

The Gospel in Miniature

You Call Yourself a Christian

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Here at Truth Community Fellowship, we love the word of God and we preach the word of God and we are happy to be able to open it week after week. As we were singing that final song, I was just mindful once again of what always occurs to me, to open the word of God and to a group of people whether it's a few handfuls or a group of this size or larger, it's always sobering whenever you stop to think about it because we're standing between, as we hear the word of God and as we go between the word of God, we're standing on the precipice between time and eternity. Every one of you is destined to stand before the throne of God one day, either as a Christian to give account of your life, or as an unbeliever to receive your eternal judgment and to head into eternal conscious punishment for your sins against God. That's just such a sobering reality. One day we are going to part and separate from one another and you will step into the presence of God and give an account for your life either as a Christian to enter into blessing or as an unbeliever to enter into judgment, and that's just such a sobering reality to contemplate as you step up into a pulpit in order to preach the word of God, and it's a sobering thing for individuals as well to have to take that into account and to factor that into life. I like to tell people that unless you have factored in the point at which you will be face-to-face with God and then calculate it back the way you should live and the way that you should respond to the things of Scripture, you haven't begun to live at all. We simply have to live life with an eye toward eternity and let that inform everything that we do.

Well, the Scripture speaks to that reality as well and in the book of 1 John, it has made these things clear and important to us. The Apostle John was very mindful of the significance of the issues of eternal life and eternal death, and we've been preaching through the book of 1 John and I'd invite you to turn there, especially if you're here as a new believer, I want to welcome you and as a visitor to welcome you to our ongoing exposition of the book of 1 John. 1 John is where we are going to be preaching from this morning and the Apostle John stated throughout his letter the reasons why he was writing. He didn't leave us to wonder exactly what he was getting at. He told us in chapter 1, verse 4, that he wanted us to have joy. He told us in chapter 2, verse 1, that he wanted us to live holy lives. And in chapter 5, verse 13, turn your attention to chapter 5, verse 13, he says, kind of bringing his letter to a close, bringing it all together and being conscious, no doubt, of the eternal issues that were at stake in what he had written along the lines of what we spoke about just a moment ago, he said in chapter 5, verse 13, "These things I

have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know that you have eternal life." If you know that you have eternal life, everything else is secondary and you can sing with the hymn, "It is well with my soul," no matter what else might transpire. If you do not have eternal life, nothing else matters no matter how favorable your present external circumstances may be.

And it's the issue of external circumstances that I really want to think about with you this morning as we approach our text in just a moment. You can see in the Scriptures consistently the reality that external circumstances are not the measure by which you can know whether things are well with your soul or not. That was the classic mistake of Job's friends in the book of Job. They looked at his external suffering, the fact that he had just lost all of his wealth, he had lost his children, he was married to a contentious wife, and he had lost his health and was covered with boils and was scraping himself with broken pieces of pottery in an effort to alleviate his physical suffering for just a few moments, and they looked at him and they condemned him and called upon him to confess his sins as one who was obviously suffering because he had somehow sinned against God. They couldn't have been more wrong. You have the testimony of God himself at the beginning and at the end of the book that Job was a righteous man. His suffering was no indication of the state of his soul or the approval of God on his life.

You can see the same thing as you think about it with our Lord Jesus Christ, hanging on the cross, stripped down, beaten, crown of thorns on his head, dried spittle on his face from where he had been mocked and beaten by the Roman soldiers. All the world, as it were, gathered around the foot of that cross mocking his name, "If you're the Son of God, prove it and come down off the cross. Show it by external circumstances. Display your power and prove that you are right with God because obviously as you're hanging on the cross there, it's obvious that you are under a curse." The same thing could be said about the Apostle Paul, beaten times without number; chased from town to town as he preached the Gospel. In every instance, Job, Jesus, the Apostle Paul and other scriptural examples that you could come up with, people suffering even at the very pinnacle, the Son of God suffering in the worst external way that would bid all men to condemn them as also judged by God, and yet the judgment of men could not possibly be more mistaken.

Well, let's bring that here into the 21st century and apply that to our own thinking about our own spiritual lives. The presence of adversity in your life is no sign that God is judging you or somehow displeased with you. I realize that in this modern connection over the past few decades as health and wealth prosperity preaching has taken root and has substituted for true biblical Christianity, that that's what we are taught to believe, that the external circumstances show the pleasure of God. If things are going well with you, then things must be right with your soul, and if you're suffering, if you're going through physical infirmity or have experienced loss or experiencing some manner of mental depression, then that's obviously a sign of God's judgment and displeasure on your life. Well, beloved, look, we have to cleanse our minds of all of that wrong unbiblical thinking because nothing could be more designed to lead you into confusion and self-deception than trying to judge the status of your spiritual life by your external circumstances. Negative circumstances doesn't mean a negative assessment of God on your life, and

conversely, positive peace and external pleasure is no indication that God's favor is on you at all. So we just have to empty ourselves of that rotten thinking that has been foisted upon us by deceiving men and go back and see what the word of God says about it.

