

They Met Jesus, Have You?

John 20:30-31

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This is the grand finale of our eight-month teaching series, *I Met Jesus*. I haven't told you where the series came from. It is more difficult than you may realize to choose a direction or book of the Bible for our weekend teaching series. I will start thinking about it long in advance and ask the leaders and staff for their input. There is a lot of prayer and evaluation of where we are as a church and what direction to shepherd. There also is an intangible inward excitement in me that I look for as well.

This series came from a comment I heard at a concert last summer. The singer was talking and told a brief account of the woman at the well from John. It got me thinking about all the interesting people Jesus ran into. I wanted to do a narrative series, and a biographical narrative series was even better because we can relate to people. So I sketched it out, talked with our leadership again, and decided to do it. We have been meeting people in John since September.

I am sad to see this series end as I think we have great momentum with it. I wish there were a dozen more people to study in John. Alas, this is it. Today we are not going to study any person in particular, but instead, we are going to look at them and the series as a whole. Essentially, I want to say today, *they met Jesus, have you?*

Who are They?

- *The boy and his bread*
- *Nicodemus*
- *A desperate dad and a paralytic man*
- *Mary, Mother of Jesus*
- *John the Baptist*
- *Mary and Martha*
- *Lazarus*
- *The blind man*
- *The crowds and the cowards*
- *Woman at the well*
- *Peter*
- *Mary and her extravagant gift*
- *Judas Iscariot*
- *Pilate*
- *Mary Magdalene*
- *Thomas*
- *The disciple and author John*

These are the main players in the story as John tells it. Do you have any favorite biographies here? Mine would be Pilate and Mary Magdalene. I have heard many times during this series, *I didn't know that about him! I didn't realize she had that background!* What have we seen with each person in the list? They are what? Just like us. Nicodemus had lots of education, but no answers for his soul. Mary and Martha were sisters and had the sisterly tendencies of jealousy and tension. The woman at the well is an unlikely highpoint in the story. She had five broken marriages and was living with a lover not her

husband – likely somebody else’s. This woman was a heartbreaker and home-wrecker. Sounds like a country song. Yet meeting Jesus turned her into a missionary.

Peter made great boasts and had great failures. At one time, Mary Magdalene was Mary the demoniac, in league with the enemies of God. Thomas, the skeptical realist, thought believers in the resurrection of Jesus were nut-jobs. Even John himself early in the story was way more interested in helping himself than helping Christ. He was ambitious, angry, and arrogant, ready to argue vehemently that he was the greatest of them all.

When you look at this list, who do these people remind you of? They are us. These screens are like giant mirrors; with this list we look into them and see ourselves. Pick the one who’s most like you.

But then something happened to them. What is the common denominator? In each case, the journey of their lives intersected with Jesus and this intersection produced a radical transformation – redemption.

What Happened to Them?

- The boy and his bread/Jesus fed 15,000 people with his few loaves and fishes
- Nicodemus/came first in secret/later took Jesus from cross in sight of all Jerusalem
- A desperate dad and a paralytic man/Jesus healed a dying son and a paralyzed man
- The woman at the well/believed in Jesus as Messiah/became a missionary
- Mary, Mother of Jesus/Jesus was her son and her Savior
- John the Baptist/John’s influence declined and he was happy about it
- Mary and Martha/Their brother was resurrected from the dead/devoted followers of Jesus
- Lazarus/resurrected from the dead/devoted follower of Jesus
- The blind man/Jesus restored his sight and he confronted the Pharisees’ unbelief
- The crowds and the cowards/they refused to believe or were afraid to
- Peter/boasted, then denied Christ/martyred upside down on a cross
- Mary and her extravagant gift/anointed him with \$50,000 perfume/generosity lauded by Jesus
- Judas Iscariot/betrayed Jesus/death by suicide
- Pilate/condemned Jesus to crucifixion/death by suicide
- Mary Magdalene/healed of demon possession/total devotion to Christ
- Thomas/skeptical of resurrection/“My Lord and my God!”
- The disciple and author John/angry, ambitious, arrogant/the Apostle of love who wrote his gospel not using his own name

Why does John tell us these stories and why did he include the spectrum of people that he did? Since John wrote under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, why did God include who he did? John says his purpose very clearly in John 20:30-31.

