

Fact-Checking our Findings

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[0 : 00] Well, perhaps it doesn't feel like it, but already by the end of chapter 3, we have already come a great way in John's Gospel.

We've come from the Word, who was with God in the beginning and who is God and who took on flesh, who became flesh and dwelt among us. We've seen him gain his first disciples.

We've seen his signs and his words that have pointed us to who he is and what he came to do, all the way up to his teaching us how we become part of what he came to do, how we come into his kingdom.

John has taken us on a roller coaster of revelation as he has introduced us to Jesus Christ. It's been breathtaking at times, the glory that we glimpsed of him at the wedding at Cana and his righteous rage that we saw unfold in the temple and the great love we saw with which he came from the Father to save us.

And all the way through these chapters, John has simply been turning the diamond again and again for us to see from different angles who Jesus is and that he has come to bring grace upon grace.

[1 : 25] And from almost the very beginning of this book, from just verse 6, he has been right there with us holding our hand. There was a man sent from God whose name was John.

John, John the Baptist, who was sent as a witness to point to Jesus. And if John, the writer of the gospel, is a bit like our guide around the picture gallery showing us these portraits of Jesus, who he is, then John the Baptist is like our guide's wise old mentor.

Remember, John was probably John's disciple before he was Jesus' disciple. I promise there won't be this many Johns for too much longer.

But wise old John met us on our way in, didn't he? He gave us some pointers and he left us in his students' capable hands. But here our guide presses pause on the tour and he goes off to get his wise old mentor again to check that he's got his facts quite right.

Notice how we've stepped out of the drama at this point. In verse 22, Jesus went out over there to spend time with his disciples and to baptize.

[2 : 45] But John has taken us instead over here, verse 23, to spend some time with his old teacher. And his idea is that now we've seen Jesus do some breathtaking things and heard him say some even more breathtaking things and begun to follow the signs to see that he is indeed the son of God.

Well, we'll probably want to check our findings with a bona fide witness. Are we seeing rightly? Are we hearing rightly?

Do we have the right idea? And if anyone can confirm or deny what we've seen so far, it is John the Baptist, the first witness and indeed the best, because as we all see, no one had a clearer view of Jesus than John.

And so this morning, if you are just dropping into our series, if you're visiting with us, or if this is the first time you've set foot in this church, it's a great Sunday that you're here.

Because sorry to those of you who have been with us from the start, but there probably won't be anything brand new for you to see in this passage. But that's okay, because that's exactly the point.

[4 : 06] You know, if you run your work past your boss, and it comes back covered in red ink with all kinds of questions and corrections, then you know you've gone wrong somewhere.

But if your work comes back clean, then you know you're on the right track. And what we get back here, as we run our first workings past John, is a nice, clean sheet.

No changes or corrections needed. He confirms what we've seen and what we've heard in Jesus is true. He is the Christ, the Son of God.

And we're going to see that in two ways this morning. Firstly, John confirms for us that he has been joyfully outshone by Jesus. Joyfully outshone.

Now, Jesus and his disciples are out in the country baptizing. And verse 23, John was also baptizing somewhere else. And people were coming and being baptized and becoming disciples of John or Jesus.

[5 : 12] And so there's an overlap, isn't there, between Jesus and John? They're kind of doing roughly the same sort of thing. And the question this raises is, what's the relationship between these two guys, Jesus and John?

Because some of John's disciples have got it into their heads that Jesus has come as a rival to John. It all begins, doesn't it, with a different argument that they're having.

In verse 25, with a certain Jew over the matter of ceremonial washing. I guess these arguments were bound to come up. After all, John's baptism was a kind of ceremonial washing, an initial washing to prepare people for the washing Jesus would bring.

Washing their bodies with water to prepare for Jesus to wash them with the Holy Spirit. Now, we're not told what that argument was about, not what this certain Jew said or how John's disciples replied.

It's not that important. But like every argument, it's got everyone really worked up. Probably John's disciples were having to defend their teacher and his way of baptizing, his teaching and his witness.

[6 : 31] These were John the Baptist guys. They would have stood up for him. So, probably feeling a bit prickly, hot under the collar, fresh from a fight, they come back to John.

And on the way, you can imagine that what pops into their minds is another potential threat to their beloved teacher. Have you heard?

That other guy is now over there baptizing as well. The one John pointed out, didn't he say that he was greater than him? That can't be right.

