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**John Overview Sermon
So That You May Believe**

Read John 1:1-18; 20:30-31

Over the last 10 months, we've worked our way through the entire book of John; we finished up by looking at the last chapter, 21, last week. Our standard practice here is to simply preach through entire books of the bible, from beginning to end, one passage at a time. But sometimes when we finish a book series, especially if it was a longer book, we like to end by bringing it all together in a single, higher-altitude overview sermon of the whole book, to help us wrap our minds around the big picture of the book as a whole, grasping its purpose and main themes. That's what we're doing today.

But it's also quite appropriate that we're looking at the entire book of John today because this is the Sunday, and when we look at the book of John as a whole, it's impossible to *not* talk about the Christmas story: the glorious truth of who Jesus is and why He came into the world, the beauty of the incarnation, the coming of Christ as the God-Man. That's what we celebrate at Christmas: the greatest gift ever given - the Son of God coming down as a baby - in order to bring joy and peace to the world to all who believe in Jesus Christ, who he is, and what He has done for us. And that's exactly why John, under the divine inspiration of the Holy Spirit, wrote this book: in order that we might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, is Jesus, and that in believing we might have life in His name. That's the main point of John, as we just read from chapter 20 a moment ago. And that's the main point of this sermon today. To this end, John answers several vital questions for us: Who is Jesus? Why did He come? What did He come to do? How should we respond?

As we walk through these answers from John today, it might feel a little repetitive. There's a lot of overlap. And we're going to be looking at a whole lot of different things that basically all just keep pointing us back to believing in Christ. But here's why this is so good for us: have you ever seen a diamond, a real, pure, good-quality diamond? It has all of these meticulously cut, well-shaped facets, and to truly appreciate its beauty and glory, what do you do? You hold it up to the light and see it refracted; and then, you slowly turn the diamond, seeing each facet of its splendor. Jesus Christ is far greater, far lovelier, far more glorious and beautiful and joyful to behold than the world's rarest and largest diamond could ever come close to

being. What we're doing today is holding up the truths of Christ Jesus before our eyes, and slowly turning to see as many facets and angles of it as we can, seeing the glorious light of truth shine all the brighter to us, that we may trust and believe in Him all the more. So let's look at how John answers these questions throughout the book, so that we can rightly believe in the person and work of Jesus Christ so that you can have eternal life in His name. The first thing we see in the book of John is...

I. Believe Who Jesus is

From beginning to end, the book of John proclaims clearly who Jesus is: He is the Christ and the Son of God. He is the God-Man, fully God and fully Man, who came to bring salvation as the lamb of God, the light and life of mankind. We see this in the very beginning, the prologue to the book, in chapter 1:1-18, the passage we read earlier. The book opens with rich, beautiful, dense, poetic, and profound language: "IN the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word *was* God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made." The Word is the eternal Son of God, the second person of the Trinity. There is only One God, the True Creator, and life and light of all men, the source of all life and truth. Yet the One God eternally exists as three persons. The Word is the Son of God, the second person of the Trinity, who has always been, has existed eternally, both as God and with God at the same time. This is so foreign to our experience, being one and three, because He is not like us; God transcends us, His ways are not our ways. We cannot comprehend Him. And yet, we *can know* Him, not fully, but truly, because He has revealed Himself to us: the light has shown in the darkness because the Word came down and became flesh, revealing the glory, grace, and truth of God to us (v.14). God the Son, the eternal Creator, came down and became man, being born as a baby that first Christmas day, that Holy Night, when our dear savior was born. When the Virgin Mary gave birth to baby Jesus in that lowly manger, the unthinkable occurred: the eternal Creator stepped down into Creation and became Created. As she held Him in her arms and nursed him to keep him alive, at the exact same time, He was upholding her and keeping her alive as God! Even while learning to walk, He was the all-powerful, all-knowing God of the universe! Jesus is fully God and fully Man.

This is who Jesus is: The God Man, the fully eternal Son of God, the fully human Christ, the Messiah, the Savior of the World. And we know this because of the witnesses that bear testimony to the truth of who Jesus is. John Himself tells us at the very end of the book, at the

end of ch.21, that He is a trustworthy witness, and that this whole book is a testimony of who Christ is. But there are many others He lists. Throughout chapter 1, we're told of John the Baptist, a faithful witness to Christ as His prophet and forerunner. The other disciples bear witness. Jesus Himself bears witness. And then, in chapter 5:30-47, we see that the Old Testament scriptures bear witness to Christ as He fulfills them, and that the Father Himself bears witness and testifies to who Jesus is, that we may believe. In order to believe something as true, we have to have the evidence of at least two or three witnesses; we have several more than three, more than we need to believe in who Christ is! But all we truly need is the Word of Christ Himself, for He is God, and as the Son, he has full authority to disclose the truth of the Father unto us, so that whoever receives His word and believe in Him has eternal life (ch. 5:19-29).

