The Gospel of John, particularly the section of that book we are currently studying, is all about believing in Jesus X.

In John 2:11 we read that His disciples believed in Him after seeing Him change water into wine at the wedding of Cana. These men believed in Jesus unto eternal life, and He would ultimately entrust His whole ministry to them, when He left this world and ascended into heaven.

On the other hand, in today’s text, we will read of the people in Jerusalem=>

“Many believed in His name, beholding His signs which He was doing” (2:23).

However, in their case John will add=> “But Jesus, on His part, was not entrusting Himself to them, for He knew all men.”

What did Jesus know about these people, that caused Him to not trust them, as He would His own disciples?

A: Their faith in Him was not saving faith, but something short of that.

The disciples wanted Jesus Himself, and a relationship with Him; but the multitudes just wanted what they believed they could get from X.

He, for them, was merely a means to an end, not an end in Himself.
The disciples’ kind of faith was saving faith, but that of the “many” in our text was not.

Rom 10:10 says=> “With the heart man believes, resulting in righteousness.”

The disciples believed in Jesus with their whole hearts, but the multitudes did not.

If you/I believe in Him w/ all our hearts the same way X’s disciples did, we are born again.

If not, we aren’t.

The “heart” in Scripture rarely means the muscle in our chest cavity that pumps blood through our body.

It usually refers to the core of man’s mental/emotional/moral being—his reason/emotions/will (i.e. his inward self).

The heart can be thought of as the “real” person, and the Bible describes it as the “hidden springs” of one’s life.

This is where human depravity resides/lies-hidden, and this is where God’s sanctifying influence is felt.

When Paul writes, “With the heart man believes” unto righteousness, he is talking about a faith that goes right to the core of a person, & brings about a moral change w/i him.

This is the difference between saving-faith & demon-faith.
Jms 2:19 says the demons believe, but the kind of faith they have, only causes them to tremble/shudder. They know that Jesus is God and that He saves the souls of those who believe in Him. But they want no such relationship with Him, and they certainly don’t love Him.

The multitudes in our own text didn’t hate Jesus as the demons do, but neither did they want the kind of heart relationship w/ Him enjoyed by His own disciples.

**Saving faith includes the affections of the heart, so a true believer truly loves Jesus X, his Savior/Lord.**

Saving faith involves more than mere understanding, or even agreement w/ the ideas, that Jesus is God come to earth as a man, or His having died for people’s sins and risen back to life.

I.e., It is more than doctrinal correctness.

It includes that, but it’s more than that.

If I hold firmly to orthodox doctrinal beliefs about X, but I don’t love Him in my heart, & my faith has no beneficial effect on my character, then my faith is not saving faith.

If my faith puffs up my ego, instead of giving me a humble desire for righteousness which can only be found in a personal/transforming relationship w/ Jesus X, then my faith has not led to my conversion/regeneration.
But I do have saving faith if, when I learn that Jesus can save me from my sin, and give me perfect righteousness, my hungry/thirsty heart responds=

“That is exactly what I’ve been wanting, Jesus, so come into my heart, become mine, and I will be Yours; I’ll love You, and I’ll obey You as my Lord.”

Saving faith is not saying to myself, “I don’t want to go to hell, and Jesus seems to be the only way of avoiding it, so I guess I’ll believe in Him.”

It’s seeking a close, personal relationship w/ X, prompted by the H.S.

Our text provides an instructive illustration of people whose faith does not save them, even though they believe w/ what seems, from outward appearance, to be saving faith. Jesus’ all-seeing eyes discover it to be lacking the quality of genuine/saving faith.

So He places no faith in their faith.

Our text can be divided into four parts=>

* Part 1—Many “believed” in Jesus (23a)
* Part 2—Why they believed in Jesus (23b)
* Part 3—Jesus did not believe in them/their-faith (24a)
* Part 4—Why He didn’t believe in them (24b-25).

**Part 1—Many “Believed” in Jesus**

[John 2:23a]=> “Now when He was in Jerusalem at the Passover, during the feast, many believed in His name,”
We always have to remember that John is writing this 60 years after the actual events that are recorded here.

Having developed since that time a much maturer understanding he now realized these people at the Passover were not really true believers.

But at the time of the events themselves, he prob. didn’t realize/recognize that.

He was a new believer himself, and must have felt excited just to see what looked like a lot of other people becoming believers in Jesus—like himself.

