

## Demand #4

# Believe in Me

“Do not let your heart be troubled; believe in God, believe also in Me.”  
John 14:1

“Believe Me that I am in the Father and the Father is in Me; otherwise believe because of the works themselves.” John 14:11

“While you have the Light, believe in the Light, so that you may become sons of Light.” John 12:36

Then He said\* to Thomas, “Reach here with your finger, and see My hands; and reach here your hand and put it into My side; and do not be unbelieving, but believing.” John 20:27

Jesus said\* to him, “Because you have seen Me, have you believed? Blessed *are* they who did not see, and *yet* believed.” John 20:29

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At the beginning of this study, John Piper asks two questions:

- 1) Why does Jesus demand that we believe in Him?
- 2) What does believing in Him really mean?

We are going to try to answer those questions this afternoon. So let's begin with the first question...Why believe in Me? What are we talking about, believe in Me? We're talking about faith in Christ or trust in Christ, aren't we? We can all agree that belief and faith and trust are all synonymous with each other.

The reason John Piper gives for believing in Jesus is because all humans, since “The Fall”, have been in a desperate situation because of our sin. “For the wages of sin is death...”Romans 6:23; “for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” Romans 3:23. We all were or are facing death. We all have had a desperate need to be rescued, and only Jesus could accomplish it. Please notice the following words in this passage of Scripture: “Perish”, “Judge” and “Wrath of God”.

<sup>16</sup>“For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life.

<sup>17</sup>“For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through Him. <sup>18</sup>“He who believes in Him

is not judged; he who does not believe has been judged already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.” <sup>36</sup>“He who believes in the Son has eternal life; but he who does

not obey the Son will not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him.”  
John 3:16-18, 36

Did you notice that phrase in verse 36? “He who believes...has eternal life; but he who does not obey...will not see life”. Believing and obeying are synonymous. To believe in Jesus Christ is to obey the Word of God! Isn't that fantastic? Jesus commands that we believe in Him and all who do not are sinning against that command, they are being disobedient. As a matter of fact that disobedience just described the unpardonable sin, unbelief. Jesus came to be our substitute. We have nothing in and of ourselves to warrant God's mercy. His grace is unmerited favor toward us, but because of His love for us He provided the sacrifice to atone for our sins.

Piper remarks about this passage, “God is just, and his anger is rightly kindled against human attitudes and behaviors that belittle his worth and treat him as insignificant. All of us have done this. In fact, we do it every day. But the amazing truth is that God has sent his Son Jesus into the world not to add to this judgment, but to rescue us from it.”

At the beginning of this study, Piper likened Christ to a fireman who is rescuing us from a burning building. We have to put our very lives into this stranger's hand and trust that he will rescue us from this imminent danger. Like a rescue worker who is there to save us from a fire, or a drowning or some sort of natural disaster, Jesus wants us to put our lives in His hands, by believing in Him, to save us from the righteous wrath of our Creator because of our sin. But the analogy of a rescue worker is woefully inadequate; Why?

The illustration about Christ as a rescuer is only true in a limited sense. Piper says, “Jesus is a rescuer. We must allow Him to carry us to safety out of the wrath of God. But it is possible to trust a fireman that you do not admire. He may be a drunkard and an adulterer in his time off. He doesn’t ask you to believe in him for all that he is, or to receive him, or to savor his life. But Jesus does. He is so much more than a rescuer. Therefore, believing in Him is more than trusting in His rescue skills. Jesus came not only to rescue us from condemnation but also that we might enjoy everlasting life, which means that we might experience all that God is for us in Him. “This is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent.” (John 17:3). He knows what we need far better than we do. We need rescue from the wrath of God, and we need a soul-satisfying relationship with God. This is what Jesus came to give. It comes to us in one way alone—by believing in Him. Therefore, He gives his demand to the world: “Believe in Me.””

