

I Witness
7-31-16

Living Waters Video

Do you trust the Bible? Do you have confidence in what it says? Would you say that you have staked your life on it? Have you ever read the Bible? I think if you see it as a document that you view the majority of as the fine print you sign at the end of a service agreement for a phone or microwave, then you miss the richness of God's word to dispel your doubt and strengthen your faith.

My goal this morning is for you to know Jesus deeper as you begin to read your Bible for yourself. So deeply that your doubt is overcome and you can't help but speak out what you've seen and experienced.

In fact, right off the bat here's a challenge – 21 Day Challenge to read one chapter of John a day for the next 21 days. If you'll do it raise your hand.

The reason we encourage you to read the Bible daily is so that your faith will grow. (Romans 10:17 Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of God) The written Word of God is your biggest weapon against doubt, in that it points you to Jesus, and He is the One who calms your doubts and fears...The Bible points you to the source of your faith – Jesus!

A man named John was one of the first disciples Jesus called. He was the brother of James and they were in a fishing business with two other guys named Simon (Whom Jesus nicknamed Peter) and Andrew. These four fishermen were some of the first to follow Jesus.

John was an eye-witness to the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. He knew Him personally and wrote 5 Books of the New Testament and his life was forever changed by Jesus Christ.

He was the only disciple of the original ones who was not killed for following Jesus. He was, however, boiled in oil and survived that, only to be banished to an Island called Patmos, where he wrote the Book of Revelation.

Turn with me in your Bible to **1 John 1:1-4**

¹“What was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the Word of Life –

²And the life was manifested, and we have seen and testify and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was manifested to us – (Manifested means to make something known out in the open)

³What we have seen and heard we proclaim to you also, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ.

⁴These things we write, so that our joy may be made complete.

Do you see all of the words describing how John and the other first disciples experienced Jesus? From the start we heard Him, and saw Him and touched Him...3 of the 5 senses mentioned here.

In these few verses John is describing Jesus in real terms we can understand – He calls Him the Word of Life. John says, we heard Him talk, we looked at Him with our own eyes, and we touched Him. Jesus was not some religious figure that was standoffish...no, He was up close and personal. John was there when it happened! He was an eye-witness.

John and the others said,

- He was real and we hung out with Him and He changed our lives forever.
- We left everything and followed Him. Seriously, we just walked away from our boats and nets and our dad and just went with Him.
- He was the most amazing person to ever walk on the face of the earth.
- We saw Him do miraculous things that no one ever did.
- He loved people that others ignored and hated.
- When He would start talking, people would just listen for hours.
- He took 12 of us with Him everywhere he went.
- He taught us how to pray and how to treat people with kindness.
- He turned water into wine, He turned 5 loaves and two fish into a full meal for thousands of people.
- Peter, James and me got to be with Him on a mountain when He was transfigured and Moses and Elijah showed up and freaked us out completely. Peter wouldn't shut up.
- He also took the three of us with Him to pray in the garden on our last night together...we fell asleep...I felt terrible about that.
- We saw Him make a storm stop when we thought we were going to die!
- Jesus cast demons out of people and restored their lives.
- He touched people with leprosy and healed them.
- He healed people who couldn't walk or talk or see.
- We saw Him raise people from the dead.
- He cried.
- He forgave people of their sins. One time we were going through this Samaritan town and there was this sinful Samaritan woman at a well there and Jesus walked up and started talking to her and saved her. She ran back to town and told everyone about Him and they all came out and a ton of them got saved!
- He told us that He was going away, but that He would never leave us alone, that the Holy Spirit would come to live inside each one of us. It happened on the Day of Pentecost!
- I remember our last meal together. We were celebrating Passover, but this time it was different...He was comparing the bread and wine to His body and blood and talked about one of us betraying Him. And sure enough, Judas was the one. He brought the mob to the garden where we were praying, well where Jesus was praying, we were sleeping, and in all the confusion I ran away and they took Him away.
- They put Him on trial and beat Him and mocked Him and spit on Him like He was dirt.
- They stuck a mock crown on Him made of thorns.
- Then after they had tortured Him they led Him outside the city and drove nails into His hands and feet and raised Him up on that cross between two thieves. You know, He even saved one of those guys.
- We stood there and watched Him die a horrible death.
- I'll never forget Him looking at His mom and telling me to take care of her.
- We were all hopeless and afraid.
- But that Sunday morning after He died something crazy happened, something that was the most miraculous thing that had ever happened – He rose from the dead. Literally He came back to life!
- Thomas wouldn't believe it until he could touch Him. Jesus was fully alive and right there with us!
- Jesus was with us for 40 days before we watched Him with our very own eyes go back up into heaven. I will never forget that scene.
- Right before He ascended He told us to tell everyone the Good News about Him...that we would be His witnesses to all nations.

