

John 2:23-25

Does Jesus Believe in You?

But Jesus did not commit himself unto them, because he knew all men – v. 24.

You're all aware, I'm sure, that the most well known Evangelist of the 20th century, the Rev. Billy Graham passed away this past Wednesday, Feb. 21. We've been seeing and hearing tributes paid to the famous Evangelist in the days that have followed and of all the facts that I've heard about him, the one that I find most striking is that he preached to some 215 million people in 185 different countries.

When I lived in Illinois I visited the Billy Graham Center in Wheaton on a couple of occasions. I've never forgotten the one display that showed these silhouetted figures in the foreground of a display and on a panel board you could identify the different preachers. If you pressed the button that was next to the name of the famous person you could then hear an audio file that would give you a summary of the man's life and ministry. I remember pressing the button for Charles Finney, that famous evangelist of the early 1800's and the first thing you heard in that audio file was a statement that said: *This is the man that changed all the rules for revival in America.* It was Finney's theology that paved the way for altar calls and for steps that could be taken by men to bring about revival.

I remember thinking to myself at the time – *they don't even try to hide it. They actually glory in revivals as man-made productions.* Billy Graham definitely came through that line of thinking when it came to evangelism. It was this line of theology and evangelism that popularized the altar call through which people were called on to come forward and make a decision for Jesus Christ. I don't know what the actual figures were or are in terms of how many people came forward but I do know that those numbers were carefully tabulated and kept. No doubt millions came forward under this kind of evangelism.

The same thing can be said of Christ's ministry as has been said about Billy Graham's ministry and that's what we find in v. 23 *Now when he was in Jerusalem at the Passover, in the feast day, many believed in his name.* At first glance you would think that this would be a good thing. Isn't this why John wrote his gospel, so that we would believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God so that believing we might have life through His name? (20:31).

Like I say on the surface it, this might seem like a good thing but then when you read the words of the next two verses it may lead you initially to scratch your head and wonder. Notice what John goes on to write after stating that at that Passover many believed in His name. *But Jesus did not commit himself unto them, because he knew all men,* 25 *And needed not that any should testify of man: for he knew what was in man.*

They believed in His name but He did not commit Himself unto them? What's the deal with that? And when you look carefully at the literal meaning of the word *commit* you discover that the Greek word behind this English word is the same word for *faith* or *trust*. Other versions capture the meaning of this word by translating the statement this way:

Jesus on his part did not entrust himself to them (ESV). A modern version that's more a paraphrase reads this way: I'll read vv. 23,24 from what's called the Bible in Basic English version: *Now while he was in Jerusalem at the feast of the Passover, a great number of people came to have faith in his name, after seeing the signs which he did. 24 But Jesus did not have faith in them, because he had knowledge of them all.*

There's something you never hear at a modern day Evangelistic Crusade. The emphasis in modern day evangelism is all about the sinner having faith in Jesus. You're invited to have faith in Jesus. The Evangelist pleads with his audience to have faith in Jesus. But have you ever heard the question asked that this statement in John's gospel raises? That question quite simply is this: Does Jesus have faith in you?

What we're introduced to, you see, in these closing verses of John 2 is a concern that John has for his readers; a concern that pertains to the quality of their faith. The faith of these Jews, you see, just didn't cut it. And this won't be the last time we meet up with this phenomenon in John's gospel. In Jn. 8:31 we read: *Then said Jesus to those Jews which believed on him, If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed; 32 And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.* And if you read the verses that follow you'll see how a heated argument ensued that so provoked these "believers" that they would take up stones to cast at Jesus.

Quality of faith, you see, was and is a matter of concern to Christ as well as a matter of concern to the Apostle Paul. The next time you read through 1Cor. 15 take note of Paul's use of the phrase *believing in vain*. That same concept is also found in Galatians and Philippians and 1Thessalonians. James, in his epistle also makes reference to what he calls *vain religion*. And just as surely as this quality of faith was a concern to Christ and to Paul and to James so should it be of great concern to you and to me.

So I want to come to the question that arises out of the statement about Jesus in v. 24 *But Jesus did not commit himself unto them.* And from this statement I want you to consider this very important question this morning which is simply this:

Does Jesus Have Faith in You?

