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Series: The Gospel of John
Message: The Heart of Man

Transcribed Message
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John 2:23-25

About the time of Jesus, a commentary was written by some rabbinical writers regarding the book of Exodus. And one of the things that they said in this was there are seven things that are hidden from man. Now, there's a lot more than seven, but it's almost like the statement in Proverbs. The day of one's death, the day of judgment consultation, the depth of that judgment, the whole matter of reward, the time of restoring David's kingdom, the time of the end of the kingdom, which was probably a reference to the Roman rule and the Roman kingdom, and then what's within the heart of man. Now obviously there are all kinds of things that we could add to that list. There are all kinds of things that we can never know.

One of the things that we can never know is we can never know what is truly in the heart and mind of another person. We don't know motivations. We don't know their thought processes. We don't know why people do and say the things that they do or if they mean them when they say them. But none of those things are hidden from God and none of those things are hidden from Jesus.

And so that brings us to a couple of interesting verses in the second chapter of John's gospel. And if I were being totally honest with you this morning, because you can't really see my heart and my mind on this unless I tell you this, but these three short verses I would have liked to have just wrapped them into last week's lesson and gone by them without a whole lot of comment and then gone right into chapter three. But as hopefully we'll see, it's not only worth our time this morning, but it forms a very important transition to what comes.

So let's see this morning. Jesus knows and understands everything about you. He literally knows you better than you know yourself. And you know what? He loves us. He loves us even in that condition, right? And what we do? We want to put our trust in him, knowing that he knows every thought that we ever think.

Let's do this. Let's start off setting the stage for these verses and just look back quickly and then a look forward. And we're going to see that these three verses really form a transition in the gospel of John and link both these chapters together.

What have we seen to this point? Well, in chapter two, the first 11 verses, we saw the miracle, the first sign that Jesus did and water was turned to wine. And within that storyline, we saw that there was belief. There was a positive response to this sign that Jesus did. We're told in verse 11 that they believed in him.

And then we went last week into the next section, verses 12 through 22. And it was the cleansing of the temple. Jesus, in cleansing the temple, had just the exact opposite response on the part of many and especially the religious leaders, as we noted. And they had a negative response of unbelief. Not only did they not believe the sign that Jesus did right in front of them, they had the audacity to say, could you do some other signs for us? We missed that one, but we'd like to see some other ones now. So that sets the stage for what we've already seen.

Let's look quickly to what we will see. What we will see, verses 23, 24 and 25, in these three verses, we're going to see more signs and we're going to see that many believed. So tuck that away. More signs are going to be spoken about and many believe. Now, the connection that we want to see between these verses and what follows is this. There's a connection. There's a transition that's happening between the story of the water to the wine, the cleansing of the temple. And all of a sudden we meet Nicodemus.

When you see the last part of that 25th verse, Jesus knows the heart of man. And then you come to chapter three, verse one, and there was a man named Nicodemus. That's a very definite connection, isn't it? That same thing is going to be true. Jesus knows what's in the heart of man. Jesus knows the heart of Nicodemus. He's going to confront him, as we'll see, Lord willing, next Sunday in a very specific way. He knows the heart of the woman at the well. He can literally say to her, go get your husband. She can say to him, I don't have a husband. He can say to her, I know you don't have a husband. You've got five of them. You've had five of them. He knew her heart. That's what this transition is going to say. And the same thing of the nobleman's son. Jesus sees the deep faith in this nobleman's heart regarding who Jesus is. So all

of this together simply tells us Jesus knows the heart of man better than man knows his own heart.

What do we need to know when we come to these verses? I just want to lay out before you what we need to know to hopefully understand what's going on here. First, we need to know what it means to believe. We need to know what it means to believe. If you were with us when we started the gospel of John, you remember that John in his gospel tells us that he's all about this matter of believing many other signs. Jesus did. There's too many of them to even write down, but these are written that you might know and have eternal life. And so John is the one who uses the word believe more than any other author in the New Testament. Ninety eight times just in the gospel of John. The word believe is used like 144 times in the New Testament. So he's using it about two thirds of the time. So John is the one who knows about this matter of belief because he bases a whole book on it.

