

BELIEVE AND HAVE LIFE IN HIS NAME

John 20:31, “But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.”

We finished John’s gospel after 10 months of weekly Bible studies and sermons. It turned out to be 41 lessons, including this one, starting in January with only a 3-week side-study for Easter. So what remains from John’s gospel in your mind and heart? Have you been changed? Inspired? Renewed? Has your trust in Jesus Christ deepened? Which of Jesus’ 7 “I am” declarations and promises do you remember? Does one of them stand out as most inspiring, helpful and motivating to you? Which of the 7 miraculous signs impacted you the most? Is there one verse in this gospel you are holding on to? If your answer is “no” to all of these questions, then maybe you need to study John’s gospel all over again. On Friday, I was inspired by Pastor Ron who was reading Colossians 3 out loud over and over in preparation for his upcoming message. So I decided to read the entire gospel of John out loud at normal reading speed. It took me 78 minutes. It was good to read it out loud.

Today, let’s review John’s gospel based on the writer’s own expressed purpose of writing in 20:31, “But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.” Let’s review the gospel in two parts: believe in Jesus and, have life in his name.

I. Believe in Jesus

The word “believe” is an important repeated word in John’s gospel. According to Biblegateway.com the word believe occurs 84 times in this gospel in the NIV Bible translation. That’s more than any other book in the New Testament. In second place was the book of Acts (62 times), and then Romans (17 times). The word “believe” means more than acknowledging that God exists, for even demons believe that—and shudder! (Jas 2:19) To believe in Jesus means to put our whole faith and trust in Jesus—not in money or our own common sense, our or own goodness, or in other philosophies—but in the person and finished work of Jesus Christ.

And what are we to believe about Jesus? John wrote so that the reader or listener may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God. This requires some explanation. Messiah is a Jewish term that means “Anointed One.” It’s the same as the Greek word “Christ.” To the Jews, those who were anointed were prophets, priests and kings. Therefore, this Anointed One referred to the ultimate Prophet, Priest and King. The ultimate Prophet would have the most clear and authoritative message from God as the Son of God. So John begins his gospel presenting the eternal Word who was with God and who was God and who became flesh (that is, human) in the person of Jesus Christ. Jesus is the Anointed Prophet from God.

The ultimate Priest would be the ultimate mediator, representative and prayer servant between God and people. Jesus said, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me" (14:6). Jesus prayed in John 17 as our Great High Priest. Not only so, on the cross Jesus became the sacrificial Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. The blood of Jesus Christ has power to cleanse the sins of all who believe in him, to bring us to God (1:29; Heb 9:14; 1Pe 3:18). Jesus is the Anointed Priest.

The ultimate King would rule with peace and righteousness forever. Jesus is the King of truth whose kingdom is not of this world (18:36,37). Jesus is the Anointed King.

Indeed this Anointed Prophet, Priest and King is the eternal, sinless, and righteous Son of God. He is one with the Father. So Jesus was qualified to declare, "Before Abraham was born, I am!", which means that he is the eternal God, the "I am" who spoke to Moses at the burning bush encounter (8:58; Ex 3:14). Ultimately, Jesus' claim to be the Son of God is what he was condemned for by the Jewish religious leaders. Jesus repeatedly called God his own Father, since he is uniquely the one and only Son of God. Jesus said to his enemies, "My Father, whom you claim as your God, is the one who glorifies me" (8:54). Jesus repeatedly said that he was from the Father, and the Father sent him (7:29, etc).

So Jesus is the Anointed Prophet, Priest and King. Jesus' word is the word of God. Jesus' mediation and intercession is that of the holy and sinless Son of God. Jesus' rule is the eternal reign of God.

We've thought about what it means that Jesus is the Messiah and Son of God. So what does it mean practically to believe in him? What does that look like? How does that make a difference in your life?

John 1:12 helps us here: "Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God..." So to believe in Jesus is to receive Jesus, willingly, thankfully and humbly.