They say loads of people are going over to him now. Instead, does John know about this? And so, verse 26, they came to John and said to him, Rabbi, that man who was with you on the other side of the Jordan, the one you testified about, look, he is baptizing and everyone is going to him.

You get the feeling, don't you, that they don't like that at all. For most of the time, I lived in Leith. On Leith Walk were two kebab shops separated by just one shop front.

[7 : 45] They were virtually next door to each other. And one of these shops was called Best Kebab. And the other shop was called Original. Best Kebab.

The names alone tell the story, don't they? Both claimed to be the genuine Best Kebab. It screamed rivalry and competition.

We were here first. We have the best one. I can't tell you who won in the end, sadly. But that's the kind of feeling that you get from John's disciples, isn't it, when they think about Jesus.

That guy that you pointed out to us, well, he's in the baptism business as well now. We've got competition. But we have the original Best Baptism, don't we, John?

Isn't that right, John? Well, John is about to seriously burst their bubble. You were not told how they reacted to what John said, but we can imagine they were left pretty speechless because to this, John replied, verse 27, a person can receive only what is given them from heaven.

[8 : 56] You yourselves can testify that I said I am not the Messiah, but I am sent ahead of him. In verse 30, he must become greater. I must become less.

He is Jesus to John. Well, he's not my rival, he says. I cannot in any way claim to compete with him. That's not what I'm here to do.

Didn't he say right from the start, from day one, he confessed and did not deny I am not the Christ. Yes, the overlap, but John and Jesus are not trying to steal clients from each other.

Instead, John is very happily and deliberately sending his clients over to Jesus. His work has to grow, he says. Mine has to shrink.

He must become greater. I must become less. So what is the relationship between Jesus and John? Well, it's not competition and rivalry.

[9 : 58] It's preparation and fulfillment. fulfillment. Preparation and fulfillment. That's what the picture of the wedding day that John paints for us is all about, isn't it?

The bride belongs to the bridegroom. The friend who attends the bridegroom waits and listens to him and is full of joy when he hears the bridegroom's voice. That joy is mine, he says, and it is now complete.

The best man that the bridegroom's friend gets everything ready. He organizes and prepares and sets everything up for the day, but the day isn't complete, is it?

Until the groom gets there. I guess today it would be the other way around, wouldn't it? All the tents waiting and the awkward silence is broken when the bride comes through the door.

And then everyone begins to cry and laugh and take pictures because at last it's happening. The person of the hour has arrived. Well, says John, that's the kind of waiting he was doing before Jesus came on the scene and now Jesus is here.

[11:10] That's the kind of joy that he has to see him. John is the best man but Jesus is the bridegroom. This is his day, he says.

He is what all the preparation has all been about because now the groom is here and the bride is going to him. The bride belongs to the bridegroom. It would be pretty bad form, wouldn't it, for the best man to try to steal the bride on the wedding day.

No, a true best man bursts with joy when he sees the bride walking down the aisle to her husband, to his friend. The happiness and the excitement that he has felt for them over the months and perhaps years of their engagement reaches its climax on that day and bubbles over.

That joy now is mine, says John, and now it's fulfilled or complete or perfected. If you were here a few weeks ago, we caught a glimpse of this at the wedding at Cana, didn't we?

Jesus, the bridegroom, revealing himself to be the one come to claim his promised bride, God himself, come to give himself to redeem his beloved people.

[12:37] And here, John, the wise old mentor, simply confirms our findings. Yes, he says, that is him. You've seen him rightly.

He is here now. Think about what he's saying. When Jesus Christ came into the world, history shifted gear. A new chapter opened in the story of the world.

Before him, God had made promises and painted pictures and made preparations for the day when his son would come.

God sent forth his son, God sent forth his son, God sent forth to bind himself forever to the church, his bride.

When the fullness of the time had come, writes Paul, God sent forth his son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law.

[13:51] And John the Baptist is full of joy because he gets a front row seat to that drama. It's the most important day in the history of the world to see it all come true in the coming of Jesus.

Who am I, he says, who are you that we could compete with him as a rival? Know the best thing he or you or I could do now Jesus is finally here is rejoice.

Rejoice and give him all the glory. So much of our Christian lives falls into place when, like John, we understand our part in his story.

In the history of the world, God's plans have ever only rested on one human being and that is Jesus Christ. And friends, newflash, we are not Jesus.

We are not Jesus. I wonder, have you said it yet? I am not the Christ. Those words we heard John say some weeks ago, I am not the Christ, put it on your fridge.

