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BELIEVING IN PEOPLE

How much faith do you have in your fellowman? Do you believe that man does his best to keep his word? Do you believe that 99% of all financial transactions are faithfully carried on?

Jesus, born in a peasant's home and reared in lowly environment, had an amazing confidence in people. The gospel writer says, "He knew what was in man." It was this knowledge that gave a basis for a faith in humanity. The mind of Jesus was the supreme conviction that confidence in people would finally win them. There are many instances in his own ministry that prove this to be true.

First, take the simple trust that Jesus showed in children. "Suffer the little children to come unto me." Jesus loved children for themselves. His attitude toward the little ones has particularly endeared him to us. He knew that the hope for the world's future lies in its children. You cannot build a new society unless you win the children and train them for a new type of life. Probably the greatest curse of totalitarianism is that under this new system children are perverted. Jesus knew the future belonged to the children, and that his kingdom could be built only by training children in his way. A remarkable faith of Jesus in people started with the youngest people.

Second, look at Zaccheus, the little man up a tree. What possible chance is there to win that grasping tax collector? Jesus had confidence that his way of life and his personality would solve the problem of money and its ramifications which Zaccheus so perfectly presented. Jesus had no wealth of his own. He lived in a day when an itinerant preacher would find the necessary food and lodging. He did not hesitate to call Zaccheus out of his tree. He had complete faith that it was possible to transform this man at his weakest point. He offered Zaccheus his presence and "must abide at thy house," he said. His life was transformed. Lives are transformed when wealth is used as a means to an end and not an end in itself.

Third, the woman bearing a waterpot at the well in Samaria. She wished to avoid her sisters and came at a time when others were not on the road. Jesus had complete confidence that he could solve the sexual problem that was besetting her. The woman at the well is typical of a problem with which most of us have to wrestle. Notice how delicately and yet how firmly Jesus approached this problem. It was solved by searching of heart, probing deeply into the innermost recesses of her life. It was solved by a complete willingness to forgive. Jesus recognized that it did no good simply to condemn. Finally, Jesus, with the skill of the wisest of psychiatrists, resolved her difficulties by putting life on a spiritual basis. He substituted a higher good than this woman had ever known. Living water would refresh her soul from day to day. He realized that one of the greatest curses was that of formalized religion.

Fourth, Nicodemus. The world has always had plenty of religion. The trouble has been that it has not had enough religion of the right sort. Jesus, with superb insight, went right to the heart of the matter, and told Nicodemus that he must be born again. Formalized religion will yield, but it will yield only to the new birth. The Wesleys, preaching to a decadent religion, dead with the formalism of the 18th century, said, "Ye must be born again." England heard and was spared the throes of revolution by the great awakening.

Fifth, Simon Peter. His very faults and weaknesses are reflected in the light of the ordinary Christian. Peter stumbled and fell, and so do we. Peter denied his Lord; so might we. The simple humanness of Peter has made him especially beloved. Jesus, too, loved him. From the moment when Andrew brought him to Jesus, the Master knew him for the superb man that he was. A fisher, and an effective one, Jesus saw that he would be an even more effective fisher of men. Despite the roughness of his trade, there was a winsomeness about this man, Peter. There was likewise spiritual qualities which Jesus recognized. When our Lord asked, "Whom say ye that I am?", he delighted in Peter's reply, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the Living God." He was aware of the dogged determination and the stamina that were later to stand the apostle in such good stead. Jesus also knew of his

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weakness, of the haste of his courage, the quickness with which it would vanish under severe trial. Nevertheless, Jesus had confidence in him. "Thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee," Peter said to him one day. Despite his weakness, despite his sin, despite his denial, Jesus never lost faith in Peter. He knew that Peter's heart was sound.

The sixth illustration is one of those interesting experiences where the anti-social background apparently made the individual hard and hopeless, the two thieves who were crucified with him. One of them said, "Lord, remember me when thou comest in thy kingdom." This penitent thief was the product of a bad environment. Jesus alone is capable of solving the anti-social problem. Jesus had faith in him.

Seventh, the picture of Jesus seeking to save an individual, Judas Iscariot. Right up to the last, Jesus believed in the possibility of redeeming Judas. Judas had a personality strangely compounded of good and evil. Jesus believed so thoroughly in the possibility of redemption that right up to the last he had faith that he could finally win Judas. Jesus did not fail; it was Judas who failed. His will was free; he made his choice. Jesus continued to believe that there was a possibility of winning even Judas. Therefore he was willing to number him among the apostles. In the great chronology of the lost sheep, the lost coin, and the lost son, Jesus taught to what lengths God's riches went to save a man. In his choice of Judas, Jesus demonstrated that God would go even further than this. He would place a man among the very elect if there was the faintest hope of winning him. Jesus knew what was in men; therefore he believed in men.

Another illustration might be Mary Magdalene, another the rich young ruler, another Saul of Tarsus, the multitudes of the earth that Jesus thought when he said, "I will draw all men unto myself," and the illustration of the great commission when he is taking in the peoples of the whole world in his plan and program, and showing his faith in the disciples to have laid on their shoulders the responsibility of winning the world.

Fourth, the world has always had plenty of religion. The trouble has been that it has not had enough religion of the right sort. Jesus, with a prophetic vision, pointed to the heart of the matter, and said, "The kingdom of God is within you." The kingdom of God is not a place, but a state of mind. It is not a religion, but a life. It is not a set of rules, but a way of living. It is not a system, but a reality. It is not a theory, but a fact. It is not a dream, but a goal. It is not a hope, but a certainty. It is not a wish, but a command. It is not a suggestion, but a promise. It is not a possibility, but a certainty. It is not a dream, but a goal. It is not a hope, but a certainty. It is not a wish, but a command. It is not a suggestion, but a promise. It is not a possibility, but a certainty.

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