

# Life in Jesus' Name

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[ 0 : 00 ] Good, well let's turn to our Bible reading this morning. And we're in John chapter 20, page 907.

And this week and next, we're just spending a little time in John's Gospel. Many of you will know that Mark Campbell has recently started a new role with the Word One-to-One.

And if you don't know what that is, the Word One-to-One is essentially John's Gospel put into a very simple, accessible format. And it's designed to be able to be bred one-to-one with a friend of yours, an unbelieving friend or member of the family.

And so, to encourage us to be making use of it and to help Mark, we're going to be spending this week and next just thinking about John's Gospel and encouraging us to use these materials, the Word One-to-One.

And next Sunday morning, Mark will be here just talking a bit more about his work and about the resource, Word One-to-One. But it's John's Gospel. And so we're going to look this morning at John's purpose in writing his Gospel, which I hope will be a real help to us.

[ 1 : 16 ] So we're going to look at particularly verses 30 and 31 of chapter 20, but I'll pick up the reading from verse 24. So it's page 907. Now Thomas, one of the twelve, called the twin, was not with them when Jesus came.

So the other disciples told him, we have seen the Lord. But he said to them, unless I see his hands, the mark of the nails, and place my finger into the mark of the nails, and place my hand into his side, I will never believe.

Eight days later, his disciples were inside again, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, peace be with you.

Then he said to Thomas, put your finger here and see my hands, and put out your hand and place it in my side. Do not disbelieve, but believe.

Thomas answered him, my Lord and my God. Jesus said to him, have you believed because you've seen me?

[ 2 : 31 ] Blessed are those who have not seen, and yet have believed. Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book.

But these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing, you may have life in his name.

Amen. May the Lord bless to us his words. Well, I'll be with your help if you had John's Gospel open there, chapter 20, and page 907.

I'll be thinking a bit about John's reason, his purpose in writing this account. So looking at verses 30 and 31 in particular. Now there's a curious but well-known phenomenon.

It's well-known, and yet so often we behave as if it's not true. And the phenomenon is that a person's happiness, however you might choose to measure that, is dependent upon money, but only up to a certain point.

[ 3 : 52 ] Once basic needs have been provided for, an increase in income leads to pretty marginal increases in what you might call happiness. Of course, happiness is difficult to define, but that is the consistent findings of those who conduct research into this sort of thing.

The economist Jeffrey Sachs notes in the World Happiness Report from last year that in the U.S., income per capita has more than doubled since 1972, while happiness has remained roughly the same or even decreased.

Now many folk know that's the case. But despite perhaps knowing the reality, they still strive after money and wealth and possessions.

They perhaps know deep down that getting the new car or the fancier phone or the bigger holiday won't deliver all that it promises. And before long, they'll be eyeing up something bigger and better. We've all been there. You've got a nice new phone, and then somebody's got an even better one. But people plow on regardless, don't they? And even well-educated people fall for the lie.

[ 5 : 02 ] In research conducted amongst first-year university students in the USA, 83% of those surveys said that becoming very well-off financially was an essential or very important life goal.

83% becoming very well-off and absolute essential. But many others do realize that money alone doesn't satisfy the deepest desires and longings of our hearts, and so they search elsewhere.

Someone showed me an Instagram post the other day. I'm not an Instagrammer. That may surprise you. Not all influencers are on Instagram. But somebody showed me a post, and here's what it said. Just spent the most splendid day at the Happy Place Festival in sunny Chiswick House. The sun shone down on all the yoga mats, and the grounds were filled with the most wonderful people, all getting together to feel the good vibes and explore what it means to be happy.

The enigmatic Russell Brand today talked about how we need to find our own religion, our own set of values to guide us through life. Well, that Instagram post is very much the dogma of the day, isn't it?

[ 6 : 19 ] Be true to yourself. Find your own way. Create your own reality. Whatever is true for you. Now, it all sounds very nice, doesn't it?

But it's based on a huge assumption. Namely, that there is no overriding reality. There is no one explanation. There is no truth.

It's just all up for grabs. And whilst that sounds very nice and easygoing and generous and kind, in reality it leads to profound confusion for people.

It's a massive leap in the dark, that sort of thinking. A huge leap of faith is required if you're going to follow Russell Brand, based on your own reasoning, your own understanding.

