

## Scripture Reading John 15:26

<sup>26</sup> "When the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, *that is* the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father, He will testify about Me.

### Sermon Text

#### 1 John 5:1–12 (NASB95)

<sup>1</sup> Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and whoever loves the Father loves the *child* born of Him. <sup>2</sup> By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and observe His commandments. <sup>3</sup> For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments; and His commandments are not burdensome. <sup>4</sup> For whatever is born of God overcomes the world; and this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith. <sup>5</sup> Who is the one who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God? <sup>6</sup> This is the One who came by water and blood, Jesus Christ; not with the water only, but with the water and with the blood. It is the Spirit who testifies, because the Spirit is the truth. <sup>7</sup> For there are three that testify: <sup>8</sup> the Spirit and the water and the blood; and the three are in agreement. <sup>9</sup> If we receive the testimony of men, the testimony of God is greater; for the testimony of God is this, that He has testified concerning His Son. <sup>10</sup> The one who believes in the Son of God has the testimony in himself; the one who does not believe God has made Him a liar, because he has not believed in the testimony that God has given concerning His Son. <sup>11</sup> And the testimony is this, that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. <sup>12</sup> He who has the Son has the life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have the life.

#### Life in the Son

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Imagine a funeral. The preacher's giving the eulogy. And suddenly, the "guest of honor" pops up out of the coffin! It really happened. A man named George from South Africa decided to fake his death as a test. "I wanted to know what people would say about me when I'm dead," George said. "I'm satisfied they spoke the truth about me and not lies." George says he's going to keep the coffin for his real funeral... which may be held sooner than he thinks, if he keeps pulling stunts like this! Apparently, the local children there in South Africa have taken to singing a new nursery rhyme, "A Tisket, a Tasket, I'm Comin' Outta the Casket!"<sup>1</sup> At any rate, George's resurrection was a fake one, but one of the central points of our sermon text is that Jesus' resurrection was a real one.

Are you born of God? If you truly believe in the death and resurrection of Jesus, you have been born of God. John writes in verse 1 of our text whoever believes in Jesus is born of God. By believing in Jesus and placing your faith in Him, you have crossed from death to life and the certainty of eternal life in God's presence. You have life in the Son. If you are born of God, you are a child of God, and you have been adopted into His family. God's family is not a temporary arrangement; it is a permanent arrangement and a permanent relationship with God and His Son in eternal heaven, as we read in Revelation 22.

Moving to verses 2 and 3 of our text, we learn what it means to love God. If we love God, we will love the children of God, and we will observe God's commandments. John concludes verse 3 by saying that his commands are not burdensome. Let's unpack why that is true. The children of God are seated all around you. You are surrounded by people who believe in the death and resurrection of Jesus. If we as children of God love each other, not just with words but also with deeds that confirm our true love for each other, that will bring about unity, joy, harmony, and peace in our Christian community and greater love for God. There is no burden in unity, joy, harmony, and peace amongst us; in fact, it makes our church a place that

we look forward to coming to on a Sunday morning because who wants to miss out on that in this crazy world we live in filled with discord and conflict.

We are in a new season here at Second Congregational, and we are focused on the Bible and all that Jesus taught, not on divisive man-made theology systems, and honestly, I'm excited to come here on Sunday morning to be with all of you because this is our refuge from the world and all the difficulties and corruption we find there. This is where we come to worship our Lord and recharge our spiritual batteries, and there is nothing burdensome about that.

Moreover, there is nothing burdensome in keeping God's commandments because a person who observes God's commands does what is right toward God and worships Him. That person does what is right toward Jesus, our Savior, and believes in Him. So too, that person does what is right toward fellow believers by loving them. Finally, that person does what is right toward neighbors, who are everyone and seeks to do good to them even if they are enemies. Dear friends, we must worship our Creator, believe in our Savior, love our brothers and sisters and Christ, and do good to everyone, even our enemies. There is no burden in that at all, and if everyone did just that, what a beautiful world this would be, what a glorious place this would be.

In verses 4 and 5 of our text, John stresses that by our faith, we are world overcomers, and we gain victory over the world by our faith in Jesus. Brothers and sisters, we will struggle and have difficulty in this world because it is broken and filled with sin. Since Adam and Eve disobeyed God in the garden, our world has been under the influence of Satan, as we learn in John 5:19, who seeks to destroy and ensnare the people that God has created in His image. For now, God allows the world system to continue, but as I mentioned this past summer, we read in Revelation 11:15 that the kingdom of the world, which is under the control of Satan, will be destroyed and overcome by the kingdom of God and His Messiah, Jesus Christ. In the same way, we overcome the world when we believe in Jesus. Believers in Jesus are not mired and stuck in the fallen world. They overcome it.