I have a very thick book in my library by John Blanchard entitled *Does God believe in Atheists?* Well, in that line of thinking I'm asking you to consider this morning – does Jesus have faith in you? Let's think first on:

I. The Importance of the Question

Many believed in his name v. 23 tells us, yet *Jesus did not commit himself unto them* v. 24. The thing that makes these verses so puzzling and the question that arises out them so important is that the benefits of salvation flow from faith. *According to your faith be it unto you* Christ said to two blind men who were then healed of their blindness (Mk. 9:29).

Faith or belief is very strongly connected to the promises pertaining to salvation, you see. The most well known verse in the Bible (and one I'm sure that Billy Graham used often and is being attributed to him through the many tributes paid to him) is Jn. 3:16 *For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.*

That verse and the one that follows makes the connection between faith and escaping condemnation. *For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved.* Verse 17 makes plain what *perishing* in v. 16 refers to. It refers to condemnation. That's the negative side of the blessing associated with faith. Believing in Christ enables a sinner to escape perishing or to escape condemnation. The positive side is also given in Jn. 3:16. Not only does a believer escape perishing but he gains life, and not just life but *everlasting life*.

That's salvation in a nutshell – escaping everlasting condemnation and knowing the blessing of everlasting life. Paul stresses the same thing in his epistle to the Ephesians. Perhaps the most well known verses in Ephesians would be Eph. 2:8,9 *For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: 9 Not of works, lest any man should boast.*

I'm sure you're aware that in his epistle to the Galatians the entire epistle is taken up with the theme of salvation by grace through faith as opposed to salvation by works. Ga 2:16 *Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified.*

Ga 3:2 *This only would I learn of you, Received ye the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?*

Gal. 3:5-9: *He therefore that ministereth to you the Spirit, and worketh miracles among you, doeth he it by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith? 6 Even as Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness. 7 Know ye therefore that they which are of faith, the same are the children of Abraham. 8 And the scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the heathen through faith, preached before the gospel unto Abraham, saying, In thee shall all nations be blessed. 9 So then they which be of faith are blessed with faithful Abraham.*

In these verses Paul makes the connection between faith and imputed righteousness. Imputed righteousness is what makes the gospel believable. This is what qualifies the sinner for heaven. His sins are imputed to Christ where they were punished in the person of Christ and Christ's righteousness is imputed to the one who has faith. It's the same argument that Paul makes in Rom. 4: Ro 4:11 *And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which [he had yet] being uncircumcised: that he might be the father of all them that believe, though they be not circumcised; that righteousness might be imputed unto them also.* Do you see how this verse lays out so

plainly the glorious truth that righteousness is imputed to those who believe? This is why Paul could go on to write in Rom. 5:1 *Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.*

So salvation comes by faith; and all the benefits of salvation come by faith. Our peace comes by faith; our joy in the Lord comes by faith; our hope of escaping condemnation and gaining eternal life – it's all by faith. You see, I hope, the importance of faith. We read this morning that chapter that is known as The Faith Chapter of the Bible – Heb. 11. In that chapter we're told in v. 6 *that without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.*

This past year we marked the 500th anniversary of the Reformation. It was 500 years ago on Oct. 31st that Martin Luther nailed his 95 theses to the church door at Wittenberg and the Reformation is known especially for the way it brought the gospel back to being a matter of faith – faith becoming one of the 5 solas to describe salvation when we think of it by grace alone; through faith alone; by Christ alone etc.

What I've been describing for you, therefore, is something very basic. And I'm quite happy to stress it this morning because it is that basic. Salvation is by grace through faith. But now, having said all this and having set out the importance of faith and its connection to the gospel and all the benefits that flow from the gospel, we have to return to our text in Jn. 2 to ask the question – *what's going on here?* You have a statement that says *many of the Jews believed in his name.* And yet you also have the statement to follow that says that *Christ would not commit himself to them.* If Christ won't commit Himself to the promises that are associated with believing then what hope can anyone have that Christ will honor such promises to anyone? It's one thing for a person to believe in Christ; it's quite another for Christ to believe in you.

There is actually a reason and a very good reason given in the text as to why Christ would not commit Himself to them. And this leads to my next point from our text. We've seen the importance of the question – *Does Christ believe in you.* We must think next on:

II. Christ's Qualification to Answer that Question

Listen again to the words of vv. 24, 25 *But Jesus did not commit himself unto them, because he knew all men, 25 And needed not that any should testify of man: for he knew what was in man.* He knew their hearts, in other words. These verses are actually affirmations of Christ's deity. He knew their hearts because He is God and God knows the hearts of men.

