

# Blessed Are Those Who Believe



## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week’s Study:** *John 8:54–58, Gen. 12:3, Rom. 4:1–5, John 12:1–8, John 19:4–22, John 20:19–31, Daniel 2, Daniel 7.*

**Memory Text:** “Jesus said to him, ‘Thomas, because you have seen Me, you have believed. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed’ ” (*John 20:29, NKJV*).

Throughout his Gospel, John has a diversity of people—people with different backgrounds, beliefs, and experiences—all testifying to who Jesus was.

“Behold the Lamb of God!” (*John 1:36, NKJV*). “We have found the Messiah” (*John 1:41, NKJV*). “We have found Him of whom Moses . . . wrote” (*John 1:45, NKJV*). “Rabbi, You are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!” (*John 1:49, NKJV*). “Could this be the Christ?” (*John 4:29, NKJV*). “We ourselves have heard Him and we know that this is indeed the Christ, the Savior of the world” (*John 4:42, NKJV*). “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life” (*John 6:68, NKJV*). “I believe that You are the Christ, the Son of God, who is to come into the world” (*John 11:27, NKJV*). “Though I was blind, now I see” (*John 9:25, NKJV*). “Behold your King!” (*John 19:14, NKJV*). “I find no fault in Him” (*John 19:6, NKJV*). “My Lord and my God!” (*John 20:28, NKJV*).

Who were some of these people, and why did they testify as they did to the identity of Jesus?

\* Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, November 16.

## Harking Back to Abraham

Jesus was not shy in declaring who He was, nor in calling on witnesses to testify to who He was, even witnesses who were long gone, including Abraham. “ ‘Your father Abraham rejoiced to see My day, and he saw it and was glad’ ” (*John 8:56, NKJV*).

**Why** was Abraham’s witness so important that it was included in John’s gospel? (*Gen. 12:3, Gen. 18:16–18, Gen. 26:4, Matt. 1:1, Acts 3:25.*)

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“Through type and promise God ‘preached before the gospel unto Abraham.’ Galatians 3:8. And the patriarch’s faith was fixed upon the Redeemer to come. Said Christ to the Jews, ‘Your father Abraham rejoiced that he should see My day; and he saw it, and was glad.’ John 8:56, R.V., margin. The ram offered in place of Isaac represented the Son of God, who was to be sacrificed in our stead. When man was doomed to death by transgression of the law of God, the Father, looking upon His Son, said to the sinner, ‘Live: I have found a ransom.’ ”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 154.

Abraham was the father of the Jewish nation. He received the promise that, through him, all nations would be blessed. This blessing came through the Messiah, born through his lineage.

Abraham was also the father of those who respond to God in faith (*Heb. 11:8, 17–19*). His willingness to sacrifice his son Isaac (*Genesis 22*), the son of promise, was not only an evidence of faith but a window into the plan of salvation.

When Jesus said, “ ‘Your father Abraham rejoiced to see My day’ ” (*John 8:56, NKJV*), the leaders responded, “ ‘You are not yet fifty years old, and have You seen Abraham?’ ” (*John 8:57, NKJV*).

Jesus’ answer was astounding. “ ‘Most assuredly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I AM’ ” (*John 8:58, NKJV*).

Jesus uses language reminiscent of what God said to Moses at the burning bush. This was a claim to be God, the self-existent One. No question, the leaders understood the implication of what He said because they then “took up stones to throw at Him” (*John 8:59, NKJV*).

**Read Romans 4:1–5. How does Paul use this story of Abraham to reveal the great truth of salvation by faith alone, without the deeds of the law? How do these verses help us understand the idea of Abraham as the father of those who live by faith?**

## The Witness of Mary

Six days before Passover, Jesus came to visit Mary, Martha, and their brother Lazarus, whom Jesus had raised to life. Simon, who had been healed of leprosy, hosted a feast in appreciation for what Jesus had done for him. Martha was serving, and Lazarus was sitting at the table with the guests (*John 12:1–8*).

