

WEEK 3 of 9

SEEING FOR YOURSELF

John 4-5

OVERVIEW

Our faith receives confirmation over and over again as we believe in Jesus.

EYEWITNESS ACCOUNTS

DISCUSS

Out of these 8 news headlines, try to guess which 4 are fake.

FAKE – Giant Pumpkin Comes Alive to Take Over Atlanta

REAL – Dead Woman Told to Mow Her Lawn (NT News, Australia)

REAL – Buddhist ‘Iron Man’ found by Nazis is from Space (blogs.nature.com)

FAKE – Vitamins Linked to Facebook Rants

REAL – Stoned Wallabies Make Crop Circles (BBC News)

REAL – Dolphins Die of Heroin Overdose After Rave at Zoo (now.msn.com)

FAKE – Science Confirms Crying Bad for Your Heart

FAKE – Kenyan Ambassador Crippled by Cotton Ball

The Gospel of John, like the other three Gospels, is full of eyewitness accounts.

What makes John’s Gospel unique, however, are the accounts about the eyewitness accounts.

- John the Baptist tells others his account of Jesus’ baptism (John 1:32-34).
- Andrew tells Simon about his discovery of Jesus’ identity (1:41).
- Philip does the same with Nathanael (1:45).

THE WOMAN AT THE WELL

We will see more of this as we continue on in John 4-5. We pick it up where Jesus has just finished his conversation with the Samaritan Woman at the Well.³

John 4:28-30

²⁸ So the woman left her water jar and went away into town and said to the people, ²⁹ “Come, see a man who told me all that I ever did. Can this be the Christ?” ³⁰ They went out of the town and were coming to him.

³ The discussion between Jesus and the Woman at the Well is very well-known, and for that reason we will focus on its aftermath instead of its content.

So the Samaritan woman goes into her town and begins telling people about her encounter with Jesus. Look at how the Samaritan people respond, and notice how their response changes slightly within these verses.

John 4:39-42

³⁹ Many Samaritans from that town believed in him because of the woman's testimony, "He told me all that I ever did." ⁴⁰ So when the Samaritans came to him, they asked him to stay with them, and he stayed there two days. ⁴¹ And many more believed because of his word. ⁴² They said to the woman, "It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is indeed the Savior of the world."

The Samaritans in the town began by believing someone else's testimony, but they went on to discover it for themselves.

DISCUSS

How would you describe what is happening to their faith in verse 42? Did they believe more? Are they more sure now? Get them talking over this.

Somehow they fully believed, and yet when they experienced Jesus for themselves, their belief was deepened or furthered.

THE SECOND SIGN

We see this happen again as Jesus gives his second sign:

John 4:46-47

⁴⁶ So he came again to Cana in Galilee, where he had made the water wine. And at Capernaum there was an official whose son was ill. ⁴⁷ When this man heard that Jesus had come from Judea to Galilee, he went to him and asked him to come down and heal his son, for he was at the point of death.

Much like the first sign at the Wedding Feast, Jesus is the one being sought out.

John 4:48-50

⁴⁸ So Jesus said to him, "Unless you see signs and wonders you will not believe." ⁴⁹ The official said to him, "Sir, come down before my child dies." ⁵⁰ Jesus said to him, "Go; your son will live." The man believed the word that Jesus spoke to him and went on his way.

Notice the official immediately believed Jesus' word. As we read what happens next, look for similarities with the Samaritans in the previous section.

John 4:51-54

⁵¹ As he was going down, his servants met him and told him that his son was recovering. ⁵² So he asked them the hour when he began to get better, and they said to him, “Yesterday at the seventh hour the fever left him.” ⁵³ The father knew that was the hour when Jesus had said to him, “Your son will live.” And he himself believed, and all his household. ⁵⁴ This was now the second sign that Jesus did when he had come from Judea to Galilee.

DISCUSS

What is happening to the official’s faith in verse 53? This time it’s a little clearer that this official’s faith is made stronger, and he is now giving his account to all his household which inspires others to believe.

This deepening or confirmation of belief also happens after Jesus’ first sign. The disciples had already believed that Jesus was the Messiah (John 1:41), but his first sign confirmed their belief (John 2:11).

SEEING FOR YOURSELF

From the Woman at the Well and from the official whose son was healed, we can understand two enormous truths:

1. God is faithful to provide confirmation after people believe. John 4 is not the only place where this confirmation occurs. Before Moses led God’s people out of Egypt, God says to him, “when you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall serve God on this mountain” (Ex. 3:12).

