

John 1:9-13 What is Belief?

What is belief? Everyone “believes” in something or someone or in some institution or some cause. And the motives to believe something are endless. Concerning religion, Hindus and Buddhists believe in their religious systems and have some hope that their belief will have good consequences in this life and the life to come. The same can be said of Muslims, Jews, Mormons, JWs; even atheists believe certain things that help them try and make sense of this world. But what about Christians? What exactly does it mean to “believe” in Jesus Christ? And what distinguishes us from the rest of the world? I hope to answer these questions for us through our text this morning. Before moving there, let me ask, “What is John’s purpose for writing?” John 20:31 must come to your mind. **“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.”** Jesus himself says in John 7:38: **“Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, ‘Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.’**” With this in mind, I want to spend just a few minutes thinking about 4 truths from our text that will answer the question: “What is Belief?” Here they are: 1) The object of belief, 2) The reason for belief, 3) The result of belief, and 4) The Power of belief.

1. The object of belief. For Buddhists, it is nirvana, through the teaching and example of Siddhartha Gautama. Hindus believe many things like Karma, Dharma, Brahman (ultimate reality), reincarnation. Muslims believe in a god who has sent his prophet Muhammed, and other core duties. Jews believe in the God of the OT (as we do). But, they do not see God’s promises fulfilled in Jesus. So, what about Christians? Who is the object of our belief? The simple answer is Jesus the Christ, the Son of the living God. In v. 9 John calls him the “true” light. In other words, there many “lights” in this world, but there is only ONE TRUE light. And as we saw two weeks ago, the WORD that became flesh does not merely speak and create light. He IS light. This means He is the ONE who defines what belief is! And John says down in v. 11-12 that the “true” light of the world came into this world and it is in HIM we must believe.

Throughout the Book of John, we see many who believe in the Son of God. Last week, we saw that John the Baptist believed in him, calling him the “lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world” (1:29). Andrew, after encountering Jesus went to his brother Simon (Peter) and said, **“We have found the Messiah”** (1:40). Another man who would become an Apostle named Phillip told Nathaniel, **“We have found him of whom Moses in the Law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph”** (1:45). And man, Nathanael, said of Him, “Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!” (1:49). All of these, and so many more will believe in Jesus, the Son of God! In John 7:38, Jesus himself says: **“Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, ‘Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.’”**

Application: The exclusivity of belief in Jesus. There is no other way. (John 14:6; 15:5). This means there are not “many” roads that lead to heaven. There are not many religions that actually “believe.” So, what do we do with the monks walking through China Grove as a plea for peace?

Also, the reason belief in Jesus is exclusive is because ONLY Jesus can give life. And in order for Him to actually “give” life is to know that He is the Son of God. And in saying this, we believe He is equal to God. (See 1 John). And, we must also share with folks, not just WHO He is, but WHAT HE has done; his PERSON and his WORK. And this is our message. He was born. He lived a sinless life. He laid down his life as a sacrifice. God accepted this sacrifice because ONLY the sinless Son of God could do such a thing and God accepted it. He took our sins upon himself. He took the wrath of God upon himself. And then he rose again from the dead and now sits at the right hand of God. And when we believe, our sins are forgiven. God’s displeasure is taken away. And we have peace with God.

2. The reason for belief. Why believe? . . . in Jesus? This is a question we must all be prepared to answer. Vv. 10-11 gives a starting point for our answer. John says, “**He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him. He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him.**” Now, these verses say that WORD, who is the LIFE and LIGHT came into the world. And the world did not know him. And then in v. 11 he says his own people did not know him. So, WHO does not know Him? The “world” does not know Him. And, the Jewish people did not know Him. This is everybody. Why is this?

Well, go back to Jesus’ words from 7:38. He says, “**Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, ‘Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.’**” You see, the reason, which is an unsurmountable problem for mankind is that we do NOT have “rivers of living water” coming from our hearts. So, what is the opposite? What flows from our hearts and the hearts of all people since the fall of Adam? It is sin and death. This is what the entire Bible teaches! Is. 64:6-7 says, “**We have all become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous deeds are like a polluted garment. We all fade like a leaf, and our iniquities, like the wind, take us away. There is no one who calls upon your name, who rouses himself to take hold of you; for you have hidden your face from us, and have made us melt in the hand of our iniquities.**” This same Isaiah, when he sees a vision of God’s holiness, says, “**Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts!**” (Is. 6:5). Just this week in my quiet time I read from Ps. 14 which says, “**The Lord looks down from heaven on the children of man, to see if there are any who understand, who seek after God. They have all turned aside; together they have become corrupt; there is none who does good, not even one**” (vv. 2-3). When we come to the NT, Paul says, “**For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God**” (Rom. 3:23). And to the Ephesians he says, “**And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience— among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind**” (Eph. 2:1-3).

