



BELIEF BARRIERS

S H A T T E R I N G O U R
S T R O N G H O L D S O F D O U B T

EXTRA STUDY NOTES

WEEK 1: BELIEF BARRIER OF RELIGIOSITY

John 2:23-25

Many of the people who 'believed' in Jesus at His point were only focused on the miracles He did and perhaps what He could do for them rather than who He was and the message He proclaimed.

John 3:1-16

V2 Nicodemus could have come at night in order not to be disturbed by the many people who were believing in Jesus. But most likely he came at night because he was afraid what his fellow Pharisees would think. Either way, Jesus accepted him without condemning him.

V2 Nicodemus was obviously curious but notice he doesn't ask a question. Jesus knew what was in his heart.

V3 The words 'truly, truly' in Greek are 'amen, amen' meaning 'it is so'. Using these words before or after a statement (or prayer) is claiming that the content is absolutely true. Here, Jesus is claiming knowledge and authority in the kingdom of God.

V3 The phrase 'born again' can also mean 'born from above'. Jesus intentionally uses the double meaning to make Nic think. Understanding the metaphor of 'rebirth' is crucial for understanding what it means to enter the kingdom of God. The metaphor conveys a sense of humility, complete reliance on God, learning a new value system, as well as citizenship and allegiance to a new kingdom.

V5 Born of water – most likely refers to baptism, specifically baptism as a sign of repentance.

V6 The word 'flesh' here could mean our sinful nature or simply physical birth – either way it is vastly different than life from the Holy Spirit.

V8 The Greek word 'pnuema' can mean 'spirit, wind or breath'. Jesus' explanation here would probably have reminded Nic of Ezekiel 37:1-14. The mystery of 'new life' isn't something we can completely understand.

V12 We can't attempt to understand calculus without first understanding more basic mathematical concepts like addition and multiplication. It is the same in the spiritual realm. We must start with basic evidence that points to spiritual truths rather than being confused and turned off by more complex spiritual concepts like the Trinity or why good people suffer.

V13 The title Son of Man points to both the human and divine nature of Jesus (Daniel 7:13).

V14 'Lifted up' can mean 'lifted up on the cross' AND 'exalted'. It is likely John used both meanings intentionally.

V16 'so loved' can mean 'God loved the world so much' or 'God loved the world in this way'.

V16 The phrase 'only son' is 'monogenes' in Greek (literally 'one gene'). It means that Jesus is made of the same stuff as God the Father, the same nature.

V16 The end result of belief (trust) in Christ is not just a rescue from death, but a rebirth into a different kind of life, one that is never-ending. The important thing is its quality not just its quantity.

Note – Throughout the gospel of John, we can see Nic grow in his trust of Jesus. He defends Jesus in front of the other Pharisees (John 7:50–51) and helped with His burial (John 19:39–42).

WEEK 2: BELIEF BARRIER OF SEXUAL IMMORALITY

John 4:1-45

Notice the contrast between Nicodemus (a Jewish religious leader, well-educated, well-respected, and highly moral man) and the woman at the well (a Samaritan woman, lonely outcast, not well educated in the Scriptures).

V7 Jesus initiating the conversation was surprising because men and women did not regularly converse in public unless they knew each other. Additionally, most Jews hated Samaritans because they were a mix of Jew and Gentile bloodlines and they created a religion for themselves that the Jews considered heretical.

V10 'Living water' was a phrase already in use to refer to flowing water as opposed to standing or still water.

V12 Both Jews and Samaritans honored Jacob as a great historical figure. Digging wells was an arduous task because they had to be deep in order to find water. Jacob's well was one of the deepest in the region (Genesis 33:18-20, 48:21-22).

V16-18 Jesus is very intentional revealing the sin in the woman's heart, but it is done completely out of love because people who don't know they have a need cannot respond to that need.

V20 The woman tries to distract Jesus with a religious dilemma. What debates do we engage in, instead of addressing the need in people's hearts for a relationship with God? What debates do we bring up instead of dealing with our own heart issues?