The fact that X didn’t receive these people w/ open arms must have mystified John, & the other 5 disciples.

The “many” who “believed,” believed in Jesus’ name—not in X Himself.

A name in Scripture often reflects a person’s authority/rank, power/majesty, character/excellence, his reputation.

They were attributing to Jesus these kinds of qualities/attributes, esp. the attribute of miracle/working power

Some thought He might be the Messiah or the great Prophet promised by Moses in Deut 18:15.

But either way, they viewed such a national hero as someone they could use, for their own advantage.

E.g. Jn 6=> “When therefore the people saw the sign which He had performed, they said, ‘This is of a truth the Prophet who is to come into the world.’ / Jesus
therefore perceiving that they were intending to come and take Him by force, to make Him king, withdrew again to the mountain by Himself alone” (6:14-15). Their idea of Messiah was merely that of a mighty man, who could overthrow their Roman oppressors, and provide them w/ endless material benefits/blessings. They didn’t view Jesus in the same light His disciples did, nor did they want that kind of relationship w/ Him.

When a person believes in Jesus X unto salvation, he embraces our Lord by faith as his Savior from sin, and the Giver of perfect righteousness.

The H.S. has caused him to feel a great hunger/thirst w/i himself, a great sense of emptiness which nothing else can fill; A great uneasiness/inward-groaning for something he prob. can’t define, & from which he can find no relief. That undefined yearning which causes this uneasiness is the intuitive knowledge that God is perfectly holy, & he is terribly unholy/unrighteous. And God is also perfectly just, so He will by no means clear the guilty or leave man’s injustice and unrighteousness unrequited. There is a terrible tension between the holiness/righteousness of almighty God, & fallen man’s sinfulness. When a man/woman whom the Spirit is convicting of sin discovers that this tension can be resolved by Jesus;
*When he discovers that Jesus has died to fulfill the Law, removing that tension from sinners like himself;
*When the H.S. grants him the repentant faith to trust Jesus to forgive his sins, remove his guilt, & cleanse him from all unrighteousness;
*When he discovers that this offer is open to anyone—even the most damnable/despicable rebel against God, dressed like the Prodigal Son in the rags of his own wickedness;
*And when he acts on this understanding by crying out to X, asking Him to cleanse him from sin/guilt, and trusting Him implicitly to do so;

Then he is forever reconciled unto God & saved from his sin, because that is what believing in Jesus unto the salvation of our souls, actually means.

**But none of that is what the supposed “believers” in X’s name of our text, had in mind.**

They weren’t interested in the spiritual issues in their lives. They just wanted relief from a few mundane problems. Surrendering their hearts/lives to Jesus, and embracing Him by faith, had no place on their agenda.

There are profound implications buried in this verse for us. We too can view Jesus in this kind of self-centered, pragmatic way, seeking the benefit of eternal life from Him, but not really loving Him;
Or wanting to get so close to Him that He interferes w/ our lives/freedom.

If that is our attitude, we are just like the false believers at the Passover, whose faith X didn’t trust/accept.

* **Part 2—Why They Believed in Jesus**

[Verse 23b]=> “beholding His signs which He was doing.”

**John doesn’t tell us what those miraculous signs were.**

In fact, John will only tell us about a handful of X’s miracles throughout his entire Gospel.

But John’s words indicate here that X performed such miracles during the days He stayed in Jerusalem after the Passover, during the 7-day Feast of Unleavened Bread which immediately followed Passover.

That’s why, in Jn 3, Nicodemus will say to X=>

> “Rabbi, we know that You have come from God as a teacher; for no one can do these signs that You do [are doing; keep on doing] unless God is with him”

(Jn 3:2).

These were the signs X was performing, that caused those w/ superficial faith to “believe” in His name.

As we saw last week, signs can strengthen the faith of true believers, but they cannot create faith in the hearts of nonbelievers.

That is something only the H.S. can do.

And a true believer can believe in His Lord w/ or w/o signs.
The false “believers” in our text were like Simon Magus in Acts 8, who was impressed with Philip for performing such miraculous signs.

Acts 8 says=> “Even Simon himself believed; and after being baptized, he continued on with Philip; and as he observed signs and great miracles taking place, he was constantly amazed” (8:13)

But here was another man w/ non-saving faith—Simon Magus, who was no more saved than the pseudo-believers in our own text.

