

Confrontation With The Bible

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[0 : 00] Will you turn now in the Gospel according to St. John, the last chapter and the last verses, because this is St. John's church, and this is St. John's day, and John puts his signature, as it were, to the end of the Gospel.

And I want us to go over that with you because it's a kind of lovely story of how John graciously identifies himself.

But I was surprised the other night to learn from our director of music, Mr. Bartell, that Mr. Bach used to include the note designated by the initials of his last name in the end of some of his music, or at least one piece of it.

And in the same way that Bach did that for his music, John has done that for his Gospel. And on page 111, and beginning at verse 18, you'll read this lovely sort of post-script to the Gospel.

Truly, truly, I say to you, when you were young and girded yourself and walked where you would, but when you are old, you will stretch out your hands and another will gird you and carry you where you do not wish to go.

[1 : 27] This he said to show by what death he was to glorify God. That was how Peter was to glorify God in his death. And after this, Jesus said to his disciples, Follow me.

Peter turned and saw, and saw following them, the disciple whom Jesus loved. This is John's signature, you see, because he was that disciple. Who had lain close to his breast at the supper and had said, Lord, who is it that is going to betray you?

When Peter saw him, he said to Jesus, Lord, what about this man? Jesus said to him, If it is my will that he remain until I come, what is that to you?

Follow me. Saying, spread abroad among the brethren, that this disciple was not to die. Yet Jesus did not say to him that he was not to die.

But if it is my will that he remain until I come, what is that to you? John poses, this is the disciple who is bearing witness to these things and who has written these things, and we know that his testimony is true.

[2 : 40] But there are also many other things which Jesus did. Were every one of them to be written, I suppose that the world itself could not contain the books that would be written.

I don't know if you've ever read that lovely hymn or sung it, where it talks about the whole sky being a parchment and the whole of the oceans of the world being an ink pot and every man a scribe by trade.

And that where they just sat down to write all that could be written of the love of God, they would run out of parchment and they would run out of ink. Well, that's the extent.

Now, if you go back again, there seems to be an earlier ending to the Gospel of John which comes at the end of chapter 20. And that's in verse 30 of chapter 20.

And it's that ending that I want you to look at today just for purposes of our edification. The other ending tells us about St. John.

[3 : 47] And this tells us about the fact that this church, which is called after him, should have, I suppose, a special place in his heart for the teaching of the fourth Gospel.

The Gospel of light and the Gospel of love and the Gospel of life. And when John brings it to a close at the end of chapter 20 before he adds the postscript of 21, these are the words he says.

Chapter 20 and verse 30. Now, Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples which are not written in this book. But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life through his name.

Well, the word that's there for Jesus did many other signs. And remember, signs is one of the characteristic descriptions in the Gospel of John for miracles.

So that when he changed the water into wine back in chapter 2, he said this was the first of the signs. And the whole Gospel is full of these signs.

[5 : 10] And John has recorded all these signs. And he says, but the ones that he has recorded are relatively few compared to all that the disciples witnessed.

Do you know how hard it is to take even the experience of a single day and sit down with your diary and put it off on one piece of writing?

How difficult it is to condense and say, this is what happened and this is what happened and this is what happened. And most of us don't try to do it because of the jumble of our lives that they're spread out all over.

But John was able to bring together all the miracles and signs which Jesus had done and to specialize on some of them in order that people might grasp them and might understand them. And the principle he used to select what he would write down was this. These are written, he said, that you might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the Living God.

[6 : 16] And so, in writing his book, he had a selective principle. And that principle was that those who read the book might come to believe in Jesus.

So that if you were to sit down and read the Gospel of John, John's purpose would be fulfilled if at the end of the book you were to make a confession of faith.

Now, I don't know how many of you have ever done it. I don't know how many of you have lived most of your life as we do, wishing that we could do it, hoping that there will be a time when we can do it, but never quite getting around to it.

And living as we do in the age of mass media, we probably tend to think books are rather a slow way of learning. In fact, they are the very best way of learning.

