

Actions Reveal Beliefs

John 11:1-7, 17-27, 39-45

Actions reveal beliefs. What you do makes it clear what you believe. For example, you are sitting in a chair because you believe that chair can support you. If this room was filled with rickety old rocking chairs that you could tell were half rotted out and most of the supports were missing, you would be standing up because even if you SAID you trusted a chair, your action – to not sit in the chair – would reveal that you didn't really trust those chairs.

Up here I have **two paper bags**. Both of them have nice, fresh donuts in them. One of them also has a mousetrap that is armed and ready to snap. I've asked two volunteers to come up here and put on blindfolds. I've chosen two of our deacons for this exercise so they can demonstrate what FAITH looks like.

- Deacon 1 – your bag just has a donut. No mousetrap. Go ahead and reach in there and grab your donut! [See what he does.]
- Deacon 2 – your bag does have a donut. But it also has a mousetrap. So I will give you this wooden spoon so you can get the donut with that instead of with your hand.

Now, if Deacon 1 had not trusted me, he would have been way more reluctant to reach into that bag, right? The fact that he reached right in, without hesitation, revealed what he believed. He believed I was trustworthy. He believed the bag really did have a donut and did not have a mousetrap.

Similarly, Deacon 2 also trusted me. He believed my promise of a donut and my warning of a mousetrap. Think of what he would have done had he believed my promise but not my warning? He would have just reached in there to grab that donut. But since he also believed my warning he used the wooden spoon to get the donut instead of his hand.

I hope this is a helpful illustration for us. **Our actions reveal what we actually believe** about God's promises and warnings.

- If we believe God's promise to bless our **intimacy in MARRIAGE**, men, we would not look outside of our marriage to images or anywhere else.
- **Young people**, if you believe God's warnings about getting physically involved with someone you are not married to, you would protect your holiness and purity at all costs. When young people push the boundaries of holiness in a relationship, those actions reveal what they really believe about God's promises and warnings regarding marriage.
- We say we believe that **God answers prayer**; that God's work is more important than ours. But our actions betray us. If I pray for 2 minutes or less each day then my actions reveal what I actually believe. I don't believe that prayer matters. And I do believe that my work matters more than His.

- We say we believe that *the gospel changes lives*. But our actions reveal what we really believe. If we never, or hardly ever, share the good news of Jesus Christ that fact betrays the belief underneath it – we don't believe the gospel is powerful; we don't believe it is the message people MUST hear to be saved; we don't believe that sharing this word is more important than feeling a little awkward.

I could go on. But the point is clear. Our actions reveal our beliefs. Today we will study John 11, focusing on **what JESUS BELIEVED** and how that influenced His actions. We will see *four of Jesus' core beliefs* and how they shaped the way He lived. May we embrace these same beliefs and allow them to bear the same fruit in our lives! First,

Jesus Believed:

1. God's Glory is ultimate, not physical health

"Now a certain man was ill, Lazarus of Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha... So the sisters sent to him, saying, 'Lord, he whom you love is ill.'" John 11:1-2

Mary, Martha and Lazarus of Bethany. These were some of Jesus' dearest friends. John says in verse 2 that Mary is the one who anointed Jesus with expensive ointment and wiped his feet with her hair. He recounts that in detail in John 12. This is the Mary and Martha who had the little contest about the best way to serve Jesus. Martha was working and sweating in the kitchen and felt that her way of serving Jesus was best. But Mary just wanted to sit at Jesus' feet to listen to Him and be with Him, and she thought HER way was best.

Martha was not wrong to work her heart out serving the Lord, but she was wrong to judge her sister for not serving the Lord the way she did. Again in John 11 we see that *these two sisters are different but Jesus loves and accepts them both*. Jesus loved this family – we'll see that clearly in his third core belief. The sisters knew he loved them which is why they sent for him.

1. Jesus Believed God's Glory is ultimate, not physical health

"But when Jesus heard it he said, 'This illness does not lead to death. It is for the glory of God, so that the Son of God may be glorified through it.'" John 11:4

Here is one of the key lessons of Experiencing God. **God is always at work**. Even when situations are confusing and painful – God is at work. In fact, that is when God does some of His best work. Jesus knew there was a bigger story playing out – a bigger plan. He believed that God's glory was the ultimate thing, not the physical health of Lazarus – even though Lazarus was a dear friend.

