



1717 BIBLE STUDIES

"Your Word Is Truth" (John 17:17)

OVERVIEW

Study: 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*.

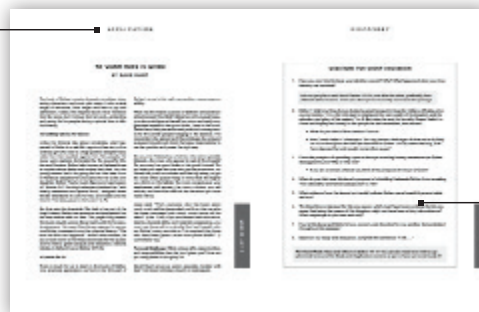
HOW TO USE

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.

INTRODUCTION

Author

Although he is not identified in this Gospel account, aside from describing himself as "the disciple whom Jesus loved" (13:23, 19:26, 20:2, 21:7, 20, 24), the apostle John has long been recognized as the author of the fourth Gospel. Both internal evidence and the witness of early church leaders identify the apostle John as the author.

Audience

John's Gospel was likely to have been written in Ephesus to both Jewish and Gentile Christians of the late first century. John's purpose was to encourage the Christian community and to reinforce belief in Jesus' divinity. John states that his Gospel was "written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name" (20:31, *New International Version*).

Date

John's Gospel has traditionally been dated after the writing of the Synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke). Church tradition has John spending his final years in Ephesus and writing his Gospel account, along with his letters, late in life. The fourth Gospel is often dated between 85 and 95.

Setting

Church tradition says that the apostle John, along with Mary, Jesus' mother, relocated to the city of Ephesus in

Asia Minor after the destruction of the Jewish temple in AD 70. From this location, John wrote his Gospel and his letters to both encourage the early saints and to assure them of the divinity of Jesus.

Theme

Jerome (c.345-420), one of the early leaders of the church, described John's Gospel as a "spiritual Gospel." While the Synoptic Gospels provide an historical overview of Jesus' life, Jerome contended that John's Gospel was more theological and reflective. John's themes in his Gospel include the Divinity of Jesus (1:1-3, 1:14, 5:18, 8:58, 10:30, 14:9, 20:28, 20:31), Light versus Darkness (1:4-5, 3:19-21, 8:12, 12:35-36, 12:46), Love (3:16, 13:1, 13:34-35, 15:9-13), Truth (1:17, 4:23-24, 8:31-32, 8:44-46, 14:6, 15:26, 16:13, 17:17, 18:37-38), and the Necessity of Belief (1:12, 3:16-18, 6:35, 11:25-26, 20:30-31).

Why Study the Gospel of John?

John clearly stated that his Gospel was "written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name" (20:31). John goes beyond merely telling the story of who Jesus is, he calls for a committed relationship with Jesus. John both provides further details about Jesus' life that are overlooked in the Synoptic Gospels and he provides theologically rich insights into the life of Christ and what it means to be a follower of Jesus. John's Gospel clearly demonstrates the divinity of Jesus and provides essential information for understanding the rest of the New Testament.

STUDY CONTENT

WEEK 1: John 1:35, 40-50; 2:1-11

WEEK 2: John 4:43-54; 5:1-14

WEEK 3: John 9:1-7, 13-16, 24-38

WEEK 4: John 20:19-31

WEEK ONE

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

STUDY: 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

STUDY

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 any-

thing 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.

Mark Scott serves as preaching minister with Park Plaza Christian Church in Joplin, Mo. For 35 years, until 2021, he served as professor of preaching and New Testament with Ozark Christian College in Joplin.

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.

David Faust serves as senior associate minister with East 91st Street Christian Church in Indianapolis.

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 and the Study and Application sections as part of your personal study.

WEEK TWO

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

STUDY: 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; John 20:30-31

STUDY

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).

Mark Scott serves as preaching minister with Park Plaza Christian Church in Joplin, Mo. For 35 years, until 2021, he served as professor of preaching and New Testament with Ozark Christian College in Joplin.

APPLICATION

PREVIEW 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 wrote the weekly Bible study column for *Christian Standard* for several years, 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.

David Faust serves as senior associate minister with East 91st Street Christian Church in Indianapolis.

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 these verses.

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 and the Study and Application sections as part of your personal study.

WEEK THREE

LESSON AIM: **Beware of spiritual blindness which comes between people and the truth of God.**

STUDY: Gospel of John (Part 3)

THEME: Believe

LESSON TEXT: John 9:1-7, 13-16, 24-38

SUPPLEMENTAL TEXT: John 5:16, 31-47; John 7:1-4, 37-52; John 9:8-12, 17-23, 39-41; John 12:17-19; 1 Corinthians 1:18-19

THE UNBELIEF OF THE PHARISEES

BY MARK SCOTT

The secular proverb, “There are none so blind as those who will not see,” is certainly true. That proverb would describe many of the Pharisees of Jesus’ day. These were the “separated ones.” They separated themselves from the things of the world so that they would be pure before God. But a host of them allowed their pride to separate them from God and the people they were supposed to lead. Their righteousness had become “extreme” (see Tom Hovestol’s book by Moody Press, *Extreme Righteousness: Seeing Ourselves in the Pharisees*).

