

BELIEVING
UNBELIEVERS
IN JOHN

“For they loved the glory that comes from man more than the glory that comes from God.”

INTRODUCING THE STUDY

- (2/4/18) **Many in Jerusalem/Nicodemus** (Pride; unwilling to be reborn by God's Spirit and a love for darkness)
- (2/11/18) **Jews at Feeding of 5,000** (Unwillingness to see Jesus as the bread who will satisfy my deepest hunger)
- (2/18/18) **The Offspring of "Abraham"** (Pride; not judging myself by my works but by my perceived identity)
- (2/25/18) **Fearful Parents/Many of the Authorities** (Fear; love of glory from man more than glory from God)

John 20:30–31, “Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.” This text should be read as the purpose statement of John’s gospel. But what does this mean? In recent years many have used this statement to interpret John’s gospel as an apologetic for those who have no faith in Jesus. Supposedly, if one has never read the Bible, one should start by reading John’s gospel. The aim: as people are impressed by the miraculous signs in John, people will move from no faith to faith. Certainly, this can happen and that would be great; however, was this the Spirit’s *primary* aim with John’s testimony?

One problem with reading John’s gospel in this way is found in **John 2:23-25**. “Now when he was in Jerusalem at the Passover Feast, many believed in his name when they saw the signs that he was doing. But Jesus on his part did not entrust himself to them, because he knew all people and needed no one to bear witness about man, for he himself knew what was in man.” This is one of a few similar examples in John’s gospel. Jesus is not impressed with people who only believe Jesus is from God because they saw Jesus work some cool miracles. Furthermore, there are multiple occasions where people saw the miraculous signs, but they were left unchanged or even hardened. Real faith comes more by hearing Jesus, not as much by seeing the “supernatural.”

As we will see in this study, John’s gospel is probably not *primarily* written to move people from zero faith to faith that exists. The signs in John are not meant to cause people to be blown away by a new miracle worker. If displays of raw power were the intention, turning water into wine is a somewhat underwhelming introduction.

What then is the primary intention of John’s gospel? We can get a clue from John’s rich descriptions and explanations of Jesus’ signs. Each of the signs are filled with rich imagery and allusions to Old Testament texts and pictures. Those who are not very familiar with the Old Testament do not hear this in John’s gospel. The signs combined with these allusions are very helpful in causing people to grow to have a deeper appreciation for who Jesus is, rather than simply motivating by pictures of raw power. This leads to a deeper level of real faith. There is a reason why John emphasizes that the wine Jesus offers at the wedding feast is far superior to the wine previously made available to the people.

But who would benefit from a telling of the Good News like this? A telling of the gospel like this could have a serious impact on those who know God’s word, but, due to a variety of pressures, their lives say that they are still on the fence when it comes to Jesus. They have some faith, but they don’t have a faith that has found real life in Jesus’ name. They know God’s word, but they haven’t seen or *heard* the Word made flesh.

Why would people be on the fence when it comes to Jesus? Jesus addresses this problem a number of times in John’s gospel. Jesus repeatedly encounters “believing unbelievers” — people who do not deny the power and wisdom of Jesus, but they don’t find life in his name because they are unwilling to see him as their everything. Our goal is to look at a few of Jesus’ interactions with these “believing unbelievers,” because we can learn from what causes people to sit on the fence - whether to remedy our own faith now or to grow it into the future. We do not want to simply believe in Jesus’ power, we want to see him as the King and Son of God and find life in his name.

JOHN 2:23-3:21 (ESV)

2:23 Now when he was in Jerusalem at the Passover Feast, many believed in his name when they saw the signs that he was doing. **24** But Jesus on his part did not entrust himself to them, because he knew all people **25** and needed no one to bear witness about man, for he himself knew what was in man.

3:1 Now there was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews. **2** This man came to Jesus by night and said to him, “Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher come from God, for no one can do these signs that you do unless God is with him.” **3** Jesus answered him, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.” **4** Nicodemus said to him, “How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother’s womb and be born?” **5** Jesus answered, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. **6** That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. **7** Do not marvel that I said to you, ‘You must be born again.’ **8** The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.”

