

Jesus: Wise & Discerning
John 2:23-25
The Gospel According to John
Series #11

Introduction: Take your Bible and join me in John chapter 2, the Gospel of John, chapter 2.

We turn our attention now to consider the greatness and the goodness of Jesus the Christ. Most recently in John's Gospel we have seen his interaction with the wedding feast where he performed his first sign of turning water into wine. His disciples believed on him there, but the masses missed it. The wedding crowd missed the significance of Jesus' work. We saw that he went from the "out of the way" town of Cana in Galilee to Capernaum and eventually to Jerusalem for the feast of the Passover. This was the largest gathering of Jewish people in one place from all over the then known world. And it was their highest and holiest feast of them all. It was where they celebrated and remembered the work of God to free them from slavery in Egypt. And the Jewish celebration was filled with significance – small things that point to bigger and more important things. In fact, to this day, the Jewish celebration of the Passover – known as the Seder – is full of small signs that point to eternal truths about God and His promises which are fulfilled in Jesus. Well, it was here in Jerusalem at the midst of their largest public gathering for worship that Jesus confronts their false worship in a bold way. He proves that he is not running for political office or pining for the approval of the crowds. He overturns the money changers tables and drives out the herds of animals that were making the Temple a marketplace rather than a house of worship. And as we saw last week – this act was pointing to greater and deeper truths about his true identity. He was not just some prophet from Galilee – he was God in the flesh with authority to judge mankind's worship. And when he was challenged about what authority he had to do what he had done, he promised them a future sign – the greatest of his signs – his death at their hands and his resurrection from the grave.

But once again, the bold actions and words of Jesus are met with unbelief and opposition. But then the atmosphere changes a bit in verses 23-25. The feast of the Passover is followed by a weeklong feast known as the feast of unleavened bread – which John conflates here and calls it all the Passover Feast. And John tells us that Jesus was performing many signs during this weeklong Feast, and the response of the crowd has seemingly changed. They are responding to his miraculous signs and so they are excited about his ministry and many are believing in his name. But Jesus knows better. He knows what is really going on in their hearts, and for this reason he doesn't entrust himself to them.

There are two clear points in this short text and they both hinge upon that Greek word *pisteuo* – or to believe – to have faith. We are told that the crowd believed. And we are told that Jesus did not entrust himself to them – which is the same Greek word – he did not believe in them – he did not have faith in their faith. So, we have the belief of the crowd and the belief of Jesus put in

contrast here in this text. And we learn that the crowd's belief was a false belief, and we learn that Jesus had true knowledge of their hearts which is why he didn't believe in their belief. Let's read these few verses, and I am going to read down through chapter 3 and verse 3 because the link with the next section is so important. *Read 2:23-3:3.*

Popularity with the crowd is a powerful drug. Once a man or woman tastes the power and influence and acclaim of popularity they are often ruined. They learn quickly that if they give the people what they want they will be eulogized as one of the greatest of leaders. And how easy it would have been for Jesus to give into that powerful temptation. But he is no ordinary man to be so easily swayed by big crowds cheering his praise. Jesus is God in the flesh. He proved it when he made water into wine. He proclaimed it when he turned over tables and condemned false worship in the Temple. He prophesied it when he told them to destroy the temple of his flesh and he would raise it again in three days. And here he displays it by how he responds to the crowd who profess belief in his name.

