

April 13, 2014
Community Baptist Church
Sunday Morning Service
Series: John
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Greer, SC 29650
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To Ponder . . .

Questions to ponder as you prepare to study John 2:23-25.

1. How would you react if you actually observed someone doing miracles?
2. What does the text mean when John wrote that many believed?
3. How does this text (if it does) challenge us to be more discerning when people claim to be believers?
4. In your own words, describe the scene Jesus revealed in Matthew 7:21-23.

THE CREATOR KNOWS WHAT IS IN MAN **John 2:23-25**

People in Jesus' day knew that He was special. A lot of them believed various things about Him. All of those people who came to various conclusions about Him could rightly say that they believed. It is true that they believed something. But haywire, nilly-willy faith in ideas, concepts, or signs never gained the righteousness of Christ for any sinner.

Jesus Christ and Him alone must be the object of our faith. Everything else will fail us. Is He the rock on which your faith is firmly planted? He knows.

Some People Trusted Jesus (v.23).

We rejoice to read the good news that many believed in Jesus' name. It happened that *when Jesus was in Jerusalem at the Passover Feast, many believed in his name (v.23a)*. Obvious from John's record is the fact that Jesus remained in Jerusalem to observe the entire Passover Feast. We know that the Passover itself was always celebrated on one day, Nisan 15. But that special day was followed by a week of celebration and commemoration called the Feast of Unleavened Bread. It was supposed to be a week dedicated to remembering the exodus God gave to His people many years before. We cannot tell for sure what characteristics the feast had taken on by the time of Jesus. Whatever the feast had become by Jesus' day, it was at least a time when a huge throng of God's people gathered in Jerusalem and Jesus was there.

Out of that throng of people, many believed. Reading that many people believed in Jesus' name causes true Christians to rejoice and maybe even say, "Amen" or "Praise the Lord." However, we need to take special note of the meaning of that phrase. It is true that the Greek word for *believe* is *pistuo* which means just that, "to believe." It is the word Paul used in Romans 4:3 to remind us that Abraham *believed* God, and God put righteousness on his account because he believed. It is the word found in Acts 16:31 when the Philippian jailer asked how he be saved. Paul and Silas said, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved."

But to believe in Jesus' name does not necessarily result in the new birth. What? Is that possible? Okay, believing on Jesus unto salvation is the challenge of John's writing. He wrote, *But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God (John 1:12)*. He even recorded Jesus' own statement to Nicodemus, *Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God (John 3:18)*. So were all these people who believed in Jesus' name during Passover born again? The remainder of our text would indicate that they were not.

So what do we do with the fact that John said that many people in Jesus' day believed in His name? His name is Christ which means the anointed one and referred to the Messiah. There is little doubt that the people of Israel as a whole wanted the Messiah to come and make them an independent nation again. They wanted Messiah to come and rule according to their desires. They wanted a Messiah of their own

making. Now here was the man, Jesus of Nazareth, who appeared to have the potential to be what they wanted in a Messiah. That is the root of the problem. The people believed in their own created model of Messiah.

True belief in all that the name “Jesus Christ” reveals and stands for results in a changed life. A changed life does not turn back and cease walking with Jesus because the person was miffed at what Jesus said (John 6:66). A changed life does not cry out for Jesus to be crucified! The people believed all the facts that seemed to testify that this man was Messiah. But knowledge alone does not gain salvation. Implicit, complete trust in the person of Christ drives us to confess sin and cling to Him alone for salvation. That is true belief.

But wait! The people had good reason to believe in Jesus, didn't they? They believed when they were observing Jesus' signs (v.23b). One thing for certain is that Jesus was doing signs though we do not know what signs. None of the signs Jesus did at this time were recorded by John nor did the other Gospel writers record any of these particular miracles. That is not surprising in light of the fact that Jesus did a lot of miracles and not all of them were recorded. John confessed, *Now there are also many other things that Jesus did. Were every one of them to be written, I suppose that the world itself could not contain the books that would be written (John 21:25)*. In fact, John picked out certain signs to record for a specific purpose. *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)*.

It would not take a particularly special miracle to attract the people's attention. Any true miracle will accomplish that any time. A miracle is a totally unexpected action performed against the backdrop of the ordinary and predictable. So when a lame man jumps up and runs or a blind man suddenly sees, people take notice.

Such was the case during the week of Unleavened Bread (i.e. Passover). The people were watching. The word for watching (*theoreo*) can describe a spectator. That probably isn't the case here. Studying further we discover that the word comes from *horao* which means more than just looking at something or watching like a spectator. The idea expressed in this verb is to experience or to look with the purpose of perceiving or trying to figure out what happened.

Jesus used the word that way when He challenged the people to stop and consider why they went out to the wilderness to *observe* John the Baptist (Mt. 11:7). They weren't spectators as much as they were investigators trying to figure out who that strange prophet really was. It is also the verb found in the story of the king who gave the banquet and then came to *scrutinize* the guests and saw one who was mis-clothed (Mt. 22:11). Likewise, Jesus told the disciples to *look on* the fields and conclude that they were ripe for harvest (John 4:35).

