

Jesus brings Life

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Date: 15 December 2024

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[0 : 00] Well, now we turn to the preaching of God's Word. Tonight we'll be looking in the epistle of 1 John, chapter 5, verses 6 through 13.

If you have a Bible, you can turn there with me. And as you do, I wonder if you've heard this question yet this year. Someone asked you, what do you want for Christmas? If you're a child or a youth, this is maybe one of the greatest questions to be asked in a year because you know you have free reign to say whatever you want.

A gift that you don't have to pay for, that you don't have to earn. It's a question that's being asked and you can say whatever you want. Big things, small things, expensive things. You may not get them, but you can ask, right?

I think as we grow older, those expectations are lowered a little bit, right? We don't ask for the exciting things that we might have as a child. You know, if I got some socks, I think I'd be pretty content.

I've had a lot of jumpers be eaten by moths this year. I think just a jump or two would do fine for me this year. But oftentimes as we think about what we want as adults especially, we're not just thinking about what someone else may give to us, but what kind of we expect this season to give to us.

[1 : 11] What do we want out of this season? And oftentimes when you ask people, it's nothing more than nostalgia, right? They want to spend time with family and friends and we want to eat good food and we want to do some parties and we want to do some shopping.

We want some of the sentimentality of the Christmas music and the Christmas movies. And I think even as Christians, we can fall into this pattern of feeling without really thinking much.

Thinking about what this holiday really means. Why do we really celebrate this baby born in a manger? And so this evening I want us to answer this question not by turning to a typical Christmas passage that describes Jesus' birth, but really a passage that helps interpret that.

That helps us understand what the meaning of Christmas is all about. A passage that tells us what this ultimate gift is. Much greater than any gift we'll find under the Christmas tree or what we can ask for.

A gift of life that God provides for us. So let's look at our passage. 1 John chapter 5 starting in verse 6. This is the one who came by water and blood, Jesus Christ.

[2 : 27] He did not come by water only, but by water and blood. And it is the Spirit who testifies, because the Spirit is the truth. For there are three that testify, the Spirit, the water, and the blood.

And the three are in agreement. We accept human testimony, but God's testimony is greater because it is the testimony of God, which he has given about his Son.

Whoever believes in the Son of God accepts this testimony. Whoever does not believe God has made him out to be a liar, because they have not believed the testimony God has given about his Son.

And this is the testimony. God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. Whoever has the Son has life. Whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life.

I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know that you have eternal life. This is the Word of God. Amen. Pray with me again.

[3 : 32] Lord, as we turn to your Word, we ask that you soften our hearts, that you open our eyes. May we recognize your Word as a lamp to our feet and a light into our paths.

And so, Lord, we ask that you transform our hearts, that you encourage us and correct us, and give us a desire to follow you. We pray this in Jesus' name.

Amen. Amen. Well, when I practiced law back in the States, one of the greatest aspects of my practice was when I actually got to go and try a case.

In my line of work, I represented doctors a lot, and from the time that a case was filed to if it ever went to trial would usually be at least a two- or three-year period. And so it wasn't just a lot of waiting during that time.

There was a lot of work to be done, something called discovery. You're subpoenaing records. You're talking with witnesses. You're reviewing these records. You're trying to line up expert witnesses.

[4 : 28] You're taking depositions. You have hearings to attend to. But the ultimate is when you get to take this case all the way to trial. Because when that happens, it's basically I'm bringing my body of work, and I'm presenting it to a jury in hopes that they will see my theme and my theory, agree with me, and ultimately find my doctor not liable.

And so in this passage, we see something similar. We see something like a courtroom scene here. There's a case that's kind of being presented by God. We have these witnesses that he speaks of, and these witnesses have a testimony.

And so we're kind of invited to weigh the evidence and to come up with a decision. And so really three questions I want us to consider as we look in our passage this evening is, who is giving this testimony?

What is the testimony? And what do we do with this testimony? And so let's think about that first question. Who is giving this testimony? Now, when I would prepare for a trial, there would be a couple questions that I always want to ask myself.

What do I want the jury to know? And how am I going to tell them this? Of course, when I was representing a doctor, it would be his case that I was working on, right?

[5 : 46] But I would often think of it as my own case. It was my body of work. I was the one meeting with the witnesses. I was the one reviewing the records. I was the one learning the medicine.

I was the one communicating with expert witnesses. I was the one who was forming this theme and theory of the case. And so when you put it all together, it kind of becomes my own testimony.

But the thing is, as a lawyer, I don't get to take the witness stand to testify to a jury. I have to have others that serve as witnesses for me.

Now, I would decide who my witnesses were. I would decide what order I'd call them in. I'd decide what questions I would ask them, what records we would go through. Ultimately, it was them that were delivering my message to the jury.

