

The Disciple's Belief in John's Gospel

(By Pastor Kelly Sensenig)

"This beginning of miracles did Jesus in Cana of Galilee, and manifested forth his glory; and his disciples believed on him."
(John 2:11)

In John's Gospel, we do see a progression in the disciple's faith as believers. In other words, the disciple's faith grew in Jesus the more they listened to Him speak (see 2:11). The disciple's faith grew in Jesus as they learned of Christ, listened to His teaching and looked at all His miracles (signs). It took time for the disciples to understand the full significance of His relationship to the Father (see 14:7-11) and His upcoming death (see 18:10-11) and departure (see 14:5). There were many things about Jesus that they needed to piece together. There were many things that they could not fully grasp or link together, even though they were familiar with the Old Testament Messianic passages. At the point of time in which they lived, their faith in Christ needed to continually progress and develop. Although they truly believed all the Old Testament revelation about Christ (His person, death, return & kingdom), they still could not completely piece the puzzle together, without a progression in their faith and understanding of God's program for Jesus and the person of Christ Himself.

Some questions in their minds were: "**Jesus is the Father, but *what does that fully mean?***" "**Jesus is the Messiah, but *which one — the dying one or military one?***" "**Would Jesus be the**

coming king of the second Psalm or the coming lamb of Isaiah 53?" "Would Jesus be the crucified Messiah or the crowned Messiah?" Even the people at large could not see the significance of the Savior's death, when He first arrived on the scene. They could not see past the military Messiah concept (John 6:14-15). Jesus simply did not conform to the crowd's messianic expectations. They wondered what "Son of Man" he really was? (John 12:34). Likewise, the disciples of Jesus could not understand the role of the Messiah (John 12:16). Even the Jewish theologians were not clear in their minds concerning the sufferings of the Messiah and the glorious kingdom that the prophets announced. Some teachers actually held that there were two Messiahs, one who would suffer and one who would reign.

With the events of Christ's kingly entrance into Jerusalem, the disciples did not understand (John 12:16) how Jesus could be king and bring in the kingdom after He had already shared with them about His death and dying (John 2:19, 3:14). The disciples did not fully understand all the actions of Jesus and all the words that Jesus taught them. It would not be until after His resurrection that their eyes would begin to really see and understand all that he had taught them and when Jesus had actually planned to rule as the coming King. These are the things, which they understood more fully after Christ's resurrection from the dead.

When Jesus rose again, they could finally begin to see the meaning of His earlier statement in John 2:19-21. They finally did grasp the meaning of His words in John 2:22. Following the resurrection, the disciples could begin to clearly see that the Old

Testament Scriptures and Jesus' word about His temple (body) all pointed to the role of Jesus as the sacrificial and risen Son of God, instead of the kingly concept of His earthly rule (John 2:22). Following His resurrection, the disciples could now understand and "believe" that the Old Testament Scriptures were actually fulfilled in the sacrificial and resurrection role of the Messiah (John 2:22). Prior to the resurrection of Christ, the disciples obviously were confused about the timing of this event. Even soon after His resurrection, there was confusion concerning what was to really take place (John 20:9).

It's not that the disciples did not know the Scriptures, which spoke about His resurrection. They knew what the Old Testament taught about His resurrection. You see, the disciples were still looking for a military Messiah to set up the kingdom. The whole idea of His death and resurrection was foggy to them. They "knew not" (John 20:9) the exact role of His mission, whether Jesus would be the military Messiah or the dying Messiah, who would rise again. They "knew not" the real timing of the Lord's program. It was difficult for them to piece the entire picture together about Christ's death and resurrection along with His coming kingdom. How could He actually be king if He dies and rises again. How can this fit into the Biblical program and picture?

After the resurrection of Christ, we see this new unveiled understanding (John 2:22, 20:8 and John 20:24-25). After Jesus' resurrection from the dead, the disciples fully understood the program and person of Jesus in a greater way. They could see in a clearer fashion the meaning of Jesus' statement concerning His own resurrection program and person. After His resurrection the disciples

exhibited strong faith in the resurrection program of Jesus (20:20, 27-29) and person of Jesus (20:29). After the resurrection and His arrival on Pentecost in the person of the Holy Spirit (John 14:18), the clouds concerning the true relationship of Christ with the Father and the true role of Christ as the Messiah were being swept away. Everything was beginning to come into focus (John 12:16, 14:20, Acts 2:22-32 — note especially 24 & 32). After Pentecost, the Holy Spirit would indwell the disciples and continue to teach them about Christ's person and work (see John 16:14). The Holy Spirit's teaching ministry would clarify in their minds many things which Jesus said about His person and work while living on earth (John 14:26).

