

## THAT YOU MAY BELIEVE

Text: John 20:30-31

Readings: John 1:1-18; John 20:19-31

Heidelberg Catechism LD7 Q21

Theme: John wrote his gospel so that we may believe in Jesus and have life.

Purpose: To urge you to believe in Jesus and to continue in this faith so you may have life.

Most books you read have a preface which appears right at the beginning. If you look at the opening pages of *The Creeds, Confessions and Liturgical Forms of the RCNZ* you will see a one page preface there. It explains how this book was written and why; it describes the origin and the purpose of this book.

Luke did this when he wrote his gospel; he opened his account about Jesus by explaining where he had gained his information and why he had written.

When *John* wrote his gospel he saved his statement of purpose until the *end*. As he gets towards the close of his account of the life and ministry of Jesus he tells us why he wrote all this down: verses 30-31, "Jesus did many other miraculous signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book., But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may life in his name."

These first four books of the New Testament are known as "**gospels**". The word gospel means good news. The apostle John wrote one of these four gospels. His account was the last of the four to be written, probably around 85AD.

His gospel is different from those of Matthew, Mark and Luke. He knew that the Christians in the churches already had these three gospels and all that information about Jesus. So he took another approach and added extra information that was not in the other three. He wrote for a general audience, covering both Jews and Gentiles, seeking to bring people to faith in Jesus.

He tells us that there was a lot more information that he could have written down: verse 30, "Jesus did **many other miraculous signs** in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book."

Together, Matthew, Mark and Luke record 35 specific miracles of Jesus, not counting the general times of healing where Jesus healed many of the sick in a certain town. Of all the miracles Jesus did John picked out seven for special attention. These miracles were signs in that they pointed to who Jesus was. They were proof of the truth of his claims. They provided supporting evidence that he was the Son of God.

The *greatest* evidence of this is the sign of the resurrection. That was the most convincing proof that Jesus was the person he claimed to be, that he was God's Son, that he had all power and authority.

John did not write a biography of the life of Jesus. A biography is an even and comprehensive account of the life of a person. John did not attempt to do this; he doesn't even mention the birth of Jesus and says nothing about the first 30 years of his life. He concentrates on the ministry and teaching of Jesus and especially on the lead up to his death and resurrection. He has seven entire chapters that focus on the last 24 hours leading up to the death of Jesus on that Friday afternoon.

John was writing a gospel – the good news about Jesus – and he selected material to serve **the two purposes** of his gospel, which are, that you may *believe in Jesus*, and that by believing, have *life in his name*.

1. John's first purpose is "that **YOU MAY BELIEVE** that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God."

To “believe” is to have faith; these words are synonyms, they mean the same thing. But what do they mean? What is faith? The Heidelberg Catechism also asks this question (Q 21): “What is true faith?” It gives us a very helpful answer as it identifies three essential elements of true faith in Jesus.

a. Faith involves **knowledge**. To believe in Jesus you need to know about him.

i. You need to know that his name was “**Jesus**”.

When a child is born he or she is given a name. Parents choose a name they like, or that has a certain meaning, or that has been used in their family.

Jesus was given his name because he would “save his people from their sins” (Matt 1:21). His name is the New Testament equivalent of the Hebrew name Joshua. Both mean, “God Saves”.

This is why he was born into the world - to rescue us from the punishment we deserve, to take our sin on himself, to free us from the judgment of God. To do this he had to become a man, a human being, just like us, except that he had no sin.

ii. This Jesus came as **the Christ**.

*Christ* is the New Testament Greek word for the Hebrew word *Messiah*. Both mean “The Anointed One.” Anointing someone meant that you poured oil on their head as a symbol that they were set aside to do a special task.

In OT times people were anointed to be prophets, priests or kings. Jesus came as the fulfilment of all three groups of people.

He came as the final prophet to tell people about the God the Father (Hebrews 1:1-2).

He came as the great High Priest who was the perfect mediator between God and man.

He came as the fulfilment of the kingship and kingdom of King David to be the almighty King and Lord and Ruler over his people.

iii. To have faith you need to know about Jesus, and that he is the Christ, the Messiah, and that he is **the Son of God**.

Christians are sons and daughters of God, but we have been *adopted* into his family; but Jesus is the *natural* Son of God.

This does not mean that Jesus was *born* as God’s son but rather that he is the *eternal* Son of God; he has always been in this relationship with the Father. He was and still is the eternal God, fully God, fully divine.

To have faith in Jesus you need to know these essential truths about him from the Bible. But this is not enough.

b. You also need to be **convinced** that what the Bible teaches is true and reliable.