I. The False Belief of the Crowd – vs. 23

- a. Consider the crowd with me for a minute. We are told in verse 23 that many believed in his name when they saw the signs he was doing. This seems, at face value, like it is a good statement. This is why John is writing this account of Jesus' life. He tells us in 20:31 that he has written these things so that we might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing we may have life in his name. So, this is a good thing right – that the crowds are believing in the name of Jesus?
- b. This is the same phrase that John used in 1:12. He was telling us that Jesus came to his own and even his own people did not receive him. And then he says, “but to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God.” So, this believing in Jesus' name is equated with a true receiving of Jesus that is true of all those who are his actual children – those who are born – not of the will of man, nor of the will of the flesh, and not of blood – but are born of God.
- c. In 3:18 – that classic section about God's love for the world – the text says – “Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God.” So, this again equates the idea of believing in his name with saving faith – they are not condemned because they believe in his name. This obviously means much more than just believing in the facts associated with a name – or agreeing with what you might think of when you say someone's name. The Jewish mind of the 1st Century put quite a bit more meaning into the idea of someone's name than we do today. A name is simply a name for us. It can be changed and altered – but the real us is not dependent upon our name. But in the Jewish mind the name given at birth was of great significance. It represented all that this person is in relationship to their family and their heritage, as well as all that they were as a person themselves. For the name of Jesus, it meant that they were believing everything being associated with him. And in the context of this visit to

Jerusalem at Passover, that was simply that he was the Jews' Messiah. So, to believe in his name meant to believe that he was the one who had been promised from God in the Old Testament. So, what exactly is the problem here? Verse 24 tells us that Jesus did not have faith in their faith – so what is wrong with their faith?

- d. Well, in essence, it is a false faith because it is a faith in a Messiah of their own understanding and their own making. They are believing in the name of Jesus because they see him performing these great signs – and by the way, we don't know what those specifically are during his time in Jerusalem, but they are obviously many miraculous signs. And when they see those signs they are led to believe in this Jesus of Nazareth as the Messiah they have been expecting. But did you notice that the basis of that belief is the miraculous works he is doing? And this is a faulty foundation upon which to build the towering edifice of faith. And Jesus is perceptive enough to know the difference between true faith and false faith – one built on a good and right foundation, and one built on sinking sand.
- e. You could easily argue that this is one of the main themes of John's gospel – the confrontation by Jesus of false faith. His interactions with different people in the Gospel of John put on his various approaches to confront people with their false faith and to point them to true faith in him. In chapter 3 he will do that with Nicodemus. In chapter 4 it will be the woman at the well. In chapter 6 it will be the crowds looking for more miraculous provision. In chapters 8-10 it will be the religious leaders – the Jews. In chapter 18 it will be the false beliefs of the Sanhedrin and the Roman Governor and the crowds once again. And in every interaction, we will find Jesus clearly confronting their false beliefs, or their outright unbelief, and then teaching them what is necessary for true belief.
- f. In fact, let's look at one of those interactions – flip over to chapter 6 with me. In chapter 6, there is another Passover feast at hand, and so there is a large crowd on their way to Jerusalem for the feast. And Jesus is at his height of popularity here. Large crowds are looking for him all the time because of all the miracles he is doing for the sick. Then, this large crowd comes to Jesus on the shores of the sea of Galilee and Jesus feeds them miraculously with 5 barley loaves and 2 fish. This massive crowd of 5000 men plus their families was miraculously fed by Jesus. And so, look at the crowd's reaction in verses 14-15.
 - i. Verses 14-15 – They believed he was the Prophet promised of old, but their idea of the Prophet and what Jesus was there to do as the Prophet were not the same. So, Jesus withdrew from them.
 - ii. 25-27 – Jesus sends the disciples on the boat across the lake, and he walks on water and joins them in the middle of the night. The next day the crowd comes looking for Jesus once again and so he confronts them with the truth. Look at their interaction in verses 25-27.
 - iii. 41-51 – After Jesus confronts them with their false belief, he tells them in verse 35 that he is the bread of life and whoever comes to him shall never hunger or thirst again. Then in verses 41-51 we see Jesus' further explanation of what he meant.