John’s Purpose Statement (and Why He Included Who He Did) – 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. " (John 20:30-31)

Let’s do a little exposition on the text. Notice first that it comes immediately following Thomas’ confession. Remember how skeptical he was that Jesus was resurrected? *"Unless I...place my finger into the mark of the nails, and place my hand into his side, I will NEVER*

believe." (John 20:25, emphasis added) But when Jesus was physically standing before him as the undeniable sign of resurrection, his conclusion was not, "I guess I was wrong; oh well." Instead, his response is confessional and worshipful, "*My Lord and my God!*" (John 20:28)

From this flows our passage today. It is almost like John is reading our minds. What do we think when Thomas has the opportunity to confirm his faith by seeing Jesus with his own eyes? *If I could see him, I'd believe him too.* Notice verse 29, "*Jesus said to him, 'Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.'*" (John 20:29)

Jesus acknowledges and blesses those of us who will believe without physically seeing the resurrected Christ. This is the vast majority of Christians. Scripture puts the number above 500 who saw him resurrected. Millions have believed since then, including us. Our faith is not based on sight, but on hearing and reading, specifically God's Word. Romans 10:17 says, "*So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.*" 1 Peter 1:8, "*Though you have not seen him, you love him.*" Jesus blesses what would be the way to saving faith for all but a few, through hearing/reading, and then believing.

John flows right from that Messianic blessing on believing without physically seeing into his purpose for writing the gospel. See the purpose statement in verse 31, "*These are written so that (purpose) you may believe.*" What are written? Verse 30, *Jesus did many other signs...which are not written in this book.* So "signs" in verse 30 is the subject which "these" in verse 31 now explains.

What signs is he referring to? Certainly the ones following his resurrection – the ones which proved his resurrection (i.e. eating, touching, and speaking) – but the entirety of John's gospel is a witness to the person and work of Christ. John himself was one, saying at the beginning of the gospel, "*We have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth*" (1:14). His power. His transfiguration. His miracles. His death and resurrection. John's self-stated purpose statement is evangelistic. He is not merely writing history – *Thank you very much John. Good to know what happened so long ago.* He is writing persuasively; he wants to persuade us of who Jesus truly was and is.

Can we include the transformation in the lives of all these people we've studied? Were they signs? Was Peter a "sign" of who Jesus was? Was Mary Magdalene a "sign" of who Jesus was? Was John himself a "sign" of who Jesus was and is?

Couldn't we say that all who meet Jesus through the gospel and are transformed are a "sign"? They are a signpost of Jesus' power to save and change. See, this is John's purpose – that you may believe. "*Believing.*" This is to trust; internal resting and confidence. A belief that Jesus is "the Christ." Christ is an Old Testament word, meaning Messiah; chosen One; fulfiller of God's promises to Israel. But he is more than that. He is also "Son of God." *Believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God.* He is divine; very God of very God. John is deeply concerned about truth and doctrine; we have to believe in the true Jesus. Anything less is a genuine faith in a false Savior.

Notice John's second aim. Saving faith has something that comes with it. *By believing you may have life in his name.* Faith is the lightning; a changed life is the thunder. They always go together.

- "*Whoever believes in him may have eternal life.*" (John 3:15)
- "*Again Jesus spoke to them, saying, 'I am the light of the world.' Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.*" (John 8:12)

- "I am the resurrection and the life." (John 11:25)

Spiritual life is not something that we generate; it is the life of God in us doing its transforming work. Changed lives are "signs" or "witnesses" for Christ. In that way, Thomas was a sign. Mary Magdalene was a sign. Peter was a sign. John's refusal to use his own name, but only speak of himself as the disciple Jesus loved was a sign. These are written down so that we might believe who Jesus is and by believing experience the same "spiritual life" that changed Nicodemus and Mary and John himself.

