

Sermon for Sunday, July 29, 1973 by Andrew A. Jumper, D.D., Pastor  
Central Presbyterian Church, St. Louis, Missouri

"WHY BELIEVE IN JESUS?"

St. John 10:22-42

Text: "The works that I do in my Father's name, they bear witness of me."  
St. John 10:25

During the brief years of the ministry of Jesus, people who came into contact with him fell into two general categories--those who believed in him and those who did not. Of those who did not believe in him we would include the religious leaders of his day. In our scripture for this morning we read that some of them gathered around Jesus as he walked through the long porches on the sides of the temple. They asked him why they should believe in him. They said, "How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Christ, tell us plainly."

Now, the fact is, just as there are a lot of people today who don't want to believe in Jesus, so in his own time there were those who didn't want to believe in him either. The reason they didn't want to believe was because of the changes it would make in their lives. If a man doesn't want to change his way of life he will find a reason for not believing in Jesus. He will say that he is happy with the way he is; he will say that the things about Jesus couldn't possibly be true; he will say that he is a good person and he can live a moral life without Jesus. Now, Jesus knew that. So, he said to them, "I told you, and you do not believe."

As a matter of fact, there are many people who say they believe in Jesus when they really don't. The Bible says, "By their fruits shall you know them." We can see by the lives of many of us that we are not true believers. There is no fruit of our faith in our lives. We live as though Jesus doesn't matter. There is no evidence of love or joy or peace or patience or the other fruits of the Spirit in our lives. Perhaps it would be well for each of us to examine our own lives this morning and ask ourselves, "Am I truly a believer? Are there evidences in my life that Jesus is the Lord of my life?"

So, one class of people around Jesus were those who did not believe in Him. The second category were those who did. Jesus said, "The works that I do in my Father's name, they bear witness to me." So there were those who believe in him because of the wonderful works he did. And as they believed in him, wonderful things happened in their lives. They became changed men and women; their hearts were transformed; they bore in their lives the fruits of the Spirit. So this morning I want to talk about some of the works of Jesus that bear witness to him. If you do not want your life to be changed or if you are unwilling to admit your need to be changed, the works of Jesus won't convince you any more than they did some of the people of his day. But if you have desperate needs this morning or if you really want to believe and are willing to have your life wonderfully changed, the works of Jesus will surely convince you.

First, you can believe in Jesus because of his words. There are people who are willing to accept the teachings of Jesus but who do not want to acknowledge him as the Son of God. Yet, Jesus also taught that he was the Son of God. Either you accept all of his teachings--including that--or you must reject all he taught as being the words of a madman who cannot be trusted. Do you want to know about the meaning of life? Read such parables as, "Behold, a sower went out to sow..." Do you need comfort? Read such things as, "In my Father's house are many mansions..." or, "Come unto me all ye that labor and are heavy laden..." Do you wonder about life after death? Read such words as, "I go to prepare a place for you..."

In the 7th chapter of St. John we read how the Jews sent some men to question Jesus in order to trap him. Yet, when those men heard Jesus teach, they went back to their leaders and reported, "Never man spake like this man." I do not know what your problem or trouble may be this morning. I don't know what your heartache or sorrow or burden is. But I do know this: If you will read the words of Jesus in the Bible, he will speak to your need. People sometimes have the impression that God's word is old fashioned and out-of-date. But the words of Jesus are as out-of-date as a heartache or a tear or a burden. They are as out-moded and dated as grief and tragedy or the need to be forgiven. Fashions and fads do indeed change, but the basic needs of man do not. We never outgrow the need to be loved or understood, the need for acceptance and forgiveness. The Bible tells us that the Word of God is the same yesterday, today and forever. Yes, you can believe in Jesus because his unchanging word still speaks to the unchanging needs of man.

Secondly, you can believe in Jesus because of his deeds. This was the case with Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews, who came to Jesus one night and said, "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher come from God; for no one can do these signs that you do, unless God is with him." In the 4th chapter of St. Mark we are told how Jesus came to his disciples on the sea one stormy night and stilled the storm. The Bible says, "And they were filled with awe, and said to one another, 'who then is this, that even wind and sea obey him?'" Yes, who then is this--who then is this that opens blind eyes, makes the lame to walk and heals the sick?

Back at the turn of the century the modern liberal movement was getting up a head of steam. They did not believe the miracles of the Bible. Miracles did not follow the laws of nature and could not be accounted for scientifically. So, they began to search for the so-called historical Jesus. They said, "If we can scrape away all the untrue supernatural stories in the New Testament we will find the real Jesus of history." But that effort failed for the simple reason that when they had done away with the supernatural elements about Jesus there was nothing left. You simply cannot separate Jesus from his supernatural deeds.

Now, let me quickly confess that I do not understand the miracles nor can I explain them except to say that either they really happened or the writers of the Bible were incredible liars and built their own lives on a fantastic hoax. Personally, I can only conclude that he was truly the Son of God because of his mighty deeds.

Let me go on to confess that I believe in the miracles of Jesus for today. I know many people who have experienced genuine miracles in their lives. Yet, to me the greatest miracle of all is the ability of Jesus to change lives. What a miracle it is to know that God loves us and can change us. One of my seminary professors used to say, "The most incredible miracle of all is that God loves me. If I can believe that, any other miracle is of secondary importance." God can and sometimes does heal all manner of illness. But of far greater significance and far greater importance is the miracle that God heals broken lives, that he heals the separation between us and himself in Jesus.

Notice thirdly that you can believe in Jesus because of his death. Does that sound strange? Does it sound strange to say you can believe in a man because of his death? Yet, there is something strikingly different about the death of Jesus. Even the Roman soldier at the foot of the cross recognized it when he cried out, "Surely this man was the Son of God."

