Complete Certainty in Christ

Text: 1 John 5:19-20

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**Scriptures:** Isaiah 40:9-20; Col 1:15-20; 1 John 5:13-21

**Songs Chosen:** [SttL] 46 (1-3,5); 439; 73 (1-3,9-10); 461; 206

Series: Occasional

Theme: The Apostle John confirms that he, and fellow believers, can know with certainty that Christ, the Son of God, has come and has given the ability to truly know him and to worship God alone

Proposition: Worship God alone in the certainty that Christ has come and given you eternal life

**Introduction**

We can be sure that a terrorist shot many people in a mosque in Christchurch on 15th March 2019. Most people in the city know someone who was involved, either as a victim, a police officer, a medical professional, or someone who knows someone in these roles.

But did the Americans actually land on the moon? Yes, I think so, despite the many ‘moon hoax’ articles on the internet. Were the attacks on the twin towers on 9/11 part of a government conspiracy? I am not sure. Is the herbicide Roundup really non-carcinogenic as the original developers strongly maintain? I am not so sure. Truth is a rare commodity in a fallen world.

Socrates – the classical Greek philosopher famously said: "*I am the wisest man alive, for I know one thing, and that is that I know nothing*". What he was saying is that: “*We can be sure of one thing, and that is that we can't be sure of anything*”.

Rene Descartes, the 17th cent. French philosopher had a go at grasping hold of certainty with his well-known statement ‘*I think therefore I am’.* But was Descartes just imaging his own thoughts? Is this world just some gigantic projection of faulty human imagination? A matrix of myth, constructed as a complex illusion?

These thoughts raise some fundamental questions about certainty of truth, reliability of information, the existence of verifiable fact. The main message of John’s epistle is about **certainty** and is conveniently summarized in verse 13 of chapter 5: “*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*”.

You can see clearly here that John is writing to those who are saved – Christians, people like you and me who ‘believe in the name of the Son of God’. We can see this central theme of **knowing for certain** flowing down through this final section of John’s letter:

5:15 – we **know** (with confidence) that God answers prayer!

5:18 –we **know** (with confidence) that Christ protect us – our salvation is secure in the One who has promised that none of God’s people will be snatched out of his hand (John 10.28).

Now, in our text, John is continuing with this list of what we know for certain. There are three points in this sermon:

1. We can be sure of our identity
2. We can be sure about the truth
3. We can be sure of our focus in life
4. **We can be sure of our identity** (in Christ)

If you’re not sure about who you are, you could ask your parents, or you could check your own passport or birth certificate in order to find out.

The Apostle John is writing to confirm the **certainty** that he and his fellow believers have in their true identity. Look at what he writes in v19: “*We know that we are from God”.* In other words, Brothers and Sisters in Christ, we can be sure that we are those who

1. come from God,
2. are connected to God and
3. who find the essence of who we are **in** God

John is **not** writing here about the origin of all mankind as a special creature created by God. In this sense all people ‘are from God’. He is being more specific here. He is referring to the **children of God -** chosen/elect/adopted to belong to Him in Christ. For people in this privileged position, God is the source of their spiritual life.

According to his great mercy, Brothers and sisters in the Lord, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. You can see that John is referring to the **certainty that Christians can have in their identity** as children of God from the contrast he makes in the 2nd part of v19: *“and the whole world lies in the power of the evil one”.* The ‘whole world’ here refers to the unbelieving world system, which is in the grip of Satan’s powerful, but limited, influence.

In his gospel, John refers to Satan as ‘*the ruler of this world*’ (12:31; 16:11). The Apostle Paul calls him the ‘*prince of the power of the air*’. Those who are under the dominion of Satan belong to His Kingdom. They are helplessly in the grasp of the Evil One and are in such darkness that they do not see, do not know, the desperate nature of their condition.

John writes to true believers and says: “*We* ***know*** *that we are from God”.* How can **he** be so sure? How can **we** be so sure? John has carefully laid out three ‘tests’ (obedience, love and belief) by which **we can be sure** that we are from God. Tests by which we can have confidence that our identity is that of a member of God’s family, one of His precious children by adoption. Let’s briefly summarise these three ‘tests’ now.

1. **Obedience to God’s commands**…sometimes referred to as the ‘moral test’

* **2:3** “*And by this we know that we have come to know him, if we keep his commandments*”
* **2:29b** “*you may be sure that everyone who practices righteousness has been born of him*”

1. **Love for God’s people**…sometimes referred to as the ‘social test’

* **2:10** “*Whoever loves his brother abides in the light*”
* **3:16** “*By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers”*
* **4:7** *“Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God”*

1. **Belief in God’s Son**…sometimes referred to as the ‘doctrinal test’

* **2:23-24**  *No one who denies the Son has the Father. Whoever confesses the Son has the Father also. Let what you heard from the beginning abide in you. If what you heard from the beginning abides in you, then you too will abide in the Son and in the Father.*
* **4:2** *By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God*

We can be sure of our true identity. We can know for certain. If you desire to keep all of Christ’s commandments because you love Him, you are from God. If you want to love Christ’s followers, you are from God. If you believe that Jesus is the Christ, the anointed One of God, you are from God.

