

Finding Certainty in Uncertain Times

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[0 : 00] The reading today is from John chapter 5 verses 18 to 24. This is why the Jews were seeking all the more to kill him, because not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God.

So Jesus said to them, Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of his own accord, but only what he sees the Father doing.

For whatever the Father does, the Son does likewise. For the Father loves the Son and shows him all that he himself is doing. And greater works than these will he show him, so that you may marvel. For as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, so also the Son gives life, to whom he will. The Father judges no one, but has given all judgment to the Son, that all may honor the Son, just as they honor our Father.

Whoever does not honor the Son, does not honor the Father who sent him. Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life.

[1 : 16] He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life. Dana, thanks very much indeed for reading. Please do, if you've followed it in the Bible, keep your Bible open at John chapter 5.

If not, then it will come up on the screen in due course. Well, it's lovely to have you with us as we consider this question, finding certainty in uncertain times.

Unsurprisingly, we are not the only ones asking the question. The strapline for UBS, the Swiss Bank, their latest advertising campaign, asks, will the world always be this unpredictable?

I guess it's natural, isn't it, that we long for certainty, and perhaps all the more so at a time of global pandemic. But is certainty necessarily the best thing?

I think it's easy to assume certainty equals good, uncertainty equals bad. But is that always the case? Uncertainty can be a very good thing, can't it?

[2 : 28] It helps us to stop and think, what's important? What do I value? Am I on the right track? Do I really want my life just to continue in the way in which it's been going?

Likewise, certainty may not always be a good thing. The story is told of a man driving up the M1 motorway. He received a call from his wife.

My darling, I'm just phoning. Be careful. I've just heard on the radio there's someone driving along the M1 going completely in the wrong direction. To which the husband replied, Too right there is, and it's not just one of them.

They're all at it. There are times when it's good to have our certainty undermined. That, of course, can be uncomfortable because we tend to equate, don't we, certainty with being in control.

And yet we are, we're not in control. And I guess COVID has made that abundantly clear in so many ways. But, of course, it's true without COVID as well.

[3 : 39] I guess many of us will be only too conscious of that. Perhaps a child with mental health issues or perhaps our own uncertainty regarding our own physical health or uncertainty at work in a rapidly changing world.

In other words, life will always be uncertain. And in that sense, COVID is a great blessing because it reminds us of the fact almost every day.

And therefore, as we approach this whole question of certainty, what we really need is a certainty that's going to last. In other words, not just a certainty of the, please, might COVID be over and could life just become normal again?

But actually a lasting certainty through all the ups and downs of life. Just have a look at the advert again.

You see, what is it saying? It's saying that in an unpredictable world, what you need is an expert. Now, UBS are clearly trying to persuade us.

[4 : 49] They're the experts. We, I guess, know better. True certainty, both this life and the next, is only to be found by listening to the expert, Jesus Christ.

And that reading from John's eyewitness account shows us why. So that's up on the screen now. And we're going to focus there over the next few minutes or so.

And I want us to see, firstly, that we can be certain about Jesus. We can be certain about Jesus. Because the central claim of John's gospel, indeed, of the Christian faith, is that Jesus Christ is the creator God come to earth.

Now, as such, that answers so many of life's big questions. It does God exist? What is he like? Can I know him? Is there a heaven?

Is there a hell? What happens after death? Who am I? What's it mean to be human? What's the point of life? They're massive questions. But actually, if Jesus Christ is God, then we can be certain about the answers.

[6 : 02] And that, of course, is completely life-changing. Now, earlier on in John chapter 5, Jesus has healed a man who's been an invalid for 38 years.

You might like to read it later on. Immediately, he gets up and he walks. Now, the religious establishment are outraged outraged because Jesus does all of this on the Sabbath day, on the Jewish holy day.

Jesus replies in verse 17, the one before where our reading starts, my father is working until now, and I am working. And unlike today, where people can be slow, I think, to see so often the consequences of what Jesus is saying, the religious establishment of Jesus' day realize precisely what is at stake.

They understand that Jesus is making himself equal with God in a completely unique way. Verse 18, this was why the Jews were seeking all the more to kill him, because not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God his own father, making himself equal with God.

Now, if Jesus Christ really is God in the flesh, that changes everything. Malcolm Muggeridge was a celebrity 20th century journalist.

[7 : 38] He was initially opposed to Jesus, but then he came to put his trust in Jesus, having read the New Testament for himself. And this is what he wrote in his autobiography.

I understood that Jesus could not be turned into just a great man without diminishing him to the point that Christianity became too trivial to be taken seriously.

He was either God, or he was nothing. Do you see what he's saying? He's either God, or he is nothing.

And that is the issue that Jesus now unpacks further in what follows. Have a look at verse 19. So Jesus said to them, Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing if he's only called, but only what he sees the Father doing.

For whatever the Son does, that the Father does likewise. Likewise. As God the Son, Jesus does what God the Father does.

[8 : 47] Like Father, like Son, we might say. I guess years ago, that would have been true, wouldn't it, for plenty of people in this country. If your dad was a butcher, you'd get an apprenticeship with him in his butcher shop.

You would become a butcher. And that is the relationship, says Jesus, between me and God the Father. What my Father does, I also do.

And the reason for that is there in the next verse, in verse 20. The Father loves the Son and shows him all that he himself is doing. Now, I wonder if you remember the long-running TV series, Mr. and Mrs.

I gather it was first aired in 1965. I think it became compulsive viewing in lots of households in the 1970s and 1980s. And I gather the last series was as recently as 2013.

Couples competed against each other. And they took it in turns to answer questions, which I guess revealed something about the state of their relationship. So the husband would be kind of ushered away into a soundproof box while the wife was asked various questions.

[9 : 59] You know, what's his favorite band? Where's his favorite holiday destination? What's his favorite food? And then he would come out of the soundproof box and he would be asked the same questions.

And it would reveal the quality of their relationship or otherwise. We discover how well they knew each other. We'll have a look again at verse 20.

As Jesus says, the Father loves the Son and shows him all that he himself is doing. Jesus is claiming that his understanding of God the Father is complete.

Born of the most extraordinary intimacy. And therefore, what God the Father does, Jesus, God the Son, does. God the Son, does.

It follows, therefore, of course, doesn't it, that Jesus Christ is the perfect revelation of God. You and I cannot see God.

[10:59] We know that. We cannot understand his ways. On our own, we remain in the dark. We're shrouded in uncertainty, asking loads of questions, but actually having nowhere to go with confidence and certainty for the answers.

And yet, Jesus Christ is God himself coming to our world. It's as if his life serves as a mirror as he reflects God perfectly.

In other words, yes, of course we live in uncertain times. And yet, in uncertain times, we can be certain about Jesus. Ask the question, what is God like?

How can I know for certain? Look at the accounts of Jesus in the New Testament, the Gospel accounts. Ask the question, what is God saying to his world?

Read and hear the words of Jesus in the Gospel accounts in the New Testament. Notice, in particular, that Jesus is both the life giver and the judge.

[12:07] Verse 21, he is the life giver, for as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, so also the Son gives life to whom he will.

The fact that Jesus raised people back to life physically in this world demonstrates that he is the one who will raise people to life in the next world.

And he's the judge, he's the one to whom on the final day each of us must give an account. Verse 22, the Father judges no one but has given all judgment to the Son.

What do you say? To what end? Verse 23, that all may honor the Son just as they honor the Father. Whoever does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sends him.

Now before we go on let's just pause there to consider some of the implications of this because the implications are extraordinary.

[13:12] Firstly, some people like Richard Dawkins for example would say that Jesus never claimed to be God. Well, clearly he's wrong.

It's the claim at the heart of the Gospel accounts and it's so striking here isn't it that Jesus' opponents understand the claim only too well. Second implication, we live in a world, we live in a city where there are lots of different religions and faiths.

It's often assumed that you can't therefore know anything for certain in the spiritual realm, that it's indefensible to claim that Jesus alone is the answer to our longing for certainty and it is indefensible unless, of course, Jesus Christ is indeed God come to earth.

In which case to treat him as simply another founder of one of the world's religions or another great teacher or someone to look up to, to simply regard him like that is to dishonor him as it is to dishonor God the Father.

Third implication, and that is that I come across a lot of people who I think they want to, they want to be a Christian with what you might call a small C.

[14:42] The person who perhaps says something like this, I believe in God, I like the Christian moral framework, I get a church occasionally, I put a, I write Christian on the census form, but actually they reject any idea of being a Christian with what you might call a large C.

Talk of following Jesus, talk of being a disciple of Jesus, the need to be born again, the need for repentance and faith, all things which Jesus calls us to do, that they think is taking Jesus too seriously.

And yet, if Jesus Christ really is God come to earth, then the only expression there is of genuine Christianity is Christianity with a big C.

A radical, life-changing encounter following him. That is our first point this morning. In an uncertain world, you can be certain about Jesus.

But secondly, we can be certain about ourselves as well. I guess most of us have got used to a fair degree of COVID uncertainty. Is it a cough or a persistent cough?

[16:07] Can I get a test and if I can, am I going to have to travel all the way to Cardiff or someone like that to get one? And then there's all the uncertainty of hanging around and waiting for the results and thinking what's going to happen to everything I've got planned in my diary?

