

Seeing Jesus Series Discussion Guides April - May 2022

Easter Sunday

EASTER

Teaching Text

John 20:1-10

“Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene went to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the entrance. So she came running to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one Jesus loved, and said, “They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we don’t know where they have put him!” So Peter and the other disciple started for the tomb. Both were running, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. He bent over and looked in at the strips of linen lying there but did not go in. Then Simon Peter came along behind him and went straight into the tomb. He saw the strips of linen lying there, as well as the cloth that had been wrapped around Jesus’ head. The cloth was still lying in its place, separate from the linen. Finally the other disciple, who had reached the tomb first, also went inside. He saw and believed. (They still did not understand from Scripture that Jesus had to rise from the dead.) Then the disciples went back to where they were staying.”

Recap

For Easter Sunday this year, Pastor Jon focused on “seeing Jesus” in John’s gospel account of the resurrection. Through using three different Greek words for sight/seeing, John lays out the different ways Jesus is viewed in our world today. The first, seen in verse 5: “He bent over and looked in at the strips,” uses “blepo” and means to glance or to look in. This suggests a shallow viewing of Jesus that reduces Him to the size of our attention spans, but He is worth taking a deeper look. The next word, “theōreō”, means to gaze on for the purpose of analyzing, is seen in verse 6: He saw the strips of linen lying there. John is making the case that Christianity is a reasoning and reasonable faith. In every generation, Jesus has found a way to thrill and satisfy the human heart, meaning that for thousands of years, people have wrestled through Jesus’ claims and found them to be true. Finally, verse 8, “He saw and believed,” uses the word “orao”, meaning to perceive with intelligent comprehension, or to see with understanding. The story of Jesus is surprising and hard to believe, and that’s why many people come to find that it’s true. The hero never comes to earthly power, but ends up dying, only to have His resurrection testified about by women, the most dismissed people in the culture at the time. These things ultimately point to the truth of the Gospel because no one would ever make up a story about saving the world that goes like this. The invitation of Easter is to “come and see” Jesus for yourself, and find that through faith in Him and His story, all questions of origin, meaning, morality, and identity are answered.

Discussion Questions

Connect

1. How did you spend Easter this year?

Character

Ask someone to read John 20:1-10 aloud. Then, ask at least one of the following questions:

1. What words, images, or phrases stood out to you?
2. What about this passage encourages or challenges you?

Consider

1. Think back to the time you first heard and believed the good news of the Gospel. How did you hear? What did you feel?
2. Where/how did you see Jesus this Easter?

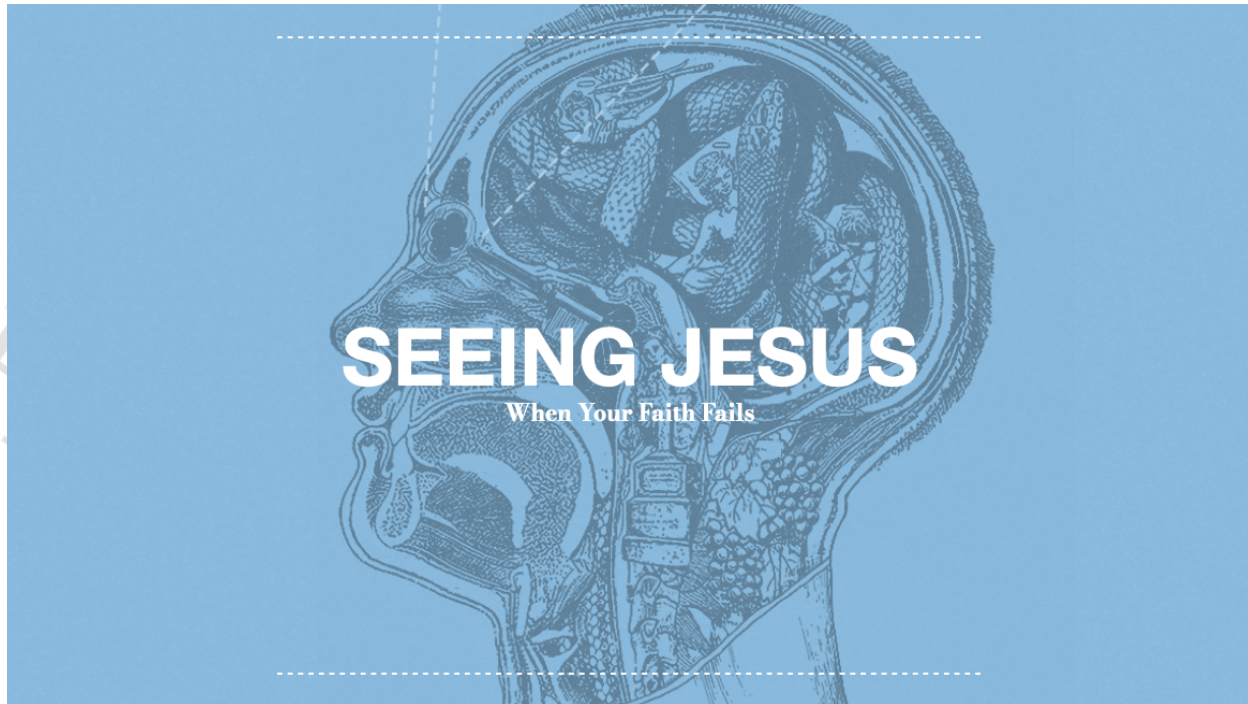
3. Are there any areas in your life where you feel dissatisfied? How can Jesus meet those needs?

