

The Message and Purpose of the Church

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[0 : 00] Let's turn again for a wee while to the section we read in John's Gospel, John chapter 5. We started reading there at verse 24.

Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He who does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life, and so on.

It's a large section, but just again by way of overview. As we said, Jesus had healed this man who was at the pool of Bethesda, caused a furore through doing that.

The religious leaders were mad at him, and they confronted him and challenged him. And Jesus then began to defend himself, not just to defend himself, but to tell them why he was doing what he was doing.

And they caught a kind of drift of his argument and what he was telling them. And they were able to understand that he was making himself equal to God.

[1 : 13] He was putting himself on a par with God. And that just put them over the edge. There was, from that moment, there was an absolute determination.

You could hear them saying one to another, he's got to go. That's it. We cannot have this person among us anymore. As far as they were concerned, he had pushed it to the very, very limit.

He had gone way beyond by calling himself or claiming an equality with God. But Jesus was showing them that he was equal with God because he said, I have come from the Father.

The Father has sent me. And my Father and I, our wills are the same. I don't do any single thing of myself. That's what Jesus is saying.

At no point am I doing any of what I do out of my own thinking or my own will. I'm doing the will of my Father. So that was, we looked at that.

[2 : 18] Then he was showing how he was equal to the Father, being given the power to raise from the dead. That the Father and the Son have the power to raise from the dead.

And then we saw how he was equal with the Father in the realms of judgment. In fact, we saw how the Father has given all judgment over to the Son.

The judge, that's why we term it the judgment seat of Christ. Because it is before this same Jesus that we will all have to appear. Appear before him in all his glory, in all his majesty.

Yes, still in his human nature. He didn't take the human nature for the 33 years and then discard it. But when he took the human nature coming into this world, he continues to have forever.

It's a great mystery. But there as we appear before him, it won't be simply as the man. But as the God man, as he always was in this world.

[3 : 21] But his glory was veiled. And he was, as we so often highlighted, dependent upon the ministry of the Spirit and doing what the Father gave him to do.

But when we appear before him, it will be in the fullness of the awfulness of his majesty and his glory. So all judgment has been given to him.

And then in verse 23, he claims equality with the Father with regard to honor. And he's saying, if you don't honor the Son, you don't honor the Father. These Jews were all into honoring God.

And Jesus is saying to them, unless you honor me, you cannot honor my Father. And so Jesus has been saying all this to them. And then in verse 24, Jesus begins with these words, truly, truly, or verily, verily.

And more than 20 times, I think in John's gospel alone, we find Jesus using these. And when Jesus uses that at the beginning of any declaration or statement, he's drawing particular attention to what he's saying.

[4 : 28] All the words of Jesus are true. Jesus never exaggerated. You know, sometimes we might exaggerate a story. We hear a story and want to maybe make it even a little better.

We may exaggerate. Or we may not catch it properly and tell somebody. And what we've told, although we intended to tell the truth, it's not the truth because we didn't get it right.

Or sometimes we just say things maybe as joking or surprise folk or all these kind of things. The Lord doesn't deal like that at all.

Everything that he says is true, absolutely true. But there are certain things he says, and he says them for it. He wants people especially to lay hold upon what he's saying.

So that's what we find in verse 24. He says, truly, truly, I say to you, Whoever hears my words and believes in him who sent me has eternal life.

[5 : 30] He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life. Now notice, he says, I say to you, Whoever hears my words and believes in him who sent me has, not will have, has already.

And if you have come to believe in Jesus, you have eternal life. It's not something that's going to happen way in the future. The fullness of what that eternal life is, is part of your future.

But right now, you have already entered into eternal life. It's not eternal life is just that. It continues right throughout death.

And in fact, becomes so much greater at our death. But it's a life that has already begun now. So that's what Jesus is saying. It's you already have it.

And so Jesus says, I say to you, Whoever hears my word and believes in him who has sent me. Now again, Jesus, we've already come across this so often in John, the importance of hearing.