V21 Jews only worshipped at the temple in Jerusalem. Samaritans only worshipped on Mount Gerizim. Both the Jews and the Samaritans put great importance on their place of worship, so Jesus' explanation would have been offensive for both groups.

V22 Jesus turns her question that was meant to derail the conversation into an opportunity to bridge to the heart of the matter: true worship and knowing God!

V23 Worship in spirit = Genuine worship happens when God's Spirit moves in our own spirit to glorify Him. Worship in truth = Real worship is worshipping God for who He truly is, not who we want Him to be or who we make Him out to be.

V28 Left her water jar = This phrase indicates a change in priorities. She forgot about her daily chore (Matthew 6:31) and left something of great value behind (Matthew 6:24).

V29 The woman uses her past sins to point people to Christ. Some of them go to Him physically (John 4:35) but also believe in Him spiritually (John 4:41-42).

V31-37 This whole encounter is a lesson for Jesus' disciples as well as for us – the purpose of teaching others about Jesus is so that they can go and do the same (fishers of men).

John 8:1-11

This is another example of how Jesus responds to people trapped in sexual immorality. Jesus does not condone or ignore the sin of adultery. There is no doubt she (and the man) were guilty and deserved to be stoned to death. But Jesus shows mercy over punishment and desires true repentance by not continuing to live in sin.

WEEK 3: BELIEF BARRIER OF NEARSIGHTEDNESS

John 6:1-69

V14 The Greek word for 'sign' in this verse is 'semion'. It refers to something that points to a greater reality. In this case, that Jesus is who He claimed to be – God with us!

V15 The Jewish people wanted a king to overthrow Roman occupation.

V20 'It is I' in Greek is literally 'I AM'. This is the same way God identifies Himself in Exodus 3:13-14. John often uses this wording to show that Jesus is God (like v35).

V27 God the Father 'set his seal' on Jesus means that God has appointed Him for a specific purpose (to bring salvation), has given Him authority and/or approves of Him.

V28 'Works of God' here indicates they were trying to rely on rituals, customs and religious traditions to 'earn' salvation.

V30-32 refers to events in Exodus 16:4-36.

V34 The people express their desire for what Jesus is offering, but they are still thinking in terms of physical bread that will satisfy their physical hunger.

V52 The Greek word for 'disputed' is 'emachonto' which can refer to verbal or even physical fighting. The people have gone from seeking, to complaining, to fighting!

V52-59 Some of the people were so focused on material things that they thought Jesus was talking about cannibalism. Others would have understood Jesus was using symbolism, but because they were thinking of Jesus in terms of an earthly king, they could not understand how He was referring to His suffering and sacrificing Himself.

V60 The disciples referred to here are different than 'the twelve' in v67.

V61 In Greek the word 'offended' is skandalizo (similar to 'scandalize' in English). In this context, it means something that disrupts their way of thinking, like a 'stumbling block'.

V63 Simply seeing, holding, or touching food is not enough. It must be consumed. In the same way, faith in Christ is not the same as intellectual knowledge. Saving faith means receiving Christ in the deepest parts of ourselves.

V66-69 Many people abandoned Jesus because He challenged them to think spiritually and eternally, rather than physically and temporally. However, Peter has a different reaction. Even though he doesn't understand completely, he does know that there is no other place to turn to compared with Jesus.

WEEK 4: BELIEF BARRIER OF FALSE BELIEF

John 8:31-38

V31 John often uses the generic term 'the Jews' to refer to the Jewish religious leaders and those who follow them.

To 'abide' in His word not only means to have a fixed determination to obey what Jesus says, but also to have an ongoing deep relationship with Him.

V32 'Truth' refers to a true knowledge about God which is closely associated with Jesus' own person and work.

True 'freedom' is found in forgiveness through Jesus where sin no longer rules one's life but He does.

V33 These Jews failed to realize they were slaves to sin. Not only that, they denied the reality of Israel's history – they were slaves in Egypt, they were carried off into captivity by Assyria and Babylon, and at this time they were occupied by the Roman Empire.

V34 Sin promises freedom but it never delivers on that promise. Those who keep practicing sin will find they are unable to free themselves from continuing in that sin. (This continual walk in sin is what Jesus is referring to as opposed to Christians who give in to the temptation of sin at times.)

