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# THE LOOKOUT

FEBRUARY 2024

## Unit: Gospel of John (Part 3)

### Theme: Believe

**Overview:** *Belief* has more than one nuance. It can refer to everything from believing it will rain, to believing the Cubs will win another World Series, to believing in God. If God does the providing for salvation, then people do the partaking of salvation. They do this by believing. *Belief* looms large in John's Gospel. The verb *believe* occurs scores of times in this Gospel, and it never appears as a noun because, for John, *belief* is something one does. In this third month of the study of John's Gospel, students will learn of the belief of the disciples, the lack of belief of the Pharisees, and how *signs* (miracles) and *sight* interface with *belief*.

## HOW TO USE

Each week has a **lesson aim**, **lesson text**, and **supplemental text**.

**Tabs** indicate the week of each lesson.

Each week features three sections: **Study**, **Application**, and **Discovery**.

Use the **Discovery** questions to study, discuss, and apply the Scripture passages in a group or class.

**WEEK OF FEBRUARY 11, 2024**

**LESSON AIM:** **Let the miracles of Jesus  
give you even more  
confidence in him.**

**UNIT:** Gospel of John (Part 3)

**THEME:** Believe

**LESSON TEXT:** John 4:43-54; 5:1-14

**SUPPLEMENTAL TEXT:** Matthew 12:38-42; John 5:36; 10:4-42; 20:30-31

## SIGNS AND WONDERS

BY MARK SCOTT

John's Gospel is full of signs (miracles) that point to some unique aspect of the person or work of Christ. Summary: John 2—water into wine; John 4—Nobleman's son; John 5—lame man; John 6—feeding of 5,000 and walking on water in the storm; John 9—blind man; John 11—raising of Lazarus; John 20—resurrection of Jesus. These fit John's purpose in writing his Gospel (20:30-31).

The gospel vocabulary for miracles comes to us via four words: *miracles*, *wonders*, *signs*, and *works*. John is partial to the word *sign*. He only used the word *wonder* once in his Gospel—and it is in 4:48. A sign is not the reality. A sign points to the reality—like a sign on a highway. The Bible has a love/hate relationship with these signs or miracles. On the one hand they can engender faith (John 10:25). On the other hand they can derail faith in the miracle worker (John 6:26).

**The Royal Official: Request for Healing***John 4:43-54*

After a brief ministry in Judea following the Passover (John 2:13--3:35), Jesus headed north and passed through Samaria. His encounter with the woman at the well occupies most of the fourth chapter. But the final narrative of John 4 deals with the request of the *royal official* (nobleman). Jesus' cleansing of the temple had created quite a stir (2:13-22). This caused the *prophet* Jesus to leave *his own country*. Jesus was greeted warmly—even by the Gentiles—upon his arrival in Galilee.

Jesus arrived in Cana—perhaps to check on the newlyweds just back from their honeymoon. Word spread quickly that Jesus was there. The royal official wasted no time. He journeyed uphill from Capernaum by the Sea of Galilee to Cana in the hill country near Nazareth. He was a desperate dad. His son *lay sick* and was *close to death*. At first pass, Jesus' response to the man's request seemed harsh—“*Unless you people see signs and wonders. . . you will never believe.*” Like the Canaanite woman of Matthew 15, the man refused to take no for an answer. He begged.

Jesus must have been impressed with the man's earnestness. He promised the man's son would live. Remarkably, the man took Jesus at his word and left. The man's high expectations for healing were confirmed by the joy of

the *servants* on the road outside of Capernaum. The *fever* left the boy when Jesus spoke the word in Cana. The man and his *household believed* in Jesus. John said this was the second sign that Jesus worked when he came to Galilee, but evidently Jesus had worked other signs when he was still down south (3:2).

**The Lame Man: Right Place/Right Time***John 5:1-14*

This miracle stood in contrast to the previous one. The nobleman brought his request for healing from a distance. The lame man was—just there. Depending on how the Gospels harmonize, some good time might well have passed since the healing in Cana/Capernaum. Jesus had journeyed back to Jerusalem for *one of the Jewish festivals* (possibly Passover).

The setting for this miracle was the pools of *Bethesda*. This is a wonderful archaeological site. It is right next to the Church of St. Anne (a church built in honor of the mother of Mary). There are many Roman columns there and plenty of cistern-like areas that could hold plenty of water with many steps leading to the pools of water.