Here we are talking about eternal life and eternal death. We are in a desperate situation because of our sin. God requires justice! There has to be a complete payment for the debt we each owe to God. God requires a perfect shedding of blood from a perfect sacrificial lamb to appease His wrath and to satisfy His justice. Only perfection could do this. There was only One who could do this. Perfect God had to come down and be perfect Man to pay for the sins of all who would be obedient to the demand, “believe in Me”, and that is Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

Let’s turn to the book of Isaiah, chapter 53, verses 4-6. <sup>4</sup> Surely our griefs He Himself bore, And our sorrows He carried; Yet we ourselves esteemed Him stricken, Smitten of God, and afflicted. <sup>5</sup> But He was pierced through for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities; The chastening for our well-being *fell* upon Him, And by His scourging we are healed. <sup>6</sup> All of us like sheep have gone astray, Each of us has turned to his own way; But the LORD has

caused the iniquity of us all to fall on Him.” John Piper says of this passage, “The reason Jesus demands that we believe on Him is that there is nothing we can add to this rescue from the wrath of God.”

Now let's turn to Zechariah 13:7, “<sup>7</sup> Awake, O sword, against My Shepherd, And against the man, My Associate,” Declares the LORD of hosts. “Strike the Shepherd that the sheep may be scattered; And I will turn My hand against the little ones.”

Approximately 700 years before Christ was born the prophet Isaiah foretold of that payment for sin. Likewise, a little less than 200 years later, the prophet Zechariah foretold of Christ being sacrificed by God. Please notice the phrase, “...against the man, My Associate. My Associate is better translated, My Equal. Because of His love for us, God struck down His Son, His Equal in Deity. He struck Him down to pay the debt we could never repay. Beloved, we are so vile and so incapable and our sin is so heinous that only God Himself could pay the debt we owed. We are so depraved in our thinking that God had to give us the very faith we needed to obey the command, “Believe in Me”. All have sinned and fall short of God's glory; no one seeks Him, not even one. He has to seek us out and He has to enable us to obey His demands. Amazing love does not even come close to describing the Gospel. It is indescribable love. It is unfathomable love.

Paul Washer describes our plight like this: “Do you know why people don't tremble at sin? It is because they don't understand the God of the Bible. They have a small view of God and a very inflated view of themselves. The church today has become a ‘Six Flags Over Jesus’ and God has been portrayed to look more like Santa Claus than the Creator of the Universe. The Gospel has gotten so diluted of the teaching on sin that no one understands why they have an absolute need of a Savior. ‘It is as though on the day of Creation, God stands there and He commands the Stars to put themselves into space and they bow and worship and obey Him. He tells the Planets to set themselves in orbit and to move according to His decree, and they all bow, worship and obey Him. He tells Mountains to be lifted up and Valleys to be cast low and they all bow, worship and obey Him. And then He looks at the brave Seas and says, ‘you will come to this point

and no further', and the Seas bow, worship and obey Him. And then God says to Man, "Come to Me", "Believe in Me" "Love Me" and Man says, '**NO!!!! Who are you to tell me what to do?!!**'" The heinous nature of sin, the depravity of Man, the inability of Man, the Holiness of Almighty God; these truths can only be revealed to us by the work of the Holy Spirit. Only He can open our eyes. Have your eyes been opened to these truths? Then how does that understanding affect your purity and your worship?

For the rest of our time, let us focus on John Piper's second question, What does believing in Jesus really mean?

The modern church today has a doctrine of easy belief-ism. The common belief nowadays is that if you walk an aisle or say a prescribed prayer, you are a Christian. Many say that if you believed just one time, no matter how you're living now, or even if you deny Christ now, you are still a Christian. Is that true? What does the Bible say about this?

One of the most commonly misused passages quoted by holders of this view is from Acts 16:31, but I am going to start in the last half of the 29<sup>th</sup> verse, "...and trembling with fear he fell down before Paul and Silas,<sup>30</sup> and after he brought them out, he said, 'Sirs, what must I do to be saved?'<sup>31</sup> They said, 'Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household'." This, of course, is the story of the conversion of the Philippian jailer and his entire household. Many people would say, "see that's all it takes, just believe and you are saved". What they gloss over in their reading of this passage is the very next verse; "<sup>32</sup>And they spoke the word of the Lord to him together with all who were in his house." They explained what it meant to believe in Jesus. Another passage that is used is John 6:47, "Truly, truly, I say to you, he who believes has eternal life." What is He saying is to be believed? Do they believe in just the fact that Jesus lived; or do they believe in so much more about Jesus and about our own selves?

