

WE HAVE SEEN HIS GLORY

Many Believed in His Name

Read Text: [John 2:23-26](#)

Exposition

John is telling the stories of Jesus, so that his audience might “believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.”¹ And now here in our text we read, “many believed in his name.” That sounds like “mission accomplished”, doesn’t it? Let us notice the text carefully: “many believed in his name when they saw the signs that he was doing.”² And then we are faced with another divinely inspired comment:

“But Jesus on his part did not entrust himself to them, because he knew all people and needed no one to bear witness about man, for he himself knew what was in man” (John 2:24–25, ESV).

Now these verses are exegetically connected to Jesus’ encounter with Nicodemus. It is there we learn what the “many” believed when they witnessed the miracles he was doing. They believed that “God is with him.”³ Sadly their faith was not saving faith and Jesus knew it. John uses a play on words when he comments on this. He writes, “the people *trusted* in his name, but he did not *entrust* himself to them.”⁴

I believe there are 2 points to this passage. The first is to note that not everyone who believes, believes unto salvation. “[Jesus] knew that their faith-decision was incomplete. They had seen the signs, but they had not heard the teaching. John is telling us that a sign-based faith is not enough.”⁵ The second (because it is repeated by John) is to note that Jesus is omniscient. He knows all things. He is God.

Because the first point is one that we talk less about; and to some might come as a surprise, I will spend most of the time looking at it – at John’s treatment of “belief”.

John’s Treatment of “Belief”

It is here we pause our exposition of this text because this is one of John’s important themes in this Gospel. Throughout this Gospel John describes 3 levels of belief (or faith):

1. Unbelief.

¹ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#). (2016). (Jn 20:31). Wheaton: Standard Bible Society.

² [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#). (2016). (Jn 2:23). Wheaton: Standard Bible Society.

³ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#). (2016). (Jn 3:2). Wheaton: Standard Bible Society.

⁴ Carson, D. A. (1991). [The Gospel according to John](#) (p. 184). Leicester, England; Grand Rapids, MI: Inter-Varsity Press; W.B. Eerdmans.

⁵ Osborne, G. R. (2018). [John: Verse by Verse](#). (J. Reimer, E. Ritzema, D. Thevenaz, & R. Brant, Eds.) (p. 72). Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press.

2. Temporary belief.
3. Continuing belief.

John uses the word “belief” nearly 100 times in this Gospel. It is always used as a verb. This means that John is never thinking of intellectual knowledge; he is always speaking of something done (an action) directed toward something or someone. “John’s usage of *pisteuo* presupposes an authentic, active, abiding belief in Jesus of Nazareth . . . However, there are other instances when *pisteuo* is used in a superficial, transitory manner.”⁶

Let us look at another example. Turn to John 8:28-30. *“So Jesus said to them, “When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am he, and that I do nothing on my own authority, but speak just as the Father taught me. And he who sent me is with me. He has not left me alone, for I always do the things that are pleasing to him.” As he was saying these things, many believed in him.”* (John 8:28–30, ESV).

Notice that “many believed in Him”. Let us read on: *“So Jesus said to the Jews who had believed him, “If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples.”* (John 8:31, ESV). How did they respond? After arguing that they are acceptable based upon their national heritage, they called Jesus a “demon” in verse 48! What we see in this account is that many believed in him but when confronted with further claims of Christ we learn that Jesus determines they are not “truly disciples” (v31) but “children of the devil (v44). A similar event happened in John 6⁷.

John’s Gospel is very clear: Faith that saves is a continuing, obedient faith. If, every time you read the phrase that “so and so believed in him” and assume saving faith, you will soon find yourself in confusion, if not heresy. John’s Gospel teaching us that affirmations of faith must be examined and handled in context. And what is true about John’s Gospel is true of life. Simply saying you believe is not necessarily saving faith. According to this Gospel of John true faith seeks to obey God’s Word. Listen again to Jesus: *“ . . . If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples.”* (John 8:31, ESV). In John 14, we read: *“If anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him”* (John 14:23, ESV). Watch what John does in this grammatical parallelism in John 3:36,

*“Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life;
whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life,
but the wrath of God remains on him.”*

John, in his first letter provides equal pastoral concern by affirming that those who do not continue are always portrayed as never truly being “of us” (1 John 2:19).

⁶ Habben, Ryan, . . . That You Might Believe, Formulating a Theology of *Pisteuo* (Believe) in John’s Narrative, <http://cicministry.org/scholarly/sch007.htm>

⁷ *“After this many of his disciples turned back and no longer walked with him.”* (John 6:66, ESV)

What Is True Faith?

Do you see that? Genuine saving faith is an obedient faith; a continuing faith. Matthew records the words of Jesus when he says, *“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, ESV). Paul wrote in Colossians 1:21ff that you are reconciled to God “if you continue in the faith”⁸. The writer to the Hebrews said the same thing: *“For we have come to share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original confidence firm to the end”* (Hebrews 3:14, ESV).

Application

Let us return to our text: With John’s emphasis on belief or faith in his Gospel, John 2:24 stands as a critical verse. It reminds us that in the New Testament the word believe does not always mean that a person has placed genuine faith in Jesus. These people “believed” because they saw what Jesus did and only assumed God was with him. But another critical point that John wants to leave us with in this text is that Jesus is omniscient, and Christ can look right into their hearts and see their motives. In this passage John has been pointing us to such topics as faith that endures and the all-knowing mind of Christ. Again, John’s readership is drawn to the glory of Christ. He is omniscient, all-knowing. The writer to the Hebrews picks up these same points and helps us apply this passage.

In Hebrews 4:12 we often quote this verse as if it pertains to the Bible, but let’s look at it carefully:

“For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart. And no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account.” (Hebrews 4:12–13, ESV)

Did you notice that the Word of God discerns the thoughts and intentions of the heart? And did you notice that nothing is hidden from **His** sight? Did you see that word ‘His’? His sight is Jesus Christ’s sight. Nothing is hidden from him. I don’t have time to expound it, but it is interesting that the context of Hebrews 4 is also a call to persevere, to continue, to strive. Did you notice verse 11⁹?

Oh, Beloved I would love to spend a great amount of time in this passage, for you see the concern of the writer is the same as our text. Genuine faith is a continuing faith and Jesus knows our hearts. He knows if we are real. We can fool our family and friends. We can fool ourselves. But we cannot fool Jesus. He knows our hearts. So what are we to do with this? What does a person do who is concerned about his

⁸ *“And you, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death, in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him, if indeed you continue in the faith, stable and steadfast, not shifting from the hope of the gospel that you heard, which has been proclaimed in all creation under heaven, and of which I, Paul, became a minister.”* (Colossians 1:21–23, ESV)

⁹ *“Let us therefore strive to enter that rest, so that no one may fall by the same sort of disobedience.”* (Hebrews 4:11, ESV)

or her heart? What does a person do who is concerned about their salvation? What does a person do if they are ashamed of what Jesus can see deep inside? What does a person do?

Well the answer is right here in the text. In short, the answer is run to Jesus. That what true faith does, it runs to the throne of grace. It runs to Jesus for grace and mercy. The only comfort for our soul is with Jesus. He is the only one that can forgive sins. He is the only one that can sympathize with our weakness. He is the only one who can give comfort and assurance. Those who have genuine faith boldly approach the throne of grace in time of need.