

1 John 5:6-5:21

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[0 : 00] Let's pray together. We pray the words we've already heard from the psalm. O God, you are my God.

! Amen.

You can be seated. And as you sit down, it would be very, very helpful if you grab the Bible in front of you. You will need it for page 1023.

The choir has memorized this passage. So they don't need a Bible because they've already told us the Spirit moves in their hearts. So wonderful.

But for the rest of us, you will need your Bible and it would be helpful to open it to page 1023. There's a lot in this passage. And I think after wrestling with it for a week, if you had to distill the text to one word, which is not easy to do, I think the word would be certainty.

[1 : 25] Our passage this morning is about certainty. This word comes to us at a really good time this morning because we're living in a world of great uncertainty.

If you are anxious this morning about the instability and uncertainty of the world, or maybe there's some uncertainty in your own life, goodness, there's even uncertainty in the life of our church this morning.

God's word this morning offers us assurance and certainty, and it's worth listening to. If you struggle with having certainty about the Christian faith, whether you're a follower of Jesus or not, God's word this morning is for you.

So we're going to jump right into it. I've grouped the chapter into three sections about certainty. The first is certainty that we belong to God and we are beloved by him.

Look at verse 1. Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God. This is an absolute statement said with absolute certainty.

[2 : 45] If you look at the verse tenses, this is why you need your Bible, you'll see that being born of God in that sentence comes before you believe.

You could translate the verse, Everyone who today believes that Jesus is the Christ has already been born of God, is a child today, a child of God today, and will therefore remain a child of God for all eternity.

Our present belief is the consequence, not the cause, of being born of God. We are born of God before we believe.

We belong to God before we believe in God. Said another way, God acts first in our salvation. God makes the first move.

God initiates our salvation. I imagine that's a challenging word for some of you, so I better back it up with some Bible verses pretty quick. Look at verse 11 of our text.

[3 : 51] God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. You may know Romans chapter 5, verse 8. While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

Or in the last chapter, 1 John chapter 4, verse 10. In this is love. Not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son. The most famous verse of all, John 3, 16.

God so loved the world, that he sent his Son. That whoever believes today in him, shall not perish, but have eternal life. See, God moves first.

God acts first in our salvation. We are beloved by him, before we believe. We belong to him. And because God acts first, that means our salvation is not based upon us, or our own merit, or our own effort.

So we can have great confidence that we're born of God, beloved by God, and will remain God's children forever, because our salvation is not based on us. It's based on him.

[5 : 01] The Christian faith is good news, because it's all about what God has done already, not what we must do today. You can therefore be certain that you're beloved, because God has already shown us that he loves us, and we are already born of him.

Now that may sound really encouraging to you, but I suspect some of you are asking this question in the back of your minds, but how do I know if I'm actually born of God?

How do I know for certain that I'm a child of God? And in our text, really helpfully, there are three proofs that prove you are born of God.

Again, these three things don't cause you to be born of God. They are the consequence of being his child already. So let me give you an example, and Jordan, you can testify to the truth of these words.

In my family of origin, my parents, three siblings, and me, there are certain proofs that reveal we are all members of the same family.

[6 : 10] First, all of us are good with maps. All of us. One of us is world famous for being good with maps. He's a professional, but for the rest of us, we're pretty good.

I didn't get lost when I went to Venice. It's pretty good. Second proof. Whenever anyone in my family enters a kitchen, we open every single cupboard door for no reason.

And we leave them open for all eternity. A third proof we're from the same family is everyone in my family must live in a climate that's within a range of 11 degrees Celsius and 22 degrees.

Outside of that range, we will either melt like the Wicked Witch of the West, or we will freeze faster than a snowman. Now, you may be sitting there and thinking, hey, I'm good at maps, I open cupboards, and I can't handle any temperature fluctuation as well.

So maybe I'm a member of your family. To which I say, no, you're not. We're full. These are three proves that are characteristics that show we're members of one family.

