

## EXPOSITION OF JOHN

### Message #13

### John 2:23-25

When it comes to the subject of Jesus Christ, one must believe something about Him because He was a real Person who really did live in history. Most people will say “they believe in Jesus Christ,” but what must be asked is “what do you mean by that?” or “what do you actually believe about Jesus Christ?” What does a person actually mean who says he believes in Jesus Christ? That is the real question.

If you are unique in what you do or say, you will draw a crowd and interest some people. It doesn't matter if what you do is right or wrong, positive or negative, entertaining or evil. People gravitate to one who is different. But the real question is why are we drawn to this person? What is it that causes this lure? In the early days of the life of Jesus Christ, it was His miracles. People were following Him because they had never seen anyone who could actually do the kinds of things he did. They certainly believed He was unique, but that did not mean they accepted Him as their personal Savior who could save them from their sins. In fact, Jesus said to a multitude His signs did not produce saving faith (John 12:29, 37). In fact, He actually hid Himself from these kinds of people (John 12:36).

When we come to this passage of Scripture we come to a very interesting text. Jesus Christ was in Jerusalem and verse 23 says **many were believing on Him**. One might wonder - why then didn't Christ establish His kingdom? If He were in Jerusalem and many people were believing on Him, why didn't He establish Himself as King of the Jews and entrust Himself to these people as their King and set up His kingdom? **The answer to that question is found right here - He knew what was in these people**. Even though He is in Jerusalem, He was really not in their hearts. Jesus is God, He is Omniscient and He knew every man and woman, boy and girl.

It is true that great numbers of people were drawn to Jesus Christ initially. Most were drawn to Him as "fly-by-night" commitments. **They were following Him for the moment, but they were not believing on Him in the sense of really trusting that He was the only One who could justify them and remove their sins**. Some were drawn to Him because of the miraculous. Jesus could do amazing things. He could astonish people by His miracles. His signs and wonders were impressive. They were supernatural miracles that transcended that which was natural. Jesus was drawing big crowds initially because He was so unique. Like Las Vegas illusionists, who draw big crowds because of the unique things he does. **But Jesus knew what was inside all men and most had not really believed on Him in the sense of coming to terms with their sin**. In fact, most of these people who followed Him for awhile, eventually withdrew from Him and abandoned Him (John 6:66). **These people wanted Jesus to be King over Rome (6:15) but not the Savior of their sins**. So He did not present Himself as King. Before He would bring about political change, the Jews needed a spiritual change and since they were not willing to spiritually change, Jesus did not give them a political change.

There is an important point to be learned from this text:

**JUST BECAUSE MANY PEOPLE SAY THEY BELIEVE IN JESUS CHRIST DOES NOT MEAN THAT JESUS CHRIST HAS ENTRUSTED HIMSELF TO THEM OR THAT THEY ACTUALLY HAVE A PERSONAL RELATIONSHIP WITH HIM.**

This is a very sober passage. One may say he believes in Christ and still not really have Christ in his life. It is one thing for a person to have faith in Christ, after all He is an historical figure. It is quite another for Jesus Christ to come into a person's life as personal Savior. It is one thing for a person to get temporarily all revved up about Jesus because of some exciting sign. It is quite another for one to commit his life to Jesus Christ and to be willing to follow Him when the going gets tough.

Now we want to observe the five component parts of this story, which are a prelude to the famous discussion with Nicodemus:

### **COMPONENT PART #1** – Jesus Christ was in Jerusalem at the Passover . 2:23a

Verse 23 begins with a conjunction “now” (δε), which is in sharp contrast to the preceding context. In contrast to not doing miracles for the leaders in the temple (2:18), He did do them for the people in Jerusalem. In contrast to what was happening in the temple, here is what happened in the city. In contrast to the rejection of the religious leaders, here is the acceptance of the common people.

Now Christ in Jerusalem at the Passover should have been another great and moving homecoming for Him. He should have come into Jerusalem at this Passover and had all the Jews honor Him and worship Him as God and as King. They should have heralded Psalm 22 and Isaiah 53, and connected it to Him, but as we shall see, they didn't. **Christ went to Nazareth and they wanted to kill Him. Christ is in Jerusalem and eventually they will kill Him.**

The Passover time would have been very special to Jesus Christ, for He knew that He was the ultimate Sacrifice for sins. He knew He would be led like a lamb to slaughter in just a few years. This must have been very emotional for Christ, knowing that He was the One who would be the Sacrifice. Now this is the same week in which He purged the temple. Jesus Christ did not run away, after purging the temple, He stayed for the week long festivities and continued to minister.