John 16:13 reveals that The Holy Spirit would come after Jesus' death to lead the apostles into the truth about Jesus and His work on the cross. He would teach them about the need for Christ's death upon the cross in light of the coming kingdom. *Remember that the disciples did not know the timing of the cross and the kingdom reign of Jesus.* The disciples needed to understand that Jesus needed to first die in order for people to enter the glorious kingdom day in the future.

Furthermore, Jesus said that the Spirit would not teach the disciples on His own (on His own initiative) but would teach only what He hears from the Father (John 16:13). The Holy Spirit would reveal to their lives concerning future events ("things to come"). Dwight Pentecost has written a monumental work on prophecy after this title. The context is revealing that the Spirit would teach what is yet to come about Christ's death and resurrection and ascension into glory. This was a promise to the apostles. Their partial understanding of the

person and work of Jesus as the Messiah would be unveiled as the Spirit would give them insight into the meanings of the events of the cross and the resurrection, as well as truths about Jesus' return. Actually, all the New Testament books are the fulfillment of this teaching ministry of the Spirit.

In John 16:17-18, we see that prior to the Spirit's indwelling and teaching ministry, the disciples had a hard time understanding about the coming death of Jesus. They wondered how this could be in light of the coming king and the kingdom, which they expected to see established.

Instead of asking Jesus to explain His words, the men began to discuss it among themselves, almost as though they were embarrassed to admit their ignorance. However, you do not get very far by exchanging your own ignorance! It is only when we come to the Lord and ask for His help that we learn the important lessons of life!

Although the disciples were obviously saved as were the other seventy disciples of Jesus (Luke 10:20), their faith (belief) in God's program and understanding of the relationship of the Father with Jesus, needed to be nurtured, guided, strengthened and confirmed. There is a definite initial belief in Christ as Savior (Acts 16:31). *Biblical belief involves a personal response to Christ's person and work for salvation at a given point of time (John 6:29, 1:12).* That the disciples made this decision for Christ is clear. They were no doubt saved through John the Baptist's ministry of preaching repentance and salvation through the Lamb of God (John 1:29 and 35-46). John was calling the nation back to belief in Christ's person and work. Their initial belief resulted in their salvation. It was true saving faith in

Christ, who was the Lamb of God. However, this saving faith was confirmed in the Lord Jesus as they witnessed His miracles (John 2:11, 6:69). Finally, this belief was consummated by the resurrection and resurrection appearances of Christ (2:22, 20:8, 20:25-29). *Thus, it was a progress of belief. Initial faith in Christ's person and work, which needed to be developed over their ministry with Christ.* The disciples, living in their day, found it hard to grasp "how" (in what manner) Jesus could be God (even though they believed He was God) and what program or role the Messiah would take on (a sacrificial one or military one). They, similar to the Old Testament prophets (I Peter 1:10-12), found it difficult to see "how" it would all fit together until after Christ's glorious resurrection. After the resurrection, all the scales upon their eyes began to fall off. They would understand the full significance of Christ's person and the timing of Christ's sacrificial program, which would end with resurrection. *The resurrection was the final proof, which confirmed that the role of the Messiah would be death and resurrection and not a kingdom rule.* However, the disciples still were confused about the actual timing of Christ's future kingdom program from their own perspective in time (Acts 1:6). How long would it be before the kingdom arrives? It would not be until later that the timing of the kingdom program of the Messiah would be seen in a clearer fashion by the disciples (Acts 15:13-17).

This simply gives us a better understanding of John 2:11, when it states how the disciples "believed on Him." *It was a developing, progressive and growing belief in the person and program of the Lord Jesus through the process of progressive revelation.*

When a person believes in or on Christ today, they will exhibit faith in the person and work of Christ. Only this kind of faith is true saving faith (John 20:31, 1:12, 3:16, Acts 4:12). Anything short of a personal response to Christ is not genuine faith in Christ and does not result in salvation (see John 2:23-25, 8:31, 8:24).

The disciples had genuine faith from the start; however, they needed to allow that faith to grow and mature as their understanding of Christ's mission and person was explained to them. This was done throughout the earthly ministry of Christ and of course, further revealed to their lives after the Holy Spirit came to abide within them forever (John 16:14). It would be the Spirit of God who would reveal to their lives the person, work and loveliness of Jesus Christ in a more understandable and deeper way. Watchman Nee wrote, "God will answer all our questions in one way and one way only. Namely, by showing us more of his Son."