

Confidence we have Life

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[0 : 00] Well, please do keep your Bibles open. We'll use them in a moment, as you'd hope. But I was just meaning that we're starting a new series, as Steph said, in the letter of 1 John.

And so I'm going to begin with a bit of background and the purpose, and then we'll get to our passage. And that's when you'll need to really focus on the reading. So do keep your Bibles open. But let me start by asking, I wonder if you've ever had your confidence shaken.

I remember when I first started teaching, I picked up a casual day at a school, and the advice to me was, don't let them see your fear.

Fine, I'll do that. So I went in there, and the first half of the day was fine, you know, straight-laced, stern face and all the rest of it. But after lunch, I came back into the room, and they started laughing at me.

I couldn't work out why. Had I spilled lunch down the front of me? Was my hair messy? And then I realised my fly was down. It was so embarrassing, and it shook my confidence. I never went back to teach that school again.

[1 : 07] Of course, our confidence can be shaken in lots of areas of life, can't it? It can be shaken at work, if we get a bad review from the boss. It can be shaken at school, if we get a bad result on a test.

It can be shaken in terms of going out because of climbing COVID cases, or our confidence to pay bills can be shaken due to rising costs in interest rates, petrol and food, and on it goes.

Of course, the thing that helps us in all those areas, though, is knowing that God is sovereign. We may have to adjust our lives a little bit, but God promises to provide.

What's more, Jesus is still the Christ. The word Christ is, again, remember, not a surname. It's a title that means anointed one, king. And the king who saves us and promised us eternal life.

Which means even if we suffer loss in this life, we have eternal life that will more than make up for it. But what happens when our confidence in those truths is also shaken?

[2 : 15] When we start to wonder, is it really true? Is Jesus really the Christ? Do we really have eternal life? I'm guessing most of you have heard about the recent census results, since the media has put it everywhere, it seems, and has taken delight in reporting the drop in Christianity within Australia.

And so for the first time ever, less than 50% call themselves Christians in our country. It's gone from 61% in 2011, and 10 years later to 44% in 2021.

In fact, I saw an article from the ABC that said, the latest census has a message, God is dead, and we have killed him. Quoting that philosopher, Friedrich Nietzsche.

Now, there are mitigating circumstances that I'll come back towards the end. But when we see so many leaving the Christian faith in our country, it can, not necessarily, but it can cause us to wonder about our future here.

And it can even cause us to wonder, are we really right? Everyone seems to be leaving. Is Jesus really the Christ?

[3 : 34] Do we really have eternal life? And I say this because this is the background to 1 John. Well, it's similar. You see, a number of people had left the Christian community that John is writing to.

They no longer ticked the Christian box on their census, if you like. And now they actually deny Jesus is the Christ. And so John calls them anti-Christ, because they're denying that Jesus is the Christ.

They're anti it. And what's more, they're trying to lead others astray. And so later on in John's Gospel in chapter 2, he says, Many anti-Christ have come. This is how we know it's the last hour, the last days.

They went out from us. They've left our church, our community. And he says, Whoever denies that Jesus is the Christ, well, such a person is the anti-Christ. He goes on to say, As for you, see what you've heard from the beginning remains in you.

And this is what he promised us, eternal life. I'm writing these things to you about those who are trying to lead you astray. You see, these anti-Christ who have left are now trying to lead them away too.

[4 : 46] And it seems to have shaken the confidence of these Christians. And so John writes to give them confidence. And he keeps saying, You know, or that you may know.

The word know comes up 34 times in this letter. And while he has lots of reasons why he's writing, I think the big one comes at the end of his letter. He says, I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that, purpose, you may know, have confidence, that you have eternal life.

In fact, he follows a similar pattern in his gospel, in the gospel of John or book of John, the beginning of the New Testament. He starts by talking about the beginning and the word.

And he does the same thing in his letter, doesn't he? The difference, though, is, like our first reading from Genesis and John's gospel, it's talking about the word creating physical life at the beginning of creation.