Cover

Break up into groups of two or three thank Jesus for His sacrifice on the cross. Then, lift up the areas where you need to freshly receive the truth of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection. Ask the Holy Spirit to strengthen your belief in these truths and reveal how they impact these parts of your life.

CHURCH OF THE CITY NY

Week 1 - Seeing Jesus When Your Faith Fails



Teaching Text

Luke 22:31-32

“Simon, Simon, Satan has asked to sift all of you as wheat. But I have prayed for you, Simon, that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned back, strengthen your brothers.”

Recap

This Sunday, Pastor Jon began a series called Seeing Jesus, building on last week’s Easter message about the resurrection. He pointed out three things that the enemy uses to block our view of the mercy and hope that we have been given through Jesus: sin, self, and secularism.

The enemy uses *sin* to block our vision by trying to make us focus on our failures and prevent us from seeing Jesus’ forgiveness, which is actually limitless. He can use our *self* to block our vision by making us focus inward on how we can fulfill our own needs instead of the provision of God. And finally, he can use *secularism* (the idea that the world has no spiritual moral foundation) to put the burden of living a full life on our own shoulders, even though God wants to give us life abundantly.

Jesus is calling us like He called Peter; to return to Him and strengthen others. The Christian life is complicated, and only by seeing Jesus clearly can we follow Him.

Discussion Questions

Connect

1. If you could instantly become an expert in something, what would it be?
2. What is a moment, conversation, lesson, or experience from this past season of community group + sermon series that has stayed with you or made an impact on your faith in the last few months?

Character

Ask someone to read Luke 22:31-32 aloud. Then, ask at least one of the following questions:

1. What do these verses reveal about the nature of faith? What do they reveal about the character of Jesus?
2. Take a few minutes to read a few verses preceding and following this passage. How does the context of this passage help you understand its meaning?