[6 : 38] Jesus, this is why he's saying, listen, that's really what Jesus is saying. Truly, truly, please listen to this. Whoever hears my word.

And Jesus is so keen to hammer home the importance of hearing the word. And when we talk about hearing, it's not just hearing the voice off.

It's hearing in a way that you actually listen and it goes right in. Because, you know, it's quite easy to come to church and to hear the voice of a preacher.

And it's no more than the sort of like the babble of a stream, like the running water. It's just sort of, that's it. You're just, you're aware of words and they're sort of flying by and you're into this kind of, you know, sometimes, sometimes church, sometimes sermon time is dream time.

I say that because I have to confess there were times in my own life that I came to church maybe for quite a number of years. And it's very good at sleeping.

[7:48] Or even if I wasn't sleeping, of daydreaming. Dead easy. And what we've always got to remember about church is that we've got an enemy of our souls who does not want us to hear.

And Satan will cause a drowsiness. You know, you can come in to church and be as bright as a button and hardly in at any length of time and your head's beginning to go. And I know that some people, we live very full lives and people are tired.

But it's amazing how often whenever we come to deal with the spiritual, you come to set aside a time to pray. And you can often find that heaviness, heaviness of spirit, this tiredness coming over.

So Satan's very good at that. He doesn't want people, A, to come to church. And if they do come to church, he doesn't want them to hear. Because he knows the impact, the effect of hearing.

He knows that he's witnessed to it all the time. He's seen souls hearing the word and coming to faith. So this is one of his number one targets, is to stop people hearing the word of God.

[8:59] But Jesus is emphasizing how important it is that we hear. And now we see, as we said, the blessing of believing. And that's what it is.

It's believing. It's accepting. You know, sometimes we have this idea, oh, right, this whole idea. And yes, it is of conversion. But it's believing. How must I be saved?

Remember the jailer said that. What must I do to be saved? Very simple. Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. Believe who he is. Believe what he has done. Believe who he has come from.

Believe these words. Accept this. Accept it for yourself. Lay hold upon it. Live it. That's it. Sometimes we make it really complicated and tie ourselves in knots and say, oh, it's beyond me.

No, it's just, in a sense, there's an amazing simplicity in it. Believe it. And Jesus is saying, to do that, then we have life.

[10:02] We have entered into eternal life. Now, some people say, I'm not interested in that. You hear a lot of people when you talk to them, I'm not interested in all this stuff about away in the future and all this pie in the sky stuff.

I want stuff for this. I want to live this life now. I want a full life. Not interested in these sort of things away in the future. Well, this is what the Lord is saying. Yes, it's in the future, but it's also here and now.

The blessings. You think of all the blessings that you receive in Jesus Christ. Forgiveness. The pardon of all your sins.

All the guilt that's in your life. You look back over your life and all the things you've said and done and you haven't done. Forgiveness. It's quite a growing catalogue and you only know, and I only know a little, little bit of it.

Lord knows it all. But, you know, when we come to believe in Him, the slate is wiped clean. It's all gone. God's not going to look for it anymore.