Whereas in the letter, he's talking about the beginning in terms of Jesus' ministry. That which we have seen, that John has seen and heard. But it's also a similar pattern in terms of the purpose.

[5 : 58] It comes towards the end as well, though there is a difference. John's gospel, these are written so that you may believe in Jesus. In other words, it's especially for non-Christians.

It's still great for us Christians, don't get me wrong, but it's especially for non-Christians that they might believe in Jesus. And if you're here today and you're not sure if you're into this Christian thing or you believe yet, or if you're online and you're wondering, then can I encourage you, read John's gospel.

Go to the New Testament, Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, and read through and see what you make of Jesus. But his letter, the purpose statement, also comes at the end, but this time it's for us who already believe so that we may know, have confidence, that we have eternal life.

Though, as you will see, if you haven't already seen, John is very wordy. He often circles back to themes he's mentioned before to show that they're all connected or interrelated, which can be frustrating.

I've been spending hours and hours trying to get my head around this letter and sometimes I've walked away with a headache because it just goes around and around. And so I think the best way forward is to treat this letter like a hot cup of tea on a cold winter's day.

[7 : 22] You know when it's a cold day outside and you wrap your hands around the hot mug and you sip it slowly and it warms your body? Well, as we wrap our heads around one John by sipping it slowly, bit by bit, four verses today, it will warm our souls, give us confidence, reassurance that we really do have life.

John will do that in a number of ways, but today he does it by reminding us our life in Christ is based on evidence. So point one, verse one and two, this will be our longest point.

Have a look there at verse one. Here we, you need your Bibles. 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.

The life appeared, we have seen it and testified to it and we proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and has appeared to us.

Now first notice here how he speaks about Jesus. You see the end of verse one, he calls Jesus the word just as he did in the gospel, but notice it's the word or he's the word of life.

[8 : 44] Thank you all to people of you. Try to make sure you're still with me here. Word of life. And not so much the physical life that the word created in John's gospel or in our first reading from Genesis, but eternal life.

Because if you look in verse two, he goes on to say, this life appeared, we have seen, testified, we proclaim to you the eternal life that was with the Father.

He's calling Jesus the eternal life now. In other words, right from the start, John speaks about eternal life found in Christ.

Because this is his big reason for writing. That they may know they have eternal life in Christ, you see. And so how can they know? Well here today, because John has witnessed it.

So did you notice in verse one as well, all the eyewitness language here? Verse one, he says they have heard, they have seen, looked at, and touched.

[9 : 48] They've rubbed shoulders with Jesus in history. And they've seen what he did, how he gave life in terms of sight to the blind, legs to the lame, how he even gave new life by raising the widow's son from Nain.

And in fact, John has even seen Jesus himself rise from the dead. And rising from the dead has proved that Jesus really is the Christ, the king.

I mean, who else has risen from the dead never to die again? Even those heroes died again in history, but Jesus hasn't. But it also proves he can raise us too.

Give us life eternal. But the point here is this eternal life in Christ is based on eyewitness evidence, that of John and the apostles.

This is what he proclaimed to them as he goes on to say in verse two, the life appeared, we have seen it and testified to it and this is what we've proclaimed to you.

[10 : 56] In other words, this is not some fairy tale, this is not something that we've just made up, we've seen it in real life, says John. And so they can be confident of eternal life.

They can know Jesus will raise them to new life because John saw Jesus himself rise to new life. And we can know it too.

For John has proclaimed what he heard and saw to us as well. Not by his verbal word, of course, we're not that old, but by his written word, like the gospel of John.

And we can trust what we have is what he wrote down back then. That it's been handed down to us reliably. Why? Well, let me give you a couple of historical reasons.

We're talking about confidence today and so I thought it's appropriate to do a bit of apologetics here. The first reason is that there's not that big a time gap in historical terms between when John first wrote and the New Testament writers first wrote and the earliest copies we have.

[12 : 06] And so there hasn't been a huge amount of time for a new religion called Christianity to sprout up, which has been completely different to the writings of the apostles. By way of comparison, the writing of Homer, not Homer Simpson, sorry, just trying to keep your attention here.

