

Sharing the Word- John 5:19-24 AM

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[0 : 00] Well, it's lovely to be with you. It's very special for Jane and I to be here. We really appreciate it. And I wanted to start by telling you about a business meeting I had just a few months ago. It was with a young guy that we'll call Dan. And Dan said this. He said, I've got a great partner. He said, I've got three great kids. I've got a big Audi on the drive. I've got a great house and a great job. He said, surely that can't be all there is. He said, I understand that you actually talk to people about God in some way. He said, what are you saying? Now, that started a look at the book of John using word one-to-one.

I've got to ask you a very simple question. Who engineered that conversation? Well, it clearly wasn't me, was it? And said a word. Clearly God did it. When Dan got to the end of chapter four of John, I asked him how he was finding God's word. And he said this.

He said, Richard, you know when you get to bed at the end of a busy day and your head hits your pillow and you pull your duvet up over you in your bed and you go, ah. He said, that's how I feel every time I look at the word. Isn't that wonderful? Now, who's at work?

Well, you see, God's at work, not me. I'm just a page turner. It's God that's doing the work in Dan's life and Dan is loving it. Yes, I've discovered, and it's a real shocker, if honest, the people of the world really are not at peace with the world's promoted lifestyles.

Individuals actually crave a peace that passes all understanding and the world just can't give it to them. In fact, in very rough number terms, we reckon that on average, one person in four, if offered a user-friendly look at the Bible, will actually grab that opportunity. That's a 20% increase since the pandemic started. One in four. And do you know what? That holds nearly all the way around the world. Oh, and by the way, that isn't the look with someone who's a professional like Chris.

[2 : 13] It's a look with someone like you and me. Now, if you're a Christian here this morning, you're not going to like what in nearly every case I and countless others around the world hear as a really amazed and often angry question from someone who's looking at God's word for the first time. Do you know what they say? Why has no one ever shown me this before? I had a meeting with a very well-educated man and I was on my third meeting and he slammed the corner of his desk. I thought, oh my goodness, what have I said? He said, Richard, I've had one of the most expensive educations that money could buy.

Why has no one ever shown me this before? In a world that says life is about me and my rights, people of the world actually find it stunningly helpful to see what God has to say to us.

But in their biblical ignorance today, they usually need someone to show it to them. For someone to say yes to looking, I guarantee you it will be because the Lord has prepared them in some way and never because of our skill, our cunning, and our brilliance in how we asked.

Hence, for this morning, I'm doing something rather different. Here is the title of this talk. The word, is it where my confidence lies? You see, is Jesus someone we take for granted?

We believe he existed. We follow him. We come to church. But when was the last time that we stopped and looked at exactly what the calling of the word really is to each of our lives? To be blunt, is there something he calls us to do from the safety of our eternal relationship with him?

[3 : 59] Well, to answer that, please come with me as we go for a short walk through John. I hope a journey that will surprise you, excite you, humble you, and fill you with assurance. And by the way, if you wouldn't call yourself a Christian here today, I am delighted you came. I hope you find this particularly interesting. Where shall we start? Well, we're going to start at the very beginning.

And to do so, we're actually going to use some of the pages of Word 1 to 1. So here it goes. It's up on the back behind me. In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

Now, look, this is a fabulous Bible teaching church, so I don't need to take you through these verses the way that the notes of Word 1 to 1 do on the screen in front of you. It's always, by the way, the word is on the left, and then the notes are on the right. Rather, I want to tell you of the impact of these words on a guy called Martin. I bought Martin coffee for 15 months, and my phone went after 15 months, and it was Martin. Richard, I'd like to buy you a coffee. Well, I thought, that's great. I've been paying for them for 15 months. This is going to be interesting. So I went for my free coffee. He handed me my coffee, and he said, Richard, I knelt at the foot of the cross last night. I said, that's brilliant. What took you there? Oh, it was nothing you said. He said, Richard, I've got to tell you, I never got over the first six words. In the beginning was the Word. He said, those have been stamped on my memory like a beef iron that goes on a steak. Do you remember that sizzling look? It can't get it off my mind. He said, I've read Richard Dawkins. The man's an idiot. There has to have been a beginning. And then John, not you, Richard, then John showed me who the Word was, what the Word had come to do, how actually the Word died on a cross for my sins, and then offered me a life with him in eternity. It was nothing you said, Richard. Well, what a relief. Isn't that a relief? He was fixated by what the Word had said. And what had Martin seen? Well, as the notes say, before time, before creation, before the beginning, God existed, and the Word was part of him. Now, can you think of any other book in the history of printing that makes such an outrageous claim? What does verse 2 actually then add to that claim? He was in the beginning with God.

