

I Believe

In one of the modern re-makes of the Christmas movie “Miracle on 34th Street” many of the people in the courtroom were wearing buttons that said: “I Believe.” This phrase has become associated with the Christmas season and we find yard signs and wall art expressing the same thing. In the movie, the phrase was an expression of belief that the man on trial was indeed Santa Claus. For many (if not all) of the people posting the signs during Christmas season believe in a Santa Claus or at least want others to think they do.

What is involved in our being able to state our belief? Perhaps, we hear a trusted person tell us something and, because we trust them, we believe. For example, we may tune in to a local weather personality and hear that it will be cool but dry; we believe this is true and we dress accordingly. For others, it may take more proof before we believe.

The classic example of this type of person is the famous doubter in the Bible know as Thomas. We may recall that Jesus had been with some of the disciples following the resurrection. Thomas did not want to believe based on the witness of his fellow disciples.

But Thomas, one of the twelve, who was called Didymus (I.e., *the Twin*), was not with them when Jesus came. So, the other disciples were saying to him, “We have seen the Lord!” But he said to them, “Unless I see in His hands the imprint of the nails, and put my finger into the place of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe.” (John 20:24-25 NASB)

Eight days later, Jesus provides the exact proof that Thomas wanted.

Then He said to Thomas, “Place your finger here, and see My hands; and take your hand and put it into My side; and do not continue in disbelief, but *be* a believer.” Thomas answered and said to Him, “My Lord and my God!” Jesus said to him, “Because you have seen Me, have you *now* believed? Blessed *are* they who did not see, and *yet* believed.” (John 20:24-29 NASB)

This requirement of proof from a disciple who had been with Jesus during much of His ministry shows the skepticism that we see today was in existence even in the days when Jesus was on earth. What does it take for us to reach the point where we say: I believe?

As Jesus was beginning His ministry, He went to meet with John the Baptist. John was a cousin of Jesus but more importantly, he was the prophet sent to prepare the way for His ministry. That prophet was John the Baptist. John understood his part in the ministry of Jesus. In the 1st chapter beginning with verse 19, we find that some of the religious leaders came to check on John.

This is the testimony of John, when the Jews sent priests and Levites to him from Jerusalem to ask him, “Who are you?” And he confessed and did not deny; and *this is what* he confessed: “I am not the Christ.” And *so*, they asked him, “What then? Are you Elijah?” And he said, “I am not.” “Are you the Prophet?” And he answered, “No.” Then they said to him, “Who are you? *Tell us*, so that we may give an answer to those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?” He said, “I am THE VOICE OF ONE CALLING OUT IN THE WILDERNESS, ‘MAKE THE WAY OF THE LORD STRAIGHT,’ as Isaiah the prophet said.” (John 1:19-23 NASB)

John gave them the scriptural answer so that they would be able to know that the Christ, the Messiah would soon be on the scene. For those of us who want to read this prophecy, it can be found in Isaiah 40:3.

John knew about Jesus and knew that Jesus was sent by God and that Jesus would replace John in the plan of salvation as revealed by God. John held no false impression of his own importance.

As we continue to read in the first chapter of John picking up at verse 29.

The next day he saw Jesus coming to him, and said, “Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world! This is He in behalf of whom I said, ‘After me is coming a Man who has proved to be my superior, because He existed before me.’ And I did not recognize Him, but so that He would be revealed to Israel, I came baptizing in water.” And John testified, saying, “I have seen the Spirit descending as a dove out of heaven, and He remained upon Him. And I did not recognize Him, but He who sent me to baptize in water said to me, ‘He upon whom you see the Spirit descending and remaining upon Him, this is the One who baptizes in the Holy Spirit.’ And I myself have seen, and have testified that this is the Son of God.” (John 1:29-34 NASB)

Within the group of people who were with John, two left John and started to follow Jesus. We are told the identity of one of the two yet never learn the identity of the other. There are several opinions. The most popular guess is that the unnamed disciple was John (the apostle). However, this is only a conjecture.

