

What is Saving Faith
John 2:23-25, Part One

After the events recorded in verses 12-20, Jesus, according to the first part of verse 23, “was in Jerusalem at the passover, in the feast *day*.” In other words, Jesus remained in Jerusalem for Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread that immediately followed. During that time, John records in verse 23, “many believed in his name.” Now we know from verse 24 that this belief was not genuine. They claimed to believe in Jesus, but Jesus knew that it was only mere intellectual assent – it was not genuine saving faith.

Whoever these people were, they were not true believers. They believed only with their mind, not with their heart. They were convinced in their understanding, but not in their hearts. They had an intellectual belief, not true saving faith. They had the same kind of belief that James wrote of. James said, “Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well: the devils also believe, and tremble” (James 2:19). The demons have a belief, but that belief is not a saving belief. The belief that they have does not change them. They do not abandon the kingdom of darkness for the Kingdom of God. Their belief makes them tremble. They shudder in fear, but they are never changed. Their belief, like the belief of those in our text, is an intellectual belief only.

Verse 23 says, “many believed in his name, when they saw the miracles which he did.” They believed when they saw the miracles. What miracles these were are not recorded by John, or by any other gospel writer. These miracles are the miracles that John writes about in chapter 21 and verse 25: “And there are also many other things which Jesus did, the which, if they should be written every one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that should be written.”

However, being surprised at the miracles Jesus did, and upon the evidence of these extraordinary works, there were many that concluded He must be of God. And among these, it seems from chapter 3, was Nicodemus and some of his colleagues.

But what makes all of this amazing is verse 24. Before you read verse 24, I want you to find two words in verse 23. The two words are “many believed.” Now read the first part of verse 24 with these two words in mind: “many believed,” “But Jesus did not commit himself unto them.” That’s amazing. We hear this all of the time: Just believe in Jesus and all will be okay. That is not always true. Everyone’s belief is not genuine. Though they believed in Jesus, Jesus did not believe in them. He knew that their faith was not real. They believed in Him for the wrong reason. It was not a matter of sin with them. They were not conscious of their sin; they were only amazed at His miracles.

One writer said, “Jesus regarded all belief in Him as superficial which does not have as its most essential elements the consciousness of the need for forgiveness and the conviction that He alone is the Mediator of that forgiveness.”

These people in John 2 were not concerned about their guilt of sin, and if one is not concerned about their guilt over sinning against a Holy God, Jesus will “not commit himself unto them.” It is that simple. Our generation is all concerned about so called miracles. They are concerned about life now, not life after the now. Our hearts should not be pleading for miracles, but our hearts should be pleading for the salvation of the lost. The last part of verse 24 says Jesus did not commit Himself unto these people “because he knew all men.” He knew what was in their heart. Then John further informs in verse 25, “And needed not that any should testify of man: for he knew what was in man.”

Jesus knows the true state of every person. He knows their heart perfectly. In John 1:47, He saw in Nathanael the heart of an honest, true seeker. In Nathanael He saw a person that understood who he was, and who God was. But in our text He did not see a true Nathanael – He did not see a true seeker. He saw these people as being superficial in their faith. They were only interested in the miracles. They were not concerned about their relationship with God, whether it was genuine or not. They were hanging around because of the miracles and that was all – and Jesus knew this. Genuine saving faith goes far beyond the miracles. Genuine saving faith demands an honest appeal to God for forgiveness of sin, and a wholehearted commitment to the Lordship of Jesus Christ. God will settle for nothing short of this. In these verses our Lord’s omniscience is clearly stated. He had no need for people to express their thoughts and feeling. He could read them infallibly without any of that. Jesus was God in flesh, and He therefore had perfect knowledge of the inner nature of man. He could, with perfect accuracy, discern the thoughts and intents of the hearts of men.

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