[6 : 38] Well, I had another contact that said to me, hang on, whoa, stop, Richard, when we read this verse. He said, you mean God is not an amorphous mass? Well, no, he's personal. It's he. Yes, and being in place before the very beginning, God, including the Word, is eternal. Can you think of another book that raises the possibility of eternity? Now, by the way, it takes John until verse 17 to make clear that the Word is Jesus Christ. But these opening lines are monumental. You may be used to them because you've been a Christian for a while, but to the non-Christian who doesn't know what the Bible says today, these are huge claims, huge, and they don't get any smaller. Look at sentence 3, as I would call it, verse 3 to you. All things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made. So John, the gospel writer, clearly is stating, here is the creator of the universe. And it goes on to get even bigger. We're going to jump forward a bit. We're going to jump to John 1, verse 29. And here is John, the Baptist, who is actually for the first time seeing

Jesus. And here's what he says, behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world. You see, John sees Jesus walking towards him and shouts out a unique title for Jesus. Look, look, the Lamb of God. It's a unique title. You know, he might as well have shouted, look, you see that man over there? He's come to die. He's come to die as the ultimate sacrificial lamb. He's come to pay the price for not just your sin, but my sin. He's come to make us right with God, to pay a price that none of us can pay. He's the Lamb of God.

Well, what does that tell us? Well, Jesus hasn't said a thing yet. We're only in chapter one. Jesus didn't die some tragically early killed off death. He wasn't stopped under man's authority. Rather, before his ministry even has started, John the Baptist is showing us that actually there was a plan. Now, in my world, a businessman doesn't take them long to realize that in the whole book of John, it reads like a business plan. My hour has not yet come, Jesus said. My hour has not yet come, he repeats in chapter seven. And it takes right until finally he's going to go to Jerusalem for the cross. My hour has come. There's a plan. Well, what tremendous authority. Now, often I meet people who think one of two things. Number one, I've lived an upright life. Surely that will be good enough for God. It won't be right if having been good, I didn't get into heaven. After all, I've lived my life decently. I've cared for others. I've given to charity. In short, I've tried my best. Or I meet the absolute opposite. May well be people who go to church for a long time. I have no certainty about what comes next after this life, even though I've gone to church for years. Well, let's jump forward in John to where we went with our main reading today. And it's John chapter five. And the reason we're going to look at it is because it's going to help us understand sin. Let's just go through it again. John chapter five. And I'm concentrating on 22 to 24. Moreover, the father judges no one, but has entrusted all judgment to the son. So Jesus is given by God the task of being your judge and my judge. Sure, you might be thinking, I know this. But I may ask you, have you really thought through the implications of what Jesus says next? Here it comes. Please listen carefully to this.

[10 : 50] That all may honor the son just as they honor the father. Whoever does not honor the son does not honor the father who sent him. Now, what I've just read in verse 23 probably causes more shock when I share it for the first time with people than any other verse that we look at. Why? Because it raises the question that is such a vital one. What is my sin? The answer, if I'm not honoring Jesus, giving my whole life to Jesus because I have understood that he died on that cross to pay a price for my sins that I can't pay, if I'm not doing that, then I cannot be right with God.

