

**Reading:** 1 John 4:7-5:1

**Theme:** The Importance of Apostolic Testimony.

We are in a world where many changes go on, even our life situations have constant changes and we are all under pressures of various sorts. The Christian faith seems constantly under attack, certainly more intensely in recent years. We may have fears, concerns and even doubts affecting us. The apostle John wrote to believers facing similar situations and he wrote to assure them of the things they believed. Last week we began to look at 5 pieces of evidence to enable us to be sure of the spiritual realities in our lives. We saw the **1<sup>st</sup> evidence: received the Holy Spirit (v13)**. We looking at the **2<sup>nd</sup> evidence: Apostolic Testimony** this evening.

These early Christians, some 60 years after Jesus's life had ended, He had been raised from the dead and ascended to heaven, were being taught and influenced by false teachers. Ones who had arisen and taught them clever, impressive things but were really teaching subtle error and deceiving the Christians, weakening their faith and also affecting the way they lived. John wrote to them assure them of the reliability of the things they had been taught and had believed in. We see:

### **1. The Eyewitnesses' Testimony.**

The false teachers would claim revelations, visions, things revealed to them in various ways - often making out God had now moved on from what He had previously revealed and a new thing was going on. We are not to imagine that such false teachers are confined to the 1<sup>st</sup> century A.D. as they have been

about since then and are still present. Often it is not put so bluntly as I said they do, but their claims are dressed up in grand sounding terms “*A new development in Christian thought*” or “*God is doing a new thing by His Holy Spirit*” or “*God has progressed, moved on*” or “*God wants us to move on in our thinking, experience, understanding*”.

John, to assure these believers of their faith, goes back to basics and says that what they saw they testified to. He uses the words “*we have seen and testify*”. He is speaking of himself and the other Apostles. They were eyewitnesses to real historical events, to a real historical person called Jesus and His life and ministry. That’s how John starts this letter - emphasising not some promptings or feelings or visions but things they had seen, heard, touched and handled - in other words real events that could be checked and verified. The Apostles were there, they saw the Lord Jesus, lived with Him, ate, walked, talked with Him, slept alongside Him, saw Him tired, saw Him cry, probably laughed with Him, washed with Him and a host of other things. They were with Him in a real, close and personal way.

The Lord Jesus especially taught and equipped the Apostles themselves to be His messengers. Yes, many things were said and done they could not at 1<sup>st</sup> understand or make sense of, but later did. This understanding came when the Apostles themselves were endued with power from on high - when the Holy Spirit came upon them in a mighty way. Jesus said the work and person of the Holy Spirit is essential to this, especially concerning the Apostles, John 15:26-27 “*When the Counsellor comes, whom I will send to you from the Father,*

*the Spirit of truth who goes out from the Father, He will testify about me. And you also must testify, for you have been with me from the beginning.” Then in John 16:13 “But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on His own; He will speak only what He hears, and He will tell you what is yet to come.”*

Here the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> evidences come together. The Apostles were guided and directed by the working of the Holy Spirit to preach and teach the truth of Jesus. Both the eyewitness testimony and the work of the Holy Spirit were needed. If we look at Peter’s preaching in Acts it is always presenting facts that he as an eyewitness knew and he linked them to OT truths and applied it. As the gospel accounts were written, we always have a connection to the Apostles - Matthew is obvious, Mark recorded Peter’s words and teaching, Luke researched and no doubt spoke to living Apostles as well as spending time with Paul on his missionary journeys, and John is obvious too.

The gospel accounts all centre on the same events and person, yet we have different facets of Jesus’ life presented to us. The Apostles were used in the writing of these - their accounts of what they saw and were often given to counter false spurious gospels. That is so important to note as they, who promoted truth and integrity, proclaimed, testified as to what they saw with their own eyes. Not only this, but the Holy Spirit, who will not lie, He led them into all truth and to understand the significance of the things they heard and saw. He, the Holy Spirit, was the one who moved them to preach, teach and write down these things - not overruling their personalities

and so we can see John's personality in his writings, we can see Peter's impetuous nature in his writings and even in the gospel account Mark wrote down from him.

Our assurance is not to be based on latest ideas or on modern ideas projected back some 2000 years as to what Jesus could possibly have said or did - those ideas would change as time passes, but we go on the actual eyewitness testimony recorded and preserved for us in the NT. How else can we know of Jesus and get to know Him except by the writings, the record of these eyewitnesses. In v12 we learn of the Invisible God but in v14 John says "*we have seen*". Who had they seen? The Son the Father sent! We are not to doubt the eyewitness testimony of the Apostles else we will find ourselves prone to wander, drift away from it and be blown about by every new idea that blows regularly through the Christian scene.

