

Remaining?

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[0 : 00] So I thought to get the brain cells working this morning, we'd begin by a bit of general knowledge, true or false. Okay, I've been getting into pointless the last few weeks, getting up with Chloe at ridiculous o'clock in the morning.

So I thought we would give this a shot. So, by show of hands, true or false, here's your first question. The Italian word for milk is latte.

Hands up for true. I'm very aware we've got some Italians here, so no looking. Hands up for true, hands up for false. Okay, the answer, it is true.

We've learned something this morning. I hope you've learned more than that, but you've learned something this morning. Latte, Italian for milk. Question number two, Guernsey is the biggest of the Channel Islands.

Hands up for true. Okay, hands up for false. Okay, it is false. Someone want to tell me what it is? It's Jersey. Excellent.

[0 : 57] Fantastic zoo in Jersey. Question number three. Lewis Hamilton is the first Formula One driver to win the BBC Sports Personality of the Year award.

Hands up for true. Okay, hands up for false. Excellent. It is false. Does somebody want to give me some more names to educate the youngsters among us? Nigel Mansell.

Jackie Stewart. One more. Damon Hill. Fantastic. Great. So here's the fourth and final question. Really simple this morning. The true capital city of France is Nice.

Hands up for true. Wow. Wow. Look at that. Look around. Just put hands up for true. Can we just pause there for a minute? Just to celebrate this truth.

If you knew that that was true, please stand up. Look at this. It's fantastic. We have doctors. We have lawyers. We have teachers. Derek, brother.

[1 : 59] Great to see you this morning. Did you know that was true? They moved it, didn't they? Fantastic. Andrew, you knew that was true, didn't you? Neil, can you believe the rest of these guys?

We don't know that's true. I thought we were meant to be an educated group of people meeting here this morning. Seriously, did none of you, seriously, did none of you read that article in the news this week?

How they've moved it from Paris? Nobody read that? Paris is old news, folks. You need to move on. Let's have a seat. How do you feel when somebody in the church, a group of people, stand up and deny something that you know to be true?

How do you feel? For you see, the question facing this church that John is writing to isn't about language, it isn't about Formula One drivers. It's far more important than that.

Jesus Christ, true or false? Or put it another way, it's what the apostles, what they've told this group of Christians about Jesus, who he is, what he taught, what he did, true or false?

[3 : 10] That Jesus, God in the beginning, God eternal, fully God, came to earth to save us.

Born of a virgin, fully man, fully God, fully man. He lived a perfect life. He died a brutal death on a cross, the death that you and I deserve to die for our sin, for our rebellion against God.

And he was dead. And on the third day, he rose again and he appeared to the disciples, one of which was the guy that's writing this letter, John. They saw him, they talked with him, they touched him, and he ascended into heaven.

And he sent his spirit to live in his followers. And all that remains to be done is for him to come back, to return and to raise the dead and to judge the world.

This Jesus is the way, the truth and the life. He is the only one, the only one who can make us right with God. The only way to the Father. And this is the message that the apostles, they witnessed.

[4 : 20] And they delivered to this church, these Christians. So the apostles' gospel message, Jesus Christ, true or false? So imagine how the people in this church feel, where they've witnessed this group deny the truth and leave.

They claim that Jesus, yeah, he's a good guy, but he's not the guy that the apostles are making him out to be. He's not a big deal. We've moved on to greater things. We lead sinless lives.

We know God better than the rest of you do. And we have a greater victory over sin and over evil than the rest of you. We're Champions League Christians.

You guys are meddling in the conference. How would you feel? How did you feel? When somebody denies the truth, when a group of people deny the truth. Do you feel confused?

Was there not a minute that I almost had you there? Confused? Felt a little bit inferior? Fear? Unsure? You see, that's what John addresses this morning in our verses.

