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Welcome to the New Life Podcast, a ministry of New Life Presbyterian Church in Ithaca, New York. Today we have this week's sermon, preached by Tim LaCroix, our senior pastor. Join us for worship each week at 10 o'clock at 950 Danby Road, Ithaca, New York. You can also visit us on our website, www.newlifethica.org. Now here's this week's sermon.

00:43

A reading from the first epistle of the apostle John, chapter 5, verses 6 through 21. This is he who came by water and blood, Jesus Christ, not by the water only, but by the water and the blood. And the spirit is the one who testifies, because the spirit is the truth. For there are three that testify, the spirit and the water and the blood. And these three agree. If we receive the testimony of men,

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the testimony of God is greater, for this is the testimony of God that he has born concerning his Son. Whoever believes in the Son of God has the testimony in himself. Whoever does not believe God has made him a liar, because he has not believed in the testimony that God has born concerning his Son. And this is the testimony that God gave us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. Whoever has the Son has life.

01:41

Whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life. I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God that you may know that you have eternal life. And this is the confidence that we have toward him that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. And if we know that he hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests that we have asked of him.

02:11

If anyone sees his brother committing a sin not leading to death, he shall ask and God will give him life to those who commit sins that do not lead to death. There is a sin that leads to death. I do not say that one should pray for that. All wrongdoing is sin, but there is sin that does not lead to death. We know that everyone who has been born of God does not keep on sinning, but he who was born of God protects him and the evil one does not touch him.

02:42

We know that we are from God and the whole world lies in the power of the evil one. And we know that the Son of God has come and given us understanding so that we may know him who is true. And we are in him who is true in his son Jesus Christ. He is the true God and eternal life. Little children, keep yourselves from idols. This is the word of the Lord.

03:14

As a pastor, I've had opportunity to talk with quite a few people about faith and belief, and specifically, objections or doubts to faith and belief. One of the common questions or doubts or objections that comes up has to do with morality, what things that God says are right and the Bible says are wrong. Other objections may have to do with the church and how the church has not...

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not done what is right. For example, the abuse crisis, mishandling of abuse, or people may bring up the Crusades, or any number of things that God's people have done wrongly. Now I've been talking to people in this manner for about 30 years. It started because of a campus ministry that I was a part of, actually Rachel and I were both a part of. And this campus ministry really emphasized evangelism and a specific kind of evangelism called initiative evangelism, or you might...

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you might refer to it as cold call evangelism. If you don't know what a cold call is, it's when you make a sales call, you're trying to sell something, you have no relationship with the person, you simply call them and try to sell them something. And so that's the kind of evangelism we were trained in. Go up to someone, start talking to them, and try to share

the gospel with them and see how they would respond. I went on several mission trips, summer mission trips, spring break missions trips, and a big part of those mission trips was to go out and share with people we'd never met about

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about Jesus. did a couple of those mission trips were beaches so we go out on the beach and share with people on the beach. Spring break Panama City, go out and on the beach and share the gospel. Now let me confess something to you, I hated this. I hated it. Not that don't like speaking to people about Jesus, I love talking to people about Jesus, I love talking to people about reasons to believe or not to believe, but this kind of evangelism I just did not like and I still probably wouldn't enjoy it even to this day.

05:09

I love to talk to people I have a relationship with, some contacts with, but I remember one time in particular, I can't remember if it was spring break or if it was one of the summer beach mission trips that I was on, I went up to this guy and he was completely stoned out of his mind. And I started talking to him about Jesus and about the gospel and I remember he stopped me and he said, oh man, if God is all powerful, why couldn't he make a rock so big?

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He couldn't move it.

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And that moment, that little bit of absurdity actually helped me to realize something. It gave me a realization. Now my reply as far as I remember was, I've heard that one before, how about this, why can't God make a marshmallow so big he can't eat it? So he kind of chuckled at that and we went on with our day. But what I realized in that interaction is there's a lot of objections to God, but the central issue is not about objections. Now,

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I don't mean to demean objections, I don't mean to discount questions, sincere questions, important questions, important doubts. There's a lot of them and I share a lot of them and we need to talk about them. But ultimately any objection, any question like this is not the central issue. The central issue is coming to terms with the person and work of Jesus. And that interaction on the beach that day helped me realize that. That objections, the absurdity of it helped me to realize that that was the central issue, not the objection.

