

# Belief and Disbelief

Notes for 15 Oct

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## Background

Matt	Mark	Luke	John
			<a href="#">12:20-50</a>

## Discussion

John 20 is a busy chapter. It begins with the famous story of Mary pouring the expensive perfume on Jesus' feet. Then the next day Jesus rides into Jerusalem on the back of a donkey and the crowd shouts "Hail to the King of Israel!". The onlooking Pharisees mutter "There's nothing we can do. Look, everyone has gone after him".

Which brings us to today's texts...

Questions:

- v20 begins "some Greeks who had come to Jerusalem... They said 'Sir, we want to meet Jesus'." What do you think they knew of Jesus? Try and forget what you know (difficult!) and think of what it might be like to be a foreigner who had heard *something* and wanted to check it out...
- v23-27 and later in this section (eg v33-34). Is this the clearest statement yet from Jesus about his soon death?
- v28-29. What is happening here? A voice speaks from heaven. Some in the crowd hear the voice, others think it's thunder. Others an angel. Why the confusion?
- v32. Is this a prophecy? "Lifted up from the earth" = crucifixion?
- v34. A very good question! "Just who is this Son of Man, anyway?"
- What happens at the end of v35?

## Belief

The next section (v37-50) is entitled "The Unbelief of the People" in the New Living Translation. Let's have a good think about that word '*belief*'.

I suspect that scientists may have a different spin on 'belief' from most others. I count myself as a member of the Clan of Scientists and we tend to not like 'belief'. We are much keener on provable facts (or as provable as our current technology and frames of reference will allow - I am very aware of the ironic fact that scientific 'facts' are malleable...).

What does it mean to believe in Jesus?

What does it feel like? Is it like believing that the grass is green? Or that Liverpool will win the Champions League? The former is a 'fact', the latter is a 'hope' (unless you aren't a Liverpool fan!).

Consider this question: is your belief in Jesus a 'fact'? A 'hope'? Something else? Explain your thinking...

### **On (bad) 'belief'...**

Sometimes, when thinking about difficult topics like the nature of 'belief' it helps to take what might be called a counterexample.

Recently, I've been following the [Alex Jones](#) trial in the US. He is the 'shock jock' who denied the Sandy Hook massacre and made life hell for the parents affected by that tragedy. As I write this he has just lost his latest court case and been told to pay the [astonishing sum of \\$965m in damages](#).

As a left-leaning Brit I view the bonfire that is current US culture and politics and wonder what is going on in the heads of the Alex Jones supporter. Do they actually *believe* this stuff?

Take, for example, Donald Trump. I've always viewed him as being a self-serving narcissist who doesn't really have 'beliefs' as such. Rather, he does what will benefit his ego and his bank balance.

But what about Alex Jones? And his fellow gutter-dweller [Mike Lindell](#). Do you think they believe the words that come out of their mouths? I suspect that they do. In both cases their businesses have been ruined by their apparent beliefs. If they were cynical, as per Trump, they would recant, re-assess, and *spin* their way out of the mess they are in and get back to the real game of fattening their bank accounts. But they don't seem to want to do that. Are they true believers?

If you were a fan of Jones or Lindell (or, indeed, Trump) how would you move on from your belief? How would you decide that 'No, I was wrong. I now believe something else to be true'? What are the steps in such a process?

### **On (good) belief...**

Let's be a little more positive!

All of us who frequent the Virtual Vestry 'believe' in Jesus. I think I can state that as a fact! But I would think we'd differ as to what we 'believed' about Jesus and about the nature of our 'belief'.

For some it is very important to believe in, say, the miracles, exactly as they are portrayed in the gospels. For others, this is not so important.

For some it is very important to believe in the resurrection of Jesus. For others, this is less important (though I struggle to see how a non-believer in the resurrection would want to classify themselves as a 'Christian' in the first place... Discuss!)

Our very own Llew Edwards, in a series of talks given at Crieff Church, talked about the 'Hills to Die On' - those things, those beliefs, that are essential and without which we would not be a follower of Jesus.

- What are your 'Hills to Die On'? What beliefs are non-negotiable?
- Do you consider those beliefs to also be facts? Does it matter?

## The Big Question of the Week

*What do YOU believe in?*

Explain your thinking and show your working!

My take on religious belief is this: I don't know much about what happened in Palestine in 30-ish AD. I wasn't there. I hear there was a man called Jesus who did some interesting things and taught some interesting ideas. I can read about him, but there's not a lot to go on. Surprisingly little, in fact. The book in which I can read about Jesus also has some other sections that disturb me. Sections that I don't like and can't understand. So, I gloss over them and rationalize them away.

But what I do *know* is that there have been events in my life where I have caught a glimpse of *something* out there that says to me that this universe in which I find myself is more than a meaningless collection of atoms and chemistry. It seems to have *purpose*. I BELIEVE in that. And I suspect that the best representation of the *purpose* can be found in those few stories that we have of the Jew called Jesus.

Pretty much everything else is up for grabs!

Makes life interesting...