

# The Abiding Life & Certainty

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[0:00] Well, a couple of years ago, I was reading a biography about Bonhoeffer. I'm not sure if any of you have read that book. It's by Eric Metaxas. It's about 500-600! And I'm not much of a reader, but I thought, you know, maybe this is worth a shot and I'll tackle this book and see how it goes. And what was interesting to me as I read through this book, there was almost a sense in which Bonhoeffer became a close friend. There was, Eric did such a good job at kind of leading the reader through the story of this man and his heart for people and his willingness to risk much for the sake of Christ and for the sake of the church and all of the struggles that he went through and the churches that he helped to establish and the people he was able to encourage and the challenges that he faced.

And you knew it was coming. You knew at the end of this story that it was going to end in the martyrdom of this man. And the closer and closer you got to the end of this book, the slower and slower my pace became because I just didn't want to say goodbye. He had really become a close friend. And this morning we come to the end of this letter in 1 John. And it's my prayer that God has done for you what he has done for me and that Jesus has become sweeter through the study of 1 John. And that the beloved apostle John has become a dear friend. Now, fortunately, we don't have to say goodbye to this friend because we know that next week we're going to, even though we're going to be in a different part of Scripture, we're going to be seeing and coming to appreciate the same main character, the same person who is central in every part of the Scripture from Genesis to Revelation. We'll see the story of God come to light for us again next week. And so even though we're wrapping up our study in 1 John, really the same themes and the same truths that we have been studying throughout our series in 1 John will continue in our study as we move in to 1 Thessalonians. Last Sunday I had the opportunity of teaching the junior high and high school.

And I asked one of my kids afterwards, so what did you think? How did it go? And they said to me, well, it was the same thing that Caleb taught on Wednesday. I mean...

So Caleb's doing a great job. I just have appreciated his ministry. But I want to let you know, that is the truth. No matter where we go in the Scripture, whether we're in the minor prophets, you know, Hosea and Joel and Amos and Obadiah, what do they have to add to the story? Well, let me tell you, they have to add much to the story because it's all about God. From start to finish, the story is a story about God. And so as we come to the Scripture, no matter where we are, whether we're teaching about the life of David or teaching about the life of Joseph or we're in the New Testament, we're learning about the abiding life, we're learning the story about God and how to have that sweet fellowship with Him that He craves for us. Do you realize that God desires and craves fellowship with you? He craves it so much that He sent Jesus Christ to this earth, to die for us, to bridge the fellowship gap, the sin gap that disrupts fellowship with Him.

[4:10] He bridged that gap to make salvation possible, to make fellowship possible, to make joy, abounding joy possible for you, and to connect us not only to Christ, but to connect us to one another.

It really is a remarkable story and it's been encouraging to my own heart as we walk through the study of 1 John and to pick up the same themes as we look again at 1 Thessalonians and we're going to be moving through that in the coming weeks. So in the closing of our time with 1 John, let me invite you to take your Bibles if you would please, as we open up to 1 John chapter 5.

We're going to begin in verse 6 and we're going to move to the end of the chapter, taking this piece by piece. Now maybe you're asking the question, how does this relate to the communion service that we're going to be having here towards the end of our time together?

And I want to help make that connection. Some of you have probably already made that connection or already very aware, but for those of you who have not made the connection, I want us to realize that if the Bible is the story about God, whether we're in 1 Corinthians chapter 11, or whether we're in the Gospels, or whether we're in 1 John, or anywhere else in the Bible for that matter, because it's the story about God, it's the story of redemption. It's the story of salvation.

It's the message of God's rescue. And so it's really great for me to be able to see the story of God, even in unique places, and to appreciate that as we go to those places. And so this morning, as we're in 1 John chapter 5, I want us to see that the message of the story of Christ is the same.

[6:15] It's the story of his redemption for us, his body, and his blood, and his price that he paid for us to bridge the gap for salvation and fellowship with him.

As we look at this passage this morning, there's going to be something that stands out and is inescapable for us as we look at these verses. And I hope that as you read the Scripture, it's your habit to read with a pen, not only so that you can underline and highlight the things that are important and that stand out to you, but so that you can take notes along the way.

