

Life in Jesus' Name

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[0 : 00] Good, well, a very warm welcome to you all, and welcome to our Wednesday lunchtime Bible Talk. Well done for being here. It's a horrible day out there, isn't it?

It feels like winter has suddenly arrived, but well done for getting here, and you're very welcome indeed. Now, you'll see on your seats, on top of your Bibles, there's little cards. We're beginning today a new series, and we'll be going right the way through the autumn until Christmas, looking at the Gospel of John.

So each Wednesday lunchtime, we will be taking a little bit of John's Gospel, and part of the reason of doing that is not only to edify you and build you up, but also to equip you to reach out to those you know and love with the Gospel.

So part of it is to equip you to evangelize, because John's Gospel is, as we'll see in a moment, very explicitly evangelistic. So there's two aims, really, this term, to teach and edify you, but also to equip you to use John's Gospel yourself to reach out to your friends and family and neighbors.

And one of the key ways we're going to do that is with a resource called the Word One-to-One, which is essentially John's Gospel put in a very accessible format.

[1 : 23] And I want to introduce you to Mark Campbell. Mark is now working full-time with the Word One-to-One, and he spends a bit of his time here working in the church. And he's just going to come and introduce us now to the Word One-to-One.

So over to you, Mark. Thank you. Good afternoon. As Paul said, the second aim, really, of the Lunchtime Services just now is to think about how we could read the Gospel, share the Gospel with other people.

And the resource we're going to use to try and help us with that is called the Word One-to-One. Now, over the next couple of months, then I'm probably going to stand here fairly regularly and give you some information about the Word One-to-One, how we can use it, how it's been used in different places and contexts, and how we can encourage and support one another as we think about our circle of friends and our circle of contacts.

I started the role in June with the Word One-to-One. And really, the main thing I want to say to you is just the absolute joy it is to be able to sit down with people and just to read the Bible with them. And just for friends of mine, just for them to say, actually, I've never read that before. Or for them to say things like, so actually, it was the resurrection that convinced the disciples that Jesus was true.

[2 : 45] You know, things like that have just been absolutely brilliant. I'm not someone that feels particularly gifted or confident at this, but I have learned just to ask the easy question of, have you ever read the Bible?

And if not, would you like to? And it's hugely encouraging, and I've been really encouraged by the work that's been happening in London, in parts of Sydney, in parts of South Africa, lots of places where people like you and me are just asking friends if they want to look at the Bible and see what it says.

So I'm going to share a wee bit more about the resource as we go through it. But as Paul says, it's simply John's Gospel written in a slightly more accessible way for some people. It's written in short books, and it makes it an easy opportunity to meet informally in your house, in a coffee shop, somewhere that might suit your friend.

And that's the main thing, a place that suits them. And then we can look at John's Gospel together. So thank you very much, and I'll say more as the weeks go on, I'm sure. Thank you, Paul.

Great. Thank you, Mark. And as we work through John, Mark will often be around, so do go and chat to him.

[3 : 56] If you want any help or advice in terms of using this resource with friends, then he'll be here and you can always chat to him. So I thought today it would be very helpful for us to have a bit of an introduction to John's Gospel.

And we're going to go to the very end of his Gospel, where John has a little couple of sentences where he summarizes why he's gone to all this effort to write his Gospel.

So if you turn in your Bibles to John chapter 20. I don't have a page number. Who's got a page number for me? 907. 906.

So 906, John chapter 20. And we're really focusing on verses 30 and 31. So here's what they say. 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.

[5 : 01] The Son of God. And that by believing, you may have life in his name. Well, let me pray and we'll think about these words together.

Father, we do thank you for the great privilege we have in being able to read your word. Lord, we thank you so much that it is easily accessible.

And that it's through your word that you promise to be at work. Your word is powerful and it can bring people from death to life. So please encourage us with these words this morning.

And please equip us to go from this place eager to share the great hope that we have. In Jesus' name we ask it. Amen. Now there's a great deal of confusion in our society about the big questions in life.

