

Hear John's testimony

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[0 : 00] Miranda, thank you. With this passage open in front of us from John's Gospel, will you open your ears and hear?! Will you open your eyes and see? Will you consider the evidence and then believe in Jesus as your Lord and your God?

You know, there is a way of thinking in our culture that says that Christianity and Jesus and God is all basically make-believe, made up, a kind of fairy story with no real evidence for it whatsoever. Woody Allen once said sarcastically, if only God would give me some clear sign, like making a large deposit in my name at a Swiss bank. But God hasn't. Didn't do it for him. Because he ain't there, says Woody.

I remember talking to a guy many years ago, who was about 10 years ago, he was walking away from the Christian faith, very sadly. And he told me he was cycling along one day and he got to some traffic lights and he said to himself, right, this is it.

God, if you're there, show me. Change these traffic lights now and I'll believe in you. But nothing happened. Which fits. It fitted, obviously, for him.

[1 : 25] With the idea that God and Jesus are something nice to believe in if you want. An inspiring story to comfort those who are scared.

Good for the kids to learn about, maybe. And yet at the end of the day, as with all religions, just a kind of shut your eyes, switch off your brain, pretend and hope story.

With no real evidence whatsoever. You know, sometimes we can wonder about that ourselves. Even we who call ourselves Christians.

Maybe you've been carried along in church by your family or by a past decision to be a Christian. And yet nagging away inside of you all sorts of doubts.

If God is there, where is he? He's not answered my prayers. He's not cared for me in my life like I thought he would. Jesus is meant to be my good shepherd, I keep being told.

[2 : 27] And yet, if only there was more evidence. Well, in a world which dismisses the Christian faith as make-believe.

And knowing the doubts and worries that can easily creep in, even to long-term Christians. I'm so pleased we're reading John's Gospel at the start of September and onwards. Because as John writes his book that we've just heard a bit from, he is so clear that what he's writing isn't fantasy, it isn't fable, it isn't make-believe or anything like that.

Rather, what we have in front of us is written eyewitness evidence. We'll get there eventually, but in John chapter 20, right at the end, verses 30 to 31.

Coming to the end of his book, John sums up why he's writing, what he's writing about and why. It's on the screen here, look at this. Jesus performed many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book.

But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God. And that by believing you may have life in his name.

[3 : 37] What is John's Gospel? It's a written record of the signs Jesus performed. It's what he did and what he said in the presence of his disciples.

Says John, what I'm giving you here is recorded, written evidence of what we saw and we heard, what Jesus did and what Jesus said. This is first-hand eyewitness testimonies laid out for us, evidence for us to consider.

And I'm writing this, says John, that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name. You know, it's a really big deal being a Christian. It's not a casual life choice in England or the Middle East or Southeast Asia to take Jesus as your Lord and your God and live your life for him. And we've only got one life.

Don't want to waste it, giving my all to some pretend and hope story. If this morning you want evidence for the Christian faith, if we want to grow in confidence that Jesus really is the Son of God, worth and true, truly the one to give our life to, then John's Gospel is for us.

[4 : 52] All of John's Gospel for sure. And certainly these verses we've had read just now. Having made massive claims about Jesus in verses 1 to 18, no one has ever seen God, but God the Son became flesh and made God known.

Now in verse 19, if you've got it open in front of you, John sort of drops us into daily life in and around first century Jerusalem. Jerusalem was the centre of Jewish life and the Jews are the people to whom God had revealed himself over centuries.

The people to whom God had made promises of a Messiah, a saviour who would come and rescue them and take their sins away and change the world. And in verse 19 onwards, John recounts four days.

Four days right at the start of Jesus' public ministry, full of evidence for us. So first off, in verses 19 to 34, we meet John the Baptist.

Here's a first point this morning. Hear John's testimony about Jesus, God's chosen one. Look at this with me.

