I Believe – Part 4

# Trusting God

# (Mark 6:17-28)

Today, we’re in the final part of a four-part message series called “I Believe”. What we've been talking about is the reality that so many people are rejecting God in our culture today in the name of religion, but the truth is that they're not rejecting the true God, they're rejecting a false view of who God is. And so, we’ve been talking about a God who’s expected to do whatever we want, a God who has too many rules, a God who must give us some sort of sign, some proof of his existence, and today what I want to share with you is a common perception that God just doesn’t care. You know, that God’s out there, that God knows, but he’s just too busy, he doesn’t care enough to involve himself in our struggles and concerns.

As a matter of fact, I wouldn’t be surprised if the majority of you haven’t had a moment where you questioned God because he didn’t answer your prayer. Some of you right now may be praying about something really important, you’re trying to believe, but things just keep going wrong, all this stuff keeps happening, and so you’re questioning how you can believe in a God that just doesn’t seem to care. Maybe even this morning, you’re asking, “Are you really there? I want to believe, but I’m not feeling anything, I’m not seeing anything, it’s just like you don’t even care.”

Well, this morning, if you’ve ever felt like that, we’re going to look at trusting God when you feel like you’re all alone, and you don’t see any sign of him doing anything for you, in your life, or in your specific situation. You know, it’s like you see what he’s done for so-and-so, you hear stories about this great move of God, but you’re dealing with all this stuff, you’re struggling, and it’s just like he doesn’t care. And so, let me assure you that you’re not the only person. As a matter of fact, as you read the Bible you find time after time that they were very real people who experienced difficulties and emotions just like we do. Just about every book of the Bible, you find people who are going through some very tough times, but the one that’s the most personal, the most meaningful to me, is John the Baptist.

You know, when it comes to asking, “Where are you God? This just isn’t fair!” The story of John the Baptist ranks up there near the top for me and maybe for others of you who are in ministry positions, because John the Baptist was committed to his calling. I mean, he was like really radical, he wore animal skins, ate locusts and wild honey, and he was really popular because he didn’t take anything off anybody. He knew that his purpose was to prepare the way for Jesus and he devoted his life to doing just that; and so, he was doing all the right things, but because of his attitude, because he always told the truth and said just what was on his mind, he ran into trouble with the king and got arrested.

Now, I’ve got to give you a little background, a little context, because King Herod was rather a fascinating character. In fact, his family was the textbook example of dysfunctional relationships and Mark chapter 6 tells us that Herod actually married his brother’s wife named Herodias. Historians tell us that she also happened to be his niece and so, this is where John the Baptist got himself in trouble, because in verse 18, he told Herod that he had no business marrying his brother’s wife. And it was his meddling in their affairs that angered Herodias; in fact, she despised John the Baptist, she wanted him killed, but she wasn’t able to because Herod believed that John the Baptist was a man of God and so he protected him in prison. Now that gives you a little bit of context, and so let’s pick up the story in verse 21, where Mark tells us,

“Finally, the opportune time came. On his birthday Herod gave a banquet for his high officials and military commanders and the leading men of Galilee. When the daughter of Herodias came in and danced, she pleased Herod and his dinner guests…” (Mark 6:21-22).

Now, the Bible doesn’t say much about the nature of this dance, but from what we know historically about Herod and Roman customs, we can assume that the dance was very seductive. King Herod himself, being an impulsive man and likely drunk as well, was so captivated by his stepdaughter’s dance verse 22 says,

“The king said to the girl, "Ask me for anything you want, and I'll give it to you." And he promised her with an oath, "Whatever you ask I will give you up to half my kingdom” She went out and said to her mother, "What shall I ask for?" (Her mother seizing the opportunity replied) "The head of John the Baptist…" At once the girl hurried in to the king with the request: "I want you to give me right now the head of John the Baptist on a platter" (Mark 6:22-25).

And so, consider this for a moment, here is John the Baptist who served Jesus faithfully, who said, “I must decrease so that he may increase. I’m not even worthy to untie his sandals. Follow him, he’s the one, I’m just here to prepare the way. Repent of your sins and turn to Jesus.” And so, John was a faithful and committed servant of God and yet the Bible says in verse 26, that even though the king was greatly distressed…

“Because of his oaths and his dinner guests, he did not want to refuse her. So, he immediately sent an executioner with orders to bring John's head. The man went, beheaded John in the prison, and brought back his head on a platter. He presented it to the girl and she gave it to her mother” (Mark 6:26-28).

Now, at other times the Bible records servants of God being protected in a fiery furnace, delivered from hungry lion’s, even violent earthquakes causing prison doors to fly open and chains to come loose by the mighty hand of God, but that doesn’t happen here. John the Baptist is waiting, he’s wondering, he’s hearing about these great miracles that Jesus is doing, and the Bible tells us that he sent his disciples to ask Jesus,

“Are you the one who was to come, or should we expect someone else?" (Matthew 11:2-3).