Can we be certain about anything? And the general consensus seems to be anything goes. Can we be certain about anything?

[6 : 17] Well, the answer that John's gospel gives is an emphatic yes. We can be certain. There is a better way.

And yes, we can be certain. And we can be certain about the biggest, most fundamental questions that we face as human beings. You see, what is on offer in John's gospel is life itself.

Life in all its fullness is on offer. And it comes through believing in Jesus Christ. And that is a belief based on evidence.

That is why John writes his account. Look again at those words from chapter 20 we just read.

Jesus, many are the signs in the presence of the disciples which are not written in this book. But these signs are written.

So that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. And that by believing you have life in his name. Do you see what John is saying here? He's giving us the whole purpose of his book.

[7 : 26] You see, 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.

John tells us why he's gone to all this effort to write this most amazing account. Why has he done it? Well, his purpose is not academic.

His purpose is not merely a biography. He's not just recording some of Jesus' sayings because he found them particularly interesting. No, he's not just recording. But he's actually preaching.

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. That's why he's writing. John is getting at the sort of questions that we all wrestle with when we're not distracted with work or family or entertainment.

[8 : 32] The sorts of questions that seep into our minds when we're trying to get to sleep. Or when we face a crisis in our lives. The key questions that John is answering here are exactly those ultimate questions that gnaw away at our very hearts and minds of all people everywhere.

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

In one name only. The name of Jesus Christ, who is the very eternal God incarnate, the Word made flesh. So that's John's answer.

And so there's a lot at stake, isn't there? He's making big claims. So let's look a bit more closely then at John's purpose statement here.

And the basic order is, first, evidence, leading to belief, and then life. So first, evidence. John gives us indisputable testimony about Jesus' words and works.

[9 : 49] Look again at verse 30. Jesus of many other signs in the presence of the disciples which are not written in this book. But these are.

These are. So John is saying that Jesus did many things in the presence of witnesses. And some of those things I've recorded in this book.

But there's a whole lot more I've not included. These things were done in the presence of witnesses. This wasn't done in a corner, says John. They were done in the presence of others. And so for John, faith is not a leap into some sort of unknown darkness, is it? All he sets out here in his book contains the honest testimonies of honest men.

Testimies of what they saw and heard. What they touched. What they handled. And as you read through the gospel, you'll see it's almost entirely made up of witness.

[10 : 53] Testimies. Jesus did this. He went here. He said this. He did that. All the way through the gospel. And so John claims that his gospel is verifiable history.

This is an account of things that really happened. It's not that John wandered off into some cave somewhere and received revelations that only he had. It's not that he dug up some ancient tablets which only he could translate.

No. This wasn't done in a corner. This was public. Verifiable. There were witnesses. These things really happened. This isn't fiction.

C.S. Lewis. Well-known author. He was as well as an author. He was a world-class literary critic. He taught at Oxford and then at Cambridge.

And when reading the gospel accounts, including John, he makes this comment. I have been reading poems, romances, vision literature, legends and myths all my life.

[12 : 04] I know what they're like. And I know that 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, novelistic, realistic narrative.

Those are the two alternatives. Either really is reportage of what actually happened or somebody anticipated a whole new genre of literature and came up with this gospel.

So Lewis's meaning, C.S. Lewis means that ancient fiction is nothing like what we call modern fiction. You see, modern fiction is very often realistic, isn't it?

It reads like eyewitness account. But that sort of writing, that sort of fiction only really emerged in the last few centuries. And it was certainly unknown 2,000 years ago.

[13 : 09] The gospel accounts are not fiction. Just take John 21. Just look over the other side of the page there. And in this chapter we're told about Peter.

He 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.

So look at verse 8. We're told they were 100 yards offshore. And then verse 11. They caught precisely 153 fish.

Now none of those details are relevant to the plot or to character development at all. If you or I were making up a story about Jesus that we wanted to be exciting and realistic, then we would include such details, wouldn't we?

