

# The Jesus Touch

A 12-week journey through the Gospels

*with*

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## ***Dedication***

*Breezy & D ~*

*Jesus touched my life in many ways;  
but the most cherished is  
with you!*



*Boundless and eternal gratitude belongs  
to my Gracious Lord  
for leading me all the way on this incredible journey.*

*And I give special thanks to*

*Mike Sparks*

*Tom Tignor*

*Three of the dearest sisters:*

*Natalie Polutta, Jan Sessions, and Debbie Weaver  
and the praying Elders and Staff of Burnt Hickory*

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WEEK TWO  
**John, the Persecuted**

**DAY 1**

From Glory to Gloom

John, the ... *what* ?!

At first glance of our title this week, you're likely to think one of two things:  
1) "I must be thinking of a different John," or 2) "She's crazy!"

Yes, I'm referring to John, the Baptist. Hang in there and you'll see where his days of glory soon turned to gloom.

As sure as the promised Coming Messiah, His messenger, too, was prophesied.

**Read Malachi 3:1:**

**John was called God's \_\_\_\_\_**

**Read Isaiah 40:3:**

**He would \_\_\_\_\_**

## ABOUT JOHN

John was a miracle-child promised by angels and whose birth was foretold by prophets. What can we deduce of him?

**Read Luke 1:15-17 and fill in the blanks:**

- **He would be \_\_\_\_\_ before the Lord.**
- **He would be \_\_\_\_\_ with the Holy Spirit.**

"This all happened at Bethany on the other side of the Jordan, where John was baptizing."

*John 1:28*

**Read Matthew 3:1-12. Circle all that apply:**

**He was mild.**

**He was passionate.**

**He was bold.**

**He spoke a soft message.**

**He was eccentric.**

**He drew great crowds.**

**Read Luke 3:1-18 John was teaching and preaching  
(check all that apply):**

- Repentance/Baptism**
- Exemption of Abraham’s descendants**
- Coming of the Messiah**
- Ethics**
- Future judgment**

He left his family and comforts of home to preach repentance and the coming kingdom of God—paving the way for the baptism of the Christ.

John, though a servant of God like Anna from last week’s lesson, he is at the polar opposite end of the personality spectrum. He was loud, bold, uncompromising and zealous for the Lord. But the crowds swarmed about him.

He challenged authorities corrupting religion and never backed-down from rulers that behaved unethically. Let’s see what happens when your firmly stated beliefs ruffle the governor’s royal feathers.

**Complete Luke 3:19-20:**

**But when John \_\_\_\_\_ Herod the tetrarch  
because of his marriage to Herodias, his brother’s wife,  
and all the other evil things he had done, Herod added  
this to them all:**

\_\_\_\_\_

He courageously confronted Herod Antipas, condemning his relationship with Philip’s wife. Antipas had divorced his wife in order to marry Herodias—who not only was married to his brother, but was also his niece.

**TouchPoint**

Herod Antipas,  
Tetrarch of Galilee,  
was the ruling  
governor appointed  
by Rome and son  
of Herod the Great.

**Would you so boldly confront someone’s sin?**

\_\_\_\_\_

**Can you remember a time you challenged blatant sin?**

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

As a result, Herod had John tossed in prison.

## The Quieted Herald

“It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair.” Although *A Tale of Two Cities* was penned by Charles Dickens in 1859, it more aptly suited the times of John. They were the best of times because the long-awaited Messiah had arrived on the scene. It was the worst because of the oppression by religion and government alike. They had the wisdom of John, but the foolishness of the Pharisees. There reigned faith and skepticism, light and darkness, hope... and despair.

Day Two with John finds this quieted herald sitting in Herod’s jail cell for speaking his righteous convictions.

We don’t know how long he was there, how he was treated, or the condition of his confinement, but have you ever considered the real possibility that he got discouraged?

I believe it is here that we can sense a noticeable shift in John’s tone and disposition.

**What do you “hear” when you read Luke 7:18-19?**

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Do you hear duress? Discouragement? Possibly even despair?

**Has standing up for what is right ever landed you in a lonely place?**

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## WHAT IN THE WORLD DOES THE WORLD DO WITH A PROPHET?

John wouldn’t be the first prophet to have cause for despair. I’m sure he knew the history of Elijah’s persecution at the hands of Jezebel. (Especially since he was often compared to him!) Jeremiah, another famous prophet, was persecuted at the hands of his own King Zedekiah.