[5 : 26] Now, we've had BEC News. Here's God's Word News. Here's some of the headline ideas from this passage. Verse 22. Who is the liar? It is whoever denies that Jesus is the Christ.

Verse 26. I am writing these things to you about those who are trying to lead you astray. Verse 21. I do not write to you because you do not know the truth, but because you do know it.

You see, when it comes to what to believe about Jesus, John is telling them that they can be certain. They can be certain of the truth and that they must remain in the truth of the gospel.

And he's really doing two things in this passage this morning. On the one hand, he's warning against and he's exposing the group, the liars that have left. And on the other hand, he's confirming and he's assuring the truth to those who have stayed in the church.

You can trust the truth. So he confronts the lie and he confirms the truth. Let's see how that works out. Verses 18 and 19.

[6 : 34] Let's read this together. The truth about the times. John writes this. Dear children, this is the last hour. And as you have heard that the Antichrist is coming, even now many Antichrists have come.

This is how we know it is the last hour. They went out from us, but they did not really belong to us. For if they had belonged to us, they would have remained with us.

But their going showed that none of them belonged to us. Let's leave it there for just now. I wonder when the last time was that you heard the words, perhaps from a friend or dare I say your other half.

What did you expect then? Yeah? Did you think it was going to be easy? You ever heard those words? Maybe after complaining about an aching body after your first visit to the gym in a long time. Did you really think it was going to be easy? You know, Mike and I were in the office on Friday and Thursday talking about the difficulties of what it is to be a new parent. You think it was going to be easy?

[7 : 39] I think we might have. What did you expect? Why are you surprised? Because before we dive into the detail of these verses and tackle some of the scary words that emerge, I want to suggest that this is the lens that we need to view this passage with, this section.

This is his big idea in writing this. And I'm really grateful, I must say, to my old tutor, Andy Gemmel, from Cornell, who's helped me understand this section. So, surprised, what are they surprised about?

Well, the appearance of what he calls Antichrist. Now, that's a scary term, isn't it? Antichrist, Antichrist, let's be honest. Would you be comfortable calling anybody that? No?

What does he mean? Well, the reason that we feel uneasy about that term is that you and I are living in an age where we love to watch horror films. Dare I say you maybe watched some when you were young.

I remember going to friends' houses to have sleepovers watching horror films. And so when we hear that term Antichrist, that is the lens through which we are interpreting what he's saying there. So we imagine, don't we, a hooded stranger, a pitchfork, horns, and he's got 666 tattooed on his rotating forehead.

[8 : 51] That's what I think an Antichrist is. But what does John mean? Well, you see, in Greek, the word ante, it simply means instead of.

Or it means in place of. Now, Jewish literature of the day has it that an evil figure is going to appear before the end of time. Interestingly, in the context of the book, you'll find John talking about the devil at chapter 3 and verse 8.

I don't think that's their unrelated ideas. And John says to this group of Christians about the Antichrist, Guys, you know this. You've heard this. Looks to be right. It's verse 18. You've heard. And so the spirit of that evil one is already at work in the world. That's what he's saying. And John, he points to this group who have left. This group who have left the church. And he says they are the instead of Jesus people. They are the people who are trying to draw you away from Jesus teaching because they themselves have left Jesus' teaching.

[9 : 53] Now, in the text, notice the word us there at verse 19. They've left us is what he says. And by us, he doesn't mean the church. What he means is they have left the apostles' gospel.

They have left us. That's what he's saying. So they have theologically moved on from the truth of the gospel. What they are promoting, this spirituality that they're trying to impress on you, entice you into, is simply the world's way of thinking dressed up in Christian language.

Don't follow them. And when are they likely to encounter these instead of Jesus' people? Well, what does he write in verse 18? In the last hour.

The time between Jesus' ascension that we were talking about earlier, his ascension and his return. The gospel age. The age when the good news of Jesus, what he has done for us, has been clearly revealed to the world.