Peter later told Simon=> “You have no part or portion in this matter [the Xn faith], for your heart is not right before God” (Acts 8:21).

I suspect that many Xns would be shocked if you told them it’s possible to believe in Jesus X w/o being saved.

But here we have several people of whom that was true.

In all these cases, nonbelievers were drawn to miracle workers by the power of miraculous signs, and to one degree or another, they identified w/ them.

But there was no hint of true saving faith in their hearts.

* Part 3—Jesus Did Not Believe in Their Faith

[Verse 24a]=> “But Jesus, on His part, was not entrusting Himself to them,”

“Entrusting” is episteuen, which is just a slight variation on the word episteusan, translated “believed” in verse 23.

I’m sure you can hear the connection between these 2 words, from the same root.
I.e., Jesus didn’t believe in the people who supposedly believed in Him because of the miracles He had performed.

He didn’t view them as believers to be trusted w/ His cause. They were not converted, their sins had not been forgiven, and inwardly their spirits had not been renewed. They weren’t aware of any of that themselves, but Jesus knew it.

**Passages like this make me very uncomfortable as a pastor.**

I am afraid there are many people in today’s modern church who don’t know it, but their faith is spurious/deficient faith, like that of the people in our text.

Jesus said=> “*The gate is small, and the way is narrow that leads to life, & few are those who find it*” (Mt 7:14).

But to hear many of them talk, the gate that leads to eternal life is large, the way is broad, & anyone who thinks of himself as a Xn, is on his way there.

I pray that, if any of us here have spurious, pseudo-faith like these of Jesus’ time, the H.S. will reveal that to us, before it’s too late.

X said (Jn 8:31-32)=> “*If you abide in My word, then you are truly disciples of Mine; / and you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.*”

The fact that some people are “truly disciples” means that others are false disciples, who are not yet free.
So as a pastor, I would tell you to abide in God’s Word, seek to learn about Jesus as you do so, seek to know/trust/love Him, in a very personal way. The more you come to know Him thru study of His Word, the more you will have reason to trust/love Him, because Scripture clearly reveals His Self-sacrificing goodness/kindness, & His amazing love for sinners.

* Part 4—Why Jesus Didn’t Believe in Them

[Verses 24b-25]=> “for He knew all men, / and because He did not need anyone to bear witness concerning man for He Himself knew what was in man.”

The ultimate reason why Jesus didn’t believe in these false, superficial “believers” was His knowledge of all men. By His divine omniscience, He had known that Nathanael was a man w/o guile before Nathanael had even spoken a word to Him.

And He knew that these people in our text had stony-ground faith like those in His parable of the 4 soils (Matt 13). They would feel excited about Jesus for a day/two (maybe even a few months in some cases).

But when they faced affliction, or were allured by wealth, they would invariably/inevitably fall away, because of the absence of saving-faith and spiritual reality in their hearts.

Their faith was shallow, emotion-based, tentative/temporary.
It was not the kind of deep/living/God-given faith that transforms a heart, saves a soul, or renews a life.

As we see in verse 25, the immediate reason for Jesus’ distrust of these people’s faith, was the fact that, being omniscient, He needed no outside testimony to anyone’s else’s character.

Rev 20:11 says that, at the Great White Throne Judgment, books will be opened containing the comprehensive records of every unsaved person’s deeds.

This won’t be for Jesus’ sake—He already knows every minute detail of their lives.

It will be for the sake of men/angels, who don’t know all that.

The difference between living-faith & dead-faith will be made very clear, manifest in the nature of their deeds.

And the eternal justice of God will become manifest, as the wicked are consigned to outer darkness, forever.

Someone: How could a loving Savior send anyone into eternal punishment like that?

Because people who don’t love Jesus are indifferent towards Him, & in their proud indifference/independence, they would actively dislike Him if directly confronted by His sovereign authority over their lives, as King of kings and Lord of lords.
While eternity rolls relentlessly on, that dislike will harden & solidify into a hatred, not unlike Satan’s hatred for X.

The course they chose in this life will have set the direction they will forever pursue throughout eternity, never able to alter it, making hell the place where they logically/rightly belong.

**One of the present differences between true/false-believers is that false believers shrink from the penetrating gaze of Jesus’ omniscient knowledge of their hearts.**

By contrast, the attitude of true believers, is found in Psalm 139:

> “Search me, O God, and know my heart; Try me and know my anxious thoughts; / And see if there be any hurtful way in me, & lead me in the everlasting way” (Psa 139:23-24).

