

8. Jesus Gave People the Choice to Believe

As Jesus talked with people, He would share with them the need to believe, what to believe, and then give them the opportunity to make the choice to believe. As we help developing spiritual leaders, we also need to show them how to do these same things.

First, Christ showed people the need to believe. When Nicodemus came to Jesus one night, Jesus immediately shared with him the need to believe. In John 3:3, we read, “Jesus answered and said to him, ‘Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.’” Nicodemus was a Jewish religious leader and a member of the Pharisees. Like the other Pharisees, he thought he would certainly make it to heaven, because he was making every effort to obey the law. Nicodemus first had to come to the point where he realized that he needed to believe.

Later, Jesus healed a man who had been born blind. Since Christ put clay on his eyes and told him to go wash in the pool of Siloam, he did not see Jesus at that time. Later, Jesus came to him after he had been cast out of the synagogue. John 9:35-36 says, “Jesus heard that they had cast him out; and when He had found him, He said to him, ‘Do you believe in the Son of God?’ He answered and said, ‘Who is He, Lord, that I may believe in Him?’” Jesus helped the man to realize that he needed to believe.

Second, Christ showed people what they needed to believe. In John 3:16-17, Jesus told Nicodemus what he needed to believe, “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. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved.” Jesus made it clear to Nicodemus that he had to believe in the Son of God, in order to have eternal life.

As Jesus talked with the man who had been born blind, Jesus asked him if he believed in the Son of God. Then, to make it clear who the Son of God is, Jesus said, in John 9:37, “‘You have both seen Him and it is He who is talking with you.’” Jesus told the man that he had seen the Son of God. Since the man had only had sight for part of the day, he had only seen a limited number of people. Then, Jesus became even more specific. Jesus said that the Son of God was talking to him at that very moment. Jesus wanted to make certain that there was no question in the mind of the man what, and whom, he needed to believe.

Jesus also made it clear to groups of people what they needed to believe, so they could have their sins forgiven. One day, Jesus was speaking to the Pharisees in the temple at Jerusalem. In John 8:23-24, Jesus said to them, “You are from beneath; I am from above. You are of this world; I am not of this world. Therefore I said to you that you will die in your sins; for if you do not believe that I am He, you will die in your sins.” Jesus made it very clear, to the Pharisees, that they had to believe in Him in order to have their sins forgiven.

Jesus had made it very clear to them that they needed to believe in Him. However, they continued to question. Finally, Jesus told them why they could not understand. John 8:43-45 says, “‘Why

do you not understand My speech? Because you are not able to listen to My word. You are of your father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own resources, for he is a liar and the father of it. But because I tell the truth, you do not believe Me.” They could not believe in Christ, because they chose to continue to follow their father, the devil.

At a later feast, the Jews confronted Jesus again. John 10:24-25 says, “Then the Jews surrounded Him and said to Him, ‘How long do You keep us in doubt? If You are the Christ, tell us plainly.’ Jesus answered them, ‘I told you, and you do not believe. The works that I do in My Father’s name, they bear witness of Me.’” Jesus was not leaving them in doubt. He told them very clearly that He was the Son of God and that they needed to believe in Him.

Third, Jesus showed these Jews that they had a choice to believe. As the Jews continued to confront Him, Jesus told them one more time that they needed to believe in the Son of God and that He was the Son of God. John 10:35-38 says, “‘If He called them gods, to whom the word of God came (and the Scripture cannot be broken), do you say of Him whom the Father sanctified and sent into the world, ‘You are blaspheming,’ because I said, ‘I am the Son of God’? If I do not do the works of My Father, do not believe Me; but if I do, though you do not believe Me, believe the works, that you may know and believe that the Father is in Me, and I in Him.’” It was not a case that Jesus did not make it clear that He was the Son of God and that they had the choice to believe in Him, instead, it was a case that they made the choice not to believe.

Three years earlier, Jesus had also shown Nicodemus that he had the choice to believe. John 3:18 says, “‘He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.’” Nicodemus learned that night that He had the choice not to believe and remain condemned, or he had the choice to believe and no longer face condemnation. The choice was made very clear, so he had the choice to believe.

One day a rich young ruler came to Christ. Again, Christ told him that he had to make a choice to believe and choose to follow Christ, in order to have eternal life. Mark 10:21-22 says, “Then Jesus, looking at him, loved him, and said to him, ‘One thing you lack: Go your way, sell whatever you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, take up the cross, and follow Me.’ But he was sad at this word, and went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions.” In this case, the young man made the choice not to believe and place his faith in Christ. We see that he clearly understood his choice, but he decided that things were more important to him than following Christ. Christ showed His love by allowing that young man to make the choice to reject. Christ did not try to force him to follow or even give him an easier choice.

Even when people chose to reject Him, that did not change the attitude of Christ toward those people. This is illustrated most clearly by the way Jesus responded to Judas. Matthew 26:48-50 says, “Now His betrayer had given them a sign, saying, ‘Whomever I kiss, He is the One; seize Him.’ Immediately he went up to Jesus and said, ‘Greetings, Rabbi!’ and kissed Him. But Jesus

said to him, ‘Friend, why have you come?’ Then they came and laid hands on Jesus and took Him.” At the very moment Judas was betraying Him, Jesus still treated Judas with love and respect and called him “friend”. He gave Judas the freedom to make the choice to reject, and even betray Him, and yet, still treated him as a friend.

We want to teach developing leaders to follow the example of Christ and keep loving people, whether those people choose to follow Christ or reject Christ. Christ still continues to reach out to people, even when they reject Him, so we want to show developing leaders the importance of giving people a clear choice and continuing to love them and reach out to them even when they reject Him.

Christ illustrated this principle by the way He kept reaching out to Saul, even when Saul was rejecting and persecuting Him. Saul showed his rejection of Christ by disputing with Stephen. Acts 6:9-10 says, “Then there arose some from what is called the Synagogue of the Freedmen (Cyrenians, Alexandrians, and those from Cilicia and Asia), disputing with Stephen. And they were not able to resist the wisdom and the Spirit by which he spoke.” Saul made the choice not to believe.

Saul continued to reject. Acts 7:58 says, “And they cast him out of the city and stoned him. And the witnesses laid down their clothes at the feet of a young man named Saul.” Acts 8:1a says, “Now Saul was consenting to his death.” Acts 8:3 says, “As for Saul, he made havoc of the church, entering every house, and dragging off men and women, committing them to prison.” Christ continued to love Saul and even gave him another opportunity to make the choice to believe.

Acts 9:4-6 says, “Then he fell to the ground, and heard a voice saying to him, ‘Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?’ And he said, ‘Who are You, Lord?’ Then the Lord said, ‘I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. It is hard for you to kick against the goads.’ So he, trembling and astonished, said, ‘Lord, what do You want me to do?’ Then the Lord said to him, ‘Arise and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do.’” Christ never changed His love for Saul. He loved him even when Saul was persecuting those who followed Christ. Christ continued to give him a choice until he responded to that choice by believing in Christ.

The Lord calls us to help developing leaders learn to share the need to believe, help them understand how to clearly explain what people need to believe, and then give those people the opportunity to make the choice to believe. May the Lord richly bless you as you help developing leaders learn to become more like their Savior.