Is there a better way? Can we have certainty? And certainty seems to be the one thing that is lacking, isn't it, in modern Western society? You can't even be sure about your own gender anymore.

[ 7 : 19 ] It's up to you. You decide that. You create. Nothing's certain. So can we be certain about anything? Well, the answer, according to the Bible and according to John's Gospel, is an emphatic yes.

We can be certain. There is a better way. And we can be certain about the most fundamental, biggest questions, biggest realities that we face as human beings.

What is on offer in John's Gospel is life itself, life in all its fullness. And it comes through believing in Jesus Christ.

And that belief is based on solid evidence. That is why John writes his account. Let's read again those two verses from chapter 20. Now, Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples which are not written in this book.

But these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing, you may have life in his name. You see what John is saying?

[ 8 : 28 ] He's giving us the purpose of the whole book. We don't get to make up the meaning of Bible books. It's not down to us to create the meaning.

Rather, the Bible itself tells us what it means and how we're to understand it. And John tells us here pretty plainly what his aim is. His purpose isn't academic.

It's not merely a biography. He's not primarily interested in writing a chronological account of Jesus' life. He's not just recording some sayings of Jesus that he found particularly interesting.

He's not doing that. He's not just recording. But he is actually preaching. He wants to achieve something and do something in the lives of those who read it. And he's preaching with a very clear purpose in mind.

Namely, that all who read this account would make a commitment to follow Jesus Christ. And so know life, eternal life. John is getting at, he's aiming at, he's answering the sorts of questions that Russell Brand and all those other folk at the Happy Place Festival were grappling with.

[ 9 : 37 ] The sorts of questions that we all grapple with when we're not distracted with work or family or entertainment. The sorts of questions that seep into our minds as we struggle to get to sleep.

The sorts of questions that we face when we're in the midst of a crisis. The key questions that John is answering are exactly those ultimate questions that gnaw away at the hearts and minds of all people in all places at all times.

And in his gospel, he declares the ultimate realities of which we can be certain. His answer is that the meaning of life, the meaning of the whole universe, the way of salvation and eternal life is found in one place only, one name only.

The name of Jesus Christ, who is the very eternal God incarnate, the word made flesh. So there's a lot at stake, isn't there?

If that is what John is claiming, you don't get much bigger than that in terms of claims. So let's look a bit more closely at John's purpose statement here.

[10:47] And the order is straightforward. First, evidence, then belief, and then life. The ultimate goal, as we've seen, is life, eternal life.

And this life comes only through faith in Jesus. And the only way to genuine Christian belief is through first-hand testimony of the apostles and all that Jesus said and did.

So look at these three things. First, evidence. John gives us indisputable testimony about Jesus' words and works. Look again at verse 30. Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples which are not written in this book.

But these are. These signs, they are written. So John is saying, Jesus did many things in the presence of witnesses.

And some of those I've recorded in this book. But there's a whole lot more I've not included. And it was all witnessed. These things weren't done in a corner, says John.

[11:51] They were done in the presence of others. So faith, at least for John, is not a leap into some unknown darkness, is it? All that he sets out here in his book consists of honest testimonies of honest men.

Testimonies as to what they saw and heard. What they touched. What they handled. And as you read through John's gospel, you'll see that it's almost all testimony.

Jesus did this. He went here. He saw these people. He did this. He said this. He did these things in the presence of others. So John claims that his gospel is verifiable evidence.

It's verifiable history. People saw it. This is an account of things that really happened. It's not that John wandered off to some cave somewhere and received revelations that were only made to him. It wasn't that he dug up some ancient tablets which only he could translate. No, this wasn't done in a corner. This was public. Verifiable. These things really happened.

[13:00] It's not fiction. C.S. Lewis, as well as being a very well-known author, was a world-class literary critic.

He studied and worked at Oxford and then Cambridge. And when reading the gospel accounts, including John's, he makes this comment. I've been reading poems, romances, vision literature, legends and myths all my life.

I know what they're like. I know none of them are like this. Of this gospel text, there are only two possible views. Either this is reportage or else some unknown writer without known predecessor or successor suddenly anticipated the whole technique of modern realistic narrative.

So Lewis means that ancient fiction is nothing like what we would call modern fiction today. Modern fiction is realistic.

