

Sermon 9 May 2021

## **So that you may know**

**Readings:** [1 John 5:9-13](#), [John 20:30-31](#) and [2 Corinthians 4:16-18](#)

Doubt, Distraction and Disbelief.

After the Sermon we will sing the well-known hymn "Blessed Assurance"

Blessed assurance, Jesus is mine  
Oh, what a foretaste of glory divine  
Heir of salvation, purchase of God  
Born of His spirit, washed in His blood

The Apostle John wanted to make sure that you and I have that blessed assurance. No guessing, wondering or thinking that we have salvation: but that we will know that we have it.

We looked a few weeks ago at an overview of John's life. The context of when he wrote 1 John is important. This was written when he was over 90 years old and living in Ephesus.

John had been a young man when he, together with his older brother James, Peter and Andrew were called to follow Jesus<sup>1</sup>. By the time he wrote 1, 2 and 3 John he had become known as the Apostle of love. Quite different to "The Sons of Thunder" being the title Jesus had given John and James<sup>2</sup>.

John had changed after the years of being with Jesus. Changed by the preaching, healing and compassion of Jesus. Changed by the life, death and resurrection of Jesus.

He was the closest friend to Jesus with five references to John being the best friend of Jesus, and the one loved by Jesus.<sup>3</sup>

By the time 1 John was written there were 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> generation Christians. While many remained true to the teachings of Jesus, others began following false teachings, adding to the Gospel message and looking to other "gods".

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<sup>1</sup> [Matthew 4:22](#)

<sup>2</sup> [Mark 3:17](#)

<sup>3</sup> [John 13:23; 19:26; 20:2; 21:7;21:20](#)

It seemed that doubt, distraction and disbelief had crept in.

One of the questions that divided the community was the question of the humanity of Jesus. In our post-modern world debate today might more likely arise around the divinity of Jesus. Some of the members had split off from the church, apparently denying that Jesus was the Christ,<sup>4</sup> others denied that he had come in the flesh.<sup>5</sup>

John was intent on encouraging those who remained in the church that their confession of the earthly Jesus as the Christ and Son of God was true.<sup>6</sup>

John had always preached the true gospel calling on Christ followers to own that they were children of God, that Jesus loved them, and that they were to love one another.

Repeatedly he quoted Jesus: *"A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another."*<sup>7</sup>

John uses the terms "children" and "brothers" for the believers and "Father" for God. Family terms and terms of deep endearment.

Mark Driscoll writes<sup>8</sup>:

*"Roughly 40 times in 1 John, John speaks of love and admonishes Christians to act like brothers and sisters and to "love one another".<sup>9</sup>*

The message from John to the churches in Ephesus and surrounds is just as urgent and important to us today as it was to those first hearing John's message.

Why is this? It is because we are just as likely (or more likely) to grapple with doubt, distraction and disbelief as were those in Ephesus.

And we need to be aware of this and to heed John's call.

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<sup>4</sup> 1 John 2:22. "22 Who is the liar? It is whoever denies that Jesus is the Christ. Such a person is the antichrist—denying the Father and the Son."

<sup>5</sup> 1 John 4:2-3. "2 This is how you can recognize the Spirit of God: Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, 3 but every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God."

<sup>6</sup> See this article: [1 John 5:9-13 Commentary by Audrey West – Sermons and Biblical Studies \(biblia.work\)](#)

<sup>7</sup> [John 13:34-35](#)

<sup>8</sup> See Study Guide at: [1-John-Student-Guide.pdf \(sjm.church\)](#)

<sup>9</sup> For example: [1 John 3:23; 4:7; 4:11-12](#)

In his message of a few weeks ago Lincon touched on the difference between the Gospel of John and the Gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke.

Matthew, Mark and Luke are referred to as the synoptic gospels because their content is similar covering what Jesus did, his miracles, parables and sayings. John tells us who Jesus is. His focus is on the identity of Christ. John's gospel has been described as the spiritual gospel.

An author<sup>10</sup> points out the following unique features of John's gospel:

- John records only eight miracles, six of which are not found in the other gospels (compare this to Mark who recorded twenty-two miracles and mentions ten more);
- No parables are recorded in John: while Matthew records fifteen, Mark nine and Luke over thirty;
- In the "I am" sayings in John we find nine illustrations/metaphors to describe Jesus for example: Bread of Life, Living Water, Light of the World, the Door, Good Shepherd, and the True Vine;
- Every chapter in John provides a separate portrait of who Christ is and what He does, giving us greater insight into His character and nature;
- Over one-third of John's Gospel (chapters 12-19) covers the last week of Jesus' life.

