

What Jesus Believed - Part 1
What Jesus Believed About God
January 15, 2012
Bo Weaver at The Bridge Community Church
Wilder, KY

This morning we are beginning what is going to be a year-long theme for 2012.

That theme is:

A Year of Living for Jesus

Over the course of this year we are going to explore what it means to be a follower of Jesus Christ.

We are going to consider the expected beliefs and practices of someone who calls himself or herself a Christian.

If you received this week's E-newsletter you will recall some statistics I cited that reveal that while a lot of people claim to be Christians, a very small percentage are truly following Christ.

According to a survey conducted by the **Barna Research Group**:

84% of American adults identify themselves as Christian

56% of American adults say their religious faith is very important to their life

But out of all these who name the name of Jesus, only...

3% of self-identified Christians in America have come to the places where they **have surrendered control of their life to God, submitted to His will for their life, and devoted themselves to loving and serving God and people**

Isn't the surrendering of one's life to the control of God, submitting to His will, loving and serving God and people what being a Christian is all about?

I believe it is.

What these statistics say to me is that as important as it is to evangelize lost people, there remains a great deal of work to be done in the making of disciples among believers.

This is going to be our theme and our purpose for 2012.

In the coming year we are going to seek to discover what it means to be a follower of Jesus – and then endeavor to follow Him fully.

In order to discover what it means to truly follow Jesus, we are going to examine the person of Jesus.

Jesus is the **prototype** of what a true Christian is to be.

The Bible teaches that not only did God send Jesus into the world to provide salvation for mankind, but to also serve as **an example** of what a child of God is to be and do.

Or as Paul put it in **1 Corinthians 11:1**:

"...imitate me, just as I imitate Christ."

This should be every Christians goal, to imitate Jesus, to live as He lived.

The first thing we are going to do is consider **what Jesus believed**.

Starting today and continuing over the next few weeks we'll be considering:

- **What Jesus believed about God**
- **What Jesus believed about Himself**
- **What Jesus believed about mankind**
- **What Jesus believed about the Bible**
- **What Jesus believed about Satan, angels and demons**

In this day of **moral relativism** and **pluralism**, an age that dismisses the idea of absolute truth, many people downplay the importance of beliefs.

They say things like:

"It doesn't matter what you believe, as long as you are sincere in your beliefs."

Many deny the existence of such a thing as absolute truth.

They say things like:

"Truth is whatever is true for you – my truth can be something completely different."

The only absolute that is acceptable today is that there are no absolutes, overlooking the fact that this is itself an absolute statement.

The conventional wisdom of our day says that when it comes to absolute truth, when it comes to values, when it comes to meaning and goodness, you've got to determine that for yourself.

William Willimon, a United Methodist Bishop and theologian was talking about this.

He noted that the **President of Yale**, when welcoming incoming freshmen said:

"We cannot supply you with a philosophy of education any more than we can supply you with a philosophy of life.

This has got to come from you, from your own active learning, your own choices, your own decisions.

Think for yourself.

Now when it comes to history, if you say Columbus discovered America in 1805, we'll impose our beliefs on you, because we believe there's knowledge about that.

When it comes to physics, if you say $E=MC^3$, we will impose our beliefs on you, because we believe there is knowledge there.

But when it comes to values, wisdom, goodness, what is right ... good luck. Think for yourself."

In other words, William Willimon says, "The university has absolutely no clue about the really important issues of life.

We have a smorgasbord of courses; we have a great buffet line of faculty.

Whether that adds up to something called 'wisdom' by the time you graduate, we have no idea."

Think for yourself.

I'm afraid this kind of thinking has found its way into the church.

Even a lot of Christians or so-called Christians reject the notion of absolute truth, saying it doesn't matter what you believe, so long as you are sincere in your beliefs.

In a national study of Youth and Religion **77% of young adults said they believe in God.**

58% identified themselves as Protestant.

16% identified themselves as evangelical.

An evangelical is someone who professes to believe the Bible is God's Word and that salvation comes through Jesus Christ.

Of the **16%** who identified themselves as evangelicals only **74%** said they believe Christianity is the only true religion.

This means that 26% of those would say they are born again, Bible believing, Jesus loving Christians don't believe you have to believe in Jesus to go to heaven.

Never mind that Jesus said, “I am the way, the truth and the life. No man comes to the Father except through Me.” – John 14:6

I’m sure there are some of you here right now who have trouble believing that Jesus is the only way to God, or that Christianity is the only true religion.

You subscribe to the idea that as long as you believe in God and try to be good that that is enough to get you to heaven.