- iv. 60-66 – Jesus knows that there are many among this crowd of disciples who did not have true belief. They were there for the signs and for the miraculous provision of bread – but they did not want the bread which was from Heaven.
- v. 67-69 – So, Jesus uses this moment to draw out the true faith of his disciples in contrast to the crowd. And notice the difference between the false and true faith. The false faith of the crowd was based upon signs and wonders that validated the crowd's own desires and opinions of what they wanted from a Messiah. But the true faith is based upon the words of the true Christ. The signs validated for the disciples that Jesus was the Christ, and this meant that his words were true – even if they were hard to receive.
- g. So, do you notice the difference between false and true faith. False faith is offended by the words of the Messiah when they don't match up with what they want. But true faith is further fueled by these same words because they are the words of eternal life. The object of true faith is the true Messiah who speaks these true words of eternal life – where else would they go.
- h. Back in chapter 2, Jesus knows that this is the kind of false faith that the crowd has. They see his miraculous signs and they have this knee-jerk reaction of belief. But he doesn't believe in their belief.

II. The True Knowledge of Jesus – vs. 24-25

- a. That's the point of verses 24-25, where we see the true knowledge of Jesus on display. Don't forget the scene here – there were many who were professing faith in Jesus' name as they saw him perform many miraculous signs. If Jesus were a modern-day evangelist type, he would be taking names and addresses and counting the numbers of professions to put in his next newsletter. But Jesus knew better. He is all-wise and discerning. He did not entrust himself to them – meaning that he did not believe in them and let their newfound belief in him set his agenda. He was not distracted by their popular response of affirmation. And later on, in his ministry he was not distracted by their rejection and turning away. Jesus knew who he was, and he knew his purpose and plan and mission – and no one's praise or rejection was going to derail his work. He was not about to entrust himself to man's fickle heart.
- b. This is true because Jesus knew all people and he needed no one to bear witness about man, for he himself knew what was in man. In chapter 1 we learned that John the Baptist had come to bear witness about the one who was to come after him – the true light. And then we learned that the Word was the one who was going to exegete the Father to us – to bear witness about him. But this verse says that Jesus did not need that favor returned. He does not need us to bear witness about ourselves to him because he already knows us – he knows what is in us – in our hearts. And this is a constant witness to us of his deity – that he truly is God in the flesh. To illustrate this, just think of all the things that this Gospel record tells us that Jesus knows that are evidence of his deity:

- i. *He knows Nathanael before he met him* - 1:48: Nathanael said to him, “How do you know me?” Jesus answered him, “Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you.”
 - ii. *He knows the woman at the well* - 4:17: The woman answered him, “I have no husband.” Jesus said to her, “You are right in saying, ‘I have no husband’; ¹⁸for you have had five husbands, and the one you now have is not your husband. What you have said is true.”
 - iii. *He knows what is absent in the Jews’ hearts* - 5:42: But I know that you do not have the love of God within you.
 - iv. *He knows that some following him do not truly believe* - 6:61, 64: But Jesus, knowing in himself that his disciples were grumbling about this, said to them . . . But there are some of you who do not believe.” (For Jesus knew from the beginning who those were who did not believe, and who it was who would betray him.)
 - v. *He knows when his hour had come* - 13:1: Now before the Feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart out of this world to the Father
 - vi. *He knows that Judas was going to betray him* - 13:11: For he knew who was to betray him; that was why he said, “Not all of you are clean.”
 - vii. *His disciples testify that he knows all things* - 16:30: Now we know that you know all things and do not need anyone to question you; this is why we believe that you came from God.”
 - viii. *In the Garden of Gethsemane he knows all that would happen to him in his death* - 18:4: Then Jesus, knowing all that would happen to him, came forward and said to them, “Whom do you seek?”
- c. This is why Jesus did not have faith in their faith. This is why he did not entrust himself to them. As truly God he knew what was in their hearts. He knew they just wanted a Messiah who would operate according to their own agenda, not a Messiah of God’s making. But Jesus was the Servant of the Lord as prophesied in Isaiah – not the servant of the crowd’s every whim and wish. Do you remember what Isaiah predicted about this servant?
- i. There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, and a branch from his roots shall bear fruit. ²And the Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him, the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord. ³And his delight shall be in the fear of the Lord. He shall not judge by what his eyes see, or decide disputes by what his ears hear, (Isa. 11:1-3)
- d. Certainly, this text in John 2 is prime evidence that he did not judge by what his eyes saw, for he knew the heart. And this is all evidence that He was truly God. But does this mean then that he was not truly or fully man? Is Jesus just kind of a man in appearance only, but in reality, he is just deity indwelling a human body for a time? And we have to be very careful here – we have to get this right! Jesus is one person with two natures – his divine nature and his human nature. And these