**Read Jeremiah 37 and document the treatment Jeremiah received from King Zedekiah.**

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Jeremiah was imprisoned and eventually charged with treason for his message about Babylon's capture of Jerusalem.

**TouchPoint**

Tradition says that Isaiah, yet another of God's messengers, was charged with falsely predicting the destruction of Judah and executed at the hands of Manasseh.

*Martyrdom and Ascension of Isaiah*

**Recorded in Matthew 23:37 are the convicting words of Jesus: (fill in the blanks):**

**"Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who \_\_\_\_\_  
the prophets and \_\_\_\_\_ those sent to you"**

Considering all this, how easy would it have been for John to doubt? I imagine his understanding of how things should be going, compared to the circumstances in which he found himself, just didn't match up.

I have found myself in painful situations when reality just didn't align with my worldview. A worldview that screams; "If I'm doing God's will, I will always be treated fairly."

**Can you relate? Have you ever stood firm on biblical principle and suffered consequences that didn't align with your expectations?**

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If John was doing the will of God, which he believed he was, it doesn't seem a far stretch to think he wondered, *Why am I imprisoned?*

## TELL ME AGAIN

The same man who proclaimed unequivocally; "I have seen and I testify that this is God's Chosen One," was seeking confirmation. He sought reassurance.

**Read Luke 7:19 in the sidebar. Star the matching quotes:**

**You are the one who is to come ...**

**Are you the one who is to come ...**

**We shouldn't expect anyone else ...**

**Should we expect someone else ...**

**Luke 7:19**

John sent them to the Lord to ask, "Are you the one who is to come, or should we expect someone else?"

I hear in John's question; "Tell me again ..." that he needed a reminder.

Trials seem to first assault our memories—clouding our knowledge, muddling our faith, and inflicting amnesia of who we know Jesus to be. I become most fearful when I have forgotten that God is sovereign, mighty, and good. It is precisely then that it is wise to follow in John's stead and prayerfully ask Jesus for a reminder.

**Have you been or are you now in the midst of a situation in which you need to remember Who Jesus Is?**

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## A Reassuring Touch

The Bible Camp my kids have attended for years is situated on one of the most heavenly pieces of earth. It is scenic, serene and spectacular. But it is isolated. When they go in, no communication comes out until they come home a week later.

I can honestly say I have never worried about them while they were there, but it was always nice to hear they were OK. A few years back, our Children’s Minister went to spend the day. It was a welcome message when she told me all was well. I felt my heart instantly settle—touched by a reassuring word.

John asked. And Jesus answered. Jesus honored this suffering servant’s request by sending back a powerful reminder.

Jesus replied, “Go back and report to John what you hear and see: The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is proclaimed to the poor.”

*Matthew 11:4-6*

Jesus knew just what John needed most—reassurance. So Jesus touched this prophet and preacher with a familiar word he would recognize.

**Jesus instructed the messengers to report what  
“you \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_”**

### AN EVIDENT MESSIAH

By testifying to what they saw and heard, these messengers were affirming proof-positive evidence. The Messiah whom John was heralding would perform specific deeds as evidence of sure identity.

**Match the verse of promise with the affliction:**

<b>Blind</b>	<b>Isaiah 35:6</b>
<b>Lame</b>	<b>Isaiah 61:1</b>
<b>Deaf</b>	<b>Isaiah 26:19</b>
<b>Dead</b>	<b>Isaiah 29:18</b>
<b>Poor</b>	<b>Isaiah 35:5</b>

As a fellow-prophet, John would recognize the expected deeds of the promised Messiah foretold by preceding prophets. Jesus reassured John with the fact that He was filling the shoes only the Messiah could fill.

This reminder helped John to see more clearly what God was doing in accordance with what He had promised. The Messiah of God may not always do what we expect, but He will always do as God has promised.

**In the face of adversity, what is it you quickly forget about the Christ of God?**

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**How important is it to remember what He has said . . . what He has done?**

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**Read Psalm 42:6. What did the Sons of Korah say to do when souls are downcast?**

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## A MESSIAH AND HIS MIRACLES

Jesus openly performed the miraculous as display of God's divine power, His authority and proof of His identity in fulfilling prophecy.