And Professor Northrop Fry, as I think I've told you, says this, living as he does in the crown and peak of the 20th century, surrounded by all the technology of the 20th century, he says unmistakably, the most technically efficient machine that man has ever invented is the book.

[7 : 36] So that man, in all the complexity of who he is, with a book in front of him, is man in relation to the most technically perfect machine that he has ever invented.

So that this posture of man in relationship to a book is the posture which is, in a sense, basic to the Christian life.

That's why we try very hard to induce you in some way or other to find yourself in this position with this book in front of you, this book of books in front of you.

It is my experience for the last 20 years or more that on Tuesday morning we meet for breakfast.

And someone recently said that you're allowed to have breakfast first.

And then we study the Bible. And that weekly Bible study in company with a few other people where you confront the Word of God is really a high point in my week.

[8 : 49] And if you don't have such a point in your week, you need it. Now lots of people, as you might see from this very verse, might be satisfied if in the course of their life they saw a miracle or two.

And some people are wont to think miracle, think of miracles very deeply so that they speak of miracles happening on the golf course. And they associate miracles with winning pools sometimes. And they associate miracles with the most prifling incidents of their life. But miracles don't make disciples. What is required is teaching.

It's confrontation with the written Word. that's what makes disciples. And you can pile miracles one on top of the other as John says happen to the disciples.

But unless there is that teaching concerning the person of the miracle worker, Jesus Christ, then you'll have missed the point. I remember one young man telling me that he went to church and both his ears were terribly infected and he was told by the doctors that he would be deaf and he went to the priest of the church and the priest took two candles and crossed them over his throat and prayed for him and he was healed.

[10 : 24] He was full of wonder. And I said, do you believe in Jesus Christ? He said, no. Because it's possible that miracles can be wasted on our own well-being.

But the fundamental miracle of human existence is the miracle which takes place when we are confronted by the book.

And in the book we read that of which John says it was written in order that you might come to believe. That believing might be an irreducible dimension of your life.

That you would become a believer by your encounter with this book. This most technically perfect machine that man has ever invented.

And so, it's not miracles. The miracles drew the attention of people to Jesus Christ, but it was the teaching about who he was.

[11 : 31] And you see, that's the difficulty with a lot of people who associate Jesus with the possibility of a necessary miracle which they would like to have happen in their lives.

But that's not what Jesus set out to do. He set out to make disciples. And disciples are those who would believe in him.

So look at what happened. The book was written with this purpose that you might believe. believe.

And if you examine the grammar of it, it means that you might go on believing.

That believing would be a condition of your life. That you would be described as a believer. And then it says what you are to believe.

And the first thing that you're to believe is that Jesus is the Christ. The anointed one of God. not only that he is the Christ, but that he is the Son of God.

[12 : 34] He is the one in whom the whole Paul tells us in Colossians, God reveals himself in his Son.

He is who God is. He is the one whom God has sent, but he also is God himself. And that you come to believe one.

Well, you may say, well, it's impossible to believe that. And I agree, it is entirely impossible to believe that unless you consider the record that has been left that will lead you to believe that.

Unless you encounter this word of God, this book, which was written for that purpose, that you might come to believe. Well, then he goes on to say, not only that you will believe concerning the person of Jesus Christ, and it's very important that you recognize that he is the Christ, he is the Son of the living God, because lots of people will say that they believe in Jesus.

And they say it because they think he left a good example for us to follow. Or they liked his teaching, or they liked various aspects of the concept of his death on the cross, his self-giving.

[13 : 57] There's so many admirable qualities about Jesus, any one of which we might select and say, well, yes, that's important to me, and for that reason I believe in him.

But you have missed the point unless you have come to believe what Jesus teaches us about himself, that he is indeed the Christ, the Son of the living God.

then it's not a matter of Jesus fitting into your worldview or your life plan.

It's a matter of you discovering in Jesus the worldview and life plan of God that he has for you. And it's in reading this that you come to believe.

Now watch how the passage ends. it says that believing you might have life in his name. Now, I suppose one of the really difficult things for people to understand about the Christian faith is that to believe is to have something.