It is obvious then from the wording that Jesus had the people's attention. Whatever miracles He did grabbed the people's attention which caused them to draw conclusions. They watched, they wondered, and they tried to process what they had just experienced. Also, it seems likely that Jesus did more than a couple of these amazing things.

Getting the attention of the people was the purpose for which Jesus did the wonders and signs. Yes, it is true that Jesus was very kind to give sight to the blind, to give the lame person new legs, to heal the woman with hemorrhage problems, to cleanse lepers, to raise the dead and feed the hungry. But the ultimate purpose of the sign was to arrest the attention of people who needed a Savior. This was not normal fair anymore than Jesus driving the merchants out of the temple was normal fair. He purposely arrested the people's attention and ripped them out of the mundane so that they were forced to draw some kind of conclusion about Him.

People were no more used to a miracle worker in that day than we are today. There are reasons why we are skeptical of self-proclaimed miracle workers. Healing or speaking in weird sounds is not normal. But in today's religious arena, the whole purpose of such trickery or spiritism seems to be to attract attention to the sign “doer.” The miracle workers draw attention to themselves, not to Christ. They should be careful lest they end up like seven sons of Sceva the High Priest who thought that the way Paul cast out demons was so cool that they tried it. They got more attention than they bargained for. Luke wrote, *But the evil spirit answered them, “Jesus I know, and Paul I recognize, but who are you?” And the man in whom was the evil spirit leaped on them, mastered all of them and overpowered them, so that they fled out of that house naked and wounded (Acts 19:15-16)*.

Many modern “miracle workers” are like Simon the magician was in Peter’s day. He thought it would help him get more gigs if he could parcel out the Holy Spirit like he thought Peter and the apostles were doing. To him it was all about getting attention. Again it was Luke who told about him. *But there was a man named Simon, who had previously practiced magic in the city and amazed the people of Samaria, saying that he himself was somebody great. They all paid attention to him, from the least to the greatest, saying, “This man is the power of God that is called Great” (Acts 8:9-10).* Oh, that man needed to believe in Jesus. Okay, follow the story. *Even Simon himself believed, and after being baptized he continued with Philip. And seeing signs and great miracles performed, he was amazed (Acts 8:13).* That’s good news. Well, sort of. Things didn’t quite work out the way we wish they would have. Eventually Simon proved that he was a gold-digger looking for attention and Peter soundly rebuked him. *Now when Simon saw that the Spirit was given through the laying on of the apostles’ hands, he offered them money, saying, “Give me this power also, so that anyone on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit.” But Peter said to him, “May your silver perish with you, because you thought you could obtain the gift of God with money! You have neither part nor lot in this matter, for your heart is not right before God” (Acts 8:18-21).* Doesn’t sound like a real believer, does he? He was much like the people in Jesus’ day.

They all were much like the people in our day. It is human nature to be attracted to the big, the flashy, the unusual, the hard to explain. Throughout history, the traveling “healers” who peddled their snake oil have been able to attract a crowd. This is why the Charismatic Movement swept up so many thousands of people in the 80’s. That is until God pulled back the curtain on several of the Simon-like phonies. I have often wondered where all those church-going folks ended up. Things continue on as Solomon said, “There’s nothing new under the sun.” So today, thousands of people are attracted to the mind-numbing, emotion-stimulating stage shows called “church.” The music, the lights, the euphoria, the popularity, the down-to-earth preacher who tells stories and preaches the simple homilies that “get you right where you live” are so attractive. Thousands of people show up pretty regularly and no doubt most of them **believe**. . . something.

Many people believed in Jesus’ name. But Jesus didn’t believe in them.

Jesus Did Not Trust the People (vv.24-25).

John said that Jesus did not put any trust in the people. *But Jesus on his part did not entrust himself to them (v.24a).* Jesus didn’t believe the people’s belief. The people’s emotions were stimulated by the moving atmosphere Jesus’ miracles created. The people’s intellect was convinced that this was the Messiah. But Jesus knew the truth had not penetrated their hearts. The people did not understand their need of the Messiah. Personal sin was not an issue to them. The fact that they were estranged from their Creator because of their sin totally escaped them. The possibility that all their religious expression and activity would not reconcile them to their offended Creator never entered their minds. That they needed the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world was foreign to them.

Therefore, the people did not understand the real purpose of Messiah. They wanted a Messiah who would make life better for them. They wanted a Messiah who would guarantee a good future for them and their families. They wanted a Messiah who would make them feel good about themselves and make them feel good to be called a Jew.

Those people illustrate the error that is common in nearly all humans still. We do not have a problem finding multitudes of people who believe facts about Jesus. The majority of people in America talk about Jesus their Savior. Sometimes it seems as though almost everyone in Greenville County is quite familiar with that kind of church talk. Ask them about it and they do not hesitate to stake their claim in it. But their idea of a Savior is a mythical figure who can guarantee a stress-free life on earth and heaven at death. Their Savior is not a person but a concept they add to life, something like insurance.