V35-36 The word 'slave' in Greek is 'doulos' which means bondservant. Bondservants often lived in the master's house but were not free and were not part of the family as children are. So, in this verse, Jesus is making the point that freedom in Him is not only freedom from being a slave to sin, but is also freedom to become children of God having a loving relationship with Him.

V38 In this verse Jesus hints at who their 'father' really is. In v44, He makes it clear that their 'father' is neither God nor Abraham, but the Devil himself!

In the following verses, the conflict escalates. Their arrogance leads to insults (v41) and even accusations of insanity (v48). Jesus responds with blunt condemnation as well as a deliberate statement about His divinity (v58) by declaring 'before Abraham was, I AM!'"

WEEK 5: BELIEF BARRIER OF DISAPPOINTMENT

John 11:1-48

- V1** The Lazarus resurrected by Jesus is NOT the same person as the Lazarus mentioned in the parable in Luke 16:19–31.
- V4** When Jesus goes to Bethany, he arrives four days after Lazarus has died (v17). Doing the math, this means that when Jesus gets the message about Lazarus, he is already dead.
- V5-6** Notice that it was out of love that Jesus waited. He knew that was the best and most loving thing to do, even if it didn't seem that way to Mary and Martha.
- V8** Previously, when Jesus referred to himself as the 'I AM' (10:31), the Jewish religious leaders considered it blasphemy punishable by death.
- V10** 'Walking in the light' refers to the knowledge and will of God. Jesus uses this metaphor to emphasize their need to follow Him, the Light of the world. Even though at times it might seem foolish or dangerous, they are as safe as God allows them to be in His sovereign will.
- V25** Jesus uses another "I AM" statement referring to Himself as God (Exodus 3:14).
- V26** 'never die' in Greek is literally 'never die into the age'. The repetition carries the same meaning as we would say in English 'never, ever die'.
- V27** Martha confesses what she does believe, not what she doesn't understand. Using the phrase 'who is coming into the world' refers to the prophecy of the coming king (Zechariah 9:9).
- V28** Rabbis did not generally instruct women, but Jesus is a different kind of Teacher!
- V34** The phrase 'deeply moved' in Greek denotes a general deep emotion but can be either positive (compassion) or negative (anger).
- V35** 'Wept' translates a Greek term that implies more quiet tears rather than 'wailing' like the other people who were mourning.
- V35** With only 2 words and 9 letters in English, many people think this is the shortest verse in the Bible, but if you include the Old Testament, Job 3:2 is only 2 words with 6 letters. However, if you look at the original Greek, this verse has 16 letters, so 1 Thessalonians 5:16 wins with only 14 letters. But if you include the original Hebrew which only counts consonants, 1 Chronicles 1:25 is the shortest with only 9 letters!
- V41** The purpose of the stone cover was to keep scavenger animals and thieves away from the body.
- V42** Jesus didn't need to pray publicly, but He does what He does for our benefit.
- V48** If Jesus continued to attract more followers, the Pharisees were worried their own popularity would decline. Also, if the Roman government sensed rebellion, they could destroy their place (the temple or Jerusalem) and the whole nation of Israel.

WEEK 6: BELIEF BARRIER OF FAILURE

John 18:1-11, 15-18, 25-27

V1 The Kidron brook is located on the way to the Mount of Olives. The garden setting reminds us of both the beginning and end of human history (Genesis 2:8; Revelation 22:1-5).

V2 Since the soldiers may not have known Jesus and there were no photographs, they needed Judas to point Him out.

V4-6 Through healing the servant's ear, Jesus demonstrates His power, showing that what is happening and what is about to happen is still under His control. He is allowing it in order to accomplish God's purpose for salvation.

V6 Here is a clear 'I AM' statement (Exodus 3:14) where Jesus identifies Himself as God. The force knocks the men to the ground!

V8-9 Jesus cooperates with the soldiers to be arrested Himself, but He will not allow them to harm His followers at this point. This action parallels the Gospel as Jesus puts Himself between His people and punishment.

V10 John's inside knowledge of the high priest (John 18:15) meant he may have known Malchus, personally.

V11 The metaphor 'drink from the cup' is used to refer to one's destiny in both good and bad senses. Here it means to suffer and die according to God's sovereign will.

WEEK 7: BELIEF BARRIER OF PASSIVITY

John 18:28-19:16

18:28 Jewish religious leaders were not given the authority by the Roman government to carry out a punishment of death. So, they had to bring Jesus to Governor Pilate, but since he was a non-Jew, they couldn't enter his headquarters because they believed it would make them ritually 'unclean'.

18:28 It is significant that these events take place near the Passover when many Jews would come to Jerusalem to celebrate. Zealots could encourage crowds of passionate Jews to riot.

18:31 Pilate's words reveal his dismissive arrogance not only towards the situation with Jesus, but also towards the Jews in general, not wanting to be involved in their affairs.

18:32 While technically illegal, the Roman government probably didn't care too much about Jews killing other Jews, especially if it concerned a religious matter. This was why Jerusalem's leaders attempted to frame Jesus as a revolutionary. It is significant that Jesus was executed in the Roman way (crucifixion) versus the Jewish way (stoning) because it fulfilled what the prophets wrote about the Promised King, the Messiah (Psalm 22:16-18, 34:20, Isaiah 52:13-53:12).

18:36 The kingdom Jesus was taking about is spiritual and rooted in the hearts of those who trust in Him (Hebrews 8:8-12). His kingdom is not spread by physical war or political revolution, but by the example of His followers and by evangelism. (Matthew 5:13-16; 28:19)

18:36 Servants could refer to Jesus' disciples or even angels. (Matthew 26:53)

18:38 Pilate uses the question "What is truth?" only as a rhetorical device meant to simply end the conversation as if to say, "who cares?" Pilate's dismissive attitude causes him to walk away without really considering what Jesus is saying and has said earlier. That is, Jesus himself is 'the truth'. (John 14:6)

18:40 The word translated 'robber' in Greek is 'lestes' which has a broad meaning of 'a person prone to violence'. In this context, it probably refers to Barabas being a Jewish 'rebel' who fought against Roman occupation.

19:1 The whips used for flogging could have had pieces of bone or metal attached to make the punishment more severe.

19:5 In presenting Jesus in this way, Pilate could have been trying to gain sympathy for Jesus from the crowd or he could have been humiliating Jesus and the Jews by making a mockery of what 'their king' would look like.

WEEK 8: BELIEF BARRIER OF SKEPTICISM

John 20:24-29

V25 Thomas wasn't able to believe based on the other disciples' testimony. Even though he doubted, notice that Jesus does not condemn him, but allows him the opportunity to know for himself.

V26 By repeating the fact that the doors were locked John means to emphasize the miraculous aspect of Jesus' appearance among the disciples.

V28 When Thomas declares "My Lord and my God!" he not only confesses Jesus' position but also makes it personal. To become a follower of Jesus, there must come a point when we do the same.

Apologetic Notes:

If Jesus' resurrection was manufactured, we would expect there to be more of a gradual acceptance with more and more false appearances occurring. However, the exact opposite is true. There were five appearances on the first day (to Mary Magdalene, to the women, to the two on the way to Emmaus, to Peter, and to the ten). Then there are five more appearances spread out over forty days. After that no more with the exception of the appearance to Saul of Tarsus. The appearances were progressively restricted, not built up.

Also, this miracle would have been easy to disprove at the time by simply producing Jesus' body. That didn't happen. Other religions claim miracles with no way to prove or disprove what really happened.

Furthermore, the appearances were not welcomed at first. They were resisted as idle talk, and those who had not actually seen Jesus for themselves refused point blank to accept the stories. But the evidence was enough to convince even a skeptic like Thomas.

Finally, many of the original disciples died for proclaiming what they witnessed, specifically Jesus being raised from the dead. If they just made it up, they wouldn't have been willing to die for the lie. This is in contrast to religions where leaders maintained their wealth and power by continuing their religion. No one in the first century obtained wealth or status from their allegiance to Christ.