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I remember some years later I was talking to a young man. was, this was when I was a pastor, he was dating our nursery worker, they were both in college, and I talked to him several occasions about faith, he had questions about faith, and I tried to talk to him about it. I remember one time we were talking and he was sharing another objection, another reason, and I remember stopping and saying, hey, you you're always going to be able to come up with reasons not to believe. You're always going to come up with more reasons. And I can come up with reasons all day long of not to believe.

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But ultimately, what you have to do is come to terms with who Jesus is and how you're going to respond to that.

07:17

In the text today, this is essentially what we have. As we wrap up 1 John and we come to the conclusion, we've talked about a lot of things and I've talked about how he's cycled through some similar things over and over and over. But the main point of this section today and the main point of the sermon and indeed the main point of this book, this letter, is that Jesus is the Christ, he is the Son of God, he came in the flesh, he shed his blood and we have to reckon with that. All of us have to reckon with

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The very last words of this letter in verse 21 are, children keep yourself from idols. Now this may seem a little disjointed, like it comes out of the blue. He hasn't been talking about

idols. Why does he talk about idols now? In fact, some scholars posit that maybe we've lost part of the letter, like it's missing, you know, we've lost it.

08:11

There's no reason really though to conjecture that we've lost part of the letter that it's missing. Because if we think about it, this verse, verse 21, does fit with what John is saying. If idolatry is following or believing a God that is not real, then this is what he's been talking about the entire time. From the very beginning of the letter, he's been talking about how we have to believe in Jesus. And that Jesus, His coming in the flesh and His perpetual death for our sake,

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is the only way. And how he concludes the letter is you have to keep this before you. Don't follow any other way. Keep yourself from idols, he says. And if we go back to verse 6, which is how we start this passage, and the text is printed in your bulletin if you want to look on. This is how he starts it. In essence, the main point of this passage and the book is there is no greater salvation. There is no greater salvation. He says in verse 6,

09:08

This is He who came by water and blood, Jesus Christ. Not by water only, but by water and blood. Now we've been talking all along about how one of the points that he's emphasizing against those who were teaching falsely is that Jesus really came in the flesh. That He was incarnate, really and truly. That He was a human being, a human person.

09:32

Because there were people who were teaching in the early church that Jesus did not come in the flesh, that He only appeared to have flesh, or perhaps any other number of variations of this false teaching. And so, John is over and over emphasizing that Jesus is real. He really came in the flesh. He's a real human who lived, and He was God's Son.

09:54

But the point of John saying this here, not water only, but also blood, I think is one of the common objections that we hear and one of the common statements that we hear is I'm spiritual but not religious. In essence, what John is saying is you can't be spiritual and not be religious. You have to have water and blood. Now, some have posited that water and blood here are reference to the sacraments, baptism and the Lord's Supper, and our prayer of adoration, which Lucy read.

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reference that. And I do think there is allusion here in this passage to the sacraments. But ultimately, what this verse is saying...

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not water only, but water and blood is referencing that it's not just spirituality because water in John's theology, water is connected to spirit and he actually mentioned spirit in the next sentence. It's not just spirituality, it's not just water, it's not just the knowledge of things, but it's blood, it's physical, it's reality, it's Christ who came really and truly. In other words, you can't just have the spiritual stuff, you have to reckon with Jesus.

11:03

Jesus is salvation. the fact that He came into the flesh and shed His blood is our salvation. And there is no greater salvation. And so we have to reckon with that. We have to reckon with it. There is a person named Jesus Christ who was born, who lived, who gave His life, and we have to reckon with that person. There is no greater salvation because the fact that God

11:30

the God who created the and the earth, everything that we see. The God who created that would come and become one of us in order to solve the problem of sin, in order to solve the problem of brokenness, that He would become one of us.

11:47

and give his life, shed his blood in order to redeem us, there is no greater salvation than that. There's no other religion that has the creator God, the greatest deity, sacrificing him or herself for the sake of humanity. It truly is the greatest salvation that we can conceive of, that the most powerful creator of all things would give his very life for his creatures.

