

THEY PUT THEIR FAITH IN HIM

John 11:45-57

Key Verse: 11:45

"Therefore many of the Jews who had come to visit Mary, and had seen what Jesus did, put their faith in him."

Generally we call John's gospel a special gospel which is written in a deductive method. First, John gives the theme that Jesus is God, and then gradually interprets philosophically that Jesus is God, while other synoptic gospels assemble bits and pieces of facts about Jesus and synthesize them and come to the conclusion that Jesus is God. In other words, John's gospel is written in a deductive method and the other three synoptic gospels are written in an inductive method based on six causes. John's gospel is known as the gospel of light, life and love. These three words are condensed in one word--the truth. It is important to know the contents of John's gospel as a whole. It begins with the prologue and theme (1:1-18). Second, the author introduces Jesus through John the Baptist (1:19-4:54). Third, is Jesus' ministry as God's Son (5:1-10:42). Fourth, Jesus confronts crisis in Jerusalem (11:1-12:50). We have studied thus far. The remaining part is about Jesus teaching his disciples, and his trial, death, burial, resurrection, and the conclusion (13:1-21:25). In this passage the Jews, who were hungry for political power, appear to kill Jesus when Jesus did life-giving ministry. We will think about why they were so murderous. At the end of this passage, ordinary people appear. Ordinary people are like pieces of clouds and morning fog. They only try hard, basically, to eat three meals a day. Ordinary people cannot be normal people. The strongest desire for any man is to become an ordinary man.

First, Jesus gave his life to put faith in men (45). According to the contents of this gospel it seems better for us to think about one word: "faith" or "believe," which is repeated more than 80 times in this gospel. We must know why Jesus gave his life to put faith in men. We must come to know by studying the word "faith" or "believe." When we study the word "faith" or "believe" up through chapter 11, we come to know the specific purpose of Jesus in giving his life to put faith in men. We also come to know that faith opens our spiritual eyes to see God and eternity, and that men are immortal beings and that the kingdom of God is everlasting--forever.

Look at verse 45. "Therefore many of the Jews who had come to visit Mary, and had seen what Jesus did, put their faith in him." When Jesus wiped two sorrowful women's tears from their faces and raised the dead Lazarus who had died four days before, then there were two groups of people. The first was those who had seen what Jesus did and put their faith in him. The other was those who rejected to believe what Jesus did. In view of history, there are always those who believe at the glorious revelation of Jesus. At the birth of Jesus, Jesus was born in a stable of an animal and laid in a manger. But many people and a crowd of angels praised God by saying, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests" (Lk 2:14). Those who had seen what Jesus did for the sisters and Lazarus and put their faith in him look unimportant to the eyes of the people of the world. Rather,

they look like weird people. But in the sight of God, they are very precious and high-leveled people who saw the preview of Jesus' glorious resurrection and the three-dimensional world.

There are many important things in the world. A Big Mac is necessary for a hungry person. A bus pass is necessary for a student to commute. To gain fame and wealth is important. To live a longer life is also important. I heard that a lady who was 93 years old said on her death bed that she didn't want to die. But all these things are very temporal and not the most important thing for all humankind. According to the first part of John's gospel, faith in the Son or faith in God is most important. Therefore, John manifested his purpose of writing John's gospel in John 20:30-31. It says, "Jesus did many other miraculous signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name."

