

## Bible Studies on the “signs” in John’s Gospel

### Study 1: The Nature and Purpose of the Signs

#### 1. Discuss:

- a. Name something or someone you support or believe in – like a sporting team, or a political movement, or a particular cause. What was it that attracted you to this team/cause/movement/person? What is it that makes you continue to believe in, or support it/him/her/them?
- b. What was it that drew you to Christianity? What is it that persuaded you (and continues to persuade you) to believe in and follow Jesus?

#### Background information

We are going to be looking at the Gospel of John. John was one of the twelve disciples. He was the son of Zebedee, and the brother of James – assumed to be the younger of the two brothers, since he is always listed after James when they are mentioned together. The brothers were fisherman, who are believed to have been among those who first followed John the Baptist before beginning to follow Jesus. John is believed to have been the youngest of the disciples, and out-lived the rest, dying of old age in Ephesus in around 98 AD.

John, despite his youth, had a prominent position among the disciples. He, along with Peter and James, seems to have formed a part of the “inner core.” Those three are often mentioned together, and were the only witnesses to the raising of Jairus’ daughter (Mark 5:37), the transfiguration (Matthew 17:1), and Jesus’ agony in the Garden of Gethsemane (Matthew 26:37). At the last supper, John sat next to Jesus (John 13:23), and his mother certainly had the impression that he was favoured by Jesus, since she asked for him to be seated at Jesus’ right hand in the kingdom (Matthew 20:20). On the cross, Jesus entrusted John with the care of his mother (John 19:27). Later, Paul would refer to Peter, James, and John as the “pillars” of the church (Galatians 2:6-10).

John refers to himself throughout his Gospel as “the disciple whom Jesus loved” (John 13:23, 19:26, 20:2, 21:7, 21:20). His Gospel is very different to the other three (Matthew, Mark, and Luke), which are commonly referred to as the “synoptic” Gospels. “Synoptic” means “with the same eye,” and refers to the fact that those three Gospels tell the story in very similar ways. John’s Gospel, on the other hand, is written through a unique “eye,” with a language, style and structure that is quite different. One of the many differences is that whereas the other Gospels talk about Jesus performing “miracles,” or “works of power,” John talks instead about “signs.” It is those “signs”, and what John sees in them, that we shall be looking at in these studies.

#### READ John 20:24-31

2. This (v. 30) is the last of 17 occasions in John’s gospel in which he refers to Jesus performing “signs.” One of the earliest references was in John 2:23.
  - a. Looking at these two verses (John 2:23 and 20:30), why do you think John calls Jesus’ miracles “signs”? What does John think these “signs” should do for us?
  - b. Given what happened with Thomas, and what Jesus said to Thomas in verse 29, why do you think it was so important for John to record these “signs” for us?
  - c. What do you think it takes to persuade someone to believe in Jesus today?
  - d. If someone asked you why you believe in Jesus, what would you say?
3. What is it that John wants us to believe about Jesus?

- a. How does this differ from what other people around us believe about Jesus?
  - b. Does it matter if someone doesn't agree with us about these things?
4. What does believing in Jesus give us? [see also John 3:15-16, 36; 5:24; 6:35-40, 47; 11:25]
  5. If someone asked you how confident you are of having eternal life, what would you say? Why would you say that?