

LORD, WHO HAS BELIEVED?

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I. Introductory Remarks.

On the week before the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ, He came riding into Jerusalem on a donkey. For the early followers of Jesus, this was a week that began with tremendous excitement and expectation.

They had been followers of Jesus now for approximately three and one half years and had witnessed Jesus performing extraordinary miracles, healing the sick, casting out demons and even silencing the religious leaders of the day with the authority in which He answered their questions and challenges.

They had come to believe He was the coming Messiah that all of the prophets of the Old Testament had spoken of. And now they are ready to crown Him as their King and to live and rule with Him forever. All of Jerusalem was looking towards this great event with anticipation and hope.

John 12:12-15 *The next day a great multitude that had come to the feast, when they heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem, took branches of palm trees and went out to meet Him, and cried out: "Hosanna! `Blessed is He who comes in the name of the LORD!' The King of Israel!" Then Jesus, when He had found a young donkey, sat on it; as it is written: "Fear not, daughter of Zion; behold, your King is coming, sitting on a donkey's colt."*

- **From Exaltation to Rejection**

Again, this week began with tremendous excitement and great expectations. As the week progressed the people, including the disciples, went from exaltation to dejection, from excitement to disappointment and discouragement, from hope to disillusionment and from belief to unbelief.

They began the week proclaiming Him as King and ended the week rejecting Him. You might say, it was a week in which dreams were shattered and their belief in Jesus as the Messiah was destroyed.

At the end of the week these same people who began the week proclaiming Him as King of the Jews were now rejecting Him and sentencing Him to crucifixion on the cross.

His disciples who proudly argued with one another about who was going to be the greatest and sit next to him in the kingdom were now forsaking Him. And

Peter, who once proclaimed Him as the Christ was now found denying Him three times. Their belief in Christ was so shattered that even after His resurrection they were slow to believe.

John 12:37-38 *But although He had done so many signs before them, they did not believe in Him, that the word of Isaiah the prophet might be fulfilled, which he spoke: "Lord, who has believed our report? And to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed?"*

- **Failed Belief Systems**

All of these people and situations are classic examples of failed belief systems. What was it that caused their belief to fail in the moment of crisis and to say they had no king but Caesar?

The goal of this message is to discover what it is that causes us not to have the strong belief system that we think we do. We don't want to be caught in the same web of deception that these people were to the extent that they fulfilled the Prophet Isaiah's prophecy concerning, "Lord, who has believed our report?" Peter and the other disciples were deceived concerning their belief and faith. Peter never thought it possible he could deny the Lord. The others never imagined abandoning Him in His moment of crisis. What about you? Do you know how strong your belief system is?

II. Causes Of A Failed Belief System.

1. False Concepts and Lack of Understanding.

Jesus tried on many occasions and used opportunities as well to prepare His disciples and the multitudes for this time of crisis. But they all failed to grasp the significance of what He was trying to tell them. Right up until the end they had false concepts of Jesus and His kingdom.

John 12:32-34 *"And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all peoples to Myself." This He said, signifying by what death He would die. The people answered Him, "We have heard from the law that the Christ remains forever; and how can You say, 'the Son of Man must be lifted up'? Who is this Son of Man?"*

How many times do we fail to hear things because we already have an idea of what someone is trying to tell us?

The people of Israel in that day had a strong concept already fixed in their minds as to what was expected from the Messiah and how He would rule. They are still trying to see Jesus and His kingdom through a distorted lens.

Because of this their hearts could not grasp the full significance of what Jesus was saying to them. As He was sharing with them, they were already beginning to lose faith in Him. "Lord, who has believed our report?"

- **Jesus' closest disciples had this same problem.**

Matthew 16:22 Then Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him, saying, "Far be it from You, Lord; this shall not happen to You!"

Here we find Peter, who had just received the revelation of who Christ was, still holding to his false conceptions and preconceived ideas. They were preventing him from seeing the full picture of how Jesus' kingdom was to be revealed.

