



John 2:23-25

Fair Weather Christians

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.

24 But Jesus did not commit Himself to them, because He knew all men,

25 and had no need that anyone should testify of man, for He knew what was in man.

Kids, lets say you knew someone who said they were your friend. Whenever you are having a birthday party at the roller-rink they are there, whenever you go out to restaurant they want to come along, whenever you play a video game, there they are playing with you. When you are popular with other kids, there they are right at your elbow making sure everyone knows *they* are your *best* friend. But when you're sick, they don't visit you. When you don't have anything cool to play with, they have other things to do. When you ask them over to dinner, and they hear you are having something boring they don't want to come. And when you are unpopular with other kids, if they are making fun of you, your "friend" is either suddenly nowhere to be seen, or joins the *other* kids in making fun so nobody will think you are their friend.

Let me ask you, that person *says* they are your friend, but are they really? No, not really. They are actually what is called a *fair-weather friend*. Fair-Weather is an old fashioned way of saying "Good Weather" and it means that they are your friends only when the sun is shining and everything is pleasant, but when the weather turns bad, its stormy and you need them, they are nowhere to be found. They are your friends when its easy and when it benefits them to be there. But that isn't a real friend. A real friend doesn't like you because of what they think you can do for them, they love *you*. A real friend isn't just there for you in the good times, when you are popular, they are there to support you in the bad times as well. They will stand by you no matter what.

During your lifetime most of you will find that some of your friends were real friends and others were the fair-weather kind. Sometimes it will be easy to spot the difference, I remember in University on the occasions when I had money I was more popular in the pub than when I didn't. As the Jewish proverb goes, "*When you have money in your pocket you are handsome, you are wise -- and you sing well, too*" sometimes it will be harder to spot the difference. Sometimes it will be more difficult, but you will have them and so you need to be wise about who you trust and who you don't.

As we go through the Gospel of John we will find that Jesus had a lot of fair weather friends during his earthly ministry. Some of them probably would have been easy to spot, people we would have said are only following him and pretending to his friends because he fed and healed people, and they hoped he would kick out the Romans. Others though, we probably wouldn't have spotted. I dare say none of us would ever have guessed that Judas was going to betray Jesus when the going got rough, that he was a *fair-weather friend*. None of the other Apostles guessed. But Jesus knew all along.

You see Jesus always knows who is His true friend, and who is only a fair-weather friend, who really loves and trusts Him and who is only pretending. And that is what these verses are telling us. They start out by telling us that during the Passover celebrations in Jerusalem after Jesus cleansed the temple and drove out the merchants and money changers, he did many miracles, or “signs” they are called signs incidentally because as a sign tells you the identity of something – so as you are driving up on the city we live in a sign tells you “Welcome to Fayetteville” so these miracles were like signs telling you *“This Jesus is the Messiah, this is the Son of God”* because only someone who was the Son of God could do them. In the course of His three year ministry, Jesus did thousands of those miraculous signs, and most of them aren’t recorded. John himself writes in John 20:30-31 ***“And truly Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name.”***

So Jesus did these signs and many people *believed* in His name, that is seeing them, they believed Jesus was the Messiah. So far so good, but then in the next line it says, *he did not commit Himself to them, because He knew all men.* Now the word translated commit is ἐπίστευεν, it’s actually from pisteuo which is the same root word translated *believed* in the preceding verse. They “believed” in Jesus, but he didn’t believe them or commit or entrust himself to them. Why didn’t he? Well as I said earlier Jesus always knows who his true friends are, because He is God, and knows the true state of the hearts of all men.

For instance in Matt. 9:3-4 after he He said to the paralytic, "Son, be of good cheer; your sins are forgiven you." “And at once some of the scribes said within themselves, "This Man blasphemes!" Then we read ***“But Jesus, knowing their thoughts, said, “Why do you think evil in your hearts?”*** Now I or any other person can’t read your thoughts but to God your heart is an open book. That point is then hammered home in the next verse, Jesus didn’t need anyone to come and testify and tell him *so and so really believes in you, or so and so doesn’t really believe in you.* He knows what is in man.

So while Jesus entrusted Himself to His disciples like Nathanael, he didn’t entrust Himself to these people who saw and were impressed by his miracles. Well if they both believed Jesus was the Messiah, what was the difference between Nathanael and these people in Jerusalem? If I can put it in very simple terms, it is that disciples of Nathanael were true friends of Christ, while these Jerusalemites were *fair-weather friends*. The disciples were true believers, while these believers were what are called *stony ground hearers*.

That name comes from Christ’s parable of the sower, or the soils. He described them this way in ***Luke 8:13 “But the ones on the rock are those who, when they hear, receive the word with joy; and these have no root, who believe for a while and in time of temptation fall away.”***

An example of this kind of believer was the sorcerer Simon Magus who we read about in Acts 8:13 Then Simon himself also believed; and when he was baptized he continued with Philip, and was amazed, seeing the miracles and signs which were done.

Note that it was the miracles that captivated him, and he lusted after them, he wanted not Jesus and the eternal life he offered, but power to do wonders, and so he offered Peter money for it and so Peter condemns him saying in 8:20-21 “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.”

You see friends there is a belief in Jesus that is mere belief and not real faith. Mere belief consists of two things.