It reads like eyewitness account. But that sort of fiction only really developed in the last few centuries. And it was certainly unknown 2,000 years ago. The gospel accounts are not fiction.

[14:14] Just take John chapter 21 there. Look down a few verses. And we're told here that Peter was just offshore in his boat when he saw Jesus on the shore.

And he tells them to cast their nets on the other side. And they catch more fish than they can handle. But notice some of the precise details. Look at verse 8. They are about 100 yards offshore. And then verse 11. We're told precisely how many fish they caught. 153. Now none of those details are relevant to the plot or character development at all.

And if you and I were making up an exciting story about Jesus today, we would probably include little details like that to give the air of realism. But that sort of fictional writing was totally unknown in the first century.

The only reason why somebody 2,000 years ago would mention these things, why they would mention being 100 yards out from the sea or 153 fish, the only reason that would be recorded is

because it was actually witnessed.

[15:23] They actually saw these things. They counted the fish. They really happened. And again and again you see that through John's gospel. Precise details. John's gospel is first-hand evidence.

It's eyewitness testimony. These things really did happen. And because they really did happen, there are significant implications for us and for all people.

Because this book is evidence about Jesus, the Christ, the Son of God, that is a reality that provokes a response either to belief or unbelief. And that's our next point.

We've seen the evidence. And that is to lead to belief. John appeals to us that we'd respond to Jesus. Look again at verse 31.

These are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. And that by believing, you may have life in his name.

[16:25] So John is writing these things. He's recording these events so that you may believe. But it's not belief in a vague sort of way.

It's not belief in anything. It's not Russell Brand, make up your own thing. It's not just belief for the sake of belief. No, it's belief in a very specific thing. Look at verse 31. True faith means believing certain things about Jesus.

Namely, that he is none other than the promised Messiah, the Christ. And that he is God's only Son. God himself, the source of life, made known at last in the person of Jesus of Nazareth.

So John's aim is that everyone who reads this account will come to the conclusion that believing Thomas comes to there in verse 28. Where he exclaims, my Lord and my God.

So it's to believe particular, specific things about Jesus. And from the very beginning of his account, every part of his gospel is intended to lead the reader to a higher and higher understanding of Jesus of Nazareth.

[17:37] Until we echo, for ourselves, Thomas' confession. Any understanding of Jesus that's less than that means we've not really grasped the Christian faith.

Anything less than Jesus' law, the Son of God, that isn't a Christian response. And so as well as setting out the evidence, John urges a response.

He shows us not only the evidence, he wants a response. He shows us not only the signs, but also the significance of the sign.

He points us to how we should respond. And that's a repeated pattern you see over and over again through the gospel. You see the sign, but also you see the significance.

So for example, in chapter 5, you don't turn there, but in chapter 5, you have in the first half of the chapter, after verse 16, you have the sign, the healing of the lame man on the Sabbath.

[18:35] But then from verse 17, you have the significance of the sign. The event is explained by the very words of Jesus. And listen to what he says there in the chapter.

He says, In the account itself, in John's gospel.

And the question poses always, what will you do? What will you do in response to what you've learned here about Jesus? All the evidence points to him being exactly who he claims to be.

The Son of God. And so all the way through John's gospel, he's posing that question. Will you believe? Or will you reject? And John would urge you.

Anyone who reads his account, he'd urge you to choose life. To believe in Jesus Christ. Because it's only in him that life is found. Only in him is there salvation.

[19:58] Only in Jesus. To evidence. To evidence. It's there to lead to belief. And that belief, says John, leads to life. That's our third point.

John shows us the eternal benefits of belonging to him. So the ultimate goal. The reason why John's written this account is so that people would have life.

That's the great goal. Eternal life. This life comes only through faith in Jesus. And the only way to genuine Christian belief is through the first-hand testimony of the apostles and all that Jesus said and did.

And the life that John speaks about here is eternal life. Life in the world to come. Life in all its unimaginable fullness. It's life that we only get the faintest glimmers of here and now.

The faint shadows of what we enjoy in this world. Seeing a view of breathtaking beauty. The enjoyment of a glorious sunny day.

[21:02] The joy of your wedding day. Or the wonder of holding your firstborn child in your arms. Those are but foretastes of what is to come. Listen to these words from Revelation chapter 21.

