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# Hearing, seeing, and believing in the Gospel of John

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## Hearing, Seeing, and Believing in the Gospel of John

Faith and unbelief are central concerns for the Fourth Evangelist, and a major facet of the issue is the connection between faith and seeing Jesus' signs and resurrection appearances. The problem has long been a disputed point among interpreters of the Fourth Gospel. Some have argued that the evangelist disparages faith based on signs (John 2,23-25; 20,29), since true faith must be based on the word<sup>(1)</sup>, but another interpreter insists that signs were performed and recorded precisely to evoke faith (20,30-31)<sup>(2)</sup>. Some have suggested that signs produce an inadequate form of belief which can grow into true faith (3,2)<sup>(3)</sup>, but others have pointed out that signs

(1) J. BECKER, "Wunder und Christologie: Zum literarkritischen und christologischen Problem der Wunder im Johannesevangelium", *NTS* 16 (1969-70) 130-148; L. SCHOTTRUFF, *Der glaubende und die feindliche Welt: Beobachtungen zum gnostischen Dualismus und seiner Bedeutung für Paulus und das Johannesevangelium* (WMANT 37; Neukirchen-Vluyn 1970) 251-258. Cf. R. BULTMANN, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary* (Philadelphia 1971) 696; W. WILKENS, *Zeichen und Werke: Ein Beitrag zur Theologie des 4. Evangeliums in Erzählungs- und Redestoff* (ATANT 55; Zürich 1969) 44, 141-142; E. HAENCHEN, *John* (Hermeneia; Philadelphia 1984) I, 237, II, 212.

(2) M. M. THOMPSON, *The Humanity of Jesus in the Fourth Gospel* (Philadelphia 1988) 63-64. Cf. M. DE JONGE, *Jesus: Stranger from Heaven and Son of God. Jesus Christ and the Christians in Johannine Perspective* (SBL SBS 11; Missoula, MT 1977) 136.

(3) BULTMANN, *John*, 131, 207-209; S. HOFBECK, *Semeion: Der Begriff des "Zeichens" im Johannesevangelium unter Berücksichtigung seiner Vorgeschichte* (Münsterschwarzacher Studien 3; Münsterschwarzach 1966); R. E. BROWN, *The Gospel According to John* (AB 29-29A; Garden City, NY 1966; 1970) I, 195-196, 530-531; W. NICOL, *The Semeia in the Fourth Gospel: Tradition and Redaction* (NTS 32; Leiden 1972) 99-106; R. KYSAR, *John: The Maverick Gospel* (Atlanta 1976) 67-73; R. FORTNA, *The Fourth Gospel and Its Predecessor: From Narrative Source to Present Gospel* (Philadelphia 1988) 247-250. Cf. WILKENS, *Zeichen*, 59.

are rightly perceived only by those who already have faith (11,40)<sup>(4)</sup>. Some conclude that the initial faith was produced by the word<sup>(5)</sup>.

A number of these studies have investigated the problem thematically, attempting to discern a coherent view of seeing, hearing, and faith in the relevant portions of the gospel in its present form<sup>(6)</sup>. The difficulty is knowing how to assess the various passages, since the gospel refers to signs in both positive and negative ways, and uses "believe" for both inadequate and genuine types of faith. Other studies rely on source and redaction analysis to ascribe the more positive view of signs to a "signs source" and the more negative view to a redactor<sup>(7)</sup>. The problem is that scholars have not been able to agree on the criteria that can be used to distinguish redactional levels or on the extent of a possible signs source.

An alternative approach is a literary one that again takes the gospel in its present form, but focuses on the characters as representatives of various types of faith. R. Alan Culpepper, for example, suggests that the evangelist uses the characters to attract readers to positive exemplars of faith, evoke sympathy for inadequate responses, and alienate readers from characters who reject Jesus<sup>(8)</sup>. This approach is a promising one which can be developed further by noting how characters are *juxtaposed* in the gospel. The Fourth Evangelist's use of juxtaposition has sometimes been noted, but has not been fully developed as an interpretive tool. Yet attention to juxtaposition can help to clarify the role seeing, together with hearing, in the genesis of faith.

<sup>(4)</sup> DE JONGE, *Jesus*, 135-136; R. KY SAR, *The Fourth Evangelist and His Gospel* (Minneapolis 1975) 69-73; id., *Maverick*, 71-72; R. SCHNACKENBURG, *The Gospel According to St. John* (New York 1968; 1980; 1982) I, 519; M.-É. BOISMARD, "Rapports entre foi et miracles dans l'Évangile de Jean", *ETL* 58 (1982) 357-364, esp. 357.

<sup>(5)</sup> F. SCHNIDER - W. STENGER, *Johannes und die Synoptiker: Vergleich ihrer Parallelen* (Biblische Handbibliothek 9; München 1971) 83.

<sup>(6)</sup> See the works by Thompson, de Jonge, and Hofbeck, in notes 2 and 3, above. See also C. TRAEYS, *Voir Jésus et le Père en lui selon l'Évangile de Saint Jean* (Analecta Gregoriana 159; Rome 1967) 225-243.

<sup>(7)</sup> See the works by Bultmann, Fortna, Becker, Nicol, Schottroff, Wilkens, and Boismard in notes 1, 3, and 4 above.

<sup>(8)</sup> R. A. CULPEPPER, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel: A Study in Literary Design* (Philadelphia 1983) 99-148; R. F. COLLINS, "The Representative Figures in the Fourth Gospel", *Downside Review* 94 (1976) 26-46, 118-132.

## John 1,19-51

The narrative portion of the gospel begins with an interchange between John and a delegation from Jerusalem (1,19-28), an account of John's testimony to Jesus and its effect on two of his own disciples (1,29-39), and a description of the effect of their words and Jesus' words on Peter, Philip, and Nathanael (1,40-51). The evangelist structured the initial interchange in two scenes of approximately equal length (1,19-23.24-28), by repeating that the delegation had been sent from the Jews or Pharisees (1,19.24), and by referring to the Christ, Elijah, and the prophet (1,20-21.25). In the next part of the passage the evangelist again created two scenes of approximately equal length (1,29-34.35-39) by repeating references to "the next day" and to John seeing Jesus coming or walking, by the announcement "Behold the Lamb of God (1,29.35-36), and by stressing the word "remain" (*menein*; 1,32-33.38-39). The two pairs of scenes are connected by the presence of John the Baptist, and by the references to his testimony, his reasons for baptizing, and the unknown character of the coming one (1,26.31). Despite these connections, the Jerusalem delegation presents a striking contrast to John the Baptist and his disciples<sup>(9)</sup>.

