

Themes in the Gospel of John

Witnesses of Christ as the Messiah

Lesson #4 for October 26, 2024

Scriptures: John 1:19-23,29-37,35-39,43-51; 3:1-21; Isaiah 40:1-5; Romans 5:6.

1. As we have discussed, the Jews believed that the Messiah was coming to be their king and to lead them to defeat the Romans. So, Jesus had the challenging job of convincing them that not only was He the Messiah that had been prophesied in the Old Testament, but also that His kingdom was very different from what they were expecting. Part of that challenge was to prove that He was, in fact, divine.
2. What do you think it would take to convince a Jew in Jesus's day—or you in 2024—to believe that Jesus was/is the divine Son of God? Several times, Jesus said: “Those who believe in me have eternal life.” (For example, see John 6:47.) We will consider the witness of: (1) John the Baptist, (2) Andrew, Peter, and John, (3) Philip and Nathanael, (4) Nicodemus, and (5) Jesus Himself.
3. But, Jesus's life provided much evidence of His divinity and proof of Him being the Messiah.
[From the Bible study guide=BSG:] But there's more: turning water into wine; feeding thousands with a few loaves of bread; healing the nobleman's son; restoring the man at the pool of Bethesda; giving sight to the one blind from birth; raising Lazarus from the dead. **The evangelist** [John, the disciple and Gospel writer] **calls on a variety of events, and people**—Jew, Gentile, rich, poor, male, female, rulers, commoners, educated, and uneducated—**to bear witness to who Jesus is.**—*Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide** for Sabbath Afternoon, October 19.†‡
4. One of the first pieces of evidence that the Gospel of John gives us is from **John the Baptist**. While most of the Jews were looking for a Messiah to come and lead them against the Romans and eventually to rule the world, some Jews actually thought there might be two messiahs: (1) One priestly Messiah who would do the spiritual things, and (2) The other, a royal Messiah who would conquer the Romans. Have you even heard of that idea?
5. John the Baptist's ministry began about six months before the start of the ministry of Jesus. As people flocked to the desert to listen to John, it was not long before the religious leaders sent people to question him about who he was and why he was baptizing. His response is recorded in John 1:6-9,20.

John 1:6-9,20: ⁶ God sent his messenger, a man named John, ⁷who came to tell people about the light, so that all should hear the message and believe. ⁸**He himself was not the light; he came to tell about the light.** ⁹This was the real light — the light that comes into the world and shines on everyone....

²⁰ John did not refuse to answer, but spoke out openly and clearly, saying: “**I am not the Messiah.**”—American Bible Society. (1992). *The Holy Bible: The Good News Translation** (2nd ed., John 1:6-9,20). New York: American Bible Society [abbreviated as *Good News Bible*].†‡

6. But, apparently, as they were questioning John, Jesus already had appeared in the crowd. Jesus looked no different from any of the other people who had assembled to hear John.

John 1:26,33: ²⁶John answered, “I baptize with water, but among you stands the one you do not know....”

³³ “I still did not know that he was the one, but God, who sent me to baptize with water, had said to me, ‘You will see the Spirit come down and stay on a man; he is the one who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.’”—*Good News Bible*.*

[BSG:] The Jews in the time of Christ had their own ideas about the coming Messiah, and they were adamant that everything fit into their neatly packaged schemes. They suspected that John the Baptist was perhaps a Messiah type, but **he testified that he was only a forerunner of the true Messiah**, sent prophetically by God to prepare the way for Him. Soon after, John pointed to Jesus as “the Lamb of God.” But Jesus and His sacrifice for our sins did not align with the Jewish leaders’ expectation of a royal earthly Messiah, who would defeat their oppressors and rule over them and, eventually, the world.—*Adult Teachers Sabbath School Bible Study Guide** 52.††

7. How do you feel about the testimony of John the Baptist when he said that Jesus was “the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world”?
8. John had been told that he would see the Spirit coming down and alighting on the Messiah. When that time came, Jesus was the One shown to be that Being. Did the Holy Spirit come down on Jesus twice? Or, only at the baptism? Had John been shown who Jesus was before he baptized Him?
9. How was John the Baptist impacted by the manifestation of the Holy Spirit as a *Dove* coming down on Jesus? How would you be impacted if you saw a Dove, obviously descending from heaven and landing on Jesus, representing the Holy Spirit coming upon Jesus?