[15:07] Put it in your calendar. Remind yourself daily, I am not the Christ. We are not even the best man. That honor goes to John, doesn't it? nor are we in the wedding party, organizing, preparing for the big day.

No, brothers and sisters, if your faith is in Jesus, you are part of the bride in this story. The bride belongs to the bridegroom, loved beyond measure, redeemed from disgrace, rescued from our sins, washed clean by his word, made every day more beautiful, to stand before him a radiant church, without blemish, spot or wrinkle, but holy and blameless.

A person can only receive what is given him from heaven, says John. Well, what God has given to us is to be loved and rescued by his son.

Does that not fill us with joy this morning? That is a joyful thing, that is the best news we could ever hear if we have waited for him and listened to his voice.

Does his finally being here not fill us with pure delight and excitement and joy? But there's humility, too, in owning our part in the story.

[16:43] Perhaps life as a Christian isn't going the way you thought it would go. Perhaps you haven't done great things for Christ or led people to Christ or even lived wholeheartedly for Christ.

But we receive only what God gives us. Friends, we were never destined to fulfill God's plans or rescue sinners or change the world.

Like John, our part in the story is to wait for him and to listen for him and to rejoice that he has finally come, that he has brought God's every plan to completion, that he is the glorious yes to all of God's precious and very great promises.

When we understand who Jesus is and our part in his story, then we, like John, will say and mean it when we say, he must become greater, he must become greater, I must become less.

We'll learn to point to him and turn the spotlight away from ourselves and unto him and all that we think and do and say. Because firstly, wise old John confirms for us that he has outshone all that came before him, all that came after him.

[18:17] It has all been wonderfully and joyfully outshone by the coming of Jesus. Jesus. And the second thing that John confirms for us then is that therefore we must humbly receive him, we must humbly receive him.

If we can only receive what God gives them, we must receive the greatest gift that God has ever given, which is his son, Jesus Christ. And again, John is not saying anything brand new here, is he? He's simply checking back with us like a good teacher to check that we have clearly seen what he's been showing us. The one who comes from above is above all.

The one who is from the earth belongs to the earth and speaks as one from the earth. The one who comes from heaven is above all. He testifies to what he has seen and heard, but no one accepts his testimony.

Jesus has come from heaven for he was with God and he is God. He came from heaven, became flesh, put on our full humanity and lived among us so that we could see his glory, to show us what God is really like.

[19:35] And John says that his coming from heaven sets what Jesus says at a premium, because no one has ever been to heaven except the one who came from heaven.

So who better or who else is there who can speak to us about God except Jesus. Everyone else is from the earth and belongs to the earth and speaks as one from the earth, says John.

Before becoming a minister, I studied a subject called social anthropology. It's a mouthful, but it just means study of humanity or study of culture and society.

what we were taught on day one is that if someone somewhere says that magic is real, well, who are we to say it's not?

Or someone in another culture says that plants and animals and rocks are God, well, why should they be wrong? Well, John is saying take Jesus out of the picture and that really is all we have.

[20:46] It's my word against yours, being from the earth, we speak as people from the earth, earthly things. So on a purely earthly and human level, all religion is your word against mine.

And why should anyone be right or wrong? You know, actually most of the people around us today think that way about spirituality and religion. Perhaps you're visiting this morning and you would identify or relate to that point of view.

But now put Jesus back in that picture. Someone has come from heaven to earth. He's popped the bubble.

He's broken the circle, the closed circle that we once lived in. And while we all can speak about earthly things down here, well, he has come from heaven to speak about heavenly things.

And that changes everything, doesn't it? heaven. It's not just us left to ourselves down here talking about God anymore, because Jesus has come from up there to tell us the truth about God.

[21:54] Authoritatively. We can't have a conversation with Jesus about God on equal terms. Because he has come from heaven and he is God.

And we are from the earth and we are not God. the one who comes from heaven is above all, says John. And he has come and said, this is who I am.

Some of you must have heard the classic story about the blind man and the elephant. One guy comes and feels the elephant's leg and says, oh, it must be a tree.

Another guy feels the elephant's tail and says it must be a rope. Another person feels the elephant's trunk and says, oh, this must be a hose. And the moral of that story is that even though these guys all believe they are feeling something different, well, at the end of the day, they are all feeling the same thing.

And the storytellers say that's just like God. Everyone thinks God is something different, but at the end of the day, everyone worships or knows the same God.

[23 : 03] God. But what about if at some point in the story the elephant said, I'm an elephant? That would change things, wouldn't it?

