

Believe

John 20:19—31 (v. 31)

Introduction

In July of 1973, the New York Mets found themselves in last place in the NL East by 12 ½ games. Their chairman, M. Donald Grant, went into the locker room to try to inspire them. It wasn't a very impressive speech and in the middle of it, relief pitcher, Tug McGraw, stood up and shouted over Grant, "Ya gotta believe!" He wasn't being disrespectful, but supportive. He was just that kind of guy. And, for some reason, it worked. That became their war cry and by the end of August, they were 6 ½ games out and went 21-8 the rest of the way to win their division with a record of 82-79.

The Importance of Belief

McGraw was right, ya gotta believe. The person who doesn't believe in anything will fail at everything. In golf, they call it visualizing. The idea is to see with your mind's eye yourself striking the ball and making the shot the way it's supposed to be. This helps you believe you can make the shot.

Belief in What?

Now, belief in yourself and your capabilities are great for athletics or doing a job. But we're not here for a self-help lesson. True success in life isn't about the "power of positive thinking." The question is, "What do you believe *in*?" Faith must have an object. And when we talk about salvation, like we are today, the object of our faith is Jesus Christ.

Purpose Statement

Every author has a reason for writing his or her book. The author must know "why" before putting pen to paper or fingers to keyboard. This is called the Purpose Statement. Many times, it will appear in the Introduction. John's Purpose Statement is found in our reading today: *These are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in His name (John 20:31).*

The Gift of Faith

Belief in Christ isn't like belief in yourself or your team. It's not something we can conjure up on our own. Faith is a gift of God, given by grace. That's what we mean when we say we are saved by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone. Christ paid the debt we could never pay when He died on the cross. Forgiveness of sins is a gift of grace. To receive the forgiveness won on the cross we receive it by faith. But that faith is also a gift of grace. So, how do we receive it?

Faith Come by Hearing

Faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ (Romans 10:17). God gives us this faith through His Word. That's what Paul means when he says: *For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes (Romans 1:16).* The same Word that reveals Christ to us, gives us the faith to believe in Him.

A Personal Faith

To believe that Jesus is the Christ the Son of God means to believe everything revealed about Him in Scripture, especially that He died on the cross and rose again. And it's not merely giving mental assent to this historical fact. Saving faith believes that Jesus Christ, the Son of God, died on the cross and rose again *for me*.

An Ongoing Faith

Also, this saving faith isn't a one-and-done type of thing. Had the Mets believed in July that they could turn things around but given up after a couple losses, they would never have made it. The word John uses that is translated *believe* is in the present, subjective, active tense, giving it the sense of *keep on believing*. Saving faith is an ongoing faith. Since we receive that faith from the Word, we must stay in the Word, continuing to put ourselves in a place to hear the Word, such as worship. When the Word is added to the bread and wine, we receive forgiveness of sins and a strengthening of that saving faith in Holy Communion. Ya gotta believe in the crucified, risen Jesus Christ!

*And the peace of God,
Which surpasses all understanding,
Will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.*