9 Nicodemus said to him, “How can these things be?” **10** Jesus answered him, “Are you the teacher of Israel and yet you do not understand these things? **11** Truly, truly, I say to you, we speak of what we know, and bear witness to what we have seen, but you do not receive our testimony. **12** If I have told you earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you heavenly things? **13** No one has ascended into heaven except he who descended from heaven, the Son of Man. **14** And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, **15** that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.

16 “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. **17** For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. **18** Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God. **19** And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil. **20** For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his works should be exposed. **21** But whoever does what is true comes to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that his works have been carried out in God.”

MANY IN JERUSALEM / NICODEMUS (2:23-3:21)

- 1. (2:23-3:2) What do many in Jerusalem and Nicodemus think of Jesus? Why?**

- 2. (2:23-3:8) How all does Jesus respond to many in Jerusalem and Nicodemus? How do Jesus' demands here contrast with the faith that the many/Nicodemus have?**

- 3. (3:3-8) By what means did the Pharisees believe they would be able to see God's kingdom (cf. Luke 18:9-11; Philippians 3:2-6; Romans 2:17, 25-29)? By what means does Jesus say people will be able to see/enter God's kingdom (cf. Ezekiel 36:25-27)?**

- 4. (3:13-18) What is the condition of the world and how can we have eternal life? Again, how does this contrast with the Pharisees' view of their condition and path to life?**

- 5. (3:2, 19-21) When did Nicodemus come to Jesus? What all prevented Nicodemus (and prevents us) from having real faith that comes into the light?**

- 6. (7:45-52; 19:38-42) How did Nicodemus (and how can we) move from unbelief? What should this look like in your day-to-day life?**

JOHN 6:22-71 (ESV)

6:22 On the next day the crowd that remained on the other side of the sea saw that there had been only one boat there, and that Jesus had not entered the boat with his disciples, but that his disciples had gone away alone. **23** Other boats from Tiberias came near the place where they had eaten the bread after the Lord had given thanks. **24** So when the crowd saw that Jesus was not there, nor his disciples, they themselves got into the boats and went to Capernaum, seeking Jesus.

25 When they found him on the other side of the sea, they said to him, “Rabbi, when did you come here?” **26** Jesus answered them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, you are seeking me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves. **27** Do not work for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give to you. For on him God the Father has set his seal.” **28** Then they said to him, “What must we do, to be doing the works of God?” **29** Jesus answered them, “This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent.” **30** So they said to him, “Then what sign do you do, that we may see and believe you? What work do you perform?” **31** Our fathers ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written, ‘He gave them bread from heaven to eat.’” **32** Jesus then said to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, it was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven, but my Father gives you the true bread from heaven. **33** For the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.” **34** They said to him, “Sir, give us this bread always.”

35 Jesus said to them, “I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst. **36** But I said to you that you have seen me and yet do not believe. **37** All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out. **38** For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will but the will of him who sent me. **39** And this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up on the last day. **40** For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day.”

41 So the Jews grumbled about him, because he said, “I am the bread that came down from heaven.” **42** They said, “Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How does he now say, ‘I have come down from heaven?’” **43** Jesus answered them, “Do not grumble among yourselves. **44** No

one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him. And I will raise him up on the last day. **45** It is written in the Prophets, 'And they will all be taught by God.' Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to me— **46** not that anyone has seen the Father except he who is from God; he has seen the Father. **47** Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes has eternal life. **48** I am the bread of life. **49** Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died. **50** This is the bread that comes down from heaven, so that one may eat of it and not die. **51** I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. And the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh."

52 The Jews then disputed among themselves, saying, "How can this man give us his flesh to eat?" **53** So Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. **54** Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day. **55** For my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink. **56** Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him. **57** As the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so whoever feeds on me, he also will live because of me. **58** This is the bread that came down from heaven, not like the bread the fathers ate, and died. Whoever feeds on this bread will live forever." **59** Jesus said these things in the synagogue, as he taught at Capernaum.

60 When many of his disciples heard it, they said, "This is a hard saying; who can listen to it?" **61** But Jesus, knowing in himself that his disciples were grumbling about this, said to them, "Do you take offense at this? **62** Then what if you were to see the Son of Man ascending to where he was before? **63** It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh is no help at all. The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life. **64** But there are some of you who do not believe." (For Jesus knew from the beginning who those were who did not believe, and who it was who would betray him.) **65** And he said, "This is why I told you that no one can come to me unless it is granted him by the Father."