[11:07] and not only does he tell us that but he makes us aware of that where we have that peace that's where the peace comes from you see when God's love is made sure made clear to us and love casts out fear perfect love we're told in the Bible casts out fear and that's why we get this kind of peace this sense of assurance of belonging of that things are right wow it's you can't put a price on that and that is that's the beginning of the blessing and that we can actually look forward it's not with a sense of dread or a sense of uncertainty or fear but that we can actually meet death look forward to these things look forward to the judgment where we will be openly acknowledged and acquitted on that day it's an amazing amazing blessings that come to us so Jesus is here he's talking about this life but then in verse 25 he says truly I say to you an hour is coming and is now here when the dead will hear the voice of the son of God and those who hear will live and Jesus is here very simply talking about the New Testament times that he is ushering in and he's saying very simply just exactly what what is happening here that as Jesus has begun to preach people are starting to believe and there's this that's what we have here an hour is coming and is now here when the dead will hear that is those who are spiritually dead they're coming to life and then remember after at the time of Pentecost thousands were converted and then the New Testament church began to spread and so it is right to this day all over the world today in China there are thousands and thousands and thousands and thousands thousands of people who have come to faith in Jesus Christ right across in parts of Asia and in many other parts of this world that down in South America places that had been in in darkness are now coming into light people who were dead are coming to life and there's this ongoing spread of the gospel right throughout this world and then Jesus goes on further and he says to them that as a father has life in himself so he has granted the son also to have life in himself but then he's saying something amazing do not marvel at this for an hour is coming you see first of all he talks about the hour of the gospel an hour is coming and is now here that's a gospel hour and you know we're still part of that that's where we are today this hour the gospel this is Jesus is talking about the time of the gospel but then he talks about another time that's coming do not marvel at this for an hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice and of course that's quite an extraordinary thing all who are in the grave all he says young old rich poor in all areas and in all parts of this world those who are buried in magnificent graves with the most ornate ornate beautiful headstones those who have been buried in mass war graves with the horrendous crimes when you think of all the concentration camps and the the fearful horrors that went in there and the the fearful amount of mass graves throughout this world millions and millions and millions and millions even the sea will give up

its debt but every single one will be accounted for again you say for I don't understand that neither do I how will it happen I don't know but as we've said often enough before that the God who took from the dust of the ground what had never ever ever been there before and formed man what we are and then took from the man that he made a bone and built and formed woman and brought her to the man can the God who made out of blood or anything from the dust of nothing from the dust the ashes whatever that that is that is remaining there even even what's been eaten by life the Lord is in control of every single atom and molecule everything every tiniest thing in this world is under his control and he will raise up again

That's what he has promised to do, and it's an extraordinary thought. And it so says there shall come all who are in the tombs will hear his voice.

Amazing moment. Just this call. And Jesus gave an example of that when Jairus' daughter died.

Remember, he spoke and rose. He spoke at the funeral service of the widow's son. And he spoke also at the grave of Lazarus.

[16:45] Just the word, Lazarus, come out. And it will be that word that will speak and bring power and raise from the dead.

And it tells us then, those who have done and come, and they will all come out, those who have done good to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil to the resurrection of judgment.

And you see that this is quite an awesome thing. There is going to be a final separating.

I said, where are the ways? Those who have gone to sleep in Jesus, those who have believed in him and have gone with him, their bodies will be raised, reunited with the body to dwell with the Lord forever.

Those who have rejected Jesus, their bodies will also rise. But they, their body and soul together, will experience the rejection of Jesus throughout an endless eternity.

[17:51] It's a fearful situation. And you know, people say, what does a person have to do to be lost? Basically nothing.

Our default position is lost. That's really how we are by nature. We're lost. That's why Jesus came into this world. If we weren't lost, God wouldn't have had to send his son.

But it's because we're lost. And we can't find our way back to God. That's why Jesus came. And he came to save us. And he came to deliver us.

And he came to give us life. And these words that we have here, really, they speak very similarly to the words of Daniel. Remember it says in Daniel, Those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt.

That's an awful description. Contempt is an awful thing. Imagine being under that condition forever and ever and ever.

[18:59] That's what it says. Remember, this is not the words of the church as such. It's not that the church has devised this or made it up. Some people will say, Oh, the church just does this kind of scaring stuff to try and get people.

No. These are the words of the Lord Jesus Christ. That's what Jesus is saying to us. And so, we find that this is what's ahead of us all.

The resurrection of the body either to good or to evil. And that's what it tells us here. Those who have done good to the resurrection of life and those who have done evil to the resurrection of judgment.

And some people say, Oh, so if you're good in life, everything will be well. If you do bad things in life, everything will be wrong. Everything, you're going to be lost.

