

TRUST THE LORD

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Presented at Trinity Community Church, San Rafael, California, on Sunday, January 25, 2009

What's so important about Jesus? Isn't it enough to believe that there is a God?

*Hebrews 11:6 It is impossible to please God without faith. Anyone who wants to come to him must believe that God exists **and** that he rewards those who sincerely seek him.*

Believing that God exists is good, but what the Bible means by faith is something more than that: it is believing that He rewards those who sincerely seek Him.

That statement says several things:

- God is a person who makes relationships with others
- God can be found by those who seek Him diligently
- God rewards the effort of faith (seeking Him)

Believing that God exists prompts nothing; it is entirely passive, perhaps even unaware.

Believing that He rewards those who diligently seek Him prompts action, motivates diligent pursuit. And that's what brings Jesus into focus.

First truth: Real faith must be active. Inactive faith is dead, non-productive.

Many people hover on the edge of a living faith, having once tasted His vital presence long ago. But they do not seek Him; rather, they *assume* Him. They believe in God, but don't *believe God*. They don't disbelieve; they are not atheists. But they don't actively or actually trust Him; they simply passively believe that He exists.

If you are such a person, studies will show that you are comforted, at times, by Christian music, Bible quotations, receiving prayer, and church attendance. But the same people seldom pray on their own, or read much of the Bible, or worship in private, or engage in Christian service.

Faith must be active. Is it time for your faith to be activated for Christ?

Second truth: Faith must be persistent. Glancing is not gazing and seeing is not seeking. To emphasize this truth Jesus told His followers a story.

*Luke 10:5 Then, teaching them more about prayer, he used this story: "Suppose you went to a friend's house at midnight, wanting to borrow three loaves of bread. You say to him, ⁶ 'A friend of mine has just arrived for a visit, and I have nothing for him to eat.'⁷ And suppose he calls out from his bedroom, 'Don't bother me. The door is locked for the night, and my family and I are all in bed. I can't help you.'⁸ But I tell you this—though he won't do it for friendship's sake, if you keep knocking long enough, he will get up and give you whatever you need because of your shameless **persistence**.⁹ "And so I tell you, keep on asking, and you will receive what you ask for. Keep on seeking, and you will find. Keep on knocking, and the door will be opened to you.¹⁰ For everyone who asks, receives. Everyone who seeks, finds. And to everyone who knocks, the door will be opened.*

While Jesus scorns the mindlessly repetitious prayers of the heathen as useless babble, He also praises the importunity of a widow who came repeatedly to a certain judge seeking justice. The primary difference between the two is not behavior, but spirit.

The unbelieving heathen think that by sheer repetition of words their prayers will have effect. The widow knew she must persuade the unjust judge of her sincere need.

We might say that the former believed that God existed, but the latter also believed that He rewards those who diligently seek Him.

Third truth: Faith must be tested. Your faith must be persistent because it will be tested:

- By circumstances beyond your control
- By conditions beyond your strength
- By compassion beyond your abilities

To see this clearly, let me read a story from the Gospels. In fact this particular story appears in all four Gospel accounts. I would like to read it from a unique blending of the four accounts, offered by Johnston Cheney in his fascinating work The Life of Christ in Stereo, or Jesus Christ, the Greatest Life, in which he expertly weaves every word from every account into a single story. This text folds together the words of Matthew 14, Mark 6, Luke 9, and John 6. As I read it, listen for the elements of testing circumstances, difficult conditions, and challenging compassion.

[King Herod] ordered an executioner to bring him [John the Baptist's] head. He brought back the head on a platter...

When John's disciples heard what had happened, they came and took his body and buried it in a tomb. Then they went to tell Jesus. When He heard what had happened, He left the place He had been.

When the apostles returned, they reported to Jesus everything they had done and taught. Then He said to them, "Come away by yourselves to a quiet spot and rest for a while."

Many people were coming and going, and the disciples didn't even have time to eat. So He took them and left in the boat for the other side of the Sea of Galilee (or Sea of Tiberias) to go to a quiet spot near the city of Bethsaida.

Somehow the crowds learned of it and saw them leaving, and many recognized Him. So on foot they hurried in that direction, coming from all the towns. (They followed Him because they saw the miracles He performed on the sick.) Arriving first, they came as one group toward Jesus.

When He stepped on shore, He saw the huge crowd. He was moved with compassion toward them because they were like sheep without a shepherd. He welcomed them and began to teach them many things. He talked to them about the kingdom of God and healed those who needed it.