Well, this might be a good opportunity for you to continue that practice, because what I want to point out to you in the first part, or in these concluding words, is the certainty that we have as those who abide in Christ. There is certainty in the Christian life.

Notice in verses 6 through 12, there is a recurring word that we're going to see over and over and over again. It's the word testify. We see that word there at the very beginning of verse 6.

This is he who came by water and blood, Jesus Christ, not by the water only, but by the water and the blood. And the Spirit is the one who testifies.

[7:44] In verse 7, we find there are three that testify. In verse 8, we see these three agree, meaning in the mouth of two or three witnesses, a thing will be established. They're testifying. In verse 10, we'll see whoever believes in the Son of God has the testimony in himself. In verse 11, and this is the testimony.

Then if we, as we look at verses 13 to 21, he shifts from this use of the word testimony to a use of a word to know. In verse 13, he says, I write these things to you who believe, that you may know. And I would encourage you to underline that you may know. Verse 14, and this is the confidence.

In verse 15, and if we know, then we know that we have. Then in verse 18, we know. And in verse 20, and we know, so that we may know. It is inescapable what John is trying to get at in these remaining verses of his little letter to the church of Ephesus. There is something that can be known, that can be examined, that can be rested on, and you can have confidence in the truths that he's been articulating throughout this little letter. Over this past week, we had the privilege as a family, we do Netflix from time to time. And my wife found a little movie called The Case for Christ.

It's really the story of Lee Strobel. And if you know anything about his story, he was an investigative reporter for the Chicago Tribune. He was an atheist, and he was adamant about the fact that there was not a deity that existed. Well, through some circumstances that took place in his family, namely, his family was having dinner, and his daughter began to choke on some food.

And by God's providence, a lady came to help clear the food from the little girl's throat, and lo and behold, she was a Christian. And through this interaction that was taking place between this lady and her committed testimony to the gospel, and suggesting that this did not happen by circumstance, but this was a divine appointment, the wife began to take some interest, and went to church, and came and essentially committed her life to Christ.

[10:41] Christ. Well, Lee was not interested in this taking place in his family, and so he determined that as an investigative reporter, he was going to find the facts that would disprove Christianity.

One of his Christian co-workers says, well, if you're going to take Christianity out, you need to go to the heart of Christianity, and that is the resurrection. So he spent the next several months trying to disprove the resurrection, and through the course of that process, came to understand that the evidence was overwhelming. And through that process, God led him to faith in Christ. You see, this world would have us believe that those who are Christians are just living by blind faith. There's just

ignorance in them. They've abandoned all rational thinking. They're not thinking and evaluating the facts as they are, the things that you can touch and see and evaluate and examine up close. But John wants us to understand that the Christian life, although it is a life of faith, it is also a life of proof. It's a life of evidence.

It's a life that the criteria can stack up and help us to help to demonstrate that what we believe really does have substance. There can be certainty in the Christian life. And so this passage this morning is a passage of encouragement, really. There are at least five things that I see in this passage that we can take comfort in and to know that God has established these truths, and we can have certainty and confidence about these truths.

I think I'm going to do something a little different this morning. I usually spend the bulk of my time on point number one, and then we don't have time to get to the others. I hear some chuckling.

I, I, I, I, guilty as charged, I, I understand. So we're, we're going to, we're going to move through point number one. We're going to go two, three, four, and five, okay? So stick with me. And then we'll go back to point one because point one really helps to fill out our time of communion. So pray for me in this process so that we can really get to the, the real heart of, of what this is, is talking about this morning. The first point, though, I, I want to just put it there for you so that you have it in your reservoir. We'll come back to it in just a moment. But, but the first point that we see here in, in verses 6 through 10, is that we can have certainty about Jesus Christ. There is no question in this letter who is the central figure of John's attention. He begins this whole letter with, with this exuberance and enthusiasm about the person of Christ. He says, we, we have seen him. We've, we've heard him.

