

Stage III. The Early Judean Ministry

C. The First Passover of Jesus' Ministry

2. Jesus' First Major Healing Ministry, in the Temple

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23 Now while he was in Jerusalem at the Passover Festival, many people believed in Jesus' name as they saw the signs he was continually performing. 24 But Jesus himself would not commit himself to them , for he knew all people. 25 He did not need anyone to testify to him about mankind, for he always knew what was in each person.

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NOTE: We use superscript identification of the source gospel in "blended texts" as follows: Matthew = ^{MT}, Mark = ^M, Luke = ^L, John = ^J, Acts = ^A. This "superscript ID" is inserted at the beginning of the quoted text, identifying that Bible book until a different superscript appears. In addition, *the words of Jesus are italicized in red*. Old Testament quotations are CAPITALIZED.

	CONTEXT DIGEST
Location	The Temple in Jerusalem
Timeline	Early April, 30 AD (Month Three)
Jesus' Life Context	Stage III: The Early Judean Ministry
	C. The First Passover of Jesus' Ministry
Title	2. Jesus' First Major healing Ministry, in the Temple

COMMENT:

Jesus followed up the cleansing of the Temple with an outpouring of compassion, for he began to heal people. (For Jesus, cleansing always leads into ministry.) John's description makes it clear in the Greek that there was a non-stop stream of healing taking place. In Cana we saw the first instance of a specific miracle-scene in the life of Jesus. Today's reading give us the first example of a general, non-specific healing scene in the gospels. What is the difference?

Specific miracle-scenes in the gospels describe the details of the miracle, including the interaction between Jesus and the person(s) receiving the miracle. Of the 35 specific miracle scenes in the gospels, nine describe miracles related to nature, and 26 involve healing and exorcisms. In contrast, general, non-specific healing scenes describe Jesus healing a succession of people in a certain place over a period of time, with no specific details of any of the miracles. Multiple passages with this kind of healing scene in the gospels show us that Jesus actually performed many more miracles (probably in the thousands) of healing and deliverance than the 35 specific miracles recorded in the gospels. These represented the kind of miracles that Jesus was performing en masse on a regular basis.

This first instance of public healing ministry by Jesus was particularly important for two reasons. First, it occurred in the Temple Courts in Jerusalem. It was therefore an official Messianic claim by Jesus, performed before all the Jewish leadership, and an extensive cross-section of the Jewish nation, including people from all throughout Palestine, and pilgrims from around the world as well. Since it occurred at the beginning of

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Jesus ministry, it established his Messianic credentials from the outset in a powerful way, and caused the news about him to spread like wildfire throughout the land.

Second, these miracles were an unusual expression of compassion and grace. Jesus healed in spite of the inadequate quality of the people's faith. John emphasized this with his explanation of Jesus' thinking in our text (2.24-25). There is a crucial lesson here about the goodness of God's grace in spite of our sinful unworthiness to receive it.

The key issue was the nature of the peoples' faith. In spite of the fact that "many believed in him," Jesus did NOT "commit himself" to them in response. This is surprising. Furthermore, this decision not to commit himself to the quality of their faith was based upon his perfect knowledge of their hearts, and thoughts. John highlighted this by mentioning it twice in succession. Jesus knew them, therefore He did NOT believe in them. This is a very important development in John's narrative, and we need to understand what Jesus is telling us all through His example in this text.

For Jesus (and the rest of Scripture, too!) "to believe" involves a decision of the entire personality (mind, emotions, and will), in a commitment to a personal relationship with God, based upon accurate (truthful) information about what God has said and done. The personal relationship component of faith is expressed by the term: "believe in" Jesus. Our trust in truthful information is expressed by the phrase: "believe that" God said or did something. True faith balances the "believe in" and "believe that" aspects of our relationship with God. That is, believing is more than agreeing to certain truth statements about God, and it is also more than merely relying upon God's power.

Believing is a powerful decision that creates a strong bond between the believer and the object of their faith. Thus John uses a trademark preposition in his gospel, "into," when he writes "believe in" Jesus. A literal translation sounds odd in English, so "into" is reduced to "in" for the vast majority of translations.