[7 : 25] They don't cause us to be members of the family. Rather, they are consequences that flow out of being born into my family of origin. And in the same way, those who are born of God, born into his family, will have these family traits that prove our pre-existing status as children of God.

So the first proof is right at the beginning of verse 1. Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God. The first proof you are born of God is that you believe that Jesus is the Christ.

At Introducing Jesus After Easter, we looked at this term, and we learned that the word Christ means king. It means God's chosen king. So if you believe that Jesus is the Messiah, God's chosen, anointed king, promised and sent to save the world, to forgive our sin, to make us to be born again as beloved children of God and to bring his kingdom of heaven to earth, if you believe that, that is proof that you are a child of God already.

The first proof is belief that Jesus is the Christ. The second proof is still in verse 1. It goes on. Everyone who loves the Father loves his child as well.

So the second proof you're born of God is you love God and you love his children. This is what much of 1 John has already been about, including last week's text, so I don't need to go on here except to say that love of God and love for his children is the second proof that you are born of God and that his Holy Spirit dwells within you and is transforming you to become like Christ.

[9 : 11] The verse goes on. And this is how we know that we love the children of God, by loving God and carrying out his commands. Love for God is shown in obedience to God.

Now again, the order is critical. We behave because we are first beloved. The love of God for us compels us to want to love God in return.

And we love him in return by loving one another, his children, and by obeying his commands, which he gives for our good because he loves us. Third proof.

Verse 4. Everyone who has been born of God overcomes the world. Now what does that mean? You can define it by going what the opposite would be.

It means that we haven't been overcome by the world. The world with all its evil and uncertainty and sin and darkness cannot extinguish in us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God.

[10 : 19] God's light has shone into our hearts in the face of Jesus Christ and the fire of his Holy Spirit now burns within us and the darkness cannot overcome it. Verse 4 goes on.

This is the victory that has overcome the world. Our faith. Who is it that overcomes the world? Only the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God.

First, faith in Christ. Second, love for God and his children. And third, victory over evil. These are the proofs that show for certain you are a child of God.

The second certainty in our chapter is certainty in what we believe about his Son. How can we be certain the Christian faith is true? That's what this section is all about.

The entire Christian message hinges on one person. Jesus. He is the cornerstone of the Gospel. Cut him out and there's nothing left.

[11 : 22] Our chapter tells us Jesus is the source of life. It tells us through him God gives us eternal life because he is God's Son and he is the Christ.

Unbelievably high claims. But how do we know any of this is true? How can any of us know for certain that Jesus is who the Bible says he is?

And not just some great teacher or inspirational leader or even mythical character of history. The Christian faith is put on trial in verses 6 to 13.

And the testimony that is admitted into the court of public opinion, the star witness on which the entire case stands is God himself. God is called to testify to show us who Jesus is.

Look at verse 9. This is the testimony of God that he has borne concerning his Son. God gives us his testimony to show us who Jesus is.

[12 : 23] And God's testimony is based upon three things in verses 7 to 8. The Spirit, the water, and the blood. So may it please the court to admit three pieces of evidence.

Exhibit A, exhibit B, and exhibit C. Exhibit A, verse 6. Jesus, the Son of God, is he who came by water. First piece of evidence in God's testimony is the water.

Two generations after this letter was written, there was a Christian named Tertullian, and he writes, very convincingly, that the water refers to Jesus' baptism. I think he's right.

Jesus' baptism was at the very beginning of his public ministry. And remember, when Jesus goes to the river and John the Baptist baptizes him, as soon as Jesus emerges from the water, do you remember what happens?

We're told through eyewitness testimonies that heaven itself is ripped open. God's Holy Spirit descends like a dove and rests on Jesus, abides in him, and then a voice from heaven booms over all creation, this is my beloved Son.

[13 : 29] In him I am overjoyed. That's the testimony of God. Exhibit A, the water, the baptism of Jesus, where God himself testifies that Jesus is his Son.

Exhibit B of God's testimony is also in verse 6 and it's called the blood. Again, the earliest Christian accounts we have, about 60 years after the letter was written, say the blood refers to Jesus' death on the cross, the very end of his earthly ministry.