How important it is for us to trace the footsteps of Jesus to know how Jesus gave his life to plant faith in his disciples as well as in the hearts of many people. Let's review some of the highlights that we have studied. There was a wedding at Cana in Galilee. Jesus performed a miraculous sign at this wedding ceremony. Usually Jewish people had six days of feasting before the wedding ceremony began. There, Jesus and his disciples were invited. But after several days the wine, which was essential to entertain the guests, was gone. Jesus ordered the servants to fill up the six stone jars. When they were filled up, he changed handwashing water into sweet wine. Thus, it was possible for the feasting to continue. John 2:11 says, "This, the first of his miraculous signs, Jesus performed at Cana in Galilee. He thus revealed his glory, and his disciples put their faith in him." It is amazing that his disciples, who were mostly gluttonous, understood the heavenly secret that Jesus came to this world with transforming power. Probably they also wanted to be transformed by Jesus and to look like Jesus. Jesus changing water into wine was not primarily from his concern about the wedding ceremony. This miraculous sign was done to plant faith in the hearts of his disciples. Here we learn that whatever we do, we should not be distracted by a fantastic event, but we must pay attention to planting faith in the hearts of God's flock.

There was a man named Nicodemus. Under the rule of the Roman Empire, Nicodemus became a Sanhedrin member. He was a man of fame and wealth. All the girls who knew Nicodemus might have longed for marrying a man like Nicodemus. Especially, whenever he drove his Sanhedrin chariot, pulled by four black stallions, many ambitious men around him really admired him and made him an object of envy. Nicodemus himself, while driving, felt he was flying in the sky when his Sanhedrin robe was stretched by the wind like an eagle's wings. But reality was reality. He was a hungry man for political power. So he became a top man in the political world. He must have been an incarnation of Otto von Bismarck or Vladimir Ilyich Lenin. As much as he gloried in himself, his responsibility was too heavy to deal with. He could not be an exception to the agonies and sufferings which came from the applied power and the necessary evils of the world. He looked good. But his inner man was as desperate as a squirrel in the cold winter. One night, he visited Jesus to experience some miraculous power to overcome himself. But Jesus told

him, "You must be born again" (3:3). Again Jesus told him, "Flesh gives birth to flesh but the Spirit gives birth to spirit" (3:6). Jesus really wanted him to believe that there is a physical body and a spiritual body. Jesus knew that he wanted to live in this world forever with his fame and power. His agony was groundless. But attachment to this world was growing in his heart. So Jesus wanted to teach him spiritual reality, and talked about how to see the kingdom of God and how to enter the kingdom of God. But Nicodemus did not have basic knowledge of mankind. He did not know that "All men are like grass, and all their glory is like the flowers of the field; the grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of the Lord stands forever" (1Pe 1:24,25). In his frustration, Nicodemus took a haughty attitude toward Jesus by saying, "How...?" From God's point of view, he was inevitably inviting God's wrath and eternal condemnation because he did not believe what Jesus said (3:17-21). But Jesus loved him and gave him John 3:16, which says, "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life." Jesus wanted to plant in him faith in the Son as well as faith in God so that he may not perish but have eternal life. Here we learn that we cannot live in this world forever with fame and wealth. But when we believe in Jesus, we will not perish but have eternal life. Faith opens our spiritual eyes to see spiritual reality. But Nicodemus could not believe in Jesus' words at the moment. Later, it appears that Nicodemus became a secret disciple of Jesus by believing that he is the Son of God (7:50; 19:39).

There is another story about the importance of having eternal life. There was a Samaritan woman who thought physical pleasure is the best for a human being. So she had had five husbands and one roommate. When she lived according to her sinful desire, her sinful desire grew and she became helpless. So she changed husbands again and again, but there was no solution for her. This woman must have looked very despicable and smelly. But Jesus regarded her as a heavenly princess. Jesus drew her attention by asking a favor of her, "Will you give me a drink?" (4:7) She freely talked with Jesus. Then Jesus said in 4:13,14, "Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life." Jesus really wanted to plant in her faith in the Son so that she may have eternal life, instead of perishing in the fleeting pleasures of sin in this world. She was a woman for whom it was impossible to understand spiritual reality. But she went to her townspeople and said in 4:29, "Come, see a man who told me everything I ever did. Could this be the Christ?" The village people were evangelized by her. They said to the woman in 4:42, "We no longer believe just because of what you said; now we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this man really is the Savior of the world." We praise Jesus that Jesus planted faith in the Samaritan woman. As a result, the village people were saved. Praise Jesus that he did not try to solve the segregation issue between Jews and Samaritans; he only wanted to plant faith in them.