Well, the Apostle John told us in chapter 5, verse 13, "I have written these things to you so that you may know that you have eternal life." Well, given the urgency of knowing that we have eternal life, given the urgency of that coming day when nothing else is going to matter, when we step into the presence of God, whatever that's going to be like, when we step into the presence of God, the only thing that is going to matter is that he sees us as righteous and that our sins have been forgiven and your one goal in life is to make sure that that's true of you and to repent of every sin that would keep you from that, to repent of the vanity that would keep you in love with the world and indifferent to these important spiritual matters.

Well, as we come to our text in chapter 4, verse 13, I'd invite you to turn there, what we're going to see is a summary of the elements of assurance, the things that you can ask yourself, the things that you can look for in your own heart as being that which is the proof that your sins have been forgiven, that you are a true Christian, that it is truly well with your soul. And if I could stamp my foot, which I could but I won't, if I could stamp my foot to emphasize it, if I could pound the pulpit, which I could but I won't, understand that nothing is more important than what we have in front of us here today. And if you're a Christian, even at that and you know that you're a Christian, you still need to take these things seriously and embrace them because what we see in this passage in front of us is the blueprint by which you should build your life; the foundational convictions that should form everything that you think and do.

We've come to chapter 4, verses 13 through 16 in 1 John; chapter 5, verse 13 was simply by way of an introduction. As we've gone verse by verse through 1 John, the Lord has brought us to verses 13 through 16 here this morning. Notice the emphasis at the beginning and the end of this passage on the word "know." We are designed to know. It is an utter fiction, it is a lie from the devil, it is a lie perpetrated by the Catholic Church that we're not intended to know. It's a lie that we're not supposed to know that we have objective peace with God and that issue is settled for all of eternity. It's an utter lie. It's contradicted by the passage that we see here in front of us this morning. 1 John 4:13-16 where he says,

13 By this we know that we abide in Him and He in us, because He has given us of His Spirit. 14 We have seen and testify that the Father has sent the Son to be the Savior of the world. 15 Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God. 16 We have come to know and have believed the love which God has for us. God is love, and the one who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him.

That beautiful picture that John so often talks about, the idea of an ongoing abiding in the reality of God, an ongoing reality of God abiding in us through his indwelling Holy Spirit, we are meant to know as Bible believing Christians, we are meant to know that

these realities are true, the question is how do we know. It's not by anything external. It couldn't be that. We see too many examples of Scripture which would contradict that. The question is: what is it that we look at, and what you see is that the reality, how you know is measured by your response to what God has revealed in his word. It is a measure of heart attitudes, heart affections, that we are to look for.

In the sequence of thought in this passage, I'm just going to introduce this by way of overview and then we'll unpack it kind of point by point. The sequence of thought in the passage is this: we know that we have eternal life, or you could say we know that we abide in God, because he has given us of his Spirit. He has given his Spirit to us. That's how we know that we abide in God. Now, that raises a question. That's an invisible, intangible reality. How do we know that we have the Spirit of God? Well, we know that we have the Spirit of God because we confess that Jesus is the Son of God and we dwell in love. Your response, your belief, your confidence in Christ is one of the marks of the presence of the Spirit of God in your life because Jesus said, "The Spirit testifies to me." Your love, your presence of love for God and love for other believers, is another mark of the presence of the Spirit. So you kind of unwrap this like the skins of an onion. We know that we abide in God, peel that back. How do we know that? Because we have the Spirit. How do we know that we have the Spirit? Because of the way that we confess Christ and the presence of love in our hearts. That's the direction of this passage.

So we're going to look at four elements that you can examine your heart of that promote true assurance, and really as you look at these four elements of true assurance, what you're going to see is you're going to see a miniature presentation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ wound up in these four verses that we just read, verses 13 through 16. How do you know that you're a true Christian? How do you know that you're going to pass through the waters of serious judgment and come out safe on the other side? How do you know that your soul won't be cast into perdition but instead will be received into the glories of heaven? How do you know these are the things that you look for? And I've got to tell you, I've got to tell you that the possibility, the conscious reality that some of you wouldn't be there with me when I myself go into heaven just weighs on my heart really heavily here this morning. I want all of you to be there. I want all of you to know Christ. I want all of you to understand the glories of salvation and for these things to be real to you and I can't take it for granted that that's the reality of your heart, the reality of who you are, and all I can do is show you what Scripture says and then implore you and exhort you and encourage you and beg you to take these things seriously; to examine your heart and to know that they are true in your own life because these are indispensable marks of true Christians that show that you have eternal life.

We're going to look at four things in your attitude toward four things, your love for four different elements of spiritual reality, and the first one that we're going to look at is, and let's put them in a form of a question: what is your attitude toward the revelation of Scripture? What is your attitude toward the revelation of Scripture? What do you think about the Bible? Do you love the 66 books of the Bible? Do you love God's word? Is it important to you? Is it dear to you because that's one of the marks of a true Christian;

that's one of the things that God gives to true believers when he saves them is he gives them a love and a desire for the word of God.

