

Introduction

Have you ever come across someone who says that they would believe in God if they saw a miracle? And do you think that they really would? And what if they did? I put it to you that their ongoing faith would almost certainly be dependent on continuing miracles, and not real faith at all. Perhaps I need to clarify that point a little, in that many people do come to faith as a result of seeing a miracle, but very rarely if they are demanding a miracle in the first place as a basis for belief.

Furthermore, not only are miracles a doubtful basis for faith, but even the miracles that Jesus personally performed while here on earth, were not sufficient to make many of the Jews believe. Read Vs37 "Even after Jesus had done all these miraculous signs in their presence, they still would not believe in him."

There are at least 35 recorded miracle of Jesus (some of those multiple miracles) in the gospels and in John's Gospel we have already seen some phenomenal ones.

In John 4 Jesus healed the Royal Official's when He was some 30-35kms away

In John 5 Jesus healed a man who had been an invalid for 38 years

In John 6 we have the record of Jesus feeding 5000 men, plus women and children with just 5 small loaves and 2 fish

In John 9 he gave sight to a man who had been blind since birth

In John 11 Jesus raised Lazarus to life after he had been in the tomb for 4 days

Throughout Jesus' ministry the Jews had often asked Jesus to produce some miraculous sign to prove His authority. Read John 2:18 and John 6:29-30 Jesus wanted genuine belief, the Jews wanted miracles.

But when Jesus did perform spectacular miracles, the Jews were so caught up in criticism and jealousy that they were often oblivious to these miracles. When the man born blind was given his sight there was no rejoicing, but only criticism for healing on the Sabbath, and when Lazarus was raised from the dead, the Jewish leaders were filled with jealousy and wanted to kill both Jesus & Lazarus (John 11:47-48a; 12:10-11)

Unbelief

Vs37-41

As we read on in John chapter 12 we discover the this unbelief was prophesied by the Old Testament prophet, Isaiah, and furthermore that their continued unbelief leads to hearts so hard that it becomes impossible to believe, Read Vs38-41. There is a limit to the opportunities that a person has to believe in God. That of course is not to say that God does not want people to believe in Him. The third chapter of Peter's 2nd epistle makes in quite clear that God wants everyone to come to faith in Him Vs9 "The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance."

But continual unbelief does lead to a heart so hard that repentance becomes nigh on impossible. The story of the Exodus, with Pharaoh's heart becoming harder and harder is a prime example, and that together with this passage this morning serves as a great warning for everyone.

The rest of the chapter looks at superficial belief, real belief and the results of rejecting or believing in Jesus, to which we need to pay careful attention.

Superficial Belief

Vs42-43

What we have here is people, even from among the Jewish leaders, who actually believed in Jesus, but were afraid to show their colours, afraid to acknowledge before others that they believed in Jesus because, 1. they were afraid of the Pharisees, and 2. they loved the praise of men more than praise from God. That's a real challenge!

Remember the story of the healing of the man blind from birth. When his parents were asked how could he now see? they refused to answer and passed the buck because they were afraid of the Jews. See also John 7:12-13

Proverbs 29:25 says "Fear of man will prove to be a snare, but whoever trusts in the LORD is kept safe." Fear and trust don't go together, but fear of man, and wanting to please people go hand in hand. Is your main concern to be popular with your friends and workmates, whether they are Christian or not, or is your primary concern to please God by living His way in every aspect of your life, with total trust in Him?

Real Belief

Vs44-47

That brings us to our third point; real belief, which has three aspects set out for us:

Believing in Jesus and the Father who sent Him, accepting Jesus as the Light, and accepting Jesus' word

The Jews prided themselves in their belief in God, but they rejected Jesus. He made it quite clear to them, that in rejecting Him, they were rejecting His Father God. John 6:45 "It is written in the Prophets: 'They will all be taught by God.' Everyone who listens to the Father and learns from him comes to me." John 8:42 Jesus said to them, "If God were your Father, you would love me, for I came from God and now am here. I have not come on my own; but he sent me." To believe in Jesus, is to believe in God.

Real belief also means accepting Jesus as the light of the world, following His guidance & enlightenment, responding to his exposure of sin and living in the purity of that light.

Thirdly, real belief means accepting Jesus word in everything he says, not choosing the bits that suit us, but everything. Reread Vs49-50. At the end of the sermon on the mount Jesus says this: (Matthew 7:24-27) "Therefore everyone who **hears these words of mine and puts them into practice** is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock. But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash."

There are many people today who claim to believe in God, but when it comes to the crunch, rules, regulations and rituals of their particular religion, or even their own opinions are more important to them than the words of Jesus, as revealed in the Bible.

Conclusion

We have looked at three levels of belief this morning

1. Unbelief - so hardened that even the miracles of Jesus could not move it.

2. Superficial belief - hidden because of the fear of man and the desire for reputation.
3. Real belief - belief in God the Father and the Son, belief in Jesus as the Light of the World, and acceptance of all that Jesus says and responding to it.

Finally in this passage there are two results set out according to our response -

1. Condemnation Vs 48 "There is a judge for the one who rejects me and does not accept my words; that very word which I spoke will condemn him at the last day." See also John 3:18; 3:36; 5:24. Many have objected that a God of love would not send people to hell, but the fact is, He doesn't send them to hell, but He allows them that choice of accepting or rejecting His great love and salvation.
2. Eternal life for those who believe Vs 50 See also 1 John 5:11-12