

The True God and Eternal Life

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[0 : 00] Good evening and a very warm welcome to this evening's live stream. From wherever you're watching, I pray that God will bless you and he'll bless us all through and during this short service of worship.

We're going to begin tonight by a reading and it's from the Gospel of John chapter 10 and from verse 22 through to verse 42. So that's the Gospel of John chapter 10 verses 22 to 42.

The works that I do in my Father's name bear witness about me, but you do not believe because you are not part of my flock. My sheep hear my voice and I know them and they follow me. I give them eternal life and they will never perish and no one will snatch them out of my hand. My Father who has given them to me is greater than all and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand.

I and the Father are one. The Jews picked up stones again to stone him. Jesus answered them, I have shown you many good works from the Father, for which of them are you going to stone me?

[1 : 36] The Jews answered him, it is not for a good work that we are going to stone you, but for blasphemy, because you being a man make yourself God. Jesus answered them, is it not written in your law, I said you are gods?

If he called them gods to whom the word of God came, and scripture cannot be broken, Do you say of him whom the Father consecrated and sent into the world, you are blaspheming, because I said I am the Son of God?

If I am not doing the works of my Father, then do not believe me. But if I do them, even though you do not believe me, believe the works, that you may know and understand that the Father is in me and I am in the Father.

Again they sought to arrest him, but he escaped from their hands. He went away again across the Jordan to the place where John had been baptising at first, and there he remained.

And many came to him, and they said, John did no sign, but everything that John said about this man was true, and many believed in him there.

[2 : 44] We pray that God will add his blessing to that reading of his word. Let's now join together in prayer. Let's call upon the Lord in prayer. Almighty and gracious God, we give thanks tonight that we are able to approach you in worship, and that we do so collectively as well as individually.

We thank you, Lord, that though we are not physically together, yet we are able to share together in the worship of your great name, that we are able to pray to you and hear the prayers of your people we beseech you.

We give thanks that we are able to read your word, that we are able to give our mind to its teaching for a short time. We give thanks that we are able to join in praise together, the praise of your glorious name.

And we thank you, Lord, for all that you are to us, for everything you mean to your people, for all that you are in yourself. We do give thanks for all that you give to us, but we give thanks above that for all that you are in yourself, and for all that makes you glorious and great, for all that marks you as you are revealed to us in your word.

We pray, O Lord, tonight that we may know something even more of your greatness, that we may understand more fully the wonder of your grace, the glories of your being and of your works of wonder.

[4 : 12] And we ask, O gracious God, that you would help us as we come to interact once more with your word, that we may do so in such a way that will feed our souls. We ask that whatever our relationship with you or with one another is tonight, that we may be enriched by your word, that we may know the benefit of fellowship with you as we come to you in the name of Jesus Christ.

O Lord, our God, we thank you for the gospel. We pray that the gospel message, as it goes forth today, in the different ways in which that is done, may truly be blessed to your people and to many others besides, that they will come to be drawn into the number of your people.

We ask that you would grant encouragement to your people in the midst of all that is taking place in the world, the many restrictions that cause so much in the way of anxiety and fear, and perhaps even doubt and astonishment.

Lord, we give thanks that your word is designed for our situations in life, that whatever they may be and however much they may change from one day to the next or from one generation to another, your word is truth.

Your word remains true. And your word remains as the medium by which you have revealed yourself to us and through which you bless your own people. We thank you tonight that we can come with our confession of sin, our own personal sins, and the sins of the people we belong to.

[5 : 43] For we know that this is a part of what your word teaches, that many others before us of your people have come before you with the confession of sin, in part to bring to you their nation, their people.

We do so, Lord, tonight as well for ourselves. Bless us, we pray, as a people, at this time of anxiety. We pray, Lord, when your providence has brought us to such confinement and so many restrictions, that you would enable us to appreciate all the more the freedom with which your people are made free in Christ, that abounds to us in the gospel.

We ask, Lord, tonight that each of us may know that freedom, that liberty with which Christ makes us free, so that whatever events take place in our experience in life, we may know that your salvation is above that and that you take care of your people through each eventuality.

We pray tonight for those who are troubled. We ask, oh Lord, especially for those troubled over this virus, who have the illness themselves, who find it in their families.

