

God Is Truth

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[0 : 00] So we're going to look for the last time at 1st John. I've said over the weekend that there's quite a lot of repetition in 1st John, which is absolutely true in many ways. So that gives me an excuse to repeat a lot of what I've said over the weekend. And that's important. God usually says things in the Word. It's important He says things often.

That's because He knows how quickly we forget things. And so I'll not make an excuse if I'm being repetitive as long as it's based on the passage that we're reading. And really I guess we're not going to look at the whole chapter. In many ways the focus in a sense is around the theme which was God is truth, God is light, God is love, and God is truth.

And that comes from verse 6. This is, He who came Jesus by water and blood Jesus Christ, not by the water only but by the water and the blood and the Spirit is the one who testifies because the Spirit is the truth. For these are three that testify the Spirit, the water and the blood and all these three agree. And we've seen that John is really committed to getting across a message. Maybe we've said that he talks about a message a lot, the truth, the testimony. What he knows and what he's heard. He's not playing around. He's not mucking about it's seriously stripping back. He's not just giving them pleasantries. He's not just passing the time with them. It's really urgent. It's like there's a blue light flashing above what he's saying because it's so important. And that's why he's repetitive because he can't get past the significance of who God is being light and how that reveals itself and being loving. And what that means then for us that we love one another because he's preaching in this situation. I'll say a wee bit about that in a minute. The kind of context he's preaching into. But I think one good thing, if you don't take anything away from the weekend at all, you forget everything, that's fine. But remember one thing, the Gospel is not good advice, it's good news. Remember that because so often we descend into thinking we just come to church to get a bit of good advice, how to live and how to do things differently.

But the Gospel isn't good advice, it's good news. And it's something that we celebrate, it's something we rejoice in. And like as we sat at the table in the morning, we talked about that joy and solemnity in something so big and serious but yet so joyful and so thrilling for us. And so John wanted his audience, those who read his letters, to understand that as well as good news. And it's not just good advice because these false teachings, because what was happening was the false teachers were coming in and trying to give different advice and trying to say, well Jesus, this isn't really the Son of God and you need to believe us and you need to do this. And don't listen to them, be divided. You know, they were just causing havoc with what they were saying. And we know that John is desperate as it was probably a group of small house churches that he's writing to, maybe around

Ephesus area, not sure entirely, but the false teachers were coming in and creating havoc, wolves, sheep, growing grenades and bang, and causing all kinds of disastrous results in these young churches. And John is desperate to get them to focus on what's important.

[3 : 43] And God recognizes that these are issues and problems for every church in every generation and for every heart, because it's not just sometimes a church issue, it's not just a community issue. Very often it's a heart issue that he's dealing with, because the evil one will explode grenades in our heart to draw us away from Christ and draw us away from one another. So what's John's aim in these letters that he's given us? And we particularly will look at something tonight, but he certainly wants us to be captured. He wanted these churches to recapture maybe and for us to capture or recapture as well the love of God. How often does he speak about God's love? God is love. This is how he showed his love. This is who he is. This is how you should be. And it's all this incredible message that we saw this morning. He's tough, strong, courageous love. It's not a weak, soft, sappy thing. It's a really strong life changing reality that God has with us. And

he wants the people to be captured by that love again, to see him, to see God, to see who God is by faith, and to see that behind everything we do as Christian, everything we do as believers is motivated, is driven by this miraculous, this life giving, this gift that comes from God in salvation.

Because so often it isn't what drives us. So often it's not our motivation. Well, I can speak personally. So often our motives, and my motives, motives that best are mixed.

So often it's not the love of Christ that drives us. So often it's pride or looking good or impressing other people or sort of trying to even, amazingly, trying to impress God as if we can do that. But he wants us to get back to that reality of love and captured by that love as the motive for how we live and how we treat one another on a daily basis, and how we respond to one another as Christians, and how we live as one another as Christians.

So being captured by that love, and I think you also therefore, and I've kind of covered that, is to be committed to being a band of brothers and sisters together. Who was happening in these churches were being divided. And you remember what really marked out the New Testament church was that there was all kinds of people were coming to us. Strange mixtures of people. There was prisoners and prison officers and slaves and slave masters and businessmen and businesswomen and housewives and all kinds of different races and nationalities were coming together under one banner under Christ. And it was turning the world upside down. It's not like he dulled and plain today. You know, people put her along to church and no one takes any notice of it anymore. At best, I think we're just out of date and weirdos.

But in these days, it was turning the world upside down because you had Roman gladiators and you had slaves who were worshipping together and calling each other brother and sisters.

[7 : 13] And it was that, these 12 disciples were turning the world upside down with a message that they'd been given. The 12 disciples themselves were a rag tag of all kinds of different people.