66 After this many of his disciples turned back and no longer walked with him. **67** So Jesus said to the Twelve, "Do you want to go away as well?" **68** Simon Peter answered him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life, **69** and we have believed, and have come to know, that you are the Holy One of God." **70** Jesus answered them, "Did I not choose you, the Twelve? And yet one of you is a devil." **71** He spoke of Judas the son of Simon Iscariot, for he, one of the Twelve, was going to betray him."

JEWES AT THE FEEDING OF 5,000 (6:22-71)

1. (26, 30-31, 34) What all were these Jews looking for out of Jesus?
2. (27, 29, 32-33, 35) According to Jesus, how should we view the Son?
3. (35-59) Why all should we see Jesus like this? What is the result of *this* belief in Jesus?
4. (41-42, 52, 60-61, 66) How do these Jews and many of Jesus' disciples react to Jesus' call for richer faith? Compare with Israel's attitude in the desert (cf. Numbers 11:6, etc.).
5. Consider the spiritual problem in these Jews as it relates to you today. What is wrong with what these Jews were seeking? In what ways might you tend to act in this way?
6. (66-69, etc.) Considering the pictures Jesus paints in this chapter and Peter's example of faith, what should this kind of faith look like in your day to day life? What all prevents you from seeing Jesus in this way?

JOHN 8:28-59 (ESV)

8:28 So Jesus said to them, “When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am he, and that I do nothing on my own authority, but speak just as the Father taught me. **29** And he who sent me is with me. He has not left me alone, for I always do the things that are pleasing to him.” **30** As he was saying these things, many believed in him.

31 So Jesus said to the Jews who had believed him, “If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, **32** and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.” **33** They answered him, “We are offspring of Abraham and have never been enslaved to anyone. How is it that you say, ‘You will become free?’”

34 Jesus answered them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who practices sin is a slave to sin. **35** The slave does not remain in the house forever; the son remains forever. **36** So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed. **37** I know that you are offspring of Abraham; yet you seek to kill me because my word finds no place in you. **38** I speak of what I have seen with my Father, and you do what you have heard from your father.”

39 They answered him, “Abraham is our father.” Jesus said to them, “If you were Abraham’s children, you would be doing the works Abraham did, **40** but now you seek to kill me, a man who has told you the truth that I heard from God. This is not what Abraham did. **41** You are doing the works your father did.” They said to him, “We were not born of sexual immorality. We have one Father—even God.” **42** Jesus said to them, “If God were your Father, you would love me, for I came from God and I am here. I came not of my own accord, but he sent me. **43** Why do you not understand what I say? It is because you cannot bear to hear my word. **44** You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father’s desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks out of his own character, for he is a liar and the father of lies. **45** But because I tell the truth, you do not believe me. **46** Which one of you convicts me of sin? If I tell the truth, why do you not believe me? **47** Whoever is of God hears the words of God. The reason why you do not hear them is that you are not of God.”

THE OFFSPRING OF "ABRAHAM" (8:28-47)

1. (30-31) Who is Jesus speaking to in this situation?
2. (31-32) How can they be "*truly my (Jesus') disciples*"? What will be the result of this?
3. (33) What problem do they have with what Jesus says?
4. (34-47) What discrepancies exist between Jesus' view of these Jews and their view of themselves?
5. (34-47) Why does this discrepancy exist? What evidence do these Jews use to back up their view of themselves and Jesus? What evidence does Jesus use?
6. Try to identify the heart problem(s) that cause(s) these believing Jews to actually be unbelievers. In what ways could you make similar errors?
7. Consider the whole text. According to what Jesus says here, what are all the ways you can ensure you are actually Jesus' disciple, offspring of Abraham, and "of God"?

PORTIONS OF JOHN 9, 11, 12 (ESV)

9:1, 6-7, “**1** As he passed by, he saw a man blind from birth... **6** Having said these things, he spit on the ground and made mud with the saliva. Then he anointed the man’s eyes with the mud **7** and said to him, “Go, wash in the pool of Siloam” (which means Sent). So he went and washed and came back seeing.”

