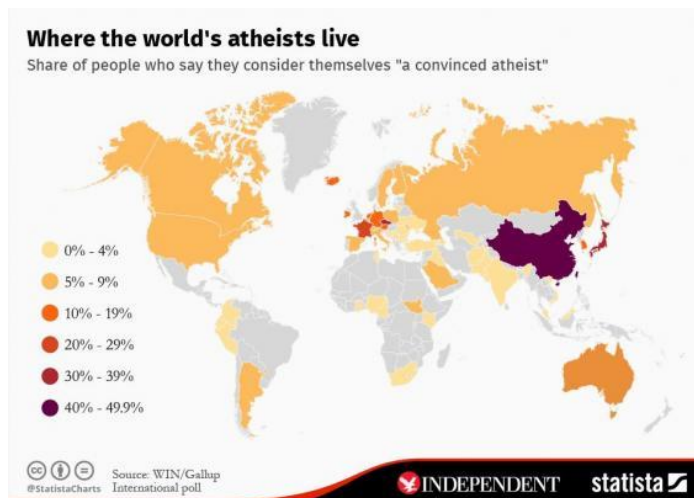


This may seem like a strange title for a sermon on Resurrection Sunday—You Will Not Believe. This is our most important Christian holiday, right? This is the resurrection of our Savior, Jesus Christ. So why would I start such an important day on a down note? The title is pulled directly from our passage. In John 4:38, Jesus said these words—*You will not believe.*



Every believer struggles with this simple thing called belief. Faith. Unbelievers have none. Here is a map of where the world's atheists live. It's no surprise that the highest concentration is in China. Of course this secular study on atheism could never have eyes to see the tens of millions of Chinese believers and the mass revival of the last four decades in China. They only have eyes to see the lack of faith, not its presence.

Somehow I stumbled upon a chat room for atheists. One guy listed 25 reasons why he an atheist.¹ I found two of them to be interesting and relevant to our topic this morning.

1. No miracles

“No miracles nowadays. God never had a problem meddling in peoples lives before. Why has he suddenly got quiet at just the same time our species has figured out hoiw to record and analyse things?”

2.No reliable revelation

“Here’s my argument for atheism: Different religions teach wildly contradictory things. They can’t all be true. Therefore most religions must be wrong about most of what they teach. But if most religions are wrong about most of what they teach, revelation is a flawed epistemology. Whatever the true nature of reality is, using spiritual means to discover is a recipe for error.”

No evidence of miracles and no reliable revelation. These are classic arguments for atheism. Two weeks ago I had the privilege of witnessing to two Jewish men who were visiting from Israel. One declared himself to be an atheist and the other was a practicing unbeliever. He still went through some of the basic Jewish religious practices but he no longer believed them. I started in the Old Testament and worked my way to Jesus. I’m not sure if they had ever heard the whole gospel before. They were stuck on this second issue—if there is any reliable revelation; if you can even know what is true and what isn’t. Later on I’ll tell you how that conversation went.

But these two excuses can also be reasons for Christians to doubt their faith. We don’t see God at work in this world and we don’t trust his word. Unbelievers have no faith and believers struggle to hold onto what they do have. Why is it so hard to believe? Does the miracle of the resurrection help us believe? This morning, on the celebration of the resurrection of our blessed Lord Jesus, we will examine why it is so hard to believe. Let’s read the verse in its larger context.

43 After the two days he departed for Galilee. 44 (For Jesus himself had testified that a prophet has no honor in his own hometown.) 45 So when he came to Galilee, the Galileans welcomed him, having seen all that he had done in Jerusalem at the feast. For they too had gone to the feast.