This seemed to be somewhat of a pagan site with a legend attached to it about an angel who stirred the water, and the first one to get in was healed (though there is a textual variant about that legend in verse 4). However, there is no textual variant in verse 7 when the lame man mentioned the stirring waters. Many *blind, lame, and paralyzed* people were at the pools. The lame man had been there for *thirty-eight* years. By sovereign grace Jesus chose this man to heal (not anyone else). Jesus' question remains profound in our day, “*Do you want to get well?*”

The man's excuse (v. 7) was met by Jesus' command (v. 8). “*At once the man was cured.*” One might know that it was the *Sabbath*. Of course the man was chastised for carrying his mat on the Sabbath. When questioned by the authorities, the man could not come up with Jesus' name as the one who healed him. Jesus had slipped away. But they met later in the temple and Jesus challenged him to sin no more. The Jews were upset, the lame man was healed, and Jesus had stirred more than the waters (John 5:15-18). ■

## PREVIEWS OF COMING ATTRACTIONS

BY DAVID FAUST

Don't you feel curious when you see a sign on a vacant lot that says, "Coming Soon"? It's natural to wonder what restaurant, store, or church building will be constructed on the site. We like to know what is "coming soon."

Economists try to predict stock market and housing trends. Sports analysts guess which teams will win their games, and by how many points. Political prognosticators study the polls to predict who will win November's elections. In movie theaters, before the main feature starts, viewers sit through previews of coming attractions designed to entice customers to return.

### Signs of Things to Come

My friend Mark Scott, who writes the Bible study column for *Christian Standard* each week, introduced me to an intriguing thought. He views Jesus' miracles as previews of coming attractions—signs of things to come. He calls them "steps in the direction of the healing of all creation." In other words, God's past miracles make it easier to believe in future glories yet to be revealed. The Lord's mighty deeds recorded in the Bible reveal in short bursts what happens when God's kingdom shows up "on earth as it is in heaven."

Jesus' miracles were spiritual eye-openers—purposeful signs of his deity, evidence of his messiahship. "Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited by God to you by miracles, wonders and signs" (Acts 2:22).

When he healed the sick, it foreshadowed the perfect health we will enjoy in the new heavens and the new earth. Because he enabled a man whose legs hadn't worked for 38 years to pick up his mat and walk, it's a little easier to believe that "those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength" and someday "they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint" (Isaiah

40:31). Because Jesus healed the deaf, it's easier to imagine what it will be like to hear the angels praise God in heaven with perfect pitch and harmony.

His miracles of resurrection foreshadow the comfort we will receive when God wipes away every tear from our eyes and there will be "no more death or mourning or crying or pain" (Revelation 21:4). When the Lord gave sight to a man who was born blind, the miracle supported his claim, "I am the light of the world," and pointed toward the holy city that "does not need the sun or the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and the Lamb is its lamp" (Revelation 21:23).

### The Now and the Not Yet

Life is hard, for sin has contaminated the earth with pain and sorrow. Death casts a dark shadow over everything. Fear and woe taint the here and now.

But the signs and wonders John and other eyewitnesses saw Jesus perform truly are previews of coming attractions. They provide glimpses of future glories that go beyond what our eyes have seen, our ears have heard, or our minds have imagined. Yes, we live in the brokenness of "now." But we serve a God who can heal the sick, restore sight to the blind, and raise the dead. By faith, we embrace the magnificent "not yet" of all that lies ahead.

And do you realize? In Revelation 22:7 the Lord posted a sign that says, "Coming Soon"!

**Personal Challenge:** What excites you most about heaven? What evidence compels you to believe in it and look forward to it? Read Revelation 21:1-4 and thank God for the new eternal dwelling place he is preparing for his people. ■

## DISCOVERY

### QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

1. Talk about a time when you felt desperate enough to beg Jesus for something. What was the outcome?

Ask two people to read aloud **John 4:43-54; 5:1-14**, one after the other, preferably from different Bible versions. Then ask a third person to briefly summarize the passage.

2. Why do you think the royal official (a person of status and authority) came to Jesus and begged him for help?
3. When Jesus told the man, "Your son will live," the official "took Jesus at his word and departed." How can we emulate that kind of unwavering faith in our own lives?
4. What does the response of the royal official's family to his son's healing teach us about the impact we can have for Christ on those around us?
5. Why is it important for us to put our faith in Jesus apart from signs and wonders?
6. The disabled man at the pool of Bethesda could never get to the water in time. What barriers in our lives might prevent us from experiencing Jesus' transforming power?
7. Jesus healed the man on the Sabbath. What does this teach us about Jesus' priorities in relation to rules and traditions?
8. After his healing, why did Jesus warn the man to stop sinning?
9. How does this encounter illustrate the idea of both physical and spiritual healing?
10. Based on our study and discussion, complete the sentence: "I will . . ."

**For Next Week:** Read and reflect on **John 9:1-7, 13-16, 24-38**. You can also read next week's supplemental texts as well as the Study and Application sections as part of your personal study. 📖