[13:58] We've, we've touched him. We, we've spent time with him. We've, we've listened to his message and, and we are commending him to you. Make no mistake about it. There is nothing that matters more than Jesus Christ. He, he begins with that and he finishes with that very, very idea. We, we've seen it throughout chapter 4. We've seen it here at the beginning of chapter 5. He finishes with that thought here in chapter 5. He wants you to understand that you can be certain about Jesus Christ. And we'll look at those witnesses towards the end of our message this morning. Point number two. That was the fastest point number one we've ever had, huh? All right. Point number two. We're, we're, we're going to pick this up here in verse 11. And John wants us to recognize that if there is certainty about Jesus Christ, there is also certainty about the future. Certainty about the future. Notice what it says here, beginning in verse 11. And this is the testimony, again, that key word, that God gave us eternal, 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. Can you hear the heart of this beloved apostle pleading with his audience in the midst of difficulty that they're experiencing? Those that had abandoned this church, he, he alludes to them in chapter 2. And he says they were not of us because they, they went away from us. The, the turmoil that was taking place in, in this city of Ephesus and for this specific church. He wants this church to understand that however uncertain their circumstances are in the moment, there is certainty about the future. There is certainty about eternal life.

There is certainty about eternal life. I write these things that you may know that you have eternal life. life, he says in chapter 5, verse 13. Jesus' death and resurrection guarantees future life for all of those who are in Christ Jesus.

After all, that is why Jesus came in the first place. We all know John 3, 16. God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son that whoever believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life.

Jesus came so that you could have hope and confidence about the future. And if there is confidence about the future, what else matters?

What else is there? If you know that the difficulties that you're facing are only temporary, if you know the struggles and the conflicts that, that you are experiencing right now are, are just superficial, if you recognize that the, the challenges that you face are only momentary, but there is a

future hope in heaven, there is eternal life with God, nothing else begins to matter.

[17:41] John wants his, his congregation, these, these people that he has spent so much time shepherding and pastoring to know, if you know him, you know everything that matters.

You can have confidence about the future. And in this expression, he is, he is pleading with, with the rest, those who don't know Jesus, if you know him, you can have eternal life as well.

So many during Jesus's ministry were, were interested in this question. We see the rich young ruler in Matthew chapter 19, who, who came to Jesus and said, good teacher, what good thing shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?

And then in Luke chapter 10, the lawyer that comes and asks a similar question, a lawyer stands up and, and tested him saying, teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?

This is the question of anyone who is really interested in what's coming in the future. Any religious institution, any orientation of, of spirituality has the future and, and the, the eternal life as its final objective.

[18:55] But only those who are in Christ can experience it. Jesus says, I am the way, the truth, and the life.

No one comes to the Father except through me. You want life? You must come through the author of life, the initiator of life, not only physical life, but spiritual life.

Jesus came to bring life. We see that in John chapter 10, verse 10. He says, I have come that they might have life and that they might have it abundantly.

And those apart from Christ will only know death. Romans chapter 6, 23, for the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ, our Lord.

The question for us this morning is do you know Jesus Christ? And if you know him and have embraced him as Savior, then you have the joy of eternal life.

[20:04] You see, the resurrection of Christ changes everything for us. Paul picks up this theme in 1 Corinthians chapter 15.

And basically, he recounts the significance of the resurrection. He says, it is the resurrection that gives purpose to our message. In 1 Corinthians 15, 14, he says, if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain.

It is also the resurrection that gives our faith substance. In 1 Corinthians 15, verse 14, it says, if Christ has not been raised, then our faith is in vain.

It is also the resurrection that activates our obedience. In verse 17, he says, if Christ has not been raised, then you are still in your sins.

And it is the resurrection that gives us hope. for the future. In 1 Corinthians 15, verse 19, he says, if in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of people most to be pitied.

[21:13] But, in fact, Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstborn of those who have fallen asleep. Because of Christ's resurrection life, we who are in Christ will also experience the life that he has to give.

What hope? What certainty? What certainty? What certainty? The certainty of Christ's resurrection leads to certainty of future life for those who are in Christ.

And we come to our next point. Not only certainty, not only certainty about the future, but certainty about answered prayer. We see that in verses 14 to 17.

Here's what it says. And this is the confidence that we have towards 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 have asked of him. This is the confidence, John says.