The questions of the Jewish delegation centered on messianic expectations; they wanted to know if John was the Christ, Elijah, or the prophet, who was presumably the prophet like Moses (Deut 18,15-18). John bluntly denied that he was the one they were expecting. They pressed the point, however, asking why he was baptizing if he was not the Christ, Elijah, or the prophet. John replied with the startling statement, "Among you stands one whom you do not know" (1,26). His remark suggests that their messianic expectations did not adequately prepare them to recognize Jesus. It also raises the question of how one *does* recognize Jesus as the coming one.

John the Baptist answers the question by acknowledging that he himself did not recognize Jesus at first (1,31.33), but was able to do so because God *spoke* to him and said, "The one on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain, this is he who baptizes with the Holy

<sup>(9)</sup> The diptych technique in John 1,19-28 and 29-34 has also been noted by G. MLAKUZHYYL, *The Christocentric Literary Structure in the Fourth Gospel* (AnBib 117; Rome 1987) 117. Cf. CULPEPPER, *Anatomy*, 126-127.

Spirit" (1,33). Later, the words which John heard were confirmed when he *saw* the Spirit descend and remain on Jesus. The same pattern continues in 1,35-39. John the Baptist saw Jesus again and said, "Behold the Lamb of God". Two of his disciples followed Jesus when "they *heard* him say this" (1,37). When Jesus asked them, "What are you looking for?" they did not voice any of the messianic expectations found earlier in the chapter. Instead, they asked "Where are you staying?" and Jesus answered, "Come and you will see" (1,39). The disciples responded to what they heard, saw where Jesus was staying, and remained with him.

The text does not suggest that Jesus did anything extraordinary there, but in the next scene Andrew announces, "We have found the Messiah" (1,41). Peter came to Jesus because of what Andrew had said (1,41-42). Next Philip responded to Jesus' own command, "Follow me" (1,43) and in turn told Nathanael what he had found (1,45). Even though Philip's claim ran counter to Nathanael's own expectations, Nathanael went to Jesus, who told him, "Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you" (1,48). When Nathanael heard these enigmatic words he acclaimed Jesus as "Son of God" and "King of Israel" (1,49). Jesus identifies Nathanael's response as a confession faith, and promises that Nathanael and the other disciples will see even greater things. "Because *I said* to you, I saw you under the fig tree do *you believe?* You [singular] *shall see* greater things than these... you [plural] *will see* heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man" (1,50-51).

## John 2

The promise to Nathanael anticipates chap. 2, which contains two short episodes: the miracle at Cana and the cleansing of the temple. There are important reasons to think that these episodes should be read together. First, the stories are linked thematically. In each, Jesus used a Jewish institution to reveal something about his identity and mission. The water jars at Cana were once used for "the Jewish rites of purification" (2,6), but became vessels of the wine through which Jesus revealed his glory (2,11). The Jerusalem temple was the central cultic institution for Jews in the first century, but Jesus anticipated its replacement by his own crucified and resur-

rected body (2,19-21)<sup>(10)</sup>. Both episodes anticipate Jesus' passion or "hour" (2,4.21) and include the theme of signs and faith (2,11.18.23-25).

Second, there are striking formal similarities between the two stories, which can be seen in the following outline. The difference is that the main action occurs after the verbal exchange at Cana and before it at the temple.

<i>John 2,1-12</i>	<i>John 2,13-25</i>
SETTING: Cana (2,1-2)	SETTING: Jerusalem (2,13)
	MAIN ACTION (2,14-17)
	Temple cleansing
VERBAL EXCHANGE (2,3-5)	VERBAL EXCHANGE (2,18-20)
Jesus' mother says wine is gone	Jews demand a sign
Jesus speaks of his "hour"	Jesus speaks of "temple"
Jesus' mother shows	Jews show
uncomprehending confidence	uncomprehending skepticism
MAIN ACTION (2,6-10)	
Water changed to wine	
NARRATOR'S COMMENT (2,11)	NARRATOR'S COMMENT
	(2,21-22)
Jesus manifested his glory	When Jesus was raised
his disciples believed	his disciples believed
TRANSITIONAL SCENE (2,12)	TRANSITIONAL SCENE (2,23-25)
Jesus goes to Capernaum	Jesus does not trust those
with mother, brothers,	who believed because of
and disciples	the signs

Despite the thematic and formal similarities between these two episodes, they present responses to Jesus that are strikingly different. The verbal exchanges in both passages began when someone asked Jesus for something — implicitly at Cana and explicitly in Jerusalem. In both cases Jesus responded by abruptly shifting the plane of conversation to the "hour" of his passion or to the destruction and resurrection of the "temple" of his body. Yet Jesus' mother showed uncomprehending confidence in him, while the bystanders in the temple reacted with uncomprehending skepticism.

<sup>(10)</sup> Cf. C. H. DODD, *The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel* (Cambridge 1953) 303; D. M. SMITH, *John* (Philadelphia <sup>2</sup>1986) 20; E. C. HOSKYN, *The Fourth Gospel* (London <sup>2</sup>1947) 185.

Contrasting responses to Jesus also appear at the end of each passage. The Cana story concludes, "This, the first of his signs, Jesus did at Cana in Galilee, and manifested his glory, and his disciples believed in him" (2,11). The tone of the verse indicates that faith was the appropriate response to the sign and by accompanying his mother and disciples to Capernaum, Jesus gave tacit approval to their responses (2,12). In Jerusalem the results were different. After the resurrection the disciples would connect the temple cleansing with belief in the scriptures and Jesus' words. But Jesus did not entrust himself to the others in Jerusalem who believed on the basis of the signs that he did during the festival. The juxtaposition of these scenes raises a question: Why did people at Cana respond with confidence or acceptable faith, while those at Jerusalem showed skepticism or unacceptable faith<sup>(11)</sup>?

