

*Seeing and Believing Versus Seeing and Not Believing
in the Context of the Signs of Jesus*

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INTRODUCTION

The intent of this paper is to detect the salient features of faith in the lives of those people who believe in Jesus as a result of seeing the signs performed by Him, and to ascertain what is behind the unbelief of those who see the same signs and do not believe. Implicit within this study is the semantic domain of ‘perception’ which embodies such ideas as ‘seeing’, ‘observing’, ‘witnessing’ or ‘bearing witness’, ‘knowing’ and so forth, all of which must be taken into account when one talks of ‘seeing’. Leon Morris states here that “knowledge and faith go closely together.”¹ Smalley also perceives this significance when he asserts that “verbs of ‘seeing’ are very important in the Fourth Gospel and are regularly used in association with the idea of faith.”²

PRIMARY PURPOSE

Even though John never uses the term πιστις in the Fourth Gospel, his presentation is replete with the concept of faith. Indeed, without this notion his argument would have been meaningless to his original readers. This fact is made even more evident when we view the Apostle’s major purpose set forth in 20:30-31:

Many other signs therefore Jesus also performed in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these have been written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name (NASB).

The Apostle uses here a μεν . . . δε clause which signifies that a distinct contrast is being made. He writes, πολλα μεν . . . ταυτα δε which says that “on the one hand, Jesus performed many other signs (which John chose not to include), but on the other hand, these [σημεια] (which he includes) have been written so that you may believe. . . “

¹ Leon Morris, *Jesus is the Christ: Studies in the Theology of John*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989, 179.

² S. Smalley, *John: Evangelist and Interpreter*, Nashville: Nelson, 1978, 139.

There is a textual variant in this passage that has troubled many interpreters in the past. We are presented with a variation between the imperfective³ active subjunctive πιστευητε and the aorist active subjunctive πιστευσητε. I maintain that the notion of verbal aspect must be taken into consideration here as well as anywhere else when dealing with the ancient Greek verbal system. This notion is “how the writer or speaker perceives the action of the verb in relation to its context.”⁴ In this particular case, either aspect of the subjunctive would probably suit the context of John’s narrative because the wider context of this Gospel requires an evangelistic mission. The primary difference between the two would be, ‘continue to believe . . .’ (imperfective) or ‘believe as a complete action or event’ (aorist). I believe that the aorist subjunctive is better attested from the context of the whole book. I also concur with Peterson⁵ that there are two other purposes as well: 1) to *strengthen* the Christian faith and 2) to *defend* the Christian faith.

Indeed, there is a logical link between the signs of Jesus and the believing faith of his audience. As Peterson succinctly states, “Christ’s miracles are reported in order to generate faith in the reader. In fact, John puts such emphasis on believing, that he uses the word *believe* ninety-nine times in his Gospel.”⁶ From this alone, it is easy to see that John has set forth a primarily evangelistic (or apologetic) purpose.⁷

³ For a clear description of the term ‘imperfective’ see, K. L. McKay, *Greek Grammar for Students: A Concise Grammar of Classical Attic with Special Reference to Aspect in the Verb*, Canberra (ACT), Australia: Department of Classics, The Australian National University, 1977, 138; see also McKay, *A New Syntax of the Verb in New Testament Greek: An Aspectual Approach*, (Studies in Biblical Greek, Vol. 5, D. A. Carson, Gen. Ed.), New York: Peter Lang, 1994, 29-30.

⁴ McKay, *op. cit.*, 1977, 136-141; McKay, *op. cit.*, 1994, 27-38.

⁵ Robert A. Peterson, *Getting to Know John’s Gospel: A Fresh Look at its Main Ideas*, Phillipsburg, N. J.: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1989, 5-16.

⁶ *op. cit.*, 4.

⁷ Smalley, 138.

Σημειον

Although John never uses the word δυνάμις in this Gospel, he does use σημειον often and exclusively of miracles in a spiritual sense to point man to God.⁸ He also uses εργον to refer primarily to Jesus' divine mission which Ladd maintains designates the basic quality of one's life manifested by his conduct and reflects the fact that the Father is present in it.⁹ Τερας, 'a wonder' or 'portent', is employed once in 4:48 in conjunction with σημειον. Of σημειον Bauer says, "miracle of divine origin, performed by God Himself, by Christ, or by men of God."¹⁰ Ladd agrees that σημειον clearly refers to a mighty deed wrought by Jesus that represents the revelatory and redemptive event happening in him. It is unfortunate, however, that he does not see an impetus in the signs to compel one to embrace faith.¹¹ Certainly, as already stated, the signs function to generate faith in the reader.