So we can trust Jesus's claims about who He is, which He does all throughout the book. He does this, most famously, in His 7 "I Am" statements." But there are actually 8. Several times, Jesus proclaims simply, "I Am" by itself - alluding to the Old Testament self-disclosed name of God: Yahweh I am that I Am. Several times, Jesus says this, claiming not only equality with God, but to be One with the very God of Old Testament Israel. This isn't lost on the Jews: it's why they wanted to kill Him. They accused Him of blasphemy, but He was just telling the truth: He is God. As Jesus said in ch.10:30: "I and the Father are one."

The other "I Am" statements flesh out specific truths about who Jesus is for us, giving us greater shape and nuance to who He is, showing us both what and why we are to believe. First, Jesus said "I Am the bread of life" (John 6:35). Just like we need to eat physical food to live, and bread gives us strength, physical life, and sustenance, so we spiritually need to feast on Christ through faith in order to live spiritually; all who feast on the Truth of who Christ is and believe in Him receive spiritual sustenance and eternal life from Him alone.

Secondly, Jesus said, "I am the light of the world" (ch.8:12). He brings spiritual sight, truth, and guidance into the spiritually dark and blind world, and into our own hearts and lives, opening the eyes of our hearts and giving us truth, knowledge of God, and faith to believe and see rightly through the eyes of faith. He demonstrated this by opening the eyes of a physical blind man in the very next chapter, and that man was spiritually able to see who Jesus is, while the Pharisees and religious leaders and teachers of the day proved spiritually blind, unable to see rightly and believe the truth literally standing right in front of them, showing they were of the

Devil, having Satan as their Father instead of God. Christ is the light of the world that we may see the truth, truly know God in Him, and become children of God.

Third, Jesus said “I am the door of the sheep” (John 10:7, 9). The only way to join the church and become part of God’s covenant people is through personal faith in Christ; anyone who does not personally repent and believe in Jesus has not yet entered His flock; it’s not enough to be born to Christian parents or be a good person or even just to come to church; if you don’t personally repent and believe in Jesus, you are not part of the Flock of God for He is the only door of the sheep. Someone may be an elect sheep, but if they have not yet repented and believed they are not yet part of God’s covenant people, not yet part of the flock, and cannot join a church, receive baptism, or the Lord’s Supper. Christ is the door. Not only this, but fourthly, He said, “I am the Good Shepherd” (John 10:11, 14). Christ shepherds His people, His sheep. He watches over, leads, protects, provides for, and saves every single one of His people. He even lays down His life for His sheep. Christ died on the cross for the sins of His people so that we can be saved.

Therefore, Jesus also said, “I Am the Resurrection and the Life” (John 11:25). The fifth I Am Statement. Jesus said this right before raising Lazarus from the dead. He is the source of eternal life, of victory over death, salvation from the grave. And He secured and proved this by rising from the grave so that we can be raised with Him through faith.

And that is the only way to eternal life. Which is why Jesus then said, his sixth I Am statement, “I am the way, the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father except through me” (John 14:6). Christ is the only way to the Father, the only way to Heaven, the only way to be saved from death and Hell and the judgment we deserve for our sin. And He is the sure and certain way Whoever believes in the truth of Jesus, who He is, and trusting what He has done to save us, shall be saved!

But this trust and belief is a lifelong, transformative union with Jesus. Therefore, Jesus said, lastly, “I am the true vine” (ch. 15:1); “I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing” (ch. 15:5). Christ is the source of all spiritual life, strength, and fruit. When we truly believe, we are connected to Jesus, and He changes us, producing fruit in our lives. We’ll come back to that later, in point 4.