"Into" has a forceful energy in it, showing that true faith actually penetrates into the very Being of God (Jesus) and creates a union with Him. This union with Jesus ("I in you, and you in Me") created by real faith is another major theme of his teaching in John's gospel. Jesus receives our faith and allows it to "enter" into Him, and He in turn "enters into us" by His Spirit. The result: union. This brings to the crux of the issue in John 2.24.

In addition to the bonding power of true faith in John's gospel, believing must include commitment to follow in obedience. The same verb translated "believe" in 2.23 is rendered "commit" (or another word with essentially the same meaning) in 2.24. Faith is commitment TO Jesus, and it results in commitment FROM Jesus back to us, when He receives our faith (allows it to "enter" Him) as genuine. He knows our hearts, and makes an accurate judgement about the faith that approaches Him every time. In this case, He judged that the "believe in" and "believe that" dimensions of the people in Jerusalem was insufficient to warrant committing Himself back to them as their Personal Lord and Savior.

What was the problem? Simply put, they had faith in Jesus as a miracle-worker, but it stopped there. This is good as far as it goes, but it is a far cry from the robust confessions of faith of the first five disciples, or others who believe into Jesus in this gospel. Belief in the miraculous was really no big deal in the first century, compared to believing in the full Divinity of Jesus Christ and His saving works. These people were not yet committed to the Person of the Lord Jesus as Messiah as His disciples, and so He remained uncommitted to them.

We see the greatness of Jesus' grace in the way he continued to heal and deliver the needy people in the Temple over the week of Passover, in spite of their inadequate faith. They were not ready to become his disciples, but he loved them anyway, and poured out his compassion upon them. Saving faith is a pre-requisite for following Jesus, but it does not determine the character of his love for us, which is truly unconditional. These countless healings prove it.

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It is noteworthy that John does not describe Jesus preaching and teaching in the Temple during the week of Passover. This fits into his presentation of Jesus ministering to individuals during the Early Judean period. Jesus surely did proclaim the gospel to the great crowds in the Temple courts, but John does not mention it. Preaching to the masses will be the focus of his Great Galilean Ministry later on.

APPLICATION:

Western Christianity tends to err in two opposite directions regarding faith, at the same time. On the one hand, we tend to think of faith as assent to propositional truth; the "believe that" dimension of faith. If we agree with all the right doctrines intellectually, we "believe." Clearly that is not enough. Faith must include commitment to the Person of Jesus, in terms of risking full obedience to His Word because of Who HE IS.

On the other hand, in the last 50 years we have seen a huge emphasis upon miraculous power as evidence of true faith. Faith in Jesus as a miracle-worker is considered the premium expression of "believe in" kind of faith. Watch out with that. Jesus did not commit Himself to people who merely believed in his miraculous power..

Furthermore, everything "supernatural" in this world is not necessarily of God. I can show you numerous examples of "faith religions" in Japan, for example, who claim miraculous powers, and publish daily testimonies of healing events. Their appeal is to the curiosity of people regarding the "supernatural."

This is why the gospel writers, and especially John, present the miracles of Jesus as "signs" pointing to His ultimate sign: God humbling Himself in unconditional love to give His life for His enemies, forgiving them even as they mock and spurn Him, and rising from the dead to prove that He STILL loves and welcomes all who come in true faith to Him. This kind of behavior is only possible for God, and welds together the supernatural power of God with the revelation of His Holiness, in perfect moral goodness. This is "Christian faith" indeed, and is rooted and grounded upon the nature of God as Trinity.

How is the balance in your own faith between the "believe in" aspect, and "believe that...?" Where do you need to increase your content in order to have a balanced faith?

What is the evidence that Jesus has received your faith and committed Himself to you? What "fruit" of your faith have you experienced?

Paul wrote that "No person can call Jesus 'LORD' except by the power of the Holy Spirit." He means "call Jesus LORD" in the sense of confessing that truth because we truly believe it with all of our hearts.

Have you done that? Do you attribute your confession to the power of the Holy Spirit?

None of us are worthy to receive anything from God on the basis of our own merits. All of us have inadequate faith. That is why WE need grace... totally underserved (or unmerited) favor. That is why Jesus came to save us, "full of grace and truth...and out of his Divine fullness we have all received grace, constantly being replaced with new flows of grace." J 1.14B, 16.