

St Martins C3 – November 20th, 2022

Trust or Unbelief? – Knowing God

Sermon Notes:

Today, we end this series by considering how these messages from the last two months propel us into faith.

Read Mark 6:1-6

Already in Mark, Jesus has been travelling and announcing the good news of His Kingdom and the response has been mixed. Some have loved him and accepted him, others have rejected him, his family has said he is crazy, and one group even tried to kill him.

So, Jesus comes home and there is an opportunity for the people to respond to Jesus. The listeners begin by asking questions.

Questions are a good thing, but their conclusions are not. They scoff at Jesus, become deeply offended and refuse to believe in Him. They don't understand who He really is. They have a blind spot in understanding God's nature.

A lesser revelation of God leads to a rejection of Him. A pure revelation of God leads to trust in Him.

The result is fewer lives touched. Due, we are told, to their unbelief. Faith is not a magic formula to make God do what we want, but the atmosphere of faith is essential for the Kingdom of God that Jesus is bringing.

Faith is when we trust in God more than we trust in any other thing. We see very few examples of Christians who trust in God more than they trust in any other thing. Those who do are world changers. We need to have faith in thought, word and deed.

In thought

“Faith ... is the art of holding on to things your reason has once accepted, in spite of your changing moods.”

— [C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*](#)

Our faith is our acknowledgement of who God is. God is Holy and Loving and Just and we acknowledge Him in our thoughts.

In Word:

We use our words to declare who God is, it is a faith act.

Action

Faith in God is more than a private decision. It is more than the right answer. It is something that affects all of you.

The problem with the Nazarenes was that they saw Jesus for who He was but refused to give all of themselves to Him. We too need to make sure we are not blasé in our response to God’s revealed nature. As we encounter Him for who He is we should want to give all we have to Him.

It is for us to acknowledge all God is and all he has done and all we know of what he will do and to choose to trust Him for the present. May we walk every day with trust in God above anything else in our thoughts, words and actions.

Questions for Connect Groups:

Sermon Reflection:

What stood out to you from this week's message?

What are some of the imbalances or blind spots people have about Jesus?

Why did the people's lack of faith stop the working of miracles in this situation?

What is the difference between the power of positive thinking and faith? Define faith.

Life Application:

What has caused others around you to become offended at God and refuse to believe?

What are some of the imbalances or blind spots we have about God's nature?

Some people refuse to believe whereas others say they believe but then don't follow their beliefs with trust-based action. What is that about?

How can we combat the tendency to be filled with faith one day but apathetic the next?

What does it look like for you to trust God in a) thought, b) word and c) action?

If you were full of faith what would change in your life? How can you move towards that now?

Monday Devotion: The Pharisees' Rejection

Read Matthew 12:1-14; 22-24

Over the past two months, we have explored the nature and character of God. As we come to the end of the series we have a choice in front of us. All we have learned means we need to respond to God in appropriate ways. No longer can we say, as some do, "God is distant I cannot know what he is like, let alone know him personally."

This week our devotions will present us with five different responses that we can either choose to accept or reject. Each of these responses is shown through people who encountered Jesus. By word and deed, these people saw that Jesus was more than just a man, but each of them had a different response to him.

The first group we look at are the Pharisees, the religious leaders of Jesus' day. These are the ones who should see Jesus for who He really is and in the gospels, they have plenty of opportunity. They see Him redefine the law, they see Him heal a man and cast out demons.

Their response is to completely reject Jesus. He does not fit their image of the Messiah and He threatens their power. They plot to kill Him and call Him the prince of demons.

There are people in our world, even religious people, who have set themselves against God. They may come to church but they have given up on God. Our challenge is to ensure we are not creating God in our own image and rejecting who God has revealed Himself to be.

Tuesday Devotion: The Rich Man's Hesitance

Mark 10:17-22

Some people are open in their rejection of God, while others simply decline when given the opportunity to commit.

One day a rich young man comes to Jesus with a question. This is no casual concern, it causes him to run to Jesus. He asks how he can receive eternal life. Jesus points him to the law, particularly the commands on treating others well. The man is not deterred; he believes he ticks all of the boxes.

