

WHO CAN YOU BELIEVE
SEVENTH SUNDAY OF EASTER

1 JN 5:9-15
MAY 17, 2015

⁹ If we receive the testimony of men, the testimony of God is greater, for this is the testimony of God that he has borne concerning his Son.

¹⁰ Whoever believes in the Son of God has the testimony in himself.

Whoever does not believe God has made him a liar, because he has not believed in the testimony that God has borne concerning his Son. ¹¹

And this is the testimony, that God gave us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. ¹² Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life.

¹³ I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God that you may know that you have eternal life. ¹⁴ And this is the confidence that we have toward him, that if we ask anything according to his will he hears us. ¹⁵ And if we know that he hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests that we have asked of him.

Courtrooms have been busy in Ferguson, MO; Boston, MA;
and now Baltimore, MD

One thing is indisputable, people have died.

The question is who is responsible? Who is guilty?
and what do they have coming?

It comes down to who you believe.

Bystanders who are witnesses have part of the story,
and public opinion & media are ready to fill in the blanks,
Police, prosecutors & public defenders
may have different story

And video and other evidence that turns up sometimes has
a surprising new angle on the truth.

Judges and juries must listen to the testimony carefully
because it is a matter of life and death.

John, in text, calls our attention to a courtroom,
it is not in some major city but in our own heart & mind.

we are called to pay careful attention to testimony
because it is a matter of life and death - for us.

Who are we to believe? What are we to believe?

BELIEVE THE TRUTH OF GOD ABOUT LIFE.
BELIEVE THAT JESUS GIVES TRUE LIFE
BELIEVE GOD TRULY GIVES WHAT HE PROMISES

BELIEVE THE TRUTH OF GOD ABOUT LIFE.

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As so often, there appears to be contradictory testimony.

And the question at issue is also complicated.

The issue has to do with the son of God, Jesus. Who is he?

but the issue this is leading to in next verse is

what is life and how can we have life?

At the time John writes, there is a debate about who Jesus is.

Some claim he is just a man God came into for a while,

others claim he is God in form appearing to be human.

John in Gospel and letters makes case he is

both true God and true man at same time.

Human mind objects, that doesn't make logical sense.

John's reply is this is what God himself says

and, in fact, the only way he can be our savior

is for God himself to take our place in death.

Which leads to his main point here, how can we have life?

The testimony of men, as is often the case, is contradictory,

and tends to be based on partial views of appearances.

Some say it is obvious life is simply biological

and has no other purpose or meaning.

Others say, Oh no, life is given meaning by

the relationships we have with others

or the experiences with which we fill our lives.

Without bothering to argue or think too deeply about it,

many live as if life is about making a living

and the more stuff you have to live with, the better.

others will live as if life is about enjoying the moment

or at least having the freedom to do what you want.

As we look around at what we can see from where we stand

there seems to be some evidence for these ideas

and there is one who is ready and willing to

spin it all into making a case - the devil

But John says just a minute, there is more reliable testimony,

of God himself, able to see things much different from us.

God gives testimony to these things in his word,

and as Jesus himself says in Gospel: God's word is truth.

John says here that whoever believes in God's son
has this testimony within himself,
Not that we discover it by simply looking into our own heart
but when we hear God's word, God speaks within us
saying: you know it is true.
And not to believe it is not just keeping an open mind
but saying God himself is a liar.
So what is it that God says about Jesus and about life?

BELIEVE THAT JESUS GIVES TRUE LIFE

¹¹ And this is the testimony, that God gave us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. ¹² Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life.

¹³ I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God that you may know that you have eternal life.

Again, in order to understand great significance of this claim,
it is helpful to look at evidence to the contrary.

One thing obvious to anyone who looks is death.

Our loved ones die. Young and old die.

Some die slowly and some in tragedies, but all are gone.

There is no apparent reason not to assume we too will die.

And why, who is to blame?