John doesn't open his gospel with the birth of Jesus. He goes back to Jesus as God from the very start.

*"In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning."<sup>11</sup>*

John's gospel is also unique in that John records his purpose in writing his gospel.

This is set out in Chapter 20, verses 30 and 31 headed in my Bible as **The Purpose of John's Gospel**

*"<sup>30</sup> Jesus performed many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. <sup>31</sup> But these are written that you may believe that*

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<sup>10</sup> Ben Godwin in this article: [The uniqueness of John's Gospel | Daily Mountain Eagle](#)

<sup>11</sup> John 1:1-5

*Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name."*

John confirms that many other signs took place in the presence of the disciples but were not recorded by him. Then he says:

*"But these are written that you may believe".*

Put away doubt, ignore distractions and send disbelief into exile.

*"But these are written that you may believe".*

And believe what? Believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

John's purpose, like his Gospel, firstly focuses on Jesus. Jesus, living on this earth, sharing his ministry.

Secondly, the purpose identifies Jesus as the Messiah, the fulfilment of the Old Testament prophecies, and the fulfilment of God's promises.

Thirdly, it refers to Jesus as the divine Son of God.

And then the call that we are to believe and thereby receive life, life now in full fellowship with God.<sup>12</sup>

John's purpose reinforces the words of Jesus that he recorded in [John 3:16](#)

*"For God so loved the world that he sent his one and only son, so that whoever believes in him will not perish but have eternal life."*

Eternal life meaning not only a quantity of life, but quality-of-life here and now.

Eugene Peterson paraphrases the words in John 10:10 as follows:

*"I came so you (they) can have real and eternal life, more and better life than you (they) ever dreamed of."*

"More" refers to quantity. "Better" refers to quality-of-life here and now.

The Apostle Paul wrote this in Romans:<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> See: article on <https://www.enterthebible.org>

<sup>13</sup> For this passage and others click on this link: [Romans 10:9-10; Ephesians 2:8-9; 2 Corinthians 5:21; Acts 16:30-31; Acts 4:12; Revelation 3:20](#)

*“9 If you declare with your mouth, “Jesus is Lord,” and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. 10 For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you profess your faith and are saved.”*

That is the gospel message summarised.

When you accept Jesus as your Lord and saviour, believing that God raised Jesus from the dead, you are saved. The slate is wiped clean and your sins are forgiven. You are justified: it is just as if you had not sinned at all.

Believe with your heart and profess with your mouth.

This had been what John had preached and taught all his life. But now, as he wrote to the believers at Ephesus he had a deep concern that many believers were experiencing doubt, distraction and disbelief.

We see in the opening verses of 1 John how John explains his standing and authority to call on the followers not to add to, or dilute, the true gospel message.

*“1 That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched—this we proclaim concerning the Word of life. 2 The life appeared; we have seen it and testify to it, and we proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and has appeared to us. 3 We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ.”*

John's standing and authority came from the fact that he had spent time with Jesus, hearing what he had taught and seeing what he did. They had joined hands together. His was no second-hand testimony or hearsay evidence. He had been there with Jesus. He had seen the empty tomb and had been with the disciples when Jesus appeared after his resurrection. John was not repeating some theory that had been passed on to him or that he had read about. His was direct evidence from Jesus.

He was proclaiming what he had seen, heard and felt so that the believers would have fellowship with their fellow believers and also with God.

Against this background, we look at verses 9-13 in 1 John 5. We see that John continues with the question of evidence and testimony.

The believers are accepting what they hear from other men and woman - human testimony - but John points out that God's testimony is greater. And God's testimony is about Jesus, his Son. What John is saying to the followers is that they are not to be distracted by theories and false teachings of men but are to look to God's revealed truth.

They are to accept God's truth that Jesus is the Son of God and the Messiah. The followers are urged to believe the testimony that God has given about his Son.





Failure to do this, says John, makes God out to be a liar.

And then John summarises what God's testimony is:

*"And the testimony is this: God has given us eternal life [we already possess it], and this life is in His Son [resulting in our spiritual completeness, and eternal companionship with Him]. 12 He who has the Son [by accepting Him as Lord and Saviour] has the life [that is eternal]; he who does not have the Son of God [by personal faith] does not have the life."<sup>14</sup>*

Remember that John was writing to believers. He is not trying to persuade them to become believers: he is pointing out that having accepted Jesus as Lord and Saviour they already have eternal life.