PROBLEM

We are immediately faced with a pressing problem when approaching this subject. Why do some believe and others reject/do not believe when presented with the same empirical evidence? Also what attitudes are behind either believing in or rejecting Christ? Is the human sense of 'seeing' restricted only to physical sight or does it go further?

⁸ Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to John* (NICNT), Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971, 686.

⁹ George Eldon Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979, 273.

¹⁰ W. Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, translated and adapted by W. F. Arndt and F. W. Gingrich, fourth edition revised and augmented by F. W. Danker, (Cambridge University Press, 1952/University of Chicago, 1979), 748, 2.a.

¹¹ Ladd, *op. cit.*, 274.

CATEGORIES OF PEOPLE

Logically, there are two categories of people connected with sign-seeing and belief. The first is that group which witnesses Jesus' miracles and, upon this witness, goes beyond the ordinary facts to put their faith in Jesus that he is who he claims to be. There appear to be varying levels of faith within this group.¹²

The second group, on the other hand, consists of those people who refuse to believe Jesus is the Son of God, even though they are confronted with his works. This group, it would seem, consists negatively of false faith and total rejection.

The Signs in Relation to Seeing, Belief and Unbelief

The nine signs which John has selected for his readers are essentially divided for two main audiences: 1) chapters 2-12 for Jews and Gentiles where unbelieving Jews are predominant and 2) the post-resurrection appearances where Jesus witnesses to his disciples.¹³

WATER INTO WINE

The first sign that John ascribes to Jesus is found in 2:1-11, the setting of which shows Jesus and his disciples attending a wedding feast in Cana of Galilee. John gives us reference to six stone water jars used for the Jewish rite of purification. Jesus orders the jars to be filled and when they are filled to the brim, he orders the servants to draw some out and take it to the headwaiter. Some¹⁴ see the water jars as representing the old Jewish purification rites in accordance with their law and custom established after the exile, and

¹² Morris, *op. cit.*, 1989, 184 n. 26

¹³ Peterson, *op. cit.*, 20-21.

¹⁴ D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, Leicester, England: InterVarsity Press, 1991, 173f; Peterson, *op. cit.*, 44f.

the wine representing the replacement of these rites with something much better, with both spiritual and eternal significance.

Jesus' death was to serve as the replacement for and superceding of the Jewish laws of purification, and John symbolizes this in a way which is intended to cause his readers to think, to ask questions and to examine this in order to see that true, lasting, internal purification comes from God and not through the old order of man who goes through the motions of external cleansing.

Smalley¹⁵ seems to have trouble going any further than merely saying that John signifies here that a new center to Judaism has been given by Jesus. Furthermore, he says we do not see Jesus actually performing the miracle itself and he attaches more authority to John's 'signs source' than to the possibility that John was actually an eye-witness, reporting on what he had seen with his fellow-disciples from the point of retrospection. To this, we are compelled to respond that the Apostle's very purpose behind this Gospel account extends far beyond the confines of Judaism to point to the One for whom Judaism is awaiting, namely, Messiah, whom John clearly identifies as Jesus. Furthermore, within this *pericope*, the Apostle *does* present Jesus as the performer of this miracle and he does so as an eye-witness. John did not need to rely upon his 'signs source' because he saw this miracle with his own eyes.

Kysar¹⁶ also betrays his own particular bias concerning signs and faith when he places more 'evidence value' of the signs on the signs source material and more 'sign value' in the so-called redactional work of the evangelist. Again, we must respond that the Apostle John was a close, indeed intimate disciple of Jesus, whose first-hand

¹⁵ Smalley, *op. cit.*, 177-78.

¹⁶ R. Kysar, *The Fourth Evangelist and His Gospel: An Examination of Contemporary Scholarship*, Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1975, 222-23.

knowledge and experience with the Lord would be vivid in his mind as he recounted in written form the ministry of Christ over that three year period. He did not need a special ‘signs source’ to inform his account of Jesus’ life and works. Moreover, this evangelist, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, had not only every right, but also a responsibility to redact his Gospel narrative to suit his thematic purpose. Even a cursory look at the Gospel accounts patently demonstrates that each one of the four Gospel writers edited his narrative according to specific, purposeful criteria to suit his goal.

