

[8 : 13] But if he really wanted to welcome me, then he'd introduce me to the other guys as well. You see, his superficial welcome showed me he wasn't really interested in getting to know me.

And in a similar way, John tells us that the Galileans welcome is superficial. He gives us the heads up in verse 44. And if their welcome is superficial, then it means they don't really believe in Jesus. In fact, John reminds us of this by saying in verse 45 that these Galileans were also in Jerusalem during the Passover festival. And they saw the miraculous signs that Jesus did. But do you remember how their belief was described back in chapter 2?

Just turn with me back to chapter 2, verse 23. It's just one page back, just before chapter 3, last paragraph of chapter 2. Listen to how their belief is described or the warnings given here.

It says, Now while he was in Jerusalem at the Passover festival, many people saw the signs he was performing and believed in his name. Well, it sounds good. But, verse 24, Jesus would not entrust himself to them, for he knew all people.

[9 : 27] He did not need any testimony about mankind, for he knew what was in each person. You see, they say they believed in his name, verse 23, but then, verse 24, Jesus does not trust them.

He does not trust them enough to lower his guard and treat them as true disciples. Why? Well, because it says he knows what's in them.

He knows their hearts. And he knows their faith is fickle. Their belief is superficial. And some of the people here in chapter 2 are the very Galileans in chapter 4.

That's what John tells us in chapter 4, verse 45, that they were there in Jerusalem at the Passover festival and they had seen the signs he performed. You see, John is reminding us that these Galileans are the very same ones who have fickle faith.

And so their welcome will not last. As John has said in chapter 1, Jesus came to those who were his own, but his own people did not receive him. But how is their belief superficial?

[10 : 38] How is their faith faulty? Well, in two ways. At first, they don't seem to believe in Jesus as the Messiah. Instead, they seem to believe in him as a healer or a prophet.

And I say this because of the contrast that John seems to draw between them and the Samaritans that he's just mentioned. I look back in verse 29 of chapter 4 and just quickly let me remind you.

Verse 29, the woman leaves Jesus, goes back to her people and says to them in verse 29, come, see a man who told me everything I ever did.

Could this be the Messiah? And they came out of the town and made their way towards Jesus. And then skip down to the bottom of the page, verse 39, where the Samaritans are picked up again.

Many of the Samaritans from that town believed in him because of the woman's testimony. He told me everything I ever did. So when the Samaritans came to Jesus, they urged him to stay with them and he stayed the two days.

[11 : 40] And because of his words, many more became believers. And they said to the woman, we no longer believe just because of what you said. Now we have heard for ourselves and we know that this man really is the saviour of the world.

The Messiah come to save God's people. And then we come to the Galileans who welcomed John and yet John has told us that they're not going to honour him.

Their welcome of him will not last. Their welcome of him, in fact, will change to crucify him. In other words, the contrast with the Samaritans also suggests that these Galileans don't believe in Jesus as Messiah, saviour king.

their belief is superficial. The second way, though, their belief is superficial is that they need to keep seeing signs. Have a look at what Jesus says about them in verse 48.

In verse 48, he says, unless you people see signs and wonders, Jesus told him, you will never believe. Jesus says they need to see signs to believe in him.

[12 : 53] but the thing is, he has just shown them plenty of signs in Jerusalem. They were there. They saw them. They have seen enough evidence to know he is the Messiah.

So by saying they still need to see signs and wonders to believe, Jesus is really saying is that they don't have any genuine belief in him. They still keep needing more evidence.

When I was at my old church, I remember visiting someone in hospital who was the grandmother of a church member. I'd not met the grandmother before, but she knew a church minister was coming. Yet when I turned up, she didn't believe that I was the minister. She said, you look too young to be a priest. It was obviously a while ago. My kids certainly think I look old enough now, but I reassured her that I was, but she still didn't believe me.

I said, oh look, I've got my Bible. I can read it. No, she still didn't believe me. Then I gave her my business card that had Reverend Andrew Price on it and no, she still didn't believe me. You see, if you don't genuinely believe in someone's identity, then you keep requiring more signs, don't you?

[14 : 10] Or to put it the other way around, if you keep requiring more signs to believe, then it shows you don't genuinely believe in the first place. doesn't it? That was the Galileans.

We see it with people today. People say, oh, if God does this for me or shows me a sign, then I will believe. You know, if he heals my sick relative or something like that.

And lo and behold, it happens and they might go to church once or twice, but then they stop and say, oh look, I need another sign just to be sure. and so on.