Now, here's what I want to say. I want to add two things to that. There are no modifiers. There are no qualifiers before the word believe in the gospel of John. Nobody ever says when they're talking about believing, nobody ever says they really, really believed. Nobody says they truly believed. Oh, they sincerely believed. They genuinely believed. We don't have adjectives. We don't have qualifiers. We don't have modifiers in front of the word believe. We don't even have the language, and I understand that I use it, you use it. We don't even have the writers of the New Testament saying so and so exercised saving faith as opposed to unsaving faith. So I want to put that before us. There's belief, there's faith without qualification.

Secondly, faith is simply receiving the testimony of God. What does it mean to believe? It means that you receive the testimony of God as being true. The testimony of God is true.

I already mentioned tomorrow there's going to be an inauguration of the 47th president of the United States. If I say to you, do you believe that President Trump, when he is inaugurated tomorrow, do you believe that he is going to keep the promises that he has made to the nation? Now, as I consider that question, it seems very straightforward, and it seems that there likely are three answers. Yes, I think he will. I believe that he will. I accept and receive his testimony as being true. No, I don't. I think at the end of the day, he'll be like everybody else and he won't do what he said he was going to do. He got elected. That's what he wanted.

And then he'll figure out what he wants to do after that. Or you could possibly say, thirdly, I don't know. I'm not sure what he will do.

Well, just think about that question. Think about the simplicity of that question. Think of the simplicity of the answers to that question. Is he going to keep his promises? Yes, he will. No, he won't. I don't know. My point is simply this. It's not complicated. It's not complicated to believe is to accept the testimony of God as being true. Now, obviously, the context and the setting will determine what that testimony is. But as we think of it here, it's going to be the testimony regarding Jesus and what he is doing and saying.

Listen to this statement by the same human author, John, writing in the first epistle, first John, chapter five, verse nine. See if you put this together with what he says in the gospel. If we receive the testimony of men, the testimony of God is greater for this is the testimony of God that he has born concerning his son. Whoever believes in the son of God has the testimony in himself. Whoever does not believe God has made him a liar because he has not believed in the testimony that God has born concerning his son. And this is the testimony that God gave us eternal life. And this life is in his son. Whoever has the son has life. Whoever does not have the son of God does not have life. I write these things to you who believe in the name of the son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life.

Now, that's the simple, straightforward understanding of what it means to believe. It is to accept the testimony of God that he has given to us as being true. Now, when we do that, the second thing we need to know is we need to know that when we believe we receive the forever gift of eternal life. That's what the Bible promises. That's what John tells us all through his gospel. That's what he just said in 1 John 5. To hear God's word, to hear God's truth, to hear God's testimony and to believe it is to then receive the gift of eternal life.

Now, at this point, somebody almost always says, well, what about James chapter two and verse 19? What about James 2:19? The demons believe and they tremble. The demons believe. Are you suggesting that the demons now have eternal life? It says that the demons believe and they tremble. Well, of course not, because all you have to do is look at that verse

and look at that context and look at that passage. And the answer is very clear. It is not talking about the gospel.

Secondly, what is it that the demons believe? They don't believe a gospel that brings redemption. It would seem they're outside of that sphere anyway. But what they believe is they believe that there's a God and they believe that God is one. Well, those are wonderful truths to believe. But those aren't the truths that the gospel speaks about when it says to believe this testimony of God results in eternal life. When someone puts that out there, that isn't a response to what we're putting forward here. Belief equals and brings about eternal life. It has to be a belief specific in the gospel, doesn't it? That results in eternal life.

