

Witnessed?

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[0 : 00] So starting our new summer series in 1 John is called Certain, Secure, Illuminated. I hope that's how we're going to feel at the end of it. And it's all about knowing that we know God.

But can I just say, I think 1 John should come with a health warning. It is not an easy book. It is not something that we're just going to be able to dip in and out of.

It's something that's going to take some rigorous study, some serious gray cells. We're going to remember to take our thinking caps every time we open it. I don't think I have wrestled with a book ever as much as I have 1 John.

It is tricky. But we're going to find great things in it. I think it's hard for two reasons. Firstly, that John, who writes this book, is not the Apostle Paul.

So we read Paul and it's very logical. He says things like, this means this, and then this means that, and then this means the next thing. And then he goes on at the end of his arguments to always say, therefore do this.

[1 : 09] Live like this. Walk like this. Behave like this. Think this. Do that. John. Some of what he says is very complicated. But we can see there is logic behind it.

There's a structure. John, on the other hand, seems at many times to be quite structureless, quite confused. Sometimes it seems like he's just vomiting words onto the page.

Sometimes it seems contradictory. And sometimes we're going to think, oh, well, you're just repeating yourself to fill up space. So we find John hard because it doesn't quite meet with our Greco-Roman way of doing argument.

Da, da, da, da, da, da, da, da equals this. So we're going to have to watch out for that. Secondly, and I think more confusingly, 1 John seems to do almost the opposite of what he says it's meant to do.

So the big theme sentence that he gives us is in 1 John 5 verse 13. He says, I write these things to you that believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life.

[2 : 23] So in other words, he's saying, I'm writing this book so that your confidence level goes up. I'm writing this to you who believe so that you may know for definite that you have eternal life.

That's why he's writing. But then we read things like this. And you know that he appeared in order to take away sins. And in him there is no sin. No one who abides in him keeps on sinning.

No one who sins has either seen him or knows him. As a result of reading that verse, do you feel more confident that you know God or less confident? Because I certainly feel less confident as someone so aware of one who keeps on sinning.

Or what about this verse? We know that we have passed from death to life if we love each other. Anyone who does not love remains in death.

Again, having read that verse, do you feel more confident or less confident? And so it seems that John says, I'm writing this book so you might have real confidence. But as we read it, rather than our confidence getting bigger, it seems to shrink away.

[3 : 32] And so we're going to have to do some real work if we're going to get what this book is about. However, though at first reading this book is tricky, it's like wrestling a jelly, it easily slips out of your fingers.

It is a letter that is of great importance. It's very profitable to spend time in. I also think it's a very timely letter that has lots to teach us about the state of our church and our lives in the 21st century. So having gone nine rounds with it over the last couple of months, I hope that I can pass on some of the great lessons that I've been learning from this book. One more introductory comment and then we'll dive in.

I promise if I haven't put you off already, well done for staying here. 1 John is an occasional letter. That means John writes it to a particular group of people facing a specific problem.

It is a letter that is written on an occasion. He's addressing a particular problem amidst a specific group of people. And we've got to keep this in mind if we're going to squeeze out every bit of truth and all the lessons that God is trying to teach us.

[4 : 51] And the big clue to what this problem is, is found in 1 John chapter 2 verses 18 and 19. Let me read it for you. He says, 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. Now don't let that word Antichrist confuse you.

We're not talking about people in dark hoodies with 666 tattoos who drink goat's blood for breakfast. That's not what we're talking about. We're talking about instead of Christ people. We're talking the instead of Jesus group.

The people who are trying to have a Christianity that detracts away from Jesus Christ. And what it seems is that there's a group of people within a local church who have left.

[5 : 58] They've left the congregation. And they've left the church because they think that the church they were at was like a spiritual kindergarten.

And they viewed themselves as on a much higher plane, much more spiritual, much more powerful, much more impressive. That they've got a much clearer insight into who God is and what it means to live for him.

They claim to be on a special higher plane. And they said to the congregation, we can't be with you anymore. It's like babysitting. And so reading between the lines in the letter, they claim things like they've got a superior knowledge of God.

If you read the letter, the word no comes up again and again and again. They're saying we're the ones that really know God and you don't. They claim a better anointing, a more fuller anointing from the spirit.

We're far more spiritual. God has poured out the spirit into our lives in a far greater way than he has in yours. You'll see the word anointing comes up again and again in this book.

[7 : 11] He also says we've got greater purity. We're going to see this particularly next week. That they're claiming we're leading sinless lives on this earth right now. We're far more pure.

We have far more control over sin in our lives. And finally, they claim a greater victory over the devil in this life. That we've utterly defeated him.