Consider

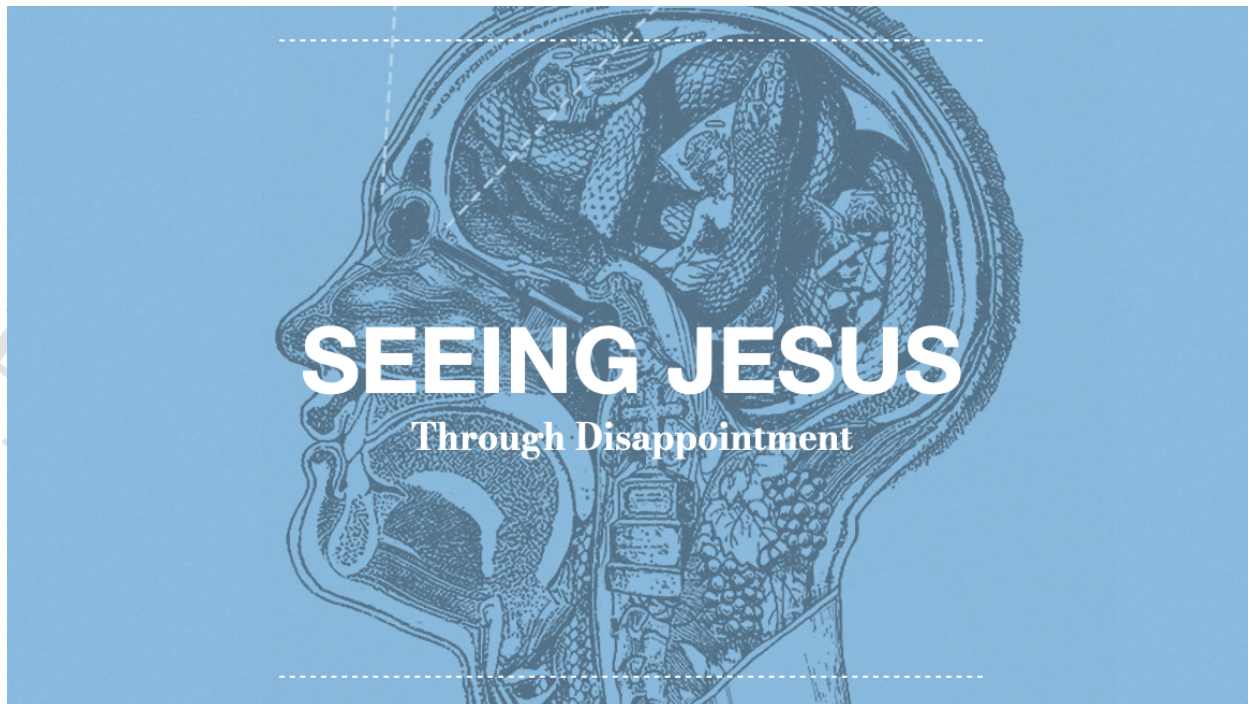
As Pastor Jon preached this Sunday, the enemy's strategy to make our faith fail is to place something between us and God that blocks our view of God from that vantage point.

1. Are there things in your life you feel are currently blocking your view of God, or causing you to shift your focus away from Him?
2. What are things in the past that have blocked your view of God that He has redeemed for you?
3. Right now, how much of your faith feels hinged on your own personal efforts? How much is rooted in the fact of Jesus being the center of your life?

Cover

Break out into smaller groups to pray around how you can encourage one another to seek out and receive God's grace over all our sin and struggles this week. (Also share any general life prayer requests for the week and also if there are any areas in your faith that you are currently wrestling through.) Pray for a release of a fragile, false self, and ask God to renew your faith and your identity in Him.

Week 2 - Seeing Jesus Through Disappointment



Teaching Text

Luke 24:13-35

Now that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem. They were talking with each other about everything that had happened. As they talked and discussed these things with each other, Jesus himself came up and walked along with them; but they were kept from recognizing him.

He asked them, "What are you discussing together as you walk along?"

They stood still, their faces downcast. One of them, named Cleopas, asked him, "Are you the only one visiting Jerusalem who does not know the things that have happened there in these days?"

"What things?" he asked.

"About Jesus of Nazareth," they replied. "He was a prophet, powerful in word and deed before God and all the people. The chief priests and our rulers handed him over to be sentenced to death, and they crucified him; but we had hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel. And what is more, it is the third day since all this took place. In addition, some of our women amazed us. They went to the tomb early this morning but didn't find his body. They came and told us that they had seen a vision of angels, who said he was

alive. Then some of our companions went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said, but they did not see Jesus."

He said to them, "How foolish you are, and how slow to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Did not the Messiah have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?" And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself.

As they approached the village to which they were going, Jesus continued on as if he were going farther. But they urged him strongly, "Stay with us, for it is nearly evening; the day is almost over." So he went in to stay with them.

When he was at the table with them, he took bread, gave thanks, broke it and began to give it to them. Then their eyes were opened and they recognized him, and he disappeared from their sight. They asked each other, "Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?"

They got up and returned at once to Jerusalem. There they found the Eleven and those with them, assembled together and saying, "It is true! The Lord has risen and has appeared to Simon." Then the two told what had happened on the way, and how Jesus was recognized by them when he broke the bread.

Recap

This Sunday, Pastor Suzy continued our Seeing Jesus series with "Seeing Jesus Through Disappointment" by walking through Jesus' post-resurrection encounter with two of His disheartened disciples on their journey to Emmaus. By viewing this account like a miniature play, she broke this story down into three acts and an epilogue that reflect a journey we can still relate to today.