9:18–23, “**18** The Jews did not believe that he had been blind and had received his sight, until they called the parents of the man who had received his sight **19** and asked them, “Is this your son, who you say was born blind? How then does he now see?” **20** His parents answered, “We know that this is our son and that he was born blind. **21** But how he now sees we do not know, nor do we know who opened his eyes. Ask him; he is of age. He will speak for himself.” **22** (His parents said these things because they feared the Jews, for the Jews had already agreed that if anyone should confess Jesus to be Christ, he was to be put out of the synagogue.) **23** Therefore his parents said, “He is of age; ask him.””

12:37–43, “**37** Though he had done so many signs before them, they still did not believe in him, **38** so that the word spoken by the prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled: “Lord, who has believed what he heard from us, and to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?” **39** Therefore they could not believe. For again Isaiah said, **40** “He has blinded their eyes and hardened their heart, lest they see with their eyes, and understand with their heart, and turn, and I would heal them.” **41** Isaiah said these things because he saw his glory and spoke of him. **42** Nevertheless, many even of the authorities believed in him, but for fear of the Pharisees they did not confess it, so that they would not be put out of the synagogue; **43** for they loved the glory that comes from man more than the glory that comes from God.”

11:43–48, “**43** When he had said these things, he cried out with a loud voice, “Lazarus, come out.” **44** The man who had died came out, his hands and feet bound with linen strips, and his face wrapped with a cloth. Jesus said to them, “Unbind him, and let him go.”

45 Many of the Jews therefore, who had come with Mary and had seen what he did, believed in him, **46** but some of them went to the Pharisees and told them what Jesus had done. **47** So the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered the council and said, “What are we to do? For this man performs many signs. **48** If we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him, and the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation.””

THE FEARFUL PARENTS/AUTHORITIES (9,11,12)

1. (9:18-23) How did the parents of the man born blind reply when questioned about their son being healed?

2. (12:37-43) What did many of the Jewish authorities think of Jesus?

3. (Ch. 9, 12) Why did the parents reply in this way? Why did the authorities not confess their belief in Jesus?

4. (Ch. 9, 11, 12) Many often believe that if God would just show them a sign or his power, then they will believe, be more faithful, be more devoted, stop sinning, etc. Consider this claim alongside the parents (9), the authorities (12), those who saw Jesus raise Lazarus (11), and even others like Judas (12). What did **each** of these people do despite seeing Jesus' power?

5. Consider yourself. What actually prevents you from having a deeper level of faith?

FINAL ENCOURAGEMENT (JOHN 9:17, 24-41)

9:17, So they said again to the blind man, “What do you say about him, since he has opened your eyes?” He said, “He is a prophet.”

9:24 So for the second time they called the man who had been blind and said to him, “Give glory to God. We know that this man is a sinner.” **25** He answered, “Whether he is a sinner I do not know. One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see.” **26** They said to him, “What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?” **27** He answered them, “I have told you already, and you would not listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Do you also want to become his disciples?” **28** And they reviled him, saying, “You are his disciple, but we are disciples of Moses. **29** We know that God has spoken to Moses, but as for this man, we do not know where he comes from.” **30** The man answered, “Why, this is an amazing thing! You do not know where he comes from, and yet he opened my eyes. **31** We know that God does not listen to sinners, but if anyone is a worshiper of God and does his will, God listens to him. **32** Never since the world began has it been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a man born blind. **33** If this man were not from God, he could do nothing.” **34** They answered him, “You were born in utter sin, and would you teach us?” And they cast him out.

35 Jesus heard that they had cast him out, and having found him he said, “Do you believe in the Son of Man?” **36** He answered, “And who is he, sir, that I may believe in him?” **37** Jesus said to him, “You have seen him, and it is he who is speaking to you.” **38** He said, “Lord, I believe,” and he worshiped him. **39** Jesus said, “For judgment I came into this world, that those who do not see may see, and those who see may become blind.” **40** Some of the Pharisees near him heard these things, and said to him, “Are we also blind?” **41** Jesus said to them, “If you were blind, you would have no guilt; but now that you say, ‘We see,’ your guilt remains.”

6. (9:24-41) Consider this text. How can we learn from this blind man and have a faith that truly sees Jesus as we ought to? Considering this text, what does this look like in practice?