To give it an air of realism. But that sort of fictional writing just didn't exist 2,000 years ago. The only reason why somebody writing 2,000 years ago would mention that they were 100 yards out to sea or that 153 fish were caught is because those details were retained by eyewitnesses.

[14 : 20] They really saw these things. They really counted those fish. They really happened. So John's gospel, it's first-hand testimony. It's eyewitness testimony.

They saw these things. These things really did happen. And because they really did happen, there are significant implications for us, for all people.

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

So there's the first thing, testimony. Secondly, belief. Belief. John appeals to us that we respond to Jesus. So look again at verse 31.

He says, these things are written. Why? 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.

[15 : 23] He's written so that you may believe. But it's not just belief in a vague sort of way, is it? It's not just belief for the sake of belief. It's not just belief in some sort of general spirituality.

No, look at verse 31. It's specific, isn't it? 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. God's only one other than the Lord. 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.

John wants you to reach that same conclusion because of what you've seen here in this account. any understanding of Jesus that's less than that, well, it means you've not really grasped his gospel or the Christian faith at all.

And so as well as setting out the evidence, John is urging a response. He shows us not only the signs that Jesus did, but also the significance of those signs. He points us to how we should respond.

[16 : 47] And that's a repeated pattern you get over and over again through the gospel. You get the sign, but you also get the significance. You get the anticipated response.

So for example, you don't turn here, but in chapter 5, in the first half of the chapter, you have the sign, the lame man on the Sabbath being healed by Jesus.

And then the second half of the chapter, you get the significance of that sign. You get the explanation of it, the implication of it. And the event is explained by the words of Jesus.

Listen to what he says in that chapter. He says, truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but passes from death to life.

So Jesus is interpreting for us the event. He gives us the significance of the sign. And you get that all the way through John. Not just the events, but what we're to do with that information.

[17 : 50] How we're to respond, it's there. So the question is always, what will you do in response to what you've seen and heard about Jesus Christ?

And all the evidence points to him being exactly who he claims to be, the Son of God. So will you believe, asks John.

Will you believe or will you reject? And John would urge you as you read 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. Only in Jesus. So testimony, the evidence. John lays it out, he does it so that you'll believe.

And he does that so that you might have life. That's our third thing, life. John shows us the eternal benefits of belonging to him. The ultimate goal in John's gospel is life, eternal life.

[18 : 56] The life that comes only through faith in Jesus. And the only way to genuine Christian belief, as we've seen, is through the first-hand testimony of the apostles on all that Jesus said and did.

Look again one last time at verse 31. These things 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.

And the life that John is speaking about here is life in all its fullness, eternal life, life beyond the grave, life in the world to come, life in all its unimaginable fullness.

It's the life that we only get the very faintest of shadows of here and now. Think of when we see a breathtaking view, the enjoyment of a glorious day in the sun, the joy of your wedding day, or just the sheer wonder of holding a first-born child in your arms.

those are but foretastes of what is to come. Listen to these words also from the Apostle John in his book of Revelation.

[20 : 14] Here's what he says about what's to come. 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 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 any more for the former things have passed away.

And he who is seated on the throne said, Behold, I am making all things new. That is the life that John is speaking about here.

And that is a great message of hope and joy, isn't it? That life is on offer to all who would believe in Jesus. And so no longer do we have to stumble around in the dark creating our own meaning, our own religion.

[21 : 24] That's utterly hopeless, isn't it? It's built on fiction. It's futile. That's not life. But what we have revealed in the Gospel of John, if we're going to take him seriously here, is nothing other than the creator God himself stepping down into our dark world and making himself known in the person of Jesus.

He is the source of life. He's the answer for life, eternal life. And John says, it's only here, only by reading this evidence, only by following that evidence to its logical conclusion, belief, only through that do you have life.

Evidence, belief, life. You see it all through John's Gospel. So that's his purpose. That's why he's written, this account.

