

Text: John 16:29-31

Title: "Do you believe?"

Time: 6/11/2023 am

Place: NBBC

Introduction: Imagine yourself as the Apostle John, one of the Twelve on the night of the crucifixion of Christ in this upper room. It has been an intense week. Against the better judgment of some of you, Jesus has led your group back to Jerusalem. It has been a return of public and dangerous controversy: first the triumphant entry and then the cleansing of the temple. You are surprised you were not arrested. These, along with the warnings of your young Leader, have been harbingers of trouble. He even said that courageous Peter would deny Him. "Where does that leave me?", you wonder. For now, it is comforting to recline at table next to your confident Lord.

Early in the evening, Jesus had washed your feet. He explained to your best friend, Peter, that he only needed a foot-washing and not a bath because the rest of him is clean. It encouraged you to hear that, because you knew that what he said about Peter was true of you too. But then Jesus strangely qualified what He said to Peter about the group being clean: "But not all of you." One of them would betray Him. Whatever encouragement you felt from the foot-washing quickly dissipated as Peter egged you on to find out from the Lord who the betrayer would be. Then Judas Iscariot was dismissed. You begin to put two and two together, not sure what's next.

During the meal Jesus had spoken of the unleavened bread of the Passover celebration as though it were His body, which would be broken for you. He took the cup after supper, and He spoke of His blood as though it were the blood of the Passover lamb. And as the supper comes to its end, Jesus takes up the discourse you would one day put in your Gospel under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit as Scripture. He said He was leaving, but also that another Helper was coming. He began

His discourse encouraging you to believe: "Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in Me." He said many other encouraging things, and then He asked a question that pierced into your heart here at the end of the discourse: "Do ye now believe?" (16:31). He asked you that because He knew that your faith was about to be tested.

One of the great purposes of the Gospel of John is to remember that question and help his readers give an answer. Just like Jesus asked John that question many years ago, John's Gospel poses the same question to you and me this morning: "Do you now believe?" Yes or no? You either do or you do not.

How we answer that question is very important to John as he writes his Gospel. He uses the verb meaning *to believe* some 109 times in his Gospel. John writes his Gospel so that you and I can answer Jesus with "Yes, I am believing now": "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" (John 20:31).

This morning, we are going to receive John's help. We need his help to answer Jesus's question, "Do you now believe?" with "Yes Lord; I now believe." Our eternal destiny depends on that answer and his help. John tells us to believe three things.

I. Believe in what is real and true; not in what is imaginary and false (16:27, Jesus commends: "ye have believed" the real and true, not the imaginary and false).

Illustration: We all know the disappointment that comes from believing in something that is imaginary and false. It may be something simple, like the time in grade school I believed that I had a good grip on my French Horn as our band walked up on the stage to perform, only to find out that I had been clinging tightly to my tuning slide which slid out, allowing

my horn to go crashing into some of the music stands. My belief in my grip on my horn was imaginary and false.

Application: More tragically, we live in a world that sanctions things as real and true simply because they are believed. That gets the equation backwards. Something must be real and true before we believe in it, not because we believe in it. Today, a real and truly heterosexual person is treated like a homosexual person because he believes he is homosexual. Following the same corrupt logic, a real man is treated like a woman athlete because he believes he is a woman athlete.

Our world believed that the covid vaccination program was "safe and effective," in spite of the fact that the company making that claim wanted to seal the real documentation on that question for 75 years. Now we are praying for many vaccine injured people, who believed in a slogan that was false.

When Jesus asks us "Do you now believe?", it is His concern that we believe what is real and true, not what is imaginary and false. And when the Gospel of John points to what is real and true, it points to Jesus Christ in passages like 3:14-18:

"And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up: that whosoever believeth **in Him** should not perish, but have eternal life. 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. For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world **through Him** might be saved. He that believeth **on Him** is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God."

In a world of the imaginary and false, Jesus is real and true. We can believe in Him. John is clear in that last verse that to believe in Jesus is to believe in His name, or to believe in His

true identity as God's Son sent into the world to die and save us from our sins.

John 1:12, "But as many as received Him [the Word, Jesus], to them gave He power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on His name."

To believe in Jesus is to believe in His name, His true identity. This Gospel identifies Jesus as the Word who created all things, as the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world, as the Son of God and the Son of Man, as the promised Messiah, the Good Shepherd, the Door, the Resurrection and the Life, the I AM, the Way, the Truth, the Life, and finally in the words of Thomas who doubted no more: "My Lord and My God" (20:28). He is the Savior sent from God.

John 5:24, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth My word, and believeth on Him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life."

Those who believe that Jesus came from God also believe His word, for He claimed these things to be true of Himself.

John 2:22, "When therefore He was raised from the dead His disciples remembered that He had said this, and they believed the Scripture and the word that Jesus had spoken."

To believe the word of Christ as real and true, not imaginary and false, is to believe what the Scripture teaches.

John 5:46-47, "For had ye believed Moses, ye would have believed Me; for he wrote of Me. But if ye believe not his writings, how shall ye believe My words?"

To believe in Him is to believe in His name or identity. To believe in His name is to believe that He was sent from God to

save us. To believe that He was sent from God is to believe in His claims. And to believe in His claims is to believe what the Bible says about Him.

Hearing all of this that is real and true, not imaginary and false, the question comes to us this morning, "Do you now believe?" What is your answer? Is Jesus real and true or imaginary and false? What about His name, His identity, His words, and the Scripture? Are they real and true or imaginary and false? According to John, we believe what is real and true when we believe in Jesus. Do you now believe?

