

1 John 5:4b-12

Introduction

In the film *The Sound of Music*, Julie Andrews sang: “Let’s start at the very beginning, a very good place to start.”

It is a good place to start. But on this occasion, I’m going to ignore Julie Andrew’s advice and start by looking at the end of the passage we just had read for us.

Please look at the final couple of sentences again with me. Verses 11 and 12. They say this:

And this is the testimony: God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life.

Those two sentences take us to the very heart of the Christian message.

It’s a message about life.

And it’s a message about Jesus.

So, I’m going to begin with these verses and the life that God gives.

The life that God gives

Look again at verse 11.

And this is the testimony: God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son.

It was my wife’s birthday last week. And we have a kind of family ritual when it comes to birthdays. We gather the birthday presents into a single pile. And then we all sit and watch as they get opened one by one.

I imagine that most families do something similar. We do it because we love to give and receive presents. We love to see the smile on someone’s face when they open a gift that’s been specially chosen just for them.

God loves to give gifts. He is loving and generous. He fills our lives with good things. And the most precious gift we could ever receive is his gift of eternal life. It’s a gift that he gives us freely in his Son, Jesus Christ.

This is what marks out the Christian faith from all other religions.

Other religions may speak of eternal life, or heaven, or paradise. But in every case, it’s something that we must earn as a reward. We must do something to get it. We need to show that we’re deserving of it.

But the Bible says that those other religions are all leading us up a wrong path. Eternal life isn't something we must earn. In fact, the Bible says we can never earn it no matter how hard we might try. We simply cannot live up to God's perfect standards. Half the time I struggle to live up to my own standards. I fail to love my wife as I know I should. I get grumpy with my children rather than being patient. I say things I regret and need to apologise. I do the very things I condemn in others. Since I can't even live up to my own standards, how can I possibly expect to live up to God's perfect standards?

If eternal life is something we must earn, then we're all in trouble. But that's why the Christian message is such good news. Eternal life *isn't* something we must earn. It's a *gift* that we must receive.

And we receive it by coming to Jesus in faith. Do you see that, in verse 11? **God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son.**

Imagine I told you that I wanted to give you all a cupcake as a gift. And I said that Lisa had them. All you had to do was go to Lisa after the service and she would give you a cupcake. You could do that. You could go to Lisa and she would give you a cupcake. What would make no sense would be to go to Michael and expect him to give you a cupcake... or Geoff... or Hilary. If I told you that Lisa was the one who had the cupcakes it would be a waste of time to go to anyone other than her.

And that's what John's saying here. **God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son.** And it makes no sense to look anywhere else. Wherever we might look to find life, if it isn't Jesus then we're wasting our time.

Look at verse 12.

Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life.

There is only one way to receive eternal life, and that's to go to the person God tells us to go to: his Son, Jesus Christ. No one is excluded. John says: **Whoever has the Son has life.** Anyone can come to Jesus and receive this gift of eternal life. But to ignore Jesus or to look for life elsewhere is to miss out.

And it's a gift that we can receive *today*.

John says: **Whoever has the Son *has* life.**

He doesn't say: Whoever has the Son will have life. Or: Whoever has the Son can look forward to having life. He says: **Whoever has the Son *has* life.**

We can possess eternal life now, today.

Without Jesus, we don't have it.

Although we're physically alive, without Jesus we are spiritually dead.

But when we come to Jesus in faith, we receive new life... spiritual life... eternal life.

It's the life we exist for... lived in fellowship with the God who made us.

It's life that will continue in eternity, beyond the grave... but it's life that begins now, the moment we believe.

So, what does this life look like?

Well, it means relating to God as our heavenly Father. It means knowing that we're loved by him and precious to him. It means listening to what he says to us in his word, the Bible. It means having the privilege of speaking to him in prayer, knowing that whatever we go through we're not alone. It means receiving a place among his people in the church, where we can love and be loved. It means finding value and purpose in serving him. And it means knowing that our eternal destiny is safe and secure in his hands.

It's all those things and much, much more.

It's real life, that's found only through faith in Jesus.

Augustine famously said, 'You made us for yourself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless until they find rest in you.'

That's what it means to possess life in Jesus. All the striving to find love and affirmation and meaning in the world comes to an end, because our desires are fulfilled perfectly in him.

Whoever has the Son has life, John says.

And if we now *take* Julie Andrew's advice and go back to the beginning of our passage, John says there that it's this faith in Jesus that overcomes the world. It's faith that's not based on wishful thinking or mindless optimism but on the testimony that God has given.

