

Read also Isaiah 52:13-53:6

My father and mother bought a “ranch-ette.” Or you might call it a “farm-ette,” because ranches do not really exist in Louisiana where they lived. My father felt compelled to fill the little barn on this small bit of acreage with a horse and a cow, thus beginning a new venture for this newly married man from New York City.

Not knowing much about cows, horses, or ranching at all, he figured they were like the family dog. You could whistle and they would come. And so he set about teaching them to come when he whistled, and he had quite a bit of success with the cow. He would go out into the field at feeding time, whistle, and she would come running. The horse was a little more resistant or independent, but with food, she could be motivated.

But the cow got so good at this that years later, after he had sold the cow to some neighbors, he could pass by their field, whistle out the window of his car, and even though she was grazing with a large herd, her head would pop up and she would start running toward my dad. She knew the sound of his call; its pull was strong enough to separate her from the crowd.

Many people followed Jesus. He just drew them by his words and his miracles. But the fact that they were there did not mean they believed His words. Seeing is not necessarily believing; not then, and it is not now. Let me give you an example.

There’s a restaurant in Waxahachie that claims to have ghosts. It’s called the Catfish Plantation.¹ Some claim to have seen the ghosts – even now. When I have eaten there, I’ve had waitresses who say they have seen evidence of a ghost; others have seen the same things, like dishes falling for no reason, but do not believe. Whether you have seen a ghost, though, does not determine whether you believe in ghosts. Some dismiss it, even with evidence that others believe. That’s because seeing is not believing. What we believe depends on our philosophy about ghosts, so we need to answer that question first.

The question, then, has to do with *do you believe in the supernatural?* This is not a new question. Let’s read from the gospel of John. READ Jn. 10:22-29

So Jesus said those who don’t believe don’t hear His voice and follow. They struggle to believe God calls them through Jesus.

Sometimes it was His disciples that struggled with this, so don’t think this does not pertain to all of us at times. Once, Philip said,

“Lord, show us the Father and we will be satisfied.” Jesus replied, “Have I been with you all this time, Philip, and yet you still don’t know who I am? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father! So why are you asking me to show him to you? Don’t you believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? . . . Just believe (it) . . . Or at least believe because of the work you have seen me do” (Jn 14:8-11 excerpts).

¹For the story, check out their website at: <http://www.catfishplantation.com/history1.html>, accessed 4/7/11.

It seems that it should always be easy; that we should always have confidence in Jesus. Believing is a matter of being called, responding, and then establishing a relationship with Jesus. Let's go back to my dad's cow. As I told you, he had no experience with cows and she had never been milked. So the cow and my dad taught each other to milk.

Well, how do you begin if you've never milked a cow? He made himself a milking stool. It had a long tong on which the bucket sat under her. He whistled, led her to the feeding trough in the barn, put down his stool and began. Whap, she swatted him with her tail; she moved around. She kicked. His success was slim. The bucket was filled with more dirt than milk. He talked to some friends. One said tie her tail. He tried it but to no avail.

Finally he tied her tail and then tied her head loose enough for her to eat but snug enough to hold her tight. She tried to swish her tail, then kicked both hind legs, and came down, head went high, tongue came out of her mouth, she cried "waaaa." He loosened the rope, got her back up and she must have been really hungry because she started to eat. Not giving up, he put the bent milk bucket back under her, tapped her leg, and carried on. She let him. And, in fact, from that day on he never had another wiggle from that cow while he milked her.

He figures she thought he had hurt her, but he had also saved her so the two of them worked out their relationship and she knew who was in charge.

Do you know who is in charge in your relationship with Jesus?

Being a Christian is a lot easier once that is figured out. In fact, when you let Him lead, the relationship can become really sweet.

Jesus said the same thing to these religious people in Jerusalem. READ Jn. 10:30-39.

He's saying *recognize the relationship*. He said, "The Father and I are one." I am from God; believe in the evidence.

That does not mean they are the same; that they are one person. That means a functional unity exists between them. That means together the Father and the Son care for you and I, whom Jesus calls, "the sheep," or the cows, as it were. "I and the Father are one" – they are one in action, not in person.

The religious people could not believe that – *he's a man*, they said. They took up stones to stone Him, but Jesus challenges their violent action.

He points to His miracles – *for which of my good works are you going to stone me?*

He essentially asked them, "*Do you believe in miracles? Can you see it?*"

That brings us once again to our question, *do you believe in the supernatural?*

Let's ask it in this way. *Do you believe that supernatural power interferes or interjects itself into nature?*

Now, in determining your belief in the supernatural, we said earlier that it has nothing to do with experience because remember, seeing is not believing. It has to do with your philosophy of life, that is, whether you think miracles are possible or not.

Now a naturalist believes nothing exists except nature, or what is seen. Nature takes its course and it is what it is. I am not going to debate the reasonableness of being a naturalist in this sermon. I am just going to say it is the opinion of some.

Supernaturalists² believe in nature, plus One Thing over and above nature that exists on its own and causes all other things to be. It operates entirely separate from nature.

You can be a naturalist and believe in God. Contrary to the supernaturalist, naturalists who believe in God believe that God is an indwelling part of nature, but not a separate being. That belief is common and today's popular term for it is "New Age" belief. God is the "mind" within nature, like you have a mind. But that concept of God is different from the supernaturalist view because it limits God's ability to act outside of nature. For instance, it would be like your mind having the power to heal yourself simply by thinking or "willing" yourself to be well. That is not the same as the Christian belief, which is called "supernaturalist."

Jesus is saying *God is outside nature, interjecting Himself into nature or the world, through me. That is what my miracles are all about. Therefore I am the Messiah.*

Those religious leaders refuted Jesus saying, "You are a mere man."

So how does all that help us? Well, it helps us to realize that when Jesus came, He produced signs or miracles that the normal workings of nature cannot produce. This is great news! God's power and action come to us through Jesus. We "see" the evidence in the Bible. Therefore, He works in our lives in the 21st century in a concrete, miraculous way too. Some believe it; some do not – just like in that day.

Believe the works, Jesus said. The Christian religion is not simply a religion of moral truths and noble intentions like other religions. No, the Christian religion is different. It is about contending with a God who interjects Himself into the world, a God who has purposes and willingly bends nature to work in your life.

Jesus said, "I want you to grasp this." If you do, if you see Jesus as God's agent, it will make a huge difference in your life. But you must experience Him by taking steps of faith and by believing. Christianity is not obtained by intellectual assent.

When you begin to believe this more and more, you begin to work with Jesus as He is; you will let Him be in charge, and begin to experience the supernatural, because Jesus and the Father are one in action. And they are powerful.

²Terms and concepts from C. S. Lewis, *Miracles, A Preliminary Study*, (New York: MacMillan, 1947), 10, 80-81.

Jesus said, “Those who believe, listen to my voice; I know them and they follow me.”

Do you hear Jesus’ voice? He asks you to have faith and to believe in the works that He does.
READ John 10:40-42

Do you believe He continues to work in and through you, hearing and answering prayers with supernatural, miraculous power? You must believe it to experience it, and when you do it will bring you great joy.

AMEN