

March 31, 2024

BELIEVE: JOHN 20:1-17

Jesus offers salvation to all who believe in Him.

Focus Attention Option 1 (ETB LG, 41)

Introduce: Direct the group to signal with a thumbs up (yes) or a thumbs down (no) their responses to the following questions:

- *Have you ever read the entire menu in a restaurant and still had trouble choosing?*
- *Have you ever been unsure what to wear for a special occasion?*
- *Have you agonized over a large purchase?*

Explain: Point out that we make dozens of decisions each day. Lead a brief discussion about the relative importance of our decisions each day. Enlist a volunteer to read the session introduction on page 46 of the PSG. (“Daily we are presented with information that requires us to make a choice to believe it or not. It may be something as simple as a weather forecast that will affect what we decide to wear that day. What we believe about some things may not matter all that much, while what we believe about other things may be a matter of life or death. This is true when it comes to believing in Jesus. He said, “The one who believes in the Son has eternal life, but the one who rejects the Son will not see life” (John 3:36).)”)

Ask: *What does it mean to “believe in” Jesus?* (PSG, p. 46) Share that accepting Jesus is the biggest decision we will ever make.

SKIP TO INTRODUCE THE PASSAGE BELOW

Focus Attention Option 2 (Adapted from the introductory information page 59 of the ETB LG)

Tell the story of Nate Saint and his fellow missionaries who were killed while attempting to share their faith (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nate_Saint). Follow up the story of his martyrdom with the information on page 59 of the ETB LG—(“Rachel Saint, sister of martyred missionary Nate Saint, devoted many years of her life to working among the Waorani (Auca) tribes of Ecuador, the same tribe that killed her brother. The president of Ecuador once asked how she had been able to effect change among this dangerous tribe. Rachel explained that the same message of forgiveness and faith in Christ to change an individual’s heart applies to all people everywhere who will believe in Him as Savior. The president then asked one of Nate Saint’s killers, ‘Who is Jesus Christ?’ The man quickly responded, ‘He is the One who came from heaven, died for my sins, and made me stop killing. As a result, I now live happily with my brothers.’”)

Notes:

This is the Aim of the lesson. It drives our discussion and should be the point we drive home throughout the lesson.

This Lesson was created using:

- *Explore the Bible Leader Guide* (ETB LG)
- *Explore the Bible Personal Study Guide* (ETB PSG)
- *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary* (HIBD)

Teachers Note: I understand the need for this type of activity if the group is large. However, you could simply ask the group the questions and then ask if anyone has an example.

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Transition: The indigenous man who killed Nate Saint alongside his fellow missionaries was changed because he came to believe in Jesus Christ and the gospel. Today, we are going to explore what it means to believe in Jesus.

Introduce the Passage: Today we are going to step away from our study of the book of Genesis as we celebrate Easter. Our lesson will focus on the events in John 20. In the previous chapter, John 19, the Gospel writer recounts Jesus' trial before Pilate and His subsequent crucifixion. The events of Jesus' crucifixion reveal to the reader that Jesus suffered greatly and died on the cross. Following His death on the cross, Jesus' body was claimed by two of His disciples and placed in an unused tomb in the city of Jerusalem. John's account picks up the following Sunday. As we study the events in chapter 20, we will see that "Jesus offers salvation to all who believe in Him." (ETB PSG, 46)

1. A REMOVED STONE (JOHN 20:1-2)

Read (or have someone read) John 20:1-2

Explain: The other gospel writers recount the presence of other women with Mary on that morning. John highlights Mary's role in the account. She is one of three people mentioned in verses 1-2.

Ask: Does anyone know anything about Mary Magdalene?

- Her name, Magdalene, comes from her hometown, "Magdala in Galilee." (ETB LG, 62)
- She was a follower of Jesus who had supported His ministry. She was also present at Jesus' death (Mark 15:40-41).
- She had been healed by Jesus when He cast 7 evil spirits from her (Luke 8:2).
- She had witnessed the burial of Jesus in the tomb just days before (Matt. 27:55-56,61). (ETB LG, 62)

John also mentions the Apostle Peter.

Ask: Does anyone anything about Simon Peter?

