

THEY PUT THEIR FAITH IN JESUS

John 11:45-57

Key Verse: 11:45

“Therefore many of the Jews who had come to visit Mary, and had seen what Jesus did, believed in him.”

Robert Moffat (1795-1883) was a missionary to Africa. He was father-in-law of Dr. David Livingstone. He and his wife Mary faithfully shared the gospel of Jesus with villagers in Botswana for 10 years, but with no visible fruit. There was not a single convert. So the mission board in England began to question their work. The couple felt pain but did not give up on their mission. One day a friend back home wrote to them to say that she wanted to send a gift for them and asked what they would like. Mary Moffat wrote back, asking for a communion set, believing that God would bless their ministry. God indeed blessed her faith. The Holy Spirit moved the hearts of six villagers and a new church was established. On the day of their first communion service, the gift from their friend finally arrived from England.

In today’s passage, we learn how important it is to live by faith in God. Faith opens our spiritual eyes to see the kingdom of God. Faith enables us to have hope in a hopeless situation. May God help us to be men and women of faith in this generation!

I. MANY BELIEVED IN JESUS (45)

Look at verse 45. *Therefore many of the Jews who had come to visit Mary, and had seen what Jesus did, believed in him.* Jesus raised the dead man Lazarus from his grave. Jesus wiped the tears from the eyes of his sisters, Martha and Mary. It was a wonderful work of God. It was yet another sign that revealed who Jesus is—the Son of God. But there were two groups of people who reacted to this miracle very differently. The first group put their faith in Jesus after they had seen what he did. The other group refused to believe in Jesus (46). Let’s think about the first group first.

In John’s gospel, the word “faith” or “believe” appears more than 80 times. It is one of the key words of the gospel as it is of the other gospels. As we learned in chapters 1-11, Jesus the good shepherd did many things to help his sheep to have faith in him. Why is faith so important? Faith opens our spiritual eyes to see God and his kingdom. By faith we come to know that God exists. By faith, we know that death is not the end of our life and that we will live with Jesus forever in heaven. John says that the main purpose of his gospel is to help us to believe in Jesus. John 20:30-31 read: *“Jesus performed many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.”*

Look at verse 45 again. *“Therefore many of the Jews who had come to visit Mary, and had seen what Jesus did, believed in him.”* Many people put their faith in Jesus after witnessing the raising of Lazarus. Jesus performed many other miraculous signs. He fed 5,000 hungry people with 5 loaves of bread and 2 fish. He opened the eyes

of a man born blind. The purpose of his miracles was much more than merely solving people's problems. Jesus wanted to plant faith in their hearts. Why? It was because they needed faith more than anything in the world, just as we need faith more than anything else in the world. Let us remember that Jesus wants us to have faith more than anything. When we face impossible situations in life, we ask God to work miracles for us. He often does, not only to solve our problems, but also to help us to believe.

So what exactly is faith? How would you answer the question? Let me tell you what faith is not, as some people tend to have misconceptions about faith. Faith is not vague optimism that things will somehow turn out fine. Faith is not positive thinking, although we become positive when we have faith in God. Faith is not a warm, fuzzy feeling that someone upstairs is looking out for us. Faith is more than emotion; it is a decision. Hebrews 11:1 defines faith this way: "Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see." Referring to this verse, John Wesley said that faith is "the power to see into the world of spirits, into things invisible and eternal. It is the power to understand those things which are not perceived by worldly senses." St. Augustine said, "Faith is to believe what we do not see, and the reward of faith is to see what we believe." Faith is an abstract noun but its effect on our lives is anything but abstract. Faith helps us to overcome the world. Faith enables us to have hope in a hopeless situation.

Let us think about what Jesus wants us to believe by reviewing some of the highlights of his work in John's gospel we studied so far. First of all, Jesus helped them to believe **who he is**. Faith is to believe in Jesus as the Son of God, the Messiah and the Savior of the world. The first miracle of Jesus was at a wedding at Cana in Galilee. Jesus turned wash water into first class wine. Everyone enjoyed the excellent wine. But the miracle signified much more than just supplying excellent drinks for the wedding guests. John 2:11 says, "*What Jesus did here in Cana of Galilee was the first of the signs through which he revealed his glory; and his disciples believed in him.*" It was a sign to help them to believe in Jesus as the Son of God who came to reveal his glory and to transform sinful people into God's children.