We meet these disciples in Act 1: Disappointment. It has been three days since Jesus died on the cross, and even though they heard the news of the empty tomb, they are disillusioned with their Messiah. Their false expectations of who Jesus was supposed to be and what He was supposed to do made Him unrecognizable to them, so they gave into doubt and left Jerusalem. Their misunderstanding caused them to walk away and begin trying to reason through their feelings, but thankfully Jesus steps in to turn the story.

Act 2: Dialogue begins when the unrecognizable God comes near to with them through their confusion. By asking questions and listening, Jesus gets the men to stop their desertion and process the grief driving them away. It is only after making room for them to share their hearts that Jesus confronts their incorrect theology and misunderstandings at the root of

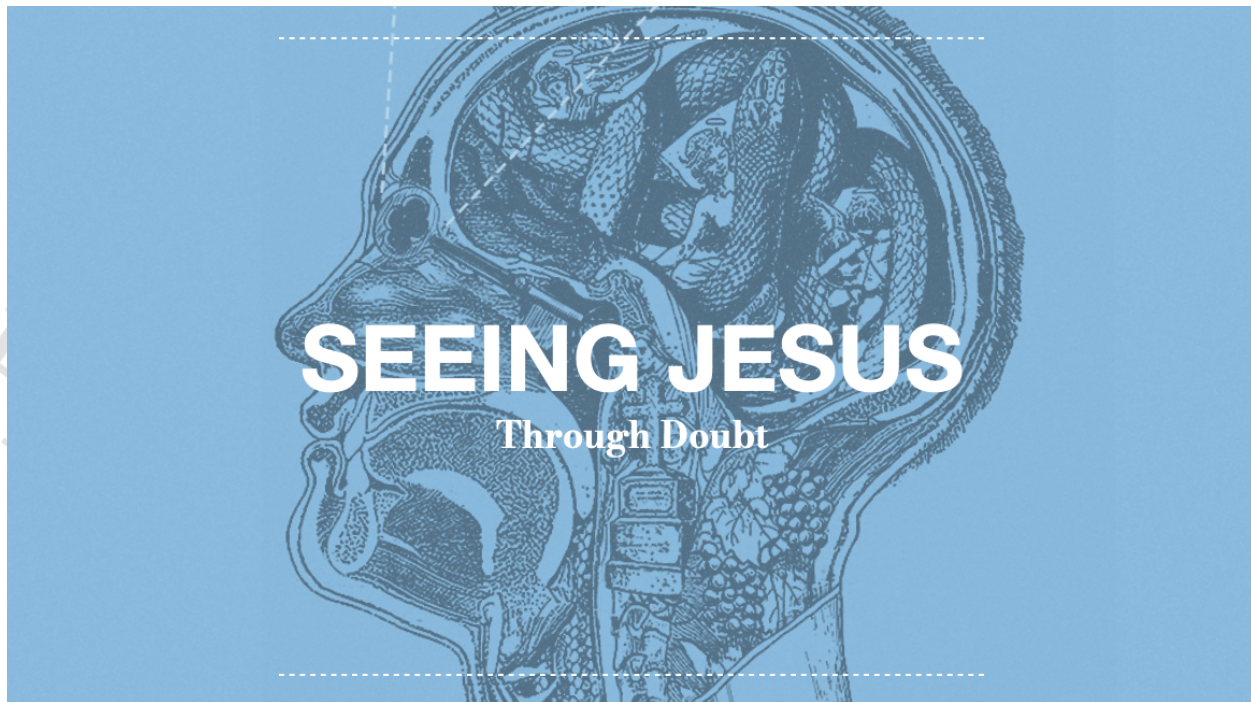
their sadness. His disciples are reawakened to the truth of who Jesus is as He interprets the scriptures and the prophets.

After this reawakening, the traveling trio arrives in Emmaus, and we move into Act 3: Dinner. The disciples plead with Jesus to stay with them for dinner, and we learn that God can be constrained, or moved, by our affections for Him. He will abide with us when we choose to tarry in His presence. It is here, in the mundane practice of breaking bread together, that Jesus finally reveals Himself to His followers. The resurrected Lord's first teaching is not a spectacular revelation to many, but a quiet and humble moment of restoration of belief for two disappointed souls.

