

Believing on Him

“Jesus answered and said unto them, This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent.”

—John 6:29

TO BELIEVE IN SOMETHING

or someone suggests a strong sense of faith, and the Apostle Paul has defined the meaning of faith in his letter to the Hebrews. We read, “Now faith is the substance [ground or confidence, *Marginal Translation*] of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.” (Heb. 11:1) The apostle then speaks further concerning the importance of having faith. He says, “Without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.”—vs. 6

We see this same principle exemplified in human relationships. If faith in one another is needed to have a genuine and lasting friendship among other human beings, how much more essential it is to have faith in God, especially if we expect to be pleasing to him and to enjoy the rich blessing of being his children. Abraham was called a friend of God simply because he believed in the promises that God had made to him. (Gen. 15:6) Throughout all the ages of the Divine plan, faith in God has opened

the door of Divine favor and to all of the blessings, honor, wisdom, and love that he has planned for his faithful people.

APPROACHING GOD

There is no other approach to enjoying a proper relationship with God except by faith and trust in him. All works of righteousness, apart from faith, are as “filthy rags” in his sight. (Isa. 64:6) Any attempt to cooperate in his plan which is not based upon full confidence in him and a belief that his will and way is best, is unacceptable. Our faith in him must be absolute, full, and complete. Whatever he reveals his will to be for us, even though it may lead to privation, hardship, suffering, or death, we must accept it. A faith that trusts God only when the sunshine of joy is brightening our lives is not the kind of faith that constitutes a true, blessed and lasting relationship with God.

Fundamental to atonement with God is to have a true and sincere belief in him. In our featured text, Jesus indicates this to be the sum total of everything that may properly be considered the ‘work of God.’ In this scripture, the test of true belief in God is shown to be the acceptance of Jesus, whom God had sent to be the Redeemer of the world. The thought is more easily seen when we remember that it was addressed to a people who considered themselves to be the elect of God in the earth, and the ones to whom God had committed his future work of blessing all nations and people.

The Israelites believed that Abraham was their father and that Moses was their lawgiver. They believed that the promises made to Abraham concerning

his “seed” was to have its fulfillment through them. (Gen. 22:17,18) They considered themselves to be God’s royal nation, his special people, and that the Messiah would exalt their nation to prominence in the earth. All other nations, in order to receive God’s promised blessings, would have to bow down to them. As Israel understood the matter, this was God’s program for the whole human family. These, they thought, were the works of God concerning them in the earth.

The Israelites also believed that they were qualified to be God’s servants through their keeping of the Law. They viewed their many ceremonies as being a part of the works of God. As a nation, they had never proved themselves faithful in keeping the Law, although they did make an outward show of obedience to the Law and its various ceremonies. Their lack of faith is displayed throughout the entire period of their national existence. It kept them in the wilderness for forty years after leaving Egypt, and prevented their entering into rest under the leadership of Joshua. It led to the loss of national independence in 606 B.C. and hindered them from accepting the Messiah when he came to them at his First Advent. They thought they were the true servants of God, and they could have been, but their lack of belief in Jesus hindered them from participation in his works.

ISRAEL’S REJECTION

Paul speaks of those who are “workers together” with God in his second letter to the Corinthian brethren. “We then, as workers together with him, beseech you also that ye receive not the grace of

God in vain.” (II Cor. 6:1) God will not use anyone in such an exalted work who does not have full faith, belief, and confidence in him. In our text (John 6:29), Jesus said, “This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent.” Unbelief was at the root of Israel’s most outstanding weakness. They believed that they were the nation to whom, and through whom, the Messiah of promise would come. They professed to be God’s coworkers in the earth; but their professions, claims, and ambitions were merely an empty theory unless they believed on Jesus—the true Messiah of blessing whom God had sent.

COWORKERS WITH GOD

Whether Jew or Gentile, no one can be a coworker with God except through Jesus. “To us there is but one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we in him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we by him.” (I Cor. 8:6) As further testimony to this, Paul said, “That in the dispensation of the fulness of times he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; even in him.” (Eph. 1:10) It is apparent that belief in Jesus is essential, both to salvation for ourselves, and as the basis of acceptable service to God. The entire plan of God and all of his works is the gathering of all mankind into Jesus through belief in him, a work which will not be complete until the close of the ‘dispensation of the fulness of times’ as Paul explained to the Ephesian brethren.