And so as you read through, you're going to read the word overcome again and again and again.

Well, just imagine you are in the church that John is writing to.

You're quite a tight church and you've got a good history together and suddenly people start saying, well, you haven't got it at all. We're much more spiritual than you. Well, if that's a new person who's come in, you'd say, well, don't let the door hit you on the way out, wouldn't you?

But what if it's a few core families in the church? What if it's the Baxters and the Greens and the Whites? And Mr. Baxter's a lawyer, so he must be well clever and know lots of great things.

[8 : 14] And Mrs. Green, she's taught Sunday school forever. Well, and the Whites, their daughters babysat your children for months and months and months. What are you going to feel? If they're the ones saying that everything you're doing is not right.

And we need to leave because we're going to do it properly right now. Well, you'd feel very, very unsettled, wouldn't you? You'd start to question, have we really got this? Are we really living some sub-Christian experience down here?

Is there any truth in their claims to know God better, to have greater spiritual power, to have greater purity, and final victory over the devil?

What if these people left your church saying your gospel is incomplete, your worship is too babyish, your spirituality is stunted, your experience is underwhelming, and your view of the Bible too restrictive?

How would you feel? How would you feel? You'd feel quite unsettled if you were one who remained. If this church that John is writing to met them next Sunday, how would they feel?

[9 : 25] And so John writes to this group of believers unsettled by the departed to give them real confidence that they're not living some sub-Christian experience. They've got the real deal.

They're not. Do you see how comforting that would be if John, who knows he was one of the founding members, called to be a disciple and then apostle by Jesus Christ. If he says you've really got it, and that comes with real authority and real weight, that comes with real gravitas, that's going to be a real shot of confidence in the arm of your church. So John writes this letter with the dual purpose of reassuring those that remain that they've really got it and unmasking those who have departed, saying what they're really like. If we keep all that in mind, then we can dive into one John with real confidence, ready to learn great things from God. So why don't I read for us, please, one John, and we're going to read the first five verses.

[10 : 33] This is what John writes.

We write this to make our joy complete.

At all. This is God's word, and we pray that he would bless it to us. Today's sermon is called Witness, and hopefully as we read that, you will see why.

And so I want to tell you about the big idea. The big idea of this passage, first up, is the light of God's revelation shines supremely through the apostolic witness.

The light of God's revelation shines supremely through the apostolic witness. This is former PC, Keith Wallace.

[12 : 09] And he was jailed for 12 months. Why was he jailed? Because of this, the pleb gates to Gandalf, involving the chief Tory whip, Andrew Mitchell.

And why was he in prison? Well, he said he was there, and he heard what Andrew Mitchell said. But then, rather embarrassingly, the CCTV footage came out.

And it turned out he wasn't even anywhere near the main street on Downing Street. He was a false witness. He claimed an eyewitness account, but he wasn't even there.

And then there's this woman, Tanya Head, who after the 9-11 World Trade Center attack, recounted her incredible survivor story. Having escaped from the 78th floor of the South Tower, where she was an employee of Merrill Lynch.

Shortly after, she became the president of the World Trade Center Survivors Network, and gained celebrity status. There she is, meeting Mayor Bloomberg.

[13 : 17] However, in 2007, it transpired that Tanya Head, real name Alicia Head, wasn't even in New York on 9-11. But 4,000 miles away, in Barcelona, attending classes at a business school.

Though both these people, Keith Wallace and Tanya Head, claimed to have first-hand experience, and yet it was a complete fabrication and lie.

And so, in contrast to both Tanya and Keith, John writes to us, and he says, I was really there. He was really an eyewitness to Jesus Christ.

What he's saying comes with real weight. It's survived 2,000 years of being scrutinized, and comes to us as verifiable, substantiated evidence.

And that's exactly how John starts this letter to this group of unsettled believers. John starts his letter staking his claim as a bona fide apostle, a chosen disciple, a member of Jesus in a circle.

[14 : 26] Therefore, John's words come to us as one who knows. Who knows it all, because he was there for it all. He has a real experience of the incarnate, risen Lord Jesus.

And so I want to show you three things from this passage, and here's the first. John lays out his apostolic credentials. Just look at those first five verses again. See how relentless John is in using personal pronouns.

The personal pronouns we, our, and us. See how many times he says, we saw, we heard, we touched. Our hands.

Revealed to us. He is relentless. In fact, 15 times in just five verses, he refers to himself as we, us, and our.

And what does he mean by this we? Well, he's not talking about we Christians. He's not even talking about we as in the apostle John and his readers.

