

# John 20:30,31

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[ 0 : 00 ] To believe or not to believe? That is the question. That is the question that John, the Apostle John presents to us in his Gospel.

If you have read John's Gospel before, you might recognise these verses that come near the end in verse 30 and 31 of chapter 20.

It is coming to the end of his Gospel, isn't it? And we get this wonderful, clear, straightforward, no-nonsense statement of John's writing.

And verse 30 and 31, this is the shortest summary of John's theology and his purpose and the content of the whole book of John.

What is your Gospel about, John? These things are written, he says, that you will believe. That you will believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God.

[ 1 : 04 ] That is what this Gospel is all about. His aim centres on the beautifully simple, yet intricately complex, the wonderfully easy, yet demanding action of Christian belief.

Of belief in the man, Jesus Christ. Of course, John's not unique in this, is he? That idea of belief in Jesus Christ is all across the New Testament, particularly in the Gospels.

The word belief is used lots and lots by the other Gospel writers. Mark uses it 11 times, 14 in the Gospel of Matthew, 9 in Luke. But in comparison, John outweighs them all.

He mentions belief 98 times. Belief punctuates his whole narrative of the life and the death and the resurrection and the appearance of Jesus from the dead.

So, from the curious seeds of belief in Nicodemus in John 3, to the simple belief of a Samaritan woman in John 4.

[ 2 : 25 ] From the short-lived, superficial belief of those who eat bread and fish at the feeding of the 5,000. To the simple belief of a blind man.

From the struggles of doubting Thomas. And the growing belief of his disciples. This question of belief is what it's all about for John.

When you read his Gospel, John's main concern about you is what you believe about this person, Jesus. With John, it can never be just an interesting diversion.

Or one theory among many other equally valid theories of life and of religion. There is only one spectrum that concerns him.

One concern, it's the belief in Jesus spectrum. Of whether you believe who Jesus is, who he claims to be.

[ 3 : 25 ] So, in the coming weeks, we're going to trace the contours of this belief in John's Gospel. Who it's in.

What actually it is. What it isn't. What it does to a person when they believe. What it will change for you.

What it will lead to in your life. And strangely, as we begin to do that, we find actually, we can sense the landscape of the journey at the end here.

In John 20. In the verses that we read. Verses 30 and 31. They are such dense verses. Of writing. It's as if the gravity of the whole of John's Gospel is being pulled into just two verses at the end of chapter 20. Depending on where you slice them, you will see the whole of John's Gospel here in summary form.

[ 4 : 31 ] Now, theologians and writers have argued about who John writes his Gospel for. Who is the audience? Who is he aiming this at? Is it Jews?

Is it Hellenistic Jewish converts? Is it Gentiles? Is it believers? Is it non-believers? Is John wanting to speak to people who don't believe?

And he wants them to cross that line into belief? Or to help people who already do believe grow? Well, I think it's both.

John's aim is that you will believe for the first time. Or that you will keep believing and growing in your believing. So, I want us to see three things in this kind of kernel, essential passage here. This summary passage. The last two verses of chapter 20. First of all, the fuel of Christian belief. The fuel of Christian belief are the signs of Jesus.

[ 5 : 36 ] The signs of Jesus. John tells us here, doesn't he, that the belief that he wants us to experience, and to enact, belief in Jesus is founded upon when a person comes into contact with the signs, or the miracles that Jesus did.

See what he says here. Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. But these signs, these miracles that Jesus did, are written that you may believe. How do you come to believe? How do you come to become a Christian? It is by taking the time to see the signs and the miracles that Jesus did.

He uses the word signs, doesn't he, because they are things that Jesus did that point to something about himself. They're not just meant to be a bit of interesting info that you can stash away, but they are signs to point you somewhere, to move you somewhere.

Jesus' signs are miracles. They are self-revelation, as the means by which a person comes to believe something about him.

[ 7 : 05 ] So belief in Jesus starts here, and it continues, and it grows in the same place, with the signs that he did, with seeing them and contemplating them, with the miracles that Jesus did.

And if you think about it, I wonder if you think that that is a strange place to start. If you were to try and convince somebody the truth of the Christian faith, where would you begin, I wonder?

Francis Schaeffer was famously asked to speak at a university mission, and on the first day, a group of philosophy students appeared at one of these sessions.

But his first session, to their surprise, wasn't on the problem of suffering in the world, or the authenticity of the biblical manuscripts.

It wasn't on the philosophical, ontological reason for God's existence. But the first session that he led was a session on angels.

[ 8 : 16 ] He said, there's really no point you listening to my philosophical arguments if you don't grasp the profound importance of the existence of angels. It was an unusual place to start, wasn't it?