In this Festival Section of John’s Gospel (chapters 5-12) the Pharisees are viewed as the primary enemies of Jesus. They wanted to kill him (5:18; 7:1). They questioned his education (7:15). They charged him with having a demon and being a Samaritan (7:20; 8:48, 52). They wanted to arrest him (7:32, 44; 11:57). They charged him with lawbreaking (9:16). They wanted to stone him (8:59; 10:31). They set Jesus up and ended up slitting their own throats. In the chapter that recounted the healing of the blind man from birth, they asked Jesus if they were also blind (9:40). Jesus answered that there was more than one type of blindness.

The Blind See

John 9:1-7

Sometime between the Feast of Tabernacles in the fall (7:10) and the Feast of Dedication in the winter (10:22), Jesus and his disciples came across a *man blind from birth*. The disciples seemed content to discuss theological reasons for the man’s blindness (i.e., sin). Jesus responded that neither the man nor his parents were to blame. Like everyone else, the man was born into a world where sin and death reigned. Due to malnutrition in the ancient Near East, blindness was fairly common. This miracle must have happened near the old city of Jerusalem in light of where the Pool of Siloam was.

Jesus said that his blindness was so that the *works* (i.e., one of the biblical vocabulary words for miracles) of God *might be displayed in him*. In verses 4-5 Jesus taught about his mission and his identity. Work for God must be done with urgency because *night is coming* (an eschatological metaphor), *when no one can work*. Since Jesus is the light of the world (cf. 8:12), he can make people see—which is what he does next.

With his spittle and dirt Jesus made a mud pie and applied it to the man’s eyes. There was some thought in the ancient world that saliva had medicinal qualities. Jesus commanded the man to go wash the mud off in the *Pool of*

Siloam. Imagine him bumping into people along the way. The “sign” is told with three verbs—he went, he washed, and he saw (v. 7).

The Blind Remain Blind

John 9:13-16, 24-34

Jesus evidently disappeared from the crowd (John 9:12). The former blind man was left to go it alone. The neighbors were the first to work him over (vv. 8-12). His brightened face must have made him look very different as they did not recognize him. Those well-intentioned dragons took the former blind man to the Pharisees. They proceeded to conduct a hearing (kangaroo court) and took their turn working him over. They could not deny the miracle, so they discredited Jesus by making him out to be a Sabbath breaker. The Pharisees brought the man’s parents in and worked them over, too (vv. 18-23).

The man was brought in for a second hearing. Every effort they made to discredit Jesus was countered by the former blind man. They called Jesus a *sinner*. The man gave his undeniable testimony. He was blind, but now he saw (v. 25). The authorities asked the former blind man to rehearse the details of his miracle again. By this point the former blind man might have been losing his patience. His logic was impeccable. “Want to be his disciples?” “We are disciples of Moses and do not know where Jesus came from.” “But he opened my eyes, and how does a sinner do that?” They replied, “*You were steeped in sin at birth.*” Even the people who witnessed Jesus’ miracles firsthand did not always believe.

The Former Blind Believe

John 9:35-38

To be thrown out of the synagogue was no small thing. It had religious, cultural, and familial ramifications. But Jesus *found him*. This is the first time the man actually saw Jesus. Even though Jesus blessed the man for believing in him without having seen him (John 20:29; cf. 1 Peter 1:8), this was a revelation with eyes wide open. The man believed and *worshipped* Jesus. Restored sight is glorious.

Spiritual blindness is terrible. Pray with Paul that the eyes of our heart will be enlightened (Ephesians 1:18).

Mark Scott serves as preaching minister with Park Plaza Christian Church in Joplin, Mo. For 35 years, until 2021, he served as professor of preaching and New Testament with Ozark Christian College in Joplin.

APPLICATION

BLIND SPOTS

BY DAVID FAUST

How could they miss it? How could the Pharisees interact so closely with Jesus but fail to recognize him as God's Son?

His miracles weren't done in a corner. Delighted wedding guests surely spread the word about how he changed water into wine. A man who couldn't walk for 38 years couldn't keep it a secret after Jesus healed his legs. Thousands with stomachs full of fish and bread must have told the news about Jesus multiplying a boy's small lunch.

The Blindness of Unbelief

But not everyone was pleased. When Jesus healed a man who had been born blind, his adversaries objected. In their opinion, by making mud and smearing it on the man's eyes, Jesus violated their rules against working on the Sabbath. The Pharisees interrogated FBM (the Formerly Blind Man), and the conversation went something like this:

Pharisees: "How was your eyesight restored?" FBM: "A man put mud on my eyes."