On the cross, Jesus died. And at his death, his identity was revealed for the whole world. We read in the Gospels, again, these are eyewitness accounts and therefore admissible as evidence that darkness covered the land despite it being noon.

The ground shook. The temple curtain separating God and people was ripped in two from top to bottom. And we even read in Matthew that some who had died were resurrected at the moment of Jesus' death.

After all of this, a Roman centurion, who's another eyewitness to Jesus' blood shed on the cross, testifies, surely this was the Son of God. The blood reveals who Jesus is and why he came.

[14 : 50] His death shows that he came to take upon himself the sin of the world, to die in our place so that we might be forgiven and born again as children of God and be given eternal life through him.

The blood reveals God's will that he so loves the world that he would give up his only Son to save it. So, so far two pieces of evidence in God's testimony, exhibit A and B.

And both of them are historical events that are based on eyewitness accounts observed in human history. They're objective truths.

Their claims can be scrutinized and examined to determine their validity. There was a recent attempt to disprove the resurrection because a guy's wife was interested in becoming a Christian.

He was horrified. He was a journalist. So he set out to disprove Christianity, to bring his wife back to her senses. His name was Lee Strobel and despite being an atheist, hell-bent on disproving the crucifixion, he was actually converted when he examined the evidence.

[15 : 59] His research is now published in his book which is called The Case for Christ. It's very good. So exhibit A and B, the water and the blood, are objective proofs based on historical facts to prove Jesus' identity and ministry.

But we still have one piece of evidence. Exhibit C is a subjective proof. Verse 6 ends, The Spirit is the one who testifies because the Spirit is the truth.

So we have objective evidence for our faith, historical accounts, but we also have subjective evidence. God, the Holy Spirit, the truth, who testifies to our hearts, turning us to God and enabling our faith in his Son.

The water and the blood are events that happened 2,000 years ago, but the Spirit is God at work in the world today and his presence and his power can be known by us and experienced in our own lives.

The Spirit is doing a work today of turning our hearts to God. The Spirit is at work in this community right now.

[17 : 13] Now, the Holy Spirit has caused some of you to be born of God. Some of you have put faith in Jesus for the first time in the past couple weeks.

I can testify to the truth of this. The Holy Spirit is at work in the world and what causes us to be born of God and to believe in his Son and to love the Father and his children and to be empowered to overcome the world is the work of his Spirit today.

You can know the Holy Spirit in your life. He is available to all of us at work even now drawing people to God and he is the third piece of evidence, the third exhibit in God's testimony to the identity of his Son.

This is the testimony of God that he has given us eternal life and this life is in the life of his Son. This is what the water and the blood and the Spirit have shown us for certain.

Which is why this section ends in verse 13 by telling us that John has written these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know you have eternal life.

[18 : 26] You can have certainty in what you believe and therefore we can have certainty that we have eternal life in Christ. The final certainty, the third certainty, the rest of the chapter is about certainty in how we should live.

So first we've looked at certainty that we belong to God, we're beloved by God. Second, certainty in what we believe about Jesus, the Son of God. And now thirdly, certainty in how we are called to behave as children of God.

Beloved, believe, behave. Verse 14 begins to answer the question how should we live in a way perhaps that's a surprise. This is the confidence we have towards God that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us.

And if we know He hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests that we have asked of Him. So how should we live?

Well, first we should be certain that God is our Father and He hears us and He grants whatever we ask according to His will. Do you believe that?

[19 : 42] This is the confidence we can have, the certainty. We can ask the God of the universe for anything and He hears us. More than that, we can have confidence not only that He hears us, but that we have the requests we ask of Him according to His will.

Now this is not a blanket offer to pray for silly things. It says that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us.

Our prayers have to align with God's good and perfect will. John helpfully gives us an example in verse 16 of what this could look like in all of our lives.