Finally, with Jesus' disappearance from the table, the story comes to an end with the Denouement (epilogue): Declaration. We are left alone with the two men again as they first declare to each other what they just experienced, and immediately begin their journey back to Jerusalem to testify of their encounter with the Risen Savior. Jesus restored their faith in this encounter so that they might go on declaring the truth of Jesus and His resurrection.

This story in Luke's gospel is encouraging for us, and provides a full picture of a cycle we often experience in our Christian walk — moving from disappointment and doubt, to processing grief by pressing into God's presence with scripture and prayer, to reawakening to truth as we seek God and He reveals Himself, and going out and testifying about His restoration power.

Week 3 - Seeing Jesus Through Doubt



Teaching Text

John 20:24-29

Now Thomas (also known as Didymus), one of the Twelve, was not with the disciples when Jesus came. So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord!"

But he said to them, "Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe."

A week later his disciples were in the house again, and Thomas was with them. Though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!" Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe."

Thomas said to him, "My Lord and my God!"

Then Jesus told him, "Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."

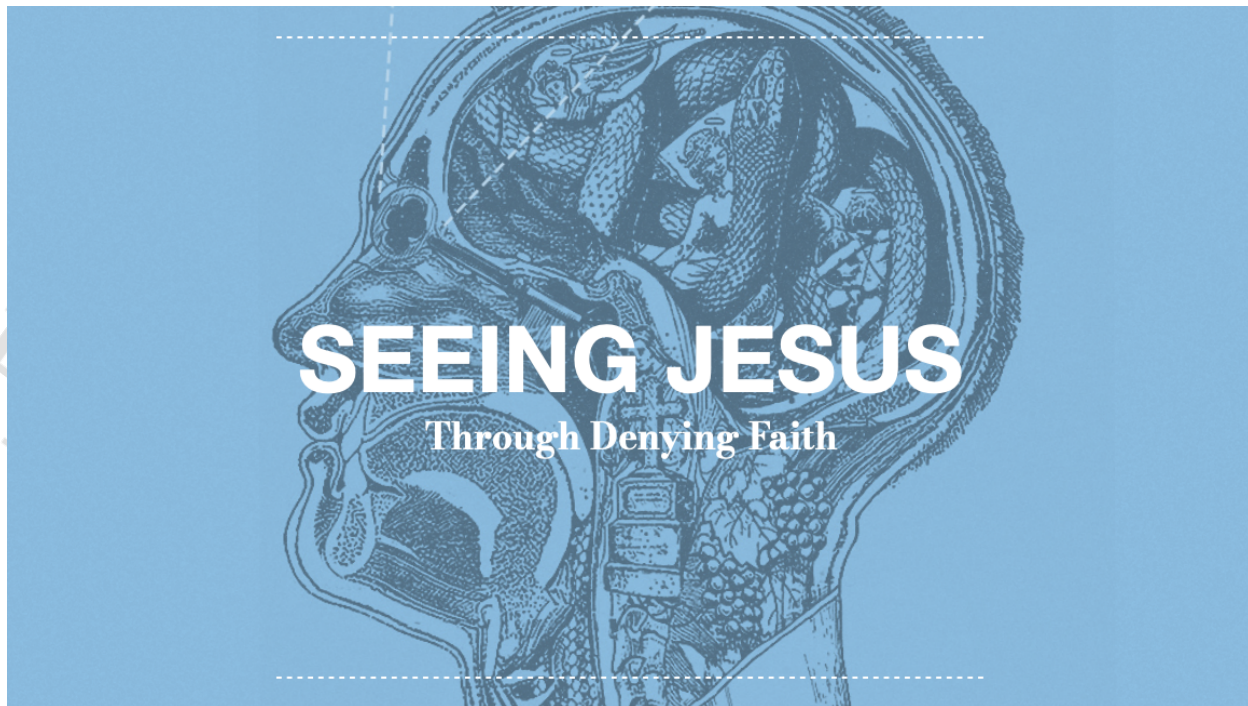
Recap

This Sunday, Pastor Jon taught on "Seeing Jesus Through Doubt" with the story of Thomas' reaction to the news of Jesus' resurrection. After missing Jesus' first appearance to His

disciples, Thomas begins to wrestle through his doubts around who Jesus is and what He came to do. Thomas' story is not meant to be a cautionary tale for believers today, but displays the encouraging truth that facing down our doubts will deepen our faith. Everyone who believes in anything will wrestle with doubt, but as Christians our faith is in the person of Jesus. So, we must follow Thomas' lead and clarify our faith by working through who Jesus is and what it means to believe in Him in our current cultural context. To see Jesus through our doubts, we must determine to focus on the Jesus we meet in the Scriptures, and then bring them into community with complete honesty. We know Thomas' story does not end in this moment of doubt, but by the grace of God, in a life lived on mission, even unto death for the sake of the Gospel. Our ultimate destiny as followers of Christ is that we too are defined and saved by God's grace, and this truth allows us to move from doubt into deeper, richer faith.