And so we see something similar happening here. Because in verse 9, we see that it is God who is giving testimony about his son. But he says in verse 7, it says that there are three that testify.

[6 : 47] The spirit, water, and blood. So we know here that God is ultimately revealing his truth. But he does so by different means, by these witnesses. And so what does he mean when he talks about the spirit, water, and blood giving testimony?

Well, if we think about the water and the blood, a lot of ink has been spilled over what this exactly means. You've had many in the past, the reformers, they kind of looked at this and saying, well, they're talking about the sacraments.

Baptism and the Lord's Supper. You have others say, well, water and blood, that sounds like childbirth. There's talking about the birth of Jesus. Or water and blood, it sounds like when Jesus was on the cross and pierced in the side.

And water and blood came out. It's talking about his death. Actually, I think the best way to look at this is by thinking about both the beginning of Jesus' ministry at his baptism.

And the end of Jesus' earthly ministry on the cross. And so when we think about this birth narrative of Jesus, we see, we can go to the Gospel of Matthew.

[7 : 45] We can go to the Gospel of Luke. And we learn a lot about how Jesus came into the world. In Matthew, it talks about even as he's a little bit older, the wise men come to visit him. Herod is tipped off that there's this Messiah that's been born.

He wants to kill all the young baby boys. And so Joseph escapes with his family down to Egypt. And that's where they live for a few years until they return to Nazareth. Beyond that, we have very little facts about Jesus' upbringing or his life or his youth.

And so it's really not until he's about 30 years old that we start to learn about his earthly ministry.

And so while the Gospel of John, it doesn't talk about how Jesus was born as a baby, very early on

in this Gospel, it talks about Jesus' earthly ministry beginning.

And it talks about this baptism of Jesus. John the Baptist had been baptizing. He had been preaching repentance, preparing the way of the Lord. And it says that John sees Jesus coming toward him.

And he declares, Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. And it records for us, Jesus going down into the Jordan River. John baptizing Jesus.

[8 : 53] And then it says, The Spirit descended from heaven like a dove and remained on him. And a voice came from heaven, You are my beloved Son. With you I am well pleased.

And so when we say that Jesus came through water, it highlights the fact that Jesus, in beginning his earthly ministry, was endowed by the Spirit. He's identified right off the bat as the Son of God. But John says that's not enough that Jesus just came by water, but that he also came by blood. This blood points to his sacrificial death on the cross. This is what John said, It's this blood of Jesus that purifies us from our sin.

And so he's emphasizing both the water and the blood is important, because you had some in the church, or even outside the church, that wanted to distinguish Jesus from the Christ. They saw Jesus as a man born of Mary and Joseph, but they saw the Christ as someone who came down and embodied Jesus at his baptism, but then left him prior to going to the cross.

And so John is pushing back on this idea and saying, No, no, no. Jesus is the Christ. He is the Christ before and during and after his baptism. He is the Christ before, during, and after his crucifixion.

[10 : 11] And so we see this in the Christmas story, this announcement from the angels to the shepherds, right? What did they announce? They said, Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy for all the people.

For unto you is born this day in the city of David, a Savior who is Christ the Lord. Not someone who will become Christ for a time, not someone who will be embodied by Christ, but someone who is Christ.

And so if the Son of God, if he did not take on human form, if he did not take our sins on the cross, then he cannot be a God, he cannot be a Savior who reconciles us to God.

Jesus Christ, our Savior, is one person. From his birth, to his death, to his resurrection, and forevermore. And so John goes on to say, It's not only that we have this water, and we have this blood that testify to this gift of life, but we also have the Spirit that testifies.

And it's interesting, it's mentioned the Spirit in the present tense, the one bearing witness. We see the Spirit was present at his baptism, right? The Spirit comes down like a dove, identifying Jesus as the Son of God.

[11 : 26] We know that the Spirit is with him at his crucifixion. What happens to the temple? This temple veil is torn from top to bottom, paving the way for us to have direct access to God.

And the Spirit, he continues to work. He continues to work in the hearts and lives of man, drawing us to belief that Jesus Christ is our only Savior. And so we can read the Scriptures for ourselves, we can learn and study about the life of Jesus, but we need the Spirit to open our eyes, to soften our hearts, to grant us faith that we may believe.

And so these are the three witnesses that are talked about here, that they unite to form God's testimony. And it says that God's testimony is far greater than that of a man.

Now when I would try a case, when I would defend these doctors, I always needed an expert witness. And an expert witness was needed. I'd bring them in, I'd have them review all the evidence in the case, look over the medical records, the deposition testimony, to decide whether or not they can agree with the care my doctor provided.

And to say, yes, I agree with you, your doctor is not liable for whatever happened in this case. He did nothing wrong. And so when I would bring an expert witness to the stand, before I could just ask them their medical or professional opinion, I had to lay a foundation.