And John could see that the false teachers were coming in and the devil was coming in and was destroying that and was turning it all into mush by making them divided and separated and worldly therefore as a result. And so he wants to get back to that truth that God is love. And if we've been touched by God's love, then that means we love one another in the radical life changing way that only God's spirit can enable us to do. And God has continues to give us that because we know, we know it's tough. It's a difficult thing to do. And it's challenging. So captured by God's love and committed to one another. And you need to apply that in Carlyle. You need to apply it in your own church context. And what that looks like, what it looks like week to week, day to day, and how that radical reality of the Holy Spirit changes, will change this community continually as they see God in you.

And I think also therefore the bit we've come into a bit more tonight is conquerors. He wants them to recognize that in Christ, their victorious and their conquerors versus four, maybe four and five, particularly for everyone who's been born of God, overcomes the world.

And this is the victory that has overcome the world, our faith. Who is he that overcomes the world except the one who believes that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. So he's wanting them to remember that they're victorious, that they're overcomers, that they have the victory in Christ Jesus. Now, when you read that, what do we all immediately think of?

I suspect we all immediately think of what's out there when we think of the world. We think that we've overcome the world, everything out there that is unbelieving. And there's a truth in that. There is a reality of a lost and dark world. But I think the first application is the world in here is the sinful, the remaining sinful tendencies that we have in our hearts, that we have to overcome and that God says we have overcome and we can overcome as we rely on God's love and God's spirit in our hearts. Because that was happening in the churches. It was the old world, the old way of thinking that was coming back out. Remember we spoke about that picture of the bottle being squeezed, what comes out when you squeeze a bottle of water without a lid on, obviously water comes out, what's inside. And if the wrong things inside us, then when trouble comes in division, we respond in the wrong way and he's saying but we can overcome that. We can be overcomers, we are overcomers because we are overcoming the world and as the sinful nature that separates us from the living God.

[10 : 27] And that's a really important truth and it's a very important truth I think because everyone in the world is trying to be an overcomer. Everyone in the world is trying to be victorious, aren't they? That's who people spend their lives doing. All our friends, all our colleagues, all our neighbours who are not Christians and if you're not a Christian this evening, you're trying to be

victorious in life, you're trying to be an overcomer and people live their lives without acknowledging God but still trying to overcome, trying to succeed, trying to be victorious, trying to win in life's battles and all kinds of different levels, aren't they? People are trying to win battles over their neurosis, over their poor self-esteem, over their circumstances, over their depression, over their loneliness, overcoming their character failures with a multitude of different get well and different techniques. People are trying to overcome their neighbour's perception of them or they're trying to win acceptance from their friends to be understood, to go well in their jobs, to get the job of their dreams or the partner of their dreams, to be victorious in that part of life, to overcome physical illness, exams, poverty, the odds, to be successful in sport or in their career, to fight or recognition comfort or justice, maybe for a good cause, to be a victorious over by having a great cause in environment or injustice or in politics. Many different reasons that people want and look to be victorious. And people will have many, many victories along the way I guess in that, in my human point of view. Maybe you've had many victories along the way, you're an unbeliever, you may think things are going well and you're strong and victorious, but life is that relentless capacity to knock you back and to remind you and to remind me of our mortality and of course the big elephant in the room is the reality of death, isn't it? It's that reality that there's no victory that we have in life that enables us to overcome the power of death, physical death and the spiritual realities that lie behind it. It's the world's last great absurdity that we all face. But in the news, the good news of Jesus, remember because it's not good advice, the good news of Jesus is that he tells a different story and he gives us a different narrative. And John wants to remind the people here and God wants to remind us as Christians and challenge you if you're not a Christian to the transcendent hope that comes through the gospel. This great gift that we can overcome, the world in us that is the rebellious hearts that we have, rebellion against God and we can know the deepest longings of our lives in and through

Jesus Christ because he is one, the ultimate victory. Remember we look back at the message, the message, the message and it was this message that Jesus Christ was born, lived and died, rose again and ascended to the right hand of the Father. And that enables us to have God shaped success. What success are you looking for in life? What is it? What do we, what do we regard as success and is it or overcoming or victory? Is it God shaped? That's a great challenge because that's not regarded by anyone around us who might not be Christians, but it's the only definition that guarantees us the ability to overcome not just in life but also in death and to be reunited with our living Savior. So for a few minutes just how can I ask the question, how can I, an average Joe, we're all average Joe's probably in the world in which we live, at least by the world standards, we're average Joe's, nobody takes much notice of us. How can we be conquerors? How can we be overcomers in this way? It taken us into that amazing place where we're children of God and where we have

His friendship, His companionship, His strength, His grace, His peace and His future guaranteed for us. I think there's a few things here quickly. First is recognizing that the real battle we all face is a spiritual one. That that is the real core battle of the life that we live. It's not our circumstances, it's not our abilities, it's not what may come to pass in our lives. That the deepest battle we face is spiritual. It's the root of everything else that needs to be overcome in life is a spiritual one. All the battles that we face in this world, all the challenges we face comes from a world that's alienated from God.