Jesus challenges him to give all he has to the poor and then to follow Him. Scripture tells us, "at this the man's face fell, and he went away sad, for he had many possessions."

Notice, the man does not openly reject Jesus, he seems to see who Jesus is more than others do. However, his failure is when he decides that his possessions are worth more to Him than following Jesus.

Many people have seen God for who He really is. Many have found the things that He does for them to be wonderful. Yet, there are many people in our world today who, even though they have discovered the true God, fail to decisively follow Him.

Only God can have the central place in our lives, we *must* put Him first. May we be those who not only understand the nature of God but choose to make every other endeavour secondary in order to obediently follow Him.

Wednesday Devotion: Nicodemus' Private

Acceptance

Read John 3:1-17; 7:49-51; 19:38-40

Angel Studios is about to release season three of its remarkable tv show of Jesus' life called *The Chosen*. One of the most compelling characters in the show is the Pharisee Nicodemus, who seeks to discover Jesus' true identity.

The gospel of John mentions Nicodemus three times. The first time Nicodemus visits Jesus at night and enquires about His identity and the nature of salvation. The second time, Nicodemus speaks up for Jesus under considerable pressure. The third time, Nicodemus accompanies a secret disciple of Jesus named Joseph of Arimathea to ensure Jesus is given a proper burial.

It seems that through Nicodemus' interactions with Jesus he becomes a sympathiser if not a believer. However, he chooses to keep it quiet.

There are many in the same camp as Nicodemus. Some keep their faith in Jesus quiet due to the pressure from the world around them, their family or work colleagues or friends. If you ask them what they believe they say they believe but they are hesitant to publicly acknowledge Jesus.

Yet the public acknowledgment of Jesus has always been a central part of a person's trust in Jesus. May we have the courage to stand up in front of others and share what we believe.

Thursday Devotion: Thomas' Doubt and Belief

Read John 20:24-29

After Jesus dies the disciples are in turmoil. The one they believe is the Messiah, the son of God, is gone. He leaves them alone and there is seemingly no hope. Their mission is in tatters, it is devastating.

Then they hear from the women who went to the tomb. John and Peter run to see whether it is true and discover an empty grave. Then Jesus himself appears among the disciples.

All except Thomas.

He hears the story but cannot believe it until he sees it for himself. He is forever known as Thomas the doubter. Yet when Jesus appears Thomas utters one of the most faith-filled cries in all of scripture. He exclaims, "My Lord and my God!", declaring Jesus' true nature as God and committing His life to Him. He is martyred (likely in India) still declaring Jesus is his Lord and God.

Thomas' story is compelling because it is our story too. Some days I exclaim that Jesus is God and He is the Lord, He is my Lord. On other days I live as though I am not sure.

As we see God's true nature, we are compelled by His greatness and humbled by His closeness. Thomas inspires us on our doubt days to reconnect with God, to see Him in all His glory and declare Him as our Lord and our God.

Why not take some time to do that today?

Friday Devotion: The Centurion's Easy Faith

Read Matthew 8:5-13

The gospels intentionally highlight the myriad responses to Jesus. They want readers to reflect on their response to Jesus and to believe in Him and have life (John 20:31).

Faith for the gospel writers is not a work that you have to strive to complete. Faith is an easy trust in Jesus more than you trust in any other thing. According to Jesus the best example of this faith is a centurion with a sick servant he cares deeply about.

Jesus offers to respond to the man's need and come to his house and heal the servant. The Roman officer declines instead requesting Jesus simply give the command and his servant will be healed. Jesus remarks on this man's faith and declares, "Go back home. Because you believed, it has happened."

The Roman officer's faith is nothing special. It is a calm recognition of who Jesus is and a dependence on His word.

Do we recognize the authority of Jesus in our lives? Do we come to Him in complete dependence and submission? Do we lay down our wishes and desires to take on His way of life? Do we trust Him to take care of us, forgive and heal us?

Today is the day to put all of your trust in Him.