II. Believe God's witnesses, not man's lies (16:32-33, "ye shall be scattered" because many would believe man's lies).

Application: John's Gospel is clear that in order for us to believe what is real and true, we must be told by God's witnesses, and if we have been duped into believing what is imaginary and false, it is because we have believed the lies of men.

Francis Shaeffer gave a great illustration about the way God uses credible witnesses to let us know what is real and true:

"Supposing we were climbing in the Alps and were very high on the bare rock and suddenly the fog shuts down. The guide turns to us and says that the ice is forming and that there is no hope and that before morning we will all freeze to death here on the shoulder of the mountain. Simply to keep warm, the guide keeps us moving in the dense fog further out on the shoulder until none of us have any idea where we are. After an hour or so, someone says to the guide: 'Supposing I drop and hit a ledge ten feet down in the fog. What would happen then?' The guide would say that you might make it till the morning and thus live. So, with absolutely no knowledge or any reason to support this action, one of the group hangs and drops into the fog. This would be one kind of faith, a leap of faith [i.e., belief without credible witnesses].

“Supposing, however, after we have worked out on the shoulder in the midst of the fog and the growing ice on the rock, we had stopped and we heard a voice and the voice said: ‘You cannot see me, but I know exactly where you are from your voices. I am on another ridge. I have lived in these mountains man and boy for over sixty years and I know every foot of them. I assure you that ten feet below you there is a ledge. If you hang and drop, you can make it through the night and I will get you in the morning.’

“I would not hang and drop at once, but would ask questions to try and ascertain if the man knew what he was talking about and if he was not my enemy. In the Alps for example, I would ask him his name. If the name he gave me was the name of a family from that part of the mountains, it would count a great deal to me. In the Swiss Alps there are certain family names that indicate mountain families of that area. For example, in the area of the Alps where I live, such a name would be that of Avanthey. In my desperate situation, even though time would be running out, I would ask him what to me would be the sufficient questions, and when I became convinced by his answers, then I would hang and drop.” [Francis A. Schaeffer, *He Is There and He Is Not Silent* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1975), pp. 124-125.]

Just like that credible voice of help in the Alps, the Gospel of John mentions important credible witnesses from God whom He expects us to examine with our questions and then believe. We have already mentioned the witness of Jesus’s own words and that of the Scripture, but there are more:

- The message of God’s human witnesses, like John the Baptist (1:7), the Samaritan woman (4:39), the nobleman whose son was healed (4:35), and Jesus’s disciples (17:20, “Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word”). This is the witness that reaches you and me this morning.

- The unity of Jesus's disciples (17:21, "That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me").
- The miracles or signs that Jesus performed (1:50).
- The greatest miracle of all – the empty tomb (20:8, "Then went in also that other disciple, which came first to the sepulchre, and he saw, and believed").

Do you now believe God's witnesses rather than man's lies?
Do you believe what is real and true, not imaginary and false?

III. Believe that you can be saved, that you need not stay lost (16:33, "in Me ye might have peace").

Illustration: Who would believe, looking at a caterpillar, that it could become a Monarch butterfly? Who would believe, looking at the snow piles of winter, that our yards would be full of springtime flowers again. Who would believe that a seed of corn, falling into the ground and dying, would grow into a plant carrying multiple ears of corn? You and I would because we have seen it happen.

Application: Who would believe that a lost sinner like you and I could become a forgiven and cleansed child of God? John would. He had seen it happen, and He has much to say about God's power to save the one who says, "Yes Lord, I believe." Here is what he says God can do for the believer:

- Give him immediate possession of eternal life (3:16).
- End his condemnation before a holy God (3:18).
- Put God's Word abiding within (5:38).
- Resurrect him on the last day (6:40).
- Cause him to know that Jesus is the Holy One (6:69).
- Empower Him to be a witness by the Holy Spirit (7:38-39).
- Motivate him to worship Christ as Lord (9:38).
- Teach him to know personally the Father in the Son and the Son in the Father (10:38).

- Let him see the glory of God (11:40).
- Free him from darkness (12:46).
- Enable him to do what Jesus did, and to do even greater things through prayer (14:12).
- Make him to be loved by the Father (16:27).

Do you now believe? If so, all these blessings have happened to you. Believe that you can be saved, that you no longer need to be lost in your sins.

Conclusion: Bishop Handley Moule wrote an article for *The Fundamentals* that illustrated the power of believing this way: “When lately the dam of the Nile was completed, with all its giant sluices [gates], there needed but the touch of a finger on an electric button to swing majestically open the gates of the barrier and so to let through the Nile in all its mass and might. There was the simplest possible contact. But it was contact with forces and appliances adequate to control or liberate at pleasure the great river” (3.150). Does the river of God’s salvation blessings flow freely through you? Do you now believe?

“A man came—I think it was actually in Philadelphia—on one occasion to the great George Whitefield and asked if he might print his sermons. Whitefield gave this reply; he said, ‘Well, I have no inherent objection, if you like, but you will never be able to put on the printed page the lightning and the thunder.’ That is the distinction—the sermon, and the ‘lightning and the thunder.’ To Whitefield this was of very great importance, and it should be of very great importance to all preachers, as I hope to show. You can put the sermon into print, but not the lightning and the thunder. That comes into the act of preaching and cannot be conveyed by cold print. Indeed it almost baffles the descriptive powers of the best reporters.”

—David Martin Lloyd-Jones,

Preachers and Preaching