Homer, the poet, he wrote the Iliad, he was a Greek poet, 500 years between his writing and our earliest copy that we have in a museum somewhere.

Julius Caesar, who wrote the Gaelic Wars, 900 years between his writing and our earliest copy. Plato, the philosopher, 1,200 years between his writing and our earliest copy.

And the most we have, it's actually less than this most scholars say, is 104 years between the New Testament and our earliest copy. I know that still seems a lot to us in modern terms, but in historical terms, it's a very close gap.

That's the first reason. We have really old copies close to the originals themselves. But the second reason is we have loads of copies. So we can check them against each other to make sure that the message has been consistent.

[13 : 19] I mean, if you've got 100 manuscripts that says one thing and two that says another thing, which are you going to believe? The 100, you've got all this evidence don't you? And so you know the two have just had a typo or something.

Again, by way of comparison, here's a table. At Plato, we have seven copies of what he wrote. Caesar, we've got 10 copies, 10 good copies. Homer, we've got 643.

New Testament, we've got 24,000. We have loads of evidence. This is largely taken from a table by John Dixon in Simply Christianity, if you want to see and follow it up.

In fact, the evidence is such that a former director of the British Museum, Sir Frederick Kenyon, wrote as early as 1940, so they worked it out even back then, the interval between the dates of the original composition, when the apostles wrote, and our earliest extant evidence, the copies we've got, becomes so small as to be, in fact, negligible.

That's how a historian regards the gap. He said, on the slide there, this is him, the last foundation for any doubt that the scriptures have come down to us substantially as they were written has now been removed.

[14 : 43] In other words, you can be confident what is in your hands in the pews today is what John wrote in his day. And what he wrote is what he saw heard and touched.

This is eyewitness evidence we have. Our faith in Jesus as Christians is not blind faith as people so much accuse us of having.

It's reasonable faith. It's rational faith based on evidence. And so, despite the census, despite what our friends at school or colleagues at work or even our family might say, we have every reason to know that Jesus is the Christ and that we really do have eternal life.

But the purpose of proclaiming this life in Christ to them is not just for eternal life later, it's also to enjoy a life of fellowship now, which is point two.

These will be quicker points. So, have a look now at verse three in your Bibles. He says, we proclaim to you what we have seen and heard so that you may also, as well as eternal life, also have fellowship with us and our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ.

[16 : 13] You see, we think we should proclaim the good news about Jesus so people can be saved from judgment for eternal life and that's right. But there's more than that. For when God saves us, he doesn't just leave us on our own, does he?

No, no, he brings us into a family where we have fellowship with one another. I mean, have you ever been away on holidays and or at a party somewhere or something or other and you've met someone who's turned out to be a Christian?

My parents, this is pre-COVID when cruises weren't banned, but they were on a cruise and they met some people on the cruise and very quickly in the first five minutes or so they worked out they were Christians and have you had that experience?

Immediately people relax because you've got this bond, the conversation lifts and you almost feel like you're no longer strangers because you're actually family.

God saves us and brings us into a fellowship, a family with each other and John says with God himself too, which is why John will call us later in his letter, the children of God because we're in God's family where he's our father as you know.

[17 : 24] You see, life in Christ doesn't just mean eternal life later, it means enjoying fellowship, the life of fellowship now. Of course, we express this fellowship in a number of ways with each other in God.

We can express it by doing what we're doing today, gathering together as family. We can express it by what we've also done today by participating in the Lord's Supper, expressing our fellowship in Christ's death, for example.

We can express it by loving each other, by obeying God's word, by partnering with each other in service and with God in prayer to help others come to Jesus and grow as Christians.

This is one of the reasons I love church, because it gives us a chance to express our fellowship in all these ways, not just in the service, but after the service.

I mean, we've had what we've called a fellowship break already. We call it a fellowship break because there's a chance to express fellowship, to ask after one another, but there's another chance after the service over morning tea, to love one another, to show care for one another.

[18 : 37] In fact, our fellowship with each other and with God will continue. God's goal for us is to be gathered together in fellowship with one another and with him forever.

So if you're looking around, this is who we're spending forever with. Before you kind of go, oh my goodness, we'll all be perfect, so there'll be no complaints or arguments.

But if this is God's goal for us, and if this is why John proclaimed Christ to us, then it kind of matters about expressing our fellowship, doesn't it? it matters how often we meet together.

I realise there's COVID, there's health, there's holidays, there's all those things, but those things aside, when we're able, as we're able, it matters meeting together. And it matters how we treat one another, not just when we're meeting, but after church as well.

And it matters how we treat God, because we're in fellowship with him too, aren't we? John will have much more to say about how we treat others and God later, because, verse 3, we proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you may have fellowship with us, and our fellowship is with the Father and his Son.

[19 : 53] But the difficulty in this situation here is, it wasn't just their confidence in eternal life that was under threat, it was also this fellowship that was under threat. Because if these antichrists led them away from Christ, then they're going to miss out on both, aren't they?

And so John writes not only to give them confidence of eternal life, but so that they might stick with Christ, remain with Christ and the fellowship he gives.

For this is what brings John joy, verse 4. We write this to make our joy complete. John has already had the joy of proclaiming Jesus to them, but what will complete his joy is seeing them remain with Christ.

John will talk about remaining with Christ later in the letter as well, but he speaks here in terms of joy, because seeing them remain with Jesus is what makes his day, it's what lifts his heart, it's what matters most to him.

for it will mean ongoing fellowship with them and eternal life for them. In fact, he says in his third letter, he says, I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth.

[21 : 23] I wonder what brings you joy? Is it a sleep-in? Is it a great coffee? Is it when your kids play nice?

Or in Chasing Christina's case, when she sleeps through the night? I remember that stage, it was a great joy when they did that. Is it when seeing the kids do well at school?

Hearing a good report from the doctor? Hearing that COVID has finally vanished, if only? They're all good things that bring us joy, but can we say with John that we have no greater joy than to see others walking in the truth.

Because if we can, then we'll persevere in praying for our kids and grandkids, our nieces and nephews, and for each other, that we'll keep going with Christ.

And we'll persevere in encouraging one another, thinking creatively about how to encourage the kids without exasperating them. And we'll rejoice when we see each other walking in the truth.

[22 : 31] I remember one of my kids telling me, this is very young and I won't say which one, but I remember one of them telling me they were nervous before a spelling test at school and they prayed that God would help them to remember all their spelling words.

And it just brought great joy to my heart. Not only because I think they got nine out of ten instead of something less, but because they were walking in the truth.

Is this what brings joy to us when we see each other living Christian lives, sticking with Christ? Because this is what matters most. It's what brings fellowship now and life eternal later.

But the big application I think comes from the big point that our eternal life in Christ is based on eyewitness evidence. like John who proclaimed what he saw and heard to us.

And so we can be confident of it. And so much so that we can even sacrifice things in this life for Christ, knowing we have eternal life that will more than make up for it.

[23 : 40] Christianity may be declining here in Australia. We may be increasingly feeling like we're on the outer. Although the ABC article went on to actually say it's booming in Africa, Latin America and even China.

And not to mention the fact that those percentages don't take into account that our population has also increased. And so it's hard to work out really how many Christians there are. And by 2060 Christianity will still be the largest religion in the world, the experts say.

But even if it's not, even if we're amongst the minority in our city or amongst our friends and family, we still have every reason to be confident that Jesus really is the Christ and we really do have eternal life.

Let's pray. Our gracious Heavenly Father, we do thank you for the Lord Jesus whose death for us pays for our sins so that we can be brought into fellowship with you and one another.

Help us to express this fellowship we pray whenever we can. and help us to find joy in seeing others grow and continue in Christ. This morning we particularly thank you that our faith is based on eyewitness evidence.

[25 : 04] And so we really do have every reason, every confidence to believe that Jesus really is the Christ and we really do have eternal life. I thank you for this in his name.

Amen. Amen.