

Proclaiming Jesus the Word of Life

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[0 : 0 0] can have Christian certainty in a world of confusion. And we'll keep coming back to this theme in John's letter. It's very appropriate, I think, for our time. Think about the huge social changes that we have lived through just in the last few years. We have gone through the upheaval of pandemic. We have seen the Me Too movement and Black Lives Matter and Brexit and changes to gay marriage and transgender issues, and that's just in the last few years. And it's really easy, I think, with the pace of change and the kind of change, to feel disorientated, distressed, perhaps just plain dizzy because of all this confusion. And then add into the mix the huge array of different ideas about Jesus popular today. So, you could walk three minutes up the road and discover Muslims believe in Jesus too. In what sense? Jehovah's Witnesses think of Jesus as a created being, not God, one who was only resurrected spiritually. We might encounter that on our doorstep. There is the idea that was popularized again recently by Philip Pullman of the good man Jesus and the scoundrel Christ. For some people, Jesus is a freedom fighter. For some people, Jesus is some kind of wise guru. For some people, He's simply a legend. So, who is right? Who can we trust?

How can we know? Christian certainty, confident Christianity. So, Pastor John's letter is a gift for us.

As he writes with the authority of an apostle, he writes to give true believers assurance and to challenge the false assurance coming from false teaching about Jesus. So, he writes from the city of Ephesus, mid to late first century. Ephesus, a place of great moral and spiritual confusion.

The city was dominated by the center of the Artemis or Diana cult, a great big temple, lots of idols, a place associated with black magic and the dark arts. And from this place, Ephesus, false teaching was beginning to be taught and to take hold. In particular, there was a chap by the name of Serinthus who wanted to separate the divine and the human. Didn't believe that Jesus could be both God and man. Thought about God, about Jesus only as being a spirit being, not truly human. That the spirit came on Jesus from baptism, left Him before the cross. And so, the churches were beginning to hear these alternative views about Jesus and about Christianity. One of the themes that we have in John's letter is that repeating refrain, we know. As apostles, there are truths that we know. So, we read 1 John 5 verse 20, we know that the Son of God has come. We are in Him who is true. He is the true God and eternal life. So, there are certain things that we can know if we listen to the apostle to be true.

[3 : 2 6] What we didn't read as we go to the end of the letter was the very last words. He says, Dear children, keep yourselves from idols. And so, commentators are puzzled over. That's a funny kind of ending. But I think what John is saying and what he'll say to us is that if we are to have certainty in our Christian faith that we are holding to the truth, if we are to live with confident Christianity, we need to keep ourselves from idols. And in particular, we must not accept a twisted message about a distorted Jesus. And so, this letter is going to show us here are the things that we need to know. And if we know them and believe them, we can have assurance that we belong to God.

So, we're going to hear some theological tests. Do we believe that Jesus is the Son of God who came in the flesh? We're going to hear some moral tests. Do we obey the commands of Jesus and take sin seriously?

We're going to hear social tests. Do we love one another within the church to express our love for Christ? That's just a preview some of the places where we'll be going. But this evening, we're just thinking about the introduction, but it's a really important introduction to the whole letter because it introduces us to the incarnation of Jesus. Jesus coming, the Son of God coming in the flesh as the Word of Life. So, we're going to think about that as the message. It also does something really important because it introduces us to John as an eyewitness. There is an authority here as he proclaims truth about Jesus. And it also introduces us to some wonderful results that flow from believing what he talks about, the promise of fellowship with God himself and the promise of deep joy.

So, let's have a look at this introduction. We'll ask some different questions. The first question is, what is John's message about Jesus? Okay, this letter is one of those, Hebrews is similar. It has an unusual opening. There's no greeting. There's no thanksgiving. Rather, he wants to get straight into truth. And he says, here is the truth that I want to testify to, that I want to proclaim, that has been revealed. And it's the truth, if you look in verse, end of verse 1, it's the truth we proclaim concerning the Word of Life. Okay, so we need to think about the Word of Life. What does John teach about it? So, let's follow some of the different strands of evidence here and understand why he is writing the way he is writing, because it matters to his argument and to his purpose. The first thing that becomes clear that John wants us to know is that the Word of Life is eternal. Okay, his introduction is no accident. That which was from the beginning. Taking us back to Genesis 1, in the beginning,

God created the heavens and the earth, taking us back to the way John introduced his own gospel. In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. His particular point here is not exactly the same as that in Genesis and John. So, there is, go back as far as you can before there was anything made, and there was God, and there was the Word for all eternity. But his particular point here is that before the life appeared, so he's thinking before Jesus was born, before Jesus took on flesh, he was the eternal Son of God. He says that there in verse 2, we proclaim to you the eternal life which was with the Father, which was with the Father and has appeared to us. So, this one that John is talking to us about is the one who was there before there was anything other than God the Father, and God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. Here is the Son of God described as the Word of Life, living an eternal personal relationship with God the Father. So, the Word of Life is eternal. We'll come back to that. But the Word of Life is also historical. So, notice what John does. He says, that which was from the beginning, going back into eternity, which we have heard and seen and looked at and touched. What's his point?