So let me ask, what comes from your heart? In and of ourselves, it is NOT rivers of living water, no matter how good we look on the outside. A leopard cannot change his spots. Neither can we

(in and of ourselves) change what flows from the heart. This is Why Jesus says to the adulteress woman at the well of Samaria and says, **“Believe in me! And, if you do, living waters will come out of your heart!”** (John 4). Think back again to 20:31. John says, **“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.”** Today, there is NO LIFE! There is no LIGHT! . . . outside of BELIEF in Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

There is a lot more I could say. But, John’s message is that we MUST Believe if we are to have LIFE, which is also “eternal” life. This is the essence of what it means to believe in what we call the GOSPEL. In order to understand the beauty of WHY Jesus says “believe in me” is to first understand the depths of sin in our condition of unbelief.

3. The result of belief. So, what is the result of belief? I shared briefly above some of these results. But to put it another way, look at v. 12: **“But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God . . .”** Here we see that a person becomes part of God’s family. Those who “receive” him: I picture Rev. 3:20 where Jesus says, **“I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me.”** This is also another way of saying “believe” in him. In other words, to “believe” in him is to receive him, to welcome him, spend time with him. And when we “believe” in him, when we “receive” him, God gives us the “right” to become his children. This word “right” or “authority” can also be translated as “power.” I think both meanings apply. To be part of God’s family is to be given ALL rights and privileges that come from God as Father. And, through the power of the Holy Spirit (as we will see in a moment), we are given the essential power to be and function as one of God’s children.

So, in a nutshell, what does it mean to be a part of God’s family? We have every legal right to be part of his family, equal to every member in his family. AND, God gives us essential power to live and continue in his family and carry out his desires as our Father. Peter says much the same: **“His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence, by which he has granted to us his precious and very great promises, so that through them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire.”** I think of Eph. 2:10 which says, **“For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.”**

Application: Belief in Jesus, the Son of God results in being part of God’s family. This means we are not born into the family. We are not in his family at birth and then by “unbelief” or “disobedience” take ourselves OUT of his family. The world believes we are ALL part of God’s family. Now, it is true that we are all created by God. We live and have our being by God’s ongoing power. I believe there is some sense in which God “loves” the world as his creation.

But, we are not “born” into his family. We must be given the right, the power to be in his family. And this comes through belief in Jesus. This is the result!

If Jesus is the “way, the truth, and the life” (John 14:6), then what do we do with the monks that walked down our streets this week? They want to promote “peace.” So do I. But, How does “peace” come? It is interesting that Jesus says, “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid” (John 14:27). So Who does this peace come from and How does it come to us? Well, it comes from Jesus, who is the only begotten Son from the Father. And how does it come to us? It comes through belief in Him. All the monks of the world cannot give you “rivers of living water.” All the monks in the world cannot bring you peace. This will only come through belief in the Son of God.

4. The power of belief. This follows from v. 12 and our application that all people are not part of God’s family by birth. Instead, it is God who works in us powerfully. Look at v. 13: “**who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.**” I think what he is saying here is that belief is a reality, that is bound up with the power of God. Now, you might say, “I believed in Jesus.” “This is my work.” And, I think from that perspective we all agree. Conversion is associated with what we do. We “believe.” We “repent.” So, how do we make sense of the words, “**who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.**”

Well, it is interesting that John equates the person who “believes” as the person who is “born.” This implies something that takes place outside of ourselves. And then he says, it is not of the “will of the flesh” nor of the “will of man,” but “of God.” So, I think at the most simple level, God’s children do not owe their origin to physical descent. For example, the Jews came from Abraham, physically. But, as God’s children, our descent is not from man, but from God. And our “birth” into God’s family is not due to the “will of the flesh” through the procreation of a man and a woman, but to God alone.

John’s explanation of this verse comes in cp. 3 with Nicodemus. Jesus says to him, “**unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God**” . . . this phrase can also be translated “born from above.” He also says, “**that which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit . . . the wind blows where it wishes . . . So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.**” Brothers and sisters, this is none other than the power of God. This is a great mystery! But, we must attribute our salvation to God alone in this regard! This means if you believe in the Lord Jesus, at the end of the day, you must give glory to God and God alone for your salvation. And this makes perfect sense if we are really “**dead in our trespasses and sins**” as Paul says (Eph. 2).

I think of Peter’s great confession as Jesus asks the disciples, “**Who do you say that I am?**” **And Peter says, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.”** And Jesus says to him, “**Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but**

my Father who is in heaven" (Matt. 16:17). This means "belief" that leads to life . . . eternal life belongs to the power of God. God is the ONE who gives "birth" to us in this regard.

At the end of the day we must praise God who "**works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure**" (Phil. 2:13).

Today, we obey the command of our Lord to baptize those who believe. With Cooper, Jesus is the object of our profess. We believe in Him. And the reason we must believe is because without belief in Him, only sin and death and separation from God is all we can look forward to. The result of our belief is life in the family of God forever. And we owe everything to the grace and mercy of God who works powerfully by the Spirit as we are born again.