[From the writings of Ellen G. White=EGW:] **When at the baptism of Jesus, John pointed to Him as the Lamb of God, a new light was shed upon the Messiah’s work. The prophet’s mind was directed to the words of Isaiah, “He is brought as a lamb to the slaughter.” Isaiah 53:7.** During the weeks that followed, John with new interest studied the prophecies and the teaching of the sacrificial service. **He did not distinguish clearly the two phases of Christ’s work,—as a suffering sacrifice and a conquering king,—but he saw that His coming had a deeper significance than priests or people had discerned.** When he beheld Jesus among the throng on His return from the desert, he confidently looked for Him to give the people some sign of His true character. Almost impatiently he waited to hear the Saviour [*sic-Br*] declare His mission; but no word was spoken, no sign given. **Jesus did not respond to the Baptist’s announcement of Him, but mingled with the disciples of John, giving no outward evidence of His special work, and taking no measures to bring Himself to notice.**—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages** 136.4.†† [<https://egwwritings.org/read?panels=p130.574&index=0>]†

10. John simply stated that he had come to prepare the way for the Messiah. Malachi tells us that a special *Elijah* was to come before the “great and awful day of God.” Jesus suggested that John was the *Elijah* in his day. Who is/are the *Elijah(s)* before the great and terrible day of the Lord? Is that not those of us who are Seventh-day Adventists and have agreed to carry the three-angels’ messages to the world? How well are we doing?
11. We do not know if there was a separate appearance of the Holy Spirit over Jesus before He was baptized that identified Him to John. However, we do know about the descent of the Holy Spirit at the time of Jesus’s baptism.

[BSG:] The statement of the Baptist regarding Jesus as the Lamb of God supports the purpose of John’s Gospel, which is to bring about a renewed understanding of the work and nature of the Messiah. Jesus would, indeed, be the fulfillment of **the promise of the sacrificial system**, going back to the promise of the Redeemer first given [to Adam and Eve] in Genesis 3:15.—*Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide** for Monday, October 21.^{†‡}

Genesis 3:14-15: ¹⁴ Then the LORD God said to the snake,... ¹⁵ “I will make you and the woman hate each other; her offspring and yours will always be enemies. Her offspring will crush your head, and you will bite her offspring’s heel.”—*Good News Bible*.*

12. ***What is the “promise of the sacrificial system”? Does crushing the serpent’s head mean the destruction of the Devil? How is that related to the sacrificial system?***

Hebrews 10:1-11: ¹The Jewish Law is not a full and faithful model of the real things; it is only a faint outline of the good things to come. The same sacrifices are offered for ever [*sic-Br*], year after year. How can the Law, then, by means of these sacrifices make perfect the people who come to God? ²If the people worshipping God had really been purified from their sins, they would not feel guilty of sin any more, and all sacrifices would stop. ³As it is, however, **the sacrifices serve year after year to remind people of their sins.** ⁴**For the blood of bulls and goats can never take away sins.**

⁵For this reason, when Christ was about to come into the world, he said to God: **“You do not want sacrifices and offerings,**
but you have prepared a body for me.

⁶**You are not pleased with animals burnt whole on the altar
or with sacrifices to take away sins.**

⁷ Then I said, ‘Here I am,
to do your will, O God,
just as it is written of me in the book of the Law.’ ”

⁸First he said, **“You neither want nor are you pleased with sacrifices and offerings or with animals burnt on the altar and the sacrifices to take away sins.”** He said this even though all these sacrifices are offered according to the Law. ⁹Then he said, “Here I am, O God, to do your will.” So God does away with all the old sacrifices and puts the sacrifice of Christ in their place.

¹⁰Because Jesus Christ did what God wanted him to do, we are all purified from sin by the offering that he made of his own body once and for all.