John moves in verses 6-9 to lay out the evidence and the testimony God has provided concerning His Son. Let me reread that passage.

<sup>6</sup> This is the One who came by water and blood, Jesus Christ; not with the water only, but with the water and with the blood. It is the Spirit who testifies, because the Spirit is the truth. <sup>7</sup> For there are three that testify: <sup>8</sup> the Spirit and the water and the blood; and the three are in agreement. <sup>9</sup> If we receive the testimony of men, the testimony of God is greater; for the testimony of God is this, that He has testified concerning His Son.

What on Earth is John saying to us? Let's break it down. You might recall that in earlier sermons, I mentioned that the false teacher, Cerinthus, taught that the divine Spirit of Christ descended on Him at His baptism but left Him before His crucifixion. Well, that is completely heretical because Jesus, the fully human and fully divine Son of God, needed to die on the cross to pay for the sins of the world. Otherwise, you and I would still be dead in our sins. What John is saying here is that the divine nature of Jesus, as well as His human nature, were both fully present at His baptism and His crucifixion. Furthermore, we have the witness of the Holy Spirit that God gives us concerning His Son.

While John is combating the heresy of Cerinthus, there is more to what he has written. John uses courtroom language and thus makes a case for the testimony of God about His Son, affirming that He is the Messiah, the Savior of the world. That testimony comes in three ways, and that is important because Jesus says in Matthew 18:16 that everything must be confirmed by two or three witnesses.

Muhammad, the prophet of Islam, claimed that he was a messenger of God, but so what? There is no other witness or evidence to affirm that claim. You might remember, in 1993.

David Koresh, the leader of the Branch Davidian cult, claimed that he was the final prophet of the Seventh-Day Adventists. But so what? There is no other witness or evidence to affirm that claim. Anyone can make a claim about themselves, but Jesus says that is not enough. There should be two to three witnesses confirming claims. That is just common sense. You can't believe everything that people claim. As Jesus says, and it makes perfect sense, you need two to three witnesses.

In the case of false prophets like Muhammad and David Koresh, their claims are unbelievable because there is no other confirming evidence that they are prophets of God. Someone can claim to be a prophet, but that doesn't mean they are a prophet. In the case of Jesus, not only does Jesus claim to be the Son of God, but God testifies in three ways to the truth of Jesus' claims. First, God testifies that Jesus is His Son when He is baptized in water by John the Baptist. Second, God testifies that Jesus is His Son by raising Him from the Dead after His bloody crucifixion. Third, The Holy Spirit of God testifies through the prophets that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, the Savior of the world.

**So, first, God testifies that Jesus is His Son.** Let's unpack that. As we read in Matthew 3:17, When Jesus was baptized in the waters of the Jordan River, the Holy Spirit descended on Him in the form of a dove, and the voice of God was heard, saying, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased." The same event is recorded in the Gospel of Mark and Luke, and there, at the water baptism of Jesus, we have the first witness that Jesus is the Son of God. Furthermore, the voice of God is heard saying "This is my Son" seven times in the New Testament if we include the transfiguration of Jesus.

**Next, the resurrection of Jesus testifies that He is the Son of God.** Jesus' blood was spilled at the crucifixion, and some very stubborn historical facts cannot easily be dismissed. I mentioned this six years ago, but it is time for review as we approach Easter. The following facts are accepted by virtually all New Testament scholars, Christian and non-Christian, theologically liberal, conservative, skeptical, and yes, some are even atheists or agnostics like Bart Erhman. Even the ultra-liberal Jesus Seminar guys accept these facts because the historical evidence is overwhelming that they are true. So here are the minimal facts accepted by virtually all of these scholars:

- 1. Jesus died by crucifixion.**
- 2. Jesus' disciples believed that He rose and appeared to them.**
- 3. The church persecutor Paul was suddenly converted to Christianity and became a believer.**
- 4. The skeptic James, the brother of Jesus, suddenly converted to Christianity and became a believer.**

So these four facts are accepted by almost all, like 98% of NT scholars studying the resurrection. There is a fifth fact that is accepted by about 75% of NT scholars. That fact is:

- 5. The tomb of Jesus was empty on that first Easter Sunday.**

These facts, taken together, form the basis of what is called the minimal facts argument for the resurrection of Jesus. So, virtually no serious scholar denies that Jesus died on the cross. No serious scholar denies that Paul had a conversion experience and went from persecuting the first Christians to becoming the chief promoter of Christianity. No serious scholar denies that James, the half-brother of Jesus, was transformed from being skeptical about Jesus to becoming a prominent leader of the early church in Jerusalem. Finally, very few scholars deny that Jesus' Tomb was empty on that first Easter morning.