**Look up Acts 2:22 and fill in the blank:**

**"Fellow Israelites, listen to this: Jesus of Nazareth was a man \_\_\_\_\_ by God to you by miracles, wonders and signs, which God did among you through him, as you yourselves know."**

Jesus exercised His authority through the signs, wonders, and miracles He performed. He testified: "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me (Matt 28:18).

### **TouchPoint**

*Apodeiknumi* = accredited: to demonstrate, set forth, exhibit, attest, approve. *Thayers Greek Lexicon* states; "The ancient Greek philosophers used this term for 'putting forth certain proof.'"

*Abbott-Smith*

**Write the letter of the realm of Jesus' authority next to the miracle.**

- |                             |            |
|-----------------------------|------------|
| _____ Calm the sea          | A) Death   |
| _____ Forgive               | B) Illness |
| _____ Heal the lame         | C) Nature  |
| _____ Raise the dead        | D) Demons  |
| _____ Cast out evil spirits | E) Sins    |

## THE WONDER IN ALL THESE WONDERS

Jesus declared His authority time and again. Multitudes, however—both then and now—have stumbled over it. It is a wonder, that in all His wonders, people wonder still.

### **TouchPoint**

*Skandalizó* = stumble:  
to put a snare,  
to cause to sin,  
to give offense.

*Strong's*

**Read Matthew 11:6.**

**What did Jesus say of the one who does not stumble because of Him?**

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Blessed are those who do not fall away because they become ensnared or offended on account of Jesus.

There is nothing more reassuring than truth. In times of difficulty, it is easy to become blinded to truth. Jesus touched John with reassuring, reaffirming truth. The truth of His authority. And the truth of His identity by the truth of His activity.

Jesus' response to John is an encouragement to all believers who have asked that same question since. Jesus did not berate or belittle, but gently guided him to the truth his heart most needed. The lesson to be learned for us all is not to allow our senses to overtake what we know to be true. Trust what you see ... not what you feel.

## DAY 4

# A Heart Divided

So far, we have seen John blanket the gamut of the human landscape. He scaled the heights—experiencing the success of a thriving, vibrant ministry; and trudged the depths—wondering if his suffering in prison bore merit.

When we look more closely at Jesus' response, we get a sense that there is more going on than meets the eye. Jesus did more by quoting Scripture than soothe John's bout with doubt. He did what only Jesus can—He strengthened his faith.

I don't know about you, friend, but my heart and my mind, at times, are impossibly inseparable! It's as if they're one giant organ ... with my heart being the dominant dictator.

Things get out-of-whack when my heart and mind are unbalanced. Either I over-analyze a situation or react emotionally. Neither extreme is particularly effective.

Why?

Faith becomes divided.

## KNOWING vs. FEELING

Picture your faith as a heart made up of knowledge (what you believe) and emotions (what you feel). Think of it as head-faith (what you know) and heart-faith (what you feel)

When one overrules the other, your heart can become divided, often lopsided.

As with John, his heart-faith (his feelings) had taken over. So Jesus addressed his head-faith.

**Read Matthew 11:4.**

**Jesus said;**

**"Tell John what you \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_."**



When heart-faith overtakes head-faith—when what you feel overpowers what you know—remember what you believe.

Jesus recalibrated John's heart back into balance. He helped him remember what he believed. He helped shift the focus of John's faith from what he felt to what he knew.

**Have you ever been in a similar position? Have you found yourself alone in a dark place when your feelings overtook what you knew to be true?**

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**Read Psalm 55:22.**

**What are we told to do?**

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**1 Peter 5:7**

Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.

**Read the verse in the sidebar. Why should you cast your cares on Jesus?**

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**Do you know someone now in a vulnerable position who needs the same reminder?**

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**Read Isaiah 35:3-4.**

**What can you tell them?**

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We all reach a crisis of faith at some point in time. They are defining moments that can strengthen and refine our faith. But only when we turn to the One who recalibrates our faith, is it put back into proper balance.

Do what John did. Turn to Jesus. Seek the reassurance your faith needs by looking to Him.

Jesus graced John with the truth of His Word to answer his heart-faith questions. Do the same. Turn to passages like Isaiah 50:10:

“Who among you fears the LORD  
and obeys the word of his servant?  
Let the one who walks in the dark,  
who has no light,  
trust in the name of the LORD  
and rely on their God.”