Now, this introduces the first mark to prove the reality of your faith: true believers accept the apostles' teaching. They receive it. They welcome it. They submit to it. Look at verse 14. We looked at verse 13 last week. Verse 14 where the Apostle John says, "We have seen and testify that the Father has sent the Son to be the Savior of the world." Let's just focus on that first half of the verse here, "We have seen and testify that the Father has sent the Son." Who is the "we" here? We've talked about this many times over the past several weeks and it's important for you to understand that the "we" that is being spoken of in verse 14 is not you and me. It has nothing to do with you and me. This is talking about the testimony of the apostles and we know that has to be the case because John starts out in verse 14 saying, "we have seen." Stop. Whoa. Time out. The people who had actually seen Christ is a much narrower body of people than people who are professing believers today. You and I have not seen with our physical eyes, with our literal human vision, we have not seen Jesus Christ. The apostles had. And as we had seen earlier in the passage, we're even going back to the very first verse of the book, John starts out by emphasizing the fact that we have heard these things, we have seen these things, we have looked at them, we have touched them with our hands. This whole book of 1 John is grounded on a physical interaction between the apostles and Christ and is premised on their physical senses being the means by which they receive that which John is now speaking of. He had seen him and flowing out of his seeing, flowing out of his apostolic commission, was his testimony, "We have seen and testify that the Father has sent the Son to be the Savior of the world." He's talking about what they as apostles did. This isn't about your and my testimony, as important as those things are. It can't be talking about that because we haven't seen Christ with our own eyes, so he's talking about himself and the apostolic circle, not a general Christian testimony to a watching world. That's important, but it's not what he's talking about here in verse 14.

Now, let's think about this. Go back to the Gospel of John with me for a moment. I want you to see this. We're going to kind of build a case here that will kind of lead you into the necessity of believing the revelation of Scripture as being a mark of a true Christian. Go back to the Gospel of John 13, and my favorite sound at this time of day on a Sunday is the sound of Bible pages turning; that always delights my heart. John 13:23. The disciples were at dinner with Jesus and as was the custom, they were lounging on the floor around a low table, and the physical interaction was close and intimate. John here is describing what happened. He is the disciple whom Jesus loved. Look at verse 23, this is John's self reference to himself, he says, "There was reclining on Jesus' bosom one of His disciples, whom Jesus loved. So Simon Peter gestured to him, and said to him, 'Tell us who it is of whom He is speaking.'" Jesus has said that one of the 12 is going to betray him; he's talking about Judas. And in verse 25, "He," meaning John, "leaning back thus on Jesus' bosom, said to Him, 'Lord, who is it?'" Jesus then answered, "That is the one for whom I shall dip the morsel and give it to him." The reason I take you to that passage here is for you to see and for it to be fresh in your mind that the Apostle John's testimony is premised on the most intimate interaction with Christ that we could imagine coming out of the first century. He was right there with him. His head was on Jesus' chest. He had a

personal experience, a personal interaction with Christ, that was the foundation of his testimony; a testimony that was aided and abetted by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit as well when he wrote the Scriptures, when he wrote his books of Scripture. But what I want you to see is that he saw him up close. He was far closer to Jesus at that moment than I am here in this pulpit to you. He had a real physical basis upon which to give his testimony and this was true of all of the apostles.

Look over for another example at John 20. We're building to something here. This is the day of the resurrection which we will remember as a collective Christian church on March 31st this year. On the day of the resurrection, John 20, Mary Magdalene, verse 1, "Mary Magdalene came to the tomb, saw the stone had been taken away." Verse 2, "she ran and came to Simon Peter and to the other disciple whom Jesus loved," there's John's self reference again, "and said to them, "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid Him." So they ran together. Verse 4, "the other disciple ran ahead faster than Peter and came to the tomb first," and watch this, watch it, verse 5, "stooping and looking in, he saw the linen wrappings lying there; but he did not go in. And so Simon Peter also came, following him, and entered the tomb; and he saw the linen wrappings lying there, and the face-cloth which had been on His head, not lying with the linen wrappings, but rolled up in a place by itself." In light of what we're saying here, do you realize what that's saying? Do you know what that means when we read the book of 1 John? Do you know? It means that we are reading the very words of a man who saw for himself firsthand the empty tomb. The body was supposed to be there, the tomb had been sealed, it was guarded by Roman soldiers over night, but Jesus Christ was not there. When you read the book of 1 John, when you read the Gospel of John, when you read the book of Revelation, you are reading the words of one who saw with his own eyes the empty tomb. You are reading with your own eyes a man whose head was physically pressed against Jesus' chest. And the question for you to ask if you are a true Christian, am I a true Christian or not? The question is: do you believe that, because if you question that, if you deny that, if you assault that, if you're indifferent to that, let me say that again, if you're indifferent to that, you're not a Christian because a true Christian is persuaded by and believes the testimony of the apostles. That is a mark of a true believer because it's what God puts in the hearts of his children. He saves us and he puts in our hearts a trust and a believing reception to his word.