What are the implications going to be for the people I live with in my household? All those kinds of things. So have a look at verse 24 because verse 24 signals an end to uncertainty in regard to the most important thing in life.

As Jesus says, truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment but has passed from death to life.

Now I wonder if you noticed the massive surprise in that verse as the Lord Jesus speaks. Notice what Jesus doesn't say.

Have a look at the verse again. Jesus doesn't say, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me will have eternal life. And nor does he go on to say he will pass from death to life.

[17:27] No, Jesus says, whoever hears my words and believes in him has eternal life now and has already passed over from death to life.

death. They have life with God now and life with God in eternity. Which means of course we can be certain now of what our destiny is going to be then.

It knocks away what I guess is the assumption tragically of so many which is that we can't know now what God's verdicts will be then.

Well you say, how can you be so sure? Well because according to Jesus whether or not we have eternal life it doesn't depend on our merit, it doesn't depend on being good enough.

No, verse 24, it depends on us hearing the words of Jesus and believing in him. That is how we cross over from death to life. Well perhaps someone says, how is that possible?

[18:32] Well Jesus has already told us. earlier in John's gospel, in the most famous verse perhaps in the gospel if not the Bible, John chapter 3 verse 16 Jesus says, for God so loved the world that he gave his one and only son that whoever believes in him may not perish but have eternal life.

Jesus died on the cross taking the penalty for our sin and wrongdoing. So that in the words of John 5 verse 24 we need to face the judgments.

Let me give us an illustration from pre-COVID times if you can kind of make that mental shift backwards to before March. Imagine you'd be able to secure tickets to a top sporting event perhaps, I don't know, tennis at Wimbledon or a rugby match or a football game or something like that.

tickets cost you an arm and a leg but actually you are delighted to have them. And yet of course the event perhaps is still several weeks or several months in advance and therefore obviously you can't tell just by looking around the place who's got the tickets and who hasn't got the tickets.

However the day of the match is going to arrive and on that day the difference between those who have the tickets and those who don't have the tickets will become abundantly clear.

[20:03] As you arrive at the venue you present your tickets you'll let in. Those without the tickets will have to remain outside. The point being that it's the decision you've already made that then determines the outcome on the day.

Well in a far greater way says Jesus the decisions we make about him now that's the key decision in terms of determining what the outcome will be on the final day.

And yet of course that illustration is incomplete isn't it? Because Jesus saying whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life not simply the assurance that we will have eternal life but that it's already begun.

Now is that not astonishing if you've put your trust in Jesus you have eternal life already. It's begun. Yes of course like everyone else we will face physical death and yet in the spiritual realm we've already crossed over from death to life.

life. I think of an elderly man dying of cancer. In his final days he wrote to a friend I can honestly say I'm looking forward to the I'm not looking forward to the last bit of the journey but beyond that I know that I shall see Christ and what can compare with that.

[21:44] well I wonder if that is your confidence this morning. Where do we find certainty in uncertain times?

In Jesus Christ. For those who have put our trust in him don't let all the uncertainties of COVID and who knows how long the uncertainties are going to go on for I guess at least several months but

let's not make all the uncertainties of COVID rob us of our joy if we know Jesus.

To know him is to be one of the most blessed people on the planet. One of the most fortunate of people in our world. We have a heavenly father who cares for us.

We know the Lord Jesus the one who describes himself as the good shepherd to lead us and it is lovely to hear something of that from Dana earlier and the declaration now of what the verdict will be on the final day.

Now if you're listening in and you haven't put your trust in him well obviously we'd love you to do so. We'd love you to share that certainty. It may be that you have questions do ask them of a Christian friend or maybe you'd like to read through more of John's gospel.

[23 : 14] Again there are opportunities to do that. There's some excellent material such that you could pair up in a reading partnership with someone else to do that or come along to that Christianity Explore course that Jake was mentioning earlier.

But of course it may just be that actually you are ready to believe in him today. in which case do chat to either Jake or myself afterwards about how you might do that for the very first time.

Let me lead us in prayer. Let's pray together. For the Father loves the Son and shows him all that he himself is doing.

Heavenly Father we praise you very much indeed that as we look at Jesus Christ the man of history. that we see a perfect reflection of yourself.

Jesus both fully man and also fully God. The one who is both the saviour, a rescuer, the life giver and yet also the one to whom each one is accountable on the judgment day.

[24 : 24] And we praise you for this extraordinary confidence that we can have both in him and in who he is and yet also the confidence we can have for ourselves, those of us who have put our trust in him.

Amen. the moment. Amen.

Amen.