

## Easter | That You May Believe, John 20:31 | April 23, 2017

Sandwiched between two incredible stories at the end of his gospel, the Apostle John makes a powerful comment. It's towards the end of his life, probably around 80-90 AD, fifty years or so after Christ's resurrection. He has seen the church explode into existence, persecution increase, all of his fellow apostles violently martyred for their faith.

### John 20:31

But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

Things settle down after Easter. Attendance dips. We get busy with other things. We've celebrated the big day and can coast for a while – except the opposite happened two thousand years ago. In the months after the resurrection, the church exploded into being.

Secular historians cannot explain how Christianity survived its first couple of centuries. It doesn't make sense.

- Christ's ministry was too short; only three years.
- He was a carpenter turned Rabbi turned Messiah
- Disciples that were fishermen, laborers, even a tax collector.
- This didn't fit the mold to have authority. When Jesus died, He only had a handful of followers; John 6:66-67, many disciples quit following Him, He asked the twelve, "You don't want to leave too, do you?"
- A new religion cannot survive losing its leader so quickly, any other comparable scenario had the religion gone within a generation or two.
  
- Two dozen years later, Suetonius, the Roman historian, records that the conflict between the Jews and followers of Chrestus had become so significant they were all banned from Rome.
- Suetonius later records that the fire that consumed much of Rome in 64 AD under Nero's reign, and largely believed to have been started by him, was used by Nero to blame the Christians and initiate large scale persecution.

It should not have survived the first century. Yet less than three hundred years after Christ's death, the church had grown so much that it became the official religion of the Roman empire under the emperor Constantine.

Why? Because it's true. There is no explanation other than God. These followers of Jesus went after the rest of the world with such a fervor because they had seen a man brutally put to death, without question, and then spent the next 40 days ([Acts 1:3](#)) interacting with Him before He ascended to heaven!

Even in the details after the resurrection we see evidence of the truth:

- Women discover the empty tomb; a woman was not a credible witness!  
**Luke 24:9-11**  
**<sup>9</sup>When they came back from the tomb, they told all these things to the Eleven and to all the others. <sup>10</sup>It was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the others with them who told this to the apostles. <sup>11</sup>But they did not believe the women, because their words seemed to them like nonsense.**
- Speaking of the disciples, Matthew, Mark, Luke, John all write about how they didn't get it, didn't know what was going to happen, made mistakes, juvenile arguments, etc. People making up a religion write themselves as the hero, not the ones who are consistently wrong.
- And they all died for it. Of the eleven, only John lived to be an old man. The other ten were scourged, stoned, beheaded, killed with spears, murdered with swords, five of them crucified, Peter was crucified upside down. If they made it up, someone would have broken. Nobody dies those kinds of death over a lie.

Which brings us back to John. He has written his gospel with one purpose; to make the case for Jesus being God.

**John 20:31**

**But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.**

Little is written about the forty days between the resurrection and Jesus's ascension to heaven; we know it was forty days from Acts 1:3:

**Acts 1:3**

**After his suffering, he presented himself to them and gave many convincing proofs that he was alive. He appeared to them over a period of forty days and spoke about the kingdom of God.**

We learn from 1 Corinthians 15:6 that during that time Jesus appeared to a number of people on a number of occasions, at one point even to more than 500 at the same time.

Yet Matthew, Mark and Luke, all written long before John's gospel, tell little to nothing (depending on the gospel) about those forty days. John, after half a century of sharing the faith, of preaching the word, focuses on two stories that he sees as a critical part in his readers believing.

### John 20:24-29

<sup>24</sup> Now Thomas (also known as Didymus), one of the Twelve, was not with the disciples when Jesus came. <sup>25</sup> So the other disciples told him, “We have seen the Lord!” But he said to them, “Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe.”

<sup>26</sup> A week later his disciples were in the house again, and Thomas was with them.

Though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you!” <sup>27</sup> Then he said to Thomas, “Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe.”

<sup>28</sup> Thomas said to him, “My Lord and my God!”

<sup>29</sup> Then Jesus told him, “Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.”

### John 21:15-19

<sup>15</sup> When they had finished eating, Jesus said to Simon Peter, “Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?”

“Yes, Lord,” he said, “you know that I love you.”

Jesus said, “Feed my lambs.”

<sup>16</sup> Again Jesus said, “Simon son of John, do you love me?”

He answered, “Yes, Lord, you know that I love you.”

Jesus said, “Take care of my sheep.”

<sup>17</sup> The third time he said to him, “Simon son of John, do you love me?”

Peter was hurt because Jesus asked him the third time, “Do you love me?” He said, “Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you.”

Jesus said, “Feed my sheep. <sup>18</sup> Very truly I tell you, when you were younger you dressed yourself and went where you wanted; but when you are old you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will dress you and lead you where you do not want to go.” <sup>19</sup> Jesus said this to indicate the kind of death by which Peter would glorify God. Then he said to him, “Follow me!”

We are all Thomas and Peter. Our faith has faltered. We have made bad decisions. Of all the stories Paul could have chosen, he chooses these that we may believe.

### Ephesians 2:10 (NLT)

For we are God’s masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago.

Our tendency is to put the men and women in scripture up on this pedestal, to think, of course they were able to do that for God – they’re BIBLE people. But they doubted. They failed. They were wrong. They were angry with one another. And in those moments of failure Jesus did not react how we would – with anger and judgment, He gently reminded them that He does not evaluate their potential on where they have been, but on the God that empowers them going forward.