[15 : 09] Not to believe is not to have it. What is it that you have when you believe? Well, you have eternal life. Well, how could that be? Well, can I show you what I think to be the critical statement here when it says that you might have life in his name?

Now, when it uses that term, in his name, what it means is that, you know how we have cocktail parties and Christmas parties and so on, and one of our customs is to sidle up to somebody we do know and say, who's that over there that we don't know?

And then having got the information, you go over and say, hello Mary, how nice to see you. Oh, you remembered me. I'm so grateful. And that kind of artifice, where relationships are so superficial, in which we try and know the names of people.

I mean, I have to play that game after church every Sunday. And I, and it's hard work. but what he's talking about here is something far more than the superficial level at which we know people.

He's talking about something far more profound. It's, it's, it's not that kind of superficiality. It's not the kind of name dropping.

[16 : 37] It's not a kind of secret code. Do you know the name? Yes, I know the name. Well, no, that's not it at all. It says that believing you might have life through his name.

And what this means is that your life is powerfully affected by your acquaintance with him whom you've come to know as the Christ, the Son of the Living God.

It's as though you were involved in a great love affair. love affair that has marked your life forever so that you can't, it's impossible for you to think of life apart from that person.

The greatest possible love affair that you can imagine would so involve you and so become a part of you that you couldn't think of your life apart from that person. Your existence would mean nothing apart from that person. You had so entered into the understanding of that person and a believing, trusting relationship with that person that nothing else matters.

[17 : 55] And that's what it means when it says that believing you might have life life. Because believing in Jesus imparts life.

Now I know that there are lots of people who think that the self-giving altruism which is so much a part of Christianity the giving up of oneself putting other people first is that you would say well I don't want anything for myself I just want to serve my fellow man there's nothing in it for me. And those who go around claiming well in fact there is something in it for me because I've now got eternal life and nothing else much matters because I've got them. But it's not in that sense it doesn't work that way.

You see he doesn't say and you have to be careful to look at this it doesn't say that that believing that you're going to have life but that in believing you do have life.

It's a present reality right here and right now. And it arises out of your believing and trusting in him. It's not a reward which is going to be given to you at the end of a life in which you've worked hard at it.

[19 : 25] It's not something which you are going to get as you're just deserving. It's something which comes out of this dynamic encounter of believing in the one whom John has set forth in his gospel as the Christ the son of the living man.

That encounter in which you've come to believe in him is the encounter in which he shares with you eternal life. So that that's where it comes from.

It comes from him and it is imparted to you by believing in him. If you were to look at John's epistle John chapter 5 verse 13 you'd find that the same thing is spoken of there.

When it says I write this to you who believe in the name of the son of God that you may know that you have eternal life. That that's what it is that is imparted to us as we come to believe in Jesus. Which means that the whole of our life is changed as we believe in his name. The whole basis of our existence is moved from one foundation to another totally different foundation.

[20 : 46] And on this foundation life becomes not something which is circumscribed around with time and effort and attainment. But it's a life which is the shared life of Jesus the Christ the son of the living God and you come to be what God intended you to be.

Well I want to remind you you belong to St. John's Church. St. John the evangelist wrote this gospel. He wrote it that you might believe that Jesus is the Christ the son of the living God and that believing you might have life in his name.

I see the private and personal dignity and individuality that belongs to you each of you and which in measure by men you might want to hold on to fiercely.

God's grace in life. But I commend you that you allow the grace of God to break into your life through that which is written that you might come to believe in Jesus that he is the Christ the son of the living God and that you might find an utterly basic reality for your life.

I'm speaking to you as though you haven't already done it and indeed you may well. You may have done it and not realized that you have done it. In other words, these verses must be for you in that case profoundly comforting.

[22 : 45] You may on the other hand have believed it and understood it. You may have believed it for a long time without fully realizing what the implications of it were of your belief or art.

But there is the possibility that you have never come to believe it. But for all of us the reality is that in believing the record which John has left in reading it, he left it for the purpose, the true reading it, you might come to believe it.

You might be strengthened in your belief. You might be made aware that believing you have life through this message.