

DOUBT LESS

part 4 - Doubt Less about Jesus

If God exists, it should not surprise us that he would reveal himself in a way that we might understand him and get to know him.

Christianity's Central Claim is that he did.

1 John 5:20 (NIV) We know also that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding, so that we may know him who is true. And we are in him who is true by being in his Son Jesus Christ. He is the true God and eternal life.

Two thousand years later, Jesus is widely known but still a mystery to so many. He's the most significant and transformative human influencer that history has ever known and also the most controversial figure of all time. How can a doubter doubt less about Jesus?

- **The question of the day is this:** How can a doubter doubt less about Jesus?
- **The Apostle John's answer is this:** Learn about him, then get to know him.

John 20:30–31 (NIV) — Jesus performed many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. 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.

There is nothing irrational about what God revealed about himself. God revealed that he is not an impersonal force. God revealed that he is a relational God.

You can't make yourself believe something you don't believe. But there is something you can do. Like in any relationship, trust is developed (or not) through our interactions. You can put into practice what God says to see if the teaching reflects reality (or not).

And so, after the Apostle John begins his Gospel with a theologically packed introduction, he tells us how he first met Jesus in order to show us how we can meet him in a similar way.

I. **COME and you will SEE**

Andrew and John heard the fiery prophet “John the Baptizer”, point to Jesus and say, “*Look, the Lamb of God*”... *his is the one who came after me, who is before me...and who is greater than me...the one I came to testify about...the “chosen One of God.”*

So wanting to know more, Andrew and John followed him to find out more. Then we read:

John 1:38-39 (NIV) — Turning around, Jesus saw them following and asked, “What do you want?” They said, “Rabbi” (which means “Teacher”), “where are you staying?” 39 “Come,” he replied, “and you will see.”

And so the personal interactions began... and their faith began to grow. **It all began with “Come and see”** Today’s meeting with Jesus, like that meeting, is only introductory. But right after this series, in two weeks, we begin a new series:

“Come and see” is a good **first step** toward “doubting less about Jesus.” **But how can we do that?** A good first step for you to “Come and see” might be reading John’s Gospel.

The invitation of “Come and see” changed into something far more intensive and radical.

II. **FOLLOW ME**

LUKE 6 tells us that after wrestling all night in prayer, Jesus chose from 12 men, from among all those who were frequently coming to see and hear more from him. John describes some of the earlier conversations leading up to this.

John 1:43 (NIV) — The next day Jesus decided to leave for Galilee. Finding Philip, he said to him, “Follow me.”

Philip is convinced **“Jesus of Nazareth”** is the one Moses and the prophets wrote about. Philip tells his brother Nathanael, but Nathanel says, *“Nazareth! Can anything good come from there?”*

Philip replied, “Come and see.” (John 1:46). Philip knows that’s all his brother needs, he needs to meet Jesus.

As we fast forward, Jesus now has 12 chosen apprentices who were willing to leave everything behind, experience many exciting things...it appears they are on the ground floor of the coming Kingdom as the prophets described... but soon things become incredibly controversial and challenging.

By the time we get to John 7, crowds of people are divided over Jesus.

- Some say he is an evil imposter.
- Some say he is a good man, doing only good things.
- But it is the Jewish leaders who are opposed to him, and ready to kill him!

It is in the middle of this controversy that Jesus responds with with this riveting statement:

John 7:17 (NIV) — Anyone who chooses to do the will of God will find out whether my teaching comes from God or whether I speak on my own.

This statement answers our Question of the day: “How can a doubter doubt less about Jesus?” Do you see it? [pause– READ IT ALOUD].

“How can a doubter doubt less about Jesus?” TRY THIS INSTEAD

III. **FOLLOWING leads to stronger BELIEVING**

Yes, in that order. FOLLOWING leads to stronger BELIEVING. For a doubter this sounds wrong. *“I am not going to follow what I don’t believe.”*

Jesus doesn’t explain.

Just as he said, “Come and see”, now he is saying “Follow and see”.

The following story is an example of how “Following leads to stronger believing”.

By Rebecca Manley Pippert, *Out of the Saltshaker & into the World*
(excerpt, pages 97 – 100)

Based on my understanding of the gospel ...I now say to nonbelievers, “Tell God (or the four walls if that is the one you think you are speaking to) that you want to find out if Jesus is truly God. And that if you could feel more certain you would follow him. Then begin to read the Gospels, every day. Each day as you read, something will probably hit you and make sense. Whatever that is, do it as soon as you can.” In other words, I call them to act on whatever strikes them as true and to do it if they are sincerely seeking God (and not trying to earn salvation by works righteousness).

One day Sue, a very bright student, came to me. She told me she was an agnostic but that her best friend, Larry, had become a Christian. He talked to her a lot about his faith and did not neglect her after his conversion. Instead he brought her to his campus Christian gatherings and introduced her to his new Christian friends. He made her feel comfortable and a part of his very different Christian world. He answered as best he could her many intellectual questions about his faith. And most importantly, he loved her.