¹*“What was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the Word of Life –*

²*And the life was manifested (made known, and we have seen and testify and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was manifested to us –*

John was an old man when he wrote his gospel and this short letter...but he never lost his passion and awe of Jesus! He wrote these things down so people would know His Jesus! Near the end of His Gospel in **John 20:30-31** John says, *“Therefore many other signs Jesus also performed in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these have been written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have eternal life in His name.*

John was an eye-witness of Jesus earthly ministry. And his life was changed forever.

You and I are witnesses of what He is doing now. What He has done in our lives, how He has changed us and other people all around us.

But we can't see Him like they did. This is where doubt wants to kick you in the teeth. Nonbelievers may mock you with why do you believe in something you can't see? Your own thoughts may attack you and cause doubt.

Let me ask you a question...do you believe in anything else that you cannot see or touch or hear?

- The wind? Can you see the wind? How do you know it exists? You see the effects of the wind.
- Electricity? Can you see it? No, but you know it exists
- Radio waves?
- Atoms?

There are lots of things you can't see that are real and yet you believe in them.

So, can you believe with confidence in the One who is unseen and yet created and sustains everything that is in the universe that is both seen and unseen?

Have you ever experienced Him in real life?

Listen to **1 Peter 1:8**, *“And though you have not seen Him, you love Him, and though you do not see Him now, but believe in Him, you greatly rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory.”*

For me, I grew up in church and heard about Jesus from the time I was a baby. My mom sang in the choir and worked with the deaf, so we were there all the time. I walked down an aisle one day at a revival when I was about 6 or 7 and shook the preacher's hand and got baptized. I had no clue what was happening, but the Lord was drawing me to Himself. Again at 13 years old I prayed a prayer at a youth rally, but still didn't belong to Jesus. I got used to the message of the cross and really bored with it. The world crept into my soul and in my boredom I explored the world of partying and acting like a fool. I basically did what I wanted to do most of the time...mom and dad learned on me! I never doubted that they loved me. I just made a ton of bad decisions. My life changed on May 10th, 1980 when I was at a tent revival in Vilonia Arkansas. It was 5 days before I graduated from High School and 9 days after my grandpa had died. The message that night from the 20-year-old Jerry Johnston was this, “You will tell

your friends about Jesus if you get a vision of them burning in hell.” It was shocking to hear that, but the Lord broke through my hard head that night and I surrendered my life to Jesus. After the revival I drove my ‘68 mustang out to a back road and took all of my 8 track tapes with godless music on them and piled them up and set them on fire as a picture of giving my life to Jesus. Since then it has been an adventure of God chiseling the world off of me and making me more like Jesus...we still have a long way to go. I have gotten to see Him do amazing things through the past 36 years as I’ve said yes to Him in being one of His witnesses. I love seeing people turn their lives over to Jesus and the change that happens to them.

I was on a plane once and a lady I’ve never met sat down next to me and as she was sitting down she whispered to me, “Pray for my husband he’s lost.” He sat down next to Sharon and she began to talk with him and share the gospel. As the lady and I talked it turned out that she was the aunt of a lady who was in the church I served at in Texas. A lady whose baby had died and I had done the funeral. God set that up. I cannot count the times when stuff like this has happened.

³What we have seen and heard we proclaim to you also, