



2nd Sunday of Easter Preaching Series on John's pastoral letters

Confident Christianity Knowing the Truth in a world of confusion and compromise

John wrote,
"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."
(1 John 5:13)

Wasn't Easter Sunday a wonderful celebration!

I was able to meet so many of your family: sons, daughters, and grandchildren. We had many new visitors, and some expressed their interest in finding a home among us.

There was one visitor who really warmed my heart.

It was young Sebastian, Colin and Patricia's grandson. He came carrying his new study bible. He came ready to learn, ready to understand, with a desire in his heart to go into ministry when he is older.

What an ambitious dream! The dream of entering the ministry, is not one to be taken lightly. It is, in fact, a calling to be:

- A proclaimer of the good news of Jesus Christ.
- An interpreter of God's truth, holding fast to the teaching of Jesus and His Apostles.
- A willingness to confront and challenge those who try to twist, distort, add to or take away what the Apostles defined as the true Gospel of Jesus Christ.

And it is in a daunting and dark world which Sebastien hopes to proclaim the true light of God's word.

We live in a world where the answer to Pilate's question 'what is truth' is answered in words such as:

"Well truth is whatever you want it to be. You get to define your own truth. Truth is relative to your situation, your experience, your own belief system."

We live in a world where there is no sharp division between right and wrong, good and evil, darkness and light, a world where there many more than fifty shades of grey.

We live in a world where the good news of who Jesus is and what He has done is twisted, distorted and diluted.

This leaves many asking, "how do I know what to believe? Where can I find truth in this world?"

This is the world into which God is calling, not only Sebastian, but all of us.

Point 1 | When Jesus calls us and places His Spirit in our heart, we will be continually transformed becoming more and more like Jesus everyday.

But before we go, we must know what we believe.

Only then, when people challenge, question and try to twist God's truth, will we be able to discern the flaws in their claims, and the deception in their lies.

Today we start a new series journeying through the pastoral letters of the Apostle John. We'll spend five weeks primarily in John's first letter.

We actually know a fair bit about John.

He was most likely a young man, around seventeen or eighteen, when Jesus first called him to be one of his disciples. He was probably the youngest of all the disciples.

We know he started out as a hot-headed young man, given to sharp and impulsive outbursts, probably continually arguing with his brother James – which is why Jesus nicknamed them the 'Sons of Thunder.'

The more John fellowshiped with Jesus his character began to change.

When others wrote about him, they described him as gentle and gracious, with an outstanding devotion and love for the Lord Jesus. That's why he was given the name the Apostle of Love.

It was near the end of John's life, around 80 to 90 AD, that John wrote these letters.

So, they are probably the last written in the New Testament, making them the final words from the last living Apostle.

This is very important. It was these letters and others, that formed the basis for the creeds to be compiled.

What I'd like to do during the season of Easter, as we journey through John's pastoral letters, is interweave a summary of the foundational truths of our Christian faith. I'm going to ask Rev Juleen and Bill to continue this theme when they preach also.

About the letters ...

Point 2 | The world in which we live is both dark and confused. John writes to confront this darkness by shining God's truth, thus separating the darkness from light, and truth from lies.

wrote to a network of house churches he had established, most likely in ancient Ephesus. As soon as a church was established, the foundational truths of the Gospel were taught, and elders were appointed, who were responsible to teach the next generation of believers about the Christian faith, and what it means to live an authentic Christian life.

Over the years, however, a group arose within the church who taught different philosophies about who Jesus was, denying that he was God's Son and that Jesus had a real human body.

These teachers left the churches, and began travelling around visiting houses where Christians met, trying to convince them to accept their new ideas about who Jesus was and how to live as a Christian in this world.

So, John writes to remind them of what is true separating it from what is false.

Ultimately, he wants them to know:

- What is a real Christian?
- How can we know with certainty that we have eternal life?

In communicating his message, John doesn't beat around the bush – and he makes many stark contrasts to drive his points home.

He is not afraid to confront those whose claims are false.

He is not afraid to call those who are spreading lies, 'deceivers' and 'antichrists.'

Yes, its spicy stuff.

But, like the Apostle Paul, John regarded the truth of the Gospel as so precious – it must never be distorted, twisted or diluted.

So John opens his message by affirming two Christian truths:

- The first affirms who God is; and
- the second affirms who Jesus is.

