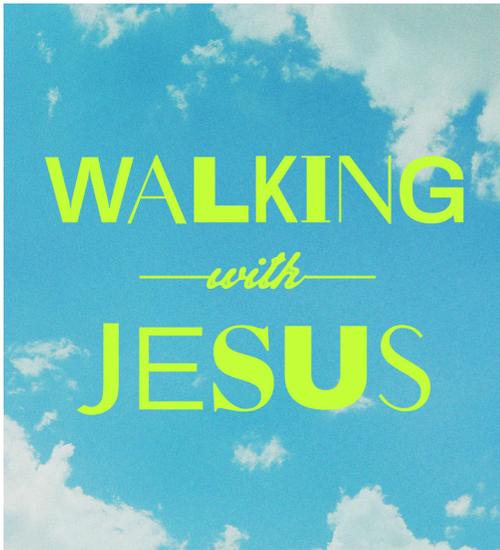




WALKING
—with—
JESUS

Sermon Growth Guide

July 2, 2023
Do you Believe?



Sermon Growth Guide

July 2, 2023

Walking With Jesus – Do you Believe?

Matthew 9:27-38

Key Verse: Matthew 9:28b “Do you believe that I am able to do this?” “Yes, Lord,” they replied.

Big Idea: To believe means to have our head and our heart convinced and committed to the truth of Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord.

Foundations

This week, we conclude our five-week summer sermon series on *Walking with Jesus*. We are focusing on five snapshots of the ministry of Jesus found in chapter 9 of Matthew’s gospel.

Today’s message focuses on Matthew 9:27-38 and the life-changing question Jesus asked to two blind men: Do you believe?

The two blind men recognized Jesus as the Son of David and sought the healing touch of Jesus to cure their blindness. But Jesus wanted to go deeper than just healing their blindness. In asking the question, “Do you believe that I am able to do this?” Jesus was asking a much more profound question about their understanding of who Jesus was and His epic role as the Messiah.

The word Jesus used for believe is a powerful word with nuances and layers. It combines being informed and convinced intellectually with the loyalty and devotion of a person’s heart.

The human condition can be marked by pain and suffering, and often, the underlying cause can be a spiritual sickness of a person needing Christ’s forgiveness. We must look at the world with the compassion of Jesus to help people experience His love.

Understanding God’s Word

Read Matthew 9:27-38.

The word “believe” appears in the New Testament about 250 times, 85 of which are in John’s gospel. If you can, read through John’s gospel and note the times the word believe is used.

The Greek word for believe is pistis. This word is often translated as faith. Are these words the same or different?

Applying God’s Word

What is the basis for your belief in Jesus?

How did you come to a place of belief and/or faith?

To what extent do you look at the world we live in through the lens of compassion?

Witnessing God’s Word

If someone asked you why you believe in Jesus, what would you say?

How might you help someone take the next step toward belief in Jesus?

Today we conclude the first of our two summer sermon series. For the past few weeks, we've been preaching through Matthew chapter nine in the **Walking with Jesus** series. We've looked at the themes of forgiveness, following, being made new, and healing. And now, we lunge across the sermonic finish line as we focus on the powerful and provocative question, **Do you Believe?**

Next Sunday, we begin the second summer series as we spend five weeks on the theme of **God is There**. We'll be looking at a selection of the Psalms and we'll be reminded that, no matter what our situation or circumstances might be, God is there to walk beside us, to teach us, to encourage us, to strengthen us, and to guide us.

Before we come to our Scripture passage today, let's join in prayer...Matthew 9:27-38 (NIV)
27 As Jesus went on from there, two blind men followed him, calling out, "Have mercy on us, Son of David!" 28 When he had gone indoors, the blind men came to him, and he asked them, "Do you believe that I am able to do this?" "Yes, Lord," they replied. 29 Then he touched their eyes and said, "According to your faith let it be done to you;" 30 and their sight was restored. Jesus warned them sternly, "See that no one knows about this." 31 But they went out and spread the news about him all over that region. 32 While they were going out, a man who was demon-possessed and could not talk was brought to Jesus. 33 And when the demon was driven out, the man who had been mute spoke. The crowd was amazed and said, "Nothing like this has ever been seen in Israel." 34 But the Pharisees said, "It is by the prince of demons that he drives out demons." 35 Jesus went through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and healing every disease and sickness. 36 When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. 37 Then he said to his disciples, "The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. 38 Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field."
This is the Word of God. Thanks be to God!