And so, John sent his friends to go find Jesus, because Jesus never came to visit him; he’s healing all these people, he’s doing great miracles, and he told John’s disciples, “Go back and report to John what you’ve heard and seen; the blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are cured, the deaf hear, the dead are raised to life, and the good news is being preached to the poor.” In verse six he says, go tell John,

“Blessed is the man who does not fall away on account of me" (Matthew 11:6).

And so, John was waiting, Jesus’ cousin was waiting, Jesus’ servant was waiting in prison. Meanwhile Jesus is healing other people, he’s doing miracles for strangers, and Jesus tells him, “Your blessed if you don’t fall away on account of me.” And so, John continues to wait faithfully, trying to believe, knowing that Jesus had the power, he had the ability to rescue him, but instead it was a guard that went in to see John in prison… and brought back his head on a platter.

It doesn’t seem fair does it? It makes you wonder does God even care? You know, if you’ve ever been in that place where you wanted to believe, but it didn’t seem like God cared, you’re not the only one. And so, in the remainder of our time together, I want to share with you some promises of God, because it’s his Word that’s going to be that firm foundation to carry us through when things just don’t seem right. It’s his Word that we need to embrace, it’s his truth that we need to remember, knowing that we don’t need to understand the plan to trust God’s purposes. And so, number one, we need to embrace God’s purpose.

## 1. Embracing His Purpose

What we need to do is to take a step back, look at the big picture, disconnect from the story, from the emotions and ask “What happened?” You see, what we discover in Mark chapter 6 is that John’s greatest desire was fulfilled. He came to prepare the way for the Lord and he did exactly that. Jesus came, God’s purpose was fulfilled, as Jesus preached good news to the poor, proclaimed freedom for the prisoners, recovery of sight for the blind, and released the oppressed (Luke 4:18). And so, John’s purpose was fulfilled, but more importantly, God’s purpose was fulfilled, the redemptive purpose of God in Christ was fulfilled; it just didn’t come about the way that John had imagined.

You know, there’s a very important verse in Proverbs. The Bible says it this way in Proverbs chapter 19, verse 21,

“Many are the plans in a man's heart, but it is the Lord's purpose that prevails” (Proverbs 19:21).

You could say it this way, many were the plans in John’s heart, but it was the Lord’s purpose that prevailed. Or many are the plans in Dave’s heart, many are the plans in Matt’s heart, Dawn’s heart, or Jim’s heart, but it’s what? It’s the Lord’s purpose that prevails. And so, you don’t need to understand the plan, to trust God’s purpose. You don’t even have to like the plan, to trust God’s purpose.

There are some of you here, you’ve been praying for a miracle, maybe somebody’s sick and they’re not getting better. Maybe it’s you, maybe you’ve been praying for yourself, you’ve got these migraine headaches, you’ve been trying different things, you’ve prayed and prayed, others have prayed and yet the headaches are still there. Others of you will have an empty chair at the table this Thanksgiving, because someone you loved and prayed for didn’t make it. You knew that God could heal them, you believed that he would, and yet they weren’t healed. You don’t understand why, but you don’t have to understand the plan, to trust God’s purpose.

You see, God is still good. He’s a good God, and so we don’t interpret the goodness of God through our circumstances. The fact is that we live in a fallen world. We live in a world under the rule of Satan. Jesus said, he is “the ruler of this world” (John 14:30). The Holy Spirit through the apostle Paul said he is, “the Prince of the power of the air” (Ephesians 2:2). And so, what we need to do is interpret our circumstances, through the goodness of God, through the promise of God, because we believe that God is good, he’s always good, and he can’t be anything but good. And therefore, we don’t have to understand everything to continue to trust in God. But the truth is, it’s just a matter of time before you hit one of those times where things just don’t make sense.

Some of you, a lot of you are like me, and you want to know the plan. You’re praying, you’re asking God, “What’s the plan? I don’t understand, why did this happen?” And you may be praying, “What’s the plan?” and God may say, “Trust my purpose.” You see, “Many are the plans in a man’s heart, but it is the Lord’s purpose that prevails.” And so, we need to turn things around, we need to change our perspective, so that our faith is no longer in our plan, but our faith is in God’s purpose. You see, he’s good, he’s wiser, and his ways are higher than our ways. And so, we simply need to put our faith in God’s purpose so that we can serve and glorify him. As we embrace God’s purpose, number two, we experience his presence in a greater way.

## 2. Experiencing His Presence

Some of you may be looking at your life right now, you may look at the stuff you’re going through, the stuff you’re dealing with, and you may have every right to say, “I don’t understand it and I don’t like it.” But I promise you, if you’ll persevere and walk with Jesus, when you get to the other side and look back. You may not understand it, you never would’ve chosen it, you wouldn’t have even wished it on anyone, but looking back you’ll recognize that God was with you, he carried you, he strengthened you, and he did something in you that you couldn’t have done on your own. You see, it’s in the things you don’t understand, in those difficult seasons of life, that God is doing something in you; and so, you’ve got to walk through it with Jesus. You’ve got to be faithful.