[6 : 06] Verse 19 starts off, now this was John's testimony. And personal testimony is so important. In a court of law at Cambridge Crown Court, men and women stand in the witness box and they testify under oath to what they've seen and heard.

I saw him do it. And so the jury establishes the truth of what took place. We rely on testimony. As we do in regular life too. We're always asking for and listening to testimony on TripAdvisor in our conversations.

I watched this film. You should see it. Polonia Club does a £12 set menu on Mondays. It's really good food. Try it. I will.

On my Facebook feed on Thursday night, my friend Jess Hawkins said, looking for recommendations for a local plumber, please. Barry Nichols replies, Martin Crook is your man. It's all over Facebook. That's what Jess wanted to hear. Barry's testimony. Barry's an honest guy. I was spending some time with him yesterday at the football and he knows his plumbers.

[7 : 17] I have seen and I testify that Martin Crook is your man. Well, verse 19 on is John's testimony, not Barry Nichols' testimony. John's testimony, not John who writes this book, but John the Baptist.

John the Baptist appears in each of the four Gospels. He's an honest man and a godly man. He's a nationally famous prophet and preacher making a stir.

And all of Jerusalem went out to him in the wilderness to hear his message and be baptised by him. In fact, we've heard about John the Baptist already in John's Gospel.

Back in verse 6, there was a man sent from God whose name was John. He came as a witness to testify concerning that light so that through him all might believe.

Look at this with me. I love John the Baptist's honest and truthful, God-given testimony. Look, the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem sent priests and Levites to ask him who he wants, because he's making such a stir.

[8 : 25] And he didn't fail to confess, but he confessed freely, I am not the Messiah. Tell us who you are. I'm not the Messiah. I'm not the main man. I'm not the saviour.

Then they asked him, then, who are you? Are you Elijah? He said, no. Are you the prophet? He answered, no. This could take a very long time. And then finally, exasperated, I guess, they say, who are you?

Give us an answer to take back to those who sent us. What do you say about yourself? And John replied in the words of Isaiah the prophet, I am the voice of the one calling in the wilderness.

Make straight the way of the Lord. Embedded in the ancient prophecies of the Old Testament, this is how it will be. There'll be a lone voice in the wilderness pointing away from himself, saying, the Lord is coming.

The Lord is coming. Like an unnamed boxing announcer standing in the centre of the ring, taking the mic and introducing the champion.

[9 : 32] Make way, this is him. He's coming. John says, this is who I am. I'm the voice. I'm the announcer sent from God. Just follow along what happens. They question him.

Why are you baptising then? Why are you doing baptisms if you're not the Messiah? And John replies with only four words about himself. Doesn't want to talk about himself and his calling and his life and his ministry.

Because he's just the voice. So refreshing when you find someone who doesn't rattle on about themselves. I baptise with water. John replied, that's me.

But among you stands one you do not know. And he is the one who comes after me. The straps of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie.

This is John's testimony. Hear John's testimony. About, well about who? Verse 29, the next day, the very next day, John saw Jesus coming towards him and said, look, look, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

[10:44] You can imagine him pointing his finger. And pointing his finger, look, here he is. He's come. He's the one.

He'll take away the sin of the world. This is the one I meant. I came that he might be revealed. And then there's more testimony in verse 22.

Still pointing his finger at Jesus. I saw the spirit come down from heaven as a dove and remain on him. I didn't know him myself, but the one who sent me to baptise with water told me, the man on whom you see the spirit come down and remain is the one who will baptise with the Holy Spirit.

I have seen, I testify that this is God's chosen one. In Isaiah chapter 42 in the Old Testament, God spoke about the coming Messiah, his chosen one, like this.

Here is my servant whom I uphold, my chosen one in whom I delight. I will put my spirit on him and he will bring justice to the nations.

[11:52] John the Baptist, I saw it happen. I saw the spirit come down on him. I have seen and I testify.

I hear John's testimony about Jesus, God's chosen one. It's just the starts of John's gospel.