[8 : 14] The Creator has entered into creation, has entered into time and space as a real figure in history.

We heard him. We saw him. We touched him. That word, we touched with our hands, is the idea of how a blind person would touch an object in order to examine, in order to know what it was. John has personally examined Jesus as he came in history. As he would say in his gospel, the Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us, and we have seen his glory. The glory is as of the one and only, full of grace and truth.

And so, the Word of Life is eternal, and the Word of Life is historical. And so, right from the beginning, he's saying to us, the Word of Life is fully God, and the Word of Life is fully man. And there's a mystery there, and he wants us to know this mystery is something that we can trust in. Because the Word of Life that he's talking about is all about Jesus. And he was an eyewitness to Jesus. The Word of Life is the gospel of Jesus Christ. It's interesting when you read these verses. Sometimes you can get the impression that the Word of Life is a title describing Jesus. Sometimes the Word of Life can sound like a description of the message about Jesus. And in truth, it can be used both ways, because the Christian message is identical. The person and work of Jesus is our good news. Christ is the gospel.

Our good news isn't a statement of truths. Our good news is a person who is the truth. So, we proclaim redemption in Christ. Eternal life in Christ. Fellowship with God in Christ. Our good news is Jesus.

The Jesus who said, I am the resurrection and the life. Jesus who said, I am the way, the truth, and the life. Jesus who said, I am the way, the truth, and the life. John's message is that Jesus is the eternal Son of God became human. Jesus is the dominant figure in history, in Western civilization. His life, his teaching, his moral character remains the foundation of society. Go on to Amazon, and you will find there are more more than 175,000 individual titles on the person and the work of the Lord Jesus. The search is still on.

[11 : 22] Who is Jesus? How can we find truth? How can we have confidence? And if we're Christians, how can we help others discover the truth about Jesus? And John writes this letter to say, I'm an apostle, listen to me.

Let my truth guide you. Let my truth guide you into what you must believe and what we must teach. And two things that stand out for us that must be central to what we believe and what we proclaim. First, that Jesus is the God-man. We cannot settle for anything less than that. In contrast with every other religion, every other view of Jesus, even those that give him a relatively high view, prophet, teacher, mighty man, that doesn't go far enough. In contrast with modern views, where often people like him as a teacher, like some of his social justice, like the Good Samaritan parable, we need to affirm he is Son of God, become one of us, fully God, fully man. So we need to affirm that Jesus is the God-man and that Jesus is the gospel. The gospel that saves is that for us and for our salvation, the eternal Son of God

God, left the glory of heaven, took on flesh in order to fully obey the law of God that we have broken and cannot keep, to go to the cross to suffer and die in the place of sinners, being the sin bearer, bearing the just judgment of God against sin, rising in victory and for our salvation, so that by faith in him, we are saved, we are forgiven, and we have eternal life.

John's message about Jesus. But the second thing that we need to ask as soon as we affirm that is, what is John's authority? It's a really important thing to consider. Some of us, you've just arrived here in Edinburgh to study. Others, you're in the midst of that. Some teach others. And a key part of studying is to understand and to appreciate in all the possible sources that you could access, Wikipedia included, which sources carry the most weight. Which authors are respected as experts in their field? Those are the sources we want to know and we want to cite. Put differently, as you arrive in the city and as you begin to meet people, you might find people asking questions if they discover that you're a Christian. What, you really believe the Bible? Isn't that outdated and out of touch? Surely we don't need to live by an ancient moral code and confidence can easily be shaken.

And so John wants us as readers to understand something about his authority. That we would understand to listen to what the apostle John teaches is to listen to God's truth, is to listen to revelation. The church in that day is being confronted with an alternative. Listening to false teaching, man-made speculation, man-made speculation. But they're being invited, and we are being invited, to trust John's account of Jesus because he is an eyewitness and an apostle. Confident Christianity rests in the authority of the apostles' message. In fact, the true church rests on the authority of the apostles' message. Back to our text and another surprising feature that you may have noticed as we were reading together. There is no personal introduction. There's no, here am I, John, an apostle.