12:13

that he would become a baby, that he would be born as a baby, a helpless child and be subject to his creatures for his sustenance and for his care. There is no greater salvation than this. There is no greater conception of our salvation.

12:33

In fact, there is no other way that we can deal with the problem of sin and brokenness in the world. And this is why John brings up blood. There is no other way that we can be forgiven of our sins, that we can receive forgiveness for the wrongs that we have done, apart from a sacrifice which is given on our behalf. This is the claim of the Bible.

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that the only way to deal with sin is by the sacrifice or the life given of another. We need that on our behalf in order to receive forgiveness, in order to have salvation. And the fact that God Himself is the one who gives His life on our behalf, who trades His life for ours, who trades His righteousness for ours, there is no greater salvation than this. So that's the ultimate claim, that Jesus Christ is the only way

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and there is no greater salvation.

13:33

But then he supports it with four points, and I'm going to go through these four points relatively quickly today. He gives us four reasons why we should accept this. And the first reason is there is no greater attestation. There is no greater attestation. He says, first, the

Spirit is the one who testifies because the Spirit is truth. And then in verse 7, there are three that testify, the Spirit, the water, and the blood, and these three agree.

14:01

Now, I referenced already this incident where John was at the crucifixion of Jesus. And he was the only disciple who was at present at the cross. Peter had denied Jesus and at this point had run away. The other disciples were not even there. But John was there for the entire thing. And John is the only disciple who, the only gospel writer who recounts to us this story of Jesus being pierced. And apparently, this had a huge impact on John.

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Because not only did he write about it in the gospel, he writes about it here. For him, this was a sign that Jesus' side was pierced and water and blood came out. This was a sign that Jesus was truly God and that he truly gave his life for us. That's what it meant for him. And so if we just go back and look at John 19, just for a second. And the passage begins in John 19, 31. But we're going to look at verse 34.

15:01

John wrote, but one of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear and at once there came out blood and water. This doesn't seem like a momentous thing at first, but for John, like I said, it was a sign of Jesus' divinity and of his salvation. So he says in verse 35, he who saw it, he's talking about himself, has borne witness, his testimony is true and he knows that he is telling the truth that you may also believe.

15:29

For these things took place that the scripture might be fulfilled, not one of his bows will be broken. And again, another scripture says, they will look on him, they will look on him whom they have pierced. For John, this was a testimony that Jesus is who he says he was. And this is the claim of John from the very beginning of this letter, is that he was there, he saw these things. And he is writing to us what he saw. If we go back to the beginning of 1 John, this is how 1 John opens as we consider the closing.

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He says, which we have heard, we have seen with our eyes, we have looked upon and touched with our hands concerning the word of life, that life was made manifest, it was revealed to us, and we have seen it, and testify and proclaim to you the eternal life, which is with the Father and was made manifest to us. That which we have seen and heard, we proclaim to you. John's claim and Peter's claim and all the rest of the apostles and New Testament writers claim is that they saw and heard the story of Jesus

16:28

and are relaying it to us. This testimony, this testimony that he claims is true. And if we're going to look at the Bible as a book, we have to reckon with that claim. That they are claiming to have witnessed these things. And this incident of Jesus being pierced is one of those moments that was really impactful for John. And he says it is a testimony of the truth, that Jesus is who he says he is. But then he goes a little step further. Not only the testimony of

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the eye witnesses but in verse 9, we're back in 1 John 5 now verse 9 he says we have the testimony of God he says if we receive the testimony of men of humans the testimony of God is greater now we receive the testimony of people all the time in our daily lives when we go to buy something online what do we do? we look at their reviews we look up the comments

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We rely on the testimony of other people. we're going to buy something, we may rely on the testimony of someone who's trying to sell it to us, if they're maybe a professional salesperson. All over the place in our daily lives, we rely on the testimony of people. In courts of law, we rely on the testimony of people. A person can be condemned or exonerated based on the testimony of a person. And so we rely on this kind of testimony all the time.