So if you receive Jesus as your Prophet, then you will willingly, thankfully and humbly listen to him. You will receive his word. God's word is truth (17:17). Remember the crowd who wanted more bread? Jesus told them, "I am the bread of life...My flesh is real food and my blood is real drink" (6:35; 6:55). Then, many stopped following him. They said, "This is a hard teaching, who can accept it?" Jesus asked his Twelve disciples, "You do not want to leave too, do you?" Here, Simon Peter spoke up with a great answer: "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We believe and know that you are the Holy One of God" (6:68-69). Peter received Jesus' words as the words of eternal life.

On another occasion, Jesus said, "If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples..." (8:31). Here, the word "hold" is that Greek word to "remain" which is repeated many times in chapter 15, where Jesus said, "remain in me", "remain in my word", "remain in my love." Jesus said, "I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much

fruit; apart from me you can do nothing” (15:5). To believe in Jesus is to accept his word and remain in it.

On still another occasion, a royal official whose son was close to death came to Jesus for help. Jesus simply said to him, “Go, your son will live.” The man took Jesus at his word and departed. It was then that his son was healed. Jesus wants us to take him at his word. Jesus promised, “Very truly I tell you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be judged but has crossed over from death to life” (5:24).

If you receive Jesus as your Priest, then you accept his intercession, mediation and sacrifice on your behalf. It means you rely on him for your righteousness and salvation. You pray in his name. You trust him to save you, and not your own goodness. You accept his blood shed for your sins on the cross. In a word, you receive his grace. You live in his grace, through his grace and by his grace. You do not seek another way to be saved or to get out of a guilty conscience, like blaming others or your upbringing. You come to Jesus daily for his mercy and grace. You willingly, thankfully and humbly accept Jesus as your only way to God.

If you receive Jesus as your King, then you accept his lordship over your life. This means you love and obey him—his word, his will, his guidance and his direction for your life. You seek to please him and the prompting and guidance of the Holy Spirit, whom he gives to all who believe in him. You willingly, thankfully and humbly accept his rule in your life. You can say sincerely, “Lord Jesus, not my will, but yours be done.”

Who are good examples in John’s gospel of those who believed in Jesus?

Of course, John the Baptist believed in Jesus as the Messiah and Son of God. John said of Jesus, “[he] has surpassed me,” “[he] will baptize with the Holy Spirit,” [he is] the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.” John said, “I have seen and I testify that this is God’s Chosen One” (1:29,30,33,34).

The Samaritan woman is another example of one who accepted Jesus as the Messiah. She received Jesus as the Messiah. Then the shame of her sins was gone and she was filled with joy and purpose in her life. She joyfully told her townspeople, “Come see a man, who told me everything I ever did. Could this be the Messiah?” (4:29)

The man born blind saw and accepted Jesus as the Messiah. He stood up for Jesus when he was interrogated. He believed Jesus was a prophet from God. As a result, he was thrown out of the synagogue. Jesus found this man and asked him, “Do you believe in the Son of Man?” The man asked, “Who is he, sir?” Jesus said, “You have now seen him; in fact, he is the one speaking with you.” Then the man said, “Lord, I believe,” and he worshiped Jesus (9:35-38).

Joseph and Nicodemus accepted Jesus. They were prominent Jewish leaders and secret followers of Jesus. But they took a stand for Jesus when he died. They boldly asked Governor Pilate for the dead body of Jesus in order to give Jesus a proper burial.

Thomas didn't believe that Jesus had risen from the dead. But when he saw risen Jesus, he said, "My Lord and my God!" Jesus said to him, "You believe because you have seen. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed" (20:28-29).

Perhaps the greatest evidence that you believe in Jesus is that you love and obey him. Someone said, "If you were accused of being a Christian, would there be enough evidence to convict you?" In other words, does your love for Jesus show in your life? Do you not only attend church, but look forward to it? Do you not only go to Bible studies but get excited to learn new things or grow in your relationship with Christ? What do you delight spending time and money on? What excites you? What do you love to talk about? These things show the world who or what you love?

Anyone who knows me personally knows that I'm a runner. I've loved running and sports since age 10. My dream was to dunk a basketball, run a 5-minute mile or finish a marathon. Recently, however, I got lower back pain, so I had to reduce my running. But it was good to humble this 54 year old to realize that I'm not so young any more. Then, how can I get excited about loving Jesus? That's a good question. Surely I need to continually repent of my self-centeredness, love of the world and selfish ambition.