Jesus knew He was not the object of the people’s faith. This was nothing new or unusual. It is the nature of people who are overcome by the sin nature. Jesus described these people in the parable of the Sower and the seed. The Sower sowed the seed of truth about Himself and it landed on hard-hearted Pharisees, Sadducees, and other sinners who could not possibly have cared less. So in this setting at Passover,

Jesus sowed the truth about Himself and many folks got excited because this is what they had been looking for. But after the feast was over and they went back to their job, the stress and problems of regular life overtook them and they kind of forgot about the “miracle worker” in Jerusalem. True to the story also, some of the folks at Passover were really impressed to hear about Messiah. But they went back home, got a raise at work, or won the lottery, or made some really lucrative investments and forgot all about how excited they had been.

People like that who have had a very impacting religious experience, but who never grow in Christ, are like so many weeds sown by the enemy among the good wheat. In Jesus’ day they grew alongside the true wheat for a long time, and few people ever distinguished any difference between them and wheat. That is until the harvest.

Jesus did not put any trust in the people because He knew the people better than they knew themselves (vv.24b-25). *He needed no one to bear witness about man, for he himself knew what was in man (v.25b)*. That Jesus knows all that is going on in our hearts is a good reason to trust Him. In fact, John demonstrated Jesus’ attribute of omniscience often. It was John who wrote about how Jesus knew who Peter was (1:42), and how He knew the details about Nathanael (1:47-48). Later at the feeding of 5,000, Jesus knew how Philip would respond to His question about food (6:6). He knew the disciples were grumbling (6:61). He knew who would believe (6:64). He knew who would betray Him (13:11). No wonder that after the resurrection Peter humbly confessed that Jesus knows all the details about us. *He said to him the third time, “Simon, son of John, do you love me?” Peter was grieved because he said to him the third time, “Do you love me?” and he said to him, “Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you.” Jesus said to him, “Feed my sheep” (John 21:17)*. This was another of the many reasons John gave for us to truly believe in Jesus as Savior.

Because He knows, Jesus didn’t need to hear any confirming testimony. It was not necessary for individuals to come forward and present evidence to Jesus that they were really sure He was the Messiah. It would not have done any good for the disciples to step up and give testimony that these were pretty sincere folks.

We, unlike Jesus, tend to be deceived or mistaken about genuine and false believers. We long so much to hear some pray the sinner’s prayer. When a sinner does confess that he believes Jesus, or she shows up at church, or they pursue religion, we fall all over ourselves treating them like brothers and sisters. This is especially true when famous people or notorious sinners profess to believe in Jesus. So instead of carefully discerning the testimony of a professor’s life, we put them in front of God’s people to hear about their shallow, halting following of Christ.

Jesus is never deceived or mistaken. He knows the truth about every person’s claim or commitment. He even knows the stumbling and bumbling of His genuine disciples, like that of Peter. And He loves us anyway.

Maybe the most important matter here is that because Jesus Himself knows what is in man, He will be the final Judge of all motives and claims (Matthew 7:21-29). Jesus taught that on that dreadful day many will claim that they believed in His name. *“On that day many will say to me, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?’ ” (v.22)*. It will not be just a few folks, but many who will make this claim. This is the same Greek word for *many* that Jesus used in verse thirteen to describe the number of people who take the broad and easy road to eternal destruction. We know that number refers to millions, more likely billions of people.

Those “many” in that day will not make meager claims of going to church every Easter or even of praying sometimes. They will lay claim to some very serious religious work. To prophesy in Jesus’ name is to do the work of a pastor, preacher, evangelist, missionary, or teacher in college and seminary. To cast out demons is to perform the amazing miracle that Christ gave the apostles power to do only during the foundational work of building the Church. Did these religious people really cast out demons? It appears so. Were they really Christians? Nope.

Many mighty works refers to displays of strength and power. The word describes the kind of miracles Jesus did. It describes the mind-numbing wonders God will throw at the earth during the Great Tribulation. The religious people in this judgment line will make claims to doing some astonishing work for Jesus because they “believed in Him.”

But things are not going to work out too well for these folks. Jesus went on to say, *“And then will I declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness’”* (v.23). Jesus knows who really trusts Him and who is playing a game. The result of faith fixed on the wrong object is eternally deadly. Listen to the rule of faith. *“Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven”* (Matthew 7:21). The will of the Father is to acknowledge your sin and offense against Him. Have you done that? The will of the Father is to admit that you need the Lamb of God who was sacrificed to pay the price for the sin and offense you confess. Do you admit that? The will of the Father is to receive by faith the payment Christ has already made. Do you believe that? The will of the Father is to accept Jesus Christ as your Savior from sin and Lord of your life. Have you done that?

The people claimed that they believed in Jesus’ name. Jesus didn’t believe in them because He knows all things about all people. What does He know about you?