



JOURNEY with JESUS

In Conclusion

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I had to write persuasive essays in high school as part of my grammar/composition class. My teacher explained that a persuasive essay is made up of an introductory paragraph followed by several paragraphs outlining why the reader should adopt the writer's position. The last paragraph is the conclusion paragraph. It often starts with 2 important words: "In conclusion" followed by a summary of the writer's remarks and an emphatic sentence stating why the reader should agree with the writer.

John starts his gospel with a fantastic introduction in chapter 1. John uses "in the beginning" language that resembles Genesis 1: "*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.*" This certainly catches the reader's attention and keeps the reader interested in what lies next.

Then, John proceeds with his persuasive essay, documenting encounters that Jesus had in his ministry: turning water to wine, talking with the woman at the well, feeding the five thousand, teaching Nicodemus, and the list goes on and on. Then, in chapter 20, John clearly states his purpose in writing:

John 20:30-31

Jesus performed many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

Basically, John is saying this: I recorded all of these stories to persuade you to believe in Jesus. And that by believing you may have life to the full in Jesus' name.

This sentence is starting to sound like an emphatic statement that could be included in a conclusion paragraph.

Right before John clearly states the purpose for writing his gospel account, he shares an encounter that Thomas had with the risen Christ. Let's read the scripture:

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."

As it turns out, Thomas needed a little persuading about Jesus' resurrection. He doubted his friends' testimony about Jesus. Thomas needed to see and touch Jesus to solidify his faith in Christ.

Some people need to doubt before they believe. That is okay. Doubt can lead to a solid, grounded belief system. If doubt leads to questions, questions lead to answers, and answers lead to belief, then the doubting was worth it. Allow your doubt to deepen your faith. Search for the answers about Christ. Reflect on the persuasive testimonies of your friends, family, and other believers.

Once again, John writes something very interesting in the last two verses of his account:

John 21:24-25

This is the disciple who testifies to these things and who wrote them down. We know that his testimony is true.

Jesus did many other things as well. If every one of them were written down, I suppose that even the whole world would not have room for the books that would be written.

If you couple these two verses with John's "purpose statement" in chapter 20, together they would read like this:

Jesus performed many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

This is the disciple who testifies to these things and who wrote them down. We know that his testimony is true.

Jesus did many other things as well. If every one of them were written down, I suppose that even the whole world would not have room for the books that would be written.

Those verses together start to sound a lot like a conclusion paragraph. John states his purpose, he persuades the reader to believe in Christ, and he provides some "summary language" about his persuasive gospel essay.

So, that is how John end his persuasive essay, right? Not so fast. Let's examine this scripture in chapter 21:

John 21:15-17

When they had finished eating, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?"

"Yes, Lord," he said, "you know that I love you."

Jesus said, "Feed my lambs."

Again Jesus said, "Simon son of John, do you love me?"

He answered, "Yes, Lord, you know that I love you."

Jesus said, "Take care of my sheep."

The third time he said to him, "Simon son of John, do you love me?"

Peter was hurt because Jesus asked him the third time, "Do you love me?" He said, "Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you."

Jesus said, "Feed my sheep."

Peter believed in Christ, but he denied that belief in the face of trials and persecution. He denied Christ 3 times during Jesus' trial and crucifixion, and in this passage, Jesus asks him 3 times if he loves him.

Believers are tempted to deny. Peter needed special encouragement and forgiveness to solidify his belief in Christ in the face of trials and tribulations.

Thomas doubted before he believed. Peter believed perhaps quicker than Thomas did, but Peter denied his belief multiple times in public.

At belief, we finally realize who Jesus is, and our lives are changed. Thomas' life was changed. Peter's life was changed. We are tempted and may deny our belief along our journey, but each time Jesus seeks a conversation with us, asking, "Do you love me? Am I your friend?" And we are forgiven again. Set free to serve, and to put our belief into action.

Arriving at belief is not the *first* sentence of the conclusion paragraph. Belief arrives in the *middle* of the persuasive essay: after our introduction to Christ and before Christ writes the final conclusion. Belief arrives in the middle of the narrative serving as a catalyst to encourage us to step out and serve Christ, and share our belief in him with a lost world.

Belief opens up the door for us to participate, along with all of the saints then, now, and in the future, to narrate God's Story to the world until Christ returns.

So, whether you have some doubts, have recently denied your belief, or are standing solidly on that belief, contribute to this persuasive essay that John started for us.

I think John is absolutely right: Jesus did many other things as well. He is doing many new and exciting things each day in our lives. Write down your belief journey and contribute to this persuasive essay.

Share your faith journey, the ups and downs, the encounters you have had with Jesus, the disappointments, the joys, the moments of forgiveness, the moments of shared sacrifice, and praise. By doing this, you are painting a picture of Christ to those who have never "seen" him.

And remember: blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed. Be blessed this day!