**What** was the significance of Mary’s actions here? How was this a witness to who Jesus really was? (*See John 12:1–3.*)

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The perfume was very expensive, worth about a year’s wages for the common laborer. Mary probably brought this gift as an expression of gratitude to the Savior for the forgiveness of her sins and for the resurrection of her brother. She intended it to be used someday for the burial of Jesus. But then she heard that He would soon be anointed King. In that case, she would be the first to bring Him honor.

Mary probably did not intend for her gesture to be noticed, but John notes, “The house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume” (*John 12:3, ESV*). Judas responded with a quick rebuke, stating that the perfume should have been sold and the proceeds given to the poor. Jesus immediately put Mary at ease by stating, “ ‘Let her alone; . . . The poor you have with you always, but Me you do not have always’ ” (*John 12:7, 8, NKJV*).

A recurring theme runs through the Gospel. Jesus knows what is in people (*John 2:24, 25; John 6:70, 71; John 13:11; John 16:19*). In this instance at Simon’s feast, Jesus knows what is in Judas. John is careful to point out who Judas is—a self-serving thief (*John 12:6*).

“The fragrant gift which Mary had thought to lavish upon the dead body of the Saviour she poured upon His living form. At the burial its sweetness could only have pervaded the tomb; now it gladdened His heart with the assurance of her faith and love. . . . And as He went down into the darkness of His great trial, He carried with Him the memory of that deed, an earnest of the love that would be His from His redeemed ones forever.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 560.

**Jesus knew what was in the heart of Mary and the heart of Judas. He knows what’s in your heart, as well. What should this truth tell us about the need of Christ as our righteousness, transforming us and covering us, as well?**

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## The Unwitting Witness of Pilate

Time and again, John records the attempts of the religious leaders to seize Jesus, to bring Him to trial, and to sentence Him to death. A theme in John's Gospel, stated often by Jesus, is that His time or hour had not yet come, by which He meant the time for His crucifixion (*John 2:4; John 7:6, 8, 30; John 12:7, 23, 27; John 13:1; John 17:1*).

Now the hour had come. Jesus was arrested in the Garden of Gethsemane, brought before Annas, then Caiaphas the high priest, then twice before Pilate.

John has called upon many witnesses from every walk of life to testify that Jesus was the Christ. Now John calls upon Pilate, the governor who tried Jesus. This was an important testimony because Pilate was a Roman, a governor, and a judge; most of the other witnesses were Jews and commoners.

**How** is Pilate's verdict connected to the theme of John's Gospel? *John 18:38, John 19:4–22.*

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Jesus was brought to Pilate early on Friday morning (*John 18:28*). His plan was to dispatch the prisoner quickly to His fate. But Jesus' demeanor drew Pilate's attention. The governor questioned Jesus closely and heard from His lips, " 'For this purpose I was born and for this purpose I have come into the world—to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth listens to my voice' " (*John 18:37, ESV*).

Though the governor ultimately condemned Jesus to death, he nonetheless three times proclaimed Jesus innocent (*John 18:38; John 19:4, 6*). And over the cross he wrote the words " 'Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews' " (*John 19:19, ESV*), completing his witness to who Jesus is. And yet despite his testimony of Christ's innocence, he nevertheless condemned Jesus to death.

Pilate had the Truth Himself standing before him and yet—allowing the mob to bully him—*Pilate sentenced Jesus to death anyway!* What a tragic example of not following what your conscience and heart tell you is correct!

**What can we learn from Pilate's example about the dangers of allowing popular sentiment, even pressure, to keep us from doing what we believe is right?**

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## The Witness of Thomas

**Read** John 20:19–31. What can we learn from the story of Thomas about faith and doubt? What major mistake did Thomas make?