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John's rhetorical point is this, if we receive the testimony of mere human beings, God is greater. How much more should we receive the testimony of God? He says, the testimony of God that he has born concerning his son. Now, where did God bear testimony about his son? Well, John is saying when he was pierced in his side, the water and the blood came forth, this was a moment of

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of the father testifying about his son. But even clearer, there were two other instances, Jesus' baptism and his transfiguration. And John was present, not for the first one, but he was present at the second one. When Jesus was transfigured, it says that a voice came from heaven and said, my beloved son, whom I am well pleased, listen to him. This had a huge impact on Peter.

18:45

As Peter talks about it all the time, he mentions it in his letters, and I think that's what John is referring to here. We have heard the testimony of God. He heard a voice from heaven saying, this is my son, my beloved son. Listen to him. John says, if we receive the testimony of men, how much more shall we receive the testimony of God? Now, we have to take John's word for it that he actually heard this. So there is a part of faith that has to rely on the testimony of other people.

19:12

But John's rhetorical point is this, we should receive the testimony of God that He is born concerning His Son. He says, whoever believes in the Son of God has the testimony in himself. So, part of what he's claiming is that for those who believe in God, who are born of God, we have this testimony in our hearts. We know in our hearts that God is testifying that Jesus is the Son of God. And so, not only is he making a historical claim, he's also making a spiritual claim.

19:42

If we are spiritual, we know that God has testified in our hearts that Jesus is the Son of God. He says, whoever does not believe God has made him a liar because he has not

believed the testimony that God has borne concerning his son. And this is the testimony that God gave us eternal life and this life is in his son. So, there is no greater attestation. You cannot find a greater attestation. You cannot find a better witness

20:10

or a better person to testify or give testimony than God Himself. And that's one reason why we should reckon with Jesus that He really is who He claimed to be. The second is there's no greater future. There's no greater future. John moves from this to talk about eternal life. He says, whoever has the Son has life, who does not have the Son, oh God does not have life. And then in verse 13, he tells us the reason why he wrote the letter. He says, I write these things to you

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who believe in the name of the Son of God that you may know that you have eternal life." The reason why John is writing is because he wants us to have eternal life. In other words, the reason why we talk to people about our faith is not so we can win an argument. It's not so we can appear smart. We have discussions and debates and John is writing his letter not just to win. He's not just writing in order to show that he's right and his opponents are wrong.

21:05

The reason why he writes this letter and the reason why we may have any discussion with someone about faith is because we want them to have eternal life. That's the reason. It's not so that we appear smart or that we can win an argument or that we can seem right. It's because we want them to have eternal life. This is the bottom line. The bottom line is that there is eternal life at stake. And this is why John writes. He says, we have confidence that we have toward him.

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that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. And all of this is regarding eternal life. The eternal life that is described in the Bible, there is no greater future. Now there are other faiths, there are other religions that have eternal life. But the eternal life described in

the scriptures, there is no greater future than that. John himself wrote about this eternal life in Revelation 21.

22:03

In Revelation 21, he talks about a new heavens and a new earth. And this is how John describes the eternal life that Jesus is bringing in. He said, he will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more. Neither there shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away. And he who was seated on the throne said, behold, I am making all things new.

22:32

The eternal life that Jesus Christ is ushering in is an eternal life where there is no more pain, there is no more sorrow, and there is no more grief or suffering. And it is eternal life that the God of the universe rules over and is making all things new. The eternal life that is described in the Bible, that John wants us to have, is an eternal life where everything sad comes untrue. That is a future that is great. In fact, there is no greater future.

23:01

So why should we reckon with Jesus? Why should we believe in Him? Why should we follow this man? It's because there's no greater attestation and there's no greater future. But thirdly, there's no greater calling. This is what he moves into in verse 14 and following. He begins to talk about the confidence we have and he says, if we ask anything, we'll have it. He says in verse 14,

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If we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. Now we've heard something like this before. In fact, we heard it in chapter 3. This is what it says in chapter 3 verse 22. It says, whatever we ask, we receive from Him because we keep His commandments and does what pleases Him. Now when I preached on that passage, I told you that this doesn't mean we get anything we ask whatsoever.

23:54

Because we don't believe in a prosperity gospel. We don't believe that, you know, get whatsoever we ask from God whenever we ask. So in other words, you know, if I ask for God for a brand new F-150, I think was the example I gave, this doesn't mean that I'll get it. And of course, the prosperity gospel, the prosperity teachers say that we'll get whatever we ask as long as we ask correctly. Or as long as we have lived the right enough life.