Again written by John. He says, Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth. For the first heaven and the first earth had passed away and the sea was no more.

And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man.

He will dwell with them. And they will be his people. And God himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes. And death shall be no more.

Neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore. For the former things have passed away. And he who was seated on the throne said, Behold, I'm making all things new.

[ 22 : 09 ] That is the life that John is speaking of. No more tears. No more pain. All things made new.

And that is a great message of hope and joy, isn't it? Life in all its fullness is what is offered. No longer do we have to stumble around in the dark, creating our own meaning, our own religion. Something that is nothing more than our own personal happiness. Even if it's built on the most fragile foundations. That is utterly hopeless, isn't it? That's built in the fiction.

It's futile. It's not life. But what we have revealed in the Gospel of John is nothing other than the Creator himself stepping down into our dark world and making himself known in the person of Jesus.

The source of life. Eternal life. That is John's great claim. The Creator God himself steps down into our world and makes himself known.

[ 23 : 13 ] So life comes through faith in Jesus. And it's based on solid evidence. Evidence leading to belief, leading to life.

That's what John wants you to grasp and get as you read his Gospel. So three implications for us today. Three things to take away.

First, choose life. Perhaps you're here this morning and you've never for yourself believed in Jesus all the claims that he made.

You've maybe heard something of the Christian message before and dismissed it as a myth. Well, if that's you, then I challenge you to consider whether you're being fair to the Christian faith and to the Bible.

Have you really examined for yourself the evidence? Read John's Gospel for yourself. Does it really come across as myth? Read it.

[ 24 : 14 ] Perhaps you've heard it before but never taken that step of believing, of trusting Jesus for life. Well, if that's you, then can I urge you with the greatest possible urgency to respond to him.

Don't just marvel at the signs recorded. Don't just enjoy the evidence presented. It's more than that. Understand the significance. And understand the significance for your eternal destiny.

Because safety and security for all eternity is found only in Jesus. So trust in him. Seek forgiveness in him today.

For if you accept Jesus now, you will live with him forever in a fullness of life that you can barely imagine. But reject him now. And he will one day reject you.

And you'll be eternally lost. So John would urge you. Choose life. Now. Today. That's the first thing.

[ 25 : 19 ] Secondly. Second implication. Remember that the word itself is powerful. We can have great confidence in the Bible. In these words we have open in front of us.

It is through this medium that God has chosen to reveal himself. What does John say? These things are written so that you may believe and have life. It's through reading the words of scripture that God will bring people to life.

I wonder if we really believe that sometimes. It is through his word that people come to everlasting life. I've heard very striking, encouraging stories of the power of the word of God in the last few weeks.

If you were at the prayer meeting the other night, you would have heard some of these too. People who've been given a Bible with no previous experience or no previous interest in Christianity. And they found themselves reading it.

And reading it and not being able to put it down. And coming to saving faith just by reading the Bible. It's wonderfully encouraging, isn't it? People coming to life haven't been given a Bible.

[ 26 : 27 ] But it shouldn't surprise us, should it? It's just what John says here, isn't it? Look at the evidence. Read it for yourself. Believe and have life. It's just what John says.

Life comes through belief in the Jesus revealed in the scriptures. This is where the power is. God works by his spirit as his word is read and as it's preached. So remember, the word itself is powerful.

When Richard Pagonon, who's developed these reading notes, when he talks about these notes, he always reminds people, it's not about you. The power doesn't come from your words of explanation.

The power's in the word. The Bible does the work. It's not down to you. So you can relax. The word will do its work. And it's good to remember that. The word itself is very powerful.

Only him. Only God at work by his spirit through his work can bring people to life. So that's the second thing. Choose life. Remember the word is powerful. And then thirdly, understand that we have the responsibility, the privilege, to be Bible sharers.

[ 27 : 40 ] So along with the clear responsibility to respond to the evidence presented, to believe in Jesus, along with that comes the responsibility for all Christians to go and tell others about Jesus, to share what we know, because we know what's on offer, life, eternal life.

And that is something worth sharing, isn't it? To share with those who are, at the moment, walking in darkness. And John expects us to share the message to pass it on.

It's not something we have to keep to ourselves. Ours is not a private faith. These events, these are public events, revealing the creator of the universe.