- 1) **Knowledge** – You know intellectually that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God
- 2) **Assent** – You intellectually agree with the content of that knowledge, you can say *I believe in Jesus as the Messiah*

But that alone is not true saving faith, after all the demons know and confess that Jesus is the Son of God, but they certainly don't have saving faith in Him.

What then is missing? What is the vital component that makes the difference between mere belief and true saving faith? That element is what used to be called *Fiducia* or in English a loving wholehearted trust. The guileless trust of a child in their parent. You can believe in Christ as these people of Jerusalem did, but if you don't love Him, if you don't trust Him, then you are not really His friend, you are merely a *fair-weather Christian* and Christ who knows all things, and *who knows those who are His* knows it.

Jesus knew even then that in a few years many of these same people would first greet Him with Palm branches saying "*Hosanna! 'Blessed is He who comes in the name of the LORD!' The King of Israel!*" and then a week later, when Pilate says to them "Behold Your King!" they will answer, "*Away with Him, away with Him! Crucify Him!*" Persecution came, and they either turned away from Him or turned on him.

Let me give you two applications then:

1) *The first application is that what we learn here should profoundly affect the way that we do Evangelism.* We saw that the signs and the wonders that Jesus did, tell us who Jesus is, and caused many to start following him, they were not able to make anyone a true believer. They made men want some of the things they thought they could get from Him, as Simon Magus thought he could get power, but they did not cause people to truly Love and Trust Him. So when the signs go, or they don't get what they want, **they leave**. True belief requires true conversion, which is a heart changing work that only the Holy Spirit can do and that work doesn't come through seeing signs, it comes through the preaching of the Law and the Gospel, the law showing you your sin and your need of salvation, and then the gospel which causes you to close with Christ, to trust in Him alone to provide you with the salvation you know you need.

Now Jesus rejected the mere belief of the people who were attracted only by the advantages they thought they could get from him, but too often the church actually says, that's how we'll get 'em. Come to Jesus for signs and wonders, come to Jesus for health and wealth, come to Jesus to fix your problems and be a happier better you. That is not the gospel. And worse, it means that we are contradicting what the Word says: "*Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution.*" (2 Tim. 3:12) and so when that happens, the people who came for the problem fix are gone. Now I'll confess, when I started evangelizing as new Christian. That's what I did, come to Jesus and you'll get X,Y,Z. I was overjoyed when I first "lead someone to Christ" at work. And then horrified when 2 weeks later, they decided that Taoism might be a better way to feel at peace with the world.

We need evangelism that convicts of sin, and calls men to trust in Christ alone. That's not just my observation, most of the great evangelists have recognized the same thing, for instance most of you know of the great 19th century evangelist D.L. Moody, who founded the Moody Bible Institute. He wrote: *"One thing I have noticed, that some conversions don't amount to anything; that if a man professes to be converted without conviction of sin, he is one of those stony-ground hearers who doesn't bring forth much fruit. The first little wave of persecution, the first breath of opposition, and the man is back in the world again. Let us pray, dear Christian reader, that God may carry on a deep and thorough work, that men may be convicted of sin so that they cannot rest in unbelief. Let us pray God it may be a thorough work in the land. I would a great deal rather see a hundred men thoroughly converted, truly born of God, than to see a thousand professed conversions where the Spirit of God has not convicted of sin. Don't let us cry "Peace, peace, when there is no peace." Don't go to the man who is living in sin, and tell him all he has to do is to stand right up and profess, without any hatred for sin. Let us ask God first to show every man the plague of his own heart, that the Spirit, may convict them of sin. Then will the work in our hands be real, and deep, and abide the fiery trial which will try every man's labor."*

2) Which brings me to the second application, while Jesus doesn't Jesus didn't entrust himself to those *fair-weather Christians* who don't truly love and trust him, He promises to entrust Himself forever to those who do. He is the Good Shepherd who laid down His Life for His Sheep and who has promised never to leave you or forsake you. But if you will go to Him you must go to Him with your whole heart, leaving behind all your heart-idols. Believe me friends, you may be able to fool others, but you will never be able to fool Christ. Do not go to Him for signs, trust Him for your salvation. Trust him in the midst of even persecution and you will find Him to be the truest friend. And learn not to hate tribulation but to welcome it for it is in persecution and trial that our faith is tested and proved true. You may be the weakest of all Christians, but if you know John 6:67 Then Jesus said to the twelve, "Do you also want to go away?"

68 But Simon Peter answered Him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life.

And finally a word of advice to you kids, taken from Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress. You may be tempted to take *fair-weather Christians* as your friends and companions in the faith. Well at one point, Christian and Hopeful are approached on their pilgrimage by that kind of Christian a man called "By Ends" who wanted to go with them, he said his religion was the same as theirs two small points, ***"first, we never strive against wind and tide; secondly, we are always most zealous when religion goes in his silver slippers; we love much to walk with him in the street, if the sun shines, and the people applaud him."***

Christian refused to have Him as part of their company saying ***"If you will go with us, you must go against wind and tide; the which, I perceive, is against your opinion; you must also own religion in his rags, as well as when in his silver slippers; and stand by him, too, when bound in irons, as well as when he walketh the streets with applause."***

Now that may seem harsh, but you will find that the longer you travel in the company of the fair-weather Christian, the more you will become a compromiser as well and because you will begin to measure your love to Christ from theirs, you won't even notice how cold you are becoming. You'll say, I'm no different from the other Christians around me! And you'll find in time that they aren't going along with you, you are going along with them.