The apostles testify. Think about it this way, think back to what we looked at just a few weeks ago as we were studying the authority of the apostles. When you're looking at the writings of an apostle, don't ever let this slip from your mind, when you're reading the New Testament, you are reading the words of a man personally commissioned by Jesus Christ himself. You do not have the prerogative to disregard it. To put that in a positive way, we as believers have the precious privilege of embracing it and believing it and loving it and setting our entire eternal destiny on the truth of what this word reveals. It is a clear distinguishing mark between a Christian and a non-Christian what they say about this word.

So I ask you for one more look at this just to be impressed with the magnificent nature of the apostolic testimony, look at John 20:27, just a few verses down from where we read.

This is the account of Thomas, doubting Thomas as some of you know him, and I'll just step into the middle of the story and remind you that after the resurrection, Jesus appeared to his disciples in physical form, in his resurrected body, bearing the wounds of a mortal crucifixion in his living body, a living contradiction of what should have been mortal wounds. He shows them to Thomas in verse 27 and he said to Thomas, "Reach here with your finger, and see My hands; and reach here your hand and put it into My side; and do not be unbelieving, but believing." Thomas answered and said to Him, 'My Lord and my God!'" You see, beloved, just from a purely human standpoint, just from a purely human standpoint, the apostles saw Jesus up close in time and space in a real historical human event that was not the product of abstract philosophy, it was not a vision, it was not a hallucination. This really happened. They really personally interacted with the Son of God who left heaven and was incarnated in earth. They really did. Their experience with Christ was more real than our experience with each other because it was direct personal interaction with deity.

Now, what does all of that have to do with assurance? What you have to understand is that everything that we know about the Gospel comes through those men; it comes through those apostles. You can't question, you can't deny, you can't reject the testimony of the apostles without throwing out the entire Gospel itself. You can't have one without the other. You can't have the Gospel without believing the Bible. And those wicked men, those wicked men who would undermine the authority of Scripture in a myriad of ways either through their sinful lives as they would stand up and presume to teach, or through their teaching that would undermine the authority of Scripture, those wicked men are driving a wedge between the people that they teach and the reality of the Gospel. You can't do that. You can't do that and maintain the claim to being a Christian. And what false teachers can't do on a bigger scale, you can't do on a personal scale. You have to love this word more than you love life itself. This is what we spill blood over if we have to, to defend and uphold the truth of this word because this is our lifeline to God. We know nothing about Christ apart from these 66 books and so a true believer understands that, receives it, believes it, and loves it.

Look over at 1 Corinthians 15 and you'll see this brought out some more. 1 Corinthians 15, another resurrection passage. 1 Corinthians 15:3, "For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received," Paul received this by revelation from Christ himself, "that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that He appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve." You see, there it is again, the apostolic circle. But notice how Paul wraps around his declaration of the Gospel around "according to the Scriptures." The Scriptures are the foundation. The Scriptures are the place where we see the Gospel revealed and if you want to know if your sins are truly forgiven, if you want to know whether your salvation is real or you're one of the many who are merely self deceived, start with asking yourself what do you believe about this book because it is in this book where God has made himself known; it is in this book through the apostles that God has revealed the saving Gospel of Jesus Christ and there is no salvation apart from it. So let me say this by word of what I hope will be rich encouragement to your heart: no matter what else is happening in your life, if you love and treasure the Bible and receive

it as God's own testimony to his own character, to his own Gospel, and that it is the very word of God that you hold in your lap here this morning, if that is your attitude toward the Scripture, beloved, praise God Almighty that's the mark that you're a real one. If you think about the Scriptures and you can take it or leave it, "I'm not going to make a big issue"; it's just not that important to you what the Bible is, what the Bible says. Oh, beloved, fear for your soul. Fear for your soul because these cannot be matters of indifference to those who have truly been born from above. So we see that our response to the apostolic testimony becomes one of the dividing points between true and false, true Christians and false Christians, and when you see yourself embracing the Scriptures, you're seeing the mark of one who has truly been born again. You can tell a true Christian by his attitude toward the Bible and I wish that people who call themselves evangelicals made a bigger deal of this than what they do. So if you want to know if your salvation is real, start by asking yourself: what do you think about the revelation of Scripture? John said, "We've seen and we testify." That's where it starts.

Turn back to 1 John now as we go on to our second point here this morning. 1 John 4. You can tell a true Christian by their attitude toward the revelation of Scripture, secondly, you can tell a true Christian by his attitude toward what we'll say, point 2: the role of the Son. The role of the Son; r-o-l-e, the role, the purpose of Jesus Christ. Look at verse 14 with me again as we look at the second half of the verse now. John says, "We have seen and testify that the Father has sent the Son to be the Savior of the world." Okay. We've said that we believe the testimony of the apostles. We believe that they were uniquely commissioned by Christ and so we submit to their writings. That leads us to the next point of it: well, what did they say? What did they say? Well, John gives it in summary form right here in verse 14, he says, "We testify," the apostles are united in their testimony, "that God the Father has sent God the Son to be the Savior of the world." Oh, there's so much packed into that verse, isn't there? First of all, it tells you that the world needs saving. If you've never understood that you need to be saved out of this wicked world, that you need to be delivered from your own environment, that's a warning sign about the health of your soul.