And believe.

## Touching the Persecuted

It began with Cain and Abel. It happens in the media, in our schools, in our homes, even—and especially—in religion.

Persecution.

Stephen testified before the Sanhedrin to its existence from centuries past:

“Was there ever a prophet your ancestors did not persecute? They even killed those who predicted the coming of the Righteous One. And now you have betrayed and murdered him” (Acts 7:52).

From the prophets, to the Author of our faith, Jesus Christ, all were persecuted for their faith. The first followers of Jesus were not immune either. Stephen was the first martyred for his beliefs. And tradition says that eleven of the twelve apostles also died a martyrs’ death.

And it is as much alive today as it has ever been.

A report conducted by China Aid stated that there was a 372% increase in incidents of persecution in China in 2012 over 2006. This has been attributed to, in part, the 2012 Chinese Communist government’s plan to eliminate all unregistered house churches.

And there are reports regularly in the news, like the one featured in the sidebar that occurred in September 2013.

### TouchPoint

Peshawar, Pakistan—  
Suicide bombers  
detonate amid  
Christians worshipping  
on Sunday at All  
Saints Church—killing  
85, wounding 140.  
“Christians have  
often been attacked  
by Sunni Muslim  
militants, who view  
them as enemies of  
Islam because of  
their faith.”

*Associated Press,  
published by  
Fox News*

## THE MASTER’S TEACHING

Prior to sending out the 12 apostles, Jesus gave explicit instructions (Matthew 10:5-42). He also told them; “I am sending you out like sheep among wolves.”

**Match up His additional warnings of treatment they might expect from Matthew 10:**

- |                |               |
|----------------|---------------|
| _____ Verse 17 | A) Betrayed   |
| _____ Verse 19 | B) Arrested   |
| _____ Verse 21 | C) Persecuted |
| _____ Verse 22 | D) Flogged    |
| _____ Verse 23 | E) Hated      |

Daunting ... to say the least! But within the overarching passage is encouragement and promise—the mightiest of which is found in verse 28: “Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. ”

On the night of his arrest Jesus spoke at length to the apostles of this expected phenomenon.

**Read John 15:18-25. Complete verse 18:**

**“If the world \_\_\_\_\_ ,  
keep in mind that it \_\_\_\_\_ .”**

**What explanation did Jesus give for the hatred toward them in verse 19?**

\_\_\_\_\_

**In verse 20 Jesus said, “If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also.” Circle the reason:**

**A servant is greater than the master.**

**A servant is not greater than his master.**

**A master is not greater than his servant.**

Jesus knows full-well the propensity for evil in man’s wicked heart. He forewarned the apostles of the troubles to come and tried to prepare them as much as was possible. His dialogue continues on into chapter 16 of John’s Gospel:

“All this I have told you so that you will not fall away. They will put you out of the synagogue; in fact, the time is coming when anyone who kills you will think they are offering a service to God. They will do such things because they have not known the Father or me. I have told you this, so that when their time comes you will remember that I warned you about them.” (1-4)



Jesus was not only their example, but their encouragement.

**Read John 16:33.**

**Why did Jesus tell them all these things?**

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**Jesus assured them that in this world  
they would have\_\_\_\_\_.**

**What is our blessed hope?**

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This is not meant to be a study of the individuals as much as it is their encounter with Jesus. By that we can draw out the need Jesus met so that we can become aware of that same need in others in order to touch them in a similar manner.

By this encounter with John, we see that Jesus touched this persecuted servant with encouragement and reassurance—a real need around the globe today.

We can be informed and moved to act in support and encouragement of missionaries imprisoned in dangerous parts of the world. We can reach out and touch them with God’s reaffirming Word, strengthening their faith under fire. And we can definitely—and most importantly—“pray on all occasions.”

**TouchPoint**

Websites of Note:

- PrayforthePersecuted.com*
- Persecution.org*
- OpenDoorsUSA.org*
- PrisonAlert.com*
- ChristiansinCrises.net*
- GFA.org/persecution*
- ChinaAid.org*

John lived differently, set apart from the world. He lived what he preached. And he went out into the wilderness to prepare the way for others to know Jesus. While serving the Lord, he was imprisoned for his message and ultimately lost his life (Matthew 14:3-13). But when he reached a low point being persecuted for his faith—Jesus touched him with a reassuring word.

So can we.