[12 : 49] I had to establish their credentials. I had to go through their education and training and experience in order for their testimony to be accepted by the court. And because of who they were, their testimony was more valuable to my case.

Because if I didn't have an expert to say my doctor did nothing wrong, then I was sure to lose the case. Well, likewise, we know and have the credentials of God.

He is the all-powerful creator. He is sovereign over all. He is infinite, eternal, and unchangeable. He cannot lie. His word is always true.

And so therefore, his testimony is most valuable. Far more reliable than that of man. And so this is the first step into accepting this testimony of God, is recognizing that we have a trustworthy witness. And so that moves us then to this second question. If it's trustworthy witness of God, what is his testimony? Verse 11 and 12. And this is the testimony.

[13:54] God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his son. Whoever has the son has life. Whoever does not have the son of God, does not have life. God's testimony is the gospel message.

God gives eternal life through his son, Jesus. And so this is a very simple explanation. As to why Jesus came as a baby. Why he began this human life.

So that we may have eternal life. His life on earth. His ministry in this earth guarantees life for us in heaven.

All of us who believe. This is the ultimate Christmas gift. And so we can sense John's excitement, even in this passage, about talking about eternal life.

Particularly when we look in the Greek text. Maybe you're someone on Christmas morning. Maybe you're rather subdued when you open presents. But certainly you've seen some, or you've either in person or a recording of someone who's very excited about presents.

[14:59] Right? They just rip them open. And they're so excited. They hold it up. This is what I got. See what I got. This is kind of what John is doing here in this passage. He's showing us this emphasis and this excitement for this gift of life.

Because in the Greek, you have a lot of flexibility in your word order. Where in English, it always kind of, your sentence is always structured, your subject, your verb, your direct object. If there's an important word or important phrase in the Greek, oftentimes you'll push it to the beginning of the sentence to highlight what you want to show your reader.

And so this is what is done in verse 11 here. Verse 11 literally reads from the Greek, and this is the witness. Life eternal gave God to us.

John is pointing out for us just how awesome this gift is. Like a kid holding up their present on a Christmas morning. This is the ultimate gift. A gift of life from God.

And so it's worth thinking about, well, how does God give us this gift? And John actually answers this question by going back to his gospel. John records Jesus' own words where he explains that life originated with the Father.

[16:12] It was given to him, the Son, and now he gives it to us. And so listen to this progression just from a few verses from the gospel of John. John 5, 26. For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself.

This allows Jesus to say, John 11, 35, I am the resurrection and the life. John 14, 6, I am the way, the truth, and the life.

This also leads Jesus in his high priestly prayer in John 17, right before Jesus is to go to the cross, praying to the Father. What does he say? I give eternal life to all those you have given to me.

And so when God gives eternal life to man, he gives it in his Son. For the Son is life.

And so when we think about eternal life, we shouldn't just be thinking about this impersonal quality of life or this experience of long life. When he's talking about eternal life, he's referring to an actual person, Jesus.

[17:16] And so this is actually how he concludes this chapter. 1 John 5, verse 20, he says, Jesus is the true God and eternal life. So Jesus has life, he brings life, and he is life.

And so that's how we can say to have the Son is to have life. To not have the Son is to not have life. Well, what does it mean then to have the Son? We see this connection in this passage, just kind of this progression from connecting what John is talking about in receiving and believing and having. If we receive God's testimony, we believe in his Son, we have eternal life. So like I mentioned, in the Gospel of John, it doesn't talk about Jesus coming as a baby, but it does talk about him coming into the world.

And it says, he came to his own people and they did not receive him. But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God.

So we see this connection between receiving and believing and possessing. And it all comes through faith. Martin Luther described faith as this.

[18 : 33] He said, faith is a hand or an instrument whereby we grab and take hold of the righteousness of Jesus. And so it's kind of like a beggar who's raising up their hand and a rich man walks by and puts money in his hand.

This poor beggar's hand doesn't deserve anything, but it's the means by which he receives this gift. This gift of eternal life is received by us through faith.

And we see that faith then, it leads to fellowship. Again, this is how 1 John, he starts this letter. He's talking about having seen Jesus.

We have seen Jesus, we have touched him, we have experienced him, and now we are testifying about him to you. Why are we doing that? So that you may receive Christ.

So that you may have fellowship with the Father and the Son. Again, thinking about Jesus' high priestly prayer. He's praying to the Father for those who will believe in him.

[19 : 35] And he's saying, just as I am in you and you are in me, so also are my believers in me and I am in them. And so to have the Son, it means not only to have faith, but to have relationship with God.

To abide in him. That he may be indwelling us. And through this, we experience life. We escape death.

