



Living As If

God doesn't ask us to simply accept His claims without evidence. That would be called *hope*, rather than *faith*— and the Christian faith is far greater than mere hope. In fact, the Christian faith is a response to evidence. Jesus came to show humanity a representation of God, and punctuated his message with tangible evidence that he spoke on behalf of the Father. Only after having seen these signs did Jesus' first century followers believe, and begin to document their experiences so that we might also believe. And if we believe, then we should live as if Jesus was who he claimed to be.

Discussion

Start Talking

Have you ever found yourself in the position of trying to convince somebody of something based upon your experience ("You have to try this restaurant." "Do not go to that store.")? What did you say? How do you decide whether or not to believe other people when they do the same thing?

Have you ever had to humble yourself to make an uncomfortable request? What motivated you to be able to do it?

Looking Back

As you thought about your own journey of belief this past week, what events came to mind as pieces of evidence that led you to believe?

Were you able to identify any people in your life who may not have encountered a mature definition of belief (having potentially been misled by our culture's understanding of the Christian faith as unwarranted hope)? What opportunities do you see to respectfully engage people with your own story of coming to a warranted belief in Jesus based upon the evidence you encountered?



What About You?

1. What factor do you think tends to be most important in shaping the things we believe?
2. What do you think most people would say if asked to describe the reasons behind their beliefs and world-views?
3. Andy talked about what he calls, “believe-in-spite-of,” people, people whose suffering or severe circumstances would seem to provide every reason in the world to doubt the presence of a loving God, and yet manage to persevere in faith anyway. Have you ever known anyone like that? Have *you* ever had that experience?
4. How would you describe the difference between mere hope and actual faith?

Look It Up

Read the Following Passages: 1 John 1: 1-3, John 20: 29-31, John 2:23, John 4: 46–54,

1. Based upon his own statements as well as the episodes he portrays in these passages, what do you think John primarily wanted his readers to take away from his account of his time with Jesus?
2. The final passage we read portrays a man of considerable wealth and social status reduced to begging favors of a man without either. Why is this significant? What all do you imagine has to happen for someone to resort to such measures?
3. It seems obvious that the official in this passage is hoping Jesus will return with him to heal the child in person. Why do you think Jesus responds the way he does, forcing the official to return home alone?
4. How do you personally navigate the tension of believing based upon the testimony of others, sometimes in spite of suffering, circumstances, unanswered prayers?

Putting It All Together

1. What does it mean, practically speaking, to live every day as if Jesus is who he claimed to be? What are tangible effects of this belief?
2. Do you understand “belief” to be a voluntary decision, or an involuntary response? How does this definition affect your reaction to difficult circumstances?
3. When do you find it most difficult to maintain your faith– in pleasant seasons of life, or more painful ones?
4. What steps do you think we can take to ensure that our response to difficult circumstances is one of humility, rather than bitterness?
5. What situations, dynamics, or interactions described in today’s passage reminded you of your own life experiences? Why?





**SOUTHSIDE
CHURCH**