Let's come to these verses. There's just three of them. We don't have a lot of time. But let's look at this matter of trust without trustworthiness. What John tells us in verse 23, first, let's look at the first part of that 23rd verse. Now, when he was in Jerusalem at the Passover feast, many believed in his name. There it is. This should sound familiar. We have heard this before, right? Many believed in his name. It should sound familiar because we've heard this very thing before. This word believe, *epustasian*. Hear that word *epustasian*? The English word translated out of it, epistemology, comes out of that Greek word for to believe. It is simply the matter of knowledge and the study of knowledge, isn't it? This statement here that many heard and believed should take us right back to the first chapter and to the twelfth verse. But as many as received him, to them he gave the right, the power, the authority to become the children of God, even to those who believed in his name. And so John has already said almost the same thing before.

Now here we read in this 23rd verse that many believed in his name. That is something he is going to say repeatedly as you go through the gospel of John, chapter three, verse 16, for God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son, that whoever believes in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. He's going to say the same thing in verse 36. He's going to say the same thing in chapter five, verse 24. He's going to say the same thing in 6:4-. All the way through, John keeps underscoring the fact that to hear the testimony of God with regard to his Son and with regard to oneself is to believe and to understand the gospel and to receive eternal life.

Now, look at the rest of that verse. Now, when he was in Jerusalem at the Passover feast, many believed in his name when they saw the signs that he was doing. Now, again, that should sound familiar to we've heard this before, haven't we? When they saw the signs he was doing now, what verse does that bring to mind? We've already mentioned it. It takes us immediately to chapter twenty and verses 30-31, doesn't it? These things that John writes about are written specifically. These signs that Jesus did that testified to who he is, that he's the Son of God. Nicodemus is going to say to him in the third chapter, nobody can do these things unless they're sent from God.

So here it is again. This book, the gospel of John, is an apologetic to encourage people to believe the testimony of God regarding his Son because of all the things that he did and said before them. John expects this to happen. Notice it does not say in this verse that they believed in his signs. He says that there were many signs, but they believed in him. That's going to be important in just a moment. He does say they believed in his name. to believe in somebody's name is to believe in that person. It is to trust their character. That's all the way through Scripture and especially in John's writing.

Now, if the chapter ended right here at verses 20-23. our lesson would be done. We could pray and sing a song and go on our way. But that wouldn't explain verses 24 and 25 would it? And so we can't do that. Here is what one commentator said as he came to verses 24 and 25, just to set the table for what we're going to be dealing with. He said verses 24 and 25 are surprising. These verses are startling. These verses are shocking. These verses are a little scary. These are the verses that we look at. Surprising, startling, shocking, a little scary. What's going on in verses 24 and 25 that would call forward that kind of a comment from a man who's given himself to studying God's word?

Let me make two observations. They're not in your outline. I didn't, you know, do some comprehensive check of this, but I'm guessing that about 95% of the commentaries that you would go to look up John 2:23, 24, and 25 are probably going to say that the faith that is spoken of in verse 23 is a defective faith. It's not a real faith. It's not a genuine faith. It's not a true faith. Or to put it in an expression that we could understand, it's not a saving faith. These people believed something. Verse 23 says they believed something, but they didn't really believe. They

didn't truly believe their faith was lacking, their faith was defective. It didn't really give them the gift of eternal life.

I don't think that's what this passage is saying. It's possible that that's what this passage is saying. I don't think that's what it's saying. Now, if it's possibly saying that, then what I'm going to teach you is wrong. So that can't be the truth, can it? No, I'm just kidding. But that is what makes these verses a little bit of a challenge to understand. If this word belief in his name does not truly save, as verse 23 says, they believed in his name. If it doesn't truly result in eternal life, then my perspective of the struggle that I have with this passage is it sounds to me like then it's almost impossible to have assurance of salvation. If these verses are calling into question the genuineness of faith, the sincerity of faith, the defectiveness or not defectiveness of faith, then I'm probably going to be struggling in my own walk with God on a regular basis, wondering if my faith is defective, if my faith is real, if my faith is genuine. So that's kind of the way I try to work this through. If that is the case, then, yeah, this passage is a little scary. It's also shocking, surprising and all those other things, too.