But it just shows that their belief in God was not genuine in the first place, doesn't it? Their request for more and more signs. Well, the fact that the Galileans still need to see signs when they'd seen plenty already shows that their belief is superficial.

They don't really believe Jesus is the Messiah. Their faith is faulty. But now John compares them with another person, the royal official, whose belief seems to start out like the Galileans but develops into a genuine belief.

[15 : 20] Point to verse 46. Once more, he visited Cana in Galilee where he had turned the water into wine. And there was a certain royal official whose son lay sick at Capernaum.

When this man heard that Jesus had arrived in Galilee from Judea, he went to him and begged him to come and heal his son who was close to death. Here we meet a royal official who probably worked for King Herod and he lives in Capernaum about a seven hour walk to Canaan.

And sadly, his son is close to dying. So when he hears Jesus, he's a day's walk away, he heads off to Canaan to beg Jesus to come back with him and heal his son.

And that tells us that he has some sort of belief in Jesus, doesn't it? That he at least believes that Jesus can heal his son. But look at how Jesus responds in verse 48. He says, unless you people see signs and wonders, Jesus told him, the man, you will never believe.

While Jesus is speaking about the people and their superficial belief, notice he's speaking to the man, to the royal official. it's as though Jesus lumps this man in with the rest of the Galileans.

[16 : 39] Now, that might seem harsh to us. After all, the man's son is facing death. But you see, Jesus knows that this man and his son are also facing eternal death.

And so the nature of the man's faith in Jesus really matters. And by rebuking the man, Jesus forces him and forces him to decide, will he walk away or will he really trust in Jesus for help?

In other words, Jesus' rebuke forces him to develop a more genuine belief in him. And that's what starts to happen. Do you see verse 49? He doesn't walk away. The royal official said, Sir, come down before my child dies.

Go, Jesus replied, your son will live. Here the man continues to trust in Jesus for help. But at this stage, it's not a fully fledged faith.

He doesn't quite believe that Jesus is the Messiah, I think, who has power to heal with a word from a distance because he still wants Jesus to come with him back to Capernaum.

[17 : 46] He's not like the centurion from his own town, if you remember that story. Have a look on the next slide. We'll skip the map. And then on the next slide, this is from Matthew chapter 8.

When Jesus had entered Capernaum, a centurion came to him asking for help. So he's from the same town as the royal official. Lord, he said, my servant lies at home paralyzed, suffering terribly. Jesus said to him, shall I come and heal him? And then the centurion replied, Lord, I do not deserve to have you come under my roof, but just say the word and my servant will be healed.

for I myself am a man under authority with soldiers under my authority. I tell this one go and he goes and this one come and he comes. I say to my servant, do this and he does it.

And when Jesus heard this, he was amazed and said to those following him, truly I tell you, I have not found anyone in Israel with such great faith.

[18 : 47] Do you see the centurion's belief was genuine because he believed that Jesus is not just a healer, but he's the king who has power, who has authority to heal from a distance with a word.

He doesn't need to see any signs and Jesus commends the centurion's faith as genuine. But the royal official, he's not quite there yet. And so Jesus actually refuses to go with him.

Instead, Jesus says, you go and your son will live. again, Jesus is forcing him to develop a genuine belief, which trusts in Jesus' word without having to see any signs.

So will he trust or will he beg again for Jesus to come with him? Well, verse 50 to 53, the man took Jesus at his word and departed.

While he was still on the way, his servants met him with the news that his boy was living. When he inquired as to the time when his son got better, they said to him, yesterday at one in the afternoon, the fever left him.

[19 : 52] Then the father realized that this was the exact time at which Jesus had said to him, your son will live. So he and his whole household believed.

In verse 53, the man finally gets it, doesn't he? He now really believes in Jesus. And I take it the man's belief is now different to what he believed before.

Before it was Jesus is a healer, he's going to heal my son, come with me, that sort of thing. But now something has changed. Now he realizes just how powerful Jesus is.

For now he knows Jesus healed his son with a word, from a distance, and in an instant, at the very moment Jesus spoke.

That means Jesus is not just an extraordinary healer, but he is indeed God's Messiah, the anointed king with power to bring new life for his people.

[20 : 54] In fact, we heard in our first reading from Isaiah today that God promised a time when he would bring new wine and new life to his people, wipe away tears from their faces. And here is Jesus.

He turns water to wine, the first sign, and now here, the second sign, saving the son from death, wiping away the father's tears. Jesus is the one who brings new wine and new life to his people, spiritually now, physically later.

And notice the man believes without having to see any other sign. Do you notice that? In fact, it seems as though he hasn't even seen this sign yet.

