

Belief or Trust?

MJCF July 11, 2021

Hebrews 11:8-12

Do you believe in Jesus? Do you believe he is our Saviour and Lord? What do you believe? These are important questions for us to think about. Followers of Jesus believe a number of things about God and Jesus. For example: There is only one God, who created the universe. The Bible is God's word to us. Jesus is the Son of God who came to live on earth. God was in Jesus. He taught and showed us how to live. He was faithful to follow God's ways even when it meant allowing himself to be killed on a cross. God then raised him to life as Lord of All. We are now forgiven all our sin through him. In Jesus, we see God's great love for all people... These are things that all Christians believe. And, we could add many more things to this list. Each week we recite the Apostles' Creed. This lists some of the things that Christians believe. These are all good and important. But, believing all the right things should not be the centre of our faith!

It's easy to get preoccupied with what we believe, when the should instead be, "Who you believe, and do you actually trust in him?" In his book, "The Sin of Certainty," Peter Enns explores the biblical understanding of believing. One example he uses is the story of Abraham. Abraham didn't just believe in God. He entrusted his life to God. If we look at the story of Abraham, God tells him that he'll be blessed with land and many descendants, even though he and Sarah are both elderly and have never before been able to have a child. At that time children, in particular sons, were very important in order to continue the family name. I'm reading from Genesis 15:1-6:

"...the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision, "Do not be afraid, Abram, I am your shield; your reward shall be very great." But Abram said, "O Lord God, what will you give me, for I continue childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?" And Abram said, "you have given me no offspring, and so a slave born in my house is to be my heir. But the word of the LORD came to him. "this man shall not be your heir; no one but your very own issue shall be your heir." He brought him outside and said, "Look toward heaven and count the stars, if you are able to count them." Then he said to him, "So shall your descendants be." And he believed the LORD, and the LORD reckoned it to him as righteousness."

This last sentence is important. "And he believed the LORD, and the LORD reckoned it to him as righteousness. God accepted Abraham because he believed, not because of anything he did. But, what does "believed" really mean in this story? The original word comes from the Hebrew word, "aman." It's where we get the word "Amen." It carries the meaning, "so be it" or "May it be so." By ending our prayers with this, we declare that we trust God to hear our prayer and respond in the best way. So, when Abraham believed God, he was "Amening" God's promise that he and his wife would be blessed with a son in their old age. Abraham didn't just believe that God could give him a child. He trusted God to actually do it! See the difference? It's possible to believe something could happen without trusting that it will actually happen, but we know that Abraham trusted. His trust of God is shown in his actions. He follows God's call to leave his home and go to an unknown place. Hebrews 11:8-12 shows how Abraham's trust in God was shown in how he lived:

By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to set out for a place that he was to receive as an inheritance; and he set out, not knowing where he was going. By faith he stayed for a time in the land he had been promised, as in a foreign land, living in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise. For he looked forward to the city that has foundations, whose architect and builder is God. By faith he received power of procreation, even though he was too old – and Sarah herself was barren – because he considered him

faithful who had promised. Therefore from one person, and this one as good as dead, descendants were born, “as many as the stars of heaven and as the innumerable grains of sand by the seashore.”

The Bible focuses on faith and believing, not just as thinking the correct things, but as trust in a person. Often when we read the word “believed” or “faith” it is more of an action word than just thinking about something. “By grace you have been saved through faith...” according to Paul’s word in Ephesians 2. Here, the word, “faith” could be understood as “faithfulness.” Like the word, “belief” it is not just something we think about. It is a word that includes a trust in God that affects all that we do. Do we trust in God? Do we trust in Jesus? How does this trust affect our lives?