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Christ appeared to the disciples after His resurrection, when they were shut up together in a room because of fear. Thomas was not with them. Later, he heard the reports of the Resurrection from the other disciples, but he despaired. It did not fit his picture of the kingdom. And, too, he surely must have wondered why Jesus would have revealed Himself to the others when he himself was not there.

Thomas said, “ ‘Unless I see in His hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe’ ” (*John 20:25, NKJV*).

Thomas was dictating the conditions of his faith. This approach to faith in Jesus has appeared again and again in John. Nicodemus answered Jesus with, “ ‘How can a man be born when he is old?’ ” (*John 3:4, NKJV*). The woman at the well asked, “ ‘Sir, you have no bucket, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water?’ ” (*John 4:11, NRSV*). The crowd who had been fed with the loaves and fishes asked, “ ‘What sign are you going to give us?’ ” (*John 6:30, NRSV*).

It is this “see and then believe” perspective that the Gospel of John counters. When Jesus met Thomas after the Resurrection, He invited him to come, see, and touch His risen body. But then He says, “ ‘Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed’ ” (*John 20:29, ESV*).

“God never asks us to believe, without giving sufficient evidence upon which to base our faith. His existence, His character, the truthfulness of His word, are all established by testimony that appeals to our reason; and this testimony is abundant. Yet God has never removed the possibility of doubt. Our faith must rest upon evidence, not demonstration.”—Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ*, p. 105.

Through the Word of God, through the Creation, and through personal experience, we have been given an incredible amount of evidence for our faith in Jesus.

**If someone were to ask you *Why do you believe in Jesus?* what would you say?**

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## Our Witness of Jesus

Again and again, as John presents witnesses to Jesus, his point is to bring us to a sweeping conclusion: “And truly Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name” (*John 20:30, 31, NKJV*).

Imagine having been there, in person, in the flesh, and having seen Jesus do many of these miracles. We’d certainly believe, wouldn’t we? We’d like to think so; but, in some ways, we have *even more* reasons to believe in Jesus than did those who actually saw the miracles.

Why?

**What** are some of the things that we have today that those living at the time of Jesus didn’t have that should help us believe? (*See, for example, Matt. 24:2, Matt. 24:14, Matt. 24:6–8.*)

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And that’s because we have not only the powerful accounts in John’s Gospel, but also the great advantage of seeing so much of what Jesus and other Bible writers predicted would come true, such as the destruction of the temple (*Matt. 24:2*), the spread of the gospel around the world (*Matt. 24:14*), the great falling away (*2 Thess. 2:3*), and the world continuing to be a fallen and evil place (*Matt. 24:6–8*). All during the life and ministry of Jesus, His following remained a small and harassed group of men and women who, by all human standards, should have vanished from history a long time ago. How could they have known, as we do, that all these things would come to pass? And they have. In fact, our own faith itself exists as a fulfillment of Jesus’ own prophecy that the gospel would go to all the world.

And, today, about two thousand years later, as followers of Jesus, we also have the privilege of bearing witness to Jesus and to what He has done for us. It is not by the reasoning of Nathaniel, Nicodemus, the woman of Samaria, or the teachings of the Pharisees that we can know Jesus as the Messiah for ourselves. It is by the reading of the Scriptures under the convicting power of the Holy Spirit that we accept Jesus as the Savior of the world.

And then, each one of us, in our way, and out of our own relationship with God, can have a story to tell. Our story may not be as dramatic as seeing the dead raised or someone blind from birth healed, but that doesn’t matter. What matters is that we know Jesus for ourselves, and in our own way bear witness to Him, as did those in John’s Gospel.

**Further Thought:** Read Ellen G. White, “The Test of Faith,” pp. 145–155, in *Patriarchs and Prophets*; “In Pilate’s Judgment Hall,” pp. 723–740, in *The Desire of Ages*.