Well, John talks about the world here. He's not just merely talking about the physical globe but he's talking about sinful society in rebellion against God and under the domination of the devil. The depth of the rebellion, mark this and don't ever forget about it, we properly measure society's rebellion in some of the external sins that we see growing in ever greater popularity as we go from week to week and year to year and the societal sins that come about, but always understand this: the height, the measure of the rebellion of the world against God, the rebellion of the realm of the creature against the Creator, is those things are only symptoms, the real mark of the rebellion was found 2,000 years ago when Jews and Romans alike nailed Christ to the cross. That is the height of human rebellion. It's the height of sin against God that the creature took the Creator and killed him without compunction, glorying in the act as they did it. Glorying in it. Mocking him. This is a measure of how much the world hates Christ, how much it hates it's Creator. Now listen, listen to me very carefully because we're not used to thinking this way: when we are born into this world, we are born into a physical and spiritual lineage that connects us directly with those who killed Christ on the cross. They are our spiritual

forefathers. They are the ones who set the pattern for us. They expressed what we would have done ourselves when we were there apart from the work of God in our lives. Those are your spiritual ancestors, the ones gathered around the cross. What you have to ask yourself, what you must come to grips with is have you separated yourself, have you consciously repented from the way that the world treated the Creator at the cross? Do you consciously disavow that as being wrong, guilty, sinful, worthy of judgment? Do you disavow it and look to that same crucified one for mercy? Look to that same one and say, "Lord, if I had been there, I would have been just like them because, Lord, I know that, I know that because the strains of rebellion have been in my own life, the strains of rebellion have marked my own life."

So we're staggered at the reality of how much this world needs a Savior. It couldn't possibly save itself. It couldn't possibly generate a desire to save itself because when the Savior was there, we killed him. Let's not flatter ourselves about the innate goodness of man, the innate wickedness of man was found with what they did with perfect righteous holiness in front of them incarnated in human flesh, what we see about man is measured by what they did with Christ and everything else that you see, the rebellion against his order of male and female relationships, the rejection of his word, the mocking of Christians, the martyrdom of Christians throughout the centuries, it's all symptoms that go back to that same root, a world in utter rebellion against God. Don't view these things as disconnected. There is a common spirit of the world, a common spirit of rebellion that animates it all, it's just a matter of manifesting itself in different circumstances and consequences, but it's the same underlying root of rebellion and the world needed to be saved, broadly speaking, you and I, specifically speaking, needed to be saved.

There is no other way to see it and what that says to us as we continue on, as we continue the passage here, beloved, oh, please just look at verse 14 with me again. Look at verse 14 with me again, "We have seen and testify that the Father has sent the Son to be the Savior of the world." What do the apostles tell us? They tell us that salvation was God's idea. It originated with God. It originated with him sending Christ. It originated with Christ saying, "I'll gladly submit to your will, my Father. I will go. I will offer my life. I will be the Savior of the world that you have appointed." A true Christian grasps that and understand that. Incidentally, let me tell you something that might brighten your view of God, brighten your view and understanding, we think of Christ as the Savior and that's rightly so, we view him as the one who interceded for our sins and rightly so, shed his blood, rose again, intercedes for us and we love him for that, don't we? We love him for that but what I don't want you to lose sight of here is that God the Father has the same exact disposition toward your salvation that Christ did. God the Father was not reluctant about salvation. It says right here in verse 14, the Father sent his Son to be the Savior of the world. God the Father wanted your salvation also. He loves us in equal measure with God the Son and so when we go and we pray, "Our Father who art in heaven, heavenly Father, I come before your throne and I pray to you," understand that you are addressing one who had in the depths of his eternal being a sovereign love for you that desired your salvation and made sure that it happened by sending his coequal person in the Trinity, God the Son, Jesus Christ, in order to secure your salvation. That's what true Christians

believe. That's how you can know if you're a Christian, it's what you think about the role that the Son of God played in the realm of salvation.

Look over at John 16, the Gospel of John, chapter 16. I just want you to see this point about the Father because I know that some people get off track on it thinking that the Son was willing but maybe the Father was reluctant. Some of that comes from bad teaching about the nature of Christ's intercession for us now that he has ascended into heaven. John 16:26, Jesus is speaking to his disciples and he says, "In that day you will ask in My name, and I do not say to you that I will request of the Father on your behalf," watch this, verse 27, "for the Father Himself loves you, because you have loved Me and have believed that I came forth from the Father." The Father himself loves you. We have the full magnitude of the Triune God exercising love toward us in perfect divine harmony and purpose when our salvation is accomplished. It was the Father's love, it was the Son's love, it was the Spirit's love all working together to make sure that you were saved out of that wicked world and brought into the kingdom of God the Father.