Would you start a conversation on the Christian faith about angels? angels. It was strange. But what Schaeffer grasped there, was that the Christian faith is at heart, a belief in supernatural reality. It is a supernatural faith in supernatural things. Where the truth is that reality is more than what we can just see in the world.

Christian belief believes in spiritual things. In the soul. In heaven. In hell. In unseen things.

In angels. And Schaeffer understood what at the heart was important for John here. For John, that is crucial.

[ 9 : 26 ] He has no hesitation, doesn't he, in laying his cards on the table and bringing up the subject of Jesus' miracles. His signs.

Of supernatural activity. People read the Gospels, don't they? And they say, well, water doesn't just turn into wine.

It must have been a magic trick. You can't feed a stadium of people with a few bits of bread and a couple of fish from a lunchbox. And you'd be right, wouldn't you?

And that is precisely what makes them special. The signs. They are miracles precisely because they don't happen in the natural world.

They are supernatural works. Because they don't normally naturally happen. And throughout the Gospel, it is people's response to the supernatural activity of Jesus.

[ 10 : 24 ] His miracles. To the signs that answer the question for them. To believe or not to believe. Earlier in chapter 2, he writes, just after Jesus turns the water into the wine at the wedding.

He says, this was the first of his signs that Jesus did in Cana of Galilee. And he manifested his glory. And his disciples believed him.

In him. The signs that the miracles shout out to us of something, don't they? In him. In him. They arouse belief.

They stir us up. They show us someone who is very familiar as a human being. Walking and talking around with his disciples on the earth. But yet, as a man, he is profoundly different. A man who is invested with glory. The glory of God. No other person who has ever walked on the face of this planet.

[ 11 : 28 ] Has or ever will be like him. Muhammad. Or Gandhi. Or the Pope. Or Buddha. Have been influential. Haven't they?

But no other person. No other person has done these signs. And these miracles. That manifest this kind of glory. Not forgetting, isn't it, that the verses that come immediately before our verses today. Where Thomas grasps the miracle of Jesus' resurrection. The scars are the signs given to Thomas. That turn him. That arouse belief in him. My Lord. My God. Dead people don't just get up and walk, do they? Dead people don't just appear in a room with the doors locked. It's a miracle. And Jesus' miracles, they are interruptions. They are intrusions into the natural world of supernatural power.

[ 12 : 35 ] It's not just the physical, visual miracles though that manifest his glory. Belief throughout the gospel and rejection hinges also on the glory that is seen in his words.

Earlier in John 7, people hear Jesus and they say, no one ever spoke like this man. Just before Jesus is arrested in John 18, he says, I am he.

The one that they're looking for. And they draw back and fall to the ground. It's not just the works of Jesus that manifest his glory.

But it's his words. In fact, it is, isn't it? Everything he does in his body. John opens the gospel by saying that the word became flesh.

And we've seen his glory. Everything about him. His words. His works. That familiarness of him.

[ 13 : 40 ] And yet the profoundly otherworldliness about him. The profoundly manifesting his glory. Profoundly supernatural words and works of Jesus.

And John tells us, doesn't he, he's got a huge wealth of material. He says that Jesus did many other signs but that they're not written in this book.

This is just to say that this is a sample in John's gospel. This is just a bite-sized chunk. As if he's saying, I could say more. But if I tried to say it all, we'd just be here forever.

I cannot exhaust all of the manifestations. All of the works and the words of Jesus that manifest his glory. But that leads us on to the question, doesn't it?

What exactly is John expecting us to see? What are we to hear? How can we see the signs when they happened so long ago?

[ 14 : 47 ] What should we look for today with our eyes? Should we believe in the gospel by seeing tears on the statue of the Virgin Mary in a church somewhere?

Should I believe in the gospel because there is a relic that I can go and see? Or there's a bit of cloth with the imprint of Jesus' face on it? Will I believe if I get a vision in a dream?

Or should I believe just because I feel like it's the right thing to do? Well, John says no. John understands actually that there is a separation, isn't there, between us now and 2,000 years later and the signs that were done by Jesus in history then.

That happened 2,000 years ago. He is not here right now in his body, is he? So that I can go and get wine from that water urn.

I cannot see him now walking and talking in his resurrected body. So the source of belief are the signs of belief. But secondly, the messenger of Christian belief is the apostles' writing.

[ 16 : 03 ] The apostles' writing. There's an interesting detail in verse 30. Jesus did many other signs. And here's the interesting bit that he adds in.

In the presence of his disciples. In the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book.

Why does he say that? Well, for starters, it shows, doesn't it, that the signs were authentic, that they really happened, that there were eyewitnesses.

But I think there's more to this. That comment in the presence of his disciples comes, doesn't it, in the context of Thomas' belief.