You have a difficult time believing that a loving God could consign a person to hell just because they don’t believe a certain way.

I’m here to tell you that beliefs matter.

Jesus believed certain things and He taught His followers to believe certain things.

Before we get into talking about what Jesus believed about God, I want to talk to you just a bit about **the importance of beliefs**.

- From **ideas**, **beliefs** are formed.
- From **beliefs** come our **convictions**.
- From our **convictions** spring forth our **actions**.
- It is our **actions** that determine our **identity** and our **destiny**.

Ideas -> beliefs -> convictions -> actions -> identity and destiny

We ultimately act out of our beliefs and our actions define who we are.

Let me illustrate the importance of beliefs from a book I’m reading.

It’s titled: **Bonhoeffer**

It’s the biography of **Dietrich Bonhoeffer**, a German pastor who opposed the Nazi’s during WW II.

When Bonhoeffer came to the United States in 1930 he was appalled to find **racial segregation** and **discrimination** in this country.

He found it difficult to believe that an entire race of people, African-Americans, had to eat in separate restaurants, had to stay in separate hotels, had to ride in separate compartments on trains, had to worship in separate churches!

You say, **“Well, wasn’t there worse discrimination going on in Germany at that time?”**

“Isn’t Germany the place that not only discriminated against Jews but actually attempted to exterminate them?”

Well, not yet.

When Bonhoeffer came to the U.S. in 1930 Adolph Hitler had not yet come to power.

If you were Jewish, Germany in 1930 was not a bad place to live.

It was much better to be a Jew in Germany at that time than to be a Jew in Russia or a Jew in Poland.

There were Jewish people in positions of government in Germany in 1930.

A full one-third of the faculty at Berlin University was Jewish.

So what happened?

What happened is that people began to believe wrong things.

The seeds of these wrong beliefs were sown nearly a century earlier.

In 1859 Charles Darwin published his ideas on evolution in the book: On the Origin of Species.

This book put forth the idea that all the various species of plants and animals on the planet, including man, rather than originating with God, evolved from a few simple life forms and that only those life forms that adapted and changed made it up the evolutionary ladder.

This idea is expressed in the phrase: *“survival of the fittest.”*

A generation later a philosopher by the name of **Friedrich Nietzsche** applied Darwin's ideas of evolution to society.

He put forth the idea that in order for the human race to improve – it was incumbent on the strong to subjugate the weak.

In a piece written by **Benjamin Wiker** I found this quote of Nietzsche:

“The essential characteristic of a good and healthy aristocracy is that it accepts with a good conscience the sacrifice of untold human beings who, for its sake, must be reduced and lowered to incomplete human beings, to slaves, to instruments.”

The “fundamental faith” of the aristocracy, then, is that “society” exists for them, for their sake, so that all the lesser types who serve them in society exist “only as the foundation and scaffolding on which a choice type of being is able to raise itself to its higher task and to a higher state of being...”

A higher state of being, the *übermensch* (super men), who cares nothing for those upon whom he steps to go up the evolutionary slope -- that is Nietzsche's goal.

Nietzsche thought the human race was slipping back down the evolutionary slope to the “last man,” something a bit above the bovine, and the only thing that could drive upwards, was a great conflict.

Writing before World War I, as a kind of preacher and prophet, he believed the "European problem" could be solved by "the cultivation of a new caste that will rule Europe."

To revive Europe, a great danger must present itself, thought Nietzsche, one that calls forth once again the desire to fight and conquer:

*"I mean such an increase in the menace of Russia [for example] that Europe would have to resolve to become menacing, too, namely, **to acquire one will by means of a new caste that would rule Europe, a long, terrible will of its own that would be able to cast its goals millennia hence** -- so that the long-drawn-out comedy of its many splinter states as well as its dynastic and democratic splinter wills would come to an end. The time for petty politics is over: the very next century will bring the fight for the dominion of the earth -- the compulsion to large-scale politics."*

Wiker concludes his article with the words:

One cannot help but hear the marching boots of the Third Reich...

While Nietzsche may not have approved of the particularities of how Hitler answered the call, he rightly receives the blame for having issued the call that Hitler, in his own way, answered.

No doubt influenced by Nietzsche's belief in the need for a super race to rule over the lesser peoples of the earth, Hitler rose to power preaching his doctrine of Aryan supremacy, a race of übermensch, and of the need to purge Germany of the blood-poisoning presence of the Jews.

He set as his goal the conquering of all of Europe and then the world.