Another example in the Bible where we see how “believe” and “trust” are connected is in Luke, chapter 8. The daughter of Jairus, one of the religious leaders is sick and Jesus is going to help. A messenger comes and says that it’s too late, the girl has already died, and Jesus need not bother coming. But then, in verse 50, Jesus says, “Do not fear. Only believe and she will be saved.” He is not just saying, “If you just believe a bit more that I could save her, I will be able to do something.” No! What Jesus is saying is much closer to; “Just put your trust in me to help, even in this seemingly hopeless situation.” Of course, everyone is amazed when Jesus actually raises the girl to life.

It’s easy to worry too much about whether or not we are believing the correct things. But, we will never ever know as much as God knows. There will always be more and more to learn. If we look at the focus of the Bible, it’s not a handbook teaching us a list of truths to follow, although we do learn many truths by reading it. Instead, it’s the story of God’s relationship with real people. The key is in relationship, not correct beliefs or thinking. As we grow in relationship with Jesus, we grow in trust. This trust is shown in what we do. Faith and beliefs are closely linked with how we live. In chapter 2, verse 19 of his letter, James says this, “You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe – and shudder. Do you want to be shown, you senseless person, that faith apart from works is barren?” (James often is pretty sharp and direct in the words he uses)! Isn’t it interesting, though, how even the demons believe in Jesus. In other words, if we just “believe” in Jesus, we’re no better than demons! The question is, do we actually trust in Jesus? Demons are afraid of him because they don’t trust him at all.

Think about your own faith. How much do you believe about Jesus? Whether or not we are Christians we are all at different places in our own faith and understanding about God and Jesus. Some people do not believe in any God, but they still have other things in which they put their faith. The question today is; “Do you just believe things about Jesus, or do you actually trust in him?” Are you “all-in” for Jesus? I know I am not always at the trust level where I’d like to be. I believe that God takes care of me, but am I actually trusting in God’s care? I often end up worrying too much about different things. This shows that I often forget to trust in God’s care.

In response to God’s blessings, I believe that there are blessings when we give of our time and money for others, but am I actually trusting that God will continue to bless me as I give? I often forget to think about the needs of people around me, and I usually worry more about whether or not I have enough money than if I am giving enough to others.

I believe God loves everyone equally, and that God’s love doesn’t depend on whether we do good or evil. But, do I actually trust that God cares for me unconditionally? I often put a lot of pressure on myself to do things as perfectly as possible, as if I need to earn God’s acceptance of me by what I do.

I believe God gives us strength to love our neighbours, but am I trusting God to give me strength to love others? I'm often focusing on myself rather than on others around me. There are many things I believe. But do I also trust as much as I believe?

Years ago, I've shared this illustration, but I like it so much that it bears repeating since it fits so well with today's message.

In the 1890s there was a famous tightrope walker named Blondin who walked across a rope over Niagara Falls, a number of times. After making it across, he quieted the cheers of the 10,000 onlookers and asked "Do you have faith in me?" The crowd shouted "We believe! We believe!" He quieted them again and said "I'm going to go back across, but this time I'm going to carry someone on my back. Do you believe I can do this?" "We believe! We believe!" shouted the crowd. Once more he quieted the crowd. "So who will be the one I carry across?..." Total silence. Not one person was prepared to act on the faith they had declared.

Our faith is often like that. We may believe that God can do many things, but do we trust in God to follow through and take care of us? If we do, it will change our lives. Through our prayers, our Bible reading, and our conversations with others who seek God's will, we'll be able to grow in trusting the Lord. Let's pray.

Loving God, you alone are worthy of all our trust. Your power and your love are far beyond imagination. Yet Lord, we hesitate to put all our trust in you. It's so easy to just rest on our beliefs about you rather than actually taking steps of faith. Forgive us, we pray. May the things we believe about you be combined with action and a deepening trust in your care. O Lord, we are a small church, and we are searching for your will for the future as we look for ways to share your light and connect with more people around us, as we seek potential new leadership. We believe that you created the world, and that you have the power to work through even our small group. Please help us to trust that you are indeed leading us in the best ways, as we seek to do your will. Through Christ, our Lord we pray, Amen.