John not only numbers this sign as the first and perhaps primary¹⁷ performed, he states that Jesus made evident his glory (perhaps his identity with regard to his greatness, worth and his relationship with the Father), and his disciples discerned behind the sign, to a *certain* extent, this glory of Jesus and so (και, as a consequence) they put their faith in him (επιστευσαν εις αυτον). The glory of Jesus could not be perceived on the surface, but had to be seen at a deeper, spiritual level.

It is interesting that John states that the servants at the wedding saw the miracle and knew whence it came (2:9), but he makes no mention of them nor the bridegroom nor anyone else as having believed in Jesus.

Out of this sign, through the eyes of faith, there emerged a growing awareness of Christ’s identity and a reaffirmation of the disciples’ earlier confessions in 1:41-51. This faith must be looked upon as an initial or incipient faith which had much room for growth and maturity as the Gospel account progresses, yet it points to growing content of faith which must be seen in the light of an inner desire for truth.

¹⁷ Carson, *op. cit.*, 1991, 175.

We see a contrasting response to Jesus in 2:23-25 when he and his disciples are in Jerusalem at the Passover. The Apostle states that πολλοι επιστευσαν εις το ονομα αυτου θεωρουντες αυτου τα σημεια α εποιει: “Many believed in his name because they kept seeing his signs which he was doing.” The imperfective active participle θεωρουντες points to the subject πολλοι and functions adverbially to modify the finite verb επιστευσαν, probably serving as a causal element for the belief. They believed in Jesus *because they kept seeing or kept looking upon* as spectators to the signs that he did from time to time (the imperfect εποιει captures this sense).

Yet the context clearly shows that this faith/belief was spurious because Jesus did not entrust (ουκ επιστευεν) himself to them on account of the fact that he possessed a knowledge of all men and he had no need for anyone to tell him what man was like. John seems to reinforce this by telling us twice. Jesus knew their faith was not genuine.

The faith in this context springs totally out of witnessing miraculous signs. They did not perceive the glory which the signs revealed. It seems these people were only after what Jesus could perform for them and were not basing their faith on the life and words of Jesus. Therefore, there is a profound tendency to succumb or yield to something else when they hear anything unpleasant or expected.

HEALING OF ROYAL OFFICIAL’S SON

The second sign that John furnishes is found in 4:46-54. The Lord has just had great success in, of all places, Samaria, where many believed because of the testimony of the Samaritan woman and because they had seen Jesus himself and had heard him speak. There is no suggestion here that Jesus had performed any signs, which serves to heighten

their simple response based on a genuine desire to believe Jesus at his word. At the same time, John uses it to castigate the Galileans in the ensuing context for their unbelief.

Jesus now leaves Samaria to go back into his territory (Galilee and Judea), to his own people to once again attempt to evangelize any who would come to him. The ‘therefore’ (οὖν) creates a logical link between the previous verse (a prophet has no honor in his own country) and the ensuing clause.

When Jesus came into Galilee, the Galileans welcomed him (εδέξαντο). This is the only instance of δεχομαι found in John in a hospitable sense.¹⁸ This verse expresses the irony of the situation that the Galileans *welcomed* him and yet *refused* his message. Whereas the ‘unclean’ Samaritans asked him to stay with them and then believed in the Savior of the world, the Galileans received him only on the basis of what they had seen him do in Jerusalem.

The perfect active participle εωρακοτες indicates that the Galileans stood in the position or were in the state of having seen all the things performed by Jesus, that this empirical evidence was present in their senses, but it had no effect on their commitment of faith in Christ (cf. 1 John 1:1 where John uses this same word as an eyewitness of the very Incarnate Christ). This serves to magnify their culpability in their refusal to believe in him.

Now, in verses 46ff., John introduces the royal official, whose son is about to die. As soon as he heard that Jesus was in town, he went to him and asked Jesus to heal his son. Jesus’ response to the man is actually addressed to the Galileans at large, as construed by the second person plural of the two aorist active subjunctives ιδητε and

¹⁸ W. F. Moulton and A. S. Geden, *A Concordance to the Greek Testament*, Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1978, 191.

πιστευσητε. “Unless you people see signs and wonders you will in no way believe.”

He refuses to perform signs on demand. Jesus criticizes this group of people whose only interest, as far as Christ’s mission is concerned, is to observe miracles.