¹¹ Every Jewish priest performs his services every day and offers the same sacrifices many times; **but these sacrifices can never take away sins.**—*Good News Bible*.*†‡

13. Do you agree with the following which is taken from the Bible study guide? Is it correct?

[BSG:] Today, some skeptics do not have much regard for the biblical concept of sacrifice either. They point to Christ's sacrifice to justify their indifference. These skeptics say that Jesus did not need to shed His blood to save sinful humanity, for He could have saved us simply through a demonstration of His love and by the performance of miracles. But life, as the Bible tells us, is in the blood, and lost humanity needed the life that is in the Son. Angels could not have accomplished this feat on behalf of humanity because they borrow life from the Possessor of life. **Why else would God have commanded countless sacrifices of innocent animals if not to point to the necessity of Christ's innocent blood for the remission of sin and the giving of eternal life?**—*Adult Teachers Sabbath School Bible Study Guide** 53.†‡

14. ***Is there something magical about blood? Was the blood of Jesus different from the blood of other human beings? The sacrifices tell of the seriousness of sin—that sin kills. (See Romans 6:23.)***

15. Notice these words from Paul.

Romans 5:6: For when **we** were still helpless, Christ died for the wicked at the time that God chose.—*Good News Bible*.*†

16. ***Was Paul including himself among the wicked for whom Christ died?***

1 Peter 2:24: Christ himself carried our sins in his body to the cross, so that we might die to sin and live for righteousness. It is by his wounds that you have been healed.—*Good News Bible*.* [How do you understand these words?]*‡

17. ***How does Christ's carrying "our sins in His body to the cross" help us to die to sin and live for righteousness? How do His wounds heal us?***

18. **Jesus died to show us what sin does to people. He died the second death which is a result of sin, separating us from God, the Source of life. (Matthew 27:46)**

Revelation 5:6-14: ⁶ Then I saw a Lamb standing in the centre [*sic-Br*] of the throne, surrounded by the four living creatures and the elders. The Lamb appeared to have been killed. It had seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God that have been sent throughout the whole earth. ⁷The Lamb went and took the scroll from the right-hand of the one who sits on the throne. ⁸As he did so, the four living creatures and the 24 elders fell down before the Lamb. Each had a harp and gold bowls filled with incense, which are the prayers of God's people. ⁹They sang a new song:

**"You are worthy to take the scroll
and to break open its seals.**

For you were killed, and by your sacrificial death you bought for God people from every tribe, language, nation, and race.

¹⁰ You have made them a kingdom of priests to serve our God, and they shall rule on earth.”

¹¹ Again I looked, and I heard angels, thousands and millions of them! They stood round the throne, the four living creatures, and the elders, ¹²and sang in a loud voice:

“The Lamb who was killed is worthy to receive power, wealth, wisdom, and strength, honour [*sic-Br*], glory, and praise!”

¹³And I heard every creature in heaven, on earth, in the world below, and in the sea — all living beings in the universe — and they were singing:

“To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb, be praise and honour [*sic-Br*], glory and might, for ever [*sic-Br*] and ever!” [Does that include Satan and his angels?]

¹⁴The four living creatures answered, “Amen!” And the elders fell down and worshipped.—*Good News Bible*. *††

19. This Lamb will demonstrate the truth to all beings including Satan himself; and Satan will be down on his knees, admitting that God has done what is right.

Philippians 2:9-11: ⁹ For this reason God raised him to the highest place above and gave him the name that is greater than any other name.

¹⁰And so, in honour [*sic-Br*] of the name of Jesus
all beings in heaven, on earth, and in the world below will fall on their knees,

¹¹and all will openly proclaim that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.—*Good News Bible*. *††

20. ***Clearly, this Lamb is to defeat the Devil and on God's behalf to win the great controversy over God's character and government.***

21. Ellen White told us specifically that **although cousins, Jesus and John the Baptist had not had any contact with each other in their first 30 years of life.** (*DA* 109.2)

22. **Several of the disciples of John the Baptist were attracted to Jesus** because of John's words. As Jesus was pointed out, they followed Him, learned from Him, and were convinced.