To believe on Jesus is much more far-reaching in its implications than many may have supposed. It

was so for the Jews at the time of his First Advent. They were looking for a Messiah who would exalt their nation to a position of glory among the other nations, hence they were not prepared to believe on the One who did not meet their expectations. The Prophet Isaiah wrote, "He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief: and we hid as it were our faces from him; he was despised, and we esteemed him not."—Isa. 53:3

After Jesus was raised from the dead, he was speaking to two of his disciples. "He said unto them, O fools, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken." (Luke 24:25) They had exulted over the promises of the Messiah's glory, but had not believed the prophetic record that depicted his suffering and death. The Jews were 'slow of heart' to believe that which was not pleasing to them. Throughout all the ages, this has constituted the greatest test of their genuine belief.

Abraham demonstrated his living faith in God by an obedience which caused him to leave his own people and his father's house. This was no alluring prospect for him to leave his home in Ur, and to start out on a long journey to a land of promise. "By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went." (Heb. 11:8) Had he not done this there would have been no evidence that he truly believed God.

All Israel would readily have believed on Jesus had he come in glory and in conquering power as they had expected, but because he was meek and

lowly, a friend of publicans and sinners, and a reprover of unrighteousness, they hid their faces from him. Those who did believe on him did so at great cost. They lost their standing among their fellows, and their names were cast out as evil. Their belief made it incumbent upon them to become witnesses for the despised Nazarene, not only in Judea but to the uttermost parts of the earth.

NO FAITH WITHOUT WORKS

James declares that “faith without works is dead.” (James 2:20) This is an evidence all along the lines of Christian discipleship. When Jesus said that the works of God were accomplished by believing on him, he did not mean that a mere profession of belief that he is the Messiah and Redeemer of the world constitutes all the works of God his followers are expected to perform. Jesus said many other things in explanation of Christian discipleship, including a life of sacrifice.

Jesus’ disciples believed on him. They had confidence that he was the Messiah, and visualized the glory of his kingdom. They wanted to be with him in that kingdom. The mother of two of them, ambitious for her sons, asked that one might sit on his right hand and the other on his left hand in the kingdom. “Jesus said unto them, Ye know not what ye ask: can ye drink of the cup that I drink of? and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?” (Mark 10:38) This proved to be the ultimate test of their belief, a test of willingness to suffer and to die with him.

To believe on Jesus in the full, absolute sense, is to believe that through him the entire plan of human

redemption and salvation is to be carried out. It is to accept his leadership by faithfully following in his steps. It is to recognize his headship in a body of which we are members controlled by his will. It is a willingness to obey his commands, to be guided by his principles, and to die as he died. It is to work for God as he worked, and to speak the things God gives us to speak even as Jesus did. It is our faithfulness along all of these lines that proves our sincere belief in Jesus, the One sent of God.

The real evidence of belief is our willingness to do God's will as expressed in and through Jesus, even when his will runs contrary to our own natural inclinations. It is not always easy to carry out God's will in our lives. We are instructed to love our enemies and to do good to those who despitefully use us and persecute us. Instructions like these may often run counter to the will of the flesh, but if we believe in Jesus, we will obey them, no matter what the cost may be to us.

A SEVERE TEST

When Jesus first sent his disciples into the ministry, these believers were given what has always appeared to the halfhearted Christian as very radical instructions. He instructed them thus, "I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, neither for the body, what ye shall put on." (Luke 12:22) Their willingness to obey these instructions was the practical test of their genuine belief in Jesus' leadership, and it was a severe test. The idea was contrary to human wisdom, and was basically unsound and foolhardy. So, too, was seen the course of Abraham when he left his own people

and his father's house. But, as with Abraham so with these disciples, their obedience to the instructions of the Lord was the proof of their sincere belief.

At the close of his ministry, the Master inquired of these faithful ones, "When I sent you without purse, and scrip, and shoes, lacked ye any thing? And they said, Nothing." (Luke 22:35) There is never any danger of lacking either temporal or spiritual blessings as long as we are faithful to the Lord's commands, for the promise is that "no good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly."—Ps. 84:11

Times have drastically changed and many of the circumstances of life are far different now than they were during Jesus' day. But the underlying principle of these instructions are basically the same, and obedience to that principle is still one of the severest tests of our faith. At the present time, the disciples of Jesus are also called to be his ambassadors and representatives. Their belief, leading up to their full consecration to do God's will, puts them on the side of God, of truth, and of righteousness. They are no longer the servants of self, but of God. Their approach to the entire problem of life has therefore been changed.

The chief concern of mankind in our world is to make a living. From early childhood, there is planning and working for home, food, and clothing. There is also planning for security in approaching old age. This is legitimate for the natural man, but belief in Christ, if it is genuine, changes the whole outlook and approach. The wholehearted believer notes the instructions of God's Word which reveals that his chief concern should be the doing of God's will. Yet

he recognizes that he needs food and clothing, and that his family does also, but the providing of these is now to him merely incidental, while the main purpose of his whole life is to do the will and work of God.