But here's what I want you to see. What did Jesus know? Let's look at what Jesus knew, verses 24-25. Verse 24, first, says he knew not to commit himself to everyone who believed. Hmm. Verse 24. But Jesus, on his part, did not entrust himself to them because he knew all people. So he knew not to commit himself to everyone who believed. Verse 24 starts off with an adversative, doesn't it? It starts off with the word but. So as you're reading your Bible and you're making observations and you're trying to understand what it says, when you read a verse and then the next verse starts with an adversative like that, it's basically saying to you, pay attention. Something's different. Something's maybe amiss here. Something needs to be looked into.

They believed in his name, but it's very likely (and my understanding of this verse would be this) that their idea about the Messiah does not align with Jesus's mission and with his idea. I mean, we just saw it in the previous chapter, in the second chapter in the opening story, the water being turned to wine. We even saw it with Jesus's own mother. We saw it with Mary, right? She wants to come to him and she basically wants to say to him, I want you to do what I

would like you to do. I want you to step in and save what's going on. And Jesus ultimately, as we saw, did it.

But remember, he said to her, basically, mom, we're not operating on a mother-son relationship anymore. I'm now transitioned into public ministry. Our relationship is changing. Your idea for me, while it is good and it's with the idea of blessing this family, I've got to do what my Father tells me to do from this point forward. So, I think you see a little bit of a snapshot even there of Jesus not committing himself to his own mother. You certainly see it later with the disciples in the 14th chapter. In the ninth verse, Jesus says to Philip, Philip, how long have I been with you? And you still don't understand it. You don't get it. They believed in his name. They didn't fully understand the mission that he was on and all that he was being called to do as their Messiah. Their understanding of Messiah and his understanding of his mission oftentimes were in conflict.

Secondly, I want you to see this whole matter of Jesus committing himself. It continues with the same word, believe. That's the word now in the English Standard Version that I'm speaking out of. The New American Standard Version. Some of you have the New International Version. All translate that word, all translate that word as trust. It's the word believe. It's the word bestowal. It's the same root word that we saw that they believed in his name in verse 23.

So here is the idea is that Jesus did not entrust himself to these people. Well, what would be going on here? Why wouldn't Jesus entrust himself to these people? Question number one.

Question number two, who would Jesus entrust himself to? If it specifically says many people believed in his name, verse 24, but Jesus would not entrust himself to them. We have to stop and ask the text the question, why wouldn't Jesus entrust himself to them and who would Jesus entrust himself to? And I think when we come, we'll see the answer in verse 25. He needed no one (that is Jesus) to tell Him, because he knew all people and needed no one to bear witness about man, for he himself knew what was in man. Jesus is omniscient. This is a statement about Jesus's omniscience, isn't it?

We started off saying there are a lot of things that we do not know about each other. There isn't any way that you know what the person next to you is thinking about right now. We

just cannot understand what's in the heart and mind of another person. Well, this says Jesus can do that because Jesus is God. It's an affirmation of his deity. Man looks on the outward appearance. The Lord looked on the heart for Samuel, right? Jesus, knowing all things, would not put himself, would not put his ministry into their hands. I think that's basically what this passage is saying. Jesus, knowing the heart of man, would not entrust himself. He would not entrust his ministry into their hands.

The counterpart to Jesus being omniscient and being trustworthy is that simply this man is the untrustworthy one. Man is the untrusted. I don't say that in terms of salvation. I think there's a distinction that can be made here. This is in terms of fellowship and service and their relationship with Christ in that regard. I think John speaks to it in his gospel in the 12th chapter. Later on, we've already seen the encounter, or we will see it in that third chapter with Nicodemus. Later in the 12th chapter, this is what John says about Nicodemus. Nevertheless, many even of the authorities believed in him, but for fear of the Pharisees... Did you get that? Many of the authorities believed in him. They didn't believe in his signs. They didn't believe in his miracles. That's not what they believed in him. They trusted the testimony of what God had said about his son. Many of these authorities believed in him, but for fear of the Pharisees, they did not confess it so that they would not be put out of the synagogue.

