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Do you Believe

"Do you now believe?" — John 16:31

Summary:

Christ's question to his disciples may be heard as an inquiry, a rebuke, and a warning against presumption. He examines our faith, reproves the slowness of unbelief, and reminds us that confident feelings may exceed our actual strength. Sincere emotions are not always settled principles, and trials often reveal weaknesses that calm seasons conceal. Believers should therefore rejoice with trembling, remember their frailty, and depend not upon grace within themselves but upon the grace that is in Christ Jesus.

Outline:

1. **Christ examines our faith**
   - He attends to our condition, deficiencies, and growth, and calls us to examine ourselves.
2. **Delayed belief deserves reproof**
   - Long enjoyment of spiritual advantages should produce firmer trust and understanding.
3. **Confidence may exceed reality**
   - The disciples felt secure, but the events ahead would reveal how weak their faith was.
4. **Feelings are not settled principles**
   - Sincere emotions may quickly change, while trials uncover what is hidden during calm circumstances.
5. **Our strength must be in Christ**
   - Believers should rejoice with trembling and depend upon Christ's grace rather than their own.

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Text

This was in response to the disciples' profession of faith. They had said unto him, "Now speakest thou plainly. Now we are sure that thou knowest all things: by this we believe that thou camest forth from God." It is not easy to determine the emphasis with complete certainty; yet, depending on where it falls, the language will suggest slightly different shades of meaning.

- **We may understand these words as a question:** "Do ye now believe? I have a right to ask, and I do ask." He is attentive to our condition and experience—to our deficiencies and our improvements. Though he needed no one to testify about man, because he knows what is in man, he will hear these things from us so that we may be moved to reflect on and be affected by our own words.
- **We may regard them as a rebuke**: "Do ye now believe? Ye ought to have believed long ago; yet hitherto, it would seem, according to your own avowal, you have not—that is, as you ought to have done, and as you might have done. How strange and blameable that, with all your advantages, you have been, even down to this hour, filled with hesitation and doubts!" He can reprove as well as encourage. Do ye not remember or understand? After his resurrection, he upbraided them for their unbelief and hardness of heart.
- **We may consider them as a check to presumption.** "Do ye now believe? You think so, but have you spoken with too much confidence? You now consider yourselves steadfast believers and suppose you will never err or fail again. I know you better than you know yourselves. Imagination is not reality. Events will show that your faith is far weaker than you now believe." "Behold, the hour is coming—indeed, it has now come—when you will be scattered, each to his own, and leave me alone."

There is a difference between hypocrisy and instability. We may mean what we say in the moment, but emotions are not principles, and impulses are not dispositions. Goodness may be present, yet it is like the morning cloud and early dew, soon passing away. How often we become a wonder—and a grief—to ourselves! How little we know of our own hearts until they are put to the test!

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The little ants disappear on cloudy, rainy days, and an observer might think they were all dead. But when the sun shines, they are all alive and moving again. The mud remains at the bottom of calm water, but the waves stir up the mire and dirt.

Let us not, therefore, make too much of frames and feelings. Let us not imagine that, because we are now walking in the light of God's countenance, we shall never again mourn his absence. Behold, the hour cometh when we may consider all our present joy as only a delusion. Do we now believe? A change in the weather, a depression of animal spirits, may renew all our doubts and fears, and we may be apprehensive again.

Therefore, let us rejoice with trembling. Let us remember our weakness and, rather than relying on the grace within us, be strong in the grace found in Christ Jesus.

"Beware of Peter's word;
Nor confidently say,
I never will deny you, Lord;
But, Grant I never may.

Man's wisdom is to seek
His strength in God alone;
And e'en an angel would be weak
That trusted in his own."

This sermon is taken from William Jay's devotional, Morning and Evening Exercises (February 1, Morning), first published in 1854.