John "completely avoided the use of nouns for faith (pistis) and knowledge (gnosis). Instead, his summary again contains only the verbal form for believing. Thus nothing less than a dynamic believing in the person of Jesus, who is both Christ and Son of God in the highest meaning of those terms, will be adequate for John. Moreover, nothing less than genuine believing that issues in life transformation will satisfy the evangelist's goal for writing this Gospel. (Borchert, John, p. 319)

An experience from our recent Israel trip illustrates this in the negative. We were at the Church of the Holy Sepulcher in Jerusalem. This is the massive and ancient church built over the historic location of Jesus crucifixion and his tomb. Inside the larger church is a small, single-file building built over the tomb location. There are thousands of people wanting to see it. The line and entrance is managed by some priests who keep an eye on the whole thing. The line can be long and it was the day we were there. I'd say maybe 200-300 people were in line ahead of us.

So we are inching along and noticing periodically a small group of people would cut in line and push their way to the front. Not wanting to cause an incident, we kept our mouths shut. Our local guide was less concerned and started to make a ruckus. She finally went up to one of the priests, and it turns out that she knew and went to school with him. She came back and explained to us that what was happening was that the people cutting in line would pay a bribe to the priest, who would then turn his back on their line cutting. I think the number was upwards of \$100 per group.

Needless to say, we didn't appreciate the corruption and the irony wasn't lost on me. Here we are waiting to see the location where Jesus triumphed over sin and death and by doing so made salvation a free gift by faith to all who believe. Would you say that priests who are racketeering Jesus' resurrection on the very site of his resurrection are a "sign" they don't get it?

But sexually sinful women, who are changed, are a sign. Self-righteous Pharisees who are changed are a "sign." Now we've arrived at why these examples are so powerful.

If Meeting Jesus Changed Them, it Means That Meeting Jesus by Faith in the Gospel Will Change Me Too

This is why this list of people is so encouraging to us. If they were all smart like Nicodemus, we would be discouraged. If they were all sitting at Jesus' feet devoted like Mary, we would be discouraged. If all we knew was Thomas' confession, we'd be discouraged. If all we saw was Mary Magdalene devoted at the tomb, we'd be discouraged.

But we look into their lives and we find that Nicodemus was smart, but looked for answers. Mary was devoted, but didn't get along with her sister. Thomas made his confession, but boasted once of his unbelief. Mary Magdalene was devoted, but once was filled with

demons. If all we knew was them at their best, we would be discouraged. *These people are so perfect, there's no hope for me.*

But behind the saints we find sinners. Sins of the worst kind. Sexual sins. Proud sins. Jealous sins. Betraying Jesus sins. You name it, this list of people did it. Yet by the end of the gospel, what has happened? Sinners have been forgiven. Sinners have been redeemed. Sinners have been changed. How has this happened? They have believed in Jesus as Christ and Son of God and the fruit of that believing is a life altogether different from who they were before. Peter is restored. Nicodemus is unashamed. The Samaritan adulterer is a missionary. And John, who wanted to call down fire from heaven and destroy a village of people, writes more about love than anyone else. How do we explain this?

They met a Jesus they saw, but the faith they had in him is not any different from the faith we have in him without seeing him and the change in them is the same change God works in us today for all who believe, and by believing, are transformed to a new life in his name.

So the question is, *They met Jesus, have you?* I wish I could introduce Jesus to you in the flesh after the service, but that is unlikely. Still, Jesus said, "*Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.*" (John 20:29) Might Jesus be referring to you? You haven't met Jesus, but you see signs of his resurrection in the gospel of John and all over in our church. Will you believe?

Finally, to all who do believe, let's not miss the opportunity to marvel at this list (see above) one more time. Why does God choose to use such ordinary people like we have here? So flawed. So inconsistent. So much baggage. Why these of all people?

Who is glorified when an adulterer becomes a missionary? Who is glorified when Jesus forgives a man like Peter who betrayed him in his darkest hour? Who gets the glory? Peter? Who is glorified when an angry man becomes the Apostle of love? John? God is glorified when he uses human weakness and frailty to display his eternal power. I look around this room and see Samaritan women, Peters, Johns, and Thomases whose lives have been changed by meeting Jesus. Why people like us? So that God may be glorified by saving sinners.

We have met Jesus and we are so glad we did.

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