We do not directly at that level, but it is part of being a fallen world and His rightful claim to first place in our lives and to our worship has been denied by us putting ourselves first. It's that classic rebellious child syndrome that we have by nature, that we stick our fingers up at God despite everything He's done, just like the child who in rebellion against their parents just despises everything that their parents have done for them and just say they know nothing and I'll succeed and do well without them and walk away from their love and support. And that's exactly what we've done with God. All of humanity has done that. Turned about the prodigal child picture, the prodigal son picture. We want everything that God can give us, all his gifts, but we don't want God. We don't want him. We just want what he gives us and we want to spend it the way we want and live the way we want and we'll find success and we'll overcome that way. And it wasn't until the prodigal son recognized that that was the cause of all his problems that he turned back to his father and so with us, the most fundamental reality that every one of us here needs to constantly be dealing with is our relationship with the living God. That's the root and the foundation of everything that we are and if

we get that right by grace, if we accept what Jesus has done on our behalf and turn to Him, then everything else begins to look different. It's not that everything becomes rosy, it's not that life's problems just dissipate, but it means that he is with us and will take us through these sufferings and difficulties in relationship with him to live with him forever. So there's recognizing that there is a spiritual battle and even if you don't recognize that, to at least consider that your unbelief may be because you have a heart that is rebellious against the living

God and that there's a, you have a spiritual enemy who has got one over on you because he's helping you not to believe. And then being more on a conqueror means coming to terms with the historical Jesus. Verse 6 speaks about the spirit is the one who testifies because the spirit is true. But then Jesus Christ came not by water only, but by water and blood. And this testimony, this truth that's spoken of here is all about Jesus Christ, always about Jesus Christ, the historical claims of Jesus Christ. And that's what John's referring back to all the time. He's a witness to the person of Jesus, the historical reality and claims of the work of Jesus. He came, he was born of a virgin, he lived for 30 years like carpenter or doing work with wood in his father's business and then after his father died would have taken over and looked after and provided for his mother. And then at 30 years old he was baptized, not because he needed it, but because he was representing humanity and he was coming to be the one who would be the one who would wash away their sins by associating himself with them. And that's what, and it speaks of the water there and also of the testimony of the Holy Spirit. And of course also by the blood. Jesus didn't come to be a good example. The gospel isn't good advice, it's good news. Is that Jesus came to be an atoning sacrifice for our sin without the sharing of blood, there's no forgiveness of sin. It's life for life, it's a recognition that he came to offer us his victory. He died taking the punishment for us and he rose again to show us the feet of death and darkness and sin in our lives. And that, why do we wash up on the first day of the week? Because it's a resurrection day. It's a day of life, it's the first day of the week. You know, a dead saviour is no good to us. The crucifixion is no value on his own unless Christ, unless the tomb is empty. And that's a great reality. I spoke there, one of the services about sharing, thanks I can't remember what I said now, about sharing faith. But I think that's another way, a great way of sharing the testimony of, if people ask you why are you a Christian or why do you believe? And I think one thing you can say is, well, there's a dead man 2000 years ago and he walked out of the grave. He walked out of the grave. No one has ever done that. No one has ever walked out of the grave in all of history to defeat the power of death. And we have to give account for that, that someone 2000 years ago who claimed to be God's son, who claimed to be the saviour walked out of the tomb, defeated death and said he did so for every single person who trusted in them. That's a massive claim. And it's recorded and it's testified to in Scripture and that's hugely impossible, hugely important and a reality. It's a testimony not only of the apostles of course, but it's the testimony of God through the Holy Spirit as we see in verse 9. It's testified not only by men, this is verse 9, but the testimony of God is greater. This is the testimony of God that is born concerning his son. And we recognize that this is God's word and God's message.