[15 : 38] Not that way. He's talking in the apostolic we. The we who saw, the we who touched, the we who heard, the we who are proclaiming.

John is saying we apostles are the ones who beheld Jesus. Who is described in these five verses as the one who was from the beginning. The eternal God.

Echoing one John 1 that Thane read for us earlier. He's described as the word of life. He's described as the life. And he's described as the eternal life.

And see how sensory the language is. He's saying we heard and we saw and we touched and we looked upon. John is saying I really know the truth because I was really there.

I touched God. God. This second member of the eternal trinity who came down to earth and lived amongst us.

[16:40] I was really there. And I think he's not just talking about the incarnate life of Jesus. But he's talking about the resurrected life of Jesus. Because as we read in John 20, that's the complete record that John is writing.

That all the time Jesus is saying look and see and touch. That encounter with Thomas. Look and see and touch and believe.

John is saying I was there. I walked around for three years with Jesus. And we thought it was over. And then he came to us risen and ascended.

We saw him and we touched him and we know that it's true. John is slapping his apostolic credentials on the desk and saying to his readers I know it all.

Because I saw it all. John who writes a gospel. Who was called by Jesus whilst fishing on the lake of Galilee. Who helped distribute 5,000 to 5,000 people bread and fish.

[17:43] Who freaked out in a storm on the sea. Who helped move the stone from Lazarus' tomb. Who walked beside Jesus while he was on a donkey entering Jerusalem.

Who made preparations for the Passover with Peter. Who was out there at the Last Supper literally reclining next to Jesus while they ate.

Who was in the garden when Jesus was betrayed and arrested. Who was tasked for caring for Jesus' mother as Jesus hung dying on the cross.

Jesus whom John met in the upper room after his resurrection. Who was in the boat after the miraculous catch of fish when Peter goes fishing. In John 20.

Who did 40 days of intense Bible study with Jesus about the kingdom of God. Before Jesus is ascended. Do you see how comforting this would be to a group of unsettled believers?

[18:45] That John says, I know. What I know I proclaim to you. And if you understand what I proclaim to you, you've got it all. So these people saying there's more than Jesus.

There's better than Jesus. There's more power than there is in the gospel. Nonsense. Nonsense. Because I know. And I was there. John writes reassuring words.

To an unsettled congregation saying, I saw firsthand. You've got the whole thing. Secondly. He talks about his apostolic testimony. See how many times in these five verses John uses communication words.

It's not just that he was there. But that he's communicated it. Verse 1, 2 and 3. He used the word proclaim. Verse 2.

He uses the word testify. Verse 5. Declare. Verse 4. Write. In every verse John speaks not about just the gathering of information. But the communication of that information.

[19:45] The transmittal of what he saw and heard. This is significant when we know John. Because in John's gospel, lots of people testify to a lot of things.

John the Baptist testifies to Jesus. Jesus testifies about himself. The Samaritan woman testifies about Jesus when she says, Come and meet a man who told me everything about myself.

God the Father testifies to Jesus. The crowds testify to Jesus as the one who raised Lazarus from the dead. The spirit testifies to Jesus. In fact, it seems if you read John's gospel that everyone testifies about Jesus except one group of people.

The disciples. In John's gospel, they never testify about Jesus. But Jesus promises that they will. When the advocate, the Holy Spirit comes, who might send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth.

He will testify about me. And you also will testify. For you have been with me from the beginning.

That's what John writes. And here we have in John's first letter, one indwelt by the Spirit who's now testifying, witnessing to the truth about Jesus.

[21:03] John is saying this and only this. The testimony of the apostles about Jesus is the authoritative truth.

About who Jesus is, what Jesus did, and what that means for us. There's not a minority report out there giving a different version of events. John is saying there's no alternate endings of how this went down.

There's no director's cut giving you more insight. There's not a DVD of extras. This isn't Jesus season one the apostles are giving us. This is the complete box set. From beginning to end. The official bona fide truth about Jesus. That they received and now they proclaim to us. Verse 5 is remarkable. God is light.

And in him there is no darkness at all. And from that John is saying this is full disclosure. God is light. There's no grey areas. There's no hidden bits.

[22 : 07] It's not like the dark side of the moon that we're not quite sure what's going on there so we make up sci-fi. God is saying, John is saying God is light. He's fully disclosed himself. He's put himself on full display with absolute clarity.

There's no small print. It's not like when you're on iTunes and they change the things and you just click agree without reading it all. And you don't know what's hidden in there. Whether they're going to repossess your house. Or give you an apple tattoo.

John says there's no small print. God has made himself known fully. Isn't that what Philip's talking about in the upper room?