46 So he came again to Cana in Galilee, where he had made the water wine. And at Capernaum there was an official whose son was ill. 47 When this man heard that Jesus had come from Judea to Galilee, he went to him and asked him to come down and heal his son, for he was at the point of death. 48 So Jesus said to him, “Unless you see signs and wonders you will not believe.” 49 The official said to him, “Sir, come down before my child dies.” 50 Jesus said to him, “Go; your son will live.” The man believed the word that Jesus spoke to him and went on his way. 51 As he was going down, his servants met him and told him that his son was recovering. 52 So he asked them the hour when he began to get better, and they said to him, “Yesterday at the seventh hour the fever left him.” 53 The father knew that was the hour when Jesus had said to him, “Your son will live.” And he himself believed, and all his household. 54 This was now the second sign that Jesus did when he had come from Judea to Galilee.

In a little while I will show you how this phrase—*You will not believe*—is directly linked to the resurrection. But first, let’s understand what was happening to Jesus. *After the two days he departed for Galilee.* Since we spent five messages on the topic, I assume you recall where Jesus was when he left for Galilee. He had just spent two days at the Great Samaritan Revival in Sychar. What started as a simple conversation with a troubled woman at a well turned into a genuine revival. We have no idea how many Samaritans placed their faith in Christ but it must have been a good number in this town nestled at the foot of Mt. Gerazim. *They said to the woman, “It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is indeed the Savior of the world.*

Remember, Shechem was the epicenter of what? Of the Promised Land. As soon as Abram landed in Shechem the Lord told him “To your offspring I will give this land.” Now when you hear the phrase Promised Land, do you think about Jews or Gentiles? We usually think that the Promised Land was for the Jews only. And in many ways, it was. God did not promise the Land to many nations but only to one nation—the Jews. However—and this is really important—the larger blessing of the Promised Land was for all nations. While Abram was still in his pagan land and before he set foot in Shechem, God gave him this promise.

I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed (Genesis 12:3).

God blessed Abram so that through him, all nations would be blessed. And this is exactly what happened with the Samaritans. Through the Jewish nation and especially through the Jew named Jesus, these Samaritan cast-offs, these prime enemies of the Jews placed their faith in Jesus Christ. By their own words they fulfilled this two-thousand-year old promise--*and we know that this is indeed the Savior of the world.* Even though the Jews and the Samaritans had different Bibles and different places of worship, the people in Sychar recognized that Jesus was also their Messiah. He was “the Savior of the world.” Jesus’s words, “you will not believe,” did not apply to the Samaritans. Humanly speaking, against all odds, revival broke out in this small town

So verse 43 begins with Jesus returning from the Great Samaritan Revival. But in order to follow this storyline of “you will not believe,” we need to be reminded why Jesus went through Samaria in the first place.

Now when Jesus learned that the Pharisees had heard that Jesus was making and baptizing more disciples than John (although Jesus himself did not baptize, but only his disciples), he left Judea and departed again for Galilee (John 4:1-3).

The Pharisees were getting bothered by Jesus’ ministry. In other words, they did not believe him. So ultimately, Jesus left Jerusalem due to unbelief. He journeyed through Samaria and found great belief but when he returned home he ran into another wall of unbelief, because this is where he said, “You will not believe.”

But admittedly, this passage is a little confusing. Did the Galileans believe Jesus or not? First, let me give you the evidence that they did not believe. First, we have Jesus own words: “Unless you see signs and wonders you will not believe.” Second, we have John’s important parentheses in verse 44. *For Jesus himself had testified that a prophet has no honor in his own hometown.* Most Bibles put this in parentheses but I am inclined to disagree with this decision. John’s comments are not an irrelevant side note. John intended this as an introduction to the story of healing the official’s son. Having no honor in his hometown is the big idea of this story.

If you recall, the first eighteen verses of chapter one was called the Prologue. All of the themes throughout the Gospel of John are contained in those eighteen verses. They are the introduction of the entire gospel. They lay out the big ideas of what was to come. In the same way, when John

wrote, *For Jesus himself had testified that a prophet has no honor in his own hometown*, this was the introduction to the healing story.

