

Responding to Jesus: Do You Trust Him?

In John 14:1, Jesus says:

Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me.

The Greek word, translated “trust” here, is John’s favorite word. He uses it 96 times in his gospel. It literally means *“to believe in something or someone; to be convinced that what a person says is true.”* So, if we say we trust someone, then our actions should demonstrate our belief.

A true story is told about the French tightrope walker, The Great Blondin. On June 30, 1859, before 25,000 people, he became the first man to walk across Niagara Falls on a tightrope. And he didn’t just do it once, he did it several times. Once he did it blindfolded. Another time he did it pushing a wheelbarrow filled with 350 pounds of cement. The crowd roared louder with each trip. Then, The Great Blondin stopped and asked the people if they thought he could push a man across in the wheelbarrow. They all shouted, “Yes, yes! We believe in you.” The Great Blondin saw one man cheering wildly and asked, “Sir, do you think I could safely carry you across in this wheelbarrow?”

The man replied, “Yes, of course I do!”

Blondin said, “Okay, get in!”

The man refused.ⁱ

So, by his refusal, that man demonstrated that he really didn’t “trust” in The Great Blondin, right?

We come today to Mark chapter 3, where John Mark is describing Jesus’ early ministry in northern Israel around the Sea of Galilee. In this chapter, Mark describes three categories of people who kept showing up whenever Jesus spoke or performed miracles. Those three groups were His Critics, the Crowds and The Called. Let’s see who in these groups is willing to get into Jesus’ wheelbarrow! First:

I. The Critics

These, of course, are the teachers of the law whom I labeled last week, the “legal beagles.” Now, these critics had no intention of ever getting into Jesus’ wheelbarrow! They saw Jesus perform miracles and not only did it not convince them of who He was, they walked away hating Him even more. After Jesus healed the man with a shriveled hand, it says:

...The Pharisees went out and began to plot with the Herodians how they might kill Jesus. (Mark 3:6)

That’s a rather severe reaction! And later in this same chapter they accuse Jesus of performing miracles by the power of Satan. They said:

...He is possessed by Beelzebub! By the prince of demons he is driving out demons. (Mark 3:22)

This charge was so ridiculous, Jesus was almost speechless. He finally said:

...How can Satan drive out Satan? If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. (Mark 3:23b, 24)

So, how did these religious leaders get so turned around? They were supposedly the experts in the Law, experts in the prophecies. It's the Law and the Prophets that predicted that a Messiah would one day have to come because the Law was not capable of removing sin permanently. That's what the prophets said:

The multitude of your sacrifices – what are they to me...

I have no pleasure in the blood of bulls and lambs and goats. (Is. 1:11)

And the Prophets said this Messiah would not come as a king or ruler but as a Suffering Servant (Is. 52:13-53:12):

See, my servant will act wisely...

He was despised and rejected by men,

a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering...

...he was led like a lamb to the slaughter... (Is. 52:13; 53:3, 7b)

So, how did these experts in the prophecies miss this?

Jesus tells us how they missed it. They were in the process of committing the unpardonable sin, that's how. What do I mean by that? Well, have you heard of "the unpardonable sin"? Jesus defines it here in Mark 3, verses 28 and 29:

I tell you the truth, all the sins and blasphemies of men will be forgiven them. But whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will never be forgiven; he is guilty of an eternal sin. (Mark 3:28-29)

The word "blaspheme" in this context means "to deny permanently the authority and claims of the Holy Spirit." What are the claims of the Holy Spirit? That Jesus is the one and only Savior and that we are sinners in need of a Savior. Do you know anyone who denies that Jesus is the one and only Savior and that he is a sinner in need of a Savior? Well, they haven't committed the unpardonable sin; not yet. Why not? Because they haven't died yet. To blaspheme against the Holy Spirit, you have to deny His claims PERMANENTLY, all the way until you die. If you do that, then yes, Jesus' words will absolutely come true for you – you will be found guilty of an eternal sin for which you will never, ever be forgiven.