A true Christian believes that, loves that. A true Christian understands that in Jesus Christ we won't insult him with pretended flattery that says, "Oh, he was a good teacher." We won't insult him with supposed flattery saying, "Oh, he was one of the great men, one of the prophets." A true Christian understands that Jesus Christ is utterly unique; that there is no one to compare him to; that there is no prophet Mohammed who somehow shares glory with him; there is no subsequent revelation that came through Joseph Smith or anything like that. The true Christian, if you want to know if you're a true Christian, ask yourself: what do you think about Christ? And what you should find in your heart if you're a true Christian is that there is an elevated place for the Lord Jesus Christ that no one else comes close to and you understand that when he came to earth, it wasn't simply to be a good example; it wasn't simply to teach for a while and then go back home. He came on a spiritual rescue mission doing that which only he could do by laying down his perfect life on the cross as a substitute to save wicked sinners out of a rebellious world and you have in your heart the sense that not only did he do that for sinners in general, oh, praise God, he did that for me. That's what true Christians believe about the role of the Son. They understand the general slop that the world tries to throw in false homage, diminished homage to Christ can't possibly be true. The true Christian believes, "No, Jesus Christ came to seek and to save that which was lost," Luke 19:10. "Christ came on a spiritual rescue mission to lay down his life for sinners and if he hadn't done that, I would be lost and I would go to that day of judgment without hope and expecting nothing but certain doom." That's what a true Christian believes. "Christ was my only means of being delivered from my sin and he did it. He did it when he died on the cross. He did it when he said it is finished. That word wasn't just that he was about to die, it meant that my salvation had been accomplished by him on the cross." That's what true Christians believe. Is that what you believe? If it is, that's a healthy sign that you're a true Christian. If you have any other view of Christ, let me beg you to get back into the word of God because you're not seeing things for the way they really are.

The Savior of the world. Christ is the only Savior that the world will ever have. Acts 4:12, "There is salvation in no one else for there is no other name given among men by

which we must be saved." In first century times, the focus was on Jews versus Jews and Gentiles. He's a Savior of both Jews and Gentiles. There is only one Savior. Today we could think about it in other racial terms: black and white, Asians and Hispanics. All are included when we preach Christ to men. We understand that there is no other Savior. There are no racial boundaries to the work of Christ as the progenitor of the human race. He is the one person who can save them. There is no other Savior and a true Christian understands that and believes that about Christ.

Do you want to know if your salvation is real? Answer in your own heart. You don't have to answer to me. I can't help you beyond explaining these things. Ask yourself: what do you think about Christ? And let's be specific here. We were talking about the nature of external earthly circumstances before. It is not necessarily the mark of a true Christian to say, "I've come to Jesus for help from my earthly problems. You know, when I'm down, I go to Jesus. When I'm facing a trial, I go to Jesus. Things are tough, I go to Jesus." True Christians do that, don't get me wrong, but if that's all your view of Christ is, some kind of external help to get you through the rough spots of life, if that's all that you think about Christ, if that's all that you view him as is a divine enabler to help you get through life without too many problems messing things up, you need to reconsider whether you're a Christian or not because a true Christian understands that that earthly stuff is secondary. A true Christian views Christ as his divine Deliverer from sin and you must see Christ that way, the Savior of the world, not just the helper of the unfortunate. If you say, "No, I view Christ as my Savior, my only hope of eternal life, the only one who can forgive me of my sins and I trust him and I believe him," if that's your view of the role of the Son, you have good reason to think that you're a true Christian. If you have divested yourself of your love for sin and entrusted yourself totally to him, that's the mark of a true Christian. If you just want Jesus to help you fulfill your own agenda in life, forget it. Don't insult him by saying, "Here's my agenda, you do what I want. Help me get what I want out of life." That's disgusting. The true Christian sees it completely differently. "Jesus, you take out of my life whatever you want. You do through me whatever you want. Just save me from my sin. I give myself to you without reservation. My life, my will, my loves, my affections all belong to you in utter undistracted, unqualified devotion and though I will fall short in living that out, that's why I needed a Savior in the first place." But there is no qualification, there is no reservation in the true Christian's attitude toward the Son.

That kind of bleeds over into point 3 here, in fact, I just preached point 3. Now what do I do? 3.5. We'll go to point 3. It's so important that we'll just re-emphasize it. Point 3 is the response of submission. The response of submission and you'll see this in the text. How do you know if you're a true Christian? What's your attitude toward the revelation of Scripture? What do you believe about the role of the Son? Point 3: do you have a response of submission to him? Look at verse 15 with me, 1 John 4:15, "Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God." Beloved, understand something, he's talking about God abiding in him and he in God; this is all wrapped up in the question of who is a true Christian: whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God. Can we just state something that should be obvious, that this isn't a superficial flippant confession, "Oh yeah, Jesus is the Son of God." Why would we treat

it that way? This can't possibly be a casual flippant thing that says, "Yeah, Son of God, sure." No! No, this is a life altering confession. This changes the whole trajectory of life and eternity. We're saying that this man Jesus of Nazareth who walked on the earth 2,000 years ago was no mere human. He was born of a virgin. He was the Son of God incarnate come from heaven who existed before time began. He's the very Son of God. This isn't casual conversation. We're saying this is life altering truth. This changes everything. This is the road to Damascus. This makes me fall on my knees. He's the Son of God.