But the very next verse adds a layer of confusion to the passage. *So when he came to Galilee, the Galileans welcomed him, having seen all that he had done in Jerusalem at the feast. For they too had gone to the feast.* If John's big idea is that Jesus would have no honor in his hometown, why did he say this when the Galileans welcomed him with open arms? Because this was not a real welcome. The key is what John said after the part about welcoming him. *The Galileans welcomed him, having seen all that he had done in Jerusalem at the feast. For they too had gone to the feast.* The people of Galilee welcomed Jesus *because* they had witnessed Jesus' signs and miracles at the Passover feast in Jerusalem. In other words, they welcomed Jesus because they wanted to see more signs. Just so you know, John uses the words "signs" to mean miracles. Turning water into wine in chapter two was a sign. Healing the sick boy in chapter four was a sign. A sign is the same thing as a miracle.

But what signs did Jesus do at the feast? The only one we tend to remember is the cleansing of the temple, when he turned over the tables of the money changers and drove out those welling animals. But Jesus did a lot more signs than just that. *Now when he was in Jerusalem at the Passover Feast, many believed in his name when they saw the signs that he was doing. But Jesus on his part did not entrust himself to them, because he knew all people and needed no one to bear witness about man, for he himself knew what was in man* (John 2:23-25).

John does not tell us how many signs he did just that there was more than one. He performed signs, plural. Jesus number one miracle seems to be signs of healing so it is likely that they witnessed many such signs. Which would also explain why the official was so desperate for Jesus to come and heal his son. They welcomed Jesus so they could get things from Jesus.

We have to be careful before we fault them for this. If you heard of someone who was healing people and doing miraculous signs, wouldn't you want a piece of that action? If you truly thought it was genuine—not just a Benny Hinn type show—wouldn't your curiosity be piqued? The atheist reported an absence of miracles as evidence for his unbelief. And Jesus said the same thing about the Galileans: *"Unless you see signs and wonders you will not believe."*

So the question for our personal faith is whether or not it is acceptable to use miracles and signs to boost our faith? Or if we do, are we just using them as a sort of spiritual crutch? It is acceptable to believe in Jesus signs and miracles. After all, he did them to prove his deity and his ultimate power over nature, mankind and even death itself. Moreover, in this same gospel, Jesus said it is acceptable to use miracles to boost your faith. *Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me, or else believe on account of the works themselves* (John 14:11).

Miracles were given for our good but they also have limited power to lead to belief. Probably the most dramatic illustration of the limited impact of miracles comes in Luke 16.

But Abraham said, 'Child, remember that you in your lifetime received your good things, and Lazarus in like manner bad things; but now he is comforted here, and you are in anguish. And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been fixed, in order that those who would

pass from here to you may not be able, and none may cross from there to us.’ And he said, ‘Then I beg you, father, to send him to my father’s house—for I have five brothers—so that he may warn them, lest they also come into this place of torment.’ But Abraham said, ‘They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them.’ And he said, ‘No, father Abraham, but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent.’ He said to him, ‘If they do not hear Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be convinced if someone should rise from the dead.’”

Now let’s stop and think about Jesus’ words. *‘If they do not hear Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be convinced if someone should rise from the dead.* The rich man was desperate to save his brothers so he offered the greatest miracle he could think of—send poor Lazarus back from the dead to warn his brothers. You have to wonder if Charles Dickens got his idea for A Christmas Carol from this story. Dickens had Scrooge’s former partner Marley warn him to change his ways. Marley did not rise from the dead but appeared as a frightening ghost. But Jesus said even a resurrection would not be enough to convince them. Had the Lazarus been raised from the dead, the rich man’s brothers would still have not believed.

But there was a man named Lazarus who was raised from the dead, was there not? It’s not the same Lazarus, but Mary and Martha’s brother was rotting in the grave for four days. Even Martha complained when Jesus asked for the stone to be rolled away. “Lord, there’s going to be a horrible smell from my brother’s decomposing body.” “Lazarus, come forth!”

What kind of reaction did this resurrection have on people? Did they believe or not? John recorded the various responses. *Therefore many of the Jews who had come to visit Mary, and had seen what Jesus did, believed in him. But some of them went to the Pharisees and told them what Jesus had done* (John 11:45-46). Some believed and some ratted him out to the Pharisees. This was the final catalyst for the Pharisees’ arrest of Jesus. Lazarus’ resurrection led directly to his own crucifixion.