Jesus knew that death was not the end – it was a MEANS to the greater end of bringing glory to God. Like all the miracles and signs, and ultimately His own death and resurrection, the raising of Lazarus from the dead was **a REVELATION of the glory of Jesus**. Could Jesus have healed Lazarus by going to him before he died? Sure. Could Jesus have healed him by command without

even going to him. Sure. But Jesus knew that those would not bring the most glory to God the Father through Him. It was time for His disciples to see that He was more than just a healer.

1. **Jesus believed God's Glory is ultimate, not physical health**

- So Jesus trusted the Father's **Timing**

"So, when he heard that Lazarus was ill, he stayed two days longer in the place where he was."

John 11:6

Jesus' actions revealed His beliefs. He waited – intentionally delayed his travel to his dear friends – for two days to ensure that Lazarus would die. If you didn't know the outcome of the story, as Mary and Martha did not – you would feel that was a heartless thing for Jesus to do. But because Jesus believed His life and ministry was ultimately about the Father's glory, not the physical health of his friends (or himself) He trusted completely in the Father's timing.

Can we say the same? Do we really believe that God's glory is ultimate? Or do our actions betray our true beliefs? Do we really believe that physical health and long life is ultimate? Do we truly believe that this life is all there is so we have to stay healthy and fit and see the doctor all the time and preserve our lives at all costs?

Do you see how our actions in this matter reveal what we REALLY Believe, regardless of what we SAY we believe. ***Do you trust the Father's timing for you and your health?*** Do you trust the Father's timing for the health and life of your loved ones?

Do you really believe that God's glory is ultimate?

One of the greatest tests of this belief came to **Steven and Mary Beth Chapman** on May 21, 2008. They had six children, three of them beautiful little girls adopted from China. The little girls, as they often did, were running in and out of the house, playing on their playset in back. Will, age 17, was coming home from trying out for a play at his school. He turned slowly into the driveway and rolled around the side of the house.

His little sister, Maria, heard his truck coming in and wanted to run to greet her big brother. She was so small he could not see her coming. She was so small she did not understand that he could not see her. The truck hit Maria, causing a head injury, and not long later she was gone. Life had changed for the Chapman family forever. It was May 21 but winter was suddenly upon them. Grief. Loss. Death. Pain. Regret. Emptiness. Maria was a bundle of joy and movement, of sticky electricity. They knew she was with Jesus – they never once doubted that. But she was no longer with them – and the hole she left in their home was enormous.

Mary Beth writes:

“As long as I can remember, and throughout my 25 year marriage to Steven, I’ve held on to certain expectations about life. But Jesus has always loved me enough to show me that even when I push my own ideas and expectations, He is there to guide me back to green pastures. He has shepherded me through the mountainous terrain of stubbornness, shame, depression, and inadequacy and brought me gently back to the lushness of His love. He loves us enough to never let us go... even when it feels like He has.

“It wasn’t like I wanted a life that was unreasonable or questionable... Still, God has turned my life, my expectations, and even some of my dreams completely upside down so many times... Whether you are in a good place, or in a place that’s hard, sad, made or desperately hopeless, in the midst of it all, God really is with us and for us. I have found that even during those times when the path is darkest, He leaves little bits of evidence all along the way – bread crumbs of grace – that can give me what I need to take the next step. But I can only find them ***if I choose to SEE.***”

What a challenge. To lose your five year old daughter. To walk with your 17 year old son through the emotional aftermath of an accident like that. What a test of this belief. Is God’s glory really ultimate? Can you trust Him through the pain?

Because it really is a matter of **trusting in God’s TIMING**. When you have kids you unavoidably have hopes and dreams for those children. You want to see them walk and talk and go to school and play sports and grow up and get married and have a job and come over for Christmas and call you and visit you and take care of you when you’re old. Right? You want TIME with them. You hope and pray for and expect TIME. A lifetime. When a child dies before a parent it tests our trust in God’s timing. Do we really believe He is in control? Do we really believe He is good? Do we really believe that our lives are about His glory?