CHURCH OF THE CITY NY

Week 4 - Seeing Jesus Through Denying Faith



Teaching Text

Luke 22:1-6, 47-53

Now the Festival of Unleavened Bread, called the Passover, was approaching, and the chief priests and the teachers of the law were looking for some way to get rid of Jesus, for they were afraid of the people. Then Satan entered Judas, called Iscariot, one of the Twelve. And Judas went to the chief priests and the officers of the temple guard and discussed with them how he might betray Jesus. They were delighted and agreed to give him money. He consented, and watched for an opportunity to hand Jesus over to them when no crowd was present.

While he was still speaking a crowd came up, and the man who was called Judas, one of the Twelve, was leading them. He approached Jesus to kiss him, but Jesus asked him, "Judas, are you betraying the Son of Man with a kiss?"

When Jesus' followers saw what was going to happen, they said, "Lord, should we strike with our swords?" And one of them struck the servant of the high priest, cutting off his right ear.

But Jesus answered, "No more of this!" And he touched the man's ear and healed him.

Then Jesus said to the chief priests, the officers of the temple guard, and the elders, who had come for him, "Am I leading a rebellion, that you have come with swords and clubs?"

Every day I was with you in the temple courts, and you did not lay a hand on me. But this is your hour —when darkness reigns.”

