

John 20:30-31 "That You May Believe"

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[0 : 00] You are listening to a message from Southwood Presbyterian Church in Huntsville, Alabama.! Our passion is to experience and express grace. Join us.

Many of you, like me, enjoy reading biographies. We enjoy meeting in the pages of a book someone perhaps we've never met before, maybe someone we've met but have not known in that way, and we get to encounter them right there. Sometimes that's the purpose of a biography, right, to inform you about a person. Often the book's written to encourage you to admire the one whose story it tells. Perhaps there's something particular about that person that you're really able to relate to or that you want to emulate in your own life and so you love reading it.

For the past two years, we have been reading John's biography of Jesus of Nazareth so that we can encounter this most influential person in the history of the world. But the purpose that this biography was written is unique. I mean, yes, there are certainly things to learn. There's character to admire. There are actions of Jesus to emulate. But John has even loftier visions for us when he writes.

There are three stories left. They have a particular focus in the final chapter. We'll get to those the next three weeks. But we have already reached the pinnacle of Jesus' story with his resurrection, right, on Easter, his encounter with Thomas, and his fears and his doubts. And Pastor Derek last week so helpfully showed us how Jesus loves to show up in just those places in our lives. That those struggles are places where our faith grows and in fact finds a place to rest in Jesus. See, Jesus calls Thomas to believe, right? John is going to remind us this morning that the purpose of all that he has told us about Jesus is that not just Thomas, that we may believe. In case you haven't noticed in two years, this slide, there's a unique purpose for John's gospel. Thomas responds to the risen Jesus, doesn't he? What does he say?

My Lord and my God. He bows. He believes in a way that changes everything for him. This is belief that that re-centers, that re-shapes all of our lives. And I don't want any of us to miss the purpose of a book that we've read for two years or maybe that you'll get your first taste of today.

[3 : 09] Having encountered Jesus, he calls every single one of us to respond. I want to give each of us an opportunity to do exactly that this morning, to respond to God. So first let's listen to God's word together. John chapter 20 at verse 30, God's word for you. Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples which are not written in this book. But these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

Will you pray with me? Holy Spirit, would you help us? Would you help us to see Jesus? Would you speak his truth through our hearts? Would you show us our Savior?

Savior, help us, Spirit, through this word. We ask in Jesus' name. Amen. There's no new story here this morning in these two verses. Rather, we get what's unusual in this biographical account of Jesus. We get an appeal from God to those of us reading, to believe, to believe, to have faith. Not just generic faith, but faith in someone specific, that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. Jesus is to be the focus of our faith.

So who is Jesus? What is it that we're to believe as we believe in him? Who is he? He's the Son of God. Why would we believe that Jesus is divine? I mean, that's pretty unusual, right? You don't walk around seeing people and thinking, there's God and there's God. That's not what we normally think of people we run into. But John has recounted so many miracles, signs that show us who Jesus is. That is literally their point. All of these signs point to his identity, to his authority over creation, right? Changing water to wine, feeding 5,000 with five loaves and two fish, walking on water. His power over disease. We've seen him heal the official son, heal the paralytic while forgiving his sins, heal the man born blind. And then, of course, his rule over death itself, as he