In John 9, we learned how Jesus opened the eyes of a man who had been born blind. The Jewish leaders were unhappy that Jesus did something that they could not do. They pressured the man to deny the miracle in his life. But the man refused to tell a lie. He told them, "I don't know much. But one thing I do know. I was blind, but now I see." He held on to the grace of Jesus. Still, he didn't know who Jesus was. He could see many things with his eyes for the first time in his life. But he could not see the Savior of the world. So Jesus helped him to believe in the Son of God by visiting him personally. Finally the man said, "Lord, I believe," and he worshiped Jesus (9:38). His spiritual eyes were opened this time and he believed in Jesus as the Lord! To have faith means to see Jesus as the Son of God and the Lord.

What else does Jesus want us to believe? Jesus wants us to believe that **he gives us eternal life**. There was a man named Nicodemus. He was a Pharisee and a member of the Jewish ruling council. He was rich and famous. But he wasn't happy. He had inner agony that people did not know about. One night, he visited Jesus hoping to experience a miracle to fill his empty heart. Jesus shocked him by telling him, "You must be born

again” (3:3). Nicodemus was a religious leader, but Jesus told him he was less than an infant when it came to the spiritual world. Jesus taught him a spiritual secret: “Flesh gives birth to flesh but the Spirit gives birth to spirit” (3:6). Jesus really wanted him to believe that there is a natural world and there is a spiritual world. Jesus helped him to open his eyes to see the kingdom of God. But Nicodemus was stubborn. He refused to accept the truth. Jesus still loved him and gave him the wonderful promise: *“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life”* (3:16). Jesus wanted to plant faith in him so that he might not perish but have eternal life. Later, Nicodemus became a disciple of Jesus by believing that he is the Son of God (7:50; 19:39). Whoever believes in Jesus shall not perish but have eternal life. Faith opens our eyes to see this spiritual reality.

There was a Samaritan woman who lusted after men’s love. She had had five husbands and was now living with a boyfriend. None of the men she had could satisfy her sinful desire for very long. After so many divorces, disappointments and heartaches, this woman was bitter and worn out. But Jesus approached her humbly by asking a favor, “Will you give me a drink?” (4:7) Jesus understood her agony and talked to her with a gentle voice. Most of all, Jesus offered her something very wonderful: “... whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life” (4:13-14). Jesus really wanted to believe in him so that she might have eternal life. This woman used to be a pariah in her village. But a dramatic change took place in her when she met Jesus personally. She went to her townspeople whom she used to avoid and testified, “Come, see a man who told me everything I ever did. Could this be the Messiah?” (4:29) Her village people came to know Christ through her testimony. She became an evangelist.

In Jesus’ time, people in Israel were suffering from many social and economic hardships under the oppression of the Roman Empire. It seemed that what they needed the most from the Messiah was some financial assistance and political freedom. But the main focus of Jesus’ preaching was eternal life in the kingdom of God. He said in John 10:28, “I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one will snatch them out of my hand.” Faith is to believe that Jesus gives us eternal life.

Jesus also wants us to have **faith that believes in his promises—the word of God**. Jesus says in John 5:24: “Very truly I tell you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be judged but has crossed over from death to life.” One day a royal official’s son lay sick at Capernaum and was dying. When the official heard that Jesus had arrived in Cana, he ran 20 miles to come to see Jesus. Moved by his shepherd’s heart and faith, Jesus told him, “You may go. Your son will live.” John 4:50 says that the man “took Jesus at his word and departed.” Jesus didn’t give him anything, not even some pills made with mud. He simply said, “You may go. Your son will live.” But the official did not complain. He didn’t say, “Talk is cheap. Show me something.” Instead, he took Jesus at his word and went. When he did so, he discovered that his son was healed at the exact time Jesus said, “Your son will live.” So he and all his household believed. The word of Christ is no ordinary word. It is the word of God. It is the word of life. Jesus wants us to put our faith in his word of promise. The royal official made a decision to believe in Jesus’ words. Faith requires a decision. To believe in God is to make a decision to believe in his words.

Abraham was a 75 year-old man without much hope when he made a decision to believe in God. God gave him a promise that he would bless him with many descendants, enough to make a nation, even though the reality was that his wife was too old to have a baby. Abraham's desire was very ordinary. He really wanted a son. But God told him, "You will be a blessing and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you" (Ge 12:2-3). By faith Abraham obeyed God's direction to leave his home to go to an unknown place. Obedience is evidence of one's faith in God. A.W. Tozer said, "The Bible recognizes no faith that does not lead to obedience, nor does it recognize any obedience that does not spring from faith. The two are opposite sides of the same coin."