There are people today who know a lot about the Bible but who don’t believe it. Some of these people are even pastors of churches; some teach in theological colleges, some are lay people who are well read in the Bible.

But just knowing about the Bible and knowing the facts about Jesus is not saving faith.

“True faith is... a knowledge *and conviction* that everything God reveals in his word is true” (HC Q 21). But even this is not enough for true faith. Even the demons know who Jesus is and are convinced that he is God’s Son.

c. To have true faith you also need **a deep rooted assurance, or trust** in Jesus.

We could compare this to taking a bungy jump. This is a familiar sight in New Zealand as people jump from high places with a strong elastic cord tied to their ankles. Most of us have seen people do

this and some of you have done it yourself! If you do so you need to apply these three elements of faith.

i. You want *to know* that the people who are operating this jump are qualified and experienced and that they know what they are doing. And you want to know that all the equipment is in excellent condition.

ii. You not only need to know the facts about this but you need to be *convinced* that all this is true, that it will work. You need to be convinced that the bungee cord will hold you, that the operators have weighed you correctly, that your ankles have been tied securely.

iii. But you don't have faith until you stand on the edge looking over the water and you *jump!* It is at the point of jumping that you put your trust in the operators and the equipment, that you rely on that rope to hold you and bounce you back!

It is the same when you trust in Jesus.

You need to know what the Bible says about him, you must be convinced it is true, and then you need to trust in him and rely on him.

You must accept Jesus as your Lord and Saviour; you must take all this into your own mind and heart.

You must believe that Jesus died and rose from the dead for you, to pay for your sin.

And you must lean fully on Jesus, trusting in him for your life and salvation.

Have you put your trust in Jesus? If you have not yet done so then I urge you to read the Bible, talk to Christians, come to the church services, hear God's word, come to know more about the Jesus Christ, the Son of God, and trust in him.

Trust like this is the *beginning* of becoming a Christian; but having started you need to *continue on* in a life of faith. The words "that you may believe" in verse 30 can also be translated as "that you may *continue* to believe".

Each day again you need to rely on Jesus, each year you need to trust in him, all your life you need to follow in his footsteps. Faith is believing that God is in control of everything that happens and that he will look after you in every situation he put you in.

Many of us here believe this and have experienced this in our own lives. We know this is true. God is with us no matter where we are and no matter what is going on.

**2. John wrote this gospel so that you might believe in Jesus Christ "and that by believing you may have **LIFE IN HIS NAME.**"**

This life comes from God the Father and the Lord Jesus and the Holy Spirit because they are the source of life. John opens his gospel by saying about Jesus, "in him was life" (1:4; 5:26).

The opposite of life is death. If you don't have this life from Jesus then the Bible informs you that you will lose your life (12:25), you will perish (John 3:16), you are doomed to destruction (17:12).

But you can have eternal life if you believe in Jesus. "This is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent" (John 17:3). Eternal life is to enjoy an ongoing relationship with the triune God. It is to enjoy a full and rich life that begins already now, in this life, but will continue on in heaven forever and ever.

We close this sermon with a story about a Frenchman named Emile Cailliet who grew up as an unbeliever; he had no interest at all in the church and had never seen or read the Bible. But when WWI came he sat in the trenches and was forced to think about his life and the where it came from and what it means.

As he considered all this he longed for "a book that would understand me", but, despite being highly educated, he did not know of such a book. So after the war he decided to compile an anthology, a collection of quotations and passages that seemed meaningful and relevant to him. He had it bound and then settled down to read it. But as he read he was disappointed. These passages did not help him. This was merely a book of his own making, reflecting the ideas of other people.

In the meantime his wife had been walking in their little French village and had come across a small Huguenot chapel. She had never seen it before and decided to go in and ask for a Bible. When she got home she felt she had to apologise to her husband for getting a Bible because she knew how much he hated religion.

But he interrupted her; "A Bible you say? Where is it? Show me. I've never seen one before." He took it off her and hurried to his study and began to read.

This is what he wrote: "I read and read and read - now aloud with an indescribable warmth surging within... I could not find words to express my awe and wonder. And suddenly the realisation dawned on me: This was the book that would understand me! ...I continued to read deeply into the night, mostly from the gospels. And as I looked through them, the One of whom they spoke, the One who spoke and acted in them, became alive to me. Its pages were animated by the presence of the Living God and the Power of his mighty acts. To this God I prayed that night and the God who answered me was the same God of whom it was spoken in the book."

That night Cailliet believed in Jesus. Eventually he settled in America and became a professor at Princeton Theological Seminary.

He came to know God and the Lord Jesus through the pages of this book, and as have many of us here.

This is why the Bible was written: "that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ and that by believing may have life in his name."

Amen