brings Lazarus back to life. And ultimately, of course, his own death and resurrection. If this is indeed the risen Jesus as eyewitness after eyewitness confirms for us, then everything that he says is true, right? When he says, I am the bread of life, the light of the world, the good shepherd, the way, the truth, and the life. In fact, the resurrection and the life. Then if this is this Jesus alive, we have to believe him. He can't merely be a decent teacher. Kind of a good moral guy. He claims to forgive sins, to give life to people, to be worthy of worship. He's demonstrated through his actions, not merely to have power, but truly to be the Son, one with God the Father, as he claims. Well, what does Jesus come to do? To be the Christ. That means the Messiah, the promised king who will rescue his people. And maybe, to be fair, not the kind of Messiah many of them were expecting, but he has come, we learn, to take away the sins of the world, to bring God's enemies into his family, to rule with power, certainly as a king, but from the cross and over the grave, these things are written that you may believe that Jesus is the incarnation of God himself. God in flesh come to rescue you, come to bring you home to him, to have relationship with you, so that you may believe that nothing can keep God from rescuing you. That's why these are written. That's why we've been studying them. He's saying to you this morning, stop kicking, stop fighting against the riptide and rest in the arms of the one who came to give you life, to bring you safely home. [8 : 22] Well, actually, let me read the fine print. That's really important on something this big. It's not just believe, is it? I mean, it can't be that easy for something this significant. Follow the footnote in your Bible. If you'll look with me there at verse 31, look closely that you may believe, you see the asterisk there? And live the way he tells you to for a good long while and then get life. Is that in your footnote? No. And you know what? Believe and understand correctly the age of the earth, the divine and human natures of Jesus, and the problem of evil, and then you get life.

No. Believe and send three easy payments of \$19.99 or 10% of your income for the rest of your life, and then you get life. No. There's no footnote in your Bible. There's no asterisk. There is no disclaimer. This is free, undiluted grace. You can't earn it. You don't deserve it, but you receive this. Nothing else is needed but trusting Jesus. He does the work. That's why Jesus said earlier in John that the work of God is to believe in the one that he has sent. Now listen, there's always more to learn. There's always room to grow, but there is beauty in this simplicity. Whoever believes in him has eternal life. Believe in the Lord Jesus and you will be saved because you know him. You know the Savior, he is that great. See, that's what faith is all about. Faith is about trusting the right object. That's the focus of our faith, the object of Jesus. Every one of us here in this room this morning exercised faith as we came in. Did you know that? Every one of us sat down in one of these pews and we trusted that they would hold us up. It appears all of them did. So glad for that. For all of us, not just those who showed up on time. We haven't yet perfected the collapsible pew for those who come in five minutes late. It's not the way it works. See, these pews hold you up not because of the certainty that you have that they will do that. It's not because each of us understood the finer points of architecture and load-bearing and sat in just the right spot. It's not because we all felt comfortable in these pews all the time. That's not what does it. It wasn't anything in us, but something in the object of our faith that held us. That's the way it works with Jesus. He, after all, is the Christ, the Son of God. You bring Him your doubts. You bring Him your fears. You bring Him your questions and your confusion and you say, but I believe that you are who you say you are. I can trust you to hold me up today. On the day when my life is really messy and I can't seem to fix it, even on the day that I die, I believe you will hold me up. And so every day forever you will hold me. Jesus wants you to know that you can trust Him. That's why these were written. He wants you to know that you can trust Him and understand that when you do, you'll have life. It's like a lifeguard running to, you know, grabbing you to bring you in and saying, I've got you. I've got you. That's the fruit of faith. We've hinted at it already, right? By believing, that's all, you may have life in His name. Life through Jesus, with Jesus, how is that possible? Is that just church talk? Well, John told us in the beginning that in Him, in Jesus, was life. And over and over, as people believe through Jesus' story, all sorts of people, all the way up to Thomas in this chapter, when people believe, everything changes. Real life, abundant life, free life, fulfilling life, fulfilling life, eternal life, the life you were made for, it starts happening when you believe. John 1, those who believe become children of God. Not children born naturally, but reborn from God to a new life. John 3, those who believe receive eternal life. Not condemnation, ever. John 6, those who believe never thirst, fully satisfied life forever. John 7, those who believe actually have rivers of living water flowing from them, Holy Spirit-empowered life. John 11, those who

believe in Jesus have lasting life, even when they die. John 12, those who believe don't walk in darkness, but have light of true life.

[14:28] See, this is not just some pie in the sky believing. Belief is always connected to life.

It's this faith, this believing in Jesus is believing that changes your life. I mean, either Mary standing outside that tomb in the garden has a dead rabbi, a failed Messiah, demons who will now overpower her, and no one to help, or Jesus is alive and gives her true life, joy in their relationship, security, purpose, hope, life. Either Thomas has wasted three years of his life. He should now be fearing for his life. He has no future.