So nothing is more worthy than passing on than that, surely. And so we must, we must share what we've read and heard this morning. But we do live, don't we?

We do live in a biblically ignorant age. Many folk have not read the Bible for themselves as an adult. And because of that, many are willing to dismiss it without really taking it seriously, without actually reading it for themselves.

[ 28 : 55 ] But that also presents an opportunity. Perhaps people are more willing to read it for themselves than we are willing to ask them. Perhaps because we are ignorant, people are willing to say, OK, what's this about?

Lee Mack, the comedian, he was on Desert Island Discs some time ago. And you'll know the premise. You're stuck on a desert island, and you choose a few songs that would keep you going, and you get to bring a book.

But you're also given the Bible. That's a given. You have the Bible with you, and you can pick something else. And here's what Lee Mack said. He said, I'm glad you get the Bible, because I would read the Bible.

I think it's quite odd that people like myself, in their 40s, are quite happy to dismiss the Bible, but I've never read it. I always think that if an alien came down, and you were the only person they met, and they said, what's life about?

What's Earth about? Tell us everything. And you said to the alien, well, there is a book here that purports to tell you everything. Some people believe it to be true. Some people don't. And the alien would say, wow, what's it like?

[ 30 : 07 ] And you respond, I don't know. I've never read it. That would be an odd thing, wouldn't it? So at the very least, read the Bible. Well, there you go.

That's a compelling case. You can pose that mental exercise. Imagine an alien comes down and asks about the Bible. What would you say? Perhaps try that Lee Mack story of the friend.

But think about the person you care for most in all the world, who's not yet a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ. What is your greatest desire for them?

I'm sure there are lots of good things you desire for them. Many good things, I hope. Employment, health, good relationships, a comfortable home. All good things. But these can't be, can they?

They can't be our greater desire for them. The greatest desire of a Christian for their most loved, non-believing friend.

[ 31 : 11 ] Our greatest desire must be, mustn't it, that they would have life. Eternal life. Life in all its fullness. To have life welcomed into the eternal family of God.

Surely that's the greatest desire we must have for anyone. Jeremy Marshall. He's the former chief exec of England's oldest private bank.

He's got terminal cancer. And here's what he wrote on this sort of topic. And midway through, he quotes Eddie Izzard. So here's what he said.

I recently attended a funeral where the celebrant said mournfully, there is no answer to death. But I believe there is. And it brings me great hope.

In the short time left for me in this world, I can think of nothing more important than sharing that hope with others. And this yearning to find hope is powerful. Eddie Izzard, who tragically lost his mother to cancer when he was six, says, everything I do in life is trying to get her back.

[ 32 : 21 ] Eddie Izzard continued, I have a very strong sense that if we are only on this planet for a short length of time, it would be nice if just one person came back and let us know it was all fine.

Of all the billions of people who have died, if just one of them could come through the clouds and say, it's me, Janine, it's brilliant. There's a really good spa. That would be great. And Jeremy goes on.

My heart goes out to Ezizov when I read those words. But I am convinced, because of my Christian faith, that someone, Jesus, did indeed come back.

Someone has come back from dead and told us it's all all right. Now, Jeremy's faith is based on evidence.

His is a fact-based faith. In fact, Jeremy now spends most of his week reading the word one-to-one with folk in the city. That's what he does with his time.

[ 33 : 22 ] Reading John's gospel with unbelieving friends. Reading with them the evidence, so that they might believe, and so he may have life, eternal life. Life beyond death.

And that is our great responsibility, our privilege as well. Mine and yours. We all get to be Bible sharers.

And what a privilege it will be to stand before the throne of our Lord and Savior for all eternity, and there beside us are those who have come to saving faith because we share John's gospel.

Because they opened up for themselves and read for themselves the evidence that led to belief, that led to life. Wouldn't that be a wonderful thing?

Now, Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples which are not written in this book. But these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

[ 34 : 36 ] Let's pray. Amen. Father God, we do thank you for the great certainty that we can have in the Lord Jesus Christ.

So help us to respond to all that we know, all we've read. Help us to respond with belief and help us to be bold, to share your great message of eternal life with those that we know.

So please help us. Help us, each one of us, to be Bible sharers because that is where the power lies. Help us, we ask. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.