BUT, as long as you are still breathing, you have not committed that sin because you still have a chance to repent and receive the gift of forgiveness. These "legal beagles" were only in the process of committing the unpardonable sin. But as long as they denied that Jesus was the Savior of the world – as long as they denied that they were sinners - they were unable to understand the Scriptures because they were resisting the Holy Spirit and He is the only one who could open their eyes to that truth.

Do you see what Jesus is also saying here? He's saying that once you die, there's no second chance. Those who teach that a sinner can be moved from Purgatory to heaven by believers here on earth praying and celebrating a Mass and lighting candles for them – they are teaching a lie. That's not true! Jesus made it clear: "...whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will NEVER be forgiven..." The only way your sins can be forgiven is if you do it here, in this life. You have no chance after you die. Do you see the urgency of sharing Grace and Mercy with our neighbors now? Secondly, Mark shows us in chapter three...

II. The Crowd

In verses 7 through 12 we see that Jesus' reputation as a healer has spread. It says that "a large crowd" has followed Jesus and His disciples to the Sea of Galilee.

In naming the places these people have come from, the Scripture is literally saying that they were coming from north, south, east and west. Some of the locations are eighty miles away. It would have taken them a week to walk there. So, you'd think that all these people would've been dedicated followers, people who really trusted Jesus, right?

Well, the "legal beagles" came from Jerusalem which was about 65 miles away and they certainly didn't come to worship Him. But if you came to be healed, doesn't that prove that you believe?

Certainly some people who were healed had a genuine faith and trust in Jesus. They acknowledged that He was the only Savior of the world and they acknowledged that they needed a Savior. But just because you believe Jesus can heal your body doesn't mean that you believe you need your soul healed as well. The 'legal beagles' believed that Jesus was healing people miraculously but they believed He was doing it by the power of Satan. In other words, they not only didn't think their souls needed to be healed, but they thought their souls were healthier than Jesus' soul!

In fact, Jesus' family thought this, including His mother! In verse 21 we see that they too have come to the lake but they are coming to "*take charge of him,*" which literally means to arrest him or forcibly take Him home. Why? Because His family, (including His mother), think He is "*out of his mind.*" So, it's possible to "follow Jesus" for wrong or selfish reasons. Some of the people just wanted to be healed physically. They had no intention of anything more than that. Others came just to see the miracles. Who isn't fascinated by a miracle?

But Jesus turns nobody away. Jesus doesn't tell anybody to "stop coming." He never says, "Don't follow me!" Not even to the demon possessed! If you think you can control Jesus, "take charge of Him," He's not gonna let you do that. In fact, He'll tell you the truth straight up. But He never says, "Why don't you just stay home." Not even to the 'legal beagles.' Why not? Because Jesus believes that even the most self-centered, egocentric control freak is worth dying for.

There is a theological perspective that believes that Christ's work on the cross was "limited." In other words, it was never meant to be applied to everyone but only to the "elect." I disagree with that perspective. I believe that by His actions and by His words, Jesus' message is clear. Jesus said: (John 3:16)

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that WHOEVER BELIEVES in him shall not perish but have eternal life.

What prevents people from being saved? That they weren't predestined? NO!! The only "limit" is if they believe. Jesus never even hinted that some people should just stop coming to Him because He had seen the list of who was predestined and they weren't on it, so they might as well just stay home! No, He invited them all and so did His apostles! Remember when the apostle Paul was on trial and he appeared before the Roman governor Felix and King Agrippa? He's preaching the Gospel to them - hardened Roman politicians! Paul says to Agrippa:

"King Agrippa, do you believe the prophets? I know you do."

Then Agrippa said to Paul, "Do you think that in such a short time you can persuade me to be a Christian?" Paul replied, "Short time or long - I

pray God that not only you but all who are listening to me today may become what I am, except for these chains.” (Acts 26:27-29)

Even the apostle Paul, who taught most clearly about predestination, never gave up on anyone. He preached to the end of his life that we are “*saved by grace through faith...*” As long as there is breath, no one has fallen beyond the gracious reach of the saving hand of God.