As in chap. 1, people's expectations are an important factor. Jesus' mother was confident that Jesus could do something about the lack of wine, but she did not demand that he act in a specific way. She told the servants, "Do *whatever* he tells you" (12). In contrast, the bystanders in the temple insisted that Jesus demonstrate his authority by performing a miraculous act or "sign" and expressed skepticism when Jesus refused to conform to their expectations by doing a miracle.

Another factor is, again, the importance of hearing. Those who began following Jesus because they heard a word about him or from him were later able to discern the significance of his actions. The first disciples followed Jesus because they heard that he was the Lamb of God (1,36) or Messiah (1,41). Philip heeded Jesus' command to follow (1,43) and Nathanael believed because Jesus said "when you were under the fig tree I saw you" (1,48-50). *The sign they saw at Cana did not evoke an initial faith. Rather, the sign confirmed and was perceived by a faith that had been engendered through hearing*<sup>(13)</sup>.

(11) Cf. CULPEPPER, *Anatomy*, 90.

(12) See recently F. J. MOLONEY, "From Cana to Cana (Jn. 2:1-4:54) and the Fourth Evangelist's Concept of Correct (and Incorrect) Faith", *Salesianum* 40 (1978) 817-843.

(13) Culpepper maintains that the disciples' confessions in chap. 1 should be distinguished from the faith mentioned in 2,11. Nevertheless, the same verb, *pisteuein*, is used in 1,50 and 2,11, and in 1,50 it does refer to an

In contrast, the people who came to Jesus because of what they saw him do were later confounded by what they heard him say. The bystanders saw Jesus cleanse the temple, asked to see a sign, but expressed skepticism when Jesus spoke of raising "this temple" in three days. The unreliable faith mentioned in 2,23-25 is the natural corollary to the skepticism of 2,20. The people in the temple did not believe because Jesus did not conform to their expectations. Others in Jerusalem did believe because Jesus apparently did conform to their expectations of a miracle-worker, but Jesus was wary of such faith. The disciples, however, were able to discern the meaning of what they saw Jesus do in the temple because they remembered what Jesus had *said* and believed the scripture and the *word* which he had spoken (2,22).

#### John 3,1-4,42

The contrast between Nicodemus and the Samaritan woman in John 3-4 continues the pattern that emerged in the previous chapters. The characters seem to be exact opposites<sup>(14)</sup>. Nicodemus was Jewish, a man, and one who held a respected position in society. His counterpart is a Samaritan, a woman, and one whose social status was dubious. Nicodemus went to Jesus "by night" (3,2) and the woman encountered Jesus in broad daylight at "about the sixth hour" (4,6).

Formally, both episodes consist largely of dialogues; neither contains a miraculous sign or a dramatic action like the temple cleansing. The initial conversations (3,1-21; 4,1-30) unfold through the use of the technique of misunderstanding, which focuses on being "born anew" (*gennēthēnai anōthen*) in 3,3-9 and "living water" in

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acceptable form of faith. See K. H. RENGSTORF, "*sēmeion, ktl.*", *TDNT* VII, 251; TRAEYS, *Voir Jésus*, 126; SCHNACKENBURG, *John*, I, 319; BROWN, *John*, I, 87; COLLINS, "Representative Figures", 34-36; B. LINDARS, *The Gospel of John* (NCB; Grand Rapids - London 1972) 119. Although C. K. Barrett says that Nathanael's faith was based on miracle (*The Gospel According to St. John* [Philadelphia 1978] 186), it was clearly based on what was heard, not on what was seen.

(14) BROWN, *John*, I, 180, 185; COLLINS, "Representative Figures", 37-38; M. M. PAZDAN, "Nicodemus and the Samaritan Woman: Contrasting Models of Discipleship", *BTB* 17 (1987) 145-148.

4,7-15. The difference is that after 3,9 Nicodemus fades from the scene, while in chap. 4 the woman remains an active partner in conversation.

These initial encounters are followed by interludes which consist of dialogues between John the Baptist or Jesus and their respective disciples (3,22-30; 4,31-38). The dialogues develop the themes of water (3,5.22-26) and food (4,8.31-34) which were introduced earlier in each chapter<sup>(15)</sup>. Each includes an initial comment to the "rabbi" (3,26; 4,31), a response and reminder of something the disciples themselves said (3,27-28; 4,34-35), and a comment about rejoicing (3,29; 4,36).

The interludes are followed by short conclusions which unify the episodes by recapitulating and developing themes mentioned earlier in the chapter (3,31-36; 4,39-42). The conclusion of the third chapter (3,31-36) refers to "from above" (3,3.7.31), the one who comes down from heaven (3,13.31), testimony (3,11.32-33), the one God sent (3,17.34), the Spirit (3,5-8.34), faith and eternal life (3,15-16.36), and the contrast between those who do and do not believe (3,18.36)<sup>(16)</sup>. The conclusion of the account of Jesus in Samaria (4,39-42) repeats the woman's comment that Jesus "told me all that I ever did" (4,29.39) and recalls how the Samaritans came to Jesus (4,30.40), adding that they acclaimed Jesus as the "Savior of the world". The major elements follow a "sandwich" pattern similar to that of 18,15-27 (cf. Mark 5,21-43; 11,12-25), and can be summarized as follows<sup>(17)</sup>:

<i>John 3,1-36</i>	<i>John 4,1-42</i>
INITIAL ENCOUNTER (3,1-21)	INITIAL ENCOUNTER (4,1-30)
Jesus' conversation with Nicodemus	Jesus' conversation with the Samaritan woman

<sup>(15)</sup> BROWN, *John*, I, 155; LINDARS, *John*, 162.

<sup>(16)</sup> BROWN, *John*, I, 159-160. John 3,31-36 is so closely connected to the Nicodemus episode that some interpreters rearrange the text, inserting 3,31-36 after 3,21. See J. H. BERNARD, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to St. John* (ICC; Edinburgh 1928) I, xxiii-xxiv, 123; BULTMANN, *John*, 160; SCHNACKENBURG, *John*, I, 380. But 3,31-36 actually seems to summarize all of 3,1-30. See DODD, *Interpretation*, 308-311; BROWN, *John*, I, 160.

<sup>(17)</sup> Cf. LINDARS, *John*, 193.

