

# "WOULD WE HAVE BELIEVED THEM?"

## INTRODUCTION

1. I have often wondered
  - a. How many of us living today, had we been living in the first century...
  - b. Would have been receptive to the preaching of those like:
    - 1) John the Baptist?
    - 2) Peter?
    - 3) Paul?
2. Most of us would probably say, "Of course, for we receive them now!"
  - a. But maybe that is because what they taught has become socially acceptable...
  - b. And more often than not, their teaching is presented to us in a non-offensive manner
3. But how was the truth originally presented? By what manner of men? If we had been there, would we have believed them?
4. I hope in this lesson to challenge our thinking along these lines...

[Imagine, then, would we have believed men like...]

## I. THE HARSH HERMIT?

### A. JOHN THE BAPTIST, WHO...

1. Did his preaching in the wilderness, forcing people to come out to hear him? -  
*In those days John the Baptist came preaching in the wilderness of Judea, [2] "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." Matthew 3:1-2*
2. He dressed himself in camel's hair and a leather girdle, eating a diet of locusts and wild honey?
  1. **Matthew 3:4** *Now John wore a garment of camel's hair and a leather belt around his waist, and his food was locusts and wild honey.*
3. Called religious people coming to be baptized a "brood of vipers"?  
**Matthew 3:5-7** Then Jerusalem and all Judea and all the region about the Jordan were going out to him, [6] and they were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. [7] But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming for baptism, he said to them, "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?"

## I SERIOUSLY DOUBT WE WOULD IF WE...

4. Complained at having to travel some distance to study God's Word!
  - a. As is sometimes the case today (e.g., going twice on Sundays, etc.)
  - b. But consider what Jesus taught in Mt 12:42
    - a. **Matthew 12:42** *The queen of the South will rise up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it, for she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon, and behold, something greater than Solomon is here.*
5. Tend to judge people by the clothes they wear!
  - a. It is easy to be affected by the "Dress For Success" philosophy
  - b. But we need to remember God's perspective.
    1. **1 Samuel 16:7** *But the Lord said to Samuel, "Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature, because I have rejected him. For the Lord sees not as man sees: man looks on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart."*
    2. **James 2:1-4** *My brothers, show no partiality as you hold the faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory. [2] For if a man wearing a gold ring and fine clothing comes into your assembly, and a poor man in shabby clothing also comes in, [3] and if you pay attention to the one who wears the fine clothing and say, "You sit here in a good place," while you say to the poor man, "You stand over there," or, "Sit down at my feet," [4] have you not then made distinctions among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts?*
6. Get upset or offended when a preacher points out our faults!
  - a. Some would have preachers never preach "negative" sermons
  - b. But even Jesus demonstrated that sometimes the occasion calls for strong measures -
    - a. **Matthew 23:13-15** *"But woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you shut the kingdom of heaven in people's faces. For you neither enter yourselves nor allow those who would enter to go in. Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you travel across sea and land to make a single proselyte, and when he becomes a proselyte, you make him twice as much a child of hell as yourselves.*

[Or how about the...]

## II. THE HILLBILLY HYPOCRITE?

### A. THE APOSTLE PETER, A MAN...

1. Whose "country ways" demonstrated his lack of formal religious training?
  - a. **Acts 4:13** *Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated, common men, they were astonished. And they recognized that they had been with Jesus.*
  
2. Who denied Jesus three times? - Mt 26:69-75
  - a. **Matthew 26:69-75** *Now Peter was sitting outside in the courtyard. And a servant girl came up to him and said, "You also were with Jesus the Galilean." [70] But he denied it before them all, saying, "I do not know what you mean." [71] And when he went out to the entrance, another servant girl saw him, and she said to the bystanders, "This man was with Jesus of Nazareth." [72] And again he denied it with an oath: "I do not know the man." [73] After a little while the bystanders came up and said to Peter, "Certainly you too are one of them, for your accent betrays you." [74] Then he began to invoke a curse on himself and to swear, "I do not know the man." And immediately the rooster crowed. [75] And Peter remembered the saying of Jesus, "Before the rooster crows, you will deny me three times." And he went out and wept bitterly.*
  
3. Whose hypocrisy on one occasion split a church?

**Galatians 2:11-13** *But when Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned. [12] For before certain men came from James, he was eating with the Gentiles; but when they came he drew back and separated himself, fearing the circumcision party. [13] And the rest of the Jews acted hypocritically along with him, so that even Barnabas was led astray by their hypocrisy.*

### B. IT IS UNLIKELY IF WE...

1. Expect a man to be formerly educated before we would want him as a preacher!
  - a. In some churches, a preacher is required to have a degree to be considered acceptable
  - b. But the wrong kind of learning can be a dangerous thing cf. 1 Co 1:18-29
2. Aren't willing to give others another chance who fail us, especially more than once!
  - a. If Peter had been treated like we sometimes treat fallen preachers today, would he have remained an apostle?
  - b. Fortunately, the early church took to heart what Jesus taught Peter about forgiveness - Mt 18:21-22; Lk 17:3-4

[And then, what about...]

### III. THE NOTORIOUS ZEALOT?

#### A. THE APOSTLE PAUL, WHO...

1. Had been a blasphemer, persecutor of the church? - 1 Ti 1:13
2. Was not a fluent speaker? - 1 Co 2:3-4
3. Had a physical appearance described as "weak"? - 2 Co 10:10

#### B. I DOUBT WE WOULD HAVE KINDLY RECEIVED PAUL IF WE...

1. Hold a person's pre-Christian life against them!
  - a. Such people must not believe in the power of the gospel to transform lives
  - b. But consider what it did for the people of Corinth.

**1 Cor. 6:9-11** *Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, [10] nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. [11] And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.*

#### 2. Don't care to hear preachers whose sermon presentation lacks "polish"!

- a. Many people will not go to hear preachers who may be young, inexperienced, or who are not eloquent
- b. Yet "smooth words and flattering speech" can oftentimes be used to deceive.

**Romans 16:17-18** *I appeal to you, brothers, to watch out for those who cause divisions and create obstacles contrary to the doctrine that you have been taught; avoid them. [18] For such persons do not serve our Lord Christ, but their own appetites, and by smooth talk and flattery they deceive the hearts of the naive.*

#### 3. Tend to judge people by their physical appearance (size, weight, etc.)!

- a. Again, we need to remember God's perspective on things -1 Sa 16:7

### **CONCLUSION**

1. What I am suggesting is that how we receive people today is a strong indication as to whether we would have received such as John, Peter, Paul and even Jesus! - cf. Mt 13:54-58
2. While we would like to think we would have been quick to listen and believe their message, perhaps we might have acted differently!
3. I hope that we appreciate the importance of looking beyond the messenger and how his message might be presented, to the message itself
4. But there is another way to determine if we would have believed them back then:  
HAVE WE OBEYED THEM TODAY?
  - a. It may be speculation on our part to say we would have believed these men back in the first century...
  - b. But one thing is sure...if we are unwilling to obey them today, we certainly would not have done it then!

How about you...?