

Believing Unto Salvation

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[0:00] Believing unto salvation. What does that mean? You've probably been around long enough to know that we do Bible shorthand.

! In the passage today from 1 John, we get the longhand version of that shorthand, believing unto salvation.

The longhand is, and this is the testimony that God gave us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. Whoever has the Son has life. Whoever does not have the Son does not have life.

I speak in the name of God, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Well, you know, that was pretty gutsy of John to write those words in his society.

It was a pluralistic society. There were many gods hanging around. And who was John to say his God is the only God? The Roman authorities wouldn't like that.

[1:09] The traditional Jewish community wouldn't like that. But God liked that, and he said it. And it's actually a little scary to preach about it in today's society.

Because today's society, I'll tell you, it mirrors John's society 2,000 years ago. So, let's be gutsy. Let's look into it and see just what John is saying in 1 John 5. As you've probably noticed, over the last three or four weeks, we've been taking a little bit of 1 John each week for the epistle lesson. This chapter, this area that we're going to speak, is what we might call the denouement of that epistle. Are you excited yet? All right.

Let's jump in. If you would turn in the Pew Bibles to page 1213, 1213, or look at, pull it up on your device.

[2:14] 1 John 5, we're going to break it into three pieces like we did last week, because that's the way John wrote it. He was writing this, I guess, for preachers in the 21st century.

I don't know, but the first will be verses 6 through 8, and then 9 through 13, and then concluding 14 and 15. Well, we go right off on verse 6 with confusion.

Verse 6 says, What does all that mean?

What's this water and blood stuff? And how did he bring, what is that? And the Spirit? You know, it can be kind of confusing. And in fact, it has puzzled scholars for 2,000 years, if you want to know the truth.

What does it mean? So let's look at three possibilities about this water and blood. Well, some would say that John is highlighting the human qualities of Jesus.

[3:35] Water, human birth. Blood, human life. John was countering a heresy, a Gnostic heresy, that said God is too pure to ever assume sinful human flesh.

So therefore, Jesus could not have been human. He maybe appeared human, but he wasn't human. John said, nuts to that.

He was human. He was God in the flesh. John knew this, didn't he? Yeah. Well, so that's one possibility. Another would say that John was spouting early Christian theology.

The water represented Jesus' baptism in the Jordan River, by which he declared solidarity with sinful humankind. That baptism in the Jordan was a baptism of repentance, wasn't it?

Of preparation for the coming of the Messiah. He identified with humans by taking on that baptism, even though he had no need to. And then the blood was his atoning blood on the cross.

[4:52] He identified with humankind. He actually took the sin of humankind to the cross to free us from its consequences. A third was a, and this is a little farther fetched from John, but it could be the Holy Spirit worked it in there.

It's a reflection of sacramental life. The water is our baptism, by which we are cleansed from sin. And it's not only a one-time act at the baptismal font, but it's a lifetime.

It's called baptismal life. In one of the churches I've been involved with, there's an aspergillum, which is a sprinkler. And all through the Easter season, the priest starts the worship by going through the congregation, sprinkling everyone, and saying, remember your baptism. Remember your baptism. Are you all sprinkled? Well, okay, so I can stop doing that. Well, okay, so that's part of it. It's Jesus shows what baptismal life is about.

We look at his holiness, and we know this is what baptismal life is about. And then the blood has to do with Holy Communion. Drink this, all of you.

[6:15] My blood, my body broken for you. My blood shed for you. Our ongoing life of Holy Communion. We have Holy Communion every Sunday at Holy Trinity, and we also have it on Thursdays, so that we are continually brought to oneness with Christ as the family.

Okay, well, that's a... I'm not sure if we had John sitting down here, he would say, well, that's what I meant. But it could be that's what the Holy Spirit meant. So anyway, any one of those three possibilities, or all three of those possibilities, tell us about the water and the blood.

And it says that the Holy Spirit testifies that the mission of Jesus was to save us from annihilation by sin.

That's not too bad, is it? He did it through water and blood. Which brings us to verses 7 and 8 together, which follows from verse 6.

It says there are three that testify, the Spirit and the water and the blood, and these three agree. Translation, the Spirit of truth, the energizer bunny of God, works through Jesus to bring us a sense of our salvation, brings us to this commitment to Jesus as Lord and Savior.

[7:46] That's the testimony that John is talking about. That's why we ask everyone on being baptized or on coming to a mature relationship with Christ, we say, do you receive Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior?

John, 1 John, that's what it means. So that, once again, that's the end of the sermon, right? But wait, there's more.

So here we go. Verses 9 through 13. Here's where we hit the climax, alright? Verse 9, If we receive the testimony of men, the testimony of God is greater.

And this is a testimony of God that he has borne concerning his son. So for John, this part is not just a theological theory.

There were numerous theological theories in John's day. He's not giving a theological theory. He's giving a real concrete testimony from God himself regarding Jesus and the importance of Jesus.

[9:06] The Holy Spirit gives the testimony. The testimony is the statement of evidence. So that's, so what? So what?

Well, here's what. Verse 10. Whoever believes in the Son of God has the testimony in himself. Whoever does not believe God has made him or himself a liar because he has not believed in the testimony that God has borne concerning his Son.

You see, God has worked in our faith. He's worked our faith, in fact. He's given us the faith that when we believe in Jesus, salvation is actualized within us.

What a gift. What a gift. Without our commitment to Jesus, John says, we miss out on the salvation Jesus gives us.

We miss it. Have you ever missed a bus? I used to have that problem when I was a kid. The bus would come and he'd wait, the bus driver, and I would wait and my mother would not wait.

[10:23] You're going to get on the bus. Right? I prayed that I would miss the bus. I never missed the bus. Have you ever missed the bus? Jesus does not want us to miss the bus.