There are a couple of points we want to observe:

- 1) When one does what is right, he does not run away and hide. Christ is out in the open. Staying and owning up to something is the mark of Christological integrity.
- 2) Jesus went to where the majority of people were - gathered for the Passover in Jerusalem. If we are going to influence people, we must go to where they are - at church.

### **COMPONENT PART #2** – Jesus Christ did many miracles while in Jerusalem. 2:23b

I want you to see something that is so important from the pen of John - **John viewed Jesus' miracles as signs** . They were not simply astonishing feats of the supernatural. They were not just powerful demonstrations that got way beyond the natural. They were "signs." The word "sign" is one in Greek that refers to some mark or token or note that distinguishes someone or something from someone or something else (G. Abbott-Smith, *Greek Lexicon*, p. 405).

For example a sign that we see for a gas station when on the expressway, marks the fact that at such and such an exit there is a specific type of gas and station that is there which is set apart from the others.

The miracles that Jesus performed, John saw as signs. Signs of what? **Signs that He was the God, Israel's Messiah and the world's Savior.** In other words, the wonders and miracles that Christ performed distinguished Him from all others who have ever lived on earth. Those signs set Him apart as God. Not one gospel writer tells us what miracles Christ did here, but there are some great ones which show up in John - 1) He turns water into wine (2:1-11); 2) He speaks life to a dying boy (4:46-54); 3) He knows how long one has been paralyzed and heals him (5:1-15); 4) He walks on water (6:15-21); 5) He raises a dead person (John 11:1-44). To be able to do these kinds miracles, one would have to be God. In fact, it was these sign-miracles that caught the attention of Nicodemus (John 3:2).

**COMPONENT PART #3** – Jesus Christ had many who momentarily believed in His name.  
2:23c

Now we may notice that these signs prompted many people to “believe in His name.” Getting people to believe in Jesus Christ is precisely what this Gospel of John is all about and it was precisely what the sign-miracles were all about (John 20:30-31). But carefully notice that it does not say they believed in His name for their salvation. It simply says “many believed in His name.” There will be many who will end up in hell who believed something about the name of Jesus Christ, in fact many in hell will have done things in His name (Matthew 7:21-23).

J. Vernon McGee said that many read this verse and say “isn't that wonderful so many believed” (*The Gospel According to John*, Vol. 4, p. 381). G. Campbell Morgan said had we been with Jesus in Jerusalem we would have said, “Lord everything is going well, look at all of the people who are trusting you” (*Westminster Pulpit*, Vol. 2, p. 320). But all it is not wonderful and not too many did actually believe on Him as Messiah and Savior. They were simply “miracle believers” (Everett Harrison, *The Sons of God Among the Sons of Men*, Bib. Sac., p. 439, 1948).

By the signs that He did, many "believed in His name." Now we know that there is no other name to believe in for salvation than the name of Jesus Christ (Acts 4:12). We know that all one has to do to be saved is to call upon His name for salvation (Acts 2:21; Romans 10:13). We also know that believing in His name is the same as receiving Christ as personal Savior (John 1:12). Believing in Christ's name is all it takes to be saved (John 3:18). So we would ask, what is wrong here? The Greek grammar gives us some great insight here.

The verb "believed" is aorist tense, which means many had a point in time, a punctiliar moment when they believed something about Him. **Now in John 1:12, the verb "receive" is aorist tense and the verb "believe" is present tense. In John 3:18, the verb is perfect tense. What that means, by both of these constructions, is that all it takes is one moment to receive Christ and one who does actually receive Christ is one who will have a faith that continually relies on Jesus Christ as the only means of salvation.** One who is saved from sin continually believes that Jesus Christ is the only way to be saved from sin. Saving faith is a single act of faith that results in a continual and habitual attitude of trust and faith that Jesus Christ is the only Savior. Apparently, these people in Jerusalem had a momentary faith in Jesus that He was a great teacher from God and a great miracle worker (John 3:2), but they had not believed in His name as their personal Savior.

What I understand grammatically about this verb “believed” is that these people had a momentary faith that was not a saving faith that would continually trusted in Jesus Christ for salvation from sin. They did not have a faith that rested totally, entirely, completely and continually on Jesus Christ for salvation. Let's face it, if you saw Jesus Christ perform a miracle, it would be very difficult for you to not believe, at that moment, that He was connected to God. But that is not the same as a faith that continually relies on Him for salvation and continually sees oneself as a sinner.

People believed in His name as a miracle worker, but not as their personal Savior. There is nothing wrong with a saving faith that stems from seeing God perform the miraculous (John 10:38; 12:37; 14:11; 20:30-31). This was not saving, born again faith.