Thomas “cast himself at the feet of Jesus crying, ‘My Lord and my God.’ ”

“Jesus accepted his acknowledgment, but gently reproved his unbelief: ‘Thomas, because thou hast seen Me, thou hast believed: blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed.’ The faith of Thomas would have been more pleasing to Christ if he had been willing to believe upon the testimony of his brethren. Should the world now follow the example of Thomas, no one would believe unto salvation; for all who receive Christ must do so through the testimony of others.

“Many who are given to doubt excuse themselves by saying that if they had the evidence which Thomas had from his companions, they would believe. They do not realize that they have not only that evidence, but much more. Many who, like Thomas, wait for all cause of doubt to be removed, will never realize their desire. They gradually become confirmed in unbelief. Those who educate themselves to look on the dark side, and murmur and complain, know not what they do. They are sowing the seeds of doubt, and they will have a harvest of doubt to reap. At a time when faith and confidence are most essential, many will thus find themselves powerless to hope and believe.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 807, 808.

### Discussion Questions:

- 1 What was the essential difference in the expressions of faith by Abraham and by Thomas? What can we learn from their stories?
- 2 In class, let those who are willing bear witness to Jesus, as we have seen done in the Gospel of John. Though the accounts differ, what do people say, and how do they all bear witness to the same Lord?
- 3 Pilate asked a very philosophical question: “What is truth?” Give your answer to that question in light of all we have studied in John.
- 4 Look at the prophecies of Daniel 2 and 7. Though those in the time of Jesus had these two chapters, what great advantage do we have today that they didn’t have back then, in terms of seeing those prophecies fulfilled and thus having even more reasons to believe?

## From Pin Trader to Camper

By ANDREW MCCHESENEY

Jacob Pierce's whole family loved trading pins, and they fanned out to find new pins at the International Pathfinder Camporee in the United States.

Then Mother saw a man with an Alaska pin. Knowing that Jacob loved Alaskan nature, she tried to convince the man to make a trade.

"I can't trade," he said. "It is a one-of-a-kind pin for pastors in Alaska."

Mother's interest only grew. "What do you do up in Alaska?" she asked.

The man introduced himself as Tobin Dodge, director of Alaska Camps, a mission initiative of the Seventh-day Adventist Church's Alaska Conference, which sponsors camps for children ages 8 to 17 every summer.

"Could my son work there?" Mother asked.

"Yes, we take counselors-in-training at 16 and counselors at 18," he said.

Jacob jumped at the idea of spending the summer in Alaska. He joined the camp staff—and went three years in a row.

The camp experience can be challenging, he said. One year, he enjoyed spending time with an Alaska Native boy at Camp Polaris, located on Lake Aleknagik in southwestern Alaska. They shared an interest in nature and climbed Jackknife Mountain, which looms above the camp. But the boy refused to behave. He also used vulgar language and seemed more interested in promoting superstitions than hearing Bible truth. He blamed a rainy day on a boy who had killed a spider, saying, "If you kill a spider, it rains."

Jacob grew frustrated. But at the end of camp, the boy gave Jacob a hug and walked over to his father. As he watched the two, Jacob suddenly began to understand the boy's behavior. The boy was practically raising himself.

"Most of the kids don't have any Christian background at all," Jacob, 20, said in an interview at Camp Polaris. "That's what makes it really an eye-opener and, to me, an amazing mission field."

He said the spiritual battles at Camp Polaris are different from those at other summer camps sponsored by the Alaska Conference because it is comprised almost entirely of Alaska Native children, who often face struggles with trauma, superstition, and substance abuse.

"But being here is worth it," he said. "It is a calling that is stronger than any that I have seen. God really needs volunteers here. This is a mission field."



*Thank you for your 2016 Thirteenth Sabbath Offering that helped repair and expand Camp Polaris so more children could attend. Part of this quarter's Thirteenth Sabbath Offering will help open a center of influence at the Adventist church in Bethel, Alaska. The Bethel Church sends local children to Camp Polaris every year.*