How can we explain these historical facts unless Jesus rose from the dead? Here is what we must conclude from these facts. Jesus rose from the dead, appeared to His disciples, appeared to Paul, and appeared to His half-brother James, just as Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians 15. Furthermore, 75% of scholars, a supermajority, affirm that Jesus' tomb was empty on that first

Easter Sunday. Those who reject the empty tomb do so because it implies that Jesus rose from the dead. If you are a skeptic or atheist, as some NT scholars are, you can never accept that because it seriously implies the truth of Christianity. However, there is good historical evidence to support the empty tomb and the resurrection of Jesus.

The best explanation for the stubborn minimal facts is that Jesus rose from the dead. If Jesus rose from the dead, we need to listen to Him because dead men don't rise except by a miracle of God. Furthermore, it is prophesied in Psalm 16 and elsewhere that the Messiah would rise from the dead. Thus, Jesus is the Messiah, who is the Son of God. The resurrection is the central claim of Christianity, and it explains why you are here this morning! How else can the rapid growth of the church be explained?

Since virtually every scholar in the field of NT studies accepts the minimal facts, the skeptics are in a very difficult place, so they try to come up with naturalistic explanations for the minimal facts. The problem for the skeptics is that the naturalistic explanations all fail. They all fail because they are contradicted by one or more of the widely accepted minimal facts.

One theory that was popular before it was cut down by the evidence was the swoon theory. This is the theory that Jesus was still alive when he was put into the tomb and that somehow, he got out of the tomb and appeared to his followers, and thus the Christian church was born. Here is the thing. The swoon theory is contradicted by the first minimal fact that Jesus died on the cross and thus has been rejected by scholars for that very reason. Moreover, for it to be true, we would have to believe that Jesus showed up to His disciples in terrible bloody shape, in need of serious medical attention, and in this condition, inspired them to go die as martyrs for a lie, claiming that He rose from the dead. It makes no sense, and no serious scholar supports the swoon theory, but I have to tell you, it is a favorite of Muslim apologists, so watch out for them.

Then there is the hallucination theory. This is the idea that the disciples just hallucinated that they saw the risen Jesus. The hallucination theory fails because groups of individuals do not experience the same hallucination. The research is clear on this. Further, the psychological conditions that typically produce hallucinations are belief, expectation, and excitement. That the disciples saw their beloved leader die on a Roman cross (minimal fact one) would not engender these feelings, but rather despair. Moreover, if the disciples experienced hallucinations, that would have meant that Jesus was still dead in the tomb, a fact that would have been obvious for all to see. People could have just walked to the tomb to show the disciples were lying. If the body was still in the tomb, the disciples wouldn't have proclaimed the resurrection, risking death to do so. Again, the hallucination theory makes no sense, and no serious scholar has supported it.

Then there is the fraud theory, which suggests that the disciples committed fraud and embellished the story or that they stole the body to produce the empty tomb. We learn in the New Testament that Jesus' tomb was heavily guarded at the request of the Pharisees. Furthermore, the fraud theory is contradicted by the disciples' willingness to die for their beliefs. The disciples would not have been willing to die for a lie. Again, no serious scholar supports the fraud theory.

The reality is that there are no naturalistic theories that satisfactorily explain the events surrounding Jesus' ministry and resurrection. We are left with this: the best explanation for the events of that first Easter morning is that Jesus rose from the dead. It was truly a miracle. Not all will believe, but for those with an open mind, there is more than enough evidence to support their belief. However, for those with a closed mind, there will never be enough evidence.

But here is where the grace of God comes in. To all who believed, God gave them the right to become children of God. God took on human flesh and, out of sacrificial love, died to save sinners and to restore His creation. No other religious leader claimed to be God, died for his followers, and rose from the dead to prove it. Take heart, my brothers and sisters. Our faith is

rooted in the solid ground of the miracle of the resurrection. Praise God, my brothers and sisters in Christ!