And the two disciples heard him speak, and they followed Jesus. And Jesus turned and saw them following, and said to them, “What are you seeking?” They said to Him, “Rabbi (which translated means Teacher), where are You staying?” He said to them, “Come, and you will see.” So, they came and saw where He was staying, and they stayed with Him that day; it was about the tenth hour. One of the two who heard John *speak*, and followed Him, was Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother. He first found his own brother Simon and said to him, “We have found the Messiah” (which translated means Christ). (John 1:37-41 NASB)

Many of you know that I frequently cite Matthew 28:19 where Jesus tells us to go make disciples. Here we see Andrew is so excited about finding the Messiah that he went and found his brother and shared the news. In a brief encounter, Andrew had come to believe that Jesus was the promised Messiah.

He brought him to Jesus. Jesus looked at him and said, “You are Simon the son of John; you shall be called Cephas” (which is translated Peter *or rock*).

The next day He decided to go to Galilee, and He found Philip. And Jesus said to him, “Follow Me.” Now Philip was from Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter. (John 1:42-44 NASB)

Here we notice that the first disciples were introduced to Jesus by John the Baptist or by one of the other disciples, Jesus took the initiative in calling Philip. He, like Andrew and Peter, was a Galilean and quite likely a fisherman.

The name Bethsaida, his hometown, means "house of fishing." Like Andrew, Philip believed that Jesus was the Messiah that had been promised throughout the Old Testament. Philip goes and finds another person with whom to share the good news.

The person who was called by Philip seems to have been a student of the Law, for Philip appealed to him on the basis of the prediction in the Law and the Prophets. Another indicator is the phrase used by Jesus **under the fig tree** (found in verse 48) was used in rabbinic literature to describe meditation on the Law.

Again, we see that Philip is so excited about finding the Messiah that he went to tell someone else.

Philip found Nathanael and said to him, “We have found Him of whom Moses wrote in the Law, and the prophets *also wrote*: Jesus the son of Joseph, from Nazareth!” Nathanael said to him, “Can anything good be from Nazareth?” Philip said to him, “Come and see.” Jesus saw Nathanael coming to Him, and said of him, “Here is truly an Israelite, in whom there is

no deceit!” Nathanael said to Him, “How do You know me?” Jesus answered and said to him, “Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you.” Nathanael answered Him, “Rabbi, You are the Son of God; You are the King of Israel!” Jesus answered and said to him, “Because I said to you that I saw you under the fig tree, do you believe? You will see greater things than these.” And He said to him, “Truly, truly, I say to you, you will see heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man.” (John1:45-51 NASB)

Nathanael was skeptical when he heard Philip proclaim that Jesus was the Messiah. **“Can anything good be from Nazareth?”** To which Philip invited him to come and see. When Nathanael heard Jesus address him as **an Israelite, in whom there is no deceit**, he asked Jesus how He knew him. Jesus told him that He had seen him under the fig tree even before Philip had called him. As mentioned earlier, that phrase about the fig tree has significance and often refers to a place where someone might sit and read, study, and meditate on God’s word.

This answer prompted Nathanael to believe. **“Rabbi, You are the Son of God; You are the King of Israel!”** Jesus assured him that he would see greater things.

This morning, we have looked at two disciples that had followed John, Peter, Philip, and Nathanael. They met Jesus and believed that He was the Messiah. There is no record of any miracles nor is there any record of dynamic sermons that were delivered. Yet, each of these men believed. Andrew believed and went to Peter. Philip believed and went to Nathanael. These men believed and acted on their belief. They left their current situation and followed Jesus. They shared the good news of finding the Messiah with others. Their belief prompted them into action. Most, if not all of us gathered here this morning will gladly declare that we believe yet, has our belief prompted us to share the good news with others? Maybe we are like our friend Thomas whom we mentioned at the beginning of today’s message. We believe but we are waiting for proof. The five men we read about in John the first chapter believed. They believed and acted on their belief. Have we acted in a manner that the words of Jesus may be said of us? **Blessed are they who did not see, and yet believed.** Are we blessed by our belief?