And is in full show for all of us to see. The age when the Spirit of God, he's given us his spirit to accomplish the worldwide proclamation of that gospel news.

[11 : 02] And John asks them, well, what would you expect to happen in that last hour? What would you expect? Friends, what would we expect to happen in that last hour? Do we think this is going to be easy?

Do we think that the evil one, do we think he's going to be taking a back seat while all this is going on? Do we expect the truth of the gospel to be advancing without significant opposition? I mean, wouldn't we be expecting the enemy troops to be rallying?

Do you expect the last hour to be easy? Well, of course you don't. This is the age of conflict and battle. Where attractive alternatives to the gospel are always being flaunted.

And the truth of the gospel is always being taunted and rejected. That's just the age we're living in. And it's the same age that you and I find ourselves in. And so the message that John gives to this group of Christians is the same one that we can interpret this morning.

That this shouldn't surprise us because we're in the last hour. And it's a tough one, isn't it, to chew on. I found it really difficult this week to try and make sense of what this is saying.

[12 : 15] Because it's an emotional truth, isn't it? I'm sure many of us know close friends. We know family members who were once walking strong with the Lord.

And now actually they want nothing to do with Jesus. And I think back to the time when I was growing up in the church. I used to go to SU camps. I loved them as a kid. I met many a good friend there.

We shared great times together. Remember, Jesus was a big deal. But now, when I speak to them, is Jesus a big deal? Not so much. And I think there is massive reassurance here from what John tells us.

That this shouldn't surprise us. It's not because when people walk away from the gospel. It's not because it ceases to be true. It's just part of the age in which we live.

It shouldn't unsettle us. It should cause us to pray. And it should cause us to know that none of this takes God by surprise. That God is sovereign.

[13 : 16] That God is in control of all things. And so therefore, we can be confident in that. You can be certain of, and you must remain in, the truth of the gospel.

Now what exactly were the departed ones saying? Well, let's read verses 22 and 23. Where John tackles the truth about the lie. So John writes this at verse 22.

Who is the liar? It is whoever denies that Jesus is the Christ. Such a person is the Antichrist. Denying the Father and the Son.

No one who denies the Son has the Father. Whoever acknowledges the Son has the Father also. Now we don't know exactly what those who had left were denying about Jesus.

We don't know exactly. There's some commentators. When I was studying for this, they speculate that they were denying the incarnation. So they were denying that Jesus was fully God and fully man when he was here.

[14:16] And he is still. I don't think we fully know. But it's interesting that at nearly every point in this letter, when John is talking about Jesus, when John is talking about Jesus' work and confronting the lies about him, he's nearly always talking about Jesus' death for sin.

Let me show you how that works. Chapter 1, verse 7. But if we walk in the light as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin.

Chapter 1, verse 9. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.

Chapter 2, verse 2. He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins. And not only for ours, but also for the sins of the whole world. Now in light of that, what are the departed ones, the ones who have left the church claiming?

If we claim to be without sin, here's what they're claiming. To be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. Now do you see the point there?

[15:34] He repeatedly, John repeatedly goes back to the truth that sin is an inescapable reality, not only in this world, but in our lives. It's a big problem.

That is the problem and Jesus is the answer to that problem. So, what were they most likely saying about Jesus?

Well, we saw it a few weeks ago. Downplaying the reality of sin. And therefore, downplaying the significance of Jesus and his death and its significance.

So what are they doing? They're probably pushing the cross to the edges of what it means to be a Christian, so that it's no longer at the heart of what Jesus came to do. And certainly nowhere near as fundamental to the faith as the apostles are claiming that it is.

And so what they're doing is they claim access to God, a greater access to God that bypasses Jesus. And John helps these people who have remained see that the maths of that, it just doesn't add up.

[16:41] You see, the apostles' equation, their maths, is that we have fellowship with God in and through Jesus Christ. Now, that's not something John has made up. It's something Jesus had said about himself, didn't he, John 14?