There is another story about how faith worked in the heart of a royal Roman official. One day the Roman official's son got a high fever and suddenly he was dying. When he heard that Jesus had arrived in Galilee, he got into his chariot and raced about 20 miles to come to get Jesus. In 4:50, Jesus replied, "You may go. Your son will live." So

he went back home and the father realized that the boy was healed at the exact time Jesus had said, "Your son will live." So he and all his household believed. It is unbelievable that a Roman official believed in Jesus in this way. But the power of faith prevails over anybody in the world. In the first century, Christians were known as criminals in the Roman Empire, but there were many royal people who believed in Jesus.

Jesus' healing of a paralytic who had been sick for 38 years incites us to understand the purpose of Jesus' healing. When Jesus went up to Jerusalem and was walking around the Pool of Bethesda, there were all the crippled men. Among them, the man who had been paralyzed for 38 years looked most pathetic. So Jesus healed him by saying, "Get up! Pick up your mat and walk" (5:8). Later, the man was hassled by the Jewish authorities. He had no idea about Jesus' purpose in healing him. But in the sequence of this story, Jesus told him in 5:25, "I tell you the truth, a time is coming and has now come when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God and those who hear will live." The man who had been an invalid for 38 years was such an insensitive person. Jesus did not give up on him, but wanted to plant faith in him that through Jesus he has eternal life. Here we must review what we are doing. Are we doing our best to plant faith in the Son so that others may have eternal life in him? Or are we just teaching the Bible out of obligation? The world is difficult because all people are bound by their attachment to this world, not knowing that there is spring, and there is summer, autumn and winter. And there is a time when they are born and a time when they die.

Once Jesus healed a man born blind. By healing a man born blind Jesus displayed the glory of God, for nobody had ever opened a blind man's eyes except Jesus. The blind man had a severe life problem because he could not see. Especially he could not have the hope of marrying a beautiful woman. He was a man of shame, begging on the street, saying, "Alms for the blind! Alms for the blind!" But Jesus opened his eyes and he could see. Then the Jews, who were the political power of the time, pressed him to deny Jesus' healing. But faith in the Son worked in his heart. So he could not tell a lie. He said in 9:11, "The man they call Jesus made some mud and put it on my eyes. He told me to go to Siloam and wash. So I went and washed, and then I could see." It is a factual event that he was blind but Jesus healed him. And his testimony was right. But the Jews pressed his parents hard to deny the fact that he was healed. His parents avoided the cross-examination. Then the Jews again pressed the man born blind even harder. The man once blind who now could see could not understand the Jews' political intrigue. He said to them sharply in 9:27, "I have told you already and you did not listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Do you want to become his disciples, too?" He was nothing but a blind man. But when he had faith in God and believed that Jesus opened his eyes so that now he could see, he could have great faith which dispelled any threat of the Jewish CIA. He could not swap his faith with his life. Sometimes we say we have faith, but we are wavering between faith and doubt. That cannot be faith. Jesus wants us to have faith like the man who was once blind.

Second, faith and the spiritual realm. Look at verse 45. "Therefore many of the Jews who had come to visit Mary, and had seen what Jesus

did, put their faith in him." Those who put their faith in Jesus look unimportant and they were like extras in John's gospel. But they are those who decisively put their faith in Jesus. Surely they made a decision of faith to believe in the Son. Without a decision of faith, we cannot have faith.

Hebrews 11:1 defines the concept of faith. It says, "Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see." In this verse we learn that faith produces hope and hope opens our spiritual eyes to see God and his kingdom. Faith helps us become holy children of God, looking forward to the kingdom of God. Faith is an abstract noun but it involves hope and love and glorious and great expectations to be realized. Faith makes man overcome the world and faith makes us children of God.