In this same verse, Jesus detects in the official a welcome and a faith that desires a cure but does not truly trust him.¹⁹ Yet the official urgently persists and asks Jesus to come to his house before his son dies. This is reminiscent of the Canaanite woman before Jesus in Mt. 15:22-28 and Mk. 7:25-30. Jesus, I would suggest, sees the kernels of faith in this man’s heart and answers his request.

The nobleman believed Jesus on the basis of Jesus’ words that his son would live, with no questioning, arguing or blatant mistrust. He had no tangible sign or evidence on which to base his faith, except on what Jesus told him. Here we see the initial faith which is often coupled with a deep desire and hope that the words will come to fruition. This account furnishes John’s readers with an example of faith in fulfillment. As G. H. C. MacGregor points out:

Faith had been present even before the certification of the miracle. Now that faith is confirmed. Previously he had trusted in a promise, now he believes in the absolute sense, that is, that Jesus is the Christ.²⁰

From an evangelistic perspective, John is trying to provoke the Jews to jealousy (cf. Rom. 11:14) so that they might see their sinful state and come to put their faith in Jesus, because even the Samaritans believed him.

HEALING THE LAME MAN

Immediately following this sign we are confronted by yet another context of sickness, in which Jesus comes into direct conflict with the Jewish authorities. In 5:1-9, Jesus heals a

¹⁹ Carson, *op.cit.*, 1991, 236.

²⁰ Morris, *op. cit.*, 1989, 184, n. 26.

man at the pool of Bethesda and John explains that this healing occurred on the Sabbath which, in itself, serves as a warning to the reader that Jesus will soon encounter more opposition from his interlocutors in his public ministry. In fact, Jesus provokes it.

When the authorities question the man about breaking the Sabbath, he passes the blame onto Jesus, whose identity he did not even bother to ascertain. His motives, it seems, were not very pure because when he learns Jesus' identity he goes and informs the leaders. There appears to be no gratitude for what Jesus has done (as compared to the blind man in ch. 9). Indeed, his attitude does not point to the sort of characteristics that Jesus is looking for in the sphere of gratitude, contrary to what Hendriksen²¹ and Barclay²² maintain. The attitude of the authorities in verse 12 is shown for what it is. They were doubtless more concerned with the code of law than with the man who had just been on the receiving end of a miraculous work by the Son of God. Even though they had not seen the actual miracle, they nevertheless could see that something powerful (and good) had happened. Yet their very attitude suggests blindness (cf. ch. 9). Carson states it well when he says,

The Jews hear of the wonderful healing and of the formal breach of their code, and are interested only in the latter. They think they see what is important, but in religious matters there are none so blind as those who are always certain that they see.²³

John portrays the inclinations of the Jewish leaders as being in total opposition to what Jesus was doing from a disposition of hatred. These men were blatantly blind; their hearts were turned to stone as far as any hope was concerned for seeing the deeper meaning behind the miracle and, of course, the identity of the one who had performed it.

²¹ William Hendriksen, *The Gospel of John* (NTC), Grand Rapids: Baker, 1953, 195.

²² William Barclay, *The Daily Study Bible: The Gospel of John*, Vol. 1, Edinburgh: The Saint Andrews Press, 1975, 182.

²³ Carson, *op. cit.*, 1991, 245.

Perhaps here we can see more clearly the implication by John in such passages as 6:44, 10:26, 29 which speak of God's sovereignty. This is an example of blinding by the sovereign God. It shows the result of reprobation on the part of the Jewish leaders. Their hearts were so hard toward Jesus and his redemptive work that there was no hope for these leaders apart from God's supernatural and sovereign grace. The subsequent context, vss. 19-45, describes a Christological dialogue which flows out of this sign. Jesus has come to save them (vs. 34), if only they would give up their foolish arrogance and pride and see their own moral bankruptcy.

The Lord goes on in vs. 43 to mention the sad fact that they refuse to accept or receive (λαμβάνω) his testimony, but if someone else comes along in their own name and with their own popular story to tell, these people are blind enough and foolish enough to accept (λαμβάνω) this person and his message. So the *willingness* to receive proper testimony is crucial to faith.

Jesus tells these men in vss. 44-47 that it is impossible for them to believe in him when they are in the habit of receiving praise from men and are not concerned with what God thinks. It is the Law of Moses which they venerate that accuses them because they do not believe Moses. This is evidenced by the second-class condition in vs. 46, εἰ γὰρ ἐπίστευετε Μουσεῖ, ἐπίστευετε ἂν ἐμοί: "For if you believed Moses (which you didn't), you would have believed me (which you really do not)." This shows very clearly their guilt in rejecting God's revelation. Their attitude is characterized by pride, self-righteousness and praise-seeking.