Who saw and believed in the presence of Jesus. Do you remember what Jesus says to him? Have you believed because you've seen? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believed.

Verse 29. Thomas is one of those disciples in whose presence Jesus did these amazing things. But after Thomas, there is going to be a break with that kind of experience.

[ 17 : 16 ] There will come a time when no one will believe in the circumstances that Thomas believed in. Jesus anticipates a time when people will be blessed when they don't believe in the signs in the physical presence of Jesus.

They will believe not because of physical manifestations of signs and of miracles, but through what has been written. The logic of verse 29, isn't it, is that those who have not seen, who have not been in the physical presence of Jesus, but believe are blessed.

And so John says, look, I am writing this so that that person can be you. So that even though you're not in his presence, you can believe and you can be blessed.

John says that his book, his words, John and the other apostles, those who write down the signs as a record, are the link, aren't they, between those who have seen in the presence of Jesus and those who will believe through their word.

So today, the way to experience the signs and miracles of Jesus is in the written word about them. The medium, the vehicle, if you like, of the words is actually a big part of the message.

[ 19 : 01 ] Jesus has decided not to give us pictures, has he? He's not given us illustrations in terms of physical things.

He's not given us a video or a cartoon. He's given us words. These signs are written that we may believe.

The signs that lead us to believe are given in oral and literary form rather than visual form. And that is particularly challenging for us, isn't it, in our visual heavy culture, in our image-based world.

Maybe it feels a little bit dull, doesn't it, to come and sit and look at words on a page. That is not a very attractive thing today. But that is exactly how Jesus has decided to operate here.

Can't God just appear to me at the end of my bed? Can't he just appear on the TV screen and interrupt Fiona Bruce? No, because belief in his apostles' testimony is part of the question of belief.

[ 20 : 19 ] It is part of what belief actually is. To take God at his word. To listen to his voice.

And to trust in it. And John says these words aren't just any other words that you can read in any other book. It's interesting, the word written there, these things are written, is the same word that he would use to quote the Old Testament.

You know when he would say, it is written in the Old Testament. It's the same word here. He's saying, isn't he, that my words in this gospel are on a par with Old Testament scripture.

This gospel is inspired by God. He has, through me, written these words on this page. These words in this place here, they are the place to experience the signs of Jesus today.

The fuel of belief, the signs of Jesus, the messenger of belief, the apostles' word. Thirdly and lastly, the goal of Christian belief. The goal of Christian belief, life in his name.

[ 21 : 36 ] Life in his name. I heard someone on the radio the other day saying, wherever you find the divine is fine. And that's what people think, isn't it?

There is this kind of fluid goop of truth that we just float around in. Actually, really, it's just truth is basically what you want it to be, isn't it?

And John is really clear. He wants us to accept propositional truths. He wants us to accept what he's saying as right and as wrong, of true and of false.

And those things are really clear and black and white often in his gospel. But John's purpose is not just academic. Look at verse 31 again.

That by believing, we will have life in his name. It isn't simply that we agree with John, is it?

[ 22 : 39 ] That we kind of assent to what he's saying. That we agree about who Jesus is. That we share in his opinion about the identity of Jesus. That the name of Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God.

Because that name itself can never just be about an incidental piece of trivia. If the man, Jesus Christ, is a supernatural man, if he is God, manifested in a body, if he is invested with the glory of God, if he is the Christ, the promised king to rescue God's people from death, if he died and rose from the dead, and is alive today, belief in him will never just be a nice add-on, will it?

It will never just be a lifestyle choice. It can only lead to one thing. Life. Life in his name.

Now and forever. Life in John is this kind of all-embracing term for salvation in the gospel.

It's not just a never-ending kind of life that just never stops, but a full and restful and fulfilling, glorious life. The apostle Paul says, doesn't he, that the wages of sin, the result of sin, when we rebel against God, it is death.

[ 24 : 12 ] The wages, or the end of belief, is life. Belief in this name of Jesus will bring a reversal to the normal way of things in the world, in your life.

It will bring a reversal of all that is wrong with you and with me and with this world. It will reverse and change the outcome of your life. this belief is never just an end in itself.

So these are his intentions and they are good, aren't they? Not to shackle you, not to close your mind, but to direct you to this goal of personal life in this one person, Jesus.

Jesus. Maybe over the next week read through John's gospel if you've got a bible. And when you do that and you get to this point at the end of chapter 20, it's as if, isn't it, John is saying, great, you've read my gospel, now go back.

Go back to the beginning. Go back and ponder what this will mean for you to have belief in Jesus. Go back and revisit the signs.

[ 25 : 30 ] Go back and revisit his words and his works. Revisit him. Review where you are with this belief. Maybe bring a friend along for the journey next time.

Ask the question, to believe or not to believe. Let's pray.