I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you really know me, you will know my Father as well.

From now on, you do know him and have seen him. So Jesus says that he is the only way to the Father. So to enjoy fellowship with God, this is how it works.

This holy God, we need to be holy. And you and I cannot be holy other than the purifying blood of Jesus that wipes us clean and Jesus gives us his perfect life and his spirit.

That's the only way that fellowship with God works. And that's why John has been spelling it out. Because you cannot have God the Father without God the Son. You cannot circumnavigate Jesus and end up at God.

[17:49] You see, this is how I tried to figure it out in my head this week. The departed say, me minus Jesus equals fellowship with God. And the apostles say, me minus Jesus equals death.

And me in Jesus equals fellowship with God. There is no way to the Father except through the Son. There is no way to be made right with God other than by trusting in what Jesus has done for you and I for the forgiveness of our sins. You cannot have the Father and not have the Son.

You cannot claim to know God and not know Jesus. Because to move away from that truth isn't just about changing your category. Notice that word he uses there.

Actually, it's about changing your eternity. You know, we live in a society, don't we? That exactly what I've just said would love to challenge me on that.

[18:48] They would love to differ with that. It says that there are other ways to God apart from through Jesus. That you can experience something of God's. To know God without Jesus.

Now, if you want a proof of that, just go and look at your community notice board. I always do it every time I go to the St. Spreys Local. Just look at the stuff that's on that board. Or another thing, if you're walking around Edinburgh for the festival, if you're walking around, look at some of the spirituality that's going on there.

Our world believes that you can go to God without going through Jesus. Our world tells us that we don't need Jesus.

Or that we can pick and choose what bits of Jesus, his teaching, that we like and we dislike. But here's the thing. Jesus isn't like some kind of divine Mr. Potato Head.

That you can dress him up however you want. It doesn't work like Barbie in Action Man. God's not playing charades with us about the truth. We don't have to guess it.

[19 : 51] We don't have to figure it out for ourselves. He has told us in his words and in the person of Jesus what is the truth. Friends, let me ask you this morning.

I know that's been heavy. What do you believe about Jesus? Who is this guy? It matters and it matters eternally.

Is he a martyr? Is he just a good example? Is he just an inspirational moral teacher? Is he a prophet? Is he, well I had a friend told me last week, he's just a positive energy?

You know Rico Tice in his book *Honest Evangelism*, I encourage you to check it out. He says this, The only identity Jesus can't have, he can't have, is ordinary guy. Or could it be that Jesus is exactly who he says he is?

That he is the only way to God. That he is the truth. That he is the life. And if you don't know him as your Lord and Saviour this morning, then see that you are living in the darkness.

[21 : 04] And you are living in a lie. And Jesus invites you this morning to come to the truth. You know because that is very exclusive, isn't it? What Jesus claims, what he said, it couldn't be more exclusive.

That he is the only way. But we must see this morning, and this is great news, that at the same time, in the same breath, is that it couldn't be any more exclusive. It couldn't be any more inclusive. This offer is available to everyone who would come and believe in him. For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only son that whoever, that's what we were singing in the kids song earlier, wasn't it?

Whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. The invitation to know the truth is available to anyone who would believe. Who would place their faith, their trust in what Jesus has done for them.

See this invitation to come and know the truth. To come and know God through and in Jesus Christ. And so having confronted the lie, John now turns to confirm the truth.

[22 : 12] Look what he writes at verse 20 and 21. He says, But you have an anointing from the Holy One, and all of you know the truth. I do not write to you because you do not know the truth, but because you do know it, and because no lie comes from the truth.

So it's a really simple statement, isn't it? You know the truth. Now picture what comforting and assuring words they must have been to that bruised and confused church congregation.

People tempted to feel inferior and question the relationship with God. Have we really got it?

Friends, I wonder if you, and I certainly know I do, that sometimes we are tempted to live our Christian lives and to think that somehow we are inferior.