It's not about what I have been doing in my life. It's whether I have fully given my life to Jesus in recognition of what Jesus has done for me. It's just not about whether I'm being good enough. No, if Jesus is my judge, has taken my punishment for my sins, then to honor him is first of all to believe in him by accepting who he is and fully realizing what he has done for me. If you wonder today what Christianity is about, you've just heard it. Only then can I talk of giving my life to him, falling in love with him and what he has in store to fulfill my life. Now, this is so important, I'm going to repeat it. Living our lives for him is the natural outcome of honoring him, not in my strength, but by my putting my faith in him and his work on the cross. Therefore, I should be constantly asking my Savior what he would have me do in his strength. Being right with God is entirely about whether we may have truly honored Jesus, and therefore fulfillment in our lives lies entirely with him. You want proof? Well, it's in verse 24. Let's have a look. Very truly, I tell you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be judged, but has crossed over from death to life. John is telling us that what happens at the moment of our death, when your soul leaves your body, that moment has already been determined and assured when we first trusted Jesus at our conversion. Let's read it again. Whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has, not will have, has eternal life and will not be judged. There's no interview at the gates of heaven in order to get in, but has crossed over from life, from death to life already. Now look, this body I'm dressed in is really like a suit, and I can tell you that as in my, I'm in my late 60s, it's showing signs of wear and tear. For a start, since I got married, I've got to be very careful at this point because she's sitting right in front of me. But since I've got married, I'm shorter, and she's made me now wear hearing aids because apparently I can't hear women the way that I used to. Well, one day this suit is going to hit the floor and Elvis will have exited the building. But if you have ever seen someone who has died, you know that the body is not the real person. They've gone. As John writes, their soul has crossed over from death to life. And for the Christian, that is with certainty, not in our goodness, but in the saving grace of a saviour. When we walk towards God at the gates of heaven, what does he see? He sees you paid for. He sees you washed clean by the sacrificial blood of the Lamb of God. He sees his Son, not you. Now, what's my point today? Why have I laboured this? Well, it's one thing to have taken this in as a truth understood. It's another thing to worship in every area of our lives, or as we have just seen described, to honour Jesus. To lay at his feet every part of our lives and ask Jesus, what are you up to? What should you have me do? Let's get really practical. What do I mean?

Well, personally, I think for years I was doing this. I was doing this. Literally, Lord, I'd love the blessings. I really enjoy the blessings of being Christian. You don't need to worry about this side of my life. I've got this covered, Lord. Thanks very much. But I love the blessings. So, please may I have the blessings. Don't touch that. Please, please may I have the blessings.

[15 : 40] And it wasn't actually until I started sharing the word, because now I could, that I realised what being a Christian really meant. It meant this. Bring it on. I've got corners in my life that you need to knock off. I need to do what you would have me do. And by the way, I will be so filled with you as I get the joy of seeing what you are up to. I'm not asking you to bless what I'm up to.

I'm asking you to point me in the direction of what you're up to. Phenomenal. It's changed my life. Now, I needed to fall at the foot of the cross and welcome Jesus with open arms. I needed to say, bring it on. Whatever you, Lord, have planned, that's what I want, please. Expressed another way, what's our prayer life like? Are we saying to God, please bless what I have decided?

What I am up to? My plans? Or are we sinking to our knees each day and asking, Lord, what are you up to today in my circle of influence? Please, can I have a part to play?

Well, let's move on. Let's go to John chapter 10 and we're going to look at verses 17 to 18. We get another outrageous claim from Jesus, something that no man could ever possibly say.

Here's what it says in 17. For this reason, the Father loves me because I lay down my life that I may take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord.

[17:16] I have authority to lay it down. I have authority to take it up again, this charge I've received from my Father. Now, look, we are many chapters before Jesus' arrest, trial and the cross, but do you see that the Lamb of God had a plan? Exactly as John the Baptist said as soon as he had first saw Jesus, this is the creator of all things, who has power and might that no man can ever claim, including the authority to lay down his life. Well, you could say, but Richard, in the wars, many men lay down their lives. Yes, but Jesus goes so much further. Just look at what comes next. He says this, I have authority to take it up again. It, life, come back to life, rise from the dead, having paid the price for my sin and your sin that sent him to such a horrendous death on the cross. No man can do that. My Savior did. And he offers you life with him today if we honor him, if we serve him, give all of our lives over to him, be empowered by his Spirit. We cannot afford to treat Jesus with anything less than honor, can we? But I'm not done with John yet. Come with me to the arrest of Jesus. And we're going to go to John chapter 18, and we're going to be in the Garden of Gethsemane. And this is what

John records. Verse 3, so Judas, having procured a band of soldiers and some officers from the chief priests and the Pharisees, went there with lanterns and torches and weapons. Then Jesus, knowing all that would happen to him, came forward and said to them, whom do you seek? They answered, Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus said to them, I am he. Judas, who betrayed him, was standing with them. When Jesus said to them, I am he, they drew back and fell to the ground. Got the picture? You can just see, they turn up mob-handed. Jesus takes charge of the situation. He only has to say his name, the name of God, I am he, and they're blown off their feet. Did you see that in Sunday school?

Because I didn't. Did you think that your friends don't know that that's what actually Jesus is like? That he just has to say, I am he. And an entire army of a band is thrown off their feet. I mean, can you imagine what happened when those men went home that night and they had to explain to their wives how it had gone? Well, we turned up mob-handed. We were feeling pretty confident. There was a lot of us. He's just one man. And actually, he said to us, who are you after? We said we were looking for Jesus. And all he said was his name. And do you know what, darling? We were blown off our feet. And instead of doing a runner, he then just stood there and waited. We picked up.