23. James and John were probably cousins of Jesus. That means that they could also have been cousins of John the Baptist. Remember this very interesting paragraph from Ellen White:

[EGW:] He [Jesus] had been separated from his mother for quite a length of time. During this period he had been baptized by John [the Baptist] and had endured the temptations in the wilderness. Rumors had reached Mary concerning her son and his sufferings. **John, one of the new disciples, had searched for Christ and had found him in his humiliation, emaciated, and**

bearing the marks of great physical and mental distress. Jesus, unwilling that John should witness his humiliation, had gently yet firmly dismissed him from his presence. He wished to be alone; no human eye must behold his agony, no human heart be called out in sympathy with his distress.—Ellen G. White, *The Spirit of Prophecy*,* vol. 2, 99.2; *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*,*¶ vol. 5, 1132.2.†‡

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24. Clearly, John as well as Andrew were willing to go the extra mile to discover everything they could about Jesus.

[EGW:] **If John and Andrew had possessed the unbelieving spirit of the priests and rulers, they would not have been found as learners at the feet of Jesus. They would have come to Him as critics, to judge His words.** Many thus close the door to the most precious opportunities. **But not so did these first disciples. They had responded to the Holy Spirit's call in the preaching of John the Baptist. Now they recognized the voice of the heavenly Teacher.** To them the words of Jesus were full of freshness and truth and beauty. A divine illumination was shed upon the teaching of the Old Testament Scriptures. The many-sided themes of truth stood out in new light.—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages** 139.2.†‡

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25. Philip and Nathanael were two more of the disciples who were early followers of Jesus.

John 1:43-46: ⁴³ The next day Jesus decided to go to Galilee. He found Philip and said to him, “Come with me!” ⁴⁴(Philip was from Bethsaida, the town where Andrew and Peter lived.) ⁴⁵Philip found Nathanael and told him, “We have found the one whom Moses wrote about in the book of the Law and whom the prophets also wrote about. He is Jesus son of Joseph, from Nazareth.”

⁴⁶ “Can anything good come from Nazareth?” Nathanael asked.

“Come and see,” answered Philip.—*Good News Bible*.*

26. Nathanael was surprised to think that anything good could come out of Nazareth.

[BSG:] Nathanael seems to have been prejudiced against the little town of Nazareth. Surely a king would not come from such a wayside location. Prejudice easily blinds the eyes from seeing people for what they are really worth. Philip seems to have recognized, possibly from previous conversations with Nathanael, that the proper way to deal with prejudice is not some exalted philosophical or theological argumentation but rather to invite the individual to experience the truth personally for themselves. He simply said, “Come and see.” And that is exactly what Nathanael did. He went and saw.—*Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide** for Wednesday, October 23.‡

27. **What did these first disciples see when they came to Jesus?**

John 1:47-51: ⁴⁷ When Jesus saw Nathanael coming to him, he said about him, “Here is a real Israelite; there is nothing false in him!”

⁴⁸ Nathanael asked him, “How do you know me?”

Jesus answered, “I saw you when you were under the fig tree before Philip called you.”

⁴⁹ “Teacher,” answered Nathanael, “**you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!**” [Is that all it took to convince Nathanael? Was he gullible?]

⁵⁰ Jesus said, “Do you believe just because I told you I saw you when you were under the fig tree? You will see much greater things than this!” ⁵¹And he said to them, “I am telling you the truth: you will see heaven open and God’s angels going up and coming down on the Son of Man.”—*Good News Bible*.*†‡

28. The important thing is that Nathanael followed Philip’s invitation to go and see Jesus. Ellen White tells us the full story in *The Desire of Ages* 140.1-5.

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29. At the first Passover during Jesus’s ministry, **Nicodemus came to him at night**. (See John 3.) Nicodemus asserted that he had seen a lot of miracles, and this was convincing evidence to him that Jesus was the Messiah. We do not know which miracles or how many miracles Nicodemus had seen. But, he certainly wanted to know more. And so, as part of that conversation, Jesus told Nicodemus that he must be born again, taking on a huge new change in his life. Jesus also said that even the Jews would be judged in the final judgment based on what they had done. Those who love darkness would be allowed to go to darkness, while those who love the light would go to God.

30. In his Gospel, John focused more on individual encounters which Jesus had with separate individuals than did the other Gospel writers. Think of the impact that the encounter with Nicodemus has had on the lives of Christians down through the generations.