[16:01] Rather, we hear the frequent use of we. Did you notice that? Listen to verse 1, that which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen, which we have looked at.

Verse 2, the life appeared, we have seen it, and we proclaim to you the eternal life. And so it goes. So who is the we that's being spoken of? And this we is John saying, I stand shoulder to shoulder with the other apostles as Jesus' messengers. That's the we. He represents those who are with Jesus and those who are sent by Jesus. So his authority should count for a lot. He uses two particular words to show his authority as an apostle in two different ways. There is first of all the word that. He says, testify. See it there in verse 2, the life appeared, we have seen it, and testify to it.

That's a law courtroom word, isn't it? The idea of giving testimony. John's point is that his authority is based on eyewitness testimony. So we're going to move for a few minutes from this letter to his gospel to think about this. Verse 1, John spoke about things which he has heard and seen and touched.

What kind of things did John hear? Well, remember that John, of all the gospel writers, records those wonderful seven sayings of Jesus, known as the I Am sayings, where Jesus takes the name of God in the Old Testament, and he applies it to himself. I am God, and as God, I am. I am the bread of life.

I am the one who satisfies, not just physically, but the spiritual longing of every heart. Jesus says, I am the light of the world. I am God's truth, shining through the darkness, bringing clarity where there was confusion. Jesus said, I am the gate for the sheep. I am the way into God's kingdom, pictured as a flock. I am the resurrection and the life. I am the one who will live and die and rise again, giving eternal life to all who believe. I am the good shepherd, laying down my life for my sheep. I am the way, the truth, and the life, the only way to know God and life with God. I am the true vine. He is our source of spiritual life. That's just some of what John heard from Jesus that he brings to us. What kind of things did John see? Again, he records seven signs that testify to the glory and the power of Jesus and give us reason to believe. He saw those great and mighty healing miracles, the power and the love and compassion of Jesus combining. He saw Jesus walking on water, showing that he has the authority of God. And he saw Jesus' friend Lazarus come back from the dead, coming out of a tomb at the command of Jesus.

[19:39] Jesus. What did John's hands touch? He was a close personal friend of Jesus. He touched the hands of Jesus himself, helping to provide bread for 5,000 as Jesus worked that miracle and asked the disciples to disperse the bread and the fish. John was there. Those hands that made the mud pack to place on the man's eyes to then send him to wash with the authority to give him sight. John was there and saw it.

He saw his friend's hands be pierced with nails on the cross, dying in our place and for our sin. He saw the hands of the risen Lord Jesus cooking fish at the beachside barbecue after his resurrection.

And he gives testimony so we can believe. I was a personal friend of Jesus. The eternal Son of God. Christ was one of us. I saw how he lived. I saw how he died. And I saw him when he rose again. And so he gives testimony. He testifies. That's his authority. He's an eyewitness.

But his second word that helps us to understand his authority is there in verse 2 and verse 3. Now, we have seen it. We have testified to it. And we proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and has appeared to us. We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard.

Okay, so the first scene was a courtroom scene. This scene is different. This is the idea of a king's herald, a king's spokesperson, sent out to speak for the king. This is reminding us that John's words carry authority because John was called by Jesus to be an apostle. And the word apostle means a sent one.

[21 : 46] He is a sent one by Jesus. Having followed Jesus closely for three years during his public ministry, having then waited as Jesus commanded to receive the Holy Spirit, and then being sent out, commissioned to go and make disciples, he proclaims the king's message. That Jesus is the Christ, that long-appointed, promised king and savior who is none other than the Son of God himself.

So he has authority as an eyewitness, and he has authority because he is sent as an apostle. Two important reflections for us when we think about our own discipleship, when we think about our own mission. Where does our authority rest? Not in being an apostle, but in trusting in the apostle's message, our authority is always and only the word of God. As Christians and as a church, we dare not shift from that. If we are to make any difference in this world, if we are to bring glory to God in this world, it is not going to be because of our human persuasion and logic, but as we proclaim Jesus Christ and Him crucified as we find it in Scripture, we must declare what the apostles as the eyewitnesses declared. We must be confident in the identity of the Lord Jesus as He's revealed to us by the apostles.

We stake our lives on the authority of the Bible. Because our mission as a church, our mission as Christians depends on this.