INTERLUDE (3,22-30)

John and his disciples

CONCLUSION (3,31-36)

INTERLUDE (4,31-38)

Jesus and his disciples

CONCLUSION (4,39-42)

Like previous instances of juxtaposition, these passages are connected thematically, by references to water (3,5.22-26; 4,7-15), "testimony" (3,11.26.28.32-33; 4,39), Spirit (3,5-8.34; 4.23-24), and eternal life (3,15-16.36; 4,14). The reference to John baptizing at Aenon near Salim (3,23), which was apparently in Samaria, prepares for Jesus' movement into the region, and the interlude in each chapter deals with the success of Jesus' ministry. The imagery of the bridegroom and bride in 3,29 also anticipates Jesus' conversation with the Samaritan woman by the well, a scene that deals with the woman's marital history, recalls OT courtship scenes (Gen 24,10-61; 29,1-14; Exod 2,15-22), and results in a new relationship between Jesus and the Samaritan people<sup>(18)</sup>.

As before, the characters in these passages respond quite differently to Jesus. Nicodemus was one of the people who believed in Jesus because of the signs (2,23; 3,2), but when Jesus made unexpected comments about being "born anew", Nicodemus became completely baffled. Jesus replied, "If I have told you earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you heavenly things?" (3,12). The signs had not prepared Nicodemus to believe Jesus' words. Genuine "seeing" means seeing or entering the kingdom of God (3,3.5) and seeing or having eternal life (3,36). Such vision can only come from a new birth and a faith that receives Jesus' testimony (3,11.33). The statement that Nicodemus did not receive Jesus' testimony, which is repeated at the end of the chapter, indicates that Nicodemus's positive response to the signs did not lead naturally to genuine faith.

In contrast to Nicodemus, the Samaritan woman encountered Jesus without knowledge of his signs. Jesus initiated conversation with her in a way that ran counter to her expectations of Jewish men (4,9), but she persisted in the conversation and was struck by Jesus' unexpected knowledge of her past (4,29.39). She told the

<sup>(18)</sup> On the connections between chaps. 3 and 4 see B. OLSSON, *Structure and Meaning in the Fourth Gospel: A Text-Linguistic Analysis of John 2:1-11 and 4:1-42* (ConB 6; Lund 1974) 209-210; LINDARS, *John*, 172; BARRETT, *John*, 228.

townspeople, "Can this be the Christ?" (4,29), a question that technically expects a negative answer. The context, however, indicates that she was verging on faith and the evangelist himself speaks of her "testimony" to Jesus (4,39). Unlike Nicodemus, the Samaritans *believed because of the woman's word* and later heard Jesus for themselves (4,39) so that "many more *believed because of his word*" (4,41-42).

### John 4,46-5,16

The stories of the healing of the official's son in 4,46-54 and the healing of the invalid in 5,1-16 provide a similar contrast. Although these stories have some affinities to Synoptic accounts<sup>(19)</sup>, their present form and collocation are unique to John. Scholars have often posited a sharp break between these stories, since 4,46-54 marks the completion of Jesus' journey to Galilee which began in 4,3, and since 5,1-16 introduces a controversy in Jerusalem which continues for the remainder of the chapter<sup>(20)</sup>. Some interpreters even rearrange the sequence in order to group together the episodes that occur in Galilee (4,46-54; chap. 6) and those set in Jerusalem (chaps. 5 and 7)<sup>(21)</sup>.

Nevertheless, there are good reasons to read these passages together. First, both episodes involve miracles of healing, which are common in the Synoptics but are infrequent in John, and both demonstrate the power of Jesus' life-giving word, a theme which remains important in the discourse in 5,19-47<sup>(22)</sup>. Second, the formal similarities between these texts create scenes that are mirror opposites.

<sup>(19)</sup> Matt 8,5-13 and Luke 7,1-10, and Mark 2,1-12 and parallels.

<sup>(20)</sup> BARRETT, *John*, 13; SMITH, *John*, 38.

<sup>(21)</sup> BERNARD, *John*, I, xvii-xix; BULTMANN, *John*, 209-210; SCHNACKENBURG, *John*, II, 5-9.

<sup>(22)</sup> DODD, *Interpretation*, 318; A. FEUILLET, *Johannine Studies* (New York 1965) 44-51; J. N. SANDERS - B. A. MASTIN, *A Commentary on the Gospel According to St. John* (HNTC; New York 1968) 156-161; CULPEPPER, *Anatomy*, 138; HOSKYNs, *Fourth Gospel*, 249; G. R. BEASLEY-MURRAY, *John* (Word Biblical Commentaries 36; Waco, TX 1987) 67.

*John 4,46-54*

SETTING: Cana (4,46)

INITIAL ENCOUNTER (4,47-50)

Man approaches Jesus  
 Jesus puts man off with a  
 comment about "wonders"  
 Man again requests healing  
 Jesus promises healing  
 Man leaves believing

AFTERMATH (4,51-54)

Encounter with servants who  
 announce healing  
 Man checks on time  
 of healing  
 Man believes  
 Man's household believes

*John 5,1-16*

SETTING: Jerusalem (5,1-5)

INITIAL ENCOUNTER (5,6-9)

Jesus approaches man  
 Man puts Jesus off with a  
 comment about a wonder  
 Jesus again offers healing  
 Man experiences healing  
 (Man leaves not knowing  
 Jesus' name)

AFTERMATH (5,10-16)

Encounter with Jews who  
 announce sabbath violation  
 Jesus checks on man  
 who was healed  
 Man reports Jesus  
 Jews persecute Jesus

In the first scene the official initiates contact, persists in asking for healing, and believes. The result is that the whole household comes to faith. In the second scene, it is Jesus who initiates the contact and persists in offering healing even though the invalid shows no sign of faith. The man eventually reports Jesus to the authorities, who in turn persecute Jesus. The sharp contrast between these episodes again raises the question as to why some people respond to Jesus with faith, while others show unfaith or hostility.

As before, hearing and expectations play an important role. The Galilean official made the journey to Cana because "he *heard* that Jesus had come from Judea to Galilee" (4,47). Even though his son was at the point of death, the man abandoned his expectation that Jesus would have to come to Capernaum to heal the boy, and he returned alone, believing the *word* that Jesus spoke: "Your son will live" (4,50). The servants confirmed Jesus' words when they reported that "his son was living" (4,51). The official checked on the time of healing and recalled Jesus' words (4,53a) with the result that his faith was confirmed and spread throughout his household (4,53b)<sup>(23)</sup>.