Or Jesus is alive and gives him true life. A savior to forgive his doubts and his sins. A lord to follow. A god to worship.

There is no halfway Jesus. You see, he shows up and he changes everything. I mean, just think about this promise of life for a minute in the Gospel of John.

We're told that in him is life. Jesus himself then promises that life is found in knowing him, in relationship with him.

[15:59] And imagine that you're one of his followers and you're hearing that. And I bet as you follow him around, you start to think, you know, this whole finding life in Jesus thing, it's going to cost me something.

There's other places where I might find life. The good life might seem to be that I can't choose if I'm with him. Like the personal comfort thing.

The self-promotion. The social influence and connection. Self-indulgence, doing whatever I want. This might cost me.

And then that night he's hanging on the cross and you're looking and you're thinking, yeah. Yeah, I was right. That would really cost me.

In fact, that doesn't look much like life to me at all. I think I'm all out on life in you, Jesus. Or, on the other hand, if he rises from the dead, then resurrection life is real life.

[17:06] It's life I can count on with unparalleled purpose of living with him, sharing of his life. Now, Jesus, I'm all in for that. The promise of John and of Jesus is that the result of believing in Jesus, the fruit of your faith in him is life.

True, abundant, eternal life you were made for in relationship with Jesus. And it's fruit that keeps growing. Life you get to keep living in every situation.

This is what I mean by it keeps growing. I'm not merely talking about a one-time choice to believe and a one-time ticket to heaven one day, someday.

I'm talking about a Jesus you believe in and a life that you live with him now in every situation.

That's the fruit of believing in Jesus. See, if you track through the whole gospel, John lays out for us believing in Jesus as a progressive and ongoing faith.

It's all the way back in chapter 2 that the disciples believe in Jesus for the first time. He turns water into wine and they're like, the disciples believed in Jesus. But you know what?

[18:17] Chapter 2 wasn't the end. They go through a lot of stuff after that. There are a lot more situations where they again believe in Jesus.

It happens in all sorts of situations. Maybe you can relate to some of these. When facing doubts. When grieving a loved one.

When threatened. When battling illness. When troubled in heart. When alone and afraid. When enduring job change.

When well provided for. When hungry and food is in short supply. In each of these situations, we are to believe that Jesus is God and Christ.

He is in control. He has come to rescue me. He's with me. He's the point of this situation. Whatever it is. He's got me. And he'll never let me go.

[19:15] And I've got to believe it again. Where do you need to believe in Jesus? Jesus. The late pastor Tim Keller says he believed in Jesus for many, many years.

Before being diagnosed late in life with thyroid cancer. And then he said, I had to believe in Jesus afresh. Again.

It was different. Who was for him when he hurt and struggled? Who would unfailingly hold him up when his strength failed? Who would give him hope in the face of death?

Is that where you are today? Needing to believe again that Jesus is the Christ. So he's got you.

And those you love. I grew up believing in Jesus. He would always be there when I, if I needed him.

[20 : 18] Right? Might happen. But then I got to college and got exposed. I was not as put together as I thought I was.

I was not as cool as I hoped I was. Hard to believe, I know. I was not as successful as I wanted to be. I couldn't please everyone.

I couldn't fix everything. Was life in me and having the success and having the friends and having the performance that I wanted? Or was it really in Jesus? I had to believe again that Jesus was the Son of God.

And knowing him and his Father was true life. Is that where you are today? As you head to college? Or as your son or daughter does?

Needing to believe again that Jesus is life? Life's not even in college? College? At the beginning of this series a couple years ago, I told you I was living in the midst of a week where nothing seemed to go right.

[21 : 28] Where if life was about the abundance of my possessions, spending those resources the way I wanted, or being the husband, father, homeowner that I wanted to be, life was bad.

I realized this week, very little had changed in that regard in two years. One problem beyond my control seems to replace another.

If you don't know what I mean, it's pictured best for me right now in my backyard shed. For a couple of years, I've not been able to control the squirrels living in this shed.