In just a few short years after Bonhoeffer returned from the U.S., Hitler came to power and through his racist and hate-filled beliefs transformed Germany from being a nation where for hundreds of years Jewish people had found a home, to a place where just before the outbreak of WW II soldiers marched through the streets to the cadence:

"Kill the Jews. Shoot the Jews."

In just a few more years they would begin to make good on these words.

The power of ideas.

The importance of beliefs.

Does it matter what people believe?

You bet it does.

It's been said that what one generation believes, the next generation assumes it and the third generation denies it.

D. A. Carson writes:

"We are living after this Post-Christian 'denial' generation. The biggest reason this generation denies Christianity is that they observed the generation before them, and saw them only assuming, but not embracing, living and rejoicing."
- D. A. Carson

We don't want to be a brand of Christians that just professes to follow Jesus – but that in reality lives no differently from the world.

We want to be a people who truly believe – a people who have convictions about following Christ – a people who follow Him fully.

Today we begin by asking:

What did Jesus believe about God?

There is no way we can cover everything Jesus believed about God, so I would like to begin with the most basic, the most fundamental thing Jesus believed and taught about God.

For this we look to **Mark chapter 12**.

²⁸ Then one of the scribes came, and having heard them reasoning together, perceiving that He had answered them well, asked Him, "Which is the first commandment of all?"

By **"first"** the questioner means, **"most important."**

²⁹ Jesus answered him, "The first of all the commandments is: 'Hear, O Israel, the LORD our God, the LORD is one. ³⁰ And you shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.' This is the first commandment.

³¹ And the second, like it, is this: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these." – **Mark 12:28-30**

Jesus is quoting what Jewish people considered the holiest of all the holy words of Scripture.

This comes from **Deuteronomy 6**.

It is called **the Shema**.

"Shema" is **the first word of Deuteronomy chapter six and verse four**.

It is the Hebrew word for **"hear."**

This is found in **Deuteronomy 6:4**.

⁴ "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD *is* one! ⁵ You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength.

⁶ "And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart. ⁷ You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up.

⁸ You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. ⁹ You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates. – **Deuteronomy 6:4-9**

This was the central text for all of Israel.

The Israelites believed that wisdom began here, that life with God began here.

Love God.

Love Him with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength.

As soon as a boy was able to speak, his father would teach him the Shema.

In fact, **Deuteronomy 6:4** would have been **the first passage of Scripture Jesus would have learned as a boy.**

It's doubtful that Joseph would have had a copy of the Scripture in his home.

Generally there was but one copy of Scripture for an entire village and this would be kept in the synagogue.

It would have looked something like this.

But whether or not Joseph had a copy of the Scriptures, he would have known the Shema by heart because it would have been taught to him by his father.

When Jesus was first learning to talk, Joseph would have taken the little toddler Jesus up onto his lap and begin reciting these words to Him.

Jewish fathers took seriously the admonition in **verse six**:

⁶ "And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart. ⁷ You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up.

They also took seriously and literally verse 8.

⁸ You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. ⁹ You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates. – **Deuteronomy 6:4-9**

Every devout Jewish person, particularly the men, would recite the Shema twice a day.

Verse 7 says to say these words *"when you lie down and when you get up."*

First thing in the morning, the Jewish man would put on a **prayer shawl**. Then he would place on his body the **teffilin**.

Teffilin were boxes with commandments written in them, just as Shema requires.

They would strap the teffilin to their arms (this is still done in some observant Jewish communities) and bind them to their foreheads as a way of saying:

"God, may my hands do your work, not foolish things, and may my mind think your thoughts, not foolish thoughts."

Then they would recite these words, **"Hear O Israel: the Lord our God. The Lord is one."**

Shema was so important to the people of Israel, that if you were on the road and you were saying Shema, and a friend walked past, you were not to interrupt the Shema by greeting that friend.

Saying Shema was the expression of a child of God's ultimate devotion to God, and about the only thing that was allowed to get in the way of it was death.

In the **Mishnah**, or **recorded oral law**, it says, **"He whose dead relative lies before him is exempt from reciting Shema and from wearing the teffilin."**

The Shema itself consisted of **three different texts** from the Old Testament:

Deuteronomy 6:4-9

Deuteronomy 11:13-21.

This passage recites the **rewards** of **obeying God's commands** and lists the **punishments** that come with **disobedience**.

Love for God is always manifested through obedience to His commands.

Jesus said, **"If you love Me, keep my commandments."**

- John 12:15

This same idea is expressed in **Deuteronomy 11:**

¹³ 'And it shall be that if you earnestly obey My commandments which I command you today, to love the LORD your God and serve Him with all your heart and with all your soul, ¹⁴ then I will give *you* the rain for your land in its season, the early rain and the latter rain, that you may gather in your grain, your new wine, and your oil. ¹⁵ And I will send grass in your fields for your livestock, that you may eat and be filled.' ¹⁶ Take heed to yourselves, lest your heart be deceived, and you turn aside and serve other gods and worship them, ¹⁷ lest the LORD's anger be aroused against you, and He shut up the

heavens so that there be no rain, and the land yield no produce, and you perish quickly from the good land which the LORD is giving you.

¹⁸ "Therefore you shall lay up these words of mine in your heart and in your soul, and bind them as a sign on your hand, and **they shall be as frontlets between your eyes.** ¹⁹ You shall teach them to your children, speaking of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up. ²⁰ And you shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates, ²¹ that your days and the days of your children may be multiplied in the land of which the LORD swore to your fathers to give them, like the days of the heavens above the earth.

²² "For if you carefully keep all these commandments which I command you to do—to love the LORD your God, to walk in all His ways, and to hold fast to Him— ²³ then the LORD will drive out all these nations from before you, and you will dispossess greater and mightier nations than yourselves. ²⁴ Every place on which the sole of your foot treads shall be yours: from the wilderness and Lebanon, from the river, the River Euphrates, even to the Western Sea, shall be your territory. ²⁵ No man shall be able to stand against you; the LORD your God will put the dread of you and the fear of you upon all the land where you tread, just as He has said to you.

²⁶ "Behold, I set before you today a blessing and a curse: ²⁷ the blessing, if you obey the commandments of the LORD your God which I command you today; ²⁸ and the curse, if you do not obey the commandments of the LORD your God, but turn aside from the way which I command you today, to go after other gods which you have not known.

Numbers 15 pertains to the wearing of a **prayer shawl**.

Jewish men were to put on a prayer shawl in the morning and again in the evening and then twice a day they were to recite the Shema.

What does the Shema reveal about what Jesus believed about God?

Jesus believed and taught that:

1. There is but one God

⁴ "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD *is* one!

There are not many gods, as is taught be Hinduism and the New Age.

God is not one with nature, as is taught in **pantheism**.

Pantheism is the view that God and nature are one and the same.

The word pantheism derives from the **Greek (*pan*)** meaning "**all**" and the Greek (***theos***) meaning "**God.**"

Pantheists thus do not believe in a personal or creator god.

As such, Pantheism denotes the idea that "God" is best seen as relating to the Universe.

Although there are divergences within Pantheism, **the central ideas found in almost all versions are the Cosmos as an all-encompassing unity and the sacredness of Nature.**

Jesus believed that God created the universe, not that He is one with the universe.

This text also tells us that God is not "in" all of us as is put forth in **Panentheism**

In **Pantheism**, God is seen as one with the universe, but in **Panentheism** **God lies within every person and is also beyond or outside of the universe.**

This is a view that is very popular in New Age teaching.

This tries to make gods out of all of us.

Jesus did not believe, nor teach this.

Jesus taught believed, as is stated in the Shema, that there is but One God – who created all and stands apart from all.

There are not many gods, the universe is not god, you are not a god, I am not a god, God is God and He is one!

Secondly, Jesus believed that:

2. There is community in the godhead

The word for "**one**" is the Hebrew word ***echad***.

It means ***united one***.

It was used in the sense of **a unity made of several parts**.

The Bible reveals a God who is **Father, Son and Holy Spirit**.

Not three Gods, but One God in three persons.

In **Genesis 1:26** God said:

"Let us make man in our image, according to Our likeness."

We know from what Jesus said about His relationship with the Father that **there is love between the members of the godhead, or the Trinity**.

Jesus said in **John 5:20**:

"For the Father loves the Son, and shows Him all things that He Himself does."

The Son loves the Father.

The Spirit glorifies the Son and draws us to Him.

There is community in the godhead, love in the godhead.

This verse reveals that Jesus believed and taught that:

3. We are invited into covenantal relationship with God

⁴ "Hear, O Israel: The LORD *our* God, the LORD *is* one!

Jesus believes and the Bible clearly teaches that God has given Himself in special covenantal relationship to Abraham, Abraham's descendents, and through Jesus, all those who have the faith of Abraham and believe in the Son.

Jesus believes and teaches that we are granted, through faith in His name, a special, covenant relationship with the God of the universe.

A covenant is the giving of oneself to another.

The closest we have to a covenant today is a marriage.
It is when two parties pledge themselves completely to each other.

By pointing us back to the Shema, Jesus is reminding us what we have in the way of a relationship with God.

We do not have a God who is far off someplace, a God who after creating the universe wandered off to do something else.

We have a relationship with God in which He has pledged Himself to us just as a bride and groom pledge themselves to one another.

This is why the people of God were promised blessings for obedience and the warned of curses if the covenant is not honored.

This is what **Deuteronomy 11** is all about.

God says, ***"If you love Me and keep this covenant I am making with you, I will bless you, I will provide for you, I will take care of and protect you."***

That is what Jesus was getting at in His Sermon on the Mount.

When Jesus came to the earth many Jewish people had forgotten, or were living as if they were not the covenant people of God.

Matthew 6

²⁵ "Therefore I say to you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink; nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing? ²⁶ Look at the birds of the air, for they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly

Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? ²⁷ Which of you by worrying can add one cubit to his stature?

²⁸ "So why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin; ²⁹ and yet I say to you that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. ³⁰ Now if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is, and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, *will He* not much more *clothe* you, O you of little faith?

³¹ "Therefore do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' ³² For after all these things **the Gentiles** seek. **For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things.**

³³ But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you. ³⁴ Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about its own things. Sufficient for the day *is* its own trouble.

"Seeking first the kingdom of God" is another way of **putting God first.**

Love Him with all your heart, soul and strength.

Jesus knew the Father well enough and understood His nature enough that He believed that:

4. God is love and a love relationship with His children is what He is after

⁵ You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength.

²⁶ In that day you will ask in My name, and I do not say to you that I shall pray the Father for you; ²⁷ for the Father Himself loves you, because you have loved Me, and have believed that I came forth from God.

– John 16:26-27

God wants us to love Him completely because He loves us completely.

Christianity is not about going through a bunch of religious rituals to please or placate God.

It's about loving Him!

It's about loving a God who first loved you!

Christianity is not about adding God to your life so you can go to heaven.

Heaven is a great benefit, no doubt!

But it's a great benefit because God is there!

We get to see Him in His unveiled glory!

We get to be in the presence of perfect love!

But we don't have to wait until we die to love Him.

We can love Him now.

We can grow in our knowledge and intimacy with Him now!

That is why Jesus came into this world.

He came to show us the Father and to make possible a relationship with Him.

The vast majority of Christians have barely scratched the surface of what a real relationship with God can be.

Those who have made knowing and loving God their greatest pursuit in life have found that nothing else in this world can compare to knowing Him.

The more we know Him the more we love Him.

The more we love Him the less we care about the things of this world.

When we really get to know Him we begin to only care about the things He cares about - and that is people.

That is why Jesus went off script a little bit when he answered the question, "What is greatest commandment?"

After quoting the Shema found in Deuteronomy chapter 6, Jesus went on to state **the second greatest commandment**.

³¹ And the second, like *it*, is this: '*You shall love your neighbor as yourself.*' There is no other commandment greater than these." – **Mark 12:28-30**

It is very significant that Jesus would go "off script" here and add a part two to the Shema.

There exists a thing in literature called copyright laws.

Only the author of a book or song has the right to change the words of his book or the lyrics of his song.

Jesus shows that He is God by adding to the most sacred of all texts, the Shema.

Jesus says, part two is to "*love your neighbor as yourself.*"

Jesus understood that because God is love, that those who are joined to Him will manifest that love to others.

We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love the brethren. - **John 3:14**

The fifth thing Jesus believes about God.

5. God's love is so great that it enables us to love the way He loves

That is not a credit to us – it's a credit to God.

We can't love as God loves.

But He can love through us – as we learn to let Him.

What did Jesus believe about God?

The God of the universe is crazy about us and wants to be in a relationship with us where we truly come to know His love and love Him back.

When we experience His love – we can't keep from loving others.

Last week Gary Dawson shared about he, his son Grant, along with Dave Ramey went down to the half-way house to deliver the 70 Christmas gifts some of you purchased for the guys there.

After sharing that story last week a guy came up to Gary and said:

"I stopped believing in God when I was sent off to prison in 1998."

But when you guys came down to the half-way house to give Christmas gifts to a bunch of convicted felons, I thought, *"Maybe there really is a God."*

"Why else would these guys care for me?"

That's what it's about, my friend.

It's about receiving God's love, loving Him back and being so filled with His love that you love others the way you love yourself.

You have not looked into the eyes of a person whom Your Heavenly Father does not love passionately.

Let's make this a year in which we really seek to grow close to God – close enough that we come to know His love for us in a whole new way.

Amen.

Share letter from Alex Stroupe

"My Covenant with God"