“I’ve seen what Christ has done for Larry,” she told me. “I see the love these Christians have for each other and for me. I’ve seen what Jesus is like in the Gospels and a lot of my questions have been answered. But I still don’t believe. I’d like to find God. But I’m plagued with doubts. Please don’t ask me to pray to receive Christ; it’d be dishonest. What should I do?”

I suggested what I mentioned above. She gulped and said, “That’s radical. But I’ll do it.”

So she began having what she called her “pagan quiet times.” And the Christians around her prayed that God would speak to her in the Scriptures and give her concrete situations in which she could obey. Several months later she said she wanted to talk to me. Here is Sue’s story:

“One day I read in the Bible, ‘If someone steals your coat, don’t let him have only that, but offer your cloak as well.’ For whatever reason, that verse hit me between the eyes. So I said to the four walls, ‘Listen, walls—or God if you’re there—I’m going to do what this verse says, if the opportunity arises today. I want to remind you that I’m trying to do things your way in order to find out if you exist and if Jesus really is who he says. Amen.’

“The day went by and I forgot the verse. Then I headed to the library to continue working on my senior thesis. Just as I sat down at my designated thesis desk this guy comes up and starts yelling at me. He told me the school hadn’t given him his thesis desk so he was going to take mine. (Everyone knows how important your thesis desk is for your work. The school only gives you one.) I started yelling back and pretty soon we caused quite a

ruckus. But it was when he glared at me and said, ‘Look. I’m stealing it from you whether you like it or not’ that it suddenly hit me.

“I just looked at him and moaned, ‘OHHHHHH, no. No. I can’t believe it.’ And to myself I thought, ‘Look, God, if you’re there, I do want to know if Jesus is God. But isn’t there some other way of finding out besides obeying that verse? I mean couldn’t I tithe or get baptized or give up something else? But DON’T TAKE MY THESIS DESK! I mean with my luck, I’ll give up the desk and then discover that you don’t exist.’

“But I couldn’t escape the fact that I had read that verse the very same day someone tried to rob me. Before, I had always been amused to see how Jesus aimed for the jugular vein in his conversations with people in the Bible. But now it didn’t feel so funny. I took a deep breath, tried not to swear and said, ‘OK, you can have the desk.’

“He looked bewildered. But just at that moment the librarian came up. She said she’d heard the conversation and was outraged. Then the boy began swearing at her and intimidated her so much that she told us we had to see his thesis advisor. So the three of us trotted over to his advisor’s office. The more the boy swore, the more nervous the advisor became. He told us he couldn’t make the final decision but we should go to the head of the department. The head of the department told us exactly the same thing but urged us to see the dean of men. And the dean of men guided us to someone else. And finally the last person we saw said, ‘Well, what does Sue think we should do?’

“All this time I kept thinking about what I’d seen in these past several months. I’d seen Larry’s life changed. I’d seen something beautiful in this Christian fellowship, something so real I could almost touch it. Even though I was not a Christian, I had been loved by these people. And I’d seen Jesus in the Bible. I felt so drawn to him. I realized, even without a thesis desk, somehow I still had more than this poor pathetic boy. I told them he could have the desk and the meeting was over.

“But when we walked out the door this guy grabbed my arm and asked me why in the world I let him have it. I told him he would think I’d really flipped out, but I was trying to discover if Jesus was really who he claimed to be. I was attempting to do the things he told us to do. ‘I’ve been reading what he says in the Gospels. And today I read that if somebody tried to rip me off I was supposed to let them and even throw in something extra to boot.’ All I could see were the whites of his eyes. ‘So I’m going to give you the desk but don’t press your luck about something extra.’

“Then he asked, ‘Why in the world would Jesus say such a crazy thing?’

“Then I said, ‘Hey, if there’s one thing I’ve learned from reading about Jesus and meeting some real Christians, it’s that Jesus would give you a whole lot more than a thesis desk if you’d let him. I know Jesus would give it to you. So that thesis desk is yours.’

“As I said those words, I just simply *knew* it was all true. I kinda felt like God was saying, ‘Well done. That’s the way I want my children to behave.’”

By Rebecca Manley Pippert, *Out of the Saltshaker & into the World*
(excerpt, pages 97 – 100)

Talk It Over

DOUBT LESS 4 – Doubt Less About Jesus

SMALL TALK

1. What teachings, claims, or aspects about Jesus and his life have caused uncertainty or doubt you have had to navigate through?

VIEWPOINT

2. **READ John 7.** How do controversies over Jesus continue to escalate in John 7 (What controversies were in chapter 5, and 6?). What factors contributed to the divided responses towards Jesus in John 7? What is controversial about John 7:37-38?
3. **READ John 7:16-17.** Focus specifically on Jesus' invitation to test His teaching and know its source. What does Jesus imply about the process of overcoming doubt and finding truth, and how does this relate to our own doubts and questions?

GETTING PERSONAL

4. How can we practically apply this principle (John 7:17) in our own lives when we encounter doubts or uncertainties about Jesus or His message?

MAKING PROGRESS (THIS WEEK)

5. Are you ready to accept the challenge of learning and doing whatever Jesus teaches you to do? Do you think this might help you believe more and doubt less? Why or why not?