

PROOF

What does it take for someone to believe in Jesus? The answer is different for everyone. John's goal in this gospel was to give the readers a wide range of evidence from his first-hand experiences with Jesus. Yet it always takes faith. The hard truth is that many thousands of people got to see and hear Jesus over His three years of ministry and still did not believe in Him. They saw the blind man receive his sight, the leper cleansed, Lazarus raised from the dead. What else did they need to be convinced? I am thankful that our God knows what He is calling us to do in believing in Him by faith. It is not easy. Thankfully, He supplies us with many tangible truths that we can use to come to believe. Today we will see how Jesus responded to one of His chosen apostles who was with Him throughout His ministry and still struggled to believe. Take a moment now and ask Jesus to help you grow in your faith and to help others to come to know and believe in Him. Help them see the proof God has given to us!

John 20:19-23 ¹⁹So when it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and when the doors were shut where the disciples were, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood in their midst and said to them, "Peace be with you." ²⁰And when He had said this, He showed them both His hands and His side. The disciples then rejoiced when they saw the Lord. ²¹So Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you; as the Father has sent Me, I also send you." ²²And when He had said this, He breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. ²³If you forgive the sins of any, their sins have been forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they have been retained."

It was quite a day! Jesus appeared five times to His followers on that blessed Sunday morning we now call Easter. He showed Himself to Mary Magdalene, to the women, to the two on the road to Emmaus, to Peter, and now to the 10 disciples in this chapter.

- 1) Take a moment to appreciate what it must have been like for them to get to see, touch, and talk with Jesus on that day. Describe what might have happened as they did. What questions do you think they asked Him? What would you have asked Him?

- 2) Why do you think Jesus had to say to them: "Peace be with you" two times?

- 3) Why did Jesus make a point to show them His hands and His side? What does that tell you?

- 4) Now having been raised from the dead, Jesus had a clear message for His disciples. First, in verse 21, He challenges them that just as the Father has sent Him, He is now sending them. What was He sending them to do?

- 5) What was He sending them with (resources)?

- 6) What things had Jesus told them to expect on their mission - that He faced on His?

- 7) How do you think they handled the responsibility of Jesus turning over His mission to them?

The second thing Jesus addressed was the coming Holy Spirit. Jesus breathed on them and told them to receive the Holy Spirit. This text seems to point back to the first time God gave man life and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life. Jesus was helping them see that He would soon be breathing life back into their spirit (dead since the fall) and they would be born again. But they would need to wait. Read Acts 1:3-5 to better understand:

“To these He also presented Himself alive after His suffering, by many convincing proofs, appearing to them over a period of forty days and speaking of the things concerning the kingdom of God. ⁴Gathering them together, He commanded them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait for what the Father had promised, “Which,” He said, “you heard of from Me; ⁵for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.”

- 8) How would life be different for them after they were baptized and indwelt by the Holy Spirit?

In Acts 2:14, Peter stands and addresses the crowd still in Jerusalem after the Passover. He speaks with passion and courage. Acts 2:41 says that over 3,000 became Christians on that day after Peter preached, and the Holy Spirit came upon His disciples and everyone was able to hear the gospel in their own language. Peter was a different man from the guy who just days earlier had denied Jesus three times and run away in shame.

- 9) In your own words, explain what happens when the Holy Spirit comes to live inside us. What exactly makes the difference and makes the change?

Note: the change that God makes in our lives is some of the proof that God is real and cares!

John 20:24-25 ²⁴But Thomas, one of the twelve, called Didymus, was not with them when Jesus came. ²⁵So the other disciples were saying to him, "We have seen the Lord!" But he said to them, "Unless I see in His hands the imprint of the nails, and put my finger into the place of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe."

- 10) Thomas was the only one that was not there when Jesus came and showed Himself. I am sure he was bummed to have missed out. Why do you think he was so adamant that he could not believe unless he personally saw and touch Jesus' scars on His hands and side?

- 11) Can you think of anything that you find hard to believe and obey God for?

- 12) Do you ever find yourself asking God to give you a sign for you to believe? Do you ever think God gets mad at you for asking for more proof to help you believe?

John 20:26-29 ²⁶After eight days His disciples were again inside, and Thomas with them. Jesus came, the doors having been shut, and stood in their midst and said, "Peace be with you." ²⁷Then He said to Thomas, "Reach here with your finger, and see My hands; and reach here your hand and put it into My side; and do not be unbelieving, but believing." ²⁸Thomas answered and said to Him, "My Lord and my God!" ²⁹Jesus said to him, "Because you have seen Me, have you believed? Blessed are they who did not see, and yet believed."

- 13) If the door was shut, how did Jesus end up standing in their midst? What does that tell you about His new glorified body?

- 14) Look up Luke 24:36-43. What else did He do to help them believe? What did it show them?
- 15) Why do you think Jesus did not rebuke Thomas for doubting but instead was very willing to give him the proof he needed, and He then invited him to believe?
- 16) Are you surprised by Thomas' response?
- 17) Do you think his faith was strengthened more because He got to see and touch Jesus or was it because Jesus took the time to help him deal with his doubts without rebuke?
- 18) In verse 29, Jesus recognizes and honors a group of people who would not get the same opportunity that Thomas got. Who is He talking about? Why is this a big deal?

John 20:30-31 ³⁰Therefore many other signs Jesus also performed in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; ³¹but these have been written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name.

When I read this passage, I always think, "why didn't John just sit down and get the scrolls he needed to write down everything he could remember that Jesus said and did - and even add an appendix and a few pictures - like of Jesus!" But I think John is making a major point here. He wrote down everything that God supernaturally moved him to include (2 Peter 1:20-21). It is enough for those who are open to God and seeking the truth. It is the proof that anyone needs to come to faith in Jesus and find the life He gives to everyone who believes. The truth is, for some people it doesn't matter how much proof God gives them, they will not believe. We each have a choice with Jesus. He is not just a nice guy or wise teacher. Because He claimed to be God, we must either, by faith, believe that He is God who died in my place, or reject that claim making Him a liar or a lunatic.

19) So where are you as it relates to your faith in God? Are you still looking for more proof?

I would encourage you to think through all the evidence that God has given us in the book of John. The resurrection, I believe, is the greatest proof. Read Acts 1:1-5 and 1 Corinthians 15:1-11. Jesus went on to show Himself to many over a period of 40 days including more than 500 at one time. The text points out many of them are alive unto this day (the time of his writing it). What this means is that Christianity could have easily been proven to be wrong if in fact it was a story made up by a few. With 500 seeing Him at one time, it was not just a vision had by one person or a small group. The fact that all but one of Jesus' disciples was killed for their faith helps us realize that either Jesus was in fact who He said He was, or they were all delusional. The great thing is that our struggle for faith is something God continues to address in our lives with the proof found in His word and the living stories that God is still writing in His followers today. If you have never put your faith in Jesus before now, stop and ask God for the faith to believe. Then invite Him into your heart to be your savior. Tell Him you believe that He died and rose again for you. Based on His word, if you believe, He does the rest. He comes to live within you. If you have done this today, be sure to tell someone who has put their faith in Him too. They can help you start your journey with Jesus. If you have already believed, thank God that He cares enough to give you the proof you needed to believe in Him.

“Truly, truly, I say to you, he who hears My word, and believes Him who sent Me, has eternal life, and does not come into judgment, but has passed out of death into life.” John 5:24