You think about that calling that Jesus gives first to the disciples and then by extension to the church, go and make disciples, teaching them to obey everything that I command. Where do we find those commands? In God's Word and in the gospel. So as we think about how we carry that out, whether we're thinking about in our families, whether we're thinking about how to be disciples in school or university with our colleagues or friends, truly we will do this only in the first place if we believe that this is true. We know the times that we're living. We're never going to share the Bible with anyone unless we are persuaded this is true and it is life-giving and it is good news. And so we need to keep hearing what Pastor John is sharing with us as he gives us testimony to the fact that the eternal Son of God came to live among us, came in the flesh to be our Savior, that he came to bear away sin.

He came to give eternal life. He came to enter into personal communion with his people so that you and I can know God. This is the Word of life we believe. This is the Word of life we hold out to others as we read the Bible with our family or with a friend, as we explain what we believe to our classmate, as we look to disciple our children. The last thing to say, having thought about John's message and John's authority, is to think about John's goal. What's the result that flows from what he's taught us? And this is where Pastor John really helpfully takes this big theology and his big theology down to everyday life. He's given us the what. Here's what is true about Jesus. Now he gives us the so what. We've got two purpose statements in verse 3 and 4. Here's the first one.

[25 : 41] We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard so that, here's our purpose statement, you also may have fellowship with us and our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ. So that we may have fellowship. First of all, and fundamentally, fellowship with the Father and with the Son. By believing the truth about Jesus, by believing in Jesus as Lord and as Savior, we are brought into life with God, a living union with the living God.

And it's a reminder to us as we think about fellowship, that fellowship and unity within a church, within Christ, is always built on truth. The truth of God's Word, the truth of the gospel about Jesus. So we are brought into fellowship with the Father and his Son. And then John also says, you have fellowship with us, which is amazing because he's one of the apostles. We share things in common shared privilege with the apostles. We're part of the same body of Christ, the church.

We're part of the same family of God. As he encourages us to pray, dear children, we are all children with the same Father, with Jesus as our elder brother, that believing brings us into living fellowship. And not only that, here's the second purpose. Verse 4, we write this to make our joy complete. There's the purpose. We write this in order to make our joy complete. Here is John the pastor.

He's writing to a group of people that he loves being confronted with false teaching, living in a very confused society. And he says, this will give me joy. When you find your joy in Jesus, when you are enjoying fellowship with God himself, when you are believing this is true and living this is true, that's going to bring me joy. And it's going to bring the church joy. That's what brings us all joy. This kind of joy is rooted in truth. John has been telling us, when we are in Jesus, we have eternal life. He is the word of life who gives life. In Jesus, I have personal living fellowship with God. In Jesus, I have brothers and sisters to share life with you. We have cause for joy that is deep and lasting.

And he takes us to think about complete joy, which reminds us that the joy that we experience now is only an appetizer, anticipating the great feast of joy still to come. When we have perfect fellowship with God, when we see Jesus face to face and we're made like him, when we get to spend eternity worshiping and working together with brothers and sisters in Christ, when sin is gone, when death is no more, when love and joy are ours forever.

[29 : 11] That's why John writes truth about Jesus, so that we could believe and we could have fellowship and we can have joy. It's great reasons for us to be sharing too, isn't it? John wants to establish confident Christianity, believers who are sure, believers who know Jesus is the Son of God. He is the promised Savior and he is my Savior. He wants to establish those confident Christians who are experiencing daily the privilege that we have of being called into fellowship with the living God.

the joy that we can have in our salvation that comes from knowing God. And when we have that joy, when we're living out of that fellowship, we will have the truth and we will also find a desire to share that truth, to encourage our brothers and sisters and to bring good news to those who have maybe never heard it before. And so, John draws us into the truth to then send us out, to bring clarity instead of confusion, to offer certainty in place of uncertainty as we proclaim the truth of the eternal Son of God entering into history on a mission to save from sin and to bring people into joyful, personal fellowship with the living God. Let's pray briefly together.

Lord, our God, we thank you for the wonderful letter of 1 John. Lord, our God. Lord, our God, we thank you for the wonderful letter of 1 John.

Lord, our God, we thank you for the powerful letter of 1 John. Lord, our God, we thank you for theaches. Lord, our God, we thank you for the kiss of harmony with the Papa, to help you shall see us. Lord, our God, we thank you for the comfort of God in answer for 12 years, and many of the people for the purist and perhaps we thank you for the Holy Spirit. Lord, our God, we thank you for theithe of our Father. Lord, I thank you for the wisdom of what I lean through, Lord, you to the Holy Spirit.