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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 4, 2024

LESSON AIM: **Testify about what Jesus has done for you and what you believe about him.**

UNIT: Gospel of John (Part 3)

THEME: Believe

LESSON TEXT: John 1:35, 40-50; 2:1-11

SUPPLEMENTAL TEXT: John 2:13-23; 4:39-42; 6:60-69; 16:25-33

THE DISCIPLES BELIEVE

BY MARK SCOTT

Years ago Stuart Briscoe preached a sermon titled “The Cost of Discipleship” (*Preaching Today*). In it he spoke of how disciples were trained by the rabbis and philosophers of Jesus’ day. Some disciples were made by “protest.” Others were made by “procedure.” Still others were made by “philosophy.” Then he added that Jesus did not make disciples in any of those ways. Instead, he made disciples “personally.” Jesus encountered these early disciples one by one.

After Jesus’ baptism (referred to in John 1:29-34), he stayed near where John the Baptist was preaching and baptizing. At this point he gave a “preliminary” call to Andrew, Peter, Philip, and Nathanael. (The formal call of these and others would yet remain—Matthew 4 and 10, Mark 1 and 3, and Luke 5.)

Invited to Believe*John 1:35, 40-50*

In contrast to the rabbis of Jesus’ day who waited for students to ask to study under them, Jesus took the initiative and called his men to check him out. The phrase “come and see” occurs twice in this section (vv. 39, 46). It is a wooing invitation. Jesus wants his followers to use their brains. He would later expect them to use these same investigative skills at the resurrection (Matthew 28:6).

Jesus’ earliest disciples were first disciples of John the Baptist. But because John knew his place, when these former students of his turned and followed Jesus, John the Baptist was most pleased (John 3:22-30). John the apostle presented this invitation in a series of consecutive days. Note the phrase “the next day” (John 1:29-30, 43) and then, “On the third day” (2:1).

On the second of those “next days,” John the Baptist identified Jesus as the Lamb of God. That was all it took for Andrew and an unnamed disciple. They followed Jesus. But they did more than *come and see*. Andrew found his brother Peter. Andrew typically found people and brought them to Jesus (John 6:8-9; 12:22). When he found his brother (all three of Peter’s names are mentioned in the text—Simon, Cephas, and Peter), this Jesus encounter left Simon with a new name (i.e., Rock).

Jesus was hustling to get to the wedding in Cana. But before he left down south he called Philip to follow him. Philip in turn found Nathanael. Philip was convinced

that Moses’ prophecy had been fulfilled (Deuteronomy 18:15). Nathanael was more skeptical. The Messiah was from where? Nazareth? “*Can anything good come from there?*” Philip’s method of evangelism mirrored Jesus’—“come and see.”

Nathanael approached Jesus, and Jesus made a pronouncement about his character—i.e., *an Israelite in whom there is no deceit* [guile]. This caught Nathanael off guard, and he questioned Jesus about it. It was obvious that Jesus knew far more about Nathanael than Nathanael ever could imagine. One could be seen under a fig tree, but because the branches come to the ground that would not be easy. Miraculous? Jesus promised Nathanael that he was the ladder to heaven (cf. Genesis 28:10-17). Nathanael was all in.

Encouraged by Signs*John 2:1-11*

Jesus would return to Judea for his first ministry Passover (John 2:12-25), but he made a quick trip to Cana for what would seem to be a family wedding. In the ancient Near East, weddings were lavish and long. Running short on wine would bring shame on a family’s name. The cryptic dialogue between Mary, Jesus, and the servants is filled with intrigue and irony. What is between the lines (“*They have no more wine,*” “*My hour has not yet come,*” and “*Do whatever he tells you*”)? What expectations did Mary have? What did Mary assume by what she told the servants?

Reluctantly (?), Jesus told the servants to fill the jars normally used for *ceremonial washings*. The miraculous turning of water to wine must have taken place in the jars. When the servants took the water (now wine) to the *master of the banquet* he was undone—certainly by the quality of the beverage but maybe also by the abundance (six large stone jars). The host gave commentary about what was normal in weddings concerning wine. Jesus made lots of wine and the quality was unmatched.