FEEDING THE 5000

This is the only miracle performed by Jesus that is recorded in all four Gospels. The writer immediately informs us that Jesus was being followed by a huge crowd of around 5,000 people (6:10), which was perhaps higher than normal because of the Feast of the Passover.²⁴ John says, οτι εθεωρουν τα σημεια α εποιει επι των εσθενειων: because they had been witnessing the signs which he was performing on their sick.²⁵ This serves to underline the tendency throughout this gospel that the majority of people were interested in Jesus' ministry only because of the signs.

It seems that Jesus was intending to be alone with his disciples, presumably to teach them further about his identity and his redemptive ministry. Yet, when he saw the crowd, he felt compassion (Mt. 14:14; Mk. 6:34) and taught them (Mk. 6:34; Lk. 9:11), instead of sending them away.

The impact of this sign was meant to be theological,²⁶ revelational and redemptive. The incarnate Son of God is the provider of man's needs, both physical and spiritual. It is unfortunate that Barclay gives three scenarios for this miracle and misses the boat on every one of them.²⁷ This passage not only precedes the Bread of Life discourse, in 6:22-65, but also hearkens back to the Old Testament, in particular to the manna from heaven given to the people to feed on (cf. Paul, 1 Cor. 10:3ff). John's intention here is that his readers see Jesus in a clearer light of who he really is.

²⁴ William Barclay, *The Daily Study Bible: The Gospel of John*, Vol. 1, Edinburgh: The Saint Andrews Press, 1975, 201.

²⁵ Maximilian Zerwick & Mary Grosvenor, *A Grammatical Analysis of the Greek New Testament*, (3rd rev. ed.), Rome: Editrice Pontificio Instituto Biblico, 1988, 302.

²⁶ Carson, *op. cit.*, 1991, 268.

²⁷ Barclay, *op. cit.*, 203-204.

John does not explicitly tell us here what impact this miracle had on the faith of the disciples, yet it appears to have gone uncomprehended (cf. Mk. 6). Both Philip and Andrew are portrayed as calculating in human terms and obviously voicing the thoughts of all twelve disciples.

The Apostle does, however, supply us with the verdict of the crowd in vs. 14: “Therefore when the people saw the sign which he had performed, they said, ‘this is truly the prophet who is to come into the world.’” They had seen the sign and yet had failed to perceive its real import, to see to what or to whom the sign actually pointed. Indeed, as the NIV Study Bible indicates, “its significance was to point to the Son of Man and the food for eternal life that he gives (vs. 27).”²⁸

Certainly these people were thinking messianically, but in the wrong light. They were operating by an earthly, political agenda. Preoccupied by their subjugation at the hands of the Romans, they wanted dearly to believe that this man, Jesus, was the ‘Prophet like Moses’ who had been promised in Deut. 18:15-18, and who would do for them even more than Moses had done in providing food and water in the desert. Carson is clear when he says that, in one sense, the crowd had seen Jesus’ signs, but in another sense had failed so miserably to see them that they asked for another in 6:30.²⁹ After the bread of life discourse, John tells us that many of the disciples fell away which points directly to false faith.

²⁸ *The NIV Study Bible*, Kenneth L. Barker General Editor, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1979.

²⁹ D. A. Carson, *Divine Sovereignty and Human Responsibility: Biblical Perspectives in Tension*, Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1981, 177.

WALKING ON THE WATER

The Apostle informs us that Jesus withdrew again to the mountains to be alone (6:15) when he perceived that the crowd was intending to take him by force to be their king. This sets the stage for the next miracle. The disciples had been directed by Jesus to row to the other side of the sea. Once darkness came, they set out in a boat across the sea, which, at the north end, was around four miles across.³⁰ After they had rowed 25 or 30 stadia, or 2.87 to 3.45 miles³¹ across the rough sea which had been stirred up by a violent squall, they saw Jesus walking on the water and drawing near to the boat, which frightened them. Jesus of course calmed their fears by identifying himself and took the boat safely to shore.

Several points need to be clarified here. The accounts in Matthew 14 and Mark 6 supplement John's narrative. In Matthew, Peter walked out on the water toward Jesus, and then they both got into the boat and arrived at Genessaret. In Mark's account, Jesus "came to them walking on the sea" (vs. 48) and "he got into the boat with them, and the wind stopped." Opposing Barclay³² and other who maintain that Jesus was walking 'beside the sea' based on the phrase *επι της θαλασσης*, I posit that Jesus was indeed walking on the water from lexical evidence elsewhere when *επι* with genitive is construed as "on" (e. g., Rev. 5:13; 10:2, 5, 8; 17:1).