He hasn't seen his son alive yet. Either way, he believes in Jesus as Messiah without needing to see any more evidence. This is the kind of genuine belief the Galileans did not have.

This is the kind of genuine belief the Samaritans did have. And this is the kind of genuine belief John wants us to have. So, do we?

[22 : 04] Last point. Do we have a genuine belief in Jesus as Messiah, Saviour King? After all, we've been given enough evidence to believe.

Oh, sure, we have not seen the signs in the flesh, but the Galileans did and they did not believe. And so seeing is not always believing. But we have enough evidence to believe.

And we have the signs recorded here and we have multiple eyewitness accounts. We have thousands of their manuscripts which speak of the greatest sign, the resurrection. We have the type of historical evidence that historians drool over.

We actually have enough reason to believe and so do we. I mean, you're all here today in church listening to a Bible talk, which is not what most people do on Sunday mornings. So I take it you have some sort of belief in Jesus.

But do you really believe in him as Messiah? The anointed king come to bring us new life. People believe all sorts of things about Jesus.

[23 : 12] Some believe he's a good man. Others believe he's a good teacher who gave good morals. And still others believe in Jesus on Sundays and then kind of forget about him every other day. Some even believe in him as saviour.

After all dying to pay for our sins so we can have eternal life. That's good news. But they don't believe so much in him as lord or king.

Or at least not their lord or their king. But all that is superficial belief. A genuine belief on the other hand means believing he really is the saviour king, the Messiah, who died and rose again.

It means not just saying we believe like the crowd did the Charles Blondin that day, but believing so much so we put our lives in his hands. Not just to save us from sin, but to direct us in life.

As Alison Smith's verse from Proverbs 3 said, to lean not on our understanding, but to let him in all our paths direct us. And so let me give you a couple of examples about what this might look like, about priorities, suffering and temperament and speech.

[24 : 29] So with priorities, my son went to see his friend play in basketball finals yesterday and apparently there were scouts at the game because his friend is very good. In fact, he keeps being asked to join several rep teams and map out his basketball career, but he has said no because the practices and the games are often on Sundays, which means missing church.

He's 13. Big call, isn't it, for a 13-year-old? That's genuine belief in Jesus as his Messiah, his king. It's just that Christ directs his priorities. Or with suffering, I visited a lady last Friday, she's been suffering for more than two years with a couple of different diseases actually, and she's prayed many times for healing, but instead, it's not come, and in fact, just last week, they've started palliative care.

She's now in her final days. Now, with such suffering and her prayers not being answered the way she wanted, it would be very easy for her to stop believing, or at the very least, to ask for a sign that

God still loves her, a sign that it's still worth trusting and following Christ, and yet she never has. She has said that she knows God's love for her because she knows Christ died for her, and that sign is enough. Indeed, she is looking forward to being in her father's house.

[26 : 02] See, that's genuine belief, isn't it? That trust in Jesus as her saviour king, despite suffering, and without needing any more signs to see. Well, the last one, temperament and speech.

My father, I don't know if I should tell you this story, actually, but growing up, I remember he lost his temper quite a bit with us kids and got angry. My siblings definitely deserved it.

But I remember, I think I was about 13 or 14, and I remember over the course of that year, he changed noticeably. And I asked my mum about it when I was older, when I was an adult, and she said, well, he knew Jesus wanted him to be slow to speak and slow to become angry, and so over the course of the year, every day he read the Bible and prayed that he would be just that.

And I thought, here is a man who genuinely believes Jesus is his king, such that Jesus even directs his temperament and his speech. Us kids didn't make it easy for him, but he specifically prayed and worked on it with God's help for a year.

This is what it means to genuinely believe, to put our lives in his hands. Well, I need to finish. When Blondin carried his assistant, Harry Colcord, across the falls, Blondin said to him, I think on the next slide, you are no longer Colcord, you are Blondin.

[27 : 30] Until I clear this place, be part of me, mind, body, and soul. If I sway, sway with me. Do not attempt to do any balancing yourself. If you do, we will both go to our death.

See, this is what it meant for Harry to put his life in Blondin's hand, to let Blondin lead him, mind, body, and soul. And if we genuinely believe in Jesus as our Saviour King, Messiah, then that's what we are to do too.

We are to put our lives in his hands and let him direct us, mind, body, and soul. Let's pray. Our gracious Heavenly Father, we do thank you for John's Gospel that points us to Jesus, who is the Messiah, the King, come into the world to save us.

Father, we thank you that he did that by dying on a cross and rising again. Father, help us, we pray, to genuinely believe in him. For we ask it in his name.

Amen.