As a matter of fact, we’ve been studying this passage in Bible study on Wednesday night, and I love the way Peter describes going through difficult times, facing suffering, and what he calls various trials. In first Peter chapter 1, verse six he said,

“In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. These have come so that your faith — of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire — may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed” (1 Peter 1:6-7, NIV).

He said, in these things, these various kinds of trials, these things you don't understand, these difficult seasons, they prove that your faith is genuine. Even though you don’t understand it, God is using it to strengthen you, he’s allowing your roots to grow even deeper. And so, you may be experiencing the pain of a broken relationship, a health issue, or a financial difficulty, and yet God can use that pain every single time. He has a purpose, he’s doing something, and so you run toward him because he’s faithful, he’s there in that situation even though you don’t understand it. He has a purpose and he’s always present, in fact the Bible says in Psalm chapter 46,

“God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble” (Psalms 46:1).

He’s always with you, he’s ever-present, and always present. Yet, so many times in life we ask God to give us what we want, when God wants to show us what we need. And there's actually no better example of this in all of Scripture than the apostle Paul. The Bible tells us that he gets this thing that he called a thorn. Now, we don’t know what it was, but it was obviously something that was painful, and something that caused him great difficulty. And so, the Bible tells us that he pleads with God to remove it. He prays like I’ve prayed with God for my wife’s health issues in the past. Three times he pleaded, three times he begged the Lord to take it away, and you’d think that if God was going to heal anybody, he’d heal the guy who had suffered so much for the name of Jesus. You know, the guy who’d been beaten and left for dead, who’d been shipwrecked, snake bitten, whipped and physically stoned, pummeled with rocks for the name of Jesus. He’s pleading, three times he prays, and God says to him,

"My grace is sufficient for you for my power is made perfect in weakness” (2 Corinthians 12:9).

Today, there may be some of you who are praying, “God heal me. Take away the pain. Change my circumstances.” And God might be saying, “My grace is sufficient for you.” He might be saying, “I’m what you need, will you draw close to me, will you experience my presence.” And this is something that you can’t explain, it’s hard to describe, but it’s how God has helped me through difficulties time and time again. When you’ve experienced his presence, when he’s carried you, when you couldn’t make it on your own, but he’s lifted you, sustained you, and comforted you, when he gives you the strength to move forward, you can testify that he’s enough, he’s ever present, and his power is enough. And so, number three, we need to understand that prayer isn’t just about asking, but it’s about trusting God and understanding his power.

## 3. Understanding His Power

And so, we need to recognize that prayer isn’t just about getting our way, that God doesn’t exist to serve us, but we’re here to serve and glorify him. Many times, as we come to him in prayer we need to understand that prayer is about trusting him, putting our dependence on him, and surrendering our will to him. It’s prayer that reminds us that we’re not in control and as we press in season after season, believing him, and trusting him, it keeps us close to the one who is in control. Amen?

You see, this is important, because as we pray in the name of Jesus, there’s power in the name of Jesus, there’s grace in the name of Jesus. It’s the name of Jesus that’s bigger and better than any other name. And so, we believe that it’s in the name of Jesus that God heals, that God provides, that God does miracles, and so we ask and trust at the same time. The Bible says it this way,

“You don’t have, because you don’t ask God” (James 4:2).

So, we’re going to ask, understanding his power, believing for miracles, and we’re going to see miracles, but there may also be times when we’re just trusting God. It’s not just asking, it’s trusting, it’s believing, and that’s what Paul ended up having to do. You know, years later, he’s reflecting back, he’s considering that thorn in the flesh, that thing that has tormented him, and suddenly he has a very different perspective. Now he’s not pleading, now he’s not begging God to take it away, but he says,

“I’ll boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong” (2 Corinthians 12:9-10).

Paul says, “I delight in these things that I never would’ve chosen. I delight in them because I experienced the power and the presence of God in those things.” You see, Paul understood that it wasn’t the victories that made him closer to God. It was those times when he couldn’t do anything but depend on God that helped him to know God in a deeper and more intimate way. Therefore, he said, “I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, and in difficulties.”

What if today you were to change your perspective? What if you were to say, “I hate these migraines, but I’m going to delight in them because they teach me to trust God in a way that I wouldn’t have otherwise.” Maybe you might say, “I delight in my search for employment. I delight in my loneliness. I delight in this whatever…” I delight because I’ve learned to depend on God like I wouldn’t have otherwise, that he’s my provision, he’s my strength, and he’s my joy in this… whatever.

And so, we continue to ask, we continue to believe God for miracles, but we’re not only going to ask, we’re going to trust because prayer is often about surrendering our will to God’s. It’s not just about getting God to do what we want, but about drawing us close to what we really want, what we need, because even when life doesn’t feel good our God is still good, he’s still on his throne, and he’s always good.

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