If, as noted above, the lake was about four miles wide at this point and the disciples had gone only about $\frac{3}{4}$ of the way across, there still remained a significant distance to cover, a distance which, particularly in a storm, would have made it very

³⁰ William Barclay, *The Daily Study Bible: The Gospel of John* (Vol. 1), Edinburgh: The Saint Andrews Press, 1975, 208.

³¹ Carson, *op. cit.*, 1991, 275.

³² Barclay, *op. cit.*, 208-9.

difficult for the disciples to see all the way to the shore. In addition, their terror at seeing Jesus *on the shore* is very unnatural if there were indeed close into shore. We may fairly ask the question why they were so afraid when there is no suggestion before that they were fearful during the violent storm. Also, in Matthew's account, Peter's falling into the waves could hardly seem tenable if he were really next to the shore.

The suggestion that this was another miracle performed by Jesus is certainly in keeping with the major theme of the whole Gospel. Furthermore, this would support the interpretation that in presenting Jesus as miraculously saving his disciples from substantive harm in the storm, John is showing not only Jesus as having divine authority over creation, but as Savior from spiritual danger as well.³³

Now, John does not indicate how this sign affected the disciples' faith, but Mark's account claims, "they were astonished because they failed to glean any significance from this sign or from the previous miracle of the loaves because their hearts were dull." I would suggest, at this juncture, that 6:22-25 is significant for John because it notes to his readers that the crowd had deduced that Jesus had gotten across the lake somehow, but not by boat. They are not certain how he arrived there, but it is equally certain that their thinking would not encompass the miraculous.

The Lord's words to them in vs. 26 reveal their true motives in seeking him. Pursuing signs for the signs themselves and for what they can get out of them is counter-productive. The people failed to see what the sign truly signified.³⁴ They saw no spiritual significance at all, only full bellies.³⁵

³³ Peterson, *op. cit.*, 48.

³⁴ Carson, *op. cit.*, 1991, 283.

³⁵ Morris, *op. cit.*, 1971, 358.

HEALING THE MAN BORN BLIND

This healing in chapter 9 is explicitly juxtaposed to the light of the world contexts (8:12; 9:5). Having made this statement, Jesus gives *sight* to a man born *blind* to illustrate that he is the light of the world. John explains in vs. 14 that this particular day was the Sabbath, which immediately makes Jesus a target of the Pharisees' anger.

We can discern a vivid distinction between the attitude of the man who had received sight and that of the Pharisees. The authorities are consumed with prejudice and bigotry. They recognize that a miraculous sign has occurred but refuse to give credence to it because that would call into question their authority and wreck their entire theological system.

The blind man, on the other hand, recognizes that Jesus is not only a man but a prophet and, finally, the Son of Man, and Lord (κύριος). There is a steady progression in his understanding. His response is marked with gratitude, worship and a desire to do the right thing. He displays a genuine faith. This completes John's statement in 9:3 that "[This man was born blind] in order that the works of God might be displayed in him."

In stark contrast, Jesus ironically identifies the Pharisees as being the ones who are *blind*. Once Jesus had identified himself as the Son of Man, the concept of which is connected with judgment, he declares in vs. 39, "For judgment I came into this world that those who do not see may see, and that those who do see may become blind." So the prologue to this Gospel (1:10-13) becomes pragmatic here.

The Pharisees, in vs. 40, show a great disparity between their idea of blindness and Jesus' meaning when they respond, "Surely we are not also blind, are we?", μη with

the indicative implying a negative reply.³⁶ In the next verse, John uses a second-class condition, or condition contrary to fact, again, *ει τυφλοι ητε, ουκ αν ειχετε αμαρτιαν*, to say, “if you were really without the light of God (which you are not), no charge could be brought against you, you could not be blamed for acting in ignorance, you would not have sin (which you do in reality have).” They believed they were not in need of spiritual illumination (vs. 40). As a matter of fact, since they claim that they have sight, but really act like the blind, their sin is not forgiven them, but remains with them.³⁷

This passage speaks eloquently of human responsibility and culpability. Even when compared to the notion of divine sovereignty in passages like 10:26-28 and 12:39-40, human responsibility is not nullified but is seen to overlap with divine sovereignty.