Steven Curtis Chapman wrote the song, “***Glorious Unfolding***” to express their faith.

God’s Glory is Ultimate □ Trust in the Father’s Timing

“Let us remember, this life we’re living is just the beginning of the beginning! There is going to be a glorious unfolding! Just you wait and see and you will be amazed. You’ve just got to believe, the story is so far from over, and hold on to every promise God has made to us. And watch the glorious unfolding!” Steven Curtis Chapman

Jesus believed this. To Mary and Martha his delay seemed inexcusable. But Jesus trusted the Father’s timing and waited two more days. Steven and Mary Beth had so many hopes and dreams and plans for Maria. But they continue to choose to SEE how God is working even in their sadness and pain – believing there will be a glorious unfolding.

Jesus second core belief:

2. Jesus believed God's plan is Best, not human plans

"Then after this he said to his disciples, 'Let us go to Judea again.' The disciples said to him, 'Rabbi, the Jews were just now seeking to stone you, and you are going there again?'" John 10:7-8

Jesus' approach to this situation *didn't make sense*. Mary and Martha felt like he was too late. His disciples felt like he was too early. Opposition from the Jewish leaders was heating up. They knew the Jews were looking for an excuse to have Jesus killed. Stoning was the Jewish death penalty.

But Jesus wasn't concerned with what PEOPLE thought, how much it made sense to them. He was convinced that God's plan was best even when it didn't make sense to people. Walking into danger doesn't make sense to us. But Jesus knew the safest place is always in the center of God's will.

2. Jesus believed God's plan is Best, not human plans

- **So he followed the Spirit's Leading**

"If anyone walks in the day, he does not stumble, because he sees the light of this world. But if anyone walks in the night, he stumbles, because the light is not in him." John 10:9-10

Jesus depended on the leading of the Holy Spirit as much as you and I do. His omniscience as God was limited by His ignorance as a human. His omnipotence as God was limited by His weakness as a human. He depended entirely on the Father's plan and knew the Father's will by listening to and following the leading of the Holy Spirit. To walk in the light is to walk in the leading and direction of the Spirit. Jesus made every decision and lived every day in the light of the Spirit's leading – and so He never stumbled even once.

We often stray into the darkness of our own understanding instead of following the Spirit as He speaks to us through the Bible and prayer and God's people.

2. Jesus believed God's Plan is best, not human plans

- **So he followed the Spirit's Leading**

"Martha said to Jesus, 'Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.'" John 11:21

Mary and Martha both said the same thing to Jesus. They thought their plan was better than His. They were like, "Jesus – you could have healed him! Why didn't you just come? Why would you be late for something like this? What were you doing that was more important?" They had a plan and Jesus did not conform to their plan.

How often do we question God on exactly these grounds? Our actions reveal our beliefs. If we really believed that God's glory is ultimate and His plan is always best then we would trust completely in His timing and follow the Spirit's leading with absolute surrender.

This was Jesus' posture in prayer and life and ministry

2. Jesus believed God's Plan is best, not human plans

- **So he followed the Spirit's Leading**

"And Jesus lifted up his eyes and said, 'Father, I thank you that you have heard me. I knew that you always hear me.'" John 11:41-42

This is how Jesus prayed. He knew the Father always heard Him. He knew the Spirit would lead Him. He trusted the Father completely and followed the Spirit's leading without hesitation or reservation.

Come back to the **paper bag illustration**. If the guys hesitated or delayed it revealed a lack of TRUST. Did they believe my promise of a donut? Did they believe my warning of the mousetrap?

Do we share Jesus' convictions here? Do we believe, as He did, that God's plan is best – even when it doesn't match with our plans? ***The test of this belief is our ACTION – do we obey when the Holy Spirit gives us instructions?*** Do we ADJUST our plans to His?

Or do we question the Lord like Mary and Martha? "Lord, if you had been here... if you had healed... if you had intervened..." If only... Why didn't you...