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or as long as we have given enough money to the preacher. But we don't believe that. And that's not what John is saying. And here's proof here of what I've been saying about these statements. What he says, did you notice there was a subtle difference? What he says is, if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. Now that's a little bit different. And that shows us that there's nuance to these statements that Jesus says, you have not because you ask not.

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Is it the case that we'll get everything we ask? No. It is the case that if we ask according to His will, He hears us and will answer. God will answer our prayers according to His will. If we pray according to what He is willing for us, He will answer. And we are given a promise that if we ask, He hears us. And that's a pretty precious promise. But He moves on to tell us the context for these statements.

25:21

Because whenever we see in the Bible, you have not because you ask not or you receive whatever you ask, it's given in a context of a specific request. The specific request here is told to us in verse 16. If anyone sees his brother committing a sin, not leading to death, he shall ask and God will give him life. So the context here, which makes complete sense, is if you are worried, dear ones, that are listening to my letter, the letter of John,

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listening to this sermon that was delivered first and then by letter to other churches. If you're worried about yourself or if you're worried about your brother or sister that they have

believed these things, that they may be going astray, pray for them and God will hear your prayer. That's the context for these statements. If you're worried about your relative, you're worried about your child, worried about your parent, you can pray for them and God will hear your prayer. That they will come back to the true God, that they will come back to faith in Christ, they will return to his church.

26:19

And so that's the context for what he's saying. And ultimately, what this all comes back to is that we have a calling. We have a calling. And that calling is to live as becomes followers of Christ. He says,

26:41

He says in verse 18, sorry, we know that everyone who has been born of God does not keep on sinning. Now that's the way the ESV translates it. I've told you this in previous passage, we saw almost exactly the same verse, that the Greek says, we know that everyone who has been born of God does not sin. Now,

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Again, we know that cannot be the case because John started his letter by saying if you say you don't sin you call God a liar. So he's not saying you don't sin. In fact, he just said if anyone sins you can pray for them so they'll be forgiven. So what is he saying? He's saying that if you're born of God, if you are called to be a child of God, this calling means that you will

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Ascent to his word that you will believe in his commandments as true and that you will not habitually Follow a sinful life in other words if you're born of God You will not keep on sinning either deliberately because you are rejecting the fact that something is not wrong or because you are Rejecting God himself and this is why he talks about the sin leading to death You might have thought that I glossed over that but I'm coming back to it

27:51

What is the sin that leads to death? If you've been around the church for a while, and I grew up in the church, I used to be terrified of sinning the sin that leads to death. Maybe some of you can relate. When I was a kid, I heard about this sin called the unforgivable sin and the blasphemy of the Holy Spirit. And I was worried that I had done it. You know, I was worried that I might have done it. One of these sins that I had done was actually it. And I was actually kind of anxious about that.

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Well, let me give you some encouragement. One of the common things that is said is that if you're worried that you've committed the sin, the unforgivable sin, it probably means you haven't. Now I think that's true. But we need a little more definition. The definition for here, the sin that leads to death, is apostasy. The sin that leads to death, the sin that you can't have forgiveness for, is the sin of rejecting God. You can't be forgiven of that sin. If you reject God and you reject His Word, you can't be forgiven of that.

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You have to stop doing that. You have to come to faith. You can be forgiven of all sorts of transgressions that you say, I'm sorry for doing that and be forgiven, but you can't be forgiven for rejecting God. Now, you can come to faith, you can turn around and start believing in God, but ultimately what John is saying, what Jesus is saying when he talks about the blasphemy of the Holy Spirit is that if you reject God and reject God's word, that is the sin that leads to death.

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Now there were people in this community that were doing that and that's the whole reason why John has written this letter because he's seen the schism that has come, he's seen people that are being led astray and he's saying there is a sin that leads to death. If you reject God and His Word completely, there's no forgiveness for that. But if you're worried about some of your friends that you think may have listened to some of these false teachings and they might be straying, pray for them and God will hear you. So there's degrees of

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of sin and rejection of God. And that's the context. Wrap all of this up in a bow, and it is telling us there is a great calling that we have. We have a calling to follow God and to obey His word and keep His commandments. He's repeated this all through the letter. Now, the first two points have to do with some... I use the word great to refer to something better, right? Something preferable. There's no greater salvation. There's no greater future.