So, I must ask; what kind of follower are you? Why have you come here today? Is something broken in your life and you’ve heard that others have found healing here so you’re hoping to find that? Are you here just out of curiosity? Maybe a miracle will happen? Let me tell you why I think you’re here: Jesus is calling you. He is the one who created you with His Father and He truly wants to spend all eternity getting to know you. He died on the cross to make that possible. He paid your debt, the debt you’ve run up by your disobedience to God’s law. But that payment won’t be applied to your account until you put your trust in His actions, His death in place of yours. It’s free to you, but extremely costly to Him. Will you claim this free gift today? Will you leave the crowd and become His true follower today? I say with Paul, “*...short time or long, I pray God that not only you but all who are listening to me today might become what I am... debt free in Christ!*”

The last group of Followers Mark shows us are...

III. The Called

In verses 13 to 15 Mark writes:

Jesus went up on a mountainside and called to him those he wanted, and they came to him. He appointed twelve – designating them apostles – that they might be with him and that he might send them out to preach and to have authority to drive out demons. (Mark 3:13-15)

While Jesus loves all people the same, He does have a deeper friendship with some than He does with others. Why is that? Well, why do you have a deeper friendship with some people than others? Isn’t it mostly because of the level of trust you have in them? The more you trust somebody, the deeper your relationship is with that person because you tell them more and more truth about yourself, right? Even the bad stuff. You don’t tell your worst mistakes to someone you don’t trust. Why not? Because they might put it on the Internet!

So, how do you build trust with someone? Mark says that Jesus called these twelve men to Him so that “*...they might be with him...*” Trust is a bridge built between two people, one brick at a time. Each brick is an action that shows you that the other person can be trusted. If I say I’m going to do something for you and I do it, one brick is laid. If I share an embarrassing truth about myself and you don’t tell it to anyone, another brick is laid; maybe two! If I break a trust, a brick or two (or ten) are torn out of the bridge. The depth of our friendship depends on how many bricks each of us has laid in our bridge.

With some people, you have a bridge that is so sturdy, it can bear the weight of some of the heaviest crises in life. With other people, you have so few bricks in your bridge that one piece of gossip will break it down.

It says in Mark 14:50 that when Jesus was arrested, “*...everyone deserted him...*” That’s a pretty serious trust break. But eleven of those disciples were reunited with Jesus. All but one: Judas. This wasn’t the first time Judas had broken

trust with Jesus. He'd been doing it all along. He was the group treasurer and John 12 says that Judas was stealing from the money box all along.

So, what's my point? Jesus doesn't just want a deep friendship with some of His followers. He wants a deep and deepening friendship with every follower. He's putting "trust bricks" into the bridge between you and Him. Are you? Trust is a two person project... always a two person project. If the depth of your friendship with Jesus isn't what you'd like it to be, it's not Jesus who needs to lay more bricks. It's you. Do you really trust Him?

Romans 8:28 says:

And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him...

Do you KNOW that? If you really knew that then, even when bad things happen, when disease or limitation comes, you would trust that God could work it for good, right? Isn't that what this verse says?

In 2008, Chris Downey had just started a new job at a successful architectural firm. A few weeks into the job, he noticed something was wrong with his vision. He went to the doctor who told him he had a tumor wrapped around his optic nerve and it had to come out right away. After the surgery, he still had blurred vision and then five days later; *boom!* - everything went dark. Downey was completely blind.

He tried to continue his work by relying on others to read the drawings but it just wasn't working. Then he heard of a blind computer scientist who had devised a program to create tactile architectural plans. Much to his surprise, Downey discovered that his blindness actually gave him a unique way to "observe" interior spaces - not with his eyes, but with his fingers. The company vice president said, "I realized that the way Chris reads drawings is... the way we [all] experience space."

Because of his blindness, Chris now can envision new possibilities for the creative use of space that he couldn't before. His limitations or weaknesses have become gifts and strengths - not only for himself, but for his clients and his community. ⁱⁱ

Jesus said: (John 14:1)

Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me.

How many bricks of trust will you lay in your bridge to Jesus this week? Let's pray...

ⁱ www.crosswalk.com

ⁱⁱ Douglas McGray, "Design Within Reach," *The Atlantic* (Oct. 2010)