When we review the whole Bible, focusing on the matter of faith, we are reminded of God's planting faith in Abraham, whose desire was to become an ordinary noble father. Abraham was too old to have faith in God. But God had great faith in him and gave him a promise that he would have a large number of children, enough to make a nation. God also promised him he would be a great man in the world. Probably, Abraham never wanted to be a great man. He wanted to be a hen-pecked husband only. Finally, God told him, "You will be a blessing to your own people and all other peoples on earth" (Ge 12:2,3). It took twenty-five long years for God to plant faith in Abraham. We call Abraham the ancestor of faith. Until he became an ancestor of faith, God cared for this one person for twenty-five years. Here we learn that to raise an ancestor of faith is not an easy matter at all. Finally, Abraham believed in God because of God's love upon him for a long time. When he believed in God he was used as the ancestor of faith. The Bible is summarized, "The God of Abraham, David and Jesus Christ" (Mt 1:1). When he believed in God, he became a blessing to his people as well as to all peoples on earth down through the generations. But his faith was not confined in this world. His faith was related to the everlasting kingdom of God. Hebrews 11:9-10 says, "By faith he made his home in the promised land like a stranger in a foreign country; he lived in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise. For he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God." Especially verse 10, "For he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God," is immensely important to our spiritual realization. It is amazing that such an ordinary man became an ancestor of faith and that he was able to see the kingdom of God.

Faith is also victory. Moses was born of Hebrew parents. He was supposed to be drowned. But by God's providence he was picked up by King Pharaoh's daughter and became her son. It is certain that his mother nursed him and planted in him faith in God. When he grew, there was a possibility he would become the heir to Pharaoh's throne as one of the crown princes. But God worked in his heart to help him refuse to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter. And he valued suffering with God's people. It is because he believed Pharaoh was not God, but the God of Abraham was the true God who gave his people promises. He could overcome his political ambition. He could overcome his fugitive life for forty years among six sisters-in-law (Ex 2:16). Finally God used him as the law-giver to his people. Most people of the world want to

rise to power and want to be kings. When we read the stories, people who wanted to be kings were those who determined to eat or to be eaten. But Moses gave up his political ambition because he had faith in God and because he had hope of delivering his people from slavery to the Egyptian Empire.

Faith shows us the picture of the kingdom of God. Revelation 21:1,2 says, "Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband." St. John was once a politically ambitious man. He was a man of dirty play. But when he had faith in the Son, he could see the picture of the beautiful kingdom of God even in exile on the island of Patmos.

Third, those who have no faith. Look at verse 46. "But some of them went to the Pharisees and told them what Jesus had done." There were those who didn't put their faith in the Son. They reported about Jesus' raising Lazarus and the people's commotion to the chief priests and the Pharisees. Then they called a meeting of the Sanhedrin to discuss about how to deal with Jesus. Their agony was that because of Jesus' popularity, Rome would come and take away both the people and their land.

Then the high priest of the time, Caiaphas, spoke up. In verse 50 he said, "You do not realize that it is better for you that one man die for the people than that the whole nation perish." He also said out of his manipulation that Jesus should be sacrificed for the Jewish nation and not only for that nation but also for the scattered children of God to bring them together and make them one. In order to kill Jesus, he even made use of God's purpose of world mission. He was appointed as a shepherd of his nation and prayer servant for all nations. But he was blinded by political power. What he said was out of his political intrigues. In verses 54-57 we observe ordinary people. They do not have their own idea. They were like herds of giraffes which are wandering for their survival here and there, in great surprise. If they had a purpose of life it was to eat three meals a day and have a good night of sleep and a fortunate wake-up the next morning. We want to be ordinary people. But we should not be like a herd of giraffes.

When we review what we have studied, we learn that Jesus wanted to plant faith in us so that we may have eternal life and the kingdom of God as our inheritance. Let's pray that we may get out of being mundane men and be spiritual and holy children of God. Let us follow Jesus who is the pioneer and the perfecter of our faith! (Heb 12:2)