[22:21] If you are in relationship, an abiding relationship with Christ, then Christ will hear your prayers. And if you are in a relationship with Christ, an abiding relationship with him, he not only hears your prayers, but he fills that out and defines what his hearing actually means.

Notice, how does John describe the hearing? If he hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the request that we have asked of him.

That's what it means when God hears. Time out. That is not my experience. Is that your experience?

Everything we ask, we receive of him? Okay, so then there must be something going on here. There must be a dynamic that we need to begin to understand when John is describing the asking and the praying, the hearing and receiving.

What is taking place? Remember, as we have introduced this series and as we have been talking about this series through the past couple of months, we've mentioned that this is really just an exposition of the upper room discourse.

[23:43] Okay? So it shouldn't be any surprise to you to know that Jesus, on at least four occasions, actually uses the exact same phrase. In John chapter 14, I would just encourage you, why don't you just keep your finger for a moment in 1 John chapter 5 and turn with me to John chapter 14 so you can see this and maybe even underline it for yourself.

John 14, verses 13 and 14. Whatever you ask in my name, this I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son.

if you ask me anything in my name, I will do it. Now move to chapter 15, verses 7 and 8. If you abide in me and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish and it will be done for you.

By this my Father is glorified that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples. Now chapter 15, verses 16 and 17.

You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you.

[25:12] These things I command you so that you will love one another. And then chapter 16, verses 23 and 24. Chapter 16, verses 23 and 24.

In that day, you will ask nothing of me. Truly, truly, I say to you, whatever you ask of the Father in my name, he will give it to you. Until now, you have asked nothing in my name.

Ask, and you will receive that your joy may be full. What in the world is going on here? What in the world is Jesus trying to commend to his disciples?

Is there a magic formula? Is there a process that we need to go through in order to get this answer from God that we're looking for? Well, if you were here last week, you know the answer to that question is no, there's not a magic formula.

That's the old way of doing life. But we've been called to the new way. The new way that sets us free from the pressure of this world and the pressure of performance and responsibility.

[26:21] But what we're talking about here is in conjunction with who Jesus is himself. And in conjunction with the abiding life that we've been called to.

Notice Jesus points to that at least a couple of times throughout this section. and also says, if you pray anything or ask anything in my name, then I will do it.

What in the world is he talking about? It begins and ends with Jesus. That's the answer. The abiding life out of which flows forgiveness and cleansing and obedience and love and confidence satisfaction and fellowship boldness in his presence endurance in the Christian life hope and joy and clarity and life.

What else is there to be had? It is all found in him. And so if we as we learn to be satisfied in him and as we are praying for the things that are oriented towards finding sufficiency in Christ seeking his glory strengthening his body building his kingdom then we will find that all of our hopes and dreams and prayers will be answered in the power of Christ.

Because as our orientation is moving in the direction of being satisfied in him and looking to him for his glory and looking for him for his strength and seeking to be about his purposes then nothing else matters.

[28:09] And he is delighted to answer those prayers because those are the things that he wants to accomplish in and through us. Perhaps the best example of this is Paul.

Paul when he prays in 2 Corinthians chapter 12 he says remember he has this thorn in the flesh right? And he prays three times that God would take it away and the answer at least in that specific request was no.

My grace is sufficient for you for my power is made perfect in weakness. Now listen that was not a no answer that was a yes answer. That was a yes answer because at the heart what Paul wanted was for the glory of God to be known and for the kingdom of God to be advanced and the power of

God working through the life of Paul to be obvious.

And God says Paul you want the right things. The only way this can happen the best way this can happen is to strip you of your personal strength so I can rush in with divine strength.

This is my yes yes not a no. As the author says for all the promises of God find their yes in him.

[29:42] That is why it is through him that we utter our amen to God for his glory. all of the answers to our prayers are yes in Christ as long as our prayers are oriented towards the glory of God and the desire for him to be evident in all of the affairs of life.

His desire is for you to grow in your abiding relationship with him and for those who are affected by your ministry to be drawn in to relationship with him as well.

So God's answers are yes. We have confidence in that. But notice as it moves to verses 16 and 17 there is also this confidence that we have in God's answer of forgiveness.