Well, that's not really what it is saying. Because when we tie Scripture into Scripture, it is very simply this. That a person who comes to faith in Jesus Christ, their life will display good.

[20:06] And a person who rejects Jesus Christ, there will be in their life that which displays evil. Now, it's a very serious thing. If a person is confessing that Jesus Christ is their Savior, and they spend their life doing what is wrong.

Hurting people. Miscalling people. Doing people. Their whole life is one of deceit and wrongdoing. You've got to say, Hey, that doesn't measure up.

And you know, at the end of the day, we're told that our works, our words, and our works will judge us. That's solemn.

That's challenging. And equally, there are people who may not have made any great confession, but there is something about their life. And you say to yourself, That life is saying something.

The Lord alone, at the end of the day, knows. But if we make a confession of faith, then that has to be married by a life that is seeking to do good.

[21:10] That's really what it's saying. Because at the end of the day, the words, our works, or good or evil, will be there to judge us. And in Jesus, now, there's a lot more we could say, because I'm seeing that the time is going.

Just very briefly, we see that Jesus then, having made these great declarations, he calls in witnesses to defend himself. And before we look at this, just one thing.

And it was C.S. Lewis who wrote, and he was challenging people. I can't remember exactly the words. And he was talking about the challenges of Christ. And, you know, he put it in his own unique kind of way.

And he said, nobody can dismiss Jesus Christ. He was a historical figure. But he said, everybody, okay, here's Jesus, this historical figure.

But listen to the claims of Christ. His claims are really quite extraordinary. And C.S. Lewis is actually saying this.

[22:16] If Jesus Christ is not who he says he is, then the claims he makes are the most preposterous, exaggerated claims that have ever been made by any human being in the whole history of this world.

And even the wee bit that we read there. That would be true. If Jesus is not who he says he is, then his claims are the claims, that's what C.S. Lewis is saying, that no person ever in the whole history of this world would ever have made such preposterous, crazy claims as that.

But then C.S. Lewis says, there's only one other alternative. Is that it's true. Jesus has lived. Everybody accepts that.

Jesus has made all these claims. There we have it. If it's not true, then nobody has ever made claims so absurd, so preposterous ever in the history of the world.

But if it's true, then we have to take them seriously. We have to bow down before these claims. Can't dismiss them. They're either true or they're not. And we know they're true. But this is a challenge that C.S. Lewis was sending out to everybody.

[23:48] You can't dismiss Jesus. You can't walk away from him. And if you believe that Jesus is who he says he is, then it's utter madness to walk away from these claims.

Because these claims are going to come back to haunt you if you walk away. You have to bow down before this Jesus.

So then the Lord Jesus is calling in these witnesses. I'm just finished. There's two or three minutes. The first is John the Baptist. And he talks there about how John was a burning bright light.

Verse 33. You sent to John, and he has borne witness to the truth. So on. And say, verse 32. There is another who bears witness about me.

And I know that the testimony that he bears about me is true. You sent to John. Now remember, John was this great preacher. Everybody knew that he was a God-sent preacher.

[24:52] The Jews were spellbound by him. In fact, the religious authorities actually sent to find out who he was. The question was even asked, is he the Christ?

Is he the Messiah? So the Jewish religious leaders accepted that John was an amazing man. But what did John tell them? Remember what John said?

No, he said, I'm not the Christ. But I'm his forerunner. I'm here preparing the way for him. I am here pointing you to him.

He's coming. And then, of course, John said when he saw Jesus, there he is. Behold the Lamb of God. So that's the first witness that Jesus brings forward.

John. And, of course, when John's work was done, John was taken out of the picture. The second witness that Jesus appeals to are the miracles.

[25 : 51] Because he goes on to say about John, he was a burning and shining lamp and so on. But the testimony that I have is greater than that of John.