I flew to Chicago a couple of weeks ago and was at exactly this point in my writing – the sermon was half done. I wanted the flight time to continue writing. Of course, it was a Spirit flight, so there is hardly room on your lap for even a small laptop, but I wanted to try. Then a guy sat down next to me who was speaking Arabic and I saw him texting on his phone in Arabic. So I secretly hoped he wouldn't speak English. But I had to check, so I asked him if it was Arabic he was typing and he responded with nice, clear English. Turns out he was from Iraq and had been a translator for the US Army, then an English teacher there. His English was good. In fact, he talked to me most of the 3 hour flight.

My plan was to do some writing. God had a different plan. But, clearly, God's plan was better. His name was Faez and he had moved to LA with his family four years ago. He was raised a Shia Muslim but had studied many religions, including Christianity. He knew there were issues with the history of Islam and made no attempt to hide the violence of the early years after Mohammed died or the continuing conflict over Mohammed's true successor.

Radical Shia believe that only Shia Muslims will go to heaven. They claim that Ali, Mohammed's "true" successor, holds the keys to heaven so only faithful Shia will get in. But Faez said he knew that was not true because Ali was just a man and only God has the keys to heaven.

Faez knows many Christians and Jews and respects our beliefs. He has taken his family to church several times, joining some Christian friends in their Christmas celebrations and other events. He knew a lot about Jesus and told me most Muslims believe Jesus did not die – but Judas was made to look like Jesus and Judas is the one who died on the cross. But Faez said there is another verse in the Quran that says Jesus did die on the cross. So when I showed him the Romans Road, talking about how only Jesus sacrifice could save a person, he said, “That is exactly correct.”

Toward the end of our three hour conversation I asked him, “***So what is keeping you from becoming a Christian?***” He said, to him, it was all the same – Muslim, Jew, Christian. He believes good people go to heaven and it doesn’t matter what prophet you follow, if you are good you will go to heaven. But he promised to stay in touch and we have communicated. He is listening to last year’s series Open the Bible and is very interested to learn more about the Bible and Jesus. Pray for Faez and his family!

God disrupted my plan, my schedule – and I had to decide ***whether I would adjust to His plan or insist on my own.*** Jesus believed God’s plan was best and so always followed the Spirit’s leading. Do we do the same? Jesus’ third conviction was:

3. Jesus believed God’s love is Constant, even in our pain

- **So he Shared in his friends’ suffering**

“Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus... Jesus wept. So the Jews said, ‘See how he loved him!’” John 11:5, 35-36

Underneath this whole account runs the river of God’s love. Jesus’ love for this family opens the chapter and this observation from the Jews comes at the heart of the story. Jesus knew and deeply believed that God’s love is constant. His love does not fluctuate with our circumstances. Our experiences in life go up and down, but God’s love does not – it is constantly toward us.

3. Jesus believed God’s love is Constant, even in our pain

- **So he Shared in his friends’ suffering**

“When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who had come with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in his spirit and greatly troubled... Jesus wept.” John 11:33,35

Twice in this passage it says Jesus was “deeply moved.” The literal translation would be Jesus “**snorted in anger.** He entered the situation with Mary and Martha. He felt their pain. He was moved by it. And it ANGERED Him. He was not just sad about sickness and death, He was angry. He snorted in anger. Death makes Jesus angry. Death is His great enemy.

Of course, Jesus knew He was about to demonstrate His supremacy over death. But still, the dominion of death in this world stirred him in His spirit and troubled Him deeply.

Never wonder if God loves you; if He cares for you. God's love is constant, never-ending, unchanging and INFINITE. I've said this many times, but it is one of the sentences that best helped me understand the love and grace of God: ***"Nothing you do can make God love you more. Nothing you do can make God love you less."***

God's love is constant. The fact that Jesus wept with Mary and Martha, even though He knew Lazarus was about to be with them again, is one more demonstration of the love of God. He loved them enough to come to them. He loved them enough to grieve with them. He loved them enough to reunite them with their brother. And that same love applies to you and me today.

"Nothing you do can make God love you more. Nothing you do can make God love you less." Nothing. You cannot add to or subtract from God's love. It is infinite. It is perfect. It is constant and unchanging. "Nothing can separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord." Nothing. God's love is constant.