Forgiveness of sin. Let me read this for us in verse 16 and 17. If anyone sees his brother committing a sin not leading to death he shall ask and God will give him life.

To those who commit sins that do not lead to death there is sin that leads to death. I do not say that one should pray about that. All wrongdoing is sin but there is sin that does not lead to death.

[31:04] What in the world is this talking about? I don't know. I don't know definitively. But here are some things that we do know. First of all we understand that what John is talking about is not talking about praying for somebody's salvation so they find their way and now all of a sudden magically become a Christian.

Certainly we need to be praying for the souls of those who are lost. Jesus on the cross says Father forgive them they know not what they do. We need to be praying for the lost.

But we cannot pray them to salvation. We cannot pray them into heaven. That is something they must do for themselves. Repentance and obedience and yielding to God is something that has to happen personally.

Something that only can be done individually. We can't do it for them. So this is not a prayer for salvation for those who are lost. lost. This is also not a prayer for forgiveness to those who are absent in the process.

What I mean by that is if you are aware of individuals in your life who are Christians and are sinning their sin doesn't lead to death meaning their sin isn't going to lead them to eternal destruction.

[32:29] You can't just shoot off these prayers and pray for forgiveness for them and that will all of a sudden be covered. Okay? I'll just pray for everyone in my church.

They're sinning these various sins and then we'll be perfectly sanctified. No, as John says in 1 John chapter 1, if we confess our sin, he is faithful and just to forgive.

That again is also requires personal brokenness. It requires personal confession. A personal recognition of our own dysfunction and stepping out of line.

Now, what I think this is talking about is closer to what we find in James chapter 5. James chapter 5, that verse 16, where those who are involved in sin ask for their fellow brothers and sisters to come around them.

And it says, therefore, confess your sin to one another and pray for one another that you may be healed. the prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working.

[33:40] I don't know about you, but there have been times in my life where I have been so, felt so bankrupt spiritually. I feel so disqualified as an individual.

I feel like I've blown it so much that God couldn't possibly hear my prayer. and so I confess my sin to a brother in Christ and say, would you just please pray for me?

I just need God to rush into my life and to fill the vacuum of my heart. And that brother comes alongside and says, I'd just love to pray for you. And in his righteousness carries me to the throne, pleads for me on my behalf for forgiveness, pleads for God's mercy to come through, and I am met by the fellowship of God and I am joined in fellowship with him.

That is the blessing that we have as believers in Christ, to do that for one another as we're willing to confess our faults to one another so that you might be healed. Galatians chapter 6, 1 and 2 says much the same thing.

It says, Brothers, if anyone is caught in a transgression, you who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness. That's what we're talking about here.

[35:07] We're talking about recognizing the dysfunction of your brother or sister in Christ, and rather than holding that against them, rushing to the rescue to seek to bring them into fellowship with God, praying with them over sin, seeking God's forgiveness, filling the gap, filling the void of their own spiritual life, and seeking to lead them in communion with God himself.

Verses 18 and 19, our next point, talk about the certainty of spiritual preservation, certainty of divine preservation.

Let me read this for us. Let's see. we know that everyone who has been born of God does not keep on sinning.

But he who is born of God protects him, and the evil one does not touch him. We know that we are from God, and the whole world lies in the power of the evil one.

and we know the Son of God has come and has given us understanding so that we may know him who is true, and we are in him who is true, in his Son, Jesus Christ.

[36:33] He is the true God and eternal life. Little children, keep yourselves from idols. over the past couple of weeks, we have been talking about the overcoming, victorious, triumphant life of the Christian.

Not because of some resident power that we have in and of ourselves, but because of the indwelling power of the Holy Spirit who strengthens us for this walk that we have from day to day. It is an overcoming, triumphant life because of this abiding relationship that we experience with Christ. because of the power of the Spirit that is working within.

That is what John wants them to have confidence about. No matter how bad this life becomes, no matter how great your adversary might be, and he points to how bad he is, he says here that the evil one cannot touch him.

Peter, in talking about the characteristics of the evil one, says, watch out, Satan walks around like a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour.