Introduction

In two days, on July 4th, the United States will celebrate its 247th birthday as a country. As you know, it was on July 4, 1776, that the Second Continental Congress voted unanimously to adopt the Declaration of Independence which announced the separation of the colonies from Great Britain. The 33-year-old Thomas Jefferson was charged to write the initial draft

of the Declaration of Independence. He was helped by other members of the "committee of five," which included John Adams and Benjamin Franklin. Probably the best-known part of the Declaration of Independence is this phrase from the Preamble: *We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men (people) are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.*"

The fight for independence was messy and took several years to achieve. But eventually, a new nation was born which had at its core the belief in, and commitment to, something that was unique and special: a country based on equality, life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.

I've mentioned to you before that my parents were both born in England and so I've got a particular interest and appreciation for all-things-British, especially our dry sense of humor. Some years ago, around about the 4th of July, I saw this on a social media site ("Happy Treason Day Ungrateful Colonials").

I also found a fictitious letter written by Queen Elizabeth II to the citizens of America. Here are a couple of excerpts:

To the citizens of the United States of America, from Her Sovereign Majesty Queen Elizabeth II... In light of your failure in recent years to nominate competent candidates for President of the USA and thus to govern yourselves, we hereby give notice of the revocation of your independence, effective immediately. (You will probably need to look up "revocation" in the Oxford English Dictionary.)

Her Sovereign Majesty Queen Elizabeth II will resume monarchical duties over all states, commonwealths, and territories (except Alaska, which she does not fancy). To aid in the transition to a British Crown dependency, the following rules are introduced with immediate effect:

- *Using the same twenty-seven words interspersed with filler noises such as 'like' and 'you know' is an unacceptable and inefficient form of communication.*
- *You will learn to make real chips. Those things you call french fries are not real chips, and those things you insist on calling potato chips are properly called crisps. Real chips are thick cut, fried in animal fat, and dressed not with ketchup but with vinegar.*
- *Hollywood will be required to cast English actors as good guys. Hollywood will also be required to cast English actors to play English characters. Watching Andie Macdowell attempt English dialogue in Four Weddings and a*

Funeral was an experience akin to having one's ears removed with a cheese grater. God Save the Queen!

Putting all fun and banter aside, the United States was birthed by a compelling *belief* in something special, and this has been at the core of our identity for 247 years. We are far from perfect and there is much division in our land, but the belief in an ideal has been our unifying and driving force for two-and-a-half centuries. We believe in life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness!

And *belief* is at the core of our identity as Christians, right? We believe in God, believe in Jesus, believe in the Holy Spirit, believe the Bible is God's Word, and believe in the new life that Jesus Christ has won for us. Just in the New Testament alone, the word *belief* is found about 250 times.

Understanding Believe

Our passage begins with these words: 27 As Jesus went on from there, two blind men followed him, calling out, "Have mercy on us, Son of David!" 28 When he had gone indoors, the blind men came to him, and he asked them, "Do you believe that I am able to do this?" "Yes, Lord," they replied.

"Do you believe?" Jesus asked.

The primary word that we translate as believe is the Greek word, *pistis*. Sometimes *pistis* is translated into *believe* or *belief* and sometimes it is translated into the word *faith*. There is a very close relationship between the two. In fact, we might consider them to be essentially the same. But there's an elasticity with *pistis* that allows it to describe coming to an intellectual understanding and conviction about something, while at the same time describing things like loyalty, devotion and fidelity. To simplify, *pistis* is something that is connected to both the *head* and the *heart*.

Both *head* and *heart* must be engaged when it comes to **Walking with Jesus**. Some of us are wired to be more about the *head*, and some of us are wired to be more about the *heart*. But both need to be engaged. Our minds need to engage the information, facts, logic about the claims of Jesus, but our hearts need to engage with trust and loyalty.

I think all of us who have preached in this sermon series have mentioned New Testament scholar, Dale Bruner. There's a good reason for that. Dale is a brilliant scholar who served as a missionary and then as a professor at

Whitworth University in Spokane. When I lived in Spokane in the late 1990s, Dale announced that he was retiring from Whitworth. I called Dale and asked if I could take him to lunch and pick his brain about teaching. He graciously accepted and we had a wonderful conversation. Dale grew up at Hollywood Presbyterian Church under the spiritual mentoring of Henrietta Mears, as did our former senior pastor, John Stevens, and many other influential leaders in the Christian Church. During that conversation, Dale said one thing that I'll never forget: Henrietta Mears taught her students that whenever they would preach or teach, they should always *aim for the heart*. You see, belief can be cultivated by good information and solid logic which resides in the *head*, but true transformation happens when the *heart* is changed from stone to flesh.