We pray that you bless them. Lord, we ask that you would bring a quick relief to us, in intervening in such a way in your power as will come to stem the spread of this virus further.

[7 : 08] Help us, we pray, as people, to be sensible and obedient to the advice we receive from those who are best qualified to give us that instruction.

We pray tonight, too, for those, Lord, who have lost loved ones in these times. We pray in this last week when we know of so many additional deaths that brought to our notice.

Lord, bless every family, we pray, that have such an affliction at this time. Bless those who need to face funeral services without the usual gatherings together and without such a gathering of people as would normally be to show their last respects.

Lord, we know that such situations bring us added tension and anxiety and grief. We commit them to you and ask that you would be pleased, Lord, to bless and guide them at this time.

Remember, again, those who work in our hospitals, in care homes and clinics, every way in which frontline services, Lord, are engaged at this difficult time for them.

[8 : 17] Bless paramedics, bless all others and engage, Lord, in dealing with those who are in need and grant that you protect and care for them. We give thanks for their dedication and we recognise that some, Lord, have died as a result of being so committed to the care of others.

Help us, Lord, we pray, for we look to you for our help at all times. For our help and our strength comes from the Lord and we seek you, Lord, at this time in our desperate straits that you would reveal yourself to us as a God of mercy, God of grace and a God who is a God who listens to the prayer of your people.

Receive us, we pray, in Jesus' name. Amen. I'm going to read again a short passage and this time it's from the first letter of John and chapter 5 verses 20 to 21.

Just these two verses. 1 John 5 and verses 20 to 21. 1 John 5 and we know that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding so that we may know him who is true and we are in him who is true in his Son, Jesus Christ.

He is the true God and eternal life. Little children, keep yourselves from idols. Well, I would like tonight for those who belong to Stornoway Free Church especially, though you may have of course been receiving of our sermons and services online before now, before the restrictions.

[9 : 50] I'm going to try and finish our studies of 1 John. We've already had 19 studies in this letter and this is obviously tonight number 20 where we come to this final couple of verses at the end of 1 John and if you haven't accessed them before you can find all our sermons, not just mine but Kenny's and other previous pastors as well, they're on our website at Stornoway Free Church and

you can see and check up on that or even go back and listen to others as well.

So these couple of verses that we find here, John is actually rounding off his letter in a way that both undergirds the gospel and the Christian salvation that he's so keen to emphasise but at the same time undermines the structures of all the heresies that he's been dealing with or the main heretical points that have come through in the letter.

So there's a wonderful emphasis there isn't there on the fact that through this teaching John is doing both things. He's undergirding the gospel, he's assuring these disciples, these people of God of what the gospel is and how they can be certain in what God has given them and at the same time he's seeking to demolish further and erode the teaching of the heretics that he's been facing in this situation.

And in these verses 20 to 21 we can trace a logical thread through these two verses. First of all the Son of God has come he says and then that leads to saying that he has come and given us an understanding.

That's the reason he came according to these two verses and in giving us an understanding he's given us an understanding so that we may know him who is through. That's the reason he came and gave us this understanding.

[11 : 37] And then he moves from that to something very closely related to that where he says we are in him who is true or we are in him who is the truth or is true.

And that really gives the people he's writing to and indeed ourselves a further assurance of our position in relation to God through Christ. That it's something that sets us in a unique position. position a position in which God himself has placed us securely. And he rounds it off by a wonderful piece of counsel or advice which really shows his pastoral care.

Little children guard yourselves from the idols. That's the thread in general terms. Let's go through it in a bit more detail and just open it out a little bit as we come to see the various points along the way.

The Son of God he says has come. The incarnation of the Son of God the Son of God Jesus Christ becoming flesh becoming human has been of such crucial importance to John all the way through this letter as we've seen.

[12 : 46] He's been emphasizing Jesus is God Jesus is fully human Jesus is the Christ and other things relating to these teachings that are foundational for the Christian faith and for our Christian assurance.

And now he's saying the Son of God has come. But notice how he said we know that the Son of God has come. Now if you recall the previous few verses in chapter 5 he has also been using the similar type language we know for John assurance is important being sure of God's truth being sure of who God is what God has done of our relationship to God so much a part of what he wants to convey to those that he's writing to here.

So he's saying we know that the Son of God has come. There's two uses of the verb to know but it's different words. We'll come to the second one shortly but this one it has the idea of knowing something as a fact knowing something in mind knowing something as historically true.