The Holy Spirit inspired these Apostles to write and He will not have them say error or falsehood. He will not now teach us something different or contrary to what He said through them. We are to beware of those who add to scriptural revelation, take away from or minimise it. Basically, I am arguing for the authority and reliability of the word of God - NT and OT both are true, without error of falsehood and can be trusted on for faith and life. Now see:

## **2. The Eyewitnesses' Message.**

They spoke as eyewitnesses, but what was the message they proclaimed? We see of this in v14b where our attention is drawn to the Father who sent His Son as the Saviour of the world. It is interesting to note in v13-14 there is a Trinitarian

reference as the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are all mentioned, as also occurs at Jesus' baptism where the Son is baptised, the Father proclaims Him His Beloved Son and the Holy Spirit descends in the form of a dove.

Back to the eyewitnesses' message which was proclaimed. Here we are dealing with centralities, essentials of the Christian faith. The false teachers of John's time denied Jesus was God the Son, was of God and some said He was not really a man and only in the form of a man and did not have a real body; others said the real man Jesus had the Christ come upon Him at His baptism and leave Him before the cross and because of this the Christ did not suffer. Yet John here says God the Father sent God the Son to be the Saviour of the world. John says "*we have seen*" literally He writes "*we gazed upon intently*". It was not a passing glance but this was One who the Apostles knew so well, they recognised and testified He is the Son of God sent by the Father.

Everything they observed about Him was incredible, so much so that John could say in John 1:14 "*We beheld His glory, the glory of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.*" John could have been questioned and he would have said "*Yes, He looked like any other man, a working man, a carpenter and yet He was always amazing and surprising us. It was if He was more than He appeared to be and He stunned us, shocked us and amazed us. His teaching, His Holiness were not put on or affected but were a real part of Him; His power over disease, demons and even death as well as creation was incredible; the shock we had when He calmed the wind and the waves! On one occasion Peter, James and*

*myself saw amazing things on the mountain as He was transfigured and He shone with an incredible glory. I saw Him in the garden in an agony, I saw Him die on the cross and His dead body taken down. I saw Him risen from the dead and saw Him ascend out of our sight into heaven.”*

John had no doubt as to who He was - God the Son. This is important to note, understand and remember. Jesus is no lesser being than God but He is fully and totally God - of the same nature and being as the Father, the same in substance, equal in power and glory - as is God the Holy Spirit. Yet, within the one godhead there are separate, identifiable 3 persons and are distinguished by their relationships within the godhead and the variety of works they undertake. In the plan of salvation, the Father chose a people to Himself and gave them to the Son for Him to achieve their salvation; to bring this about the Father sent the Son, willingly and with pleasure into the world (John 3:16). The Son came willingly also. The sending of the Son into the world, His coming to be the Saviour shows us of His person as the Son of God and His work – salvation.

We know well enough that this sending involved the Son of God taking a real body to Himself, conceived of the Holy Spirit in the womb of the Virgin Mary. His human nature was unique and sinless, made so, kept so by the work of the Holy Spirit. He lived a perfect life, did and taught wondrous things in His 3 years of ministry and then fulfilled the plan of salvation and is the Saviour He was sent to be. It is interesting that the word “Saviour” is used only here by John in this letter. Jesus came into this world of sin and sorrow to be the Saviour

of all who trust in Him. He didn't come merely to be an example, a teacher, a good man or a helper but He was sent by the Father to be the Saviour of the world. He was sent to do something and on the cross, He accomplished and completed that lifelong work, so much so that He could say *"It is finished"*.

None of us can or could ever save ourselves and we cannot or do even have to add anything to Jesus' work as it is all done! All we have to do is as **v15** says... We will look at v15 in more detail next time even though in a sense it overlaps with this verse. What it means is that we are to acknowledge, confess all that the Apostles wrote of Jesus being the Son of God and the Saviour as true, that is not just words but as Paul says in Romans 10:9-10 *"if you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved."* What we believe in our hearts we are to tell others, it is what is acknowledged, believed in one's heart and confessed publicly, openly - where possible - as an outworking of that heart belief. Again, will note this in more detail next time.

Jesus is the Saviour of the world, irrespective of our morals, background or education but He is only the Saviour of those who believe in Him no matter their social status, education, morals etc. Have we seen and recognised that Jesus is the Son sent by the Father to personally be our Saviour? It needs to be as real that that. If we find that we have accepted the Apostolic testimony about Jesus, then be sure that the Holy Spirit who

guided them into the truth is also guiding us into the truth and we have the assurance we are God's and are saved. We are not to rest until we are sure of this, until we can say with heart conviction that we have the Lord Jesus as our Saviour.

We are to ask God to make Him known to us. Ask the Holy Spirit to reveal the Saviour to us and bring us to trust Him. Yes, we will have to be serious, to take God seriously and His promise that if we seek Him with all our heart, He will be found of us.

If we know the Lord Jesus as our Saviour then we are to tell of Him as the Apostles' message **is still true and reliable**. As we are able, we are to share and tell the gospel clearly, relevantly and simply - for our generation needs our Saviour as much as John's generation. Pray the same Lord Jesus will bless and prosper our proclamation, telling of it and through the work of the Holy Spirit many would come to know our Saviour, to love Him and to live for Him.