So, let's go back to the beginning of the passage.

The testimony that God has given

Please look down again at the Bible and I'm going to read from verses 4 and 5. John writes this:

This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith. Who is it that overcomes the world? Only the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God.

In John's writings, the world is more than the planet we live on, or the inhabitants of the planet we live on. The world is humanity in its rebellion against God and its opposition to

his Son, Jesus Christ. It's humanity searching anywhere and everywhere for life except in the one person in whom it can be found.

And without Jesus, life... true life... eternal life... will always be beyond our grasp.

The world is humanity, lacking life, spiritually dead in sin and rebellion, and heading for God's judgement.

And this is the world we were born into by nature. The thinking and attitudes of the world come to us naturally because we are immersed in them from birth. But, John says, we can overcome the world. The world's thinking and attitudes don't need to be our own. And the world's fate doesn't need to be our own. We can escape the future this world is heading towards. But only through faith in Jesus.

So, how can we have this faith?

Sometimes people say, "I wish I had a faith like yours." Or something similar.

And they can. By paying attention to the testimony God has given in his word, the Bible.

We're used to hearing people's testimony in court cases - think of the Wagatha Christie libel case that finally ended last year, or the various court cases being brought against Donald Trump in America at the moment. Juries base their verdicts on the evidence available to them, which often includes the testimony of witnesses. In Jewish law, the testimony of two or three witnesses were needed to establish a matter.

And in the verses that follow, John points to three witness testimonies, all of which agree.

Look at verse 6.

This is the one who came by water and blood - Jesus Christ. He did not come by water only, but by water and blood. And it is the Spirit who testifies, because the Spirit is the truth. For there are three that testify: the Spirit, the water and the blood; and the three are in agreement. We accept human testimony, but God's testimony is greater because it is the testimony of God, which he has given about his Son. Whoever believes in the Son of God accepts this testimony. Whoever does not believe God has made him out to be a liar, because they have not believed the testimony God has given about his Son.

This language of water and blood providing testimony may sound a little strange. John's speaking of two events that happened at the beginning and end of Jesus' earthly ministry, which tell us why he came.

The first is the water, by which John's referring to Jesus' baptism in the Jordan river. As we've seen this morning, baptism is an outward sign that we need to be cleansed internally of our sin. Jesus had no sin, yet he came to be baptised in the river Jordan, along with the crowds. It was a powerful statement. He was saying that he had come to identify with

sinful humanity. He had come to stand in our place as our Saviour and King. And as he was baptised, there was a voice from heaven, that said, 'This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.' And the Holy Spirit descended on him like a dove, anointing him for the work that lay ahead.

The second testimony is the blood, by which John's referring to Jesus' death on a cross. At the cross, Jesus not only stood in the place of sinners; he died in our place, as our ransom. Though by nature we are all dead in our sins, he gave his life for ours, to buy us back from our slavery to death. He paid the penalty for the sins of his people in full, so that we can be forgiven and washed clean. It was the culmination of the work he had come to do, which began with his baptism. And as Jesus died, a great big curtain in the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. That curtain had stopped people from going into the Most Holy Place, where God was believed to be present in a special way. God was saying that, because of the cross, the way to life in his presence was now open.

The third testimony is the Spirit. The Holy Spirit caused these things to be written down by those who were eyewitnesses. They've been preserved for us in the pages of the Bible. And as we read their eyewitness testimony, the Holy Spirit testifies in our hearts that what we're reading is true: that Jesus Christ really is the Son of God, who died on a cross to win forgiveness for our sins, and to open the way to eternal life in fellowship with God the Father.

Faith in Jesus rests upon events in history, which God has caused to be recorded for us in the pages of the Bible as a testimony to us.

And this is the testimony, John says in verse 11: God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son.

What we do with that testimony matters. It's serious.

To say that we don't believe it is to make God out to be a liar.

To say that we're not interested is to reject the most precious gift we can ever receive.

If you wouldn't yet call yourself a Christian, we would love to help you find out about the life God offers you in Christ. Please do speak with me after the service if you would like to do that.

And it's what we most want for Sebastian and Melissa.

They have been blessed with Christian parents.

As they grow, we'll be doing all we can to help Danny and Claire raise them to know and love Jesus and to find life in his name.

Let's pray.

Loving Father, thank you for the gift of life that you offer to each one of us, through faith in Jesus, and for your word, the Bible, which testifies to it. Thank you for your love for us in him. Please help each one of us to come to him in faith and to receive the life he gives. In his name we pray. Amen.