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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 25, 2024

LESSON AIM: **Believe in Jesus and
have life in his name.**

UNIT: Gospel of John (Part 3)

THEME: Believe

LESSON TEXT: John 20:19-31

SUPPLEMENTAL TEXT: Matthew 23:16-26; John 5:33-47; 9:39-41;
Hebrews 11

STUDY

SEEING AND BELIEVING

BY MARK SCOTT

A thorough-going modernist says, "Seeing is believing." But even modernists do not always follow their sight with belief. The Jewish leaders certainly did not follow their sight when it came to Jesus. People in Jesus' day saw the miracles, heard him teach, and watched him interact with people high and low. Still, many of them refused to believe (John 10:37-39; 12:37-42).

But for the Jesus followers of John 20, seeing was believing. Mary Magdalene had come to the tomb with other women. When she noticed the stone had been rolled away, she ran and told Peter and John. They ran to the tomb, investigated, and left. In the meantime, Mary made her way back to the tomb by herself. There she encountered Jesus.

In the narrative of John 20:1-18 there are six occurrences of the word see with the use of three different Greek words. The normal word for see, *blepo*, refers to normal eyesight. The next word is *theoreo*. It means to see and perceive. But the final word for see is *horaō*. It means to see, perceive, and act upon what you see. This final word is the one used consistently in our lesson text—in vv. 20, 25 (twice), and 29 (twice).

Show and Tell

John 20:19-23

Depending on how one counts, there are at least 10 resurrection appearances of Jesus over a period of 40 days (Acts 1:3). Several of those took place on that first day (Sunday).

Ten of the disciples were together (Judas had already committed suicide and Thomas missed the meeting), and all of them were afraid, which was evident by the locked doors. All of a sudden Jesus *came and stood among them*. John felt no need to describe how this happened (did he know?). Jesus gave them a typical Jewish greeting, "Shalom!" Then he proceeded to show them his hands and side. The disciples were *overjoyed* when they "saw" the Lord.

But Jesus was not content to give them an apologetic lesson only. It was time for him to give them their marching orders. John's great commission came next. Jesus again greeted them with "Peace." Then he said, "*As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.*" Sent is a crucial word in John's Gospel. It often had to do with the solidarity between the Father and the Son.

To equip them for this time of "telling," Jesus *breathed on them* and said, "*Receive the Holy Spirit.*" Nothing in the text said that they received the Spirit then. In fact, Jesus would have to be glorified first (John 7:39). This was prophetic symbolism for the beginning of the church (Acts 2:1-4). It was as if Jesus were saying, "The next time you hear a sound like breath or wind, buckle up." He went on to tell them that they would have the privilege of announcing the terms of forgiveness (Matthew 16:19; Acts 2:38).

Hand and Heart

John 20:24-29

Maybe Thomas was spending time with his "twin," but he was MIA. The other 10 disciples told him that they had "seen" the Lord. Maybe Thomas's heart wanted to believe this, but his head would not let him do so. Whether the "doubter" label for Thomas was fair or not is left for the reader to discern (cf. John 11:16; 14:5). Regardless, he wanted more evidence than he had for Jesus' resurrection. He wanted to poke his finger in the nail prints of Jesus' hands and place his hand in Jesus' side.

One week passed. Thomas was present the next time Jesus appeared, but all the disciples were still paralyzed in fear. John used the same words to describe this encounter as he did earlier (doors locked and Jesus just showed up).

No one had to tell Jesus about Thomas's struggle to believe. Jesus addressed him directly, "Put your finger here, and your hand here." John left out whether Thomas even had to do that. But then the doubter gave the classic confession of the book, "*My Lord and my God.*" Essentially Thomas put his heart where his hand would have gone. Jesus then put a beatitude on those people who believe without the need to see as Thomas did.

Belief and Life

John 20:30-31

Even though John 21 contains additional resurrection appearances and restorations, John placed his purpose statement for the Gospel following Thomas's classic confession. The *signs* recorded in the Gospel are enough to engender belief. But that belief is only as good as the source in which it is placed. It is not belief in belief. It is belief that *Jesus is the Messiah* and the only one who can truly give life. ■

THOMAS'S TWIN

BY DAVID FAUST

Do you know any twins?