It's a bit like saying I know my wife's date of birth. That may be surprising to you but I do. I'm not going to tell you what it is because well that would give away her age and that wouldn't be good I'd get her out after the sermon.

I know her date of birth it's a matter of fact it's historically true. And when John is telling us the likes of verse 4 in this chapter this is the victory which overcomes the world even our faith he's been concerned to show that our faith does not rest on theories.

[14 : 23] Our faith does not rest on human ideas on human philosophies he's actually been rebutting some of these philosophies as they've come from the heretics that he's facing that he's countering that he's countering now what he's saying here is this faith that we have in Christ is grounded in historical fact the fact of his coming and in fact that's the most important fact in his whole argument yeah you might say well but surely the death of Christ is the most important fact or the resurrection of Christ is the most important fact well yes in that way but they are all by John in his theology they're really packed into this one great fact of the son of God's coming into the world and everything that John says about the death of Christ the resurrection of Christ if you check it out in his gospel you can see that he's relating that to the fact of his coming for John this is the great fact that the son of God has come and isn't that the great fact that undergirds your own life and my life tonight isn't that really the foundation of every

Christian and every Christian walk every Christian individual isn't that what really undergirds our worship isn't that why we come as we do together from time to time to worship God it's based on the fact that the son of God has come and that that contains everything that God has done in Christ for our salvation but he doesn't just say we know that the son of God has come he says he has come and given us an understanding and we have to keep these two things together the fact that he has come and the fact that he has given us an understanding he has come and the result of it he has given us an understanding his coming has resulted in his giving of this understanding to us now what is this understanding well the understanding really here means something like the ability or the capacity to know God we'll see in a minute how that relates to him who is through but the capacity the understanding the ability to know God to know God for ourselves is something that Jesus has given to his people you know we frequently meet with the assertion of the challenge to the Christian faith and to us as we as we try to relate the Christian faith as individual

Christians in the world as churches you come across the assertion that you cannot really prove those things like the incarnation like the resurrection of Jesus the miracles that Jesus did you can't really prove that you can't put it into some sort of scientific system of proof where you then have a result and say well now I believe it and therefore people say you people really you Christians why do you believe things that you cannot prove well that's not actually quite true it's not true that you can't believe them you can't prove them in order to believe them because what John is saying to him and saying to us through this is you cannot prove them outwith of this understanding you can't prove them outwith of the mind that Christ gives to his people this is part of what is included in being born again he gives you a change of mind a new mind a renewed mind he gives you in your soul to know and appreciate truth which you didn't know before until God came until Jesus came and gave you this understanding and when he's given you this understanding yes it's something indeed you can't put into a laboratory and prove to be true in a scientific way but every Christian in his heart and her heart knows that

Jesus has come and given us this understanding that the Bible is God's word that the resurrection is historically factually true you cannot get to that outside of the understanding but Jesus has come the son of God has come and given us this understanding and tonight when you come to Jesus when you receive Jesus when you come to accept the Jesus who offers himself in the gospel this is what comes with him this wonderful change this wonderful new birth through the Holy Spirit he gives us that understanding and what for most in the world certainly for for atheism or secularism whatever ism it is that challenges the gospel and challenges the validity of these things that we say are factually historically true and we believe them this is actually what you and I actually come to know of we come to know that this is the mind that Jesus has given us we has given us this understanding but why has he given us this understanding what is the objective what is the end result of this son of

God has come we know factually it's true and he has given us this understanding this capacity to know God so he says that we may know him who is true that's why we have been given this understanding that we may know God the one who is true now this is a different word here to the word know just again let me just run through the verse as it goes we know that the son of God has come and given us understanding so that we may know him who is true and the word know this time it's a bit different though closely related to the first know because this means knowing something by experience I mentioned I know as a fact my wife's birthday but if I use this word know I know something else I know her I know something more about her because I know her through relationship I know of her love and I know of trying to return that love that's all to do with relationship it's all to do with this matter of experience and here's the great thing that