Two blind men followed Jesus, and it could easily be overlooked, but they called out to Him, "Have mercy on us, Son of David!" Jesus had been called many things: *Lord, Rabbi, Teacher*, etc. But to call Jesus *Son of David* was a direct acknowledgment that Jesus was the *Messiah*.

Ironically, these two blind men recognized Jesus for His true identity. And then Jesus asked them, "Do you believe that I am able to do this?" Jesus' question has nuances and layers to it. It's not just about Jesus' ability to heal their sight, but also goes much deeper to fusing the head and heart into devoted discipleship.

And Jesus touched them and healed them. We read, "Then he touched their eyes and said, 'According to your faith let it be done to you;'" According to your *faith*... According to your *pistis*...

Jesus Heals the Whole Person

In the verses that follow, we find Jesus telling the two formerly blind men to keep their healing a secret. This may be puzzling, but the reason for the *Messianic Secret* (as it's called) was that Jesus didn't want His ministry to climax before He accomplished many other things.

This is followed by a mute man being delivered from a demon and the Pharisees' claim that Jesus' healing power is demonic in nature.

And then we come to verse 35: *Jesus went through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and healing every disease and sickness.*

What we see here is that Jesus is most interested in the healing of the *whole* person. He

fuses the proclamation of the good news with the healing of the body. If we look back, even in this sermon series, when Jesus heals a physical ailment, it is fused with the healing of the spiritual ailment. A few weeks ago, we saw the paralyzed man who was lowered through the roof by his buddies to get close to Jesus, and Jesus healed his paralysis but also pronounced that the man's sins were forgiven.

To me, this confirms that there is often a spiritual ailment at the backdrop of other ailments. Have you found that to be true?

Lynsi Synder is the President and CEO of In-N-Out Burger. Her grandfather started the company in 1948, then handed it off to her father, and, upon his death, she inherited the very popular burger chain. As it turns out, Lynsi's father was addicted to substances and was not faithful to his wife, and his death left Lynsi in a state of emotional despair and dependency. In her early life, she was married and divorced several times, endured physical and emotional abuse, and did a deep dive of her own into substance abuse. All through this she was looking for love and acceptance and security. Little did she know that there was also a spiritual void in her life. In the midst of her desperation, Jesus came and interrupted her life, and she discovered true love and healing, physically, emotionally and spiritually.

The Lens of Compassion

I think it's helpful to keep in mind that there's a spiritual dimension behind many things that we may struggle with, and that Jesus can bring healing and wholeness as we receive His grace and forgiveness.

I think that's what Jesus had in mind in verses 36-38 of our passage: *When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to his disciples, "The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field."*

It's easy for us to look at the world in which we live and dismiss it as corrupt and lost. But Jesus looks at the world differently. He looks through the lens of compassion, for He knows the real source of need: the healing of a person's sin-sick soul by believing in, and having faith in, the saving power of Jesus Christ.

I've mentioned this in a previous sermon here, but it's worth repeating. Christian philosopher and mathematician Blaise Paschal once said, *"There is a God-shaped vacuum in the heart of*

every man (person) which cannot be filled by any created thing, but only by God the Creator, made known through Jesus Christ."

I wonder how we might share in this adventure of engaging our world with the compassion of Jesus, and helping others to discover the healing power that fills that God-shaped vacuum?

Conclusion

I believe that Jesus is asking us the same question today that He asked the blind men. *"Do you believe?"* When the head and the heart come together, and our minds grasp the historical facts about who Jesus is, and when our hearts are transformed by the compelling power of His love, our answer to that question can be the same as the blind men. *"Yes, Lord."*

Do you believe?

The late J.I. Packer offered this insightful perspective: *"I can believe in UFOs without ever looking for one, and in democracy without ever voting. In cases like these, belief is a matter of the intellect only. But the Creed's opening words, "I believe in God," render a Greek phrase coined by the writers of the New Testament, meaning literally: "I am believing into God." That is to say, over and above believing certain truths about God, I am living in a relation of commitment to God in trust and union. When I say "I believe in God," I am professing my conviction that God has invited me to this commitment, and declaring that I have accepted his invitation."*

Do you believe?

One of the most historic and powerful affirmations that the Christian Church has used is **The Apostles' Creed**. As we end today, I'd like to give us all the opportunity to affirm what we believe. Will you please stand and let's affirm our faith; let's testify to what we believe. Christians, what do you believe?

I believe in God the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, and in Jesus Christ his only Son our Lord; who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and buried; he descended into hell; the third day he rose again from the dead; he ascended into heaven, and sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty; from there he shall come to judge the living and the dead. I believe in the Holy Spirit; the holy catholic church; the communion of saints; the forgiveness of sins; the resurrection of the body; and the life everlasting. Amen.