That somehow we are missing out. Inferior in light of what looks like much more impressive spirituality and trendy alternatives. But you see, the same gospel message that the apostles delivered to these Christians, these men who interacted with Jesus, these men who wrote down what he said, what he did, and they passed that message on.

That truth is the same truth that you and I stand on this morning. And so John's message to first century believers, it resounds down to us here in Bruntsfield this morning.

[23 : 38] That you can be certain of, and you must remain in the truth of the gospel. And so with those words, he issues them with a plea to remain in Jesus.

Look at verses 24 to 27. The truth about the truth. And John writes this. As for you, see that what you have heard from the beginning remains in you.

If it does, you will also remain in the Son and in the Father. And this is what he promised us, eternal life. I am writing these things to you about those who are trying to lead you astray.

As for you, the anointing you receive from him remains in you, and you do not need anyone to teach you. But as his anointing teaches you about all things, and as that anointing is real, not counterfeit, just as it has taught you, remain in him.

Now four times you'll have noticed that in those verses. He gives them the command to remain. And I don't think that's an accident. I think he wants them to understand what he's trying to tell them.

[24 : 50] And it's an idea, this word remain, I haven't counted, but I'm told that it appears 24 times in this letter. It's a very short letter, isn't it? 24 times is a lot.

And I think it's deliberate, because this is what he wants them to do. To stay with Jesus. To stay connected to him. To stay in relationship with him. Now, how are they going to do that?

Have you ever asked yourself that question? How am I going to remain in Jesus? Well, John gives them two great and wonderful encouragements. And you'll notice it in these verses if you look at it there.

John says that two things must, and he uses the phrase, remain in them. Firstly, verse 24. It's the word that they have had from the beginning.

So they have the truth. The apostles have delivered to them this trustworthy account of Jesus. The apostles have proclaimed to them his teaching.

[25 : 50] And it's reliable. And it's trustworthy. And so why would you move on from it? Don't move on from it, says John. He wants them to be people who are so in tune with the truth, that they instinctively spot any covert deviation from it.

The apostles teaching us the truth. It's the only sure ground. Don't move on from it. Don't stray away. Don't be led astray by fancy-looking, yet despairingly hollow-looking alternatives.

This word, the truth, is what they are not to leave. Abide in Jesus. Abide in the apostles' words. To do that is to remain in relationship with the Father and the Son.

And it's the same for us this morning. We need to keep ourselves rooted in this word. You see, the Bible in your hand, I don't know if you've ever thought about this.

I need to remind myself daily, and we should remind ourselves daily. The Bible in our hands is God's word in our hands. You know, William Tyndale?

[26 : 59] He was a great English reformer in the 15th century. He might be familiar to you, I don't know. But he was determined in his conviction that he was going to translate the Bible from Latin into English.

So the common people could understand it. So the Bible didn't remain in control of those who were educated and could speak Latin. And he famously said this.

This is what he hoped to accomplish by translating this. He said, A plowboy with the Bible would know more of God than the most learned scholar who ignored it. You see his conviction?

It's a wonderful conviction that everybody should have access to the Bible. And why? Because God's words to us can be understood. And isn't it a real joy this morning that we have it in our language?

How do we know God? How do we know what God is like? We have his words. We have it in English. We can understand it. And we can know what God is like because he isn't hidden.

[27 : 59] He's revealed himself to us. And so to its teachings we must strive to continue to devote ourselves to. Now I don't know if you read this week the Ofcom Scotland report.

Yeah, I did. So the Ofcom Scotland report this week, it came out with this statistic. And I wonder if this rings true for people here. It kind of did for me. The average person in Scotland now spends 19.9 hours online each week.

That's the average person in Scotland. 19.9 hours. That is not including watching TV. It's not including watching DVDs. Now I know I'm guilty of that.