Twin brothers Ronde and Tiki Barber both played football in the NFL. In high school, identical twins Tom and Dick Van Arsdale shared Indiana's Mr. Basketball title and they went on to play together at Indiana University. They finished their professional careers on the same NBA team, the Phoenix Suns.

In 1959, the Wrigley Company signed twins Jayne and Joan Knoerzer to appear in television ads and sing the Doublemint chewing gum jingle, "Double your pleasure, double your fun." Twin actors Mary-Kate and Ashley Olsen started appearing in the TV show *Full House* when they were only 6 months old. In the 1988 movie *Twins*, the mismatched duo of Arnold Schwarzenegger and Danny DeVito played fraternal twins who were separated at birth.

Twin singers Robin and Maurice Gibb performed together with the Bee Gees. Jenna and Barbara Bush, daughters of President George W. Bush, were the first set of twins to live in the White House. Perhaps the most famous twins in history were Jacob and Esau, whose tumultuous rivalry began before they were born as they jostled each other in their mother's womb.

Which Way Is Up?

Do you realize Jesus had a disciple who evidently was a twin? Thomas was also known by the Greek name Didymus, and both of his names mean "twin." (Did he have a twin brother or sister nicknamed Doubting Titus or Doubting Tabitha?)

Thomas is known for his wavering faith, but he wasn't alone in his skepticism. At first, the other apostles considered the initial reports of Jesus' resurrection nonsense until they saw him with their own eyes (Luke 24:11). It makes sense to seek reasonable evidence to confirm the facts before believing.

On one occasion, Thomas demonstrated exceptional loyalty and courage. After hearing about the death of Lazarus, Jesus headed toward Jerusalem where he was a marked man. Thomas bravely told the others, "Let us also go, that we may die with him" (John 11:16). Doubting Thomas was Daring Thomas that day.

On the night before the cross, Thomas asked Jesus, "Lord, we don't know where you are going, so how can we know the way?" (John 14:5). What a question to ask Jesus—at the Last Supper, no less! It was like a panicky student asking his teacher to explain the entire semester's lessons on the night before the final exam. Jesus had spent three years educating his disciples, but Thomas still didn't know which way was up.

Seeking Truth

In a way, though, Thomas spoke for all of us who seek truth. Jesus responded, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:6). Some of the disciples didn't get it then, and many today still don't get it; but Jesus knows which way is up. He not only points to heaven's pathway; he is the pathway. He doesn't just talk about truth; he embodies it.

In a sense, I am Thomas's twin. You might be, too. At times, most believers wrestle with troublesome doubts. But when we bring our honest questions to the Lord, the evidence for faith is strong enough to make us fall at the feet of the risen Christ and exclaim, "My Lord and my God!" (John 20:28).

Personal Challenge: In your relationship with God, what question or doubt troubles you most? Read a book or an article that deals with the issue, or discuss your question with another believer who can help you find answers that will strengthen your faith in the Lord. ■

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DISCOVERY

QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

1. Have you ever experienced a time when your wildest expectations were met? What occurred and how did you react?

Ask two people to read aloud **John 20:19-31**, one after the other, preferably from different Bible versions. Then ask a third person to briefly summarize the passages.

2. What do you think Jesus' sudden appearance behind locked doors and his message of peace would have meant to his disciples?
3. What is the importance of Jesus' commissioning of the disciples in verse 21?
4. Jesus breathed on his disciples, saying, "Receive the Holy Spirit." How and when did the Holy Spirit work in the disciples after this?
5. What is the significance of Jesus' statement about forgiveness in verse 23?
6. When Jesus appeared to the disciples behind locked doors the second time, why do you think he used the same greeting as he used in his first appearance to them?
7. What lessons can we learn from Thomas's doubt and subsequent belief?
 - Can you recall a time when your faith was restored after doubting the Lord? What happened?
8. When Thomas finally saw the risen Christ in person, he exclaimed, "My Lord and my God!" What would it take for the average person today to come to this same conclusion?
9. What does Jesus' statement to Thomas, "Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed," teach us about the essence of faith?
10. Based on our study and discussion, complete the sentence: "I will . . ."

For Next Week: Read and reflect on **1 Corinthians 1:10-17; 12:12-20** as we begin a two-month study of Paul's first letter to the church at Corinth. You can also read next week's supplemental texts as well as the Study and Application sections as part of your personal study. **L**