(23) The use of *pisteuein* with the dative in 4,50 and the absolute use in 4,53 may indicate a growth in the official's faith (BROWN, *John*, I, 512-513; SCHNACKENBURG, *John*, I, 561-562; BARRETT, *John*, 245), but it was a faith

In contrast, the invalid at Bethzatha was unresponsive to what he heard. When Jesus spoke to him he responded by complaining about his inability to benefit from the wonders of the pool. Although the man showed no sign of faith, Jesus commanded him to take up his pallet and walk and the man was healed instantly<sup>(24)</sup>. After experiencing healing he did take up his pallet and walk, but when confronted for violating the sabbath he laid the responsibility on the one who had healed him. Later, Jesus reminded him of his new-found health and warned him not to continue in sin (*mēketi hamartane*; 5,14). Since the Fourth Evangelist understands sin as unbelief and the actions that proceed from it, Jesus apparently was warning him not to persist in unbelief<sup>(25)</sup>. His words had no visible effect on the man, who reported Jesus to the authorities.

The invalid at Bethzatha, like the crowds in 2,23-25, demonstrates that simply seeing or experiencing a miracle is no guarantee of faith. Moreover, the story indicates that the man's unbelief was not due to some failure on Jesus' part, since it was Jesus who consistently initiated contacts with him. The story of the Galilean official, however, shows how one who first followed Jesus on the basis of hearing and who believed Jesus' word was able to discern the meaning of the signs. The sign in turn confirmed his faith, as the first Cana miracle confirmed the disciples' faith<sup>(26)</sup>.

### John 6,1-21

A similar pattern appears in the juxtaposition of the crowd's reaction to the feeding of the five thousand and the disciples' response to Jesus walking on the sea. These stories do appear together

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based on the word and confirmed by the sign. See WILKENS, *Zeichen*, 34; SCHNIDER – STENGER, *Johannes*, 83.

<sup>(24)</sup> The command in John 5,8 also appears in Matt 9,6; Mark 2,11; Luke 5,24. In the Synoptics the effect is that the man *rose* immediately. John says he was *healed* immediately and only rose afterward.

<sup>(25)</sup> The use of the present tense in the prohibition suggests that Jesus wanted to stop something that was already in progress. On sin as unbelief see John 8,24; 15,22.24; 16,9. Cf. BARRETT, *John*, 80-81; J. L. MARTYN, *History and Theology in the Fourth Gospel* (Nashville 1979) 71.

<sup>(26)</sup> On the similarity between the Cana miracles see esp. MOLONEY, "Cana to Cana", 826-827; THOMPSON, *Humanity*, 71-72.

er in Mark 6,32-52 and Matt 14,13-33, and were almost certainly conjoined in the sources available to the Fourth Evangelist. The present Johannine form of these stories, however, contrasts the responses of the crowd and the disciples in a way that is not found in the Synoptics but is consonant with examples of juxtaposition elsewhere in the Fourth Gospel.

As before, there are thematic connections between the episodes. Both involve difficulties in the realm of nature: a need for food and a storm at sea. The gift of bread and the incident at the sea recall the Exodus and fit well with the Passover motif that runs throughout the chapter<sup>(27)</sup>. The theme of bread, the "I am" statement (6,20), and signs, continue to play an important role in the discourse in 6,25-59.

The evangelist framed the basic story of the feeding of the five thousand with references to the crowd's perception of Jesus. At the beginning of the chapter, the evangelist says that "a multitude followed him because they saw the signs which he did on those who were diseased" (6,2). After recounting the miracle, he adds, "When the people saw the sign which he had done, they said, 'This is indeed the prophet who is coming into the world!'" (6,14). The crowd expected that such a prophet would assume political power, but before they could seize Jesus and make him king, he withdrew to the mountain alone.

The disciples' response to Jesus at the sea is quite different. First we note that in John's account the miraculous aspects of the incident are remarkably ambiguous in comparison with the Synoptic accounts<sup>(28)</sup>. The disciples had travelled three or four miles (6,19), but the evangelist does not say that they were in the middle of the lake (cf.

<sup>(27)</sup> On the Exodus motif, see B. GÄRTNER, *John 6 and the Jewish Passover* (ConNT 17; Lund 1959) 14-20; A. GUILDING, *The Fourth Gospel and Jewish Worship: A Study of the Relation of St. John's Gospel to the Ancient Jewish Lectionary System* (Oxford 1960) 61-68. Cf. BROWN, *John*, I, 255; SCHNACKENBURG, *John*, II, 29-30.

<sup>(28)</sup> BERNARD, *John*, I, 185 and SANDERS - MASTIN, *John*, 183 interpret the incident in a non-miraculous way. BROWN, *John*, I, 252, BARRETT, *John*, 280-281, and LINDARS, *John*, 245-246, note the obscure points, but conclude that the evangelist understood the incident as a miracle. J. P. HEIL's study, *Jesus Walking on the Sea: Meaning and Gospel Functions of Matt 14:22-33, Mark 6:45-52 and John 6:15b-21* (AnBib 87; Rome 1981) 16-17, 75-83, gives insufficient attention to the ambiguities in John's account.

Mark 6,47; Matt 14,24). The text does not indicate that Jesus looked like a ghost or that he actually got into the boat (cf. Mark 6,49.51; Matt 14,26.32). The concluding statement that “immediately the boat was at the land to which they were going” (John 6,21) could mean that they were miraculously whisked to safety, but given only John’s account one might think that the boat had already drawn near the shore. Most importantly, John does not say that Jesus stilled the storm (cf. Mark 6,51; Matt 14,32). The evangelist probably assumed that the incident did involve a miracle, but the muted way in which the miraculous aspect of the story is recounted focuses attention on Jesus’ words *egō eimi, mē phobeisthe*, “I am, do not be afraid” (John 6,20). The words *egō eimi* were almost certainly a part of the evangelist’s source, but in the present form of the narrative they may connote divinity, giving the story the character of a theophany<sup>(29)</sup>. In any case, the disciples were frightened when they “saw Jesus walking on the sea” (6,19), but when Jesus *spoke* to them they wanted to take him into the boat (6,20-21a)<sup>(30)</sup>.