And then the convicting statement for they love the glory that comes from man more than they love the glory that comes from God. They believed, but they weren't ready to count the cost and step out and be a fully devoted follower of Christ because they were more concerned at that point in their spiritual journey about what other people thought about them than about submitting to the Lordship of Christ. The exact same thing is said about Joseph of Arimathea in the 19th chapter of John's gospel. John will say the same thing about Joseph of Arimathea. You know what it says? It says he was a secret follower. He had believed that what Jesus claimed about himself was true. I'm the son of God. I'm the Messiah. I'm here to bring salvation. But they weren't really willing at that point yet to step out and be counting the cost for what it meant to be a follower of Christ.

I think the same thing still is very true today. That's why when Paul writes to Timothy in 2 Timothy 2, verse 2, and he says, Timothy, I've entrusted you with some precious truth. What

did he say? You find faithful men and you pass it on to them. You find faithful men. You find men and women who are ready to count the cost in following Christ and you pass that on to them. You don't just pass it on to anybody because there are a lot of believers. There are a lot of Christians, unfortunately, who are very young in their Christian faith. They have believed and put their faith in Christ, but they haven't been willing to stand up and stand out and count the cost for what it means to be a fully devoted follower of Christ. I think that's the picture that we have here in the Upper Room Discourse, John 14:21. Jesus says that he will, in fact, bring into the lives of those people who are committed to him.

Listen to what he says. 14:21. This is what he says. Whoever has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me, and he who loves me will be loved by my Father and I will love him and manifest myself to him. Jesus says now God loves equally all his children. He's not making a distinction between how he loves his children. But Jesus is clearly making a distinction between those children of his who love him and obey him and who walk in truth and those who do not.

Now, parent-child dedication, all of these young parents up here with these little kiddos, they're going to learn that at some point, even as a parent, you love your children equally. You love every one of them the same. But there are times in that journey of parenting when you don't entrust everything to all of them equally. Some of them have earned that trust, right? I mean, parents, don't look at me like that. Isn't that true? Yeah, that's true. I know your kids might be sitting close by and you don't want to tip your hand, but the reality is, we learn that when our children are walking in such a way that they are trustworthy for more, we give them more. If they're not, we don't. I think what we have in these verses is just a little glimpse of what's coming in the life and ministry of Jesus and the way he calls and challenges us to this matter of discipleship.

Let's close with this. Wherever you are in your relationship with God, God knows. That's the thing. God knows every heart that is here this morning. You can fool others, but you can't fool God. Where are you in your relationship with God? Are you walking in the light of that truth of who you are as a child of God? Are you walking in obedience? Are you playing games with God and with others? God knows our heart. He loves us, but he wants the best for us. And

he calls us to obedience. He calls us to being a fully devoted follower of Christ. He calls us to turn away from sin in our life and the things that so easily entangle us, right? Hebrews 12. And he calls us to lay hold of all that God has intended for us to enjoy.

If you've never put your trust in Christ, this morning, that's the first step. You can't be a fully devoted follower of Christ until you've put your trust and faith, and you have believed the testimony of God about his Son, Jesus, that he's the Son of God, that he came to this earth. He died on the cross. He did so for my sin and yours. And you have to believe that what God says about you, that no matter what you do, you can't receive the forgiveness of sin on your own efforts, nor the gift of eternal life. That only comes by grace and grace alone.

Let's pray. Father God, do that work by your spirit in each heart this morning. Lord, so thankful that you know every one of our hearts. You know what every one of us need. Father, call those who have never believed to put their faith and trust in Jesus as their personal Savior. Call the rest of us who know Jesus as our Savior to live a fully devoted, obedient life that really testifies to our understanding of your Lordship in every area of our life. Father, we love you. We thank you for what you will do, for what you have done. In Jesus' name, amn.