**Third, the Holy Spirit of God testifies through the prophets that Jesus is the Messiah and the Son of God.** Genesis, the Psalms, Isaiah, Zechariah, Daniel, Ezekiel, and other books of the Bible reveal dozens of Messianic prophecies hundreds of years in advance! How could Jesus fulfill dozens of Messianic prophecies if He was not a divine being? The Messianic prophecies were written hundreds of years before Jesus was born. Yes, Jesus did certain things to fulfill the prophecies, showing that He was the Messiah (Matthew 21:1-11). For example, Jesus rode into Jerusalem on a donkey specifically to fulfill prophecy. But if Jesus were a mere human, how could He fulfill prophecies that were beyond His control?

The Messiah prophesied in the Old Testament was to be a male who would enter life through the normal birth process. He would be a descendant of Abraham, Jacob, Judah, Jesse, and David. He would be born in Bethlehem of a virgin. He would escape after His birth into Egypt as a baby. His ministry would be in Galilee. He would be put to death for the sins of His people. He would be rejected by the Jews, but He would bring salvation to the Gentiles. He would be betrayed for thirty pieces of silver; in death, His hands and feet would be pierced. Soldiers would gamble for His clothing. He would be buried in the tomb of a rich man. And He would rise from the dead and ascend into heaven. Jesus fulfilled all these prophecies and many more!

Are any of us able to control the place of our birth and our sex at birth, our blood relatives, the exact manner in which we will die, and the many other things just mentioned that were prophesied about Jesus? If Jesus were a mere human, like us, He would not have had any control over these aspects of His life. But if Jesus were God, He was completely capable of bringing all these things to come to pass.

Physicist and mathematician, Peter Stoner, analyzed the probability of any individual in history fulfilling the Messianic Prophecies as 1 in  $10^{157}$  power! The statistical odds that a merely human Jesus could fulfill all that is prophesied about Him out of pure luck is zero. Unless, of course, He was not merely human, but instead, the divine Son of God. It seems obvious if we consider the fulfilled prophecies with an open mind that Jesus is God, just as He claimed to be. The question is, will those confronted with the evidence follow it where it leads?

Many say they desire to know the truth. If one truly desires the truth, one must follow the evidence where it leads. The question facing all who have an understanding of Messianic prophecy and its implications is, *can they handle the truth?* The truth seems to unavoidably lead to accepting Jesus as God and Savior. But although God desires all to be saved, many reject Jesus because they do not want to submit to His Lordship. In the first chapter of his Gospel, John writes in verse 12, "...as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God..."

Whether people receive Jesus or not, He is the Lord of the universe. Just before Jesus was crucified, He told His Apostles this in the Olivet discourse of Matthew 24:30, "then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky with power and great glory." Jesus will return at His Second Coming, we can count on that, and at that time, many will mourn because they have not received Jesus, for they will have ignored or rejected Him, but the truth of His divine nature will be inescapable.

So, there are three facts that testify that Jesus is the Son of God. First, God testifies that Jesus is His Son when He is baptized in water by John the Baptist. Second, God testifies that Jesus is His Son by raising Him from the Dead after His bloody crucifixion. Third, The Holy Spirit of God testifies through the prophets that Jesus is the Messiah, the Savior of the world.

In verse 9 of our text, John says it doesn't matter what men say; the testimony of God is greater and supersedes anything that fragile and sinful humans say. False prophets like Muhammad have deceived billions with no supporting testimony or evidence for their claims. But for Jesus, God has provided all the evidence we need to place our faith in Him. In the final four verses of our text, John uses the word testimony six times. God has testified concerning His Son by the Spirit, the water, and the blood, and those who believe the testimony can be assured of this, God has given us eternal life, and as John writes in verse 11, this life is in His Son.

Tens of thousands came to faith in Christ through the great evangelist, D.L. Moody's meetings. As he approached the end of his life, he viewed Heaven as something to anticipate. Moody wrote:

"Some day you will read in the papers that D.L. Moody of East Northfield, is dead. Don't you believe a word of it! At that moment I shall be more alive than I am now; I shall have gone up higher, that is all, out of this old clay tenement into a house that is immortal—a body that death cannot touch, that sin cannot taint; a body fashioned like unto His glorious body. I was born of the flesh in 1837. I was born of the Spirit in 1856. That which is born of the flesh may die. That which is born of the Spirit will live forever," Moody wrote. Praise be to God, every Christian that believes the testimony of God concerning His Son can share in that attitude toward Heaven for they possess life in the Son. Amen.

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<sup>1</sup> Campus Life, November-December 1997, [www.christianity.net](http://www.christianity.net).