- He was a fisherman (Mark 1:16; Luke 5:2-3).
- He was married (Mark 1:30) and lived in Capernaum (Mark 1:21-31).
- He was initially brought to Jesus by his brother Andrew at which time Jesus gave him the name Peter which means "rock" (John 1:40-42). (ETB LG, 62)
- "He often served as leader and spokesman for the Twelve." (ETB LG, 62)

Lastly, the passage mentions "the one Jesus loved." "Church tradition and biblical evidence identify this as John, the writer of the Gospel." (ETB LG, 62)

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Ask: Does anyone anything about the Apostle John?

- He was brothers with James and the son of Zebedee (Matt. 4:21–22; Mark 1:19–20).
- He and his brother were fishermen and partners with Peter (Mark 1:20; Luke 5:10).
- “He is listed among the inner three disciples who were with Jesus on special occasions.” (ETB LG, 62)
- “Five New Testament books have been attributed to John: the Gospel of John; 1, 2, 3 John; and Revelation.” (ETB LG, 62)
- “Tradition holds that John lived to an old age in Ephesus, where he fought against heresy and taught believers to love one another.” (ETB LG, 62)

Discuss: In what ways, either positively or negatively, can our biography or past experiences influence our ministry or walk with the Lord?

Explain: Our life experiences shape who we are. Our past experiences might cause us to have more empathy for groups of people who have experienced similar life events. Our past experiences might cause us to have a zeal for a specific ministry. Negatively, our past experiences might hamper our ability or perceived ability to serve in some context. Or we might carry shame because of our past experiences, and this shame might hamper our growth in Jesus. The past experiences of those presented in this passage help us understand the events that unfold.

Mary: First, Mary’s devotion to the Lord is demonstrated in her presence at the tomb. She and the other ladies desired to anoint the body of Jesus. Jesus’ burial late in the day on the day prior to the Sabbath had prevented this act of devotion. That is why Mary and the other ladies came early to the tomb (Luke 24:1). Mary’s love and devotion are on full view this Resurrection Morning.

Peter: Mary ran to tell Peter of her discovery. While Peter had previously denied knowing Jesus in the hours after His arrest (Mark 14:66-72), he was the group’s de facto leader. Despite Peter’s past failing, he was viewed as a leader by those around him.

John: John is often mentioned in connection with Peter in the Gospels. Throughout the Gospel of John, the author does not mention himself by name. His connection to Peter and enduring devotion to Christ are witnessed here.

Summarize and Transition: These three people along with the other followers of Jesus had become connected because of their faith in Christ. Their life experiences caused them to respond to situations and to Jesus differently. Their actions and interactions recorded in Scripture reveal that Jesus calls all kinds of people to himself. No one’s past is too bad or too messed up for Jesus.

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2. AN EMPTY TOMB (JOHN 20:3-10)

Read (or have someone read) John 20:3-10

Remind the group of Mary's report to the disciples. "They've taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we don't know where they've put him!" (v.2) And ask the group to imagine what Peter and John might have been thinking before and during their sprint to the tomb.

Explain: These men did not expect Jesus to be alive so they were possibly concerned because of the report of a stolen body. They might have been fearful because if someone would steal the body maybe they would do something to Jesus' followers. We don't know what they were thinking, but it is highly likely they were not expecting to receive evidence of a resurrection. In our lives, we can often struggle with having an expectant faith. We can also struggle with believing the things God tells us or promises us.

Guide and ask: Guide the group to page 49 of their Personal Study Guide and ask the question in the middle of the page. ("What are some elements of faith that are hard to understand? How does that help or hinder people when it comes to accepting Christ?")

Explain: The Christian life and the promises of the Lord often stand in stark contrast to the world and culture. It is sometimes hard to understand things like miracles or God's counterintuitive promises related to money and grace-filled living. The accounts given in Scripture can also cause some to struggle with belief and accepting Christ's promises of salvation. That is why the work of the Holy Spirit and our prayers are so important when we participate in evangelism and expanding God's Kingdom. These men ran to the tomb with no expectation of discovering a miracle. Let's examine what they found.

Examine: Ask the group to review verses 1-10 and call out details about the tomb and what the men found.

- The tomb had a large stone in front that was rolled away. ("It was customary to wrap a dead body with linen strips and to cover the face with a separate cloth, as noted in the description of Lazarus [John 11:44]" ETB LG, 64)
- Linen cloths were lying inside the tomb.
- The wrapping for the head was lying separate from the other cloths and was folded neatly.
- There was nobody in the tomb.

Ask: "How [do] these details [point] to Jesus's resurrection, rather than grave robbery or another theory?"

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Explain: The absence of a body alone would allow for the possibility that the body had been stolen. However, the condition of the linen cloths and the head wrapping seem to contradict that conclusion. A grave robber would probably not have unwrapped the body and carried it away. It would seem to me that a person would prefer to carry a wrapped dead body over an unwrapped one. Moreover, taking the time to remove and fold the head wrapping is not something a grave robber would have done.

Reread John 20:8 (If you use the ETB Leader Pack, pack item 6 is a poster with this verse on it.)

John tells us that he (“the other disciple”) saw these things and believed. “The term [saw] means ‘to perceive with understanding.’ Thus some measure of spiritual perception allowed John’s seeing to become believing. While it is not clear exactly what John believed, he is the only person in the Gospels who is recognized as believing as a result of seeing the empty tomb. Most of Christ’s followers needed to experience a post-resurrection appearance of Jesus to believe He really was alive.” (ETB LG, 64)

Summarize and Transition: After receiving the distressing news from Mary, Peter and John ran to the tomb. Upon arriving they discovered the truth for themselves. While the Gospel tells us that John believed, it appears they reached a consensus that there was no reason to hang out at an empty tomb. They returned to the place where they and the others were staying.

3. THE LIVING TEACHER (JOHN 20:11-17)

Read (or have someone read) Genesis 20:11-17

Explain: Mary stayed behind while the male disciples returned to their place of lodging. At some point, she looked inside the tomb again. This time she encountered two angels. Then she turned and discovered who she thought was the gardener. She asked him for the body of Jesus. But the presumed gardener was actually the risen Lord. His command to not “cling” to Him did not concern actually touching Him. Later, He would invite Thomas to touch His hands. Instead, “Jesus’s personal statement to Mary must have indicated that she was no longer to relate to Him through the physical senses because His ascension would end His tangible presence with His followers. Nevertheless, it was crucial that these early witnesses hear, see, and touch Jesus and affirm the physical reality of His resurrection (1 John 1:1-3).” (ETB LG, 66)

Read I John 1:1-3 (What was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have observed and have touched with our hands, concerning the word of life—²that life was revealed, and we have seen it and we testify and declare to you the eternal life that was with the Father and was revealed to us—³what we have seen and heard we also declare to you, so that you may also have

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fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ. ⁴We are writing these things so that our joy may be complete.”

In his gospel and his letters, John points out that he was a personal eyewitness to the events surrounding Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection.

Discuss: Why is it important that we report to others our experiences related to our faith?

Explain: As we pointed out above, sometimes it is hard for people to believe the events presented in the Bible. It is also hard for them to believe some of the promises given by the Lord. Our personal experiences provided tangible proof that God is at work in our lives. While people might be quick to deny the words of the Bible, it is hard for them to deny a changed life.

The account given by Mary and recorded by John provide proof that Jesus rose from the dead. We must believe the report of Mary. The apostle Paul notes this importance when he writes to the church at Corinth. Three times in 8 verses Paul expresses the importance of Christ’s resurrection.

- I Corinthians 15:14 and if Christ has not been raised, then our proclamation is in vain, and so is your faith.
- I Corinthians 15:17 And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is worthless; you are still in your sins.
- I Corinthians 15:19 If we have put our hope in Christ for this life only, we should be pitied more than anyone.

After expressing the futility of our faith if Jesus were not raised, he expresses the hope that comes because of Christ’s resurrection. In I Corinthians 15:20, Paul writes ²⁰“But as it is, Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.”

Summarize and Transition: Jesus told Mary that she was to report His approaching ascension to the disciples. She does so and on the day that He returns to the Father, angels again appear and tell the men that He will be coming again just as they saw Him go.

CONCLUDE

Guide and Review: As we celebrate Easter Sunday, let us not forget that it is Resurrection Sunday. What began as a sad day for Mary and her friends became a confusing day that eventually morphed into a day of celebration because He who was dead is now alive.

Prayer: Conclude the group time with a prayer of thanksgiving for the work of Christ on the cross and His resurrection.

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