When Jesus said, *neither will they be convinced if someone should rise from the dead,* do you think he could have also been referring to himself? I am convinced that he was. And that is the clear record of the New Testament. Everywhere they went, the apostles preached about the resurrection.



Many of you know Tim Chaffey. He taught at Cornerstone for a few years and pastored a small church. Tim will be preaching here the first Sunday in May. He’s come a long way since he lived here. He got an entry level job as an editor at Answer’s in Genesis and he now serves as the Content manager for the Ark Project. Every written piece of information that will appear in the full sized ark, which is slated to open on July 7, goes across his desk.

Tim has also been passionate about defending the resurrection. He recently released a six-part DVD series called *Risen, Without a Doubt*. He here is on the *Creation Today* show with his co-author, Eric Hovind. Tim's resurrection series is in the store of the conservative news site, *WorldNetDaily* who also advertised a webinar Tim taught about the new Christian movie, *Risen*. Tim says it's a well done and Biblically faithful movie. We had hoped to see it but it wasn't playing anywhere close by.

My point is that Tim has spent a lot of time talking about and defending the historical fact of the resurrection. Why would he spend so much time defending the resurrection if Jesus said that even if someone rises from the dead they will not be convinced? Because the resurrection is the core of our faith. Even Paul said our faith stands or falls on the truth of the resurrection.

After Jesus appeared to his disciples following his resurrection, John wrote this purpose statement for his gospel.

Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name (John 20:30-31).

So all of the signs that Jesus did—especially the resurrection—were done so that we may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Savior of the world. These signs will convince some people but not all.

Let's go back to the two complaints from the atheist. He said that there are no miracles today and there is no accurate revelation. Jesus answers both of these arguments with a single sentence. *He said to him, 'If they do not hear Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be convinced if someone should rise from the dead.'* Do you see how Jesus answered both arguments? Jesus said that Moses and the prophets—in other words, the Old Testament—were reliable revelation from God. And in the same breath he said that at least some people won't believe in the face of the most amazing miracle possible—being raised from the dead. So you and I have even more than the rich man had in Jesus' day. We have Moses, the Prophets, the New Testament and 2000 years of Christian history.

Let me go back to my conversation with the two Jewish men. We talked for about thirty minutes but as I said, they were really stuck on the point of reliable revelation from God. They were really bothered when people claimed that their belief was the right and only belief. And who could blame them because they lived in the very middle of the greatest religious persecution in the world—throughout history and up to today. Muslims and Jews and Christians all killing one another because they all believed they were right and everyone else was wrong.

So I took a different tactic and applied my definition of absolute truth to my personal beliefs. Absolute truth is something that is true for all people at all times in all places and you are willing to die for this truth but not kill or harm for it. I told them both that this is how I hold my beliefs about Jesus. I am so convinced that they are true that I would be willing to die for them but never kill for them. One of the men, Ben was his name, leaned out of his chair and said, "Now that is something I could believe in." If you think about it, please pray for me as I will continue to have

opportunity to talk with these men. Ben told me that if I ever made it to Israel that he would personally tour me around the Christian holy sites.

What about you? Do you believe that Jesus is the Christ—the Messiah? Do you believe that he died on the cross and rose from the grave? Do you believe that Jesus is the Savior of the world? Do you have life in his name? Do you believe these truths so much that you would be willing to die for them? We have all we need to believe in this way. We have a Savior who has done these things and we have we have completely reliable revelation that teaches us these truths. He is risen!

Rich Maurer
March 27, 2016

¹ <http://boards.straightdope.com/sdmb/showthread.php?t=508588>. I was shocked to see this honest comment from one of the atheists. "I can't believe that some of you don't understand why he wants to believe. As an atheist, I would exchange everything I've ever worked for in my entire life for a genuine belief in god. Who doesn't want eternal bliss to look forward to? I'd be a lot happier if I thought I was going to see my grandpa again when this was all over."