Every time I open the door, they go crazy like nobody's ever opened the door before. They scramble around, they make a new mess because the exit must be in a different place, and then they finally find their way out the same hole. Nothing that I do controls them.

But now they're gone. Replaced last week by the raccoon who ran them out so that she could give birth to her babies in the wall of my shed.

[22 : 37] Talk about beyond my control. I'm not fighting that battle. That's really no big deal in my shed. But isn't that like our lives?

One problem beyond our control just replaces another. There are way too many things in my life that I can't fix. As a parent who needs to believe that Jesus, not me, is the one who rescues my children.

As a friend who hurts with friends who lose loved ones, and I can't bring them back from the dead. Jesus does that, but I don't. As a pastor who wants to live for Jesus and lead others to do the same, but often gets distracted himself.

And sometimes hurts so deeply with people that he doesn't know what to say or how to pray. See, if life is about me, if I'm believing in me as our default is, I'm in bad shape.

There is no hope. But if a man, parent, friend, pastor like me can say, hey, good news, I'm not the Christ.

[23 : 52] But Jesus is. I'm not God. But Jesus is. And he's alive. And he's in control. And he's rescuing me.

And he's with me. And he's holding me. And he's not going to let me go. Because no one can snatch me out of his hand. And in him is hope. And in him is life. Then all I've got to do is believe again.

And I've got life. Because that's where it is. And he hasn't gone anywhere. Where's Jesus calling you to believe today?

Have you never really trusted him as God, your savior? Is that where you are? You're really, if you're honest, standing alone before God, on your own, recognizing already that you can't measure up.

That you have problems beyond your control. If that's where you are, what a great day to believe in Jesus and have life.

[24 : 56] Maybe you're here and you do believe in Jesus. Maybe you have for many years, but you are presently struggling to believe that he's got you. Or that he's the one who will rescue you.

Or that he is the one worthy of your trusting with all of the problems beyond your control. And there are a lot of them. What a great day to believe in Jesus and to have life in him.

I'd like to give you an opportunity to respond to that call to believe right now. To have someone listen to you.

To have someone pray with you as you believe in Jesus. Maybe as you consider believing in Jesus. If you're here often, this is like a Presbyterian altar call.

Those were nervous laughs. That means if in the next few minutes you feel awkward, you comfort yourself by knowing Pastor Will feels more awkward than I do right now.

[26 : 01] He feels very awkward. But God's calling us not to sit and listen and say, hmm. But to respond. He wants us to believe in Jesus.

Awkward is not the goal. Trusting God's spirit. To work through his word. To work faith in us. Is the goal. Our leaders here at Southwood love the chance to pray with you.

To know what's going on in your heart and in your life. So this morning we're going to spend a few minutes praying. And singing. And praying. And if you want someone to pray with you about trusting Jesus.

If that's for the first time. If that's for the hundredth time. Maybe there's a neighbor that you've been praying for to trust Jesus as we've been studying in the gospel of John.

We'd love to do that with you. We're going to do that now. In just a minute we're going to stand to sing a hymn. You're comforted that DJ is up here. Not just me. Some of our leaders will come to the front sides down here by the window.

[27 : 09] Some down here by the wall. Others are going to go across the back. If that's a more comfortable place for you to go to find one of them. As we stand to sing you can slip out.

And find one of them to pray with you. They're delighted to listen to some of your story. If you can't say anything and you just want to say pray for me. That's fine. But they'd love to pray specifically.

If you're able to share some of what you're feeling. They would love to be able to do that. Will you pray with me as we ask God to help us believe him and trust Jesus?

Jesus it's by your grace that we're saved through faith. Even that's not of ourselves. It's a gift from you. There's nothing that we do so we won't boast.

We boast in nothing but the cross of Jesus. Where you paid it all. So we could know life with you.

Oh for grace to trust you more Jesus.

[28 : 14] Today. Come Holy Spirit. Grow faith in Jesus. In each of us. Wherever we are. In Jesus name.

Amen. Amen. For more information. Visit us online at southwate.org Thank you.