John MacArthur and many respected evangelical leaders hold the view that the true body of Christ has lost its ability to discern. Many who are not a part of the body of Christ are being treated as Christians. They are coming into the true church and weakening it, what Jesus referred

to as, “Tares among the Wheat” (Matthew 13:24-30). This is because the Gospel in its fullness has been boiled down into what MacArthur calls, Christianity Lite.

In his book, “Hard to Believe” MacArthur writes, “It’s Christianity for consumers: Christianity Lite, the redirection, watering down, and misinterpretation of the biblical gospel in an attempt to make it more palatable and popular. It tastes great going down and settles light. It seems to salve your feelings and scratch your itch; it’s custom-tailored to your preferences. But that lightness will never fill you up with the true, saving gospel of Jesus Christ, because it is designed by man and not God, and it is hollow and worthless. In fact, it’s worse than worthless, because people who hear the message of Christianity Lite think they’re hearing the gospel – think they’re rescued from eternal judgment – when, in fact, they’re being tragically misled.”

What must I do to be saved, is the most important question that anyone can ever ask. But the answer is too hard for most people to believe. Why is that? Is belief in Jesus or faith in Jesus or trust in Jesus or obedience to Jesus something that we generate on our own; Or is it something that comes from an external Source that works in and through us? Believe me, I spent over 40 years proving that it was not something I could do myself, but just at the right time God opened my eyes and I came to repentance.

When the Holy Spirit gives us the ability to believe, actually gives us the faith needed to obey the command, “Believe in Me”, something happens first to facilitate that belief. What was it?

Let’s turn to Ezekiel 36, verses 25-27. <sup>25</sup>“Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols. <sup>26</sup>“Moreover, I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. <sup>27</sup>“I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will be careful to observe My ordinances.” This is the New Covenant folks and it was foretold over 600 years before Christ died for our sins at Calvary.

Now let's turn to John 11. Here we read of the death and resurrection of Lazarus. This is a great exchange between Jesus and Martha, Lazarus' sister; verse 21, "<sup>21</sup>Martha then said to Jesus, 'Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died. <sup>22</sup>'Even now I know that whatever You ask of God, God will give You.'" <sup>23</sup>Jesus said\* to her, "Your brother will rise again." <sup>24</sup>Martha said\* to Him, "I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day." <sup>25</sup>Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in Me will live even if he dies, <sup>26</sup>and everyone who lives and believes in Me will never die. Do you believe this?" <sup>27</sup>She said\* to Him, "Yes, Lord; I have believed that You are the Christ, the Son of God, *even* He who comes into the world.'" Beloved, that is saving faith! What a great passage! Martha had blessed assurance for her brothers' salvation! Now Jesus is led to the cave that holds Lazarus' body and mind you, he has been dead for four days. Jesus tells them to roll the stone away that blocked the cave entrance. Then Jesus said, in verse 41, "Father, I thank You that You have heard Me. <sup>42</sup>'I knew that You always hear Me; but because of the people standing around I said it, so that they may believe that You sent Me.'" <sup>43</sup>When He had said these things, He cried out with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come forth."

Now, here is my point for going to this passage; how did Lazarus obey Jesus' command? Jesus gave him life! He was dead! Jesus raised him! He could not in his own power obey the command to come forth; Jesus had to make him capable of obeying it!

If you are in Christ Jesus, at one time you were dead too. You were spiritually dead and streaking your way to Hell. Could you in your own power believe in Jesus to be saved? No, you were dead. You had no capacity to obey the command, "Believe in Me". The Holy Spirit had to replace your heart of stone with a heart of flesh; then and only then could you hear Jesus say to you, "Believe in Me"; then and only then could you obey Him. John MacArthur says, "When you see someone committed only to the Word of God, solely to the Word of God, wholly to the Word of God, that is the work of the Holy Spirit". When you finally begin to grasp the deep truths of Scripture, you begin to grasp the Majesty of Almighty God. Beloved, when you have a right view of Jesus Christ, that is most definitely a sign of the work of the Holy Spirit in you.

Let's go back to the subject of rescue for a moment. What is another word for rescue? Saved or Delivered. As a matter of fact, anywhere you see the words, save, saved, or salvation, you could replace a form of deliver (i.e. deliver, delivered, deliverance), they are synonymous. Just as Lazarus was delivered from the realm of physical death, you who are in Christ have also been delivered.