There is something about the death of Jesus that is extra-ordinary. I cannot fully nor adequately express it in words. I remember one Sunday night as a young minister standing up at evening service to read the scripture. I was reading the

crucifixion story as St. Matthew tells it. As I began to read, a hush came over us all. It was as though the Spirit of God descended on that little church. It was as though God held us in the hollow of his hand as I read. When I finished the story of Jesus' death most of us had tears rolling down our cheeks. When we read of what Jesus did for us, how he bore the agony and shame of the cross in our place, we can never be quite the same again.

One of our missionaries to Korea was examining a native woman who wished to join the church. She put her arm gently around the lady so that she would not be frightened by the questions and said, "Tell me a story about Jesus." With her face aglow the Korean woman began her simple story. She came to the Calvary scene and told it all until the moment when the nails were driven into his feet and hands. She began to sob and said, "I can't tell that part. It breaks my heart." Yes, "It breaks my heart." As one poet put it,

"I know not how Calvary's cross  
A world from Sin could free.  
I only know its matchless love,  
Has brought God's love to me."

Jesus said, "And I, if I be lifted up, shall draw all men unto me." There is a magnetism about the crucified Jesus that does something to our hearts. Let me share with you the story told by a famous Roman Catholic Bishop of France. Three university students of Paris were walking down a street one day when they passed a church where the people were going in to confession. The students, cynical and sarcastic, talked about this thing they called "superstition." As they drew abreast of the church, they suddenly dared one of the students to go into the church and tell the priest what they had been saying. Taking the dare, the student entered the church and confronted the priest. "Father," he said, "I have come here merely to tell you that Christianity is a dying institution and that religion is a superstition." The priest looked at the young man keenly and said, "Why did you come here to tell me this, my son?" The student explained the dare of his friends. The priest listened carefully and said to him, "You accepted the challenge of your friends and came here. Will you accept one from me? I dare you to walk up to the chancel where you will find a large wooden cross with the figure of Jesus crucified upon it. I want you to stand there before that cross and say these words, 'Jesus you died for me and I don't care a damn.'" To save face the student agreed. He went into the church and stood before the cross and said, "Jesus you died for me and I don't care a damn." He came swaggering back to the priest and said, "I have done it!" "Do it once more," said the priest, "for after all, it means nothing to you." The student went back and stood for a long time looking at the figure of Jesus nailed to the cross. At last he stammered out the words. To the priest he said, "I am going now. I have done it." "Once more," said the priest, "do you dare just once more?" A third time the young man stood before the cross of Jesus and looked at the suffering saviour. At last he bowed his head and fell to his knees. He came back to the priest and said, "Father, may I make my confession now?" And then the famous bishop, Canon R. E. Davies, concluded his story as he said to his congregation, "And my dear people, that young man was myself."

Yes, we can believe in Jesus because of his death. Somehow we know, you and I, that it was for us. As the hymn-writer put it,

"Upon the cross of Jesus  
Mine eye at time can see  
The very dying form of One  
Who suffered there for me:  
And from my stricken heart with tears  
Two wonders I confess



The wonders of redeeming love  
And my unworthiness.

Near Gerni, in the Swiss Alps, there is a certain dangerous cliff. There, standing out white and pure against the blue sky is a marble cross. On its cross-bar are written the words, "Jesus Only." It seems that some years ago a wealthy couple and their little girl were climbing in the mountains when the child slipped and fell to her death over that dangerous cliff. Filled with grief and desperate sadness, the parents tried to forget, to overcome the tragedy and sorrow in their lives. All of their wealth and prestige did them no good, for position and money could not buy happiness nor bring back a little girl who was dead. Through their grief they came to discover Jesus and found comfort and peace at last. And there upon the mountain where they had lost their daughter but found Jesus, they erected that cross with its message, "Jesus Only."

Because of his Words, his deeds, his death, you can believe in Jesus. You see, he is the only one who can change your life--he is the only one who can heal a broken heart, share the load of your burden, lift the unhappiness from your soul. Yes, you can believe in Jesus--Jesus only--

What language shall I borrow  
To thank Thee, dearest Friend,  
For this Thy dying sorrow,  
Thy pity without end?  
O make me Thine forever;  
And should I fainting be,  
Lord, let me never, never  
Outlive my love to Thee.

Some have been told that Christianity is a lying institution and that religion is a superstition. The priest looked at the young man kindly and said, "Why did you come here to tell me this, my son? The student explained the date of his friends. The priest listened carefully and said to him, "You accepted the challenge of your friends and came here. Will you accept now from me? I dare you to walk up to the cross where you will find a large wooden cross with the figure of Jesus crucified upon it. I want you to stand there before that cross and say these words, 'Jesus you died for me and I don't want a damn. I want the student agreed. He went into the church and stood before the cross and said, 'Jesus you died for me and I don't want a damn.' He came staggering back to the priest and said, 'I have done it! He is now my friend.' The priest said, 'For all that, it means nothing to you.' The student went back and stood for a long time looking at the figure of Jesus nailed to the cross. At last he turned away and said, 'I have done it. I am going home. I have done it.' The priest said, 'Do you have that same heart?' A third time the young man stood before the cross at Jesus and looked at the suffering without. At last he bowed his head and fell to his knees. He came back to the priest and said, 'Father, may I make my confession now?' And then the famous words came. The priest, concluding his story as he said to his congregation, 'And my dear people, that young man was right!'

Yes, we can believe in Jesus because of his death. Therefore we know, you and I, that it was for us. As the hymn-writer put it,

Upon the cross of Jesus  
Thine eye of love can see  
The very dying form of One  
Who suffered there for me  
And from my sinful heart will never  
Two wonders I conceal