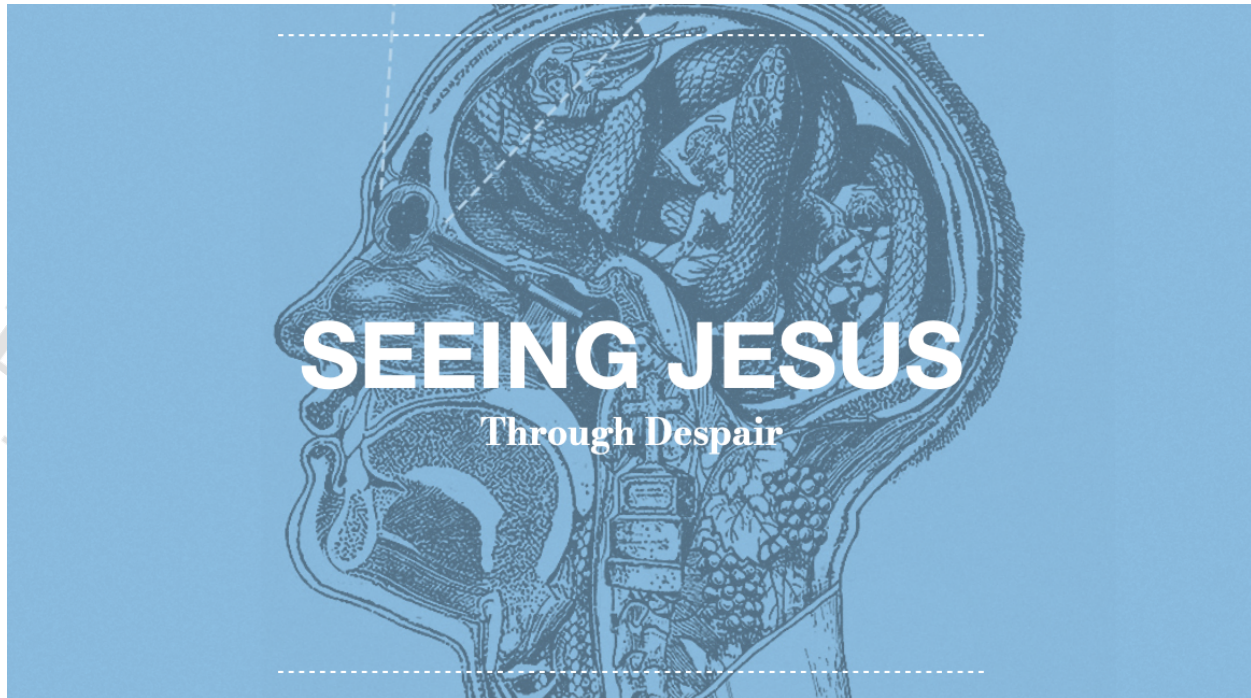
Recap

This Sunday, Pastor Jon taught on “Seeing Jesus Through Denying Faith” by taking a closer look at Judas’ betrayal and denial of Jesus. While Pastor Jon reminded us that while we cannot lose our salvation, we can deny our faith. It is confusing and painful to examine why faith fails, but it is increasingly necessary in our culture where people are rapidly turning away from faith. Judas’ story invites us to examine our motives for believing in Jesus.

Jesus is very clear about what He offers, but many people are still drawn into religion by false motives, (making money, accumulating followers, yielding power over others, sinful desires, solving problems). The true state of our faith takes time to be revealed. As seen in the Parable of the Sower in Matthew, faith taking root and bearing fruit not only takes time, but can also be resisted by the enemy, stay shallow and forgotten, or end up strangled out by the distractions of this life. Our false motives are always exposed under these pressures, and we realize the thing we have attached our meaning to stops meeting our needs, and ultimately ends up frustrating us to the point of deconstruction and abandonment.

While deconstruction can be painful and traumatic, it calls us to examine ourselves in humility, and respond to others with mercy, gentleness, and patience. We can experience the effects and benefits of faith based systems without actually encountering the grace of God. It is only through a sincere reorientation of the heart by the Holy Spirit that we can wrestle through doubt and the deconstruction of religious systems without losing our faith. We should be encouraged to take the time to allow Jesus to sort out our motives for following Him, because it is God’s desire to see people repent and return fully to Him, no matter how long it takes.

Week 5 - Seeing Jesus Through Despair



Teaching Text

John 20:11-18

Now Mary stood outside the tomb crying. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb and saw two angels in white, seated where Jesus' body had been, one at the head and the other at the foot.

They asked her, "Woman, why are you crying?"

"They have taken my Lord away," she said, "and I don't know where they have put him." At this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not realize that it was Jesus.

He asked her, "Woman, why are you crying? Who is it you are looking for?"

Thinking he was the gardener, she said, "Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will get him."

Jesus said to her, "Mary."

She turned toward him and cried out in Aramaic, "Rabboni!" (which means "Teacher").

Jesus said, "Do not hold on to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father. Go instead to my brothers and tell them, 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'"

Mary Magdalene went to the disciples with the news: "I have seen the Lord!" And she told them that he had said these things to her.

Recap

This Sunday, Pastor Suzy continued our 'Seeing Jesus' series with the story of Mary Magdalene's encounter with the risen Jesus outside of His tomb, and revealed how we can see Jesus through our despair. We meet Mary in the depths of her grief, distressed from the loss of Jesus (both in His death and now His body missing), and find she is on the edge of giving up hope. Blinded by her weeping, she does not recognize angels who have appeared in the empty grave or even Jesus Himself, yet He still draws near to her, showing concern for her grief. He calls her by her name, just as He had when He delivered her from demonic holds in their first meeting, and when she turns her face to see the voice that spoke, she realizes she has been speaking with Jesus. Mary cries out 'Rabboni' upon recognizing Him, naming God as He just named her, however, the name she chooses shows she has not quite grasped the full weight of Jesus' resurrection. She tries to cling to their old relationship, but Jesus gently rebukes her then, and us today. Grief can make us try to frantically and frenetically bring back the past, or 'go back to normal', and end up missing the new thing at work. We learn in Revelation that Jesus will make all things new, and in the waiting He has sent the Holy Spirit to draw near to us and guide us on this side of eternity. The Jesus in front of Mary was calling her to a new relationship with Him and a new mission — to share the good news of the resurrection and the hope found in life with Jesus. Mary teaches us that (1) grief and lament are appropriate responses to death and loss, (2) we must earnestly and honestly bring our grief to the Lord, and He will meet us, (3) hold on to hope, not as an idea, but in the person of Jesus, the hope of glory. Grief in this life is temporary, whether it lasts for three months or forty years. Jesus has defeated death, and made our hope secure in Him.