The contrasting responses to Jesus in these stories continue the pattern noted earlier. The crowd followed Jesus because of what they had seen Jesus do and interpreted the sign according to their own expectations. By fleeing, Jesus makes clear that the crowd missed the point of the miracle. They ate their fill of the bread, but did not rightly perceive the sign (6,26.30). In subsequent conversation with Jesus at Capernaum (6,25-59) they are confounded by his words, like the people in Jerusalem in chaps. 2-3. The disciples’ response, however, focused on what they heard Jesus say at the sea, and later, when some withdrew because of Jesus’ hard sayings

<sup>(29)</sup> On the importance and possible theophanic character of Jesus’ words in 6,20 see DODD, *Interpretation*, 345; BROWN, *John*, I, 254-255; SCHNACKENBURG, *John*, II, 27; BEASLEY-MURRAY, *John*, 89-90. Others caution against this view, e.g. BERNARD, *John*, I, 187; BARRETT, *John*, 281; HAENCHEN, *John*, I, 280. Cf. C. H. GIBLIN, “The Miraculous Crossing of the Sea (John 6.16-21)”, *NTS* 29 (1983) 96-103, esp. 98; HEIL, *Jesus Walking*, 79-80. Although Lindars concludes that the *egō eimi* is not theophanic here, he recognizes that the expression is central to the narrative (*John*, 246-247).

<sup>(30)</sup> Heil insists that by “majestically walking on the sea Jesus has manifested his complete dominance over it” and that the disciples’ desire to take Jesus into the boat was a response to this miracle (*Jesus Walking*, 81). But his attempt to argue the point, despite the lack of any reference to the stilling of the storm, is not convincing.

(6,60.66), Peter voiced the loyalty of the twelve by telling Jesus, "You have the *words* of eternal life" (6,68)<sup>(31)</sup>.

### John 7-12

The characters in chaps. 7-12 continue to develop along the lines established in chaps. 1-6 and demonstrate that Jesus' works and the scriptures are rightly perceived only by those who already believe. Only the main elements can be summarized here. The Jews in Jerusalem were trying to kill Jesus for "making himself equal with God" (5,18; 7,1.25). Jesus had previously invoked his works and the scriptures as witnesses to the truth of his claims (5,36.39), but such testimony had not convinced his Jewish listeners (5,45-47). Despite the hostility in Jerusalem, Jesus' brothers challenged him to do his works there, which revealed their unbelief (7,3-5). When Jesus returned to Jerusalem, many of the authorities rejected him because he acted contrary to their understanding of the scriptures (7,15.42.49.52). Some of the crowd did respond positively to Jesus because of the signs he had done (7,31) and the words he had spoken (7,40-41). Yet the faith of these "Jews who had believed in him" (8,30-31) was not genuine because his word found no place in them (8,37), and, after a verbal battle, they attempted to stone him (8,59)<sup>(32)</sup>.

The blind beggar (chap. 9), unlike the others in Jerusalem, had no apparent expectations of Jesus. Jesus initiated contact with the man, anointed his eyes with clay, and said "Go wash in the pool of Siloam" (9,6-7a). Like the disciples in chap. 1 and the official in 4,50, the beggar responded to what Jesus said *before* he had seen any miracle (9,7b.11), which sets him apart from the representatives of an inadequate "signs faith"<sup>(33)</sup>. His

<sup>(31)</sup> On the contrast between the crowd and the disciples see HOSKYNS, *Fourth Gospel*, 277-278; BROWN, *John*, I, 255; SCHACKENBURG, *John*, II, 29; GIBLIN, "Miraculous Crossing", 98-99.

<sup>(32)</sup> Both "the Jews" and "the crowd" are used for those who are hostile to Jesus (7,1.43-44) and for those who believe in him for a time (7,31; 8,31). Cf. CULPEPPER, *Anatomy*, 125-132.

<sup>(33)</sup> Cf. CULPEPPER, *Anatomy*, 147; SCHNACKENBURG, *John*, II, 243; RENGSTORF, "sēmeion", 251. Contrast NICOL, *Sēmeia*, 102; MARTYN, *History and Theology*, 71; COLLINS, "Representative Figures", 42.

initial response was not complete faith, but it was a trusting obedience which intensified as the man was questioned repeatedly about the identity of the healer (9,11.17.27.33). Finally, when Jesus spoke to him again, the beggar confessed his faith and worshiped (9,35-38). In contrast, the few Pharisees who responded favorably to Jesus on the basis of his signs (9,16b) quickly gave way to those who opposed him for breaking the sabbath (9,16a.24.28-29).

In chap. 10, which is the sequel to the story of the blind man (see 10,21), Jesus stresses that those who belong to his sheep are those who hear his voice. He insists that his works and the scriptures do bear witness to him (10,25.32-38), but the hostile reaction of the crowd indicates that such testimony is *actually accepted* only by those who already have faith (10,31.39). The hostility of those in Jerusalem contrasts sharply with the faith of the people at Bethany, who believed that what John the Baptist had said about Jesus was true, even though John had done no sign (10,40-42).

In chap. 11, Martha and Mary send word to Jesus that "he whom you love is ill" (11,3). Their words, like those of Jesus' mother in 2,3, contain an implicit request but do not demand that Jesus act in a specific way. Jesus delayed unexpectedly for two days before going to Judea, but Martha continued to be confident that "whatever" Jesus asked from God, God would do (11,22). Her words again resemble those of Jesus' mother at Cana (cf. 2,5). Martha's faith was not preoccupied with the miraculous, since she confessed her faith before Jesus had done a miracle (11,27) and her attempt to prevent Jesus from opening the tomb suggests that she was not actually expecting a miracle (11,39). When Jesus said "if you believe you will see the glory of God", he indicated that faith is the presupposition for perceiving the significance of the miracle.

Some who saw the miracle reported Jesus to the authorities (11,46), as the invalid in chap. 5 had done. Others "believed" because of what they had seen (11,45), but by the end of chap. 12 it becomes clear that people with such faith are ultimately unable to comprehend Jesus' words (12,9-11.17-18.34). They understood Jesus in terms of their own expectations which were derived from scripture, and "though he had done so many signs before them, yet they did not believe in him" (12,37).

## John 20,1-31

The theme of seeing, hearing, and believing culminates in John 20, where the evangelist juxtaposes Peter and the Beloved Disciple with Mary Magdalene (20,1-18) and the disciples as a group with Thomas (20,19-31)<sup>(34)</sup>. The first two scenes are set at the empty tomb on Easter morning. Mary's discovery of the open tomb in vv. 1-2 sets the stage for the whole section, then the two main scenes unfold in similar sequences<sup>(35)</sup>.