The true believer finds himself at odds with the world, but his true belief leaves him no choice. The apostle says, "Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God." (II Cor. 5:20) From this and other scriptural instructions, we know that we have been called to be special representatives for our Lord Jesus.

PROVIDING THINGS NEEDFUL

It is a severe test of faith for some to wait upon the Lord. The knowledge of God and of his plans and purposes is so inspiring that we want to tell it out far and wide. If upon coming into the Truth we are handicapped with obligations toward our families, we might be tempted to neglect these obligations in order to devote ourselves more fully to the service of the Lord. In such an event, the test of our belief would be our obedience to the instructions of the Word concerning the matter—"If any provide not for his own, and specially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel."—I Tim. 5:8

This might be a severe test of faith for some because we might see the need for workers in the Lord's vineyard. We may believe that we possess talent for some particular part of the work, and be inclined to reason that surely the Lord would not want us to neglect this opportunity merely because

we have a family to support. This would be the reasoning of the flesh. Any service that is rendered contrary to the instructions of God's Word is not acceptable to him and evidences a lack of confidence in the Divine arrangements.

Moses waited forty years before the Lord was ready to use him, and before he was ready, from God's standpoint, to be used. Jesus waited many years, yet at the age of twelve he was desirous of being about his Father's business. It was not until he was thirty years of age that he could enter upon that ministry. If the instructions of the Word and the circumstances of life seem to limit our activities in the Lord's service, we should wait patiently on the Lord, meanwhile making the very best use possible of whatever opportunities we may rightfully enjoy. Thus we will demonstrate our true belief.

BELIEF AND CONSECRATION

True belief implies action, and belief in Christ means consecration to do the will of God as it is expressed through him. To believe is the equivalent of saying to our Lord that he should take our lives and use them to his glory. Any other attitude would come short of revealing a genuine and full belief. We profess to believe that Jesus is the Son of the great God of the universe, and that he was with the Father from the beginning of the world's creation to share with him in that work. We believe that the human race was created to live upon this earth forever, and that sickness and death entered into the world only because of sin. We believe that the Creator of the universe, whom we call our Heavenly Father, sent his Son into the world to redeem

the dying race and to restore the people to life. We believe that his followers during this present Gospel Age are invited to share in his sufferings now, and are promised a share in his kingdom glory if they are faithful unto death.—Rev. 2:10

We believe that the Creator of this vast universe is actually dealing with us now. We believe that the merit of Jesus' sacrifice compensates for our imperfections so that our imperfect works may be acceptable to our Heavenly Father. We believe that it is our privilege to share in the sufferings of Christ, and that, if faithful, we will share in his glory, sit on his throne, be partakers of the Divine nature, and with him participate in the future work of blessing all the families of the earth.

All of these promises and more are included in our belief in Jesus, for he is the central figure and embodiment of the entire Divine Plan of the Ages. It is evident that such a belief is bound to change our entire perspective of life. The transitory joys of this fitful and uncertain human life are not worthy to be compared with the privilege that is ours of being "workers together" with God. (II Cor. 6:1) When we permit the power of our belief to take its proper hold upon us there is nothing we can do except place ourselves entirely in God's hands to be used according to the wise decisions of his will.

In our hearts we may say, Lord take my life, although we realize that there is little left of it, and that it is marred by sin and imperfection. We want our Lord to have it and to use it, for we believe in all of his arrangements for us and mankind. We believe in Jesus, and in the merit of his blood. If we did not believe this, we would have little heart in

offering him our life. But, because we believe, we know that our life will be acceptable to him. We thank him for this assurance, "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service."—Rom. 12:1

We may also say, take my heart and my affections as we do not want them to be centered on the things of this earth, but upon the things above. We esteem the things of this earth as of little worth, and, in view of what God has promised concerning heavenly treasures, we want our affections to be set entirely upon them, for we recognize that this is his will for us. We want to do only those things that are pleasing to him, and every part of our life to be used in the Lord's wonderful service of the Truth.

INCREASING OUR FAITH

Nothing is worthwhile now but to live for the Lord, and to increase our faith. We want no earth-born clouds of doubt to hide his face nor to quench the fires which are presently consuming our sacrifice. May he give us strength to endure the trials of the narrow way, to be unmoved by the indifference of earthly friends, and to glory in the weariness of service. Through faith, and the victory over self-will, may God's will reign supreme in our mortal body, causing us to be wholly consumed in his service.

To truly believe means much, and it must inevitably lead us to the complete surrender of ourselves to God. It means the devoting of everything we have and are to the doing of his will. It is thus that

we share in the work of God according to his plan of the ages as ministers of reconciliation, both now and when exalted to future glory in his kingdom. ■