[BSG:] Nicodemus was a Pharisee and an important member of the Sanhedrin, which served as the highest judicial system in Judaism, closest to home rule. The word “Sanhedrin” comes from the Greek word *sunedrion*, which literally means “a council.” It was composed of 71 members, comprised of three divisions, according to Matthew 27:41, as follows:

1. Chief priests (the ruling high priest, retired high priests, and high priestly family members). This block was mostly Sadducees.
2. Scribes (predominately Pharisees).
3. Elders, who were representatives of chief aristocratic families.

The office of the chief high priest had become corrupt and was often bought and sold by Rome to the highest bidder.—*Adult Teachers Sabbath School Bible Study Guide** 55.†§

31. Jesus might seem to have been very gruff in His response to Nicodemus. Of course, we do not have the full conversation or the details of their meeting recorded in John 3. However, Jesus knew exactly what Nicodemus needed to learn, and He went straight to the point. The important thing for us to know is that the night visit with Jesus was the evidence that Nicodemus needed, and he committed his life from that point on to supporting Jesus although not publicly until after Jesus’s death.

32. Just as John took a whole new approach to his understanding of the mission of Jesus after his experience with Jesus, Nicodemus took a whole new approach to his understanding of Scripture. He developed a new paradigm.

[EGW:] **He [Nicodemus] searched the Scriptures in a new way, not for the discussion of a theory, but in order to receive life for the soul. He began to see the kingdom of heaven as he submitted himself to the leading of the Holy Spirit.**

There are thousands today who need to learn the same truth that was taught to Nicodemus by the uplifted serpent. **They depend on their obedience to the law of God to commend them to His favor. When they are bidden to look to Jesus, and believe that He saves them solely through His grace, they exclaim, “How can these things be?”**

Like Nicodemus, we must be willing to enter into life in the same way as the chief of sinners. Then Christ, “there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.” Acts 4:12. **Through faith we receive the grace of God; but faith is not our Saviour [sic-Br]. It earns nothing. It is the hand by which we lay hold upon Christ, and appropriate His merits, the remedy for sin. [How does that work?] And we cannot even repent without the aid of the Spirit of God.** The Scripture says of Christ, “Him hath God exalted with His right hand to be a Prince and a Saviour [sic-Br], for to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins.” Acts 5:31. **Repentance comes from Christ as truly as does pardon.**

How, then, are we to be saved? “As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness,” so the Son of man has been lifted up, and everyone who has been deceived and bitten by the serpent may look and live. “Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.” John 1:29. The light shining from the cross reveals the love of God. His love is drawing us to Himself. If we do not resist this drawing, we shall be led to the foot of the cross in repentance for the sins that have crucified the Saviour [sic-Br]. **Then the Spirit of God through faith produces a new life in the soul. The thoughts and desires are brought into obedience to the will of Christ. The heart, the mind, are created anew in the image of Him who works in us to subdue all things to Himself.** Then the law of God is written in the mind and heart, and we can say with Christ, “I delight to do Thy will, O my God.” Psalm 40:8.—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages** 175.2-176.0.†‡

<https://egwwritings.org/read?panels=p130.778&index=0>†‡

33. So, what do you think Jesus specifically meant when He said we must “be born again”? Why would that be so important in His mind? When someone is converted to become a Christian and follower of Jesus, the transformation is like being born again. Have you seen that in the life of yourself or others? Some amazing transformations have occurred.
34. Can we as human beings tell when a person has been born again? If so, how? Think of Cain!

35. After Jesus's crucifixion, Nicodemus publicly became a follower of Jesus, and he became a great financial supporter of the early church.

[EGW:] After the Lord's ascension, when the disciples were scattered by persecution, Nicodemus came boldly to the front. **He employed his wealth in sustaining the infant church** that the Jews had expected to be blotted out at the death of Christ. In the time of peril he who had been so cautious and questioning was firm as a rock, encouraging the faith of the disciples, and furnishing means to carry forward the work of the gospel. He was scorned and persecuted by those who had paid him reverence in other days. He became poor in this world's goods; yet he faltered not in the faith which had its beginning in that night conference with Jesus. [How did the Sanhedrin treat him then?]