Finally, after God's patient training for 25 years, Abraham's faith matured. He became an ancestor of faith. He understood what God meant when he said he would make him a blessing to all peoples on earth. His faith also helped him to have hope in the kingdom of God. Hebrews 11:9-10 read, "*By faith he made his home in the promised land like a stranger in a foreign country; he lived in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise. For he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God.*" Abraham was looking forward to "the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God." He had been an ordinary man with ordinary dream. But his faith in God opened his spiritual eyes to see the coming kingdom of God. Faith in God makes a big difference in our perspective on life here and beyond.

II. SOME REFUSED TO BELIEVE IN JESUS (46-57)

Look at verse 46. "*But some of them went to the Pharisees and told them what Jesus had done.*" These people witnessed the same miracle of Jesus. But their response was totally different. They refused to put their faith in Jesus. Instead, they went to the Pharisees and told them what Jesus had done. How did the Jewish leaders react to the report? They called an emergency session of the Sanhedrin to talk about how to deal with Jesus. They asked, "What are we accomplishing? Here is this man performing many signs. If we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him, and then the Romans will come and take away both our temple and our nation" (47-48). They were alarmed by the turn of events. They voiced their fear: "This man is performing amazing miracles. If we let him continue to do this, everyone is going to believe in him. Then what will happen to our positions as religious leaders?" There was panic in their voice. Jesus worked night and day to help people to believe. But the only concern the religious leaders had was their own positions. They were blinded by their desires to hold on to their political power.

Look at verses 49-50. *Then one of them, named Caiaphas, who was high priest that year, spoke up, "You know nothing at all! You do not realize that it is better for you that one man die for the people than that the whole nation perish."* Caiaphas was high priest. He was also a Sadducee. The Sadducees came from the leading families of the nation--the priests, merchants, and aristocrats. They held privileged positions and managed to get along well with the Roman rulers. And they denied anything that would jeopardize their privileges in this world. They denied resurrection, judgment, heaven and hell, and angels and spirits. Caiaphas told the Sanhedrin, "You know nothing at all."

Then he presented a simple and practical solution to the “Jesus problem”. He said, "Get rid of him. Problem solved. Period." He had the philosophy of the Mafia. We shudder, just thinking about such a ruthless man sitting on the seat of high priest, a position to serve as a shepherd for his people.

Caiaphas was an unprincipled leader. He said that, for expediency, one man Jesus should be sacrificed for the sake of the Jewish nation. He suggested that Jesus become a scapegoat or fall guy. He said it purely out of his political mind. But what he said had a spiritual meaning that he himself never realized. Look at verses 51-52. *He did not say this on his own, but as high priest that year he prophesied that Jesus would die for the Jewish nation, and not only for that nation but also for the scattered children of God, to bring them together and make them one.* The apostle John says that God used Caiaphas as his mouthpiece to declare something truly wonderful, that is, Jesus would die as the Lamb of God to save not only the Jews but also all peoples of the world. It was to prophesy that Jesus would die to save the sinful world. Before the Jewish leaders arrested Jesus, before the mob shouted “Crucify him,” and before Pontus Pilate sentenced him to death, God himself declared that his Son would die to save the sinful world, including you and me. God’s love for us is amazing!

Verses 54-57 describe the behavior of people who had no faith in God. When their big holiday season approached, many went up to Jerusalem. And what was on their minds? This is what verse 56 says: *They kept looking for Jesus, and as they stood in the temple courts they asked one another, “What do you think? Isn’t he coming to the festival at all?”* They wanted to see more exciting confrontations between Jesus and their religious leaders. They knew that their leaders were obsessed with arresting Jesus and killing him. So they were looking for Jesus, not to believe in him, but to report his presence to the Jewish leaders (57). These people did not make a decision of faith to believe in the Lord. They had no personal commitment to Jesus. So they behaved like herds of zebras that run together for their survival. We learn here that if don’t live by faith in God everyday, it is easy for us to follow our own instinct or the trend of this world, like dead fish flowing down a stream. We must come to the word of God, believe in his promises, and live a life that is full of hope in the kingdom of God.

In today’s passage, we learn that Jesus wants us to have faith in God. Faith in God changes everything in our lives. Above all, when we believe in Jesus, he gives us eternal life in the kingdom of God. May God help us to be men and women of faith in this generation!