Pharisees: "What is your opinion of him?" FBM: "He must be a messenger of God."

Next, they questioned FBM's parents to make sure it wasn't a case of mistaken identity.

Pharisees: "Is this man your son? Was he really born blind?" FBM's nervous mom and dad: "Yes, and yes."

Pharisees: "Then why can he see now?" FBM's parents: "We don't know, but leave us out of this. Our son can speak for himself. Ask him!"

So, then it was time for a follow-up interview with the Formerly Blind Man.

Pharisees: "The man who restored your sight—we think he's bad." FBM: "That's strange. Seeing is good! I once was blind, but now I see!"

Pharisees: "How exactly did he heal you?" FBM: "I already explained that. Why are you so curious? Do you want to follow Jesus yourselves?"

Pharisees: "No! We are disciples of Moses." FBM: "Maybe so, but you must be blind if you can't see God's power enabled him to heal my eyes."

Pharisees: "Get out of here! We don't need lectures from sinners like you."

Sadly, "Even after Jesus had performed so many signs in their presence, they still would not believe in him" (John 12:37).

Are Our Eyes Open?

How could the Pharisees have such close proximity to Jesus, but reject him? Ironically, God's Living Word "was in the world . . . [but] the world did not recognize him. He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him" (John 1:10-11).

Before we pharisaically congratulate ourselves for being better than the Pharisees, we should ask, *Do we always recognize God's work? Do we consistently see his hand in nature and hear his voice in Scripture? At times, are we blind to our own faults? Do we overlook the needs of our neighbors? Do we ever try to find our own way through the darkness without walking in the light of God's truth?*

Jesus searched for the man whose eyes he had healed (John 9:35-38), and when he found him, the Lord made sure his spiritual eyes were open, too.

Jesus: "Do you believe in the Son of Man?" FBM: "Who is he, sir?"

Jesus: "You have now seen him; in fact, he is the one speaking with you." FBM: "Lord, I believe."

May our eyes always be open to see God at work. And may our confession always be, "Lord, I believe."

Personal Challenge:

Do you have some spiritual blind spots of your own? Join with the psalmists and pray, "Forgive my hidden faults" (Psalm 19:12) and "Open my eyes that I may see wonderful things in your law" (Psalm 119:18).

David Faust serves as senior associate minister with East 91st Street Christian Church in Indianapolis.

DISCOVERY

QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

1. Name a time when you blamed yourself for something you later discovered wasn't your fault. How did you feel about your discovery?

Ask two people to read aloud **John 9:1-7, 13-16, 24-38**, one after the other, preferably from different Bible versions. Then ask a third person to briefly summarize the passage.

2. Why did Jesus' disciples assume the man's blindness resulted from his sin or his parents' sin?
3. What might the act of Jesus making mud with his saliva and applying it to the blind man's eyes signify?
4. Why is obedience important in the story of the blind man's healing and what does this tell us about our own need for obedience?
5. How does the story emphasize the importance of doing God's work while it is still day?
6. How did the man born blind demonstrate faith in Jesus in the face of opposition and pressure from the religious leaders? How can we demonstrate faith today amid opposition?
7. When encouraged to speak critically about Jesus and the miracle he performed, the man who had been blind responded, "One thing I do know. I was blind but now I see!" What does this teach us about combining personal experience with faith in Jesus?
8. The man Jesus healed was barred from the synagogue because he refused to condemn Jesus. What does this teach us about the potential cost of faith and obedience to Christ?
9. What does this account teach us about Jesus' willingness to expose and heal spiritual blindness?
10. Based on our study and discussion, complete the sentence: "I will . . ."

For Next Week: Read and reflect on **John 20:19-31**. You can also read next week's supplemental texts and the Study and Application sections as part of your personal study.

WEEK FOUR

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

STUDY: Gospel of John (Part 3)

THEME: Believe

LESSON TEXT: John 20:19-31

SUPPLEMENTAL TEXT: Matthew 23:16-26; John 5:33-47; John 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.

Mark Scott serves as preaching minister with Park Plaza Christian Church in Joplin, Mo. For 35 years, until 2021, he served as professor of preaching and New Testament with Ozark Christian College in Joplin.

APPLICATION

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.

David Faust serves as senior associate minister with East 91st Street Christian Church in Indianapolis.

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 these verses.

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?
8. Can you recall a time when your faith was restored after doubting the Lord? What happened?
9. 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?
10. What does Jesus' statement to Thomas, "Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed," teach us about the essence of faith?
11. Based on our study and discussion, complete the sentence: "I will . . ."

For Next Week: This week's lesson bring this unit of study to a conclusion. Look for additional "**1717: Your Word Is Truth**" studies, for use with your Sunday School classes, small groups, or personal studies, at ChristianStandard.com.