We escape the judgment of God. We look forward to our eternal home when we will live forever in perfect harmony with God. And so this is the testimony of God.

God gives us life in his Son that is received through faith. What then is our response? What are we going to do with this testimony?

One of my greatest memories from practicing law was after a week-long case of defending this OBGYN. The case was over.

[20 : 38] All the evidence had been presented. Closing arguments had made. The jury had received their charge. Had gone back to the jury room to deliberate. And they'd probably been back there about an hour. When they pass a note, a note comes from the jury room to the judge asking a question.

And they say, can we re-listen to the cross-examination of one of the plaintiff's witnesses? It was a cross-examination that I had done of the plaintiff's witness. And it's really rare for a jury to ever ask a judge a question like this.

It's even more rare for a judge to grant this request. But he did. And so he brought the jury back into the courtroom. And we had a recording of my cross-examination played to the jury a second time.

And I know as they were, I thought as they were listening to this recording of my cross-examination, it was very likely that we were going to win this case because I got the witness to admit something that was actually in support of our theory of the case.

And so after the recording was done, they went back into the jury room. Fifteen minutes later, they come back with a verdict and find my doctor not liable. They did their due diligence. They made a proper examination of the evidence.

[21 : 48] And that led them to the truth. And so the same is our responsibility here. It says in verse 10, whoever believes in the Son of God accepts this testimony.

Whoever does not believe God has made him out to be a liar because they have not believed the testimony God has given about his Son. And so this is the question for each one of us.

Do we accept God's testimony? Do we believe that the Son of God actually brings us life? You see, Christmas time, though it brings with it lots of nostalgia that we like to cling to, it also brings with it a challenge.

It challenges us to question our beliefs. Do we really believe this? Do I really believe that a little baby boy was born of a virgin?

And this little baby boy was actually our Savior. He was actually God in human form who came and lived a perfect life and died on the cross taking the penalty for our sins and giving me a gift of life.

[23 : 00] See, the thing is, this is really difficult to even think through. As a Christian, even when we say this out loud, it sounds a little bit crazy. And quite honestly, there may be some of us who would rather stick with the nostalgia because it seems much safer and much simpler than having to wrestle with a truth like this.

But the reality is that we simply can't observe this holiday without picking a side because there's really no safe middle ground.

If we want our celebration of Christmas just to be a focus on the warmth and cheer of this season, we are calling God a liar. If we want our celebration to simply be the giving and receiving of gifts with friends and family, we are calling God a liar.

If we simply view this Christmas story as some heartwarming allegory that we want to bring us hope and joy, we are calling God a liar. Thinking of this courtroom scene one more time, when a jury issues their verdict, the trial is over, the jury can go home.

They've done their civic duty, they can return to their work, and the decision that they made is not going to have any bearing on the rest of their life. The same is not true for us because if we refuse to see the significance of Christ coming to the earth, that he was truly born and we're trying to set his people free, like we sang this morning, then there will be eternal consequences.

[24 : 42] Because our unbelief is the worst of sins because we are rejecting the testimony of God. We are refusing the gift of the Son. We are ignoring the witness of the Spirit.

And so as though we are looking into the face of God who offers us his love and his life, and we're saying, you are a liar.

And so rather than receiving eternal life, we will receive eternal judgment. Rather than receiving fellowship with the triune God, we will receive eternal separation from him.

And so John concludes this passage in verse 13 in a very similar way that he concludes his gospel. He gives us, he tells us the reason for his writing.

In the gospel, he says he writes his gospel to move readers to faith in Jesus. Here he says in verse 13 that he wants to assure believers that they actually possess eternal life.

[25 : 48] And so here, even tonight, we may have both audiences present. If you're here and you're still trying to figure out this true meaning of Christmas, know that God has taken the initiative to reveal his truth to you.

His testimony is true. His witnesses are trustworthy. And his gift is life through his Son. And so the offer for you then is to receive and rest upon Christ alone for your salvation.

For those who have already been granted this faith, John is encouraging us to have assurance in our faith, assurance of this gift of life. I think oftentimes we can feel like someone who gets a present that is much more valuable than they anticipated.

And they say, oh, that's too nice. I don't deserve it. I can't possibly accept this. Because oftentimes we can feel like we're far from God or undeserving of this gift of life when the reality is that's true.

We are undeserving of this gift of life and that's why it's called grace. And so the encouragement from John is to take comfort in this truth that we may long for deeper fellowship with Christ, that we may experience the blessing of eternal life not only in the age to come but even starting now.

[27 : 20] And so as we think about celebrating this Christmas season, may it not be disconnected from the true Christmas story. And may this true Christmas story may not be disconnected from the rest of scripture that tells us of Christ's sacrifice, his work on the cross that gives us life.

he was born that we may have life. Let's pray.