Jesus, show us the Father. Jesus says, well, Philip, if you've seen me. You've seen the Father.

John 1.18 No one has seen the Father but God.

The one and only Son has made him known. It is the apostolic gospel that is the legitimate, unique, authoritative revelation of what God is like.

[23 : 13] Jesus not only came, lived, died, rose and ascended. But his grace to us is seen in him employing and empowering reliable witnesses to testify to it.

To give us an authoritative account. So important, we can't play jazz with Jesus. We can't just make it up as we go along because there's one record given to us and it's complete and full and enough. So John is saying we have apostolic credentials. And this is the apostolic testimony. And lastly, an apostolic offer. Look at verse 3.

It is remarkable. John is saying if you believe what we say, you have fellowship with us.

You might think big deal, but look what comes next in 3B. And our fellowship is with God the Father and his Son, Jesus Christ.

[24 : 26] Through the apostolic gospel, we're brought into a fellowship with all Christians everywhere, including the apostles. And that apostolic fellowship is with God the Father and God the Son.

John is saying that the way to fellowship with God the Father is through the apostolic gospel. That simple. There's no bypass. There's no work around. There's no diversion. How do we have fellowship with God?

Through his word. His written and authoritative word. And look what this fellowship is marked by.

Eternal life, light, joy, reconciliation with God, which has been our problem since Genesis 1.

Truth and forever. It's the kind of fellowship we like. Light, joy, life, truth, forever. And therefore John lays out his apostolic credentials.

I know I was there, he says. He lays out his apostolic testimony. I saw and I proclaim it to you. As one who was empowered and employed for that job. And I hold out this apostolic offer.

[25 : 35] If you believe what I say. The truth about Jesus, you're welcomed into fellowship with us. But not just us, but with God the Father and the Son. Let me just tell you four things that we need to know from this passage.

Number one. Our Bibles is the only reliable information we have about God. The only absolutely reliable information we have about God. There's lots of books out there.

Some of them are great. Some of them are trash. But none of them are as reliable as this. So let's make this our source document. And from it learn wonderful things about the God who has made himself fully known.

Number two. It is a mediated message. This is the triangle. God, the apostles, us. This is how we learn truth about God.

It comes from God to the apostles and the apostles to us. God is not revealing fresh things about himself directly to people. He is obviously emphasizing and applying things to people's lives directly.

[26 : 41] But there's no fresh stuff. God has made himself fully known. So be very careful when people say, oh, I learned this about God, but it doesn't involve the words.

Because that's what John is saying. God revealed it to us and we made it known to you. It's not an unmediated message. Can't play jazz with God's revelation.

It's clear. And explicitly clear. It is these scriptures that are able to make us wise for salvation.

They've got a complete monopoly on that.

Number three. There's God. There's the apostles. How do we have fellowship with God? Through the apostolic witness. Through the apostles.

It's what John is explicitly saying. We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard so that you may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ.

[27 : 44] If you want to get to God, you've got to come through us. And then finally, perhaps you're here. And you think, well, I've got a few ideas.

I've got a few ideas about God. I've never really kind of investigated this stuff. Well, if this is true. If what John is saying, that we have the official account. We have the only powerful account able to bring us into fellowship with God.

Then it's got to be worth your time to investigate. It's got to be. John is saying, the only way you can know about God is through us. Then it's definitely worth our time investigating what they say.

It's amazing talking to people. Everyone uses the phrase, oh, I'm spiritual. I like to take a bit of this and a bit of that and mix it all together. And I call that my own personal spirituality. But that is complete nonsense if what John says is true.

That there's one truth that leads us to God. And it's from God to the apostles to us. Nothing else.

There's no creative thinking when it comes to this stuff.

[28 : 53] And so, what have we learned today? One big truth. The light of God's revelation shines supremely through the apostolic witness.

That's what we've learned. So let's pray together and pray that it would be shining on us and through us and in us. Let's pray. Father God, thank you that you didn't just send Jesus.

Thank you that he didn't just accomplish everything that you'd sent him to do. But thank you that he left reliable witnesses to testify to the glorious truth.

That he came into the world to save sinners. And so, Lord, may we cling to this truth. May we feast upon this truth.

Father, may what you revealed to them be revealed to us as we dig into this word. Father, may your word do its work in and through our lives. Father, thank you that you revealed it so that we would have fellowship with the apostles.

[30 : 07] But so much more that we would be brought into fellowship through you, our glorious heavenly father. And that we would have glorious fellowship with your son, Jesus Christ.

So, Father, may this word be dear to us. And may that fellowship be the very reason that we live.

Father, bless us and be with us in Jesus' name. Amen.