But for now, let’s simply marvel at *who* Jesus is! The God-Man! The Word Become Flesh! Come Behold the Lamb of God, the Light and Life of Mankind! The True Prophet, Priest,

and King! The Son of God, Alpha and Omega, One with the Father, Ancient of Days! The only truly righteous Human Being, the Christ, Messiah, and Savior of the World! Our Creator, Redeemer, and Friend! The Bread of Life, come to give living water! The Door and Good Shepherd of the Sheep! The Resurrection and the Life; the Way the Truth, and the Life; the true Vine! He is the vineyard, True Israel; the true Temple (ch.2); Jesus is the true dwelling place of God and Man, the place of union and communion with the Father! He is the source of life and the life-giving Spirit, our Helper, the Paraclete! The Great I Am, the Creator, Very God of Very God, come down to us in the flesh! When we sing Christmas songs, light candles, give cards, put up Christmas trees and lights and decorations, give presents, and have a Holiday Feast, never forget - *this is why!* We're celebrating a *person!* The point of Christmas is *worship* - not of goods and presents or fruit or tradition, but Jesus Christ, the God-Man, the Son of God and Savior of the World! So let us revel and marvel in awe and wonder and great joy at who Jesus is - this morning, this Christmas season, and *every single day of our lives*. O Come, All Ye Faithful, come, let us adore Him! Let us bow down and worship, Christ the Lord!

And as we've already seen, we cannot look at *who* Jesus is without also looking at *why He came*: He is the Savior, the Light and Life of Men, and that means He came for a *purpose*. Which brings us to point number two...

II. Believe in Why Jesus Came and What He Has Done

Jesus is the Christ, the Messiah and Savior - and so that means He came for a purpose: *to save*. But that begs the question: save from what? He came to save us from Sin, Satan, and Death. The world is spiritually dark because of sin; Creation itself distorted by sin, every single human being born a sinner, inheriting guilt and condemnation from our first parents, Adam and Eve; and so all flesh dies, as the punishment for our sins. Not only this, we're all born spiritually blind, not knowing or seeing or seeking after God, but rebels in our hearts. The world does not know or recognize Jesus, but rejects Him (John 1:10; ch.15 and 16). Because we're all sinners, mankind naturally loves the darkness rather than the light of truth and righteousness; we surprise the truth in our hearts. As Jesus told Nicodemus in ch.3:19, "people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil."

Yet Christ came to overcome the Darkness, free us from slavery to sin, overcome the grave, defeat death to death, and conquer over the World, the Flesh, and the Devil. He came to be the light and life of all men. "In him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines

in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it (John 1:4-5). “The true light, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world” (ch.1:9). Jesus came to bring eternal life and the light of truth and salvation to all the world, to all who know and believe in Him, in all the world (ch.1:11). He came so that we can become His brothers, children of God the Father. He came to become the lamb of God, to take away the sins of the world (ch.1:29). He came to be the lamb of God, to save us from our sins. We saw in recent weeks how Jesus is the Lamb of God: He is the fulfillment of the Passover Lamb and the entire sacrificial system of the Old Testament. Sin demands the payment of blood; Justice demands that the penalty of death be paid to cancel out the death of Sin. Christ came and fulfilled the Law in perfect righteousness in His perfect life. He revealed the light and life of God to the dark world through His ministry. And in John, we see Him do this in powerful ways.

Throughout the book, we see a pattern: Jesus would teach on something, then give a sign to illustrate it; or do a sign, then teach its significance and apply it spiritually. He turned water to wine and cleansed the temple in chapter 2, then told Nicodemus that to be saved we have to be spiritually born again - *cleansed and transformed* - on the inside, in our hearts, by the power and spirit of God. In chapter 5 He heals and forgives a paralytic, then proclaims His authority by the testimony of the Father. In chapter 6 He feeds the 5,000, then proclaims He himself is the true bread of life we must feast on. In chapter 8 He proclaims He is the light of the world, then in ch.9 He heals a blind man. In chapter 11 He shows He is the resurrection and the life by raising Lazarus from the grave. We see this pattern over and over again, where Jesus is showing us what he means and why we should believe it. And we see this pattern in the entire book of John as a whole: the whole book is about the eternal life and salvation Christ offers for the sins of the world, and then in the end, He proves it, fulfilling His teachings with the miraculous sign that secures it, once and for all: His Cross and Resurrection. He willingly gave Himself up to be betrayed by one of His friends, to be arrested in the garden at night, to endure an unjust trial and mockery and beatings, to suffer, bleed, and die on the cross in our place. And then He rose again on the third day, conquering over the grave! The cross and resurrection were the exaltation and glory of Christ, the Lamb of God! Christ came *to die*, in order to save. The point of the Incarnation and Birth of Christ is to bring about the Death and Resurrection of Christ, the salvation it accomplishes, and most of all, the glory and exaltation of Jesus it reveals. The point of Christmas was always Good Friday and Easter. Christmas is good news of great joy because it

points to the peace with God that we can have through the Cross of Jesus Christ, dying as the sacrifice for our sins on our behalf.