Verse 16, If anyone sees his brother or sister committing a sin not leading to death, they shall ask and God will give them life to those who commit sins that do not lead to death.

This verse is talking about a Christian who sees another Christian tripping up as they follow Jesus, making a mistake, falling into temptation, into sin.

[20 : 49] How should we behave when we see a sister or a brother sin? John tells us we should pray. Verse 16 tells us that if we ask, God will give that other Christian life.

He will deliver them from their sin, meaning their sin will not lead to their death. Christians sin. That's why we begin every service on our knees, confessing our sins.

And then we hear through those words of absolution that our sin is forgiven by God's grace through Christ's cross. So when you see another Christian tripping up, sinning, our reflex should be to pray for them.

And if we do, John writes with certainty that God will give them life. In verse 17, John adds parenthetically that there are, of course, sins that do lead to death.

And he tells us he's not talking about those sins here. He also doesn't tell us what that means. I think sin leading to death is referring to sin committed by someone who isn't born of God, who doesn't believe in Jesus, nor love God or his people.

[22 : 05] So a sin that leads to death, therefore, means a sin that is committed unrepentantly, without any remorse, or any appeal to God for forgiveness. It refers to sin that is habitual, routine, chronic, casually committed, without a worry or care for God or his will.

It is the sin of an unbeliever, or the sin of one who has abandoned Jesus to pursue evil instead. But John's not talking about that.

The point of the passage is to underline the critical importance of our prayer for one another. Our prayers sustain each other in faith. God will give life to people based upon the prayers of other Christians.

And so, therefore, with full confidence, we should pray big, seemingly impossible prayers. Outrageous prayers. Prayers said with full confidence that God can do anything, and he will do it if we ask him.

I'm not amazing at prayer. This came up in my discernment for ordination. It's a discipline in my life that I need to work hardest to keep up.

[23 : 25] And yet, despite my own weakness in this area, I have had miraculous prayers answered in my life. because my faith does not depend upon my faithfulness, but upon God's grace.

Because God answers our prayer according to his will. Now, I've had many prayers not answered as well, or prayers that have not been answered yet.

And in those, I try to trust God's good and perfect will, and to entrust myself and others to him. John invites us to have full confidence to approach God and to pray big prayers.

James tells us, you do not have because you do not ask. We're invited to draw near to God, and he will draw near to you. We're told in Philippians, in everything, with prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.

And I think this is the invitation on how we, as a church, should now live as we enter our second century. on our knees, confident that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us.

[24 : 36] A couple concrete examples. We have a committee right now discerning who to appoint as our new rector. At the same time, many of you are involved in the effort to search for a permanent physical space for us to exist in as a church and do ministry in Vancouver.

These initiatives need prayer. In both, we must not lean on our own understanding, but be looking to God. We have visitors every week coming into this community who want to know the gospel of Jesus Christ.

And right now, basically, all of our groups are full. We need new groups and new leaders who can accommodate them. And so let's pray to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into the ripe fields of Vancouver.

We want to see more and more young people and families and children at our church. We want to see our kids who have wandered from the way of Jesus return home to him.

We must pray to God who hears us and who is at work in the world today. We want to share Christ with our city and our world.

[25 : 51] We want mission to be our passion and our purpose. We want to grow in our faith and help others to grow as well. None of this happens without prayer, without God's Holy Spirit at work in us and through us.

So let's pray what we're going to do in just a minute, confident that our Father in Heaven will answer our prayer according to his will. The world wakes up this morning shrouded in uncertainty and fear and anxiety.

God equips us in 1 John chapter 5 with certainty. Certainty the world is desperate for. Good news in a world full of bad news.

Telling us we are born of God, that we can be certain what we believe about Jesus and that we can be certain if we ask God for anything according to his will, we will receive it.

And as we step out into the world, go with these words, which is how John finishes his letter. The Son of God has come and has given us understanding that we may know him who is true.

[27 : 04] And we are in him who is true by being in his Son, Jesus Christ. He is the true God and eternal life. Dear children, keep yourselves from idols.

Amen.