As a result his belief in Christ was not able to be strengthened beyond his limited perspective. This contributed to Peter's weakened condition in his moment of trial and crisis when he denied knowing Jesus.

He missed an opportunity for his faith and belief to be strengthened because of his preconceived ideas. As a result he was dull of hearing. He and the other disciples allowed their false conceptions to harden their hearts to the hearing of truth. They were selective in what they heard.

What happens to us when we are trying something new out and a difficult situation comes our way? We revert back to the old and tried way, even though it may be wrong or ineffective. This is why it is important to strengthen our belief system immediately. eg. parable of sower.

Peter as well as the other disciples had been taught the distorted view of the coming of the Messiah since early childhood days. They were false concepts that had been built very strongly into their belief system and this is what they reverted back to when they saw Christ failing them. As a result their excitement turned into discouragement, their hope into disillusionment and their belief to unbelief. They were shattered in their faith.

How many of us have allowed other things besides the word of God to shape our belief system such as negative experiences, preconceived ideas, philosophies, traditions of men or empty deceit.

Colossians 2:6-8 As you have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, rooted and built up in Him and established in the faith, as you have been taught, abounding in it with thanksgiving. Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ.

2. The Fear of Man Brings a Snare.

There are many who have had a wonderful glimpse of the truth concerning Jesus and His kingdom, but because of the fear of man and the fear of being rejected by peers and their traditions they never fully confess what they believe and the truth never gets fully planted in their hearts.

Proverbs 29:25 *The fear of man brings a snare, but whoever trusts in the LORD shall be safe.*

John 12:42 *Nevertheless even among the rulers many believed in Him, but because of the Pharisees they did not confess Him, lest they should be put out of the synagogue...*

I believe one of the issues Peter faced when denying Christ three times was the fear of man. Peter had never really conquered this area in his life and as a result in a moment of doubt and uncertainty, he gave in to the fear of man.

We must be able to boldly confess what we believe. The apostle Paul said, "*I believed and therefore I spoke*". We must do also, even in the face of opposition.

3. There is an Unwillingness to Pay the Price.

John 12:42-43 *Nevertheless even among the rulers many believed in Him, but because of the Pharisees they did not confess Him... for they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God.*

Many people do not fully hear what God is saying, because they are afraid of what it will cost them. Many people, even pastors, remain in bondage to traditions, because of fear of losing their reputation and friends when the Holy Spirit reveals further truth concerning Jesus Christ and His kingdom. As a result the belief system is weakened rather than strengthened.

III. Concluding Remarks.

My purpose in this message has been to make us aware of how dangerous and damaging it is for us not to strengthen our belief in Christ and His kingdom while we have the opportunity. It is only as we move forward in Him that we grow from faith to faith. Otherwise we are allowing these areas to weaken our belief and trust in Christ and His kingdom. There is another dark hour that is coming prior to Christ's second coming. Just as the darkness that came over the land during His crucifixion caused many to stumble, the same shall happen in the latter days.

There is a great falling away coming before Jesus is revealed at His second coming in all His glory. Just as the people succumbed to the pressure of the crowd in the days of Jesus to deny Him, the same shall happen in the last days. Because many of Christ's followers shall have poorly established belief systems, many shall fall away. Now is the day to strengthen yourself in Christ.

Hebrews 12:26-28 *whose voice then shook the earth; but now He has promised, saying, "Yet once more I shake not only the earth, but also heaven." Now this, "Yet once more," indicates the removal of those things that are being shaken, as of things that are made, that the things which cannot be shaken may remain. Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us have grace, by which we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear.*

A number of years ago a story appeared which told of a man who picked up a beautiful rock from a North Carolina stream bed and used it as his cabin doorstep. Years later, a geologist who was hiking in the area stopped at the cabin and noticed the doorstep, which he immediately recognized as a huge lump of gold. In fact, it proved to be one of the largest gold nuggets ever found east of the Rockies.

Like the man who failed to recognize gold when he held it in his hands, the disciples failed to recognize the true nature of the Lord - even after more than three years with him. What about you? Do you know who He is?