20,1-10	20,11-18
BD reaches tomb; sees cloths	Mary stoops; sees angels
Peter enters tomb; sees cloths	Mary turns; sees Jesus
BD enters tomb; sees;	Mary turns; hears her name;
and believes	and recognizes Jesus
Disciples did not yet know	Jesus tells Mary to announce
the scripture that Jesus	his ascension to "My
must rise	Father and your Father";
Disciples return	Mary returns; tells disciples
	what she saw and heard

A number of interpreters have suggested that the double references to the disciples seeing the burial cloths (20,5,6), the question "Why are you weeping?" (20,13,15), and Mary turning to Jesus (20,14,16) are redundancies which stem from an attempt to combine

<sup>(34)</sup> MLAKUZHYYL, *Christocentric*, 117, notes the diptych character of 20,1-10,11-18, and 20,19-23,24-29. We include 20,30-31 in the diptych because it addresses those "who have not seen", who are introduced in 20,29. For discussion of alternative proposals on the structure of chap. 20 see I. DE LA POTTERIE, "Genèse de la foi pascale d'après Jn. 20", *NTS* 30 (1984) 26-49.

<sup>(35)</sup> The structural and thematic similarities suggest that 20,9 may correspond to 20,17. Jesus' resurrection is mentioned in 20,9 and his ascension mentioned in 20,17; both are part of Jesus' movement back to the Father. 20,9 states that the disciples did not yet understand the scriptural necessity for Jesus' resurrection, and in 20,17 the words "my Father and your Father" and "my God and your God" echo the scriptural covenant formula "I will be your God and you will be my people". The covenant promise was associated with the gift of God's spirit (Ezek 36,27-28; John 20,22). Together these verses suggest that it was scripturally necessary for Jesus to rise in order to fulfill God's covenant promises by giving the Spirit. The disciples would not discern this until later, however (cf. 2,22; 12,16).

disparate sources<sup>(36)</sup>. Nevertheless, the repetition creates three-part dramatic sequences which climax when a character recognizes that Jesus is alive. The elements in each sequence are distinguished by body movements, like looking into the tomb, entering the tomb, and turning to Jesus. Repeated references to what was seen and said build intensity into the scene, making readers wonder when each character will grasp what has happened.

The first sequence climaxed when the Beloved Disciple "saw and believed" (20,8). The text does not specify what the disciple believed. But since the word "believe" is used absolutely, at a climactic point in the narrative, for a disciple who already was in an especially close relationship to Jesus, the text must mean that the disciple believed that Jesus was alive<sup>(37)</sup>. The comment "for as yet they did not know the scripture, that he must rise from the dead" (20,9) apparently indicates that the disciples' reactions were not governed by expectations derived from scripture, unlike the others in Jerusalem who misunderstood Jesus (7,41b-42; 12,34). The disciples connected the scriptures with Jesus' resurrection only some time *after* the Easter experience (cf. 2,22; 7,37-39; 12,16). One disciple, who was already in a close relationship with Jesus, did believe when he saw the grave-cloths. But his faith, like Martha's (11,27.39), did not entail full comprehension, nor did it lead to the announcement that Jesus had risen. Moreover, nothing is said about Peter's faith, and we must assume that even though Peter "saw" the grave-cloths, he did not yet recognize that Jesus had risen.

<sup>(36)</sup> See the summary of the discussion by R. MAHONEY, *Two Disciples at the Tomb: The Background and Message of John 20.1-10* (Theologie und Wirklichkeit 6; Bern - Frankfurt 1974) 171-227. See also F. NEIRYNCK, "John and the Synoptics: The Empty Tomb Stories", *NTS* 30 (1984) 161-187.

<sup>(37)</sup> Scholars generally grant this point; exceptions are noted by BROWN, *John*, II, 987. In addition to the commentaries, see MAHONEY, *Two Disciples*, 261-270; S. SCHNEIDERS, "The Face Veil: A Johannine Sign", *BTB* 13 (1983) 94-97; B. BYRNE, "The Faith of the Beloved Disciple and the Community in John 20", *JSNT* 23 (1985) 83-97. Byrne argues that Beloved Disciple's faith was a prototype of the faith of Christians who had "not seen", since he did not actually see *Jesus* at the empty tomb. Nevertheless, the BD does differ significantly from Christians of later generations in that he was present at the tomb and did "see" the grave-cloths. DE LA POTTERIE, "Genèse", 32-33, points out that the Beloved Disciple's faith did not entail full comprehension.

Mary's story confirms that seeing alone does not guarantee faith. She saw the open tomb (20,1), the two angels (20,12), and even the risen Jesus himself (20,14), yet persisted in thinking that the body had been stolen (20,2.13.15). Only when she heard Jesus speak her name did she recognize him. What she heard enabled her to make sense of what she saw, although the command to stop touching Jesus (20,17) indicates that she did not fully comprehend the significance of the resurrection. Mary did respond to Jesus' command, however, by telling the disciples what she saw and heard (20,18). The evangelist does not say how the disciples reacted to what she said, but her words set the stage for the scenes that follow.

The last half of the chapter contrasts the responses of the disciples with that of Thomas. The passage can be divided into two scenes (20,19-25.26-31) which are set one week apart in the closed room where the disciples are gathered together. In both scenes Jesus greets the disciples with "Peace be with you" and shows them his hands and side. The main elements appear in parallel sequences and are followed by short passages stating the effect or intended effect of these events on persons who were not present.