And He didn't need any assistance in knowing men. When it comes to you and I trying to discern the hearts of others, we need all the help we can get. This is why a plurality of elders interviews men and women for church membership. And if an applicant for membership is a young adult who still is living at home the elders will solicit the help of the parents of that applicant to discern the true spiritual condition of that applicant. Christ

never needed that kind of help. You don't find Him on this occasion having to huddle up with His disciples so He may ascertain with their assistance the true condition of these Jews. Christ knows.

And He would demonstrate this knowledge on various occasions. He would show His knowledge of the hearts of men when He would predict who would betray Him. And He would show this knowledge when He would predict Peter's denials of Him. And He would show the knowledge of men's hearts when He would predict that all His disciples would forsake Him. It's rather interesting to note that He would make that prediction following a very strong affirmation of their belief in Him.

Listen to these words from Jn. 16:28-32: *I came forth from the Father, and am come into the world: again, I leave the world, and go to the Father. 29 His disciples said unto him, Lo, now speakest thou plainly, and speakest no proverb. 30 Now are we sure that thou knowest all things, and needest not that any man should ask thee: by this we believe that thou camest forth from God. 31 Jesus answered them, Do ye now believe? 32 Behold, the hour cometh, yea, is now come, that ye shall be scattered, every man to his own, and shall leave me alone: and yet I am not alone, because the Father is with me.*

So Christ knows the hearts of men, doesn't He? When I think on that revelation of Christ in His glory that's found in the book of Revelation, where John turns to see where the voice is coming from that he heard and He beholds Christ in His glory and Christ's eyes in 1:14 are described as *a flame of fire*, I'm reminded of the penetrating ability of Christ to see right into the hearts of men and know the true state of the hearts of men as well as their true motives.

I should point out under this heading that Christ's ability to know the hearts of men works both ways. Peter would actually appeal to Christ's ability to know men's hearts when he would respond to Jesus for the third time in Jn. 21 in answer to Christ's question: *Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me? Peter was grieved because he said unto him the third time, Lovest thou me? And he said unto him, Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee.*

And so it becomes very apparent, doesn't it, that Christ knows who loves Him and who doesn't. And it's always good to keep in mind that Peter's affirmation of love to Christ follows on the heels of his denials of Christ. Even though Peter had failed and such failure would cause him to depart and weep bitterly yet Christ who knew and knows all things knew that Peter did believe and that Peter did love Him.

Now we are still left with the perplexity of John's description of these Jews. Since Christ's knowledge of the true states of their hearts is evident by the way Jesus would not commit Himself to them, we find ourselves having to face another question and that question is simply this: *Why does John call them believers?* Why does the text say that *many believed in his name* if as the words that follow indicate they did not really believe in His name but would continue in their rejection of Him?

And I think the answer to that question has to be, as I said in my introduction, that John would have the readers of his gospel be acquainted with the issue of the quality of their faith. Remember the purpose statement for John's gospel, Jn. 20:31 *But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name.*

John's aim is make believers out of his readers but not just any kind of believers. John obviously has a higher aim in writing his gospel than creating the kind of believers that are described in chp. 2 or in chp. 6 or in chp. 8. In each of those chapters you find men described as believers who are still rebels against Christ who remain hostile to Christ. That's not the kind of believer John is aiming to make.

There is a difference, you see, between faith and true saving faith. We read earlier in the service from Heb. 11 that chapter that is famous for dealing with faith. In that chapter there's a very important verse that I've highlighted because I think it gives a very concise description of what true saving faith amounts to.

After listing a number of Old Testament characters that were known for their faith the author of Hebrews makes this general statement about them all in v. 13. Heb. 11:13 *These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth.*

This verse can be very useful when it comes to distinguishing between those who believe and those who savingly believe. Notice the elements to true saving faith – They saw the promises afar off. I've described this statement as the cognitive element of saving faith. Faith you see is based on knowledge. Those OT characters possessed a knowledge of the promises. But there's also a persuasive element to saving faith. Not only were they aware of the promises but they were persuaded of them. The thing that must be noted here is that it's possible to have knowledge of the promises and to even be persuaded of them and still not have true saving faith. The thing that really closes the deal, so to speak, is found in the volitional element to saving faith. They saw the promises, they were persuaded of the promises and then with an act of their wills it says they embraced those promises and all of these things together – the knowledge, and being convinced so that their wills were affected to embrace – that all led to a confession which said that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth.