Late in the day Jesus went up the mountain and sat down there with His disciples. (Now the Pass-over, the Jewish feast, was approaching.) When Jesus looked up and saw the large crowd coming His way, He said to Philip, "Where can we buy bread so these people may eat?" He said this only to test him, because He already knew what He was going to do.

Philip answered, "Two hundred days' wages wouldn't buy enough bread for each of them to have even a little."

The disciple Andrew (Simon's brother) said to Him, "A young boy here has five barley loaves and two small fish. But what good will that do for such a large crowd?"

The twelve then said to Him, "This place is remote and it's already late. Send the crowds away so they can go into the villages and the surrounding area to find some place to stay and eat."

"They don't need to go away," Jesus replied. "You give them something to eat."

They answered, "Do You want us to go and buy two hundred days' wages worth of bread and give them that to eat?"

“How many loaves do you have?” He replied. “Go and find out.”

Once they found out, they said to Him, “We have only five loaves and two fish—unless we indeed go and buy food for all this crowd!”

But Jesus said, “Bring the food here to Me.”

Then He said to His disciples, “Have the people sit down to eat, in groups of fifty.” The place was a grassy area, and the disciples had everyone sit on the grass in groups of fifty and a hundred. Then Jesus took the five loaves and two fish, looked up to heaven, and blessed them. Once He had given thanks, He broke the loaves and gave them to the disciples to distribute to the crowd. He did the same thing with the two small fish, giving them as much as they wanted. All of them ate until they were satisfied.

When they were all full, He said to His disciples, “Gather up the leftover pieces; make sure you don’t lose anything.” So they gathered them up and filled twelve baskets with pieces from the five barley loaves and the fish left over after everyone finished eating. About five thousand men had eaten that day, besides women and children.

When the people saw the miracle Jesus did, they said, “Without question this is the Prophet who was to come into the world.”

Jesus perceived that they were ready to come and make Him king by force. So at once He insisted that His disciples board the boat and sail to the other side to Bethsaida, while He dismissed the crowds.

After sending the people away, He again went up the mountain by Himself to pray.

Jesus’ beloved cousin, John the Baptist, was dead, unjustly and unceremoniously beheaded by King Herod. Jesus was grieving.

His disciples returned from their first evangelistic journey. They were excited, but exhausted.

They had no time to rest, scarcely time to eat, because of the crowds seeking ministry. Circumstances were now beyond their control. So, Jesus said, “Let’s get away somewhere quiet for a rest.”

By the time they reached their destination, word had spread ahead of them and another great crowd had gathered for their arrival.

Jesus’ own heart was broken and weary, yet He was moved by compassion for the people, and began to teach them and minister to their needs, until it was late in the day. Again, He took His disciples up the hill to a quiet spot, but the crowd followed. Once more, He was sympathetic to their need. So the test began...

The problem: the crowd needs to eat. The disciples’ answer: Send them away.

Jesus had another idea: Let’s feed them.

Resisting the notion that Jesus was simply nuts, they took inventory of their situation:

- We’re exhausted
- Jesus is grieving
- It’s late in the day
- We have insufficient supplies
- This is a desolate place, with no supply to offer
- To do this would be too expensive

Their conclusion was: We shouldn’t do this. We can’t do this.

But Jesus, thank God, had another point of view. Now, watch His faith in action.

He tells them, “**Start with what you have. Bring it to me.**”

They brought Him five pieces of bread and two dried fish, for which He gave thanks to God and began to break it up and give it to the disciples to give to the people.

Jesus says, “**Give what you have and leave the math to God.**”

I love the phrasing of the New Living Translation, which says, “*Breaking the loaves into pieces, he kept giving the bread to the disciples so they could distribute it to the people.*” (Mark 6:41)

Jesus says, “**Do what I tell you.**”

As they distributed the food they discovered there was enough... more than enough! Everyone ate until they were full.

Finally, Jesus says, “**Conserve the results.**”

Each man carried a basket, and each filled it with leftover scraps of food. In order for their faith to grow, each one had to participate in the whole process. Twelve baskets of scraps from five pieces of bread and two fish, after feeding five thousand men, plus women and children until they were full!

Proverbs 3:5 Trust God from the bottom of your heart; don't try to figure out everything on your own.

⁶ Listen for God's voice in everything you do, everywhere you go; he's the one who will keep you on track.

⁷ Don't assume that you know it all.

The makings of miracles are all around you. If you will seek the Lord persistently, He will guide your steps and show you wonderful things you have not known.

Don't let circumstances limit you. Don't let your weariness stop you. Don't let your past abilities set the boundary for your future.

You believe in God, now put your trust also in Jesus Christ.