Point 3 | John's introduction makes two truths very clear. A Christian believes that God is the eternal Father Almighty, and His Son Jesus was with Him at the beginning.

John begins his letter writing, "*That which was from the beginning ...*" (1 John 1:1a)

It sounds very similar to how he would later begin his Gospel, "*In the beginning was the word and the word was with God and the word was God.*" (John 1:1)

The God whom we worship is Creator God with no beginning and no end.

What is why our creeds remind us, no one created God, for God is:

... the Father, the Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, of all that is, seen and unseen. (Nicene Creed)

However, this great Creator God, did not remain aloof and distant.

He brought himself near to us by coming to earth as a man.

John wanted all Christians to know that Jesus was really human, a real man, who can be seen and heard, who can be touched and handled. All the Apostles experienced this miraculous coming of God in human form.

... "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." (1 John 1:1)

The Christian faith affirms that Jesus is both God and man, at the same time.

The false teachers in John's day were claiming that Jesus did not really have a human body. They claimed that God's divine presence descended on Jesus at his baptism and then departed just before his crucifixion.

That is why we profess:

For us and for our salvation he came down from heaven, was incarnate from the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary and was made man. (Nicene Creed)

Point 4 | When John speaks of 'fellowship' he is saying we are invited to participate in the union that God the Father shares with his Son Jesus Christ.

Let's continue. John also speaks a lot about 'fellowship' ...

"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." (1 John 1:3)

What makes the Christian faith so amazing, is not only the miracle of our salvation from death to life, but also the joyous fellowship we get to enjoy with God, because of Jesus' atoning sacrifice, through His Spirit.

But to understand what John is talking about we need to break down this term 'fellowship'.

Fellowship is easily understood as "two fellows on the same ship". A helpful analogy when the 'ship' upon which Christians find our union is 'Christ'.

Furthermore, it is helpful to imagine God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit – our trinitarian God - as a circle of fellowship – a communion. The fellowship God enjoys is perfect union, with perfect love being continuously shared.

It is INTO this communion or fellowship that Jesus invites us to participate.

After all that's exactly what Jesus prayed to his father about,

"I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me." (John 17:20-22)

Did you notice that, "... May they also **BE IN US** ..."

It is into this divine union, or fellowship, between the Father and the Son, that we are invited, when we accept Jesus' invitation to be 'in Him'.

That's why a Christian is more than just a follower of Jesus Christ. A Christian is one who has chosen to find their identity 'in Jesus Christ'.

That's why John writes, *"We are writing these things so that you may fully share our joy"*. (1 John 1:4)

Confident Christianity is enjoyed by those who have a personal and intimate relationship with Jesus Christ. For Jesus bring us into the fellowship he enjoys with God the Father through His Spirit. And this is the fellowship that is shared by all of God's children.

Let's sing about that wonderful fellowship we share.

How we'll proceed through 1 John:

Easter 2 | 7th April | 1 John 1:1-2:10 | Confident Christianity:

Knowing the truth in a world of confusion and compromise

- God is the Father Almighty creator of heaven and earth,
- Jesus Christ is God's only Son, the revelation of God in human form

Easter 3 | 14th April | 1 John 2:12-29 | Confessional Christianity

Fellowship with God the Father means walking in the light, whilst admitting our vulnerability to sin, we acknowledge Christ's atoning sacrifice for our sins.

- God sent Jesus to atone for our sins, delivering us from slavery to sin;
- having been freed from sin, our faith and trust in Jesus Christ gives us right-standing before God

Easter 4 | 21st April | 1 John 3:1-24 | Compassionate Christianity

Fellowship with God in Christ means receiving God's love with which to share with others.

- Those who have experienced God's forgiveness, shared God's love with others

Easter 5 | 28th April | 1 John 4:1-20 | Confronting Christianity

Fellowship with God in Christ means confronting and challenging lies with the truth.

- God's word alone is the measuring stick to test truth from human lies
- The Spirit of God has been given to us to discern truth from error

Easter 6 | 5th May | 1 John 5:1-20 | Compliant Christianity

Fellowship with God in Christ means living obediently and confidently knowing we have eternal life.

- Those who love Jesus, obey his commandments;
- Those who are 'in Christ' have received God's eternal life

Easter 7 | 12th May | Ascension Sunday