30:14

That's a preferable future. Here I use great in a different sense, as in exalted. Of course, there might be greater callings that are more pleasurable, that allow us to do things that we may prefer to do. And that's not in the sense of greater. What I mean by greater is there's no more highly exalted calling.

30:34

There is no higher calling, you might say. The calling to follow God, the calling to live according to His word and His ways, there's no greater calling. And those of us who are called to follow God, who are born of God, we are called to keep His commandments. The promise is that when we fail, when we sin, because John is fully aware that we will,

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We can pray and God will give us life. And if we see a brother and sister and they are doing this, we can pray and God will give them life. But we have a calling and we cannot reject that calling. So we have no greater attestation, the testimony of God himself. We have no greater future, the eternal life that Jesus has promised. We have no greater calling, the calling to live as a follower of God. And lastly, we have no greater belonging. No greater belonging.

31:29

This is how John concludes the letter. That we have been born of God. We are children of God. And in verse 19 that we are from God. And then in verse 20 that we are in Christ. We belong to God. As children of God, born of God. As those who are from God and who are in God. We belong to God. And for John he puts this in binary terms.

31:56

You know, John talks about light and darkness and spirit and truth and he presents things in stark differences. He does this again in verse 19. He says, know that we are from God and the whole world lies in the power of the evil one. In other words, either you belong to God or you don't. And the belonging that we have, the belonging that he's trying to call us to is the belonging of life.

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the belonging of life, that we belong to God and we are in Christ and we're a part of his family. And he concludes this way, we know that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding so that we may know him who is true and that we are in him who is true. So it's not just the water, it's also the blood.

32:49

It's not just knowing something, it's not just being spiritual, it's belonging to someone, being in the one who is true, knowing that he is true, and belonging, and being in the one who is true, in his son, Jesus Christ. Being in Christ is a phrase that is used in the New Testament to refer to our unity with Jesus, that we are unified with Christ, and we are unified with each other as the body of Christ.

33:18

We belong to a family. We belong to a community. We belong to a church. But not only that, this church, this family and community belongs to God and is from God and is born of God and is in God. There's no greater belonging than to belong to the creator of the universe. You can't fathom a greater belonging. This is the claim that John is making. This is the claim that the Bible is making.

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that we have a relationship with the Almighty, that we belong to the Almighty, that we are a child of the Almighty, and that we are in Christ, the Son of God, who came in the flesh to

give his life for the forgiveness of our sins and for the redemption of the world. So he concludes the book, Little Children, Keep Yourself from Idols. Do not follow the deceptive paths of this world. Follow the one Christ. We have to reckon

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with this Christ. I mentioned this before but Bob Dylan had a evangelical phase and some of you know Bob Dylan know this. We're not quite sure where he stands today. He's just very vague about it. He doesn't really tell us where he is. So we can guess. But he had a very overtly evangelical phase in his past and he recorded a couple of albums.

34:45

One of those albums has this song, You Gotta Serve Somebody. And I was thinking about this passage and thinking about the message of 1 John. I think the chorus of that song, You Gotta Serve Somebody, sums it up perfectly. In it he says, You Gotta Serve Somebody. You Gotta Serve Somebody. It may be the devil or it may be the Lord, but you gotta serve somebody. If you wanna sum up the message of 1 John, that's it. You gotta serve somebody.

35:15

Is it going to be the world or is it going to be God? Is it going to be Jesus, the Lord, or is it going to be the devil? But you've got to serve somebody. And the point of this passage today and the point of the book is we have to reckon with this Christ. We can put objections in front of it and those objections may be legitimate and true and sincere. But ultimately we have to reckon with the person and work of Jesus who he claims to be.

35:42

And John wants us to make a case that we should follow this Jesus, that we should serve Him. Because there's no greater salvation. There's no greater testimony or attestation. There's no greater future. There's no greater calling. And there's no greater belonging. You've got to serve somebody. It may be the devil, it may be the Lord. But we all have to serve somebody. Whom do you serve? Let's pray.

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