How are the believers to know that they have eternal life? John has already suggested the following before he gets to our passage for this morning:

-  by their love for one another (1 John 3:14);
-  by laying down life for one another (1 John 3:16);
-  by sharing the world's goods with those who are in need (1 John 3:17);
-  by obedience to Jesus' commandment, which is to believe in his name and love one another (1 John 3:23; 1 John 5:3-5).

And then John makes this concluding remark:

*"13 I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life."*

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<sup>14</sup>1 John 5:11-15 Amplified Bible

“I write these things, so that you **may know** that you have eternal life.”

John doesn't want the believers to wonder, or to guess whether they have eternal life. He wants them to know this. He wants them to have the blessed assurance that this is so.

And he wants you and me to know that we have eternal life, and the blessed assurance that this is so.

And we can know this because our salvation rests in Jesus and not in our own performance. If it rested on me then on a good day I might accept that I am saved, but on a bad day I just would not know or would be convinced that I was not saved. But if it depends on what Jesus has done for me, then I can know.<sup>15</sup>

We need to make sure that we are guided by our faith and not by our feelings.

What is the position if I find myself questioning, or doubting what I believe?

Does this mean that I no longer believe? Does this mean that I'm no longer saved? These are questions that we need to examine.

John Ortberg wrote a book with the title “Faith and Doubt”. And he makes the point that the word “and” in the middle of “Faith and Doubt” is the most important word in the title. He points out that we often think of doubt as the opposite of faith, but could it actually strengthen our relationship with God?

**Firstly**, and most importantly, you must own that doubt is not disbelief. The very nature of faith requires the presence of uncertainty. Disbelief is an acceptance that something is not true, or a refusal to believe that it is true. Doubt raises the question “Is what I believe correct?”

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<sup>15</sup> [Enduring Word Bible Commentary 1 John Chapter 5](#)

*"Of course, doubt can lead to disbelief, but it can also lead to stronger faith. It all depends on how you react when those thoughts of doubt come up."*<sup>16</sup>

Don't let doubt that arises linger or cause you guilt, rather go back to the basics of your faith as revealed in the Scriptures to examine what is troubling you. Discuss the issue that is causing you doubt with Lincon, an elder or a trusted fellow believer. Paul instructed us to examine ourselves to see whether we are in the faith.<sup>17</sup> Doing so is not an act of disbelief: it is a process that will strengthen your faith.

**Secondly**, accept that it would be strange if doubts did not arise and use them to deepen your faith.

Accept that you can sense your belief in your heart, but you can't test it with your five senses (sight, touch, sound, taste, smell).<sup>18</sup> The writer of Hebrews, wrote this:

*"Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see."*

Let doubt deepen your faith. Accept that doubts will occur, and re-occur and use them to strengthen your faith,

So, what is the challenge for us, for you and for me?

I believe it is this: that we are to be aware of the distractions around us, the testimony of men and woman that can lead to doubt, and that doubt unaddressed, can lead to disbelief.

Don't let the distractions you face lead to a dilution of the gospel message as had happened to many believers in Ephesus.

Address doubts when they arise with hope, not guilt.

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<sup>16</sup> McKenna Park in an article at: [4 reasons you shouldn't feel guilty for doubting your faith - News - providencejournal.com - Providence, RI](https://www.providencejournal.com/news/4-reasons-you-shouldn-t-feel-guilty-for-doubting-your-faith)

<sup>17</sup> 2 Corinthians 13:5. "5 Examine yourselves, to see whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Or do you not realize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you?—unless indeed you fail to meet the test!"

<sup>18</sup>McKenna Park.



Read again the short book of 1 John and particularly the conclusion of John:

*"<sup>13</sup>These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God [which represents all that Jesus Christ is and does], so that you will know [with settled and absolute knowledge] that you [already] have eternal life."*

Know that you have the assurance of salvation and eternal life. Own this as we sing:

Blessed assurance, Jesus is mine. Oh, what a foretaste of glory divine. Heir of salvation, purchase of God. Born of His spirit, washed in His blood.

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## **2 Corinthians 4:16-18**

<sup>16</sup>Therefore we do not become discouraged [spiritless, disappointed, or afraid]. Though our outer self is [progressively] wasting away, yet our inner *self* is being [progressively] renewed day by day. <sup>17</sup>For our momentary, light distress [this passing trouble] is producing for us an eternal weight of glory [a fullness] beyond all measure [surpassing all comparisons, a transcendent splendor and an endless blessedness]! <sup>18</sup>So we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are unseen; for the things which are visible are temporal [just brief and fleeting], but the things which are invisible are everlasting *and* imperishable.