

Following Jesus for the Right Reasons

We live in a world that can seem to be out of control and filled with confusion. When you talk with people, the loss of hope that's often expressed is palpable. Any offer of the gospel of Jesus Christ will either be rejected outright or it may spark interest in what it is that Jesus has to offer. In light of this truth, today I want to introduce a new series of articles on a passage in the gospel of John—chapter 2 verses 23-25. As we begin, I want to call our attention to a portion of John 6 that has an important connection to our passage in John 2. Each of the gospel writers records the miracle of Jesus feeding the 5,000. Early in John 6, a large crowd is following Jesus. As the narrative progresses, Jesus raises the question as to how all of those people are going to be fed. Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, brings a boy to Jesus who has "five barley loaves and two fish." Jesus asks his disciples to have the people sit down. He then gives thanks and when he distributes the food, five thousand men were fed (John 6:10). When we consider the women and children, scholars estimate that there may have been upwards of twenty thousand people fed by this amazing miracle! So much food is produced from this small amount that—not only were all the people fed—there was much left over (6:13).

Interestingly, of the four gospel writers, only John records Jesus' rebuke of those who were following him for all the wrong reasons. The next day after the miracle, the people came looking for Jesus. And when Jesus saw them he said to them: "Truly, truly, I say to you, you are seeking me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves." Many people want Jesus because of what they think he'll give them. Sadly, these people in John 6 missed the substance of what the signs pointed to. They missed Jesus, the giver of *eternal life* and blessedness, and could only see their immediate need of physical food. Fallen human beings have a tendency to focus *only* on the externals. It's not that the externals have no value at all; but what matters most is the substance. Later Jesus says, "I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall never hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst." (6:35) Let's go now to our passage in John 2:23-25 and begin our investigation of this passage by looking at:

—Signs-Based Belief

These three verses at the very end of chapter 2 serve to transition us from what's gone before to moving us into chapter 3. "Now when he was in Jerusalem at the Passover Feast, many believed in his name when they *saw the signs* that he was doing." (2:23) Interestingly, John never mentions what these "signs" were. We know that toward the end of this gospel John writes, "Now Jesus did *many other signs* in the presence of the disciples which are not written in this book." (20:30) Still, verse 23 tells us that there were "signs" performed at Jerusalem and that "many believed" in Jesus. Because the verse isn't specific, we don't want to say more than the text, itself, says. The belief of the "many" may or may not have been a saving belief.

For example, at the wedding at Cana when Jesus performed his *first miracle* of turning water into wine John records in 2:11, "And his disciples *believed* in him." Verse 23, then, may not be a statement of *initial saving belief*. Rather, it may be a picture of some of the disciples who were saved earlier having their faith *strengthened* by witnessing these miracles (John 20:30-31). If so,

their faith would have been based on the truth that Jesus was the Messiah not based merely on the miracles that he was performing. On the other hand, this may also be an example of some who—like in John 6—followed Jesus for the wrong reasons, i.e., for *earthly only* blessings that they thought he would give them. It's incredibly important that we know what people expect from Jesus. As we share the gospel, we must be careful not to present Jesus as someone who will “take away all your earthly problems.” Rather, we should present Jesus as the eternal Son of God who is the only One who can provide genuine hope to those who truly believe in him by faith. Those who follow Jesus must follow him for the right reasons.

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