Now with this verse in mind from Heb. 11 and these elements of true saving faith being laid out before us, it becomes possible now to understand John's meaning when he speaks of those many that believed in the name of Jesus. The reason for their belief is given in v. 23 *they saw the miracles which he did.* They weren't dumb. They could tell that there was something different about Christ. He was a miracle worker. They saw that; they believed that but unfortunately that's as far as they went. There was no embracing of Christ that would lead to a confession that they belonged to Christ and were strangers and pilgrims in the earth. Saving faith, you see – the kind of faith that gains the commitment of Christ is a

faith that not only sees and is persuaded but it's also a faith that volitionally embraces Christ. There must be, in other words, a personal appropriation of the promises of Christ and of Christ Himself. You must receive Him, in other words as John told us earlier in the first chapter of his gospel - *But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name.*

So we've seen the importance of the question – Does Jesus Believe in You? We've seen Christ's qualifications to answer that question – He knows the hearts of all men. It remains for us to consider:

III. How We Answer the Question for Ourselves

Does Jesus believe in you? Has He committed Himself to you? We have to be very careful in answering such a question that we don't make the mistake of presuming upon our faith by saying very boldly as the disciples did in Jn. 16 – *Now we believe and are sure that camest forth from God.*

In answering the question for ourselves, you see, we need to be aware that our faith at its best is never going to be a perfect faith. Just as surely as our carnal natures continue with us so do those carnal natures carry with them the sins of doubt and unbelief. This is why I deliberately mentioned the context of Peter's affirmation that he loved the Lord. That affirmation was in the context of having denied the Lord. How often do you and I practically do the same thing?

We fail to trust in certain areas of our lives or perhaps it would be proper to say that we struggle to trust. That struggle may be in the area of patiently waiting for God to reveal His will. Like Abraham and Sarah in the book of Genesis we feel that we have to help God honor His promises and so Sarah tells Abraham to take her handmaid, Hagar, and go in unto her in order that God's promise might come to fruition. Or we fail to trust God with our finances so that we find giving to the Lord's cause to be challenging.

Answering the question as to whether or not Christ believes in us can't be determined by the quality of our faith. It has to measured instead by the quality of the object of our faith. Oh my faith may be pathetic at times but the object of my faith lacks nothing. I'm not a perfect believer but I do believe that Christ is a perfect Savior. And He can be and is therefore the propitiation for my sins and not for mine only but for the sins of the world.

And what do you say to Christ when He may put the question to you as to whether or not you love Him? Do you love Him? If you're like most true Christians then you won't be satisfied that you love Him nearly enough but you will be able to say nevertheless that you do in fact love Him. And in my mind one of the greatest sources of assurance we can have regarding our love to Him can be found in whether or not we worship Him. How many there are, I'm afraid, that say they believe in Him and may even say that they love Him but you never see them in church. Do they believe? Do they really love Him? I'm not so sure and I don't think they should be so sure either.

But what about you this morning. Why are you here? Why do we meet on Sunday? Is it not that we may first and foremost worship the Savior that we adore? My hope is in Him. My hope for escaping the condemnation I deserve and gaining eternal life is in Him. I believe that He truly came into this world. I believe that He performed the miracles that are recorded in the gospels and many more miracles besides. I believe that He died and that He rose again and that He truly is the Son of God and so I must worship Him and I must gather with others who believe in Him so that we may all raise our voices to Him in praise and thanksgiving.

And I'm inclined to think that He does commit Himself to the ones who believe in Him and manifest their belief by worshipping Him and doing all they do with an aim for His glory because of His so great salvation.

So it is a very important question to be able to answer for ourselves – Does Jesus Believe in You? And while it is a very important question to have to answer, I don't believe that it's a terribly difficult question to answer. If you've seen the promise of Christ, believed the promise of Christ which has led to you embracing the promise of Christ in such a way that you've become a stranger and pilgrim in this world because you're committed to the One you love, the One who gave Himself for you – then you have good grounds for being able to affirm what Hymn writer affirms:

His forever, only His; Who the Lord and me shall part? Ah, with what a rest of bliss Christ can fill the loving heart! Heaven and earth may fade and flee, Firstborn light in gloom decline; But while God and I shall be, I am His, and He is mine.