Devil, our prosecution, points to the obvious fact of our sins.

When we are put on the stand, we can't deny it.

we are forced to incriminate ourselves.

We have done things we know full well are wrong.

Like Tsarnaev's lawyer, we may try to make case

that although we are guilty it is not our fault,

we didn't know better at the time,

we can't help ourselves, we were misled,

but we had better not stake our life on such a weak case.

But now Jesus takes the stand and we hear his testimony.

First of all, there is eternal life in spite of death.

The proof is that Jesus died and was raised to life again.

He makes the case that those connected to him

also continue to have life forever.

Second, God testifies that God gives us this eternal life

as a free gift, despite our sins.

This gift is given to everyone in one way: in Jesus.

Whoever does not have Jesus, the son of God
does not have life.

We have this Jesus when we have faith in him,
that is by believing God's word about him is true.
This word of God is written down for us in the Bible
such as John's words right here: I write these things
that you may know that you have eternal life.
This same word of God is found in his sacraments,
such as Holy Baptism, so that we can also know
our children have eternal life.
Not because of anything we ourselves can observe
but because God says so.
So, either we are saved from sin and have eternal life
because Jesus died for us and was raised again,
or God is a big fat liar.
So, relationships & experiences & making a good living &
having freedom & enjoyment are all good gifts from God.
But with or without them, the only way to have the real life
we are intended to have is through faith in Jesus.
And through Jesus we have all we need,
even when we don't witness it with our own eyes.

BELIEVE GOD TRULY GIVES WHAT HE PROMISES

¹⁴ And this is the confidence that we have toward him, that if we ask anything according to his will he hears us. ¹⁵ And if we know that he hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests that we have asked of him.

The situations that have led to trials around the country
have revealed that when people don't trust authorities,
they don't believe what they say
and so they don't have confidence good things will happen
and they will be helped even when it is promised.
This can happen to us in our attitude about life.
If we fail to see any life beyond the suffering & disasters
that appear before us day after day
we will assume we have nothing but what we can grab
and there is not help but looking out for ourselves
But, John says, when we are convinced by God's testimony
that he has given us life in Jesus,
then we can have confidence in much more
that is not yet seen. We will have all we need for life.
We have this confidence when two things go together.
We listen to God and he listens to us.

We can be confident God listens to us because we know
that he loves us dearly since Jesus died for us
and our sins are no longer being held against us.

The other side is our listening to God.

Notice v. 14 says "if we ask anything according to his will."

God is not promising and saying you can be sure
you will have whatever pops into your head to ask for.

He is saying you can be sure you will have what is his will
which he plainly tells us is that everyone
believes his word and lives godly lives according to it.

So is quite a list of things he promises & wants us to pray for:

first stronger and continued faith,
then power to resist temptation, wisdom to know truth,
courage to do what is right, genuine love for others,
hope that gives endurance, joy in what is good,
contentment and peace in the midst of troubles.

We know this is his will for us because his word says so.

We know God can deliver on his promises
because he has kept his most incredible promise
to send Jesus as our savior.

Even if I don't have a penny in my pocket,
I can be confident I will have the money I need
if I have a bank statement that says so.

Even when it doesn't look like it at the time,
I can be sure I will have all I truly need for life
because I have a statement from God that says so.
I can know God is certainly delivering on his word
to deliver us from sin death and the devil.

When the trials of life cause a trial to go in in my heart
about the realities of life and what to rely on,

God takes the stand and delivers his testimony.

Don't just believe men and what is assumed in the world,

BELIEVE THE TRUTH OF GOD ABOUT LIFE
revealed in his word about Jesus which is no lie.

Don't just believe what sin & death imply for us,
BELIEVE THAT JESUS GIVES TRUE LIFE
to all with faith in him. Without this there is only death.

Don't trust only what your eyes see and heart desires,
BELIEVE GOD TRULY GIVES WHAT HE PROMISES
He promises in his word all we need for life now & forever.