[22 : 12] So come into terms with historical Jesus and then the importance of responding by the Spirit of God. John is really strong in this passage, not just knowing that truth, not just acknowledging that truth as it were, but putting our faith in Jesus, taking action, acting on what has been revealed, what is the testimony and what is the experience of the believers. It's John classic repetition. He repeats things again and again and in verse 1 he says everyone who believes and in verse 5 he says he who ever comes and whoever believes and in verse 10 he says whoever believes in the Son of God and in verse 12 he says whoever the Son of God has life, whoever doesn't have the Son of God doesn't have life. And he's speaking about believing and having faith. It's not mere intellectual knowledge. The word is really much more about being persuaded to change, allowing the truth to make you go to the Savior and ask for salvation and ask for forgiveness. So you fuse the water and the blood and the spirit together in your life. And maybe some of you here are younger people, maybe some of you are younger people, some of you are older people, some of you are those who have been baptized as children and have received covenant blessings as a result. But if you're not a Christian, if you haven't moved from that position, then it's very significant to remember the need not just to rely on a baptism or even to rely on knowledge of the truth, but to respond to the spirit of God who invites you to come and put your heart and life in his and know the new birth. The alternative to that is probably not intentionally, but the alternative is you're really calling God a liar. What he says here, if we don't believe the testimony and we're making God out to be a liar, that's a poor place to be. It's a really poor place to

be. Bob Dylan went through a Christian phase, but he did. I'm not sure where he stands before his God now, but he wrote some amazing lyrics during that time. In one of his songs he says, you've either got faith or you've got unbelief. Not in a very Scottish way, he says there ain't no neutral ground. That's absolutely true when it comes to where we stand before God, that there's not a neutral place where we can just wait. We either have faith or we have unbelief. And in unbelief, we're in a place where intentionally or otherwise we're calling God a liar, that Jesus isn't who he says he is and we don't need him as he says we do.

So responding to the spirit of God, coming to terms with the historical Jesus, recognizing the real battles we face, our spirits, and last thing very briefly, it's just going on to experience this new life as he speaks about here. We see his life and we see his commandments in a new light and we experience him in a new light so that he says by this we know the love that we love the children of God, when we love God and obey his commandments, for this is the love of God that we keep his commandments. And that's when we experience the spirit of God in our lives and the reality of a new life. And what is that legalistic? Is that why I'm not becoming a Christian? Because I don't want to be all the commandments. What are the commandments? God gives, the Old Testament speaks of 10 words. That's what the 10 commandments are actually translated as, 10 words. 10 words, that's all he gives us. And these 10 words can be summarized in two phrases, love God with all your heart and love your neighbour as yourself. And that's exactly what John has been saying here right throughout this letter. He's saying as you love God in your heart and as you come to trust in him, that will be worked out in the way you love one another. And that is the new life that we enjoy in Christ. And when we do that, that's when we see God. Remember we saw that this morning. God is, we can't see God, but he said when people love one another in the Christian church, that's where God is manifest. That's where he's seen. And that's a really interesting point because when we struggle spiritually, when we drift spiritually, where's the first place we leave church and the company of Christians? Because it's awkward and difficult and embarrassing.

And we distance ourselves from the place where we can see God. Now I know there's battles and struggles in staying in a Christian community, but it's where we learn forgiveness and grace and perseverance and the fruit of the Spirit which needs to be outworked with one another.

And that's as we obey his commandment, he gives us the strength to live and enjoy his peace and his blessing and his fruitfulness. So John's been really strong on this. And I hope you can go back and read 1 John again. And maybe if you've got an old Bible, an extra old Bible that you don't use very much, maybe you could underline all the things that are repeated in 1 John, the different things that lots of things are repeated. And remember that this is God's word and if he repeats something, it's obviously very important.

And then take these repetitions and pray them and think about them and ask for the Spirit of God to challenge you about them and make every effort by his grace and in his power to live in this way. And remember that there's an enemy of our souls who wants to blow you apart. Just to blow you apart in your relationship with God and blow you apart in your relationship with one another as believers and seek his protection and seek his power and seek his grace and be aware that you're not the one that causes the division and the discontent by drifting in your own heart from the living God and maybe then blaming the church for that or blaming the minister or blaming the elders or whoever it might be. We're all failed, we're all fallen, we all make desperate mistakes, leadership down, but we need to be confessing and honest and open and supportive of one another and recognize that the template of trouble that John's speaking into here with the false teacher is still a template that we're aware of. I don't think so much in terms of false teaching with me or Thomas or with others in the church. There's an orthodoxy and a strength at least at that level. It's not deliberate false teaching, but we can really get things wrong in lots of different ways and we can also because I guess because the internet now listen to all kinds of teaching that we have no idea whether it's real or genuine or good or false and we may be attracted to it for the wrong reasons and it separates us from the body of Christ. Just be aware of these things and you're not a believer tonight. I just invite you to consider this great character, God, his love and the testimony of God's word that says that the gospel is not good advice, it's good news, it's good news that you need for your life to be an overcomer of the world and in the world and into eternity. Amen.