What leads a person to pray earnestly or to study the Bible sincerely? Sometimes it's a hard situation or trial in life. It could be a nagging emptiness inside. Some years ago, a Northwestern student contacted me to resume Bible study. It was unusual. He was shaken by a controversial movie called "The Da Vinci Code" which caused him to doubt his Christian faith. His doubts led him back to Bible study. Seeking Jesus is really the work of the Holy Spirit in a person. Some people turn to Jesus only in times of desperation. I hope that God may not have to get our attention to earnestly seek him or to desire to grow in our love relationship with Jesus Christ. Lord, help us to be excited about loving you.

II. Have Life in His Name

We thought about who Jesus is and what it means to believe in him. Then what is promised to those who do so? Look at the key verse again. John 20:31, "But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name." Notice the last part: "by believing you may have life in his name." The promise here is "life in his name." What does "life in his name" mean? In light of John's gospel it means three things: abundant life now, a personal relationship with God, and eternal life in heaven with Jesus.

(1) Life in his name means an abundant life now in this world. It means life to the full. Jesus said, "The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full" (10:10). Jesus is life. Jesus is the bread of life. He is our true security, our source of strength, our soul's satisfaction and fulfillment. Jesus is the resurrection and the life. He is our victory over death, over the fear of death, and over the sorrows caused by death.

Jesus is the way, the truth and the life, and the light of the world. He gives our lives meaningful direction and purpose in this confusing world.

To those who follow Jesus, he promised complete joy, a peace that the world cannot give, and victory in him that overcomes the world. People are always seeking these things. But they often seek them through addictive drugs, sinful relationships, and worldly experiences. People seek joy and peace in this troubled world. But what the world gives is short-lived, shallow and superficial. Jesus said that he is real food, real drink and the true vine. This tells us that there are false foods, false drinks, and false vines. These false things are deceptions or lies. They are evil, from the devil, who is the source of lies, murder, hatred and deception. In contrast, Jesus is the truth. Jesus always spoke the truth. Jesus promised joy, peace and victory. Jesus promised rivers of living water welling up to eternal life, through the Holy Spirit. This is life in his name.

Jesus also promised the truth and freedom. He said, "If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free" (8:31). People really want to know the truth. But this world is full of lies and liars. Actually, we are all prone to be deceived. The fact that we sin shows that we are easily deceived. We believe a lie that sinning will make us happy; will complete us. But Jesus said that whoever sins is a slave to sin. He also said, "So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed" (8:36). People really want freedom. Some will give their lives for freedom, like William Wallace who gave his life to fight against tyranny for freedom in Scotland, as depicted in the movie, "Braveheart." The freedom that Jesus gives is not freedom to do whatever we want. It is freedom from slavery to sin. Only Jesus Christ can set sinners free from the power, guilt and condemnation of sin. Jesus gives us the truth and sets us free.

(2) Life in his name means a personal relationship with the only true God revealed in Jesus Christ. Jesus said in prayer to his Father God: "Now this is eternal life: that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent" (17:3). Eternal life is knowing the only true God and his Son Jesus Christ. Jesus revealed the only true God. In the gospel introduction, the author wrote, "No one has ever seen God, but the one and only Son, who is himself God and is in closest relationship with the Father, has made him known" (1:18).

(3) Life in his name means eternal life with Jesus in heaven. Jesus reassured his disciples shortly before his death: "Do not let your hearts be troubled. You believe in God; believe also in me. My Father's house has many rooms...I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am" (14:1-3). And of course we have the most famous verse in the Bible to reaffirm this promise, John 3:16: "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life." To perish is to die apart from God and spend eternity away from God. So, to have eternal life is to be with Jesus forever in his kingdom.

Today we reviewed what it means to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and what it means to have life in his name.

Jesus is our Prophet, Priest and King. He is worthy of our hearts and lives. May we all struggle to believe in Jesus—that is, to put all our trust and confidence in Jesus. May we all grow in our love relationship with Jesus by remaining in his word and in his love. And may we all experience what he promises—abundant life in his name.