[20 : 37] Jesus gives us this understanding so that we may experience God it's not something that just floats around in your mind that's not what makes you a Christian it's that you're in a living saving relationship with God that you have him as someone that you actually know that he is indeed someone who is real to you and that's what he's saying here that we may know him who is true I remember way back in John's Gospel chapter 17 the great prayer of Jesus where Jesus to the Father says this is eternal life that they may know you the only true God and Jesus Christ whom you have sent so there's the word know used of the God who is true and when he says true here John is saying that you may know we may know him who is true it's not the idea of true in contrast to false it's the idea of true in contrast to something that is unreal in other words the meaning of true here is something that is real and you know

God is real in this knowing of experience you know God is real because God has given you Jesus has given you this understanding so that you may know by experience that God is real you know the real God in your life and this word true is used of Jesus himself in John chapter 6 for example where he says I am the true bread which came down from heaven in contrast to the manna which through Moses was given to the people in Israel in the Old Testament Jesus is saying your fathers ate manna in the desert and they are dead my father gives you the true bread from heaven I am the true bread which came down from heaven in other words there's a reality to this bread and it's not just any kind of reality it's the reality of heaven itself the reality of the heavenliness of Jesus is what you find packed into this word through as it's used of

Jesus and of God so Christ has come the son of God has come and he's given us an understanding why so that we may know him who is true that's in the sense of God being real let me ask a question myself and of yourself tonight is God real to you is God real to you is he really in your life as someone who is really and truly personally experienced by you you have that you see through Christ when you come to accept Jesus you receive him as your saviour God enables you to receive him the Holy Spirit works in your heart and tonight if you're listening and you don't know Jesus for yourself well this is what the gospel encourages you to do come to him he's there in the gospel he's there in the bible just go on your knees ask him

Lord I need you I need to know you that you're real and your word tells me that I can know you as my father as a real spiritual heavenly father through your real son Jesus Christ so grant me faith to receive you to believe in you to experience you as real and John goes on secondly from speaking of the son of God has come he's saying we are in him who is true he's just said as we've seen so that we may know him who is true that's God the father especially and then he says we are in him who is true in his son Jesus Christ now this is for John as well as for other writers like Paul for example a hugely important matter to be in Christ remember Paul in his testimony in Philippians what he's saying about the background he had as a Pharisee as a Hebrew of the Hebrews he thought that he was going to be right with God through keeping the law by himself well he said these things

I could but lost why so that I may now know him that I may be found in him you know one of the greatest facts one of the most wonderful things to appreciate and to hold on to is that not only does God make a home in our hearts by the Holy Spirit but we have God himself as our ultimate home Jesus said in John 14 if we love him that he and the father would come and make an abode make their dwelling place with that person what an amazing thing that this great God who as Solomon said in dedicating the temple the heaven of heavens cannot contain him and he lives in your heart by faith in Christ he has your heart as his home and you have him as your home because you've come to live in him John is really saying this is exactly what he's counteracting what he's countering the his counteraction to the heresies who have disputed about the person of Jesus he's not fully God he's not fully man he's not this he's not that

[26 : 12] John is saying the son of God has come and he's given us an understanding that we may know him who is true and then and we are in him that is true we are in him that is true there is a spiritual inness if you like in the relationship between God and his people they dwell in him and he dwells in them really there's nothing more wonderful than that is there that we who brought upon ourselves the disaster of separation from God that God could justly have kept us in for all eternity that we through the love and the grace of God have come through faith in Christ to be reincorporated if you like into the life that is in this relationship with God and we are in him who is through and then he adds just by way of explanation I think and in his son we are in him who is through in his son Jesus Christ as if he's saying this is how you come to be in

God to have God as your dwelling place to have your life in God rooted in God you know Paul for example speaks about Adam the first Adam and Jesus the last Adam and if you go through Romans 6 just go through it tonight if you have time yourself and see how Paul is more or less saying God by his grace has transplanted us as people from being rooted in Adam and therefore rooted in death to being rooted in the last Adam and therefore rooted in eternal life we are in him the ocean in the world this that comes undisturbed this something that cannot be broken that God has placed us securely in himself in Christ we are in him who is true and then he goes on and he says this or he is the true God literally this is the true God and eternal life I'll just deal with that briefly he's really saying this God this real