RAISING OF LAZARUS

This seventh and most dramatic sign is linked inextricably with Jesus’ statement in 11:25, “I am the resurrection and the life.” We see in this chapter a healing which is the ultimate in a progression throughout this Gospel that shows Jesus as the giver of eternal life.³⁸

The writer reveals in 11:4 that there is divine purpose behind this sickness of Lazarus. Jesus says in 11:14-15 that he is glad Lazarus has died *for their sakes so that they may believe*, and that God’s Son might be glorified through it.³⁹ Certainly, what was about to happen would be a stimulus to real faith on the part of the disciples.⁴⁰

³⁶ Maximilian Zerwick and Mary Grosvenor, *A Grammatical Analysis of the Greek New Testament*, (3rd edition revised), Rome: Editrice Pontificio Instituto Biblico, 1988, 316.

³⁷ Morris, *op. cit.*, 1971, 497.

³⁸ Peterson, *op. cit.*, 41.

³⁹ Carson, *op. cit.*, 1991, 406; italics mine.

⁴⁰ Morris, *op. cit.*, 1989, 184.

Jesus' dialogue with Martha provides the opportunity for him to declare to her in vs. 25-26 that "I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in me shall live even if he dies, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?" Martha answers this question with a confession of faith that links this whole Gospel with John's purpose statement in 20:30-31. She says, *εγω πεπιστευκα . . .* : "I have believed and now continue to stand in the position of believing that you are the Christ, the Son of God . . ." She stands with a settled conviction in her mind and heart of who Jesus really is.

When Jesus gave the command, in vs. 39, to remove the stone, Martha interjected. Contrary to Carson's assertion,⁴¹ I suggest that Martha had lapsed slightly in her faith in the Lord, having momentarily forgotten her earlier confession. She was professing a faith right then on what she could see (and smell), on the tangible. So the Lord reminds Martha that, believing in him as the resurrection and the life from whom all life flows, she will indeed see the glory of God displayed. The real meaning of what was about to take place is accessible only to faith. Everyone present would see the miracle, whether they believed or not, but only the believers would apprehend the real significance, the glory.⁴²

When Jesus had raised Lazarus from the dead, we are told in vs. 45 that, "many of the Jews who had come to Mary and beheld what he had done, *believed in him*." "But some of them (vs. 46) went away to the Pharisees, and told them the things Jesus had done." We see here once again a direct relationship between seeing and believing or rejecting.

⁴¹ Carson, *op. cit.*, 1991, 417.

⁴² Morris, *op. cit.*, 1971, 560.

The πολλοι here were obviously convinced by this tremendous display of power if for no other reason. This, of course, is not the best kind of faith to possess, but it is certainly better than no faith at all, and it is faith that can be built upon. In contrast, the evil intentions behind the group that went to the Pharisees are evident. They had decided to reject Jesus even on the basis of this powerful evidence.

This sign is positioned in a very strategic spot. The time is drawing near now when Jesus will withdraw himself from the public arena as God's revelation to the world (cf. 1:14) and will focus his attention on teaching only his disciples about who he is and his redemptive ministry.

12:37ff

John here summarizes the basic response of the Jews to Jesus (as unbelief) in chapters 2-12.⁴³ The multitude blatantly rejected Jesus as Messiah even though they had witnessed his signs. Their culpability stands out plainly to John's readers. The Evangelist quotes from Isaiah 53 to prove that God's purpose has not been thwarted. Nevertheless, despite the majority response, some did believe in Jesus, as in 11:45.

In 12:39-40, the Apostle quotes from Isaiah 53 and continues with Isaiah 6 to indicate the divine activity behind their inability to believe. Their refusal to accept Jesus, either on the basis of his words or even his miraculous signs, is based on God's sovereign working out his divinely decreed plan. He has blinded the eyes of those who think they see and has hardened the hearts of those who contend that they serve and worship the living and true God. John elicits a predestinarian⁴⁴ orientation that is woven throughout his Gospel. In chapter 6, John gives clear indication of God's predestination of people

⁴³ Peterson, *op. cit.*, 21.

⁴⁴ Carson, *op. cit.*, 1991, 423.