We have been delivered from Error into Truth. Error is another word for Darkness and Truth is another word for Light. Turn in your Bibles to Colossians 1:12-13. We read, "<sup>12</sup>giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified us to share in the inheritance of the saints in Light. <sup>13</sup>For He rescued us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son." Now turn to 1John 2:5-7, "<sup>5</sup>This is the message we have heard from Him and announce to you, that God is Light, and in Him there is no darkness at all. <sup>6</sup>If we say that we have fellowship with Him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth; <sup>7</sup>but if we walk in the Light as He Himself is in the Light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin."

We also have been delivered from Sin to Righteousness. Turn in your Bibles to Romans 6:16-18. We read, "<sup>16</sup>Do you not know that when you present yourselves to someone as slaves for obedience, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin resulting in death, or of obedience resulting in righteousness? <sup>17</sup>But thanks be to God that though you were slaves of sin, you became obedient from the heart to that form of teaching to which you were committed, <sup>18</sup>and having been freed from sin, you became slaves of righteousness."

And finally, we have been delivered from the Temporal World into His Eternal Kingdom. We have been adopted into the family of Eternal God! We have been reconciled, no longer in enmity with God!

Our nature, our behavior, our thinking has been transformed by the work of the Holy Spirit and the washing of the Word of God! We have gone through dramatic changes! If someone tells you that they have experienced saving faith and there are no visible, drastic changes in their character, they are deceived and there is no newness of life in



them. Let me tell you something, one of the most convicting things that ever confronted me on a daily basis before I was saved was a MacArthur quote hanging on our refrigerator door right at my eye level; and by the grace of God I could never bring myself to remove it. It said this, "Grace that does not affect one's behavior, is not the grace of God." By the way, that quote is still on my refrigerator. Can I change it just tad bit for this teaching? Faith that does not affect one's character is not saving faith from God. There is Saving Faith that leads to eternal life, but there is also a damning faith. A damning faith is one where you know just enough about Jesus to get thrown into Hell; and might I add, a hotter hell than if you had never heard the name of Jesus Christ. Believe me; those who have heard but not obeyed would have been better off if they had never heard at all.

If you are not in Christ, to gain eternal life you will have to obey the Law of God perfectly. Galatians 3:10 says, "<sup>10</sup>For as many as are of the works of the Law are under a curse; for it is written, "Cursed is everyone who does not abide by all things written in the book of the law, to perform them.""

Paul Washer has a unique way to describe someone who is cursed, here it is: "Do you know what it means to be cursed? It means that someone is so vile before Holy God, so loathsome even before all the inhabitants of Glory, that the last thing that that wicked person will ever hear before they are thrown into Hell, is all of Creation standing to its feet and applauding God, because God has rid the earth of them." "The world does not believe this because the world does not want to know or want to believe how depraved Man is. And that's what's wrong with the gospel of today and that's why the gospel of today has no power to save." "There is much to do today about the Second Coming of Jesus Christ and the correct interpretation of the Book of Revelation. I assure you that you will understand everything about the Book of Revelation and everything about the Second Coming on the day that it occurs. But I can also assure you of this: You will spend an eternity of eternities and you will still not fully comprehend the depth and breadth of the Gospel of Jesus Christ."

I will conclude my comments with a powerful quote from John MacArthur, for it cuts to the heart of today's study. "The Bible is crystal clear on what we have to believe in order to be saved. No one is a Christian who does not believe the truth about Jesus Christ. 'There is no salvation in any other name.' Anyone who is a believer has come to know the truth, understand the truth, believe the truth, embrace the truth, and love the truth; and reject everything else as a means of salvation." "Let me say that again in a slightly different way. One thing can be said about a true Christian: he knows the truth, he loves the truth, and he worships the God of Truth, exalts the Christ of Truth, is indwelt by the Spirit of Truth, and obeys the Word of Truth. Truth is at the very heart of the gospel that saves."

Do you believe these issues that I just presented to you?

Are you challenged by anything mentioned this hour?

Have you been convicted of anything that you need to change?

Are you seeing that you are being challenged to resolve to grow more in the grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ in this church?

Have you resolved to do just that? And, how are you doing?