God this father and this son and all they have done together and knowing him and experiencing this is eternal life you have it you're not waiting till you reach heaven before you can say I actually have I possess eternal life you're waiting till you get to heaven to have it completed to have it crowned to have it in the glory of heaven but you actually possess it when you are in God in his son in this true God this is eternal life let that be an assurance to you tonight in the midst of all that might be troubling you from what's happening in the world all that may be a worry to you everything that for you and for me tonight fills us sometimes with astonishment with alarm this is unaffected this is not going to ever be placed in lockdown never will it take place because we are in Christ we are if you like lockdown in him enclosed in him and in God already and then he says finally just to round it off little children keep yourself from idols well it's generally reckoned that John wrote from Ephesus that he was living there towards the end of his life as an apostle as a Christian and Ephesus of course was a place that was just full of idols a society of idolatry the temple of Artemis one of the great wonders of the time situated in Ephesus and we can take I think God as presented by the heretics to be part of what John is referring to when he says keep yourself from idols not just these carvings made of stone whatever you're made of that people actually create for themselves because when you create an alternative God you're creating an idol when you create a distortion of the true

God you're creating an idol because the heart that dethrones this true God will always enthrone an idol in his place and John is so concerned at the end of this wonderful epistle concerned that these beloved Christians to whom he's writing faced with all the danger that surround them surrounded by so much heresy having seen people even leaving the company of believers in that church that he's writing to and going out into the world with an alternative gospel John is saying little children keep yourselves from idols and the preposition from is important because the word keep actually means guard yourselves closely it means guard yourself from whatever it is tonight for you and for me this is where we make it relevant to ourselves whatever tonight you know is in danger of displacing [31 : 28] God even a little bit from the throne of your heart don't allow it to happen keep that throne of your heart exclusively for God for the Lord Jesus Christ keep yourselves guard yourselves from idols and let me finish with this little children it's a wonderfully poignant emotional ending to this letter he's used these words throughout the letter little children or my little children sometimes and it shows you the wonderfully pastoral passionate heart of John for these people that are under his charge and under his teaching and you know that's something that I feel tonight and I know Kenny feels it I'm sure every pastor called by God to preach the gospel and pastor his church that's what we're saying to you we know you as our little children we love you deeply we miss being with you we miss not seeing you we long for the time when we're again together in a way that's more than just electronically good though that is my little children this is really in the interim what we want for ourselves isn't it and this is the word

I leave with you tonight my little children keep yourselves from idols keep the throne of your heart for the Lord Jesus Christ amen let's pray again Lord our God we pray that your word will continue to be blessed to us during these times we we ask that you bless it to us as we have tonight interacted with its teaching help us we pray to realize its power in our own experience grant that we may know Lord of our relationship with you being more and more emphasized in our own experience we pray that through your word we may be drawn all the closer to him and that we may know the protective care of your Holy Spirit taking your truth and applying it to our hearts bless again all who heard the gospel tonight not only through this live stream but many others too we ask

Lord that your kingdom will grow and as it is in heaven receive this our thanks we pray and pardon all our sin and cleanse us for Jesus sake Amen We're going to sing again in conclusion this evening this time from Psalm 40 Our singing is from Psalm 40 and sing Psalms if you're using the usual blue Psalm books at home that's page 51 and the tune is Walton You did not ask that calves or goats be brought as sacrifice for sin but you have opened up my ears you did not seek burnt offering then I declared Lord I have come now these words as I'm sure you know in Hebrews chapter 10 are used of the Lord Jesus Christ so he's taking this Psalm the writer in Hebrews taking this as a prophecy of Christ and of his coming into the world so we sing these words with added emphasis really from what we had tonight then

I declare this is Jesus himself Lord I have come it's written of me in the scroll I want to do your will my God your law is in my heart and soul and it goes on to emphasize that Jesus did not keep anything back that needed to be revealed as he came to reveal and bring God to us so from verse 6

4 verses you did not ask that calves or goats be brought as sacrifice for sin but you have opened up my ears you did not seek and offering then

I declared Lord I have come it's written of me in the scroll I want to do your will my God your law your law is in my heart and soul in the assembly when it met your justice I proclaimed abroad I did I did not see my lips at all you know all this about me

[37 : 07] Lord I did not hide within my heart your saving grace and righteousness in the assembly I proclaim your steadfast love and faithfulness thank you again for watching and participating in this short live stream again I pray that God will continue to bless it to you and we'll close now with the benediction now may the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ the love of God the Father and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you now and ever more Amen