[37:46] We have a great adversary. So often, I find myself becoming complacent, sometimes apathetic, maybe even a little ignorant to the involvement of our adversary in this world.

It finds a way to use the systems of this world to corrupt, to lead us into sin, to change our orientation in terms of how we think, the philosophies of this world, to lead us in a direction that takes us away from God.

God says, but those who have this abiding relationship with Christ, God says, in the end, nothing can touch you.

No matter how bad it gets, you are mine. Kind of like what he says to Peter. He says, Peter, Satan has desired to sift you like wheat, but I've prayed for you.

I've prayed for you. You're mine, Peter. No one can touch you because you belong to me. We have that promise in Ephesians chapter 1 that the Holy Spirit is our guarantee of salvation until the coming of Christ.

[39:09] Nothing can touch you. You don't have to worry about what's coming. They may touch your life, but they cannot touch your soul. They cannot affect your future destiny.

You belong to me. You can be settled in that. You can move forward in confidence because of that and because of the confidence of divine preservation, there can be great risk taking in the spiritual life.

I'm challenged to think of what we might be able to accomplish if we were willing to really trust in the promise of that divine preservation. what might we be able to do?

I was even thinking about this a couple years ago when one of my kids started learning Arabic. I thought to myself, what is this going to mean in terms of where is she going to end up?

What is God doing in her life to move her to places of riskiness, the jeopardy of the physical life?

[40:18] life? What might her future become? That is, should be a minor concern because what really matters is that we are anchored in him.

We are preserved by him. We have a future destiny in heaven because of him. It should lead us to great risk taking in our missions endeavors, in our willingness to accept much for the sake of him. Finally, verses 20 and 21, we have certainty about the truth. Certainty about the truth. We know him, we know, excuse me, we know that the son of God has come and has given us understanding so that we may know him who is true.

We are in him who is true in his son, Jesus Christ. He is the true God and eternal life. It is astounding to think that we have access to truth.

We have the ability to walk through this life convinced of the truth, anchored in the truth, walking in the truth. God has given us understanding through his word and through his Holy Spirit spirit and because of the truth that he has given to us through his son, we know we can please him and fellowship with him and we can give that message to those who desperately need it.

[42:00] As we come to the end of our service and now move to this time of communion, I want us now to back up to point number one.

certainty about Jesus Christ. What a sweet truth this is.

And God has given us evidences in three different ways. Evidence through the water, evidence through the blood, and evidence through his Holy Spirit.

We could spend an entire message talking about these three evidences that God has given to us. The evidence of the water is the evidence of his baptism. It's the evidence of Jesus in his willingness to be obedient.

John, if you remember John the Baptist, when Jesus came to be baptized, pushed back against Jesus and essentially said, what are you doing here? You don't need baptism.

[43:00] This is the baptism of repentance. And Jesus, in response to him, says, I must fulfill all righteousness. this is necessary because I must now be the means of righteousness to all.

Instead of forgiveness flowing through the sacrifices, instead of purity coming through the washing of the priests and their communion with God through the context of the temple, Jesus established himself as the means by which we can get to God.

Jesus must fulfill all righteousness. That forgiveness flows through him. Cleansing comes through Christ and not through any other means. Baptism was the way for Jesus to fulfill all righteousness. The righteousness that couldn't be fulfilled through the millennia, through the generations, was finally fulfilled in Jesus Christ. Christ. Jesus ups the ante in Matthew chapter 5, the Sermon on the Mount.

And when they couldn't fulfill even what they understood about the law, the letter of the law, Jesus raises the bar to extraordinary levels and says, well, you have heard it said, but I say to you, which essentially was, you thought the law was hard before.

[44:29] Let me tell you what I really mean. Only Jesus could fulfill righteousness. And that testimony of the pure, radiant righteousness of Christ is a testimony for us of God's authentication through his son that he was truly God.

It is the first testimony that speaks to the fact that he is who he said he was. only God could live the holy life. I'm going to pray for us and we're going to remember the holy life of God through the bread because it was through the bread that Jesus says, not my will but thine be done.

I will let my obedience lead to the point of death, even death on a cross. Let me pray as we remember the bread this morning.