two natures are present in Jesus without confusion and without change and without division and without separation. He is one person with two natures – human and divine. This is how in John 10:33 the Jews will seek to stone Jesus for blasphemy because they completely understand him to be a man, but he is presenting himself as God. He did not look different than them – he was truly man. But he was completely different than them because he was truly God. His divine nature was not set aside through his coming to earth, but rather it was veiled behind the curtain of his flesh. Philippians 2 describes it as Jesus emptying himself – or making himself nothing through the incarnation so that he could be the servant of all. This does not mean that he emptied himself of his divine nature. This was not an emptying by subtraction – where he got rid of some aspect of himself. But rather this was an emptying by addition. By taking on human nature he veiled his deity as he took upon himself the form of a servant. He had all the prerogatives of divinity and all the power and majesty and might, but it was surrendered to the will of the Father so that he might be the Suffering Servant of the Lord.

- e. What we have in this text is a small but mighty evidence of the divine nature of Jesus. He saw mankind truly and rightly. Just like he saw through their outward forms of worship in verses 13-17, so here he sees through their professions of belief. He knows what is in man because he is God. And this sets the stage for the next interaction in chapter 3 with one man – Nicodemus. Look closely at verses 24-25 again. The words in verse 24 are plural – Jesus did not entrust himself to *them* – because he knew *all people*. But look at verse 25 – the words change to singular. And he needed no one to bear witness about *man*, for he himself knew what was in *man*. Both of those nouns have the article before them – so quite literally the verse says – he needed no one to bear witness about *the man*, for he himself knew what was in *the man*. And this is the link between Jesus' interaction with the crowd and his unique interaction with Nicodemus, which we will get to next week. But you remember that incident, don't you? Jesus gets this nighttime visitor who is considered to be *the* teacher in Israel – a man of the Pharisees. If Jesus plays this rightly, from a human perspective – this would be a massive ally within the governing body of Jerusalem. But Jesus knows Nicodemus better than Nicodemus knows himself. As God, Jesus knows that the heart of man is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked (Jer. 17:9), and he, the Lord, will search and test the thoughts of man, namely of Nicodemus in the verses to come. And what will he tell him? He will say, “Nicodemus – you need a total heart change – you must be born again. Nothing you are bringing will make you acceptable to God – you must be born again.”

Conclusion: So, what does all of this mean to you today? Well, preeminently – see Jesus high and lifted up. Stop and consider the greatness of the wisdom and discernment of our Lord. Ponder his great faithfulness in the face of popularity and opposition alike. And follow his lead. Don't let the cheerleader nor the naysayer stop you from being faithful to the Lord.

And then – evaluate the basis for your faith in the Lord. Our Lord Jesus sees and knows you perfectly and truly, but you don't always. What is the basis of your faith in Jesus? Do you believe in him for what he can do for you? Is he a Savior of your own making? Or is your faith like the faith of the disciples in verse 22? They saw the greatest sign of all – the resurrection of Jesus from the dead and this confirmed to them all the words of the Scripture and the words of Jesus to them about who he was. Do these signs of Jesus in the Gospel of John confirm to you that Jesus is who he said he was – the very Son of God? And when you hear his words and study the Scriptures about him – does that fuel your faith? Or are you like the crowd here – you like what Jesus does for you as long as he keeps his mouth shut and doesn't speak? True faith is fueled by the words of Jesus, and false faith is offended by the words of Jesus. Which marks your faith?

Matthew 7:21-23

Matthew 13:20-23