This is a genuine...oh, beloved, let's just assume for the sake of argument that God doesn't like to deal in hypocrisy. Let's just assume that superficial things that we don't really mean are not what God is after when he calls us to respond to Christ. Let's just assume that, okay? We'll just assume that and realize that what God is calling for here in a confession that Jesus is the Son of God is not a mere outward statement, it's not a mere theological confession, it's a representation of the deepest part of your heart in a genuine, submissive acknowledgment that Jesus is the Son of God and therefore entitled by nature to the position of Lord of all. And as soon as you make that confession, as soon as you realize that, then you realize how unthinkable it is to call him "Lord, Lord," and not do what he says, Luke 6:46. No, we confess Jesus as the true Son of God and that Son of God means that Jesus Christ has authority. As the one in authority, that means he has authority over my soul, authority over my life, and I gladly submit to that as a proper recognition and a proper response to who he is by nature. This really isn't complicated, is it? A true Christian recognizes the preeminent position of Jesus Christ and gladly bows the knee before it.

When the Apostle Paul, we won't turn there, we're going to look at Paul's testimony a few months from now. I'm looking forward to that. But when the Apostle Paul was stopped on the road to Damascus and when he was pursuing Christians to persecute them, the Lord appeared to him and stopped him, do you remember what he said? He said, "Who are you, Lord?" And then he said, "What would you have me to do?" He recognized his position and he submitted his will to him and said, "Tell me what you would have me to do." Beloved, as you examine your heart to see whether you are a true Christian or not, that's your response to Christ. That's the only mark, that's the only response a true Christian could have. A true Christian lays down his life unconditionally to Christ. The corollary to that is that someone who does not lay their life down unconditionally to Christ is not a true Christian.

So, oh, beloved, through the word of God as Christ reveals himself through his word to us, what you have in front of you right at this moment is God has brought us to a point where, in a sense, he's brought the day of judgment forward to us in this room right now and Christ as it is through his word is presenting himself to you, saying, "I am the Son of God. I am the resurrected Christ. I testified to you through my apostles and the question that I ask," as the Lord Jesus Christ would say to you now in this room, "is do you submit to me as Lord or not?" That's pretty sobering, isn't it? We can't play games with this. We can't trivialize this. Jesus Christ is who he said he was. Jesus Christ is who the apostle said he was, the Son of God, and he won't admit into his kingdom those who carry their own self-will and rebellion against him. It's utter surrender because that's a true

confession of Christ. This isn't about playing games. And you young people, 8, 10, 12, 14 years old, you've got to come to grips with the fact that this is true; that this is real; that what the Bible says is absolutely true and even at your young tender age, you are responsible and accountable to respond to Christ in the way that he is worthy of. So as you ask yourself and examine your own heart, child and adult alike, ask yourself, look at yourself in the mirror and say, "Do I submit to this Christ? Do I submit to him? Do I belong to him? Am I his willing, loving slave? Am I his dulos to use the Greek term? Is he Master and I am subordinate? Or do I still just want him to do things my way?" Those are vast different worlds. One, the sinner says, "I'm still in charge"; the other says, "I am broken and gladly conquered by the Son of God."

Where is your heart at, beloved? You know, God, listen, listen, God has been extraordinarily gracious to you to bring you to a point today to be able to contemplate this while you're still able to respond in saving faith. Some people blow through life and their first confrontation with the reality of the authority of the Son of God is when it's too late. God has given you grace to be able to see these things and settle these things in your heart before judgment comes and then to live in an outflowing of confidence that this is real and true. Do you submit your life to Christ? Do you believe in his role as the only Savior of the world? Have you trusted him alone for your salvation? That's the mark of a true Christian and if that's an expression of your heart, then rejoice and be glad with a sober, holy truth-informed joy. Yeah, these things are really serious and these things are true but, you know, when we belong to Christ, we can rejoice in them. But if you look in the mirror and you know that what you're seeing back reflected in the mirror is the face of a hypocrite, then you should fear and you should repent while there is still time. As we were driving in today, we came within probably, I don't know, 18, 24 inches of a really bad car accident; a person swerved into the lane, just missed. Nancy commented at the time, "There is another reminder we don't know what today holds." Beloved, you don't know what holds what you walk out that door today. If you're not a Christian, don't treat this superficially. Don't treat this flippantly. This may be your final opportunity. Take it seriously.

Final point here this morning. We've asked what's your response to Scripture? What do you believe about the role of the Son? Are you marked by a response of submission to Christ? The other mark of the presence of the Spirit of God in your life is the reality of love? The reality of love. Look at verse 16 with me. Chapter 4, verse 16, and, you know, what you see here as you go into verse 16 with all of these weighty things, you see that what God intends to deliver us to even in this world is a realm of love, a realm of assurance, a realm of confidence. He doesn't play games with us but he doesn't deliver us over into continual abject fear, he delivers us over into a realm of love. Salvation delivers us into a realm of love. Verse 16, "We have come to know and have believed the love which God has for us. God is love, and the one who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him." The love of God expressed at the cross. Whenever you think about the love of God, please, let me say this again, stop thinking about your external circumstances and when the phrase "love of God" comes to your mind, make a beeline to the cross and say, "Oh yeah, the love of a God means that Christ came and was the appreciation for my sins."