(6:37, 44, 65). In his prologue, the Apostle states that “he (Jesus) came to his own [possessions/creation], and his own [people] did not receive him (1:11).” Jesus’ words to the Pharisees in 8:43f adds to their guilt: “Why do you not understand (γινώσκετε) what I am saying? Because *you cannot hear my word* [ου δυνασθε ακουειν τον λογον τον εμου]. You are of your father the devil, and *you desire to do the lusts of your father*” [τας επιθυμιας του πατρος υμων θελετε ποιειν]. They were unable to ‘hear’ Jesus’ message with ‘spiritual ears of hearing’, because they *wanted* to do the works of their father, the devil. Their inability, Jesus says, stems from their slavery to sin (8:34). Furthermore, in this present context, 12:43, John provides yet another reason for their unbelief: “for they loved the approval of men rather than the approval of God.” The Jews’ responsibility and culpability in their rejection of Jesus now show the tragic consequences of their choice.

RESURRECTION OF JESUS

The last two signs were performed strictly for the benefit of the disciples. This miracle is the most important one that John presents to us. He testifies that he came to a faith in Jesus as resurrected Lord before he saw him in resurrected form: “So the other disciple who had first come to the tomb entered then also, *and he saw and believed*” (20:8). This reminds us of the Apostle’s words in 2:22 that, after the resurrection of Jesus, the disciples “remembered what he had said, and they believed the Scripture and the word which Jesus had spoken.”

The Evangelist introduces the themes of seeing and believing that reach their climax in 20:29, according to Carson.⁴⁵ He continues,

⁴⁵ Carson, *op. cit.*, 1991, 638.

Although it has been argued that all the beloved disciple came to believe was that Mary Magdalene had told the truth and that the tomb was empty . . . , this is unbearably trite. Moreover, it not only makes both Peter and the beloved disciple unbelievably stupid (they, unlike Mary, have to enter the tomb to find it is empty!), it also fails to account for the absolute usage of the verb ‘to believe’, not to mention the introduction of the *relation between seeing and believing* (vs. 29).⁴⁶

John tells us that Jesus appeared twice to the disciples in chapter 20, the first time when Thomas was absent and the second when he was present and made his great Christological confession, “My Lord and my God” (20:28). Here Thomas also “saw and believed.”

THE MIRACULOUS CATCH OF FISH

Chapter 21 gives John’s readers the third post-resurrection appearance of the Lord to his disciples and the last sign mentioned by John. After the disciples have been fishing all night without success, Jesus tells them to cast their nets over the starboard side of the boat and they will find a substantial catch of fish. When this happens, the beloved disciple recognizes that it is the Lord who has done this. This sign is reminiscent of a similar one performed by Jesus and recorded by the doctor in Luke 5:1-11. It is intended to show the disciples once again that Jesus is Savior because they cannot catch fish (or men) without him.

CONCLUSION

From this study, several truths concerning sign-seeing, faith and unbelief emerge which, I believe, can be useful for one’s ministry.

1. God always uses signs to point to a deeper meaning, a spiritual significance.

⁴⁶ *ibid.*, n. 1 (italics mine).

2. A sound Christology must be proclaimed over ‘significs’. We are not to rely on signs but must instruct people to look both to the source and terminus of the signs, the Person of Jesus Christ and his (implied) work.
3. We have an obligation to recognize that humility, openness and an acknowledgment of spiritual need are essential elements for a working faith.
4. A *willingness* to receive proper testimony is *crucial* to faith.
5. The text demonstrates varying levels of faith upon which one may build, in concert with the work of the Holy Spirit, in a person’s life.
6. Pride, arrogance, hostility, spiritual bankruptcy are very evident in the rejection of God’s revelation of Jesus Christ.
7. Human culpability is evident in one’s rejection of the truth.
8. Divine sovereignty, in the final analysis, is a determinative factor in a saving faith. God, by his sovereign grace, is the one who ultimately redeems, yet this in no way detracts from human responsibility to believe or from the evangelistic purpose of the Gospel of John.
9. In relation to 7 and 8 above, the Apostle John, as do all the authors of the Scriptural record, teaches a compatibilist philosophy whereby “God’s divine sovereignty and responsible human freedom are not contradictory at all. God sovereignly superintends and controls all things and human beings are responsible for their choices and actions. God is sovereignly active in every moment. Yet that sovereign agency does not annul or limit human responsibility. Human agency is also affirmed; yet this human freedom does not negate or limit God’s agency.”⁴⁷

⁴⁷ Concerning the philosophy of compatibilism, see Robert A. Peterson and Michael D. Williams, *Why I am Not an Arminian*, Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2004, 137ff; also D. A. Carson, *Divine*

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