

Belief in John

3 Statements

1. Belief is an action. The Royal Official “took Jesus at his word and departed.” “Took Jesus at his word” is the same greek word elsewhere translated in John as “believe”. Upon believing, the Royal Official departed. He left! Before seeing any miracle, before knowing his son was healed, he left. Today, belief has become an idea, an emotion, or a feeling. “I believe....” has become a thought (something you think). But, in the Bible “I believe....” is an action (something you do). What you do is an indication of what you believe. When Jesus says: “Believe in me”, he is asking for us to do something, to act.

Read James 2.14-18. How does James view of “faith/belief” expand on John’s understanding?

How do your beliefs show up in your daily life?

2. Belief is connected to, but not dependent on signs. In the book of John, belief tends to center around the 7 signs. Take for example the last of the seven signs, the Raising of Lazarus in John 11.1-12.11.

- Before the event, Jesus says “Lazarus is dead and I’m glad I wasn’t there so that you may believe.” (11.15)
- Upon arrival, Jesus speaks with Martha and reminds her, “I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live...do you believe?” (John 11.25-26)
- Her reply is simple enough: “I believe that you are the Christ....” (John 11.27)
- When they arrive at the tomb where Lazarus is buried, Jesus prays: “Father, I thank you that you have heard me. I knew that you always hear me, but I said this for the benefit of the people standing here, that they may believe that you sent me.” (John 11.41-42)
- After Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead “...many of the Jews who had come to visit Mary, and had seen what Jesus did, put their faith in him.” (John 11.45) [same greek word]
- Days later “the Chief priests made plans to kill Lazarus as well, for on account of him many of the Jews were going over to Jesus and putting their faith in him.” (John 12.10-11)

Six times, surrounding one sign, is belief mentioned. John makes it clear, through Jesus own words, that the signs are the basis for many beliefs [see appendix 1 for more]. This is part of the formula that John writes in John 20.31: “These things are written so that you may believe...” The these things are in part the seven signs. Jesus said it himself: “Unless you people see miraculous signs and wonders you will never believe.” (4.48)

How do the 7 signs demonstrate who Jesus is? What do they reveal about his character? His power? His connection to God?

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3. Belief is praised where signs are absent. John precedes his purpose statement in 20.30-31, with this statement to Thomas: "Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen me and yet have believed." (John 20.29) Sure enough, belief in John was tied to signs, but there were other ways that belief happens.

- Through Testimony: John the Baptist's (John 1.7; 10.42); the Samaritan Woman's (John 4.39); and John the Author (John 19.35)
- Through Jesus' Teaching: the disciples, after hearing a hard teaching (6.60-66); after his teaching at the feast many "put their faith in him" (7.30); when Jesus spoke about his identity many "put their faith in him" (8.30). Martha when Jesus tells her: "I am the resurrection and the life...do you believe?" (11.25-27)
- Through an Encounter with Jesus: "If you look to the Son" (6.40); "Don't let your hearts be troubled, put your trust in me." (14.1); "believe me..." (14.11); "this makes us believe" (16.30).

Many have not seen miracles and believed. John's Gospel contains two examples of belief without seeing: John the author and the Royal official. On Easter morning, Mary and the other women go to the tomb in John 20. They find it empty and race back to tell the disciples. Peter and John bolt to investigate. John, being younger and faster than Peter, arrives at the tomb first but he does not go inside. Peter, arriving a few minutes later, pushes past John and welcomes himself in. He sees the empty slab and the folded grave clothes and tries to put it all together. John finally goes inside and verse 8 says: "He saw and believed." it is a testament to what true belief looks like in John. Sure he saw the empty tomb and folded clothes, but not Resurrected Jesus. Without seeing Jesus, John believed.

The Royal Official wanted his son healed and went to Jesus. Jesus says "without sign's you won't believe." (4.38) Then Jesus tells him: "Your son will live." (4.50) Before he knows his son is healed, he "took Jesus at his word." (4.50) It is the same word elsewhere translated: "believe". The Royal Official "believed Jesus". True and pure belief is trusting Jesus without seeing the sign.

Are you the type of person who can believe without seeing first? Does the thought of "believing without first seeing" scare you in any way? What makes this type of belief so important to John?

Why do you think John wanted to put so much emphasis on belief? After reading John 6.35-40 what is so important about belief?