Because Jesus believed this, ***He shared that love with everyone.*** He entered their pain and their joy. He came all the way into our world so He could be with us. Jesus fully entered our reality. He knows exactly what you are going through. He endured every temptation, every trial and every pain. All for love. Why did God send His only Son? Because "God so loved the world."

If we believe that God's love is constant we, like Jesus, will enter the suffering of our friends. We will sit with them in their grief. We will mourn with them in their loss. We will hold their hands while they struggle. We will be patient and not rush them through pain. But we won't let them get stuck in their grief either. We will walk with them – as God does – through the valley of the shadow of death, helping them remember and experience the love of God through us.

4. Jesus believed God's Power is Supreme, even over death

- **So he prayed the impossible**

"Jesus said to her, 'Your brother will rise again.' She said to him, 'I know that he will rise again... on the last day.'" John 11:23-24

This was the central tension of this story. Jesus delayed his arrival to be sure Lazarus was dead. Now he had been in the tomb four days. That left no doubt that he was not mostly dead but was all dead. What Jesus was praying for here was not a healing or resuscitation – it was a resurrection. He was praying for the impossible. **Death was the unassailable enemy.**

No one – not even the Greek and Roman gods – could defy Death. ***Death reigned supreme.*** Until Jesus. Jesus said, "Your brother will rise again." Martha acknowledged that she believed in the resurrection in general. But Jesus pressed her beyond that general affirmation with a personal question:

4. Jesus believed God's Power is **Supreme**, not death

- So he prayed the **impossible**

"Jesus said to her, 'I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me... shall never die. Do you believe this?'" John 11:25-26

Mary and Martha were face to face with death. Lazarus was sealed up in a tomb, four days dead. Jesus stood outside that tomb and called them to believe the impossible – that Jesus could and would conquer death itself. "I AM the resurrection and the life."

Do YOU believe this? This is the central question for all of us. If we believe that God's power is supreme, even over death, we will also pray the impossible. But our prayers reveal what we actually believe. We actually believe that God's power is limited and that death is final. But God's power is not limited and death is not the end. Whoever believes in Jesus will never die. Do you believe this?

The test for Mary and Martha was rolling away the stone. It was one thing to talk about rising from the dead. It was another thing to pray for it in faith. Jesus said, "Take away the stone." "Martha... said to him, 'Lord, by this time there will be an odor, for he has been dead four days.'

4. Jesus believed God's Power is **Supreme**, not death

- So he prayed the **impossible**

"Jesus said to her, 'Did I not tell you that if you believed you would see the glory of God?'" John 11:40

And so they took away the stone. And Jesus prayed, crying out to the Father – "I thank you that you have heard me." What a prayer of faith! We would pray far more boldly if we really believed this – that God always hears us!

4. Jesus believed God's Power is **Supreme**, not death

- So he prayed the **impossible**

"When he had said these things, he cried out with a loud voice, 'Lazarus, come out.'" The man who had died came out." John 11:42-43

Think about that moment, if you had been there – if you were Mary or Martha. Your brother was dead four days; sealed up in a tomb. You believed in Jesus – you had seen His power on many occasions. But resurrection? Could Jesus really do that? Could you believe Jesus for THAT?

With a simple word of command, Jesus called for Lazarus. **In the same way that you or I would wake up a friend from sleep, so Jesus woke Lazarus from death.** Now think about YOUR death. Do you believe that Jesus IS the resurrection and the life for YOU? Think about your loved ones? Can they trust Jesus with THEIR death?

Jesus believed God's power is supreme. **Do we have this same confidence?** Does this conviction come out in our prayers? Our God is the God who brings the dead to life! Can He resurrect your relationships? Can He free you from your addictions? Can He fill you with power and purpose to do His will?

These were Jesus' core beliefs:

1. God's glory is ultimate, not physical health.
2. God's plan is best, not human plans.
3. God's love is constant, even in our suffering
4. God's power is supreme, even over death.

Do you believe this? If we really believe these things we will:

1. Trust the Father's timing without questioning Him
2. Follow the Spirit's leading right away, without hesitation
3. Share in our friends' suffering and
4. Pray the impossible, believing God can and will do more than we can ask or even imagine.

Let's pray.