

Weekly Study of Sunday's Message.

April 2, 2023 "What was important to Jesus. What does it mean to believe?"

I Intro.

We're into spring now. About time. This year will bring some new and innovative ideas in all areas of our church life. We have seen an increased activity in our children's ministry, and we're working on new ideas for both our children and our students. We have many ways you can plug into life at NCC. You can find all those through our website, app, and social media sites. Our app is the best way to livestream our services, but you can also livestream on FaceBook and YouTube. You can revisit past services, sign up for events and even give. We're encouraged by your presence when you gather with us. New and familiar faces join us every Sunday. If you join us online, we appreciate your presence. We are 100% committed to our virtual attenders. We are your church family, and if there is anything you need, prayer, or anything else, please let us know. This is our weekly devotional that gives you some specific things to work through from Sunday's message. Whether you were able to participate in this service or not, this devotion is free-standing. You can use it to help you dig deeper into your own spiritual walk. We hope you find this tool helpful on your spiritual journey.

II Recap.

This is our last Sunday in this series. I know it seems like an awfully long time, but it's been a great journey. We're at the front end of passion week (the last week in the life of Jesus) and in our journey towards crucifixion Friday, and resurrection Sunday, we're looking at what was important to Jesus. If Jesus spent a lot of time teaching about certain specific things, then it must be something we need to take seriously. This series also addresses the creep of politics into the church, and refocuses our hearts on the teachings of Jesus. This is not to say that Christians shouldn't be involved in politics. This is saying we should be wise in how we engage politics and other things, making sure they align with the teachings of Jesus. These topics will help address the struggles we face in life, and give us some tools to use to guide us. So, we're looking at what was important to Jesus.

The first Sunday we talked about Jesus caring about things that are 'lost'. We discovered we all are lost in some way, looking for meaning in life. And meaning will come from understanding God wants a relationship with us. The second Sunday Kristen led us at looking into who Jesus considered "*the least of these*", and what our relationship should be with others. The third week we talked about eternal life and how that begins now. Last week we had to cancel because of the weather.

Today, we tackle the complicated topic summed up in one word. Believe.

III Sunday.

This will be kind of a tricky topic. To talk about something as non-specific and philosophical, as believe, can be really difficult. We like hard, very definable, understandings of ideas and words. And believe doesn't allow us to do that with a lot of certainty. Or in a way we can all completely agree on. So, let's start with some generic questions, and we'll work from there.

What does the word believe mean to you?

What do you believe (see what I did there?) comes with the word believe?

How is the word believe often lessened or softened in our world? What I mean is, do you feel that we often don't take that word as seriously as we should? Why or why not?

We used two scriptures this past Sunday. And we're going to hit them one at a time. The first scripture was one we used two weeks ago when we talked about eternal life. So read **John 3:16-18**.

What jumped out to you about this passage?

How do you understand what believe means, and how does it fit into our daily life?

The Greek word for believe is *pisteuo*. The primary truth of the meaning of believe is that it's more than just agreeing with a set of presuppositions or beliefs. Unfortunately in the western world, we've turned being a follower of Jesus with just having the right stand or position on certain issues. Or even holding to a specific denominational statement of faith. The way Jesus used believe means so much more. It means when we commit ourselves to be a follower of Jesus, then we are entrusting our entire life to his teachings. Which is why we're doing this series. Believe also means that we have weighed all of the other options, counted the cost (as Jesus tells those who want to follow him) and we are intentionally choosing to form our lives in a deeply different way. We'll ask a few questions after this passage, but the real work comes with the next scripture passage.

How does a deeper understanding of the word believe change our understanding of what it means to follow Jesus?

How have you experienced just agreeing with certain beliefs in your church history?

The second passage is a look at believe, or faith. It addresses how it must be a larger more robust understanding in order for it to be the meaning of believe that Jesus was talking about. We can't ignore the pointed messages of this teaching from the brother of Jesus. Read **James 2:14-26**.

What jumped out to you about this passage?

What did it add to your understanding of believe?

It's apparent this passage does not allow us to lighten what it means to believe. James lays it out pretty plainly that faith (believe) is nothing, worthless, has no power, unless we can see it in action. Without being too abrasive, James seems to say that just believing, being saved, agreeing with statements, isn't enough. To just believe is not what Jesus came for. He came to give us a new life. And it has to be seen in the way we treat others and show compassion. Bottom line- believe=action. There's no need to provide some list, or specific steps or points to make from this passage. So, let's wrestle with some real questions.

Why would the church reduce being a follower of Jesus (what we call a Christian) to just agreeing with the basic tenets of our particular belief system?

How has this harmed the church itself?

How has this harmed the reputation and ability of the church to be a relevant force in society?

What would it take for us individually and corporately as a church to reclaim and practice what it means to believe?

IV Challenge.

The call is plain and simple. The series is to help us let go of all the things that clutter our ability to live for Jesus, and to rediscover, for the first time, what was important to Jesus. To realign both our hearts and lives with what Jesus valued, and not put our trust in the things of the world.

This specific value of Jesus is to make believe what Jesus intended for it to be. Robust and active.

So, what do we need to do individually and as the big "C" church needs to do to make believe what Jesus intended?