Three implications for us then, three things for us to think about. First, choose life. Now you might be here this afternoon, I don't know, I can't see into your hearts, but perhaps you're here and you've never yet believed in Jesus or the claims that he made.

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

[22 : 59] Have you really considered the evidence for yourself as an adult? What is it that you're dismissing? If you have considered the evidence before but done nothing about it, then John would urge you to believe.

Don't just marvel at the signs recorded here, don't just marvel at Jesus. Understand the significance and the significance for your eternal destiny. So choose life.

Secondly, remember that the word itself is powerful. The word itself is powerful. powerful. I've heard very striking and encouraging stories about the power of the word of God in the last few weeks.

People who have been given Bibles having expressed no interest whatsoever before about the Christian faith or Christianity and they've found themselves reading it.

They found themselves reading the Bible and coming to saving faith. People who've walked in our doors in the last few weeks. things. It's wonderfully encouraging, isn't it, to see that happening?

[24 : 06] But we shouldn't be surprised, should we? It's just what John says here. How does that life come? Well, it comes through belief in the Jesus revealed in the pages of Scripture. That is where the power is.

God works by his spirit as his word is read, as it's preached. That's why we're so excited about the word one-to-one which Mark was talking about.

All it is, is John's gospel. The living word of God put in a very accessible format. And as people open that, he will be at work. Lives will be changed because they're encountering the word of God. So remember that the word itself is powerful. It's not down to you or me. I can't convert anybody, neither can you. But the Lord himself can, through his word and by his spirit.

Third and final implication. Understand that we have a responsibility. We have the privilege to be Bible sharers.

[25 : 12] So along with the clear responsibility to respond to the evidence presented to believe in Jesus Christ for ourselves, along with that comes the responsibility to all Christians to go and tell others about Jesus.

We know what's on offer. We've seen it here in John. Eternal life. That's what's on offer. And surely that's something worth sharing, isn't it? John expects us to pass this on.

It's not something to keep to ourselves. It's not a private faith. It's a public one. We have to share it. There's a chap down in London called Jeremy Marshall.

He was the former chief exec of England's oldest private bank. He's now stepped away from that. He's got terminal cancer. But here's what he wrote recently. During this quote, he quotes Eddie Izzard.

So it's a long quote, but bear with me. So Jeremy Marshall says this, I recently attended a funeral where the celebrant said mournfully, there is no answer to death.

[26 : 21] 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 so 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.

Eddie Izzard continued, I have a very strong sense that 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. Well, Jeremy reflects on that and says, my heart goes out to Eddie Izzard when I read those words, but I am convinced because of my Christian faith that someone, Jesus, did indeed come back.

Well, Jeremy's faith, his is a faith based on evidence. his is a fact based faith. And in fact, Jeremy now gives most of his week doing the word one-to-one, reading John's gospel with unbelieving friends in the city of London.

[27 : 52] That's what he does. Reading with them the evidence so that they might believe and so they might have life, eternal life, life beyond death.

That's our only hope, isn't it, in this world? And that is all of ours great responsibility, our great privilege. All of us have the privilege to share that hope.

We all get to be Bible sharers. It's not something for the professionals. All of us can share the Bible.

And what a privilege it will be to stand before the throne of our Lord and Saviour for all eternity.

And there beside us are those who have come to saving faith because they opened and read for themselves the Gospel of John.

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.

[29 : 12] Well let me pray. Father God, we thank you that there is a sure and certain hope for all in this world.

The evidence is here. The testimony is plain. So help us, each one of us, to be eager, Bible sharers, knowing that it doesn't depend on us, but rather it's your living word that will do the work.

And so we do ask all that you would give us the privilege of seeing people we know coming to saving faith because they've seen the evidence and so believed.

That is our prayer and please help us Lord to be willing servants for your sake we ask. In Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Well, next week we will go to the very beginning of John's gospel and we'll begin to work through it.

And hopefully that will be an encouragement to you. And we'll equip you to have confidence to use it yourself and to use the resource that Mark was sharing with us. So John's gospel and that's us through to Christmas.