*John 20,19-25*

## RESURRECTION APPEARANCE

(20,19-23)

Evening of that day

Disciples were gathered

Doors were shut

Jesus came; stood among them

Jesus: "Peace be with you"

Showed his hands and side

Disciples rejoiced

Jesus: "Peace be with you

As the Father sent me

so I send you

Receive the Holy Spirit,  
forgive and retain sins"

## ONE NOT PRESENT (20,24-25)

Thomas not present

when Jesus came

Disciples say they

they have seen the Lord

*John 20,26-31*

## RESURRECTION APPEARANCE

(20,26-29)

Eight days later

Disciples were gathered

Doors were shut

Jesus came; stood among them

Jesus: "Peace be with you"

Showed his hands and side

Jesus: "Do not be faithless"

Thomas: "My Lord and God"

Jesus:

"Have you believed because  
you have seen me?"Blessed are those who  
have not seen, yet believe"

## THOSE NOT PRESENT (20,30-31)

Jesus did many other

signs in the presence

of the disciples

which are not written

Thomas: "Unless I see  
and touch  
I will not believe"

These are written  
that you may believe

The disciples who were gathered in 20,19 had been prepared to recognize the risen Jesus by what they heard. First, Mary Magdalene had told them, "I have seen the Lord" (20,18). Second, the evangelist presents Jesus' actions and the disciples' reactions in ways that recall the Farewell Discourses, where Jesus promised that the disciples would receive peace (14,27; 20,19,21), joy (16,20-22; 20,20), and the Spirit (14,26; 20,22)<sup>(38)</sup>. The resurrection appearance confirmed what the disciples had already heard.

Thomas, the main character in the second episode, also had heard statements that prepared him to recognize Jesus. The disciples echoed Mary by saying, "We have seen the Lord" (20,25). The evangelist also specified that Thomas had been present during the Farewell Discourses when Jesus said, "If you had known *me* you would have known *my Father* also. From now on you know him and *have seen him*" (14,5.7). When Jesus appeared, Thomas confessed that Jesus was Lord and God, reflecting what he had previously been told by the disciples (20,25) and by Jesus (14,7).

The difference between Thomas and the other characters in this chapter is that he made seeing and touching a *pre-condition* for belief, as had the skeptics in Jerusalem (2,18) and the crowd in Galilee (6,30). The previous episodes in chap. 20 showed that seeing did not guarantee believing: two disciples saw the grave-cloths, but only one believed, and he was silent about his faith; Mary saw the open tomb, angels, and the risen Jesus, but she recognized him only when she heard her name. At the same time, the evangelist did not disparage seeing. The macarism in 20,29 does not deny that the disciples who believed when they saw Jesus were blessed; it insists that those who believe without seeing *are* blessed, through a faith engendered by hearing the testimony of others<sup>(39)</sup>.

The blessing of 20,29 extends the horizon of the story to readers of subsequent generations, who are addressed directly in 20,30-31. Like the Thomas of 20,24-25, the readers have not seen the empty

<sup>(38)</sup> See, e.g., BROWN, *John*, II, 1035; BARRETT, *John*, 568-569; SCHNACKENBURG, *John*, III, 323-324; DE LA POTTERIE, "Genèse", 37-38.

<sup>(39)</sup> See esp. BROWN, *John*, II, 1048-1051.

tomb or the risen Jesus, but have heard the testimony of others, and probably believe already<sup>(40)</sup>. The signs recorded in the gospel would confirm and be received by the faith which the readers already had, that they might continue to believe.

### Conclusion

Genuine faith, according to the Fourth Gospel, is engendered through hearing. Sometimes hearing leads to faith without any attendant miracle, as it did among the Samaritans. In the case of the disciples, the royal official, the blind man, and Martha, hearing evoked an initial response of faith or trusting obedience which was confirmed and deepened by a sign. Moreover, their faith enabled them rightly to perceive the sign and receive it as testimony to Jesus' claims. Not everyone who heard came to faith, and the reasons for their unbelief lie beyond the bounds of this study. Nevertheless, those who *did* manifest a genuine faith, did so after an initial experience of hearing<sup>(41)</sup>.

Those whose initial perception of Jesus was based on seeing regularly failed to come to true faith<sup>(42)</sup>: bystanders showed skepticism when Jesus cleansed the temple, the invalid at Bethzatha manifested an obtuse inability to believe, and some of the Jewish leaders reacted to the signs with hostility. Other people responded to the signs with an unreliable faith, which Jesus mistrusted (2,23-25). People like Nicodemus, and the crowds in Galilee and Jerusalem interpreted Jesus in light of their own expectations and finally balked at his words (e.g., 3,9; 6,14-15.41.60; 8,59; 12,34).

<sup>(40)</sup> The Christian character of the intended readers of the Fourth Gospel is granted by most scholars. See, e.g., BROWN, *John*, I, LXXVII-LXXIX; DE JONGE, *Jesus*, 1-3; K. WENGST, *Bedrängte Gemeinde und verherrlichter Christus: Der historische Ort des Johannesevangeliums als Schlüssel zu seiner Interpretation* (Biblich-Theologische Studien 5; Neukirchen-Vluyn 1983) 33-36.

<sup>(41)</sup> SCHNIDER - STENGER, *Johannes*, 83; BOISMARD, "Rapports", 362. Cf. DE JONGE, *Jesus*, 135-136; RENGSTORF, "sēmeion", 252.

<sup>(42)</sup> Cf. TRAETS, *Voir Jésus*, 233. The one possible exception is Nicodemus, who claims Jesus' body for burial (19,39). If his action reveals faith (BROWN, *John*, I, 959-960), it is a faith that developed only after Nicodemus spoke of giving Jesus "a hearing" (7,51) and as a fulfillment of Jesus' own words in 12,32.

Our study does not suggest that the evangelist disparaged seeing signs, resurrection appearances, or actions like the temple cleansing. At the same time, "signs faith" cannot be understood as a first step toward genuine faith, since the characters who manifest signs faith consistently fail to move beyond it. The evangelist makes clear that Jesus' actions were rightly perceived only by those who already responded with faith or trusting obedience to what they had heard from or about Jesus. The evangelist would say that "in the beginning was the Word", which evoked responses to Jesus that were confirmed by signs, led to proper perception of signs, and could grow into genuine faith even without signs.

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#### SOMMAIRE

On peut étudier le rapport que Jn établit entre voir, entendre et croire en notant comment l'évangéliste juxtapose des personnages qui représentent les différentes réponses faites à Jésus. Ceux qui manifestent une foi authentique sont ceux qui répondent avec une foi commençante ou avec une obéissance confiante suscitée par ce qu'ils entendent dire au sujet de Jésus. La réponse initiale est confirmée par des signes, elle mène à la juste perception des signes, et parfois croît jusqu'à une foi qui peut se passer de signes. Au contraire, ceux qui d'abord croient au vu de ce que Jésus fait, interprètent Jésus à partir de leurs propres attentes et finalement achoppent à ses paroles.