**COMPONENT PART #4** – Jesus was not entrusting Himself to them. 2:24

**Now it is one thing to believe something about Jesus Christ, it is quite another when Jesus actually comes into your life. It is one thing for you to say you believe in Jesus Christ, it is quite another for Jesus Christ to let you know Him.** There is no question that Jesus Christ lets certain people truly know Him intimately and others He doesn't. As Dr. Richard Lenski observed, Christ fully entrusted Himself to His disciples, but kept aloof from others at this very festival (*Interpretation of St. John's Gospel*, p. 224).

In order for a person to be saved, Jesus Christ must come into the life and that requires telling the truth about what is in your heart, namely a deceitful, desperately wicked heart. Now we may ask to whom was Christ not entrusting Himself? The answer is to those who momentarily believed on Him because He could do a miracle. There were many who said they trusted Christ, but Christ did not trust them. The reason is stated - He knew all men.

The verb "entrust" is in the imperfect tense. It is the same word translated “believe” in verse 23. The imperfect tense emphasizes action that was in progress in past time and continued to exist at the present. Jesus knew the past action of the heart. He knew that these people had not come to terms with their sin - they simply believed on Him because He could do the miraculous. There is a great Greek word play here - **Jesus did not believe those who said they believed in Him.**

He knew that there were people who said they believed on Him, who really didn't want a relationship with Him. He knew the fickleness of some people. He knew that many believe with their emotions or many believe because of the sensational. But He also knew that many of these people were "fly-by-nights." They would fall away when things got tough. So even though they believed in Him, He didn't believe in them.

Listen, there is a big difference between a person who says I believe in Jesus Christ and one who actually has Jesus Christ in his or her life. There is a vast difference between one saying he is saved and God decreeing one is saved.

If we ask most do you believe in Jesus Christ, they will probably answer “yes.” But if we ask what do you mean? Believe facts about the historical Jesus or the gospel or trust Him to save you from your sins?

## COMPONENT PART #5 – Jesus knew what was in every man. 2:25

The knowledge level of Jesus Christ is Divine. He has complete knowledge and foreknowledge of every thing and every one (John 13:1, 11; 18:4; 19:28). Nathanael had already learned this first hand (John 1:42, 47-48). The Gospel of John demonstrates that Christ knows every man (2:24); every man's heart (2:25); He knows who will betray Him (6:64); He knows God the Father (10:15); He knows and sees all things (21:17; 16:30). Jesus knows every thing about every one.

Before the noun "man" there is the article "the." **What this means is that Jesus Christ knows what is in every, single individual that can be identified anywhere.** He knows what goes on inside of every person. He knows what goes on inside every church. Knowing just one man would require Omniscience, but He knows every human.

Now notice carefully what is stated in the opening part of verse 25, Jesus does "not need anyone." He is God in need of nothing. Here is one of the great verses that proves the Deity of Jesus Christ. He knows what is in every man. He, Himself, knows what you believe about Him. He, Himself, knows what you think. **Jesus Christ not only knows the number of hairs on our head, He also knows the number of thoughts in our head and heart.**

Witnessing is an important concept to the Gospel of John, but when it comes to Jesus Christ knowing a man, He does not need any testimony at all. He doesn't need our help to point out our sin or any person's sin. Why? Because He knows man. As God, Jesus sees beyond the superficial emotions. He sees right through the phony responses, and the pretenses of worship, He sees the heart. He knows how fickle and unstable people are. He sees how desperately wicked the heart is. Jesus knew that some of these same people would be crying "Crucify Him, Crucify Him" in just a few months. As you track Christ's ministry, it moves from being somewhat popular, to being despised by many of these same people.

In view of this reality, we must marvel at the truth that He would let any person get close to Him. Can you imagine what it must have been like for Him to walk on earth next to messed up people like us? This thought is staggering. For Him, coming to this world is totally humiliating. For us, it is our only hope of redemption.

Christ's knowledge of every man proved He was God and even the Jews realized this is something only God can do. In fact, to the Jew, only God knew what was in the hearts of men (I Kings 8:39; I Samuel 16:7; Jeremiah 17:10). John closes chapter 2 leaving no doubt as to who Jesus Christ is - He is God. But the truth is, most saw Him as a great teacher sent from God (3:2), not Israel's Messiah and Savior of our sins.

Listen, Jesus Christ knows what is in your heart. He knows your uprisings and your down sittings. He knows your peak moments and your low moments. He already knows who you are and what you have done. You cannot fool Him. He sees you and knows you. The question is - will you believe on Him to save you from all of your wretched sin?