

Sermon: God doesn't lie!

When you have been a disciple of Jesus, have been with him days and nights for several years, have witnessed with your own eyes his compassion and love, his wisdom and might, his divine power.

When you have heard Jesus' teaching and explaining God's mysteries, when you have stood at the feet of his cross and seen him dying, and then have met him in new resurrected body, and have eaten with him after his resurrection and witnessed Jesus ascending into God's presence, you can see things very clearly.

John, the beloved disciple of Jesus embodies all of this. And when he writes, we are to listen carefully and learn from him. For that is the Holy Spirit himself speaking through John's writings, speaking to God's chosen people across the centuries and continents.

Today we heard it read from the first letter of John. In this letter John speaks about what people believe and what they don't believe and what our beliefs tell about our attitudes towards God.

Let us reflect on what we believe and how we got our beliefs.

We all know many things, or at least we think we do.

Some of us more, some of us less, but even children among us know a lot. It would be better to say – we believe many things.

The question is – where did we learn everything that we know, or what we think that we know.

Where did we learn everything what we believe to be true? When we were born, we really didn't know that much.

So, how did we learn it? John uses the word testimony. Lately even philosophers of knowledge, that is those extremely smart people who

spend their lives trying to understand better – how we know what we know, have come to realize that we know everything through testimonies.

That's the word that John used in his letter. Testimony. We can simply say that testimony is when you learn something from others. That's their testimony. You can learn things from your parents, and grandparents, and siblings, and friends, and teachers, and books, and journals, and today, of course, from the Internet.

All these are testimonies. This is how we have learned what we know and believe to be true. The tricky thing is this – how often do we test these testimonies? How often do we check whether we can trust them?

How often do we evaluate the expertise of people whose testimonies we assume to be true? And, of course, we can't check everything.

And the same is true about many things. But why would we then believe these testimonies if we can't check them? The answer is simple. Because we trust the people from whom we hear them.

If you trust a person, then you will trust what the person tells you. And the opposite is true as well. If you don't trust a person, then you won't believe what the person tells you. It is interesting how John puts it.

“If we receive the testimony of men, the testimony of God is greater, for this is the testimony of God that he has borne concerning his Son.” John acknowledges that we receive testimonies from men and believe them.

But then he contrasts the testimony of men with the testimony of God. And which one is greater according to John? Of course, the testimony of God is greater. And how do we know that?

Because God confirms what he says by doing something that creates trust in him. We can see it throughout the Bible.

Do you know who wrote the first five books of the Bible? That's right, it was Moses. Why did people right after Moses' death hold these books in such high regard and read them, and copied, and preserved them and taught them?

It was because these books were believed to be the testimony of ... not of men, but of God. How do we know this? It is because this is what God said to Moses when they were at the Mount Sinai: "Behold, I am coming to you in a thick cloud, that the people may hear when I speak with you and may also believe you forever."

Do you see, what happened there? God revealed himself to confirm that what Moses will later write – it is the testimony of God himself. Similarly, we can see it through the Old Testament. When God wants to give his testimony to us, he calls someone to be his spokesperson and then confirms it with signs and miracles, and it was indeed, the testimony of God, and not of men.

Finally, two millennia ago God spoke to us through his son, Jesus Christ. And he confirmed that that was God's own testimony. He confirmed it speaking from heaven, He confirmed it through many miraculous signs that Jesus did.

Healing everyone. Feeding thousands. Raising the dead. Controlling the creation. And finally, God confirmed that it is his testimony, by raising Jesus from the dead.

Can we trust someone who for millennia have foretold what he will do in the fullness of time, who have recorded these testimonies for our sake, so that we could read them even today, and then have fulfilled them in Jesus exactly as he foretold.

The Bible is God's testimony to us. It is written so that we can be assured that we can trust him, that we can believe what he says. And as John writes, this is the testimony of God "that God gave us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life."

This testimony is as clear as it could be. It was foretold by the prophets. It was taught by Jesus. It was delivered to us by his disciples. As John wrote at the end of his Gospel account:

"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."

Has everyone believed God's testimony? No... even thousands of people who saw Jesus' divine powers at work didn't believe God's testimony. Nor many people throughout the ages and even today.

Strange, we all believe testimonies of men, but not everyone believes the testimony of God. John has some harsh words addressed to such people. "Whoever does not believe God has made him a liar, because he has not believed in the testimony that God has borne concerning his son."

This is very direct. John calls things as they are. People may not like it, but the fact remains, whoever doesn't believe the testimony of God regarding his son Jesus in whom God gives us eternal life, such person has made God the teller of untruth.

It is a serious charge. If someone has heard the testimony of God, if someone has heard that in Jesus there is forgiveness and eternal life, and doesn't accept the testimony of God, rejects it, ignores it, they have made God the teller of untruth.

That is like saying to God who has given us all these testimonies which we briefly mentioned, who still speaks to us today through his Word: "I don't believe you."

And don't think that this refers only to those outside of the church. This charge hits us hard on occasion as well.

How often do we act as if we don't believe in the testimony of God? How often is our attitude towards the Bible believing it is just like any another book, and not God himself speaking to us?

How often we forget that in Jesus we have the eternal hope, this wonderful hope that surpasses anything that we can imagine?

How often we are angry, ungrateful, envious, unnecessarily worried about things of this world, how often we forget about the wonderful gift that is given to us, the testimony of God regarding his son Jesus.

I can't answer about you, only you can, but I confess that I have been guilty of some of these. So often what I say I believe doesn't match with how I act. So often I don't trust, don't give thanks, don't have peace and don't fully rely on my Father who is in heaven. I rightly deserve to be scolded by the apostle.

John the apostle lived a long life. He was just like us. He too experienced all these struggles. This is why he writes to encourage us. And what an encouragement it is. "Whoever believes in the Son of God has the testimony in himself."

Did you notice what John writes? If you believe in Jesus, you have the testimony of God in yourself. So what does this mean? Nothing less than that God, who gives this testimony, dwells with you and is you.

That's right, the Holy Spirit who alone can change our hearts and enable us to believe the testimony of God dwells in us. Do you remember, what is the main job of the Holy Spirit? It is to testify about Jesus. To lead you to Jesus. To make you one with Jesus and the Father. And he does it so well. That's why you have believed, that's why you are here among God's saints.

But then John continues: “You, who have believed that Jesus is the Christ, your Savior, you have eternal life!”

As the Father has life in himself, so also does the Son. And he has given you the Spirit of life, to dwell in you. The very source of all life, the very power that brings life to every living being, dwells in you.

He is very good with his job, the Holy Spirit. He has helped you to believe in Jesus, He has brought you to Jesus, and he has given you eternal life, and he will raise you as he raised Jesus, and will bring you in God’s presence to be with Jesus forever. That is God’s testimony to you.

And remember, God doesn’t lie. You have received his testimony, you have received his promises, and you will live to see how they all are fulfilled, until the very last one. Because our God doesn’t lie. Amen.