There’s yet more that we can be certain about…2nd point

1. **We can be sure about the truth** (about Christ)

John writes *in v20 “we know that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding”.* Here he uses a special form of the verb ‘to come’ and ‘to give’. It’s a form (perfect) which means that: The Son of God (that is Jesus Christ) has come and has not stopped coming; that is he remains and will never leave! And that Christ has given understanding and continues to give this mindset/thought/attitude – which will never be taken away.

**How, you may ask, do we know that Jesus Christ has come?** That’s the vital question which John answers right at the start of this letter (1:1-4). He writes to say that he and those with him experienced the reality of Jesus Christ, the God-man, in the flesh.

* They **saw** him with their own eyes.
* They **touched** him with their own hands.
* They **heard** his voice with their own ears.
* They **testified** to his character, his lifestyle, his powerful and miraculous acts, his great suffering, his painful death, his burial, his resurrection and his ascension.

John wrote a **factual, historical account** about Christ in his gospel – as did Matthew, Mark, and Luke in theirs. He says in chapter 20, verse 31 of his gospel: “*these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name*”. John, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, wrote his gospel with the express purpose that readers/hearers like you and me could know with absolute certainty that the divine Son of God took on flesh and dwelt among people like us.

John wanted people to know that Jesus was not some ghost, some phantom, some representation of God, rather He wanted everyone to know that Christ, the Son of God had come to this earth as a human being. A man of flesh and blood. Here in his letter he writes that ‘we know he has come”. How do we know? We have eyewitness accounts verifying the historical accuracy of the man Jesus Christ who lived, died, and was raised to life on this earth about 2,000 years ago.

It’s difficult to know these days how much of the information we receive is true. I saw it on the internet - it must be true! Well, not necessarily! I read it in a book -it must be true! Well, not necessarily!

In the Scriptures an accurate record of past events has come to us verified by eyewitnesses like John. We know that Jesus Christ has come like no other conquering King in human history. There are no similar accounts to the victory of Christ at Calvary as recorded in Scripture. The Bible is unlike any other book ever written. We can be sure of the historical truth about Jesus Christ. He has come and he remains with us. Did he not say before he ascended bodily into the sky “*Behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age*”? He has come and remains with us through the Holy Spirit and he is coming again.

He has also given us understanding which also remains with us. The word ‘understanding’ here means ‘the capacity of knowing’. The Apostle Paul puts it this way in 1 Cor 2:16 “*We have the mind of Christ*”. We can ‘think God’s thoughts after Him’ because we are being transformed by the renewing of our minds (Rom 12:2).

Brothers and Sisters, this gift which we have been given from Christ, cannot be taken away. The Apostle Paul speaks of the absolute permanence of what God has given in this way: “*For the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable*” (Romans 11:29).

We have factual history and we experience the reality that our thinking, our mind, our will, and our behaviour changes as we follow Jesus: that’s why we can be sure about the truth! Being certain about our identity and about the truth deeply affects the way we live which brings us to our final point…

1. **We can be sure of our focus in life** (to worship God alone)

Words are so powerful, so much can be said with so few of them! Here’s an example, at the end of verse 20: when John writes about God’s Son Jesus Christ he says, “*He is true God and eternal life*”. Jesus is not less than God, not other than God, He is true God. He has all the attributes, the characteristics, of God. As God is the ultimate reality. He is true. So is Christ His Son.

Because God is true, the life which he gives is real. We are made body and soul and our spiritual existence (which we cannot see) is just as real as our material existence (which we experience through our physical senses).

When Jesus was praying what is often called the ‘high priestly prayer’ as recorded by John in his gospel (17:3), Christ said: **“***And this is eternal life, that they know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent*”. To know God, to be in a living relationship with Him as a forgiven sinner, holy in His sight, is to have eternal life. There remains no reason for life to end! The debt of death has been fully paid by Christ.

Because Jesus is true God, he can and does give to us certainty. We can **be sure** of our focus in life because that focus is to be on Christ! We can, with certainty, look to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith (Heb 12:2). We can, with confidence, worship God alone, knowing that the God whom we worship in and through Jesus Christ His Son is the One True God who has wonderfully revealed Himself to us, most clearly in the person of His Son who is (Col 1:15, 18b-20): “*the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. …. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent. For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross*”.

Feeling disoriented by life today? Apprehensive about what this year may bring? Unsettled by the political, social and economic uncertainties in this world in which we live? There is One person upon whom you can fix your focus with certainty. That divine person is Jesus Christ. Trusting in Him by faith does not remove all the chatter and complexity of this world, but such focus does bring more than sufficient clarity, certainty and confidence to navigate our way to our eternal home.

Socrates was wrong - We can be sure of one thing, and that is that we can be sure about Jesus Christ, our identity in Him, the truth of his coming and his giving us understanding and our access to the True God through Him. Descartes was wrong. All God’s children can rightly say “by the grace given to me in Christ, I think the thoughts of God therefore I am His child by grace in Christ alone”.

All Scripture has been written by God, in this letter working through the inspiration of His Holy Spirit through the Apostle John who put pen to parchment so that : *you who believe in the name of the Son of God that you may* ***know*** *that you have eternal life.*

Brothers and sisters in the Lord, we can have complete certainty in Christ!

Amen