Would it really still be okay for those guys to go on believing that it was a tree or a rope or a hose? Wouldn't they be wrong? Wouldn't it be offensive even to say to this being, no, you're not what you say you are?

Now that's a silly story, isn't it? But it illustrates the position that we're all now in, now that God himself has come from heaven in the person of his son and said, this is who I am.

But we are not left to ourselves to work out how we feel about who God is because he has come and told us. And that puts us all in the position of either believing him or not or not believing him. The only one who knows what he is talking about when it comes to God is Jesus Christ because only he has seen and heard him and yet he is not believed by everyone.

[24 : 19] But, says John, once we have accepted that what he says is true and believed in him, we confirm that God does tell us the truth about who he is and he's done it in Jesus.

Whoever has accepted it has certified that God is truthful. For the one whom God has sent speaks the words of God for God gives the spirit without limits.

John is checking back and confirming with us that Jesus can be trusted completely. that because of who he is we can trust him, believe in him without fear or doubt or second thoughts about what he says.

Perhaps this morning you are considering whether you might put faith in Jesus. Can I trust him? what is he like really?

Is he worth it? Well, John says to us today, he really is. Keep coming to see, keep coming to hear him, keep coming to him again and again, checking back that what we have seen and heard is true.

[25 : 33] And then trust him for all he is worth. For all he is worth and for every word that he speaks. Perhaps this all sounds like being a Christian day one.

Do we really need to check back with John again, again in the Christian life? But don't we need to be reminded so often how much we rely on Jesus to know God or to live for God or to trust God? Later in chapter six, lots of the people who had followed Jesus stopped following him. They listened to him, but they didn't believe in him. And so Jesus turns and asks the twelve, his first followers, do you want to go away as well?

Well, listen to Peter's answer. Peter answered him, Lord, who else will we go to? You have the words of eternal life and we have believed and come to know that you are the Holy One of God. only he has the words of eternal life. Who else can we go to? And so we all must every day receive his words, come back to him again, believe in him, walk with him, because only he has the answers we all so badly need.

[27 : 01] The Father has placed the weight of the world on the shoulders of his Son. See that? Verse 35, the Father loves the Son and has placed everything in his hands.

How desperately we need to be reminded it all comes down to him, the cosmos, us, the stars in the sky, the nations on earth, the church, every person, me and you.

He holds our lives and the destinies of all things in his nail-scarred hands. And so our life with God comes down completely to him, doesn't it?

How we respond to him determines all things. So central is he to God's plan, he is the plan. And so, verse 36, whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on them.

Again, John confirms for us this is the choice we have, to reject Jesus' death, it is separation from God, facing his wrath for our sins, not entering life.

[28 : 22] In a word, it's hell. But again, he confirms for us beautifully, doesn't he, that whoever, whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, to know God truly, to have our sins forgiven, to be rescued from his anger by his love, and to enjoy life with him forever.

That is the choice that we all have today, because it all rests on Jesus. And so we must humbly receive him. John confirms there is no other way to have life with God apart from him.

And so the question is, do you believe him? Have you seen him rightly? what do you think of him? If you don't believe him, why don't you?

What are the reasons? Who else will we go to, to know God truly and rightly? And if you do believe him, then know today, have it confirmed to you, that all you know of God in Christ, and all your faith in him, and every day that you have walked with him is confirmed.

We have run our working past John, and it's come back without corrections. Let that encourage you today. Let that help your unbelief. Let it grow our joy in Jesus, our confidence in him, to rest our faith in him again, and again, and again.

[30 : 00] For we have indeed seen and believed that he is the Christ, the Son of God, and therefore have life in his name. Let's pray together.

God, our Father, how we thank you for your Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. Lord, we are in awe of his majesty and beauty, of his love, of his centrality to all that you have ever purposed or planned or promised.

All history turns on him. And so we pray, our Father, that by your Holy Spirit, you would help us to treasure Jesus, to have such joy in him.

Lord, that you would lift the weight of the world from our shoulders because you have laid it on his. That you would free us to rejoice in him each day and to trust him for all that he is and all that he has done.

Father, we thank you that in him and through him we come rightly to you and have communion with you forever. So help us to trust him, we pray.

[31 : 24] Lord, help us if we have trusted him all our lives, to continue to trust him. Lord, help us if we have never trusted him before in our lives, to come to trust him.

Lord, we ask all these things that you are great and able and you are faithful and we come to you in Jesus' name. Amen.