Nicodemus related to John the story of that interview, and by his [John's] pen it was recorded for the instruction of millions. The truths there taught are as important today as they were on that solemn night in the shadowy mountain, when the Jewish ruler came to learn the way of life from the lowly Teacher of Galilee.—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages** 177.1-2.††

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36. In identifying His future disciples, Jesus showed that He had foreknowledge of each one of us in detail. How much does Jesus know about each one of us?

John 1:41-42: ⁴¹At once he found his brother Simon [Peter] and told him, "We have found the Messiah." (This word means "Christ". [sic]) ⁴²Then he took Simon to Jesus.

Jesus looked at him and said, "Your name is Simon son of John, but you will be called Cephas." (This is the same as Peter and means "a rock". [sic])—*Good News Bible*.*†

37. **Jesus could look into the character of people and know what their real motives were. This was not only in calling disciples but also at other times.**

John 2:23-25: ²³ While Jesus was in Jerusalem during the Passover Festival, many believed in him as they saw the miracles he performed. ²⁴But Jesus did not trust himself to them, because he knew them all. ²⁵There was no need for anyone to tell him about them, **because he himself knew what was in their hearts** [their motives or true thoughts].—*Good News Bible*.*††

38. It was at that same Passover that Jesus cleansed the temple the first time. When the religious leaders questioned Him about who gave Him the authority to do what He did, He told them that if they destroyed this temple (His body), He would raise it back up again. (John 2:19)

John 2:19: Jesus answered, "Tear down this Temple, and in three days I will build it again."—*Good News Bible*.*

39. Later, He said:

John 10:18: "No one takes my life away from me. I give it up of my own free will. I have the right to give it up, and I have the right to take it back. This is what my Father has commanded me to do."—*Good News Bible*.*

40. The final, irrefutable proof of His divinity was given after the religious leaders had killed Him on the cross and buried Him; **Christ arose from the dead by the power that was in Himself.**

[EGW:] When the voice of the mighty angel was heard at Christ's tomb, saying, Thy Father calls Thee, **the Saviour** [*sic-Br*] **came forth from the grave by the life that was in Himself. Now was proved the truth of His words, "I lay down My life, that I might take it again.... I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again." Now was fulfilled the prophecy He had spoken to the priests and rulers, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up."** John 10:17, 18; 2:19.—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages** 785.2.†† [No created being could ever raise himself from the dead!][‡]

<https://egwwritings.org/read?panels=p130.3866&index=0>[‡]

41. In conclusion, while we should be convinced on the basis of the testimonies of these many witnesses, Jesus Christ Himself made it very clear that sin leads to separation from God. He "died" in the garden of Gethsemane to demonstrate to the onlooking universe what the results of sin are, and that was before any human had touched Him, or caused Him to shed any blood. He died a second time on the cross so that we humans could get at least some idea of what was involved.
42. What lessons to resist temptation and what encouragement can we take from the experience of Jesus with John the Baptist at the Jordan River? Jesus was taught by God!

[EGW:] And the word that was spoken to Jesus at the Jordan, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased," embraces humanity. God spoke to Jesus as our representative. With all our sins and weaknesses, we are not cast aside as worthless. "He hath made us accepted in the Beloved." Ephesians 1:6. The glory that rested upon Christ is a pledge of the love of God for us. It tells us of the power of prayer,—how the human voice may reach the ear of God, and our petitions find acceptance in the courts of heaven. By sin, earth was cut off from heaven, and alienated from its communion; but Jesus has connected it again with the sphere of glory. His love has encircled man, and reached the highest heaven. The light which fell from the open portals upon the head of our Saviour [*sic-Br*] will fall upon us as we pray for help to resist temptation. The voice which spoke to Jesus says to every believing soul, This is My beloved child, in whom I am well pleased.—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages** 113.1.[‡] <https://egwwritings.org/read?panels=p130.455&index=0>[‡]

43. In this lesson we have discussed the witness that was provided by John the Baptist, several of the early disciples, as well as Nicodemus and Jesus. **Have we seen enough evidence to convince us to be lifelong followers of Jesus?**

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