I wonder what you make of that. Let me ask another question. I wonder how willing you might be to believe John's testimony. I don't know what you think about that, honestly.

It's worth saying, I think, if we're honest, some of us have learnt through painful experience to be suspicious of personal testimonies.

Why, politicians make great claims, yet they lie. Advertisers lie. People stand up in court and testify, yet lie. And patients lie to their doctors.

[12:53] Kids on the street lie about what happened around the corner. Spouses lie. The smiling, slim person on the Facebook ad said you'd lose four stone in a month.

What a testimony. It was a lie. I mean, the religious sphere, ministers and spiritual gurus and writers make great claims about what they've seen and heard and gathers followers around them, but they lie.

You've got to be honest about that. All of that can scar you, actually, as a person, as you grow up. Make it hard to trust people's words. And yet, if we can put it like this, the honest testimony of a humble man can be and should be very powerful.

Says John the Baptist, completing his God-given mission, God sent him. I'm the voice in the wilderness sent by God.

Look at Jesus. He's the Lamb of God. He's the chosen one. Well, the question is, is that enough?

Like, is John's testimony enough to convince you to follow Jesus today?

[14:08] You say, well, maybe not. But it was enough for some. Because in our passage, see what happens on the next day.

And verses 19 to 24, point one. Hear John's testimony about Jesus, God's chosen one. Now, verse 35 onwards, point two. Follow him.

Jesus. Come and see. Believe. Just see what happens as we whizz through the second half of this passage. Verse 35.

The next day, John was there again with two of his disciples. And when he saw Jesus passing by, he said, look, the Lamb of God. And when the two disciples heard him say this, they followed Jesus.

Which is good. It's right. John testifies so that all might believe. And they do. They followed Jesus. They're not simple idiots, by the way, these two.

[15:12] They're not, we'll follow anything. They know John the Baptist personally. They trust his words. And so they act.

And as John the Baptist fades from view in the gospel, his job done, Jesus now takes center stage. He sees these two following and he says, what do you want? And they say, teacher, where are you staying?

He says, come and you will see. They go and see and spend the day with God's chosen one. It's about 4 p.m. in the text. This is eyewitness testimony, by the way.

Someone is watching what time it is. And I guess they talk and Jesus explains who he is and their minds and their hearts are bursting. I love what happens next.

Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, was one of the two who heard what John had said and who had followed Jesus. And the first thing Andrew did was to find his brother Simon and tell him, we have found the Messiah, that is the Christ, and he brought him to Jesus.

[16:14] That's so real. That is how it happens, you know. That is how the truth about Jesus Christ spreads. In England and the Middle East and Southeast Asia.

This is how many of us became followers of Jesus, isn't it? Someone close to us was a Christian believer. And because they loved us, they came and they found us and they said to us, I found him. I'm following Jesus, God's chosen one. Come and find out for yourself. And what starts here keeps going. The next day, verse 43, Jesus decided to leave for Galilee and finding Philip, he said to him, follow me.

I'm reading. Philip, like Andrew and Peter, was from the town of Bethsaida. And Philip found Nathanael and told him, we have found the one Moses wrote about in the law and about whom the prophets also wrote.

Jesus of Nazareth, the son of God, we found the one whom God has promised all the way through. But Nathanael's a bit of a snob, like some people living south of the camp.

[17:25] King's hedges, can anything good come from there? They said, he says, Nazareth, can anything good come from there? But Philip won't be put off.

Come and see. Well, Jesus sees Nathanael approaching from far off. He says, here truly is an Israelite in whom there is no deceit.

It's not because he's looked up Nathanael's profile. He knows who Nathanael is because he's God the son. He sees people.

He sees into people. He knows what is in us. He knows everything we've ever done. It's miraculous that. It's a little sign of who he is.

How do you know me? Nathanael asked. And Jesus answered, I saw you while you were still under the fig tree, even before Philip called you. And for Nathanael, that is more than enough evidence.