Now the thing is that that is a lot of information. If you think about it, that is a lot of information that's coming into your brain, isn't it? A lot of images, a lot of opinions, a lot of ideas.

And so the question is for us to assess ourselves, how much exposure are we giving ourselves? How much exposure does the Word of God have to our lives?

[29 : 10] You know, Jerry Bridges, who's a famous Christian author, he said this, we should bathe our hearts and our minds daily in the gospel as part of our daily communion with God. I just love that word, bathe.

Isn't it? We should be having our Bibles open, we should be soaking it up, and we must be allowing God's Word to be shaping how we understand and interpret not only our lives, but the world in which we live.

Second encouragement for them to remain is that despite what the departed are saying, remember they're claiming they have the true anointing, they've got a monopoly on the truth, and these guys don't.

Regardless of what they are saying, these people who have stayed, they have the true anointing, verse 27. And it's a word that he uses several times in these verses, isn't it?

Anointing, if you count it through. Remember these people who have left the church may be feeling inferior. John says to the guys who've remained, your anointing is real, verse 27.

[30 : 11] Now what is the anointing? I think he's simply talking about the Holy Spirit. The Spirit that lives inside each and every follower of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The Spirit that God sent to unite us, to himself, to his Son, and to his work. Again, Jesus, he told us about this. John 14.

He said, If you love me, keep my commands. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate, or helper, some of your translations will say, to help you, and be with you forever, the Spirit of truth.

The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him, nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you, and will be in you. And what will the Spirit do?

Well, reading on. But the advocate, the helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things, and will remind you of everything I have said to you.

[31 : 10] So you have the helper, says John. You have the true anointing. The Holy Spirit, who God sent to lead his apostles into all truth, is the same Spirit that God sent to live in each and every single one of our lives, if we're, our faith is in him.

So you don't need any more teaching, says John. You don't need these departed ones, who claim to have a greater understanding, to teach you their stuff.

Because you have the teacher, you have the Holy Spirit. So you have the gospel, you have God's words, you have the Holy Spirit. So remain in him.

Now just as we close our time this morning, I was reminded this week, as I was preparing for this, of the famous words of Benjamin Franklin. You might have heard them. He said, the only things that are certain in life and death, so the only things that are certain in life, are death and taxes.

Have you heard that before? Yeah? I don't know whether it was, well, it was tongue-in-cheek a bit, wasn't it? But, it's an interesting observation in life. But I wanted, as we closed our time off this morning, to assure you, from this passage, that there's something more certain that you can have in your life.

[32 : 31] And it's the trustworthy account of the gospel. It's the truth of what Jesus is saying about himself. That we can be certain about what God is saying to us here.

As we live our lives in this world, the world that promotes the idea that there's no such thing as absolute truth, we can be confident in what Jesus is claiming here.

That Jesus doesn't just have a timeshare on the truth, but he is the truth. And don't we know a, a dear sister who knows this now, not as a truth seen in the mirror dimly, but now face to face, with the truth, and in glorious technicolor.

Isn't that a wonderful thought, this morning, that's where she is? Let's be certain of the truth of the gospel, let's be those who remain, in the truth of the gospel, the apostles' gospel, Jesus Christ, true or false, friends, absolutely true.

Let's pray as we close. So, Father, we thank you that you haven't left us in the dark to figure you out.

[33 : 51] Lord, the truth is, we would not be looking for you if you hadn't come looking for us. And we thank you that we have the truth. Thank you that you made a way for us to have fellowship with you through and in your son, Jesus Christ.

And Lord, I pray for us here this morning, I pray for those who don't know you, who don't know you as the truth, Father, that you would come and bring your truth to their hearts. Lord, I pray for those who are going through hard times just now, who are grieving, Lord, that you would bring great peace and assurance.

And Lord, would you help us all this week to be those who strive to remain in you, that love your words, that trust your words, and are led by your spirit.

And we pray all these things in Jesus' name. Amen.