In fact, the whole of our spiritual lives could be told through the lens of God’s continuing confirmation of his work in us. *For example, we believe God is leading us in a difficult direction, and when we obey he confirms it by sending us wise counsel to tell us we did the right thing.*

DISCUSS

What are some ways that you’ve seen or felt God confirm his work in people? *Your group will need to think about this, and you could have a story ready to help prod them on.*

What does this do in the person receiving God’s confirmation? *Answers could include: emboldens them toward more obedience, increases godly confidence, further deepens the trust they have in God, etc.*

Just as God confirmed Abram’s decision to leave his homeland by appearing to him in a strange land (Gen 12:7-9), God works to confirm our faith in him.

2. The second enormous truth is that we make disciples through this same confirming process. As we give account of what Jesus has done in us (like the Woman at the Well), Jesus is faithful to confirm our account in others.

CONSIDER

How might your attempts to make disciples change if you knew Jesus was going to confirm your account in them?

MISSING THE SIGN

However, we know from experience that sharing what Jesus has done does not always inspire belief in others.

Let's read what happens after this sign. Jesus goes to Jerusalem and finds many blind, lame, and paralyzed people waiting for healing:

John 5:5-10

⁵One man was there who had been an invalid for thirty-eight years. ⁶When Jesus saw him lying there and knew that he had already been there a long time, he said to him, "Do you want to be healed?" ⁷The sick man answered him, "Sir, I have no one to put me into the pool when the water is stirred up, and while I am going another steps down before me." ⁸Jesus said to him, "Get up, take up your bed, and walk." ⁹And at once the man was healed, and he took up his bed and walked. Now that day was the Sabbath.

This is Jesus' third sign,⁴ but the reaction to this sign is very different.

John 5:10-16

¹⁰So the Jews said to the man who had been healed, "It is the Sabbath, and it is not lawful for you to take up your bed." ¹¹But he answered them, "The man who healed me, that man said to me, 'Take up your bed, and walk.'" ¹²They asked him, "Who is the man who said to you, 'Take up your bed and walk'?" ¹³Now the man who had been healed did not know who it was, for Jesus had withdrawn, as there was a crowd in the place. ¹⁴Afterward Jesus found him in the temple and said to him, "See, you are well! Sin no more, that nothing worse may happen to you." ¹⁵The man went away and told the Jews that it was Jesus who had healed him. ¹⁶And this was why the Jews were persecuting Jesus, because he was doing these things on the Sabbath.

⁴ Although John does not number signs 3-7, most scholars agree on this one.

OBSERVE

How would you describe the once-paralyzed man's reaction to being healed (vv. 9, 15)? Answers will vary, but could include: odd, silent, strange, flat.
How would you describe the Jews' reaction to the healing (v. 10-12, 16)? Answers will vary, but could include: confused, antagonistic, legalistic.

Neither the man nor the Jews marvel at the healing.

YOUR SIGNS

DISCUSS

How would you have reacted if you had witnessed the healing take place? Answers will vary widely, and could include: belief, skepticism, joy, courage, etc.

Many think we would believe if we saw a sign like this, but that's not always true. In fact, Jesus addresses this in a parable in Luke. A dead man who is in torment asks Abraham to go back to warn his brothers to repent:

Luke 16:29-31

²⁹ But Abraham said, 'They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them.'
³⁰ And he said, 'No, father Abraham, but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent.'
³¹ He said to him, 'If they do not hear Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be convinced if someone should rise from the dead.'"

Everyone who follows Jesus has times when he confirms his work in them. Yet, we are not always looking for it. Even when we are, it can become a habit to dismiss these confirmations as our own imaginations.

- Our hearts are burdened for someone, but we forget to pray for them or ask them about their life.
- We feel led to do something difficult, but we make excuses and avoid it.
- The Holy Spirit puts it on our heart to sit and read the Bible, but we turn our attention to unfinished business elsewhere.

DISCUSS

What might be some other situations where we miss God's confirming work in us?

BEING FAITHFUL

The opposite of missing out on God's confirming work is **being thankful for what he's doing** and **being faithful to share what he has done**.

Just like the Samaritan Woman at the Well and the official whose son was healed, **we need to believe that Jesus is working in us right now** (through the Spirit) **and be thankful for that.**

Secondly, **we need to be faithful to share what Jesus has done.** As we share, God is faithful to confirm our account in other people. This is how people come to faith in Jesus: they hear of Jesus' faithfulness and discover his faithfulness for themselves.

These two acts – being thankful and being faithful to share – work together to build each other up as disciplines in our lives.

CONSIDER

What is something Jesus is doing in your life right now? What can you be thankful for today in this moment?

How is Jesus initiating moments and relationships where you can share about what he has done in your life?

PRAYER