[18:29] He declared, he declared, Rabbi, you are the son of God. You are the king of Israel. Nathanael becomes a believer.

Which is exactly what is meant to happen. Not blind faith. Not blind faith. Not blind faith. Not shut your eyes. Switch off your brain. Silly hoping.

But he sees Jesus Christ. He encounters God the son in the flesh. And the evidence is more than enough. You are the son of God. And we're talking this morning just a little bit about evidence.

Our world says that the Christian faith is an inspiring story to comfort the scared, maybe. Good for the kids to learn about.

The bits that fit with our culture, maybe. But there's no solid evidence it's true, surely. And our hearts can feel that sometime too.

[19:33] As we seek to place our faith in a God we can't see. But our God knows this. He knows what our world is like. He knows what our hearts are like.

And in his goodness, he has given us this written eyewitness record on purpose. That you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the son of God.

And by believing may have life in his name. Meant to hear John the Baptist's testimony, his God-given testimony about Jesus. God's long-promised chosen one.

And then follow him. Come and see. Believe. Not without evidence. Not a blind leap into the chasm. But because of the evidence. Well, what was that? That was 20 minutes or so.

[20:30] I wasn't counting. In John's Gospel. Maybe you say this morning, this is good. It's good to hear this. But I'd love to see more. I'd love to see more evidence.

And if that's you this morning, final thing to say. That is okay. Because in verse 50, just four days into his public ministry, Jesus speaks to Nathanael and he says there is more.

Look at this finally. Verse 50. You believe, Nathanael, because I told you I saw you under the fig tree. You will see greater things than that.

He then added, very truly I tell you, you will see heaven open. And the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man.

Do you want more? Do you want to see more? It's an invitation here to look forward into the life of Jesus Christ, written here in John's Gospel.

[21 : 32] And as we do, we are promised we will see heaven open. Jesus Christ is like a ladder with angels on, connecting heaven and earth.

Through his character, through his miracles, through his teaching, through his death and his resurrection, he will make God known to us.

Clear signs, clear words, over and over again to demonstrate to us that he is the Christ, he is the Son of God, he is the Chosen One.

If you want more, you will see heaven open here in the extraordinary life of his Son. And then, well, and then like Andrew, like Simon, like Philip, like Nathanael, like millions of people through history and over a billion people in the world today, having considered the evidence, we are to put our faith in Jesus for the first time, or afresh this coming term.

We are to put our faith in Jesus Christ and know that we will receive life in his name. We will receive eternal life.

[22 : 52] Who is this one we put our trust in? He's Jesus, the Lamb of God, who will take away your sins, God's absolute pardon for your past.

Who is he, this one we put our trust in? He's Jesus who baptises you with the Holy Spirit. The presence of God in you and with you, now and forever.

This is the life that's on offer to us. It doesn't come through blind faith. It doesn't come through just making it up. Read and know and hear that Jesus is the Christ.

Hear John the Baptist's testimony this morning about Jesus, God's Chosen One. And then follow him and come and see and believe.

Let me lead us in a prayer together. Let's pray. John said, I have seen and I testify that this is God's Chosen One.

[24 : 04] Thank you, our Father, that though none of us have seen you, your Son became flesh and made you known.

And these first witnesses saw Jesus Christ and testified to him. Thank you for the honest, humble testimony of John the Baptist.

Thank you for the little sign of Jesus knowing Nathaniel truly. Thank you for this truthful testimony.

That your Son is the Lamb of God, the Chosen One, the Messiah, the Son of God, the King of Israel.

Thank you that in John's Gospel we are able to see great things about him. Please would you help us together these coming weeks to consider Jesus Christ.

Please open our eyes to his glory. And help us seeing the evidence for him to put our faith in him. And so have life to the full, we pray.

[25 : 13] In Jesus' name. Amen. Amen.