So Christ came in order to pay the ultimate ransom in His own blood, as the final sacrifice, once and for all, sufficient to save *anyone* in the *entire world* who trusts and believes in Him! He came to show that “God so loved the world that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life” (John 3:16). Friend, if you’re not a Christian, no matter who you are, no matter what you’ve done, no matter how many times you’ve sinned, no matter how much guilt or shame you bear, no matter how broken you are or how messed up your life is or how confused and hopeless you feel, Jesus came to save broken, hopeless sinners just like you and me. So come and Behold the Lamb of God, who came to take away the sins of the world! Believe that His life, death, and resurrection are perfectly sufficient to save you, and *anyone* in the world who believes in Him! Christ came to bring light to the darkness and offer eternal life to the whole world. He came out of love, to not only reveal the righteousness and justice of the Law, but to bring grace and truth.

And He came not only only to offer light and life to the whole world, but to secure salvation for His people. He came with an even greater, effectual, unbreakable, irresistible, unfailing, never-ending, salvific love for His people, for every single specific person chosen and given to Him by the Father. Paul and the Apostles call these people “the elect.” In the book of John, Jesus calls them His sheep. It’s the same concept, though, and we see it all throughout the book. Christ came to bring life, but it only comes to those who are *born again* (John 3), for those who are born of the Spirit of God. The Spirit blows where it wills, just as the wind does; we can’t control either. Just as we can’t cause ourselves to be born as babies, so we can’t cause ourselves to be born spiritually. God brings it about in our hearts at conversion; when we first believe, we are being born again. And Christ came to bring this about in all His sheep. All of Christ’s sheep hear His voice and come to Him (John 10:4). All those whom the Father has given the Son are called by Christ and believe, given faith by the Spirit, sent by the Father and the Son. In John 6, Jesus said “All that the Father gives me *will come* to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out,” (v.37). Christ came to save each of the elect, each of His sheep, every person the Father has given to Him, and He guarantees that each *will be saved*. He guarantees to never cast out or lose a single one of His sheep. John 6:39-40: “And this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up on the last day. For this is the

will of my Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day.” He came to secure our salvation from beginning to the end.

And so, out of love, Christ came to die for His people, His sheep, His Bride. The Good Shepherd laid down His life for His sheep (John 10:11). Christ died on the cross *for us*, for every single specific person who will ever believe, dying for *our sins*, all of your sins and mine, past present and future, dying in our place and securing atonement and forgiveness, paying the debt of wrath and death and judgment we so richly deserve. He made atonement for His sheep. And right before He laid down His life for us, He prayed for us, for His people, in ch.17. He made it explicitly clear He was praying specifically just for those who will believe, those given to Him by the Father - His sheep, His elect, chosen people. He made intercession for us as our High Priest, praying for those for whom He would lay down His life the very next day.

The significance of all of this is that it shows us Jesus came out of *love* - particularly for His *people*, His sheep. He came to save those given to Him by the Father. He came out of love for specific, individual people that He came to save. I think we’re meant to see this plainly and clearly in John. There is a lot of focus in this book on Jesus’s one-on-one conversations with people (Nicodemus, Woman at the Well, Mary and Martha and Lazarus, the paralytic man by the pool, Peter); this is pretty different from what we seen in the Synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke). I think the reason why is because we’re meant to see this personal, intimate, relational side of Christ, to see His heart for specific individual sheep - the kind He has for all of His sheep, and each of us, every true Christian. This should encourage every single one of us. If you’re not a Christian, it should encourage you that Christ offers eternal life for you, that if you hear His voice and come to Him and believe, He will not cast you out but will save you and let you come into His fold as one of His sheep, never to be cast out! So come today, right now, in faith. And if you *are* a Christian, then Brothers and Sisters, this should encourage you greatly! See how much God loves you! See the love of Christ, that He came to save you! That the Father gave you to the Son and Christ came to secure your salvation, from beginning to end! Be encouraged and believe that *all* of your sins have been paid for by the blood of Christ, and His grace is sufficient for you, so that there is now no more condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus! You have been born again, and the Kingdom is yours, along with the waters and bread of life that satisfy forever and never run out! You shall be raised with Him to eternal life! And He

shall never let you go, because your Good Shepherd promises that He will not lose a single one of His sheep; He will not let the wolf snatch you from His hand.