And so we get to verses 11 and 12. And this is the testimony that God gave us eternal life and this life is in his son.

He who has life, he who has the son has life. He who has not the son of God has not life. I spent a good bit of my life on active duty in the Marine Corps.

And then I spent another five years as a Marine reservist. I can tell you the best things we liked were simple. Simple formulas.

For the Marine, and this guy was, this is your buddy. Go that way. Don't take your eyes off your buddy. You've got to protect him. Okay?

[11:29] Isn't that simple? Well, John is doing the same thing. It's very simple. He says, God, Jesus, question mark, God, heaven.

No to Jesus, question mark, no to heaven. Can you get any clearer than that? Can you get any simpler as to how to live our life?

But now we've got a complication. That statement does not sit well with modern society. To say that brings up emotions in people.

The emotions would echo into words, bigot. Who do you think you are to say your God is better than other gods? Who are you to say that Uncle Hiram is not going to heaven?

Now, Uncle Hiram didn't really groove to God at all. He never went to church. But he was a nice guy. How can you keep him out of heaven?

[12:40] And not only that, but we have the privilege of living in cancel culture. If we say something that doesn't accord with political correctness, we're going to be destroyed.

There's action to shut the church down, isn't there? Here's a disclaimer.

Are you ready for the disclaimer? John is saying that we ourselves lock ourselves out from God's grace.

It's not bigoted. It's not mean-spirited on God's part. It's a formula. So, verse 13, I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God that you may know that you have eternal life.

There's a strong core of theology that says we never really know until we die. Then the judgment.

Then we'll find out. Well, there is a judgment when we die, but God wants us to know that we have eternal life by following Jesus.

[13:57] Therefore, that beautiful song could be written, Blessed Assurance, Jesus is Mine. That's what God wants us to know. He wants to assure you that He has saved you for heaven.

Many years ago, a brilliant man named Bright. What was his name? Bill Bright?

What? Bill Bright. Yeah, he was a bright man. Bill Bright came up with the four steps of salvation.

He didn't invent them. He found them in the Bible.

Okay? These are four steps I mention to you every so often in preaching because we need to have them memorized to understand salvation. Number one, what? God loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life.

Wonderful. The plan. Step two, we've blown it. Our sin knocks us right out of the plane. Out of the plan.

[15:02] Didn't knock us out of the plane. Knocked us right out of the plan. We've lost it. We've lost salvation. Step three, God, however, loving us, recognizing our weakness to sin, provides a way for us to get back in the plan.

And that plan is by becoming actually a man, dying for us on the cross, defeating death, rising to heaven so the Holy Spirit can come down.

And step four, acknowledge and receive Jesus Christ after repentance and you will have salvation. You are back in the plan.

That's for each one of us gathered here today. There can be assurance. So, we have reached the end except for the last two verses.

Given that God has awarded each one of us eternal life, not based on what we did, but what He did, what's in it for you and me?

[16:10] What's in it for us now while the heart is still going tick-tock? What do we gain from this whole thing? Well, verse 14, and this is the confidence that we have toward Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us.

And if we know that He hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the request that we asked of Him. Our confidence is here on earth. It comes from knowing that God hears us.

You know, there are a lot of in spite of's. He hears us in spite of total incompetence in government.

He hears us. He hears us through gasoline crises and price gouging even here in Syracuse. He hears us in spite of a vicious exchange of missiles in Israel.

He hears us in this lingering worrying pandemic. He hears us in our own nuclear family crises.

[17:28] He even hears us in our interpersonal collisions with other human beings. Would anyone acknowledge that they've never had an interpersonal collision with another person?

If you raise your hand you're a liar. Let's see. Okay? Isn't that amazing? Almighty God hears us, loves us, and blesses us with blessings in abundance.

Sometimes blessings in disguise. I've mentioned to some of you that Mariel and I were living in wonderfully warm Alabama and then it came, you in the military know this.

Notice, you're moving to North Dakota. I fought that decision. I thought it was the worst possible thing that could happen being exiled to Siberia.

You know what? It was a blessing in disguise. Now, North Dakota, you have to understand, it's flat. So one of the advantages of no one ever visits you by surprise, you can see them coming two days away.

[18:43] The other thing is, there's not a whole lot of difficulty identifying types of trees. The state tree of North Dakota is a telephone pole. You need to go out there. Well, there we were in the prairie at a base with around 12,000, 15,000 people.

And I had seven wonderful chaplains working for me. They were wonderful people. And we had the best 35 years, oh no, two years there, you can imagine.

It was a blessing in disguise. God does that. Now, you've heard of Winston Churchill. He took Britain through the Second World War. Probably would not have been victory without Winston Churchill.

Do you want to know what happened to him in 1945 when the war was over? he lost the election. He was kicked out of office as prime minister.

Several years later, his wife and he were being interviewed and his wife said, you know, actually, being beaten in that election was a blessing in disguise.

[19:56] And Winston responded, it really was disguised, I'll tell you that. You know, everything's a blessing.

Some of it's in disguise. God is here for us. He listens. He cares. He touches us. So, I want to end by inviting you to renew your relationship with Jesus Christ, to receive him into your heart and mind, maybe for the first time, maybe for the hundredth time, and let God just touch you in such a way that you fear nothing.

Let us pray. Lord God, we are here together as your children. We know that you have no grandchildren, so we know you personally, Lord, as our dad.

we place our trust in you and we receive Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior. We repent of all that keeps us from you because we know you love us so much.

Come and make your home in our hearts, for we pray this, Father, in Jesus Christ's name. Amen.

And the last from Julian of Norwich, not Bishop Julian, Julian of Norwich back in England, this said, all shall be well and all shall be well and all manner of things shall be well.

[21:35] Amen.