For the works that the Father has given me to accomplish, the very works that I am doing, bear witness about me that the Father has sent me.

All the miracles were a living testimony to the fact that Jesus is who he says he is and that it was the Father who sent him. Now, when we read about the miracles, they're amazing.

But if we had lived in these days, you know, thousands, thousands and thousands and thousands were following Jesus all the time. It's reckoned there would have been when he fed the thousands.

Remember, there were just 5,000 men alone. It reckoned there would have been about 10,000 people there. When Jesus was going anywhere, people were following. It was sensational.

[26 : 53] He wasn't doing it for sensation. But the miracles were testifying to who he was. An even greater testimony than that of John. And even to this day, Jesus is at work.

He's at work helping and holding and inspiring and encouraging. He works in you. He works in me. But then the third testimony, the last one that Jesus highlights, is the testimony of Scripture.

Verse 39, you search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life. And Jesus goes on then to show that the Scriptures bear witness of me.

But you know the great problem, the great problem with regard to the Jews, you search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life. And it is they, the Scriptures, that bear witness about me.

But you know the big problem for the Jews is that they weren't looking for Jesus in the Scriptures. But Jesus is saying to them, I am in the Scriptures. That's where you'll find me.

[27 : 59] And I think there's something we need to emphasize here. The Scriptures Jesus was talking about was the Old Testament. The New Testament Scriptures weren't there yet.

Now, obviously, when we're going to preach about Jesus, we unrightly think about the New Testament. Because the New Testament is more fully given to us with regard to Jesus.

But the Old Testament is full of Christ. Because he goes on to talk about Moses, Moses and the prophets. Remember the dialogue between the rich man and Lazarus.

If they hear not Moses and the prophets, supposing one rose from the dead. So that the revelation of God with regard to the salvation that comes in Jesus is given to us in the law and the prophets in the Old Testament.

Because some people think that the Old Testament now is irrelevant. It's not. It's full of Christ. And it was sufficient then to lead people and bring people to trust in the promised one that the Father was going to send.

[29 : 12] And so Jesus is here testifying. You have the witness of John the Baptist. You have the witness of the miracles. You have the witness of the Scripture. And he says, and you still won't believe.

And Jesus was saying to them, there's nowhere else. There is nowhere else. And if we don't believe the witness that is given here in the Word.

It's the Word. The Word, the Word, the Word. Search the Word. And if you're serious about wanting Jesus as Savior, search the Word.

Be in the Word. And ask that this Word will become life to your soul. Let us pray. O Lord, our God, we give thanks for the fullness and the richness in the Word.

We pray that our souls will appreciate more and more the glory and the wonder of this truth. Watch over us all today. Guide us and keep us and lead us in the right way.

[30 : 16] Forgive us our sin, taking us home safely, we pray in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Let us conclude singing from Psalm 96.

Sorry, no, Psalm 98. And it's Sing Psalms Version. And we're going to sing the last four verses from verse 4. Psalm 98.

From verse 4. Let earth, the sea, and all in them rejoice triumphantly.

Let streams clap hands and mountains sing together joyfully. Now let them sing before the Lord who comes to judge the earth. He'll judge the world and righteousness of peoples in his truth.

These verses, Psalm 98 from verse 4. Acclaim the Lord. Acclaim the Lord, O all the air, shout loudly and rejoice.

[31 : 42] Make music and be jubilant to lift the pure place.

With harp, the Lord, O all the air, and all in them rejoice. With harp, make music to the Lord. With harp, his praises sing.

With trumpet and with horn rejoice. Before the Lord, the King.

Let earth, the sea, and all in them rejoice triumphantly.

Let streams clap hands and mountains sing together joyfully.

[32 : 42] Now let them sing before the Lord who comes to judge the earth.

He will judge the world in righteousness. The peoples in his truth.

Now may the grace, mercy, and peace of God, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit rest and abide upon each one of you now and forevermore. Amen. Amen.