It was a miracle and John mentioned that it was the first *sign* by which Jesus revealed *his glory*. The prophets predicted that when the Messiah would come in the new age, wine would run down the hills in abundance (Joel 3:18; Amos 9:13-15). So, in the end, this miracle story was not about alcohol at all. It was about Jesus. The disciples’ faith was encouraged by the miracle but even more so by the miracle worker. ■

APPLICATION

THE FIRST THING

BY DAVID FAUST

Yolanda was new to our community and looking for work, and Gina needed assistance while she recovered from knee replacement surgery. As the two women worked side by side in Gina's home, their friendship blossomed despite a significant language barrier. (Yolanda speaks Spanish, and Gina thanks God for "Google Translate"!) Gina prayed for Yolanda's family and invited them to attend our church's Latino services. Soon Yolanda asked if Gina and her husband, Andrew, would study the Bible with her family. During a recent worship service, Yolanda confessed her faith in Christ (in Spanish) and Gina baptized her.

Their story reminds me of Andrew, one of Jesus' earliest followers. According to John 1:41, "The first thing Andrew did was to find his brother Simon and tell him, 'We have found the Messiah' (that is, the Christ)."

After Andrew met Jesus, the first thing he did was tell someone else about the Lord. Unfortunately, for many Christians that's the last thing we do. How can we put disciple making at the top of our priority list? Here are three points to consider.

1. Sharing our faith should be natural and relational.

Evangelist Dwight L. Moody observed, "Lighthouses don't fire cannons to call attention to their shining—they just shine."

No one twisted Andrew's arm and compelled him to join an evangelistic campaign. He didn't read a book or attend a training seminar before he shared his faith. He simply found his brother and told what he knew. Of course, we need to study and prepare ourselves "to give an answer to everyone who asks" about the reasons for our hope (1 Peter 3:15); but let's not make the process more complicated than it needs to be. Evangelism, someone said, is basically just one poor beggar telling another poor beggar where to find bread.

Andrew started with his family and introduced his brother to the Lord. If we pray and build authentic, high-trust relationships with others, natural discipleship opportunities will arise.

2. Christ himself is our primary message.

Andrew didn't waste time on minor issues. He told his brother, "We have found the Messiah" and brought him to Jesus. Many of our neighbors have their guard up. They are cautious because too often the gospel has gotten tangled up with confusing religious traditions and political disputes. Effective disciple makers clear away the fog and help our friends encounter the incomparable person of Jesus Christ. "For what we preach is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord" (2 Corinthians 4:5).

3. We should encourage new believers to share their testimony.

As soon as a candle is lit, it starts to shine. Immediately after Andrew met Jesus, he introduced his brother to the Lord. New believers don't have all the answers, but they know enough to introduce their friends and relatives to Jesus. The Lord told a man whose life he had transformed, "Go home to your own people and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and how he has had mercy on you" (Mark 5:19).

I knew a preacher in New York City who told new believers before they left the baptistery, "Now it's your joy and your job to tell your friends about Jesus." After all, making disciples should be the first thing Christians do—not the last thing.

Personal Challenge: Think of unbelievers or seekers you know who need Christ. Pray for opportunities to serve them in love and to engage them in conversation about the Lord. ■

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DISCOVERY

QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

1. When did Jesus first become real to you"

Ask two people to read aloud **John 1:35, 40-50; 2:1-11**, one after the other, preferably from different Bible versions. Then ask a third person to briefly summarize the passage.

2. How do you think John might have felt when two of his disciples chose to leave him and follow Jesus? Create a short list of possible positive and negative feelings.
3. Why do you think Jesus asked the two disciples, "What do you want?" when he already knew their intent?
4. How does the story of Andrew bringing Simon to Jesus exemplify the importance of sharing our faith with others?
5. Thinking about Simon's and Nathanael's encounters with Jesus in this passage, how can our lives be transformed through an encounter with Jesus?
6. Jesus told Nathanael, "You believe I told you I saw you under the fig tree. You will see greater things than that." What "greater things" was Jesus speaking about?
7. During the wedding at Cana, what does Jesus' response to his mother about the wine running out tell us about the timing of his miracle?
8. How does this event and the accompanying miracle demonstrate Jesus' compassion and willingness to help?
9. How is this miracle at the wedding a revelation of Jesus' divine authority and power?
10. Based on our study and discussion, complete the sentence: "I will . . ."

For Next Week: Read and reflect on **John 4:43-54; 5:1-14**. You can also read next week's supplemental texts as well as the Study and Application sections as part of your personal study. ■