A true believer truly desires for X to probe every secret nook/cranny of his heart, to discover every secret sin that hides there, displeasing his beloved Savior, and to cut it out like a vile/deadly cancer.

His is a sincere faith that goes to the core of his being.

Reading in Jeremiah 17, “I, the LORD, search the heart, I test the mind” (17:10), he says “Good, Lord, search my heart, & lead me in the everlasting way.”

Genuine/saving faith involves wholehearted love of Jesus X, and surrender to His Lordship, embracing Jesus’ sovereignty over one’s life.
That was true of Jesus’ 1st century followers, & it’s still true of His 21st century disciples today.

**In examining ourselves to determine whether we have true faith or false faith, we should ask 3 questions:**

First, what do you *know* about Jesus?

The people in our text were less concerned w/ the truth about Him, than what they expected/wanted Him to be, in their erroneous view of Messiah. Many people today are just as ignorant of X, because what they know of Him hasn’t come from the Bible, but from TV, from friends, or from their own imagination.

* So, do you know the truth about Jesus=> That He was God come to earth, born of a virgin, so that as the perfect Man, He could reconcile other men to God?
* Do you know that He lived a perfect/sinless life, and demonstrated His deity by His miraculous deeds?
* Do you know that He died to pay sin’s penalty for all who believe, satisfying God’s wrath as their Substitute?

Second, what do you *believe* about Jesus, w/ regards to yourself?

Have you personally appropriated these truths and applied them to yourself?

* Can you say w/ Paul=> “I know whom I have *believed* and I am *convinced* that He is able to guard what I have entrusted to Him until that day” (II Tim 1:12)
* Have you trusted in Jesus, & trusted in His love for you, to preserve the most precious thing you have, your soul?

* Do you rely upon the death of X as having sufficient merit with God, to stand as a substitute in place of your sufferings in hell—His agony on the cross, the blood dripping from His wounds, His suffering as God incarnate the anger of His rebellious creatures, His suffering His Father’s rejection because our guilt had been placed on Himself, & in the end His crying triumphantly, “It is finished!” (Jn 19:30), then rising again from the dead?

* Do you believe that God’s grace and X’s righteousness are enough for you to stand safely before a perfectly holy God?

* Do you love Jesus because, based on what you know of Him from Scripture, He is worthy of your love?

* Or is your faith based merely on the good things you hope to get from Him (like the people in today’s text)?

Third, do you see evidence of God’s gracious work in your life? Are you conscious of changes in your nature/character since the time you first believed in Jesus?
Can you see w/i yourself a growth in honesty/truthfulness, moral purity/righteousness, humility, or in compassion/love toward others?

Have you become more generous, & less materialistic?

Can you look at your life and say, “Over time it is becoming more/more clear that old things really have passed away in me, and new things have come”? 

* Do you now have new desires, new/holy feelings which once were completely foreign/alien to your heart/mind back then?

* As you look at the night sky and see all the stars, or the red/rocky mountains that surround us, have you ever thought to yourself=> “The magnificent God who created this beautiful universe and orders it all, is a good God whom I love. I would never defy/disobey His will, if it weren’t for the weakness of my flesh. I would do/be whatever He asked/wanted”? 

* Can you say, that although there was a time when you never thought of Jesus as your Savior, you now love/trust Him for having reconciled you to God?

As I went through that list of questions, there may have been some who consistently felt they had to answer “No,” if they were to be honest w/ themselves.

I want to close w/ a few thoughts for those poor souls.
1st, you, like all of us, will never have a saving relationship w/ Jesus X until the Spirit prepares your heart to receive Him. Pray/ask the Lord for a good-soil heart, prepared to receive the seed of the gospel.

2nd, in order to truly believe in X and have such a relationship w/ Him, you must first give up your faith/trust in yourself, and seek forgiveness of your sin based on X’s merit, not yours. He will only give you forgiveness/salvation as a free gift of His grace, so if you try to earn them, you’ll lose them.

3rd, trust that, once He has forgiven you, your sense of relief, your gratitude/joy will become so great, they will overflow in the same enormous love for Him that His original disciples experienced.

Your heart too will sing=>

“My Jesus, I love Thee, I know Thou art Mine.
For Thee all the follies of sin I resign;
My gracious Redeemer, my Savior art Thou;
If ever I loved Thee, my Jesus, it’s now.”