We got shields. We got spears. We got swords. We were a complete mess. And he waited while we picked ourselves up. Farical. Well, your friends will be amazed when you show them that verse.

[20:46] Have we really given ourselves over to who Jesus is? Being humbled as to why we should worship him in the way that we do? Adore him? Really give our lives to him in honor and obedience? You know, for years I went to church, I listened to all I was taught. And frankly, because I wasn't sharing the gospel, because I didn't know how and hadn't got the gospel in a format that I could share, I was not growing. I was surviving. My faith was really all about me. Is that your Christian life here today?

Have you asked him what his answer is for you to grow as a Christian and to live a fulfilled life, however old you are? Well, let me tell you about a phone call I had from a guy running a big church in Durban, South Africa. He rang me up and he said this. He said, are you sitting down? I said, yes, I am. He said, good. He said, because I've got some shock news. He said, we've discovered that the gospel is by far the most evangelistic tool that we've got. You're supposed to lie. I mean, can you believe it? He said, are you sitting down? Because we've discovered the gospel is the most evangelistic tool that we've got. He said, actually, that's not why I rang you up. The reason I've rung you up is that since our church has adopted the word one-to-one, our church members have taken off in their faith. They go out, they find God has prepared the heart of someone in their own circle of friends and contacts such that when they offer a coffee to show the stunning start of John, they say yes.

Then they discover that the Holy Spirit is with them as they turn the pages, Richard. They're becoming Bible sharers. The person is fixated by what the word says, not what the Christian says. The gospel train chugs from verse to verse and the individual wants to see what Jesus says next. As for us as a church, he said, we have never seen a discipleship training program like it. He said, the Lord is personally training us, growing our faith as we carry out his great commission. He says, it's transformed our prayer meetings. No longer are we, please pray for my exam, please pray for the interview I've got, please pray for great aunt Agatha's cat, it's got rheumatism.

[23 : 11] It's now, please pray for George. George has said yes. Please pray for me because I'm seeing Penny tomorrow and I get to show her John chapter 5. Please pray for her. And they're coming back into our church and they're doing exactly what I did to Chris. They're getting hold of us as a ministry team and they're saying, teach me more. I've seen the Lord at work through the living word this week.

And by the way, let me introduce you to Tom, Dick and Harry because they're now interested enough in Jesus that they're coming to church. Do you want to stop draining out as a Christian every week?

Want to stop your faith being all about you? Want to fall in love with Christ more? Well, do you believe that God knows all about your circle of contacts and just might have prepared someone for you to take his word too? Do you believe that? Do you understand that he will be with you as you do? Do you want your faith to be like that so set on fire as you went, as you first became a Christian and as you honor and worship your savior? Do you want to be like you were when you first became a Christian? Do you want to walk hand in hand with your savior, knowing he's got a job for you to do, the great commission, that it's your job? Well, then don't let your faith just be about you.

Grab word one-to-one. Start prayerfully asking your contacts. Stay and come at 12 o'clock today. I'm going to just be answering questions, which I know always come up. Get tickets and bring non-Christian friends tomorrow night's dinner at Dynasty. My wife and I were sent by the hotel to Dynasty, not knowing that's where we were going on Monday night. We went there last night. It's very good food. Do come.

But the key thing is, is I'll invite your friend for you to actually look at John. Just bring your friend for a great meal and to hear a bit about my life in a bit more detail. I promise you it'll be an interesting evening. And if you're in business, perhaps get tickets for Tuesday morning. We're going to breakfast at the OEB Breakfast Company. I'm going to be doing the same thing as I did on Monday night. And if you'd like to really get stuck into training, then come on Tuesday night and we'll have a really helpful workshop evening. I pray it will be, I promise you it will be fun. I pray it will be fun as well, actually. It's a good thing to me to do.

[25 : 43] You want to have certainty about your eternity with God? Well, there's just one answer. There's always only been one answer. It's all about honoring Jesus. Try asking him to show you who has he prepared to share his word in your circle of connections. The word, it is where our confidence lies. It's a living word. And you too can know the transforming, loving blessing that has hit my life and the lives of so many as our Savior speaks to a world that desperately needs his word to be shared. Let's close with that prayer I mentioned earlier. Please pray with me. Lord, what are you up to today in my circle of influence? Please, can I have a part in what you have planned? And all God's people said, Amen.