

635 "WOULD WE HAVE BELIEVED THEM?"
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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? – **Matt. 3:1-2 In those days John the Baptist came preaching in the wilderness of Judea, and saying, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!"**
2. Dressed himself in camel's hair and a leather girdle, eating a diet of locusts and wild honey? – **Matt. 3:4 And John himself was clothed in camel's hair, with 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"? – **Matt. 3:5-7 Then Jerusalem, all Judea, and all the region around the Jordan went out to him and were baptized by him in the Jordan, confessing their sins. But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to his baptism, he said to them, "Brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?"**

B. I SERIOUSLY DOUBT WE WOULD.

1. If we balk 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 Matt. 12:42 The queen of the South will rise up in the judgment with this generation and condemn it, for she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and indeed a greater than Solomon is here.

2. IF we 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 Sam. 16:7** But the Lord said to Samuel, "Do not look at his appearance or at the height of his stature, because I have refused him. For the Lord does not see as man sees; for man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart."

2. **Jas. 2:1-4** My brethren, do not hold the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, with partiality. For if there should come into your assembly a man with gold rings, in fine apparel, and there should also come in a poor man in filthy clothes, and you pay attention to the one wearing the fine clothes and say to him, "You sit here in a good place," and say to the poor man, "You stand there," or, "Sit here at my footstool," have you not shown partiality among yourselves, and become judges with evil thoughts?

3. If we 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 – **Matt. 23:13-15** "But woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you shut up the kingdom of heaven against men; for you neither go in yourselves, nor do you allow those who are entering to go in. "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you devour widows' houses, and for a pretense make long prayers. Therefore you will receive greater condemnation. "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you travel land and sea to win one proselyte, and when he is won, you make him twice as much a son 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? - **Acts 4:13** Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated and untrained men, they marveled. And they realized that they had been with Jesus.

2. Who denied Jesus three times? – **Matt. 26:69-75** Now Peter sat outside in the courtyard. And a servant girl came to him, saying, "You also were with Jesus of Galilee." But he denied it before them all, saying, "I do not know what you are saying." And when he had gone out to the gateway, another girl saw him and said to those who were there, "This fellow also was with Jesus of Nazareth." But again he denied with an oath, "I do not know the Man!" And a little later those who stood by came up and said to Peter, "Surely you also are one of them, for your speech betrays you." Then he began to curse and swear, saying, "I do not know the Man!" Immediately a rooster crowed. And Peter remembered the word of Jesus who had said to him, "Before the rooster crows, you will deny Me three times." So he went out and wept bitterly.

3. Whose hypocrisy on one occasion split a church? – **Gal. 2:11-13** Now when Peter had come to Antioch, I withstood him to his face, because he was to be blamed; for before certain men came from James, he would eat with the Gentiles; but when they came, he withdrew and separated himself, fearing those who were of the circumcision. And the rest of the Jews also played the hypocrite with him, so that even Barnabas was carried away with their hypocrisy.

B. IT IS UNLIKELY...

1. IF we 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 - **1 Cor. 1:18-29** For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. For it is written: "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, And bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent." Where is the wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the disputer of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? For since, in the wisdom of God, the world through wisdom did not know God, it pleased God through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe. For Jews request a sign, and Greeks seek after wisdom; but we preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Greeks foolishness, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men. For you see your calling, brethren, that not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not

many noble, are called. But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty; and the base things of the world and the things which are despised God has chosen, and the things which are not, to bring to nothing the things that are, that no flesh should glory in His presence.

2. IF we 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 –

(1). **Matt. 18:21-22** Then Peter came to Him and said, "Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? Up to seven times?" Jesus said to him, "I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven.

(2). **Lk. 17:3-4** "Take heed to yourselves. If your brother sins against you, rebuke him; and if he repents, forgive him. And if he sins against you seven times in a day, and seven times in a day returns to you, saying, 'I repent,' you shall forgive him.

III. THE NOTORIOUS NERD?

A. THE APOSTLE PAUL, WHO...

1. Had been a blasphemer, persecutor of the church? - **1 Tim. 1:13** **Although I was formerly a blasphemer, a persecutor, and an insolent man; but I obtained mercy because I did it ignorantly in unbelief.**

2. Was not a fluent speaker? - **1 Cor. 2:3-4** **I was with you in weakness, in fear, and in much trembling. And my speech and my preaching were not with persuasive words of human wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power,**

3. Had a physical appearance described as "weak"? - **2 Cor. 10:10** **"For his letters," they say, "are weighty and powerful, but his bodily presence is weak, and his speech contemptible."**

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

1. IF we 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 fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you. But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God.**

2. IF we 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 – **Rom. 16:17-18** **Now I urge you, brethren, note those who cause divisions and offenses, contrary to the doctrine which you learned, and avoid them. For those who are such do not serve our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly, and by smooth words and flattering speech deceive the hearts of the simple.**

3. IF we tend to judge people by their physical appearance (size, weight, etc.)!

a. So people first judged Abraham Lincoln

b. Again, we need to remember God's perspective on things -**1 Sam. 16:7** **But the Lord said to Samuel, "Do not look at his appearance or at the height of his stature, because I have refused him. For the Lord does not see as man sees; for man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart."**

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. **Matt. 13:54-58** **And when He had come to His own country, He taught them in their synagogue, so that they were astonished and said, "Where did this Man get this wisdom and these mighty works? "Is this not the carpenter's son? Is not His mother called Mary? And His brothers James, Joses, Simon, and Judas? And His sisters, are they not all with us? Where then did this Man get all these things?" So they were offended at Him. But Jesus said to them, "A prophet is not without honor except in his own country and in his own house." Now He did not do many mighty works there because of their unbelief.**

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...?