Look up at verse 10 with me of chapter 4. This is the context that led into the discussion of God's love in verse 16. He had just said, "This is love," what love? "Not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins." When John is talking here in verse 6, we believe the love which God has for us, he's saying we believe in the appreciation of Christ at the cross. We believe that God loved us and sent a Savior for us. That's the love that we abide in. Christ became the sin offering for us and satisfied the demands of God's law and God's holiness. So to abide in God's love, watch this, we're almost done here, to abide in God's love means this: it means that you continually, there is the abiding part, you continually find your spiritual rest in Christ's propitiation. Let me say that again: to abide in God's love, it's not an emotional sentimental thing, it means that you consciously continue to rest the well-being of your soul, the forgiveness of your sins, in the work of Christ on the cross. God's love, 1 John 4:10 said, he sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. The true Christian says, "That is my hope. That is where I trust all of my eternal well-being upon. I trust it in the cross." In other words, you consciously recognize and continually affirm the love of God as it is revealed in the Gospel. "Christ came to save sinners. He saved me. I rest in that. I abide in that. I believe that. I rejoice in that. I'm confident and assured in that." That's abiding in God's love. We understand that circumstances are going to fail us. We understand that some of us are going to end up in broken bodies in smelly nursing homes some day. We understand that the end of this life for most everyone, it comes with a total loss of dignity. We're not living for this world but that's not the place of our confidence; that's not the reality of our love. We are resting in the love of God shown at the cross and we know that in Christ we have a perfect substitute who secured the salvation of our souls, never to fail, and we rest in him and we abide in that reality. You say, "How are things between you and the Lord?" "Are you kidding? It's perfect because Christ is perfect and Christ bought me as his own and he owns me and he says he would never let anyone plucked me out of my hand. It's perfect." "Isn't your body ravaged with cancer?" "Yeah, but that's just my body. Don't you understand that it's well with my soul? I'm abiding in the love of God. Things couldn't be better. I am closer to heaven today than I've ever been."

So what I want you to see as we kind of wrap this up, God wants us to know that we belong to Christ. He wants us to enjoy conscious communion with him. If we're tossed about with spiritual uncertainty, "I hope I go to heaven. I don't know," that diminishes the glory of Christ at the cross. If you see yourself reflected in these four things that we have talked about today, let that ground you. Put away your doubt, put away your uncertainty and rest in confidence that what God has begun he will complete in you and honor him by trusting him. You see, we not only trust Christ by looking back at the cross and trusting him for the forgiveness of our sins, we do that for sure, but the true Christian trusts Christ so completely, so much, so without qualification, that he can sit down and rest and abide and say, "Just as he forgave my sins, he is going to deliver me into glory without fail. I trust him. That's what he said. He would never lie to me. I believe him completely." And when Christians start to think and talk like that, joy starts to just dominate your perspective on life.

You see, when a person is truly converted, that kind of love for Christ comes out, spills over in the way that we interact with each other. "I love Christians because I love their Lord." Beloved, if you're confessing Christ like we've talked about here this morning, if you're loving the brothers like we've talked about here this morning, the Spirit of God is at work in your life and if the Spirit of God is at work in your life, verse 13 says we know that God abides in us and we in him and this ends up in glory and we have assurance of eternal life. Don't trivialize it. Don't take it lightly. But if you can look at your life and see these things, then it is your birthright, your spiritual birthright. You are entitled to the most profound sense of joy and confidence that transcends everything in this world. With the writer of the hymn, we say,

"Loved with everlasting love,
Led by grace that love to know;
Gracious Spirit from above,
Thou hast taught me it is so.
In a love which cannot cease,
I am His, and He is mine.

"In a love which cannot cease,
I am His, and He is mine."

Let's pray together.

Lord Jesus, thank you. Thank you for that perfect work of redemption that you accomplished 2,000 years ago on the cross. Thank you that you gave it to us by the work of your Spirit. Thank you for the assurance that we belong to you in a love which cannot cease. Thank you that Satan, circumstances, the hostility of the world, nothing can pluck us from your eternal hand. We love you and we thank you for that. Father, I can't look into the hearts of every soul that's here, you can, you know those that have not come to saving faith. Father, yours is the gift of salvation; yours is the power to grant repentance and faith. Would you do that for those here that are still not in Christ? Would you show mercy to them, not only in bringing them here to expose them to the truth of the Gospel, but, Father, if you've gone this far, go a little bit further and seal it to their hearts with true repentance and grace and faith and let these who do not know you walk out today with a confidence, "I've been born from above. God has done a work in my heart in response to his word and I do believe in Christ. I do believe the Scriptures. I do submit to him and I'm going to rest in this divine love which comes to us through revelation from a holy God." Would you do that, Father? Would you be gracious to us to that extent? Please, Father, we ask you for just a little bit more grace than what you have already shown us. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

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