This is why Christ came, and we can have certainty of all these things because of what He did to accomplish them. Bringing us to our third and final point...

III. Respond to Christ in true faith, the way He tells us to

The book is written so that "you may believe," and the importance of faith is stressed by Christ all throughout the book. It opens telling us that all who believe in Christ become Children of God, born not of the will of flesh or man but of God (1:13). We're told we must be born again, to receive the new birth and believe in Jesus Christ, with new hearts of His Spirit, faith, grace, and truth (John 3). We're invited to come and drink deeply from the wells of living water, the water of eternal life, the fountain of eternal youth, that only Christ provides (Ch.4). We're told to feast on Him, the Bread of Life, to Hear His voice and come, because He alone is the way, the truth, and the life. The only way to Heaven, the only way to escape death and be resurrected, the only way to God and eternal life, joy, and peace, is through believing in Jesus. *We must believe.*

But what does it mean to believe? The book of John shows us: The true faith that true sheep have is not a "one and done" thing, but a new birth, a beginning of a new life; it is like a sheep who hears the call of His shepherd and comes to the flock; like a branch of a vine that bears fruit; true saving faith is fruit, obedient, life-changing. This means the call to believe that we hear from the book of John is not just for non-Christians to believe and become Christians; it is a call for all of us, to believe and keep believing.

So the book of John also shows us what it looks like to believe. Or, to put it differently: what it looks like to trust and follow Jesus and live as a Christian. We see this most pointedly and explicitly in the Farewell Discourse of chapters 13 - 17. In that long section, Jesus gave lots of teachings to us, as His disciples, for what it looks like to believe, for how we are to respond to Him and live as those who believe and follow Him. We see that true faith means loving and serving Jesus and fellow Christians because of how Jesus has loved, served and saved us (ch. 13, where He washed the disciples' feet, even of the one who would betray Him). True faith means loving one another even as Christ has loved us (John 13:34); we see this in the High Priestly prayer of ch. 17, and we saw it last week in Jesus telling Peter that if he loves Him, Peter must feed Jesus's sheep, Christ's people, local churches of real Christians. True faith means following, loving, and obeying Jesus (John 14 - 15); Jesus said in 14:15: "If you love me you will keep my

commandments.” True faith abides in Christ, as branches in the vine, and bears fruit (John 15). True faith means being filled with and transformed by the Helper, the Holy Spirit (chs. 14 - 16). Jesus said, “And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you” (John 14:16-17). Again, in ch.16:7-8: “Nevertheless, I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage I go away, for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you. But if I go, I will send him to you. And when He comes, He will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment.” Christ came in order to grant us the Spirit; everyone who believes Has the Spirit, and everyone who believes does so because of the Spirit of truth, whom Christ has sent into our hearts to regenerate and change our hearts, convict us of sin and righteousness, and give us faith in the Truth. And the Spirit strengthens and encourages us as our Helper, so that we do not stay the same, but are sanctified and transformed to become more like Jesus! This is true of everyone who believes because it cannot be separated from true faith. Therefore, true faith endures suffering and persecution (John 15 and 16). The Spirit strengthens us to endure, even when the world hates us because it hated Christ (John 15), reminding us in our hearts that our sorrow shall be turned to joy and that we shall overcome because Christ has already overcome the world on our behalf (John 16). Finally, we see that true faith not only loves fellow Christians but strives for unity and peace with fellow Christians; and we see this most fully in Christ's own prayer for us, and for all who will believe, in John 17. In this Gospel, Jesus Himself gives us a full, robust, thick vision of what true belief and Christian faith looks like.

So let us respond to Christ in real, sincere faith and put our belief in action. Let us do that now by coming to the Table. If you are a true believer, and have professed your faith in Christ through baptism, and are showing that you love Jesus people by being part of a local church as a member in good standing, we invite you to come join us for the Lord's Supper in just a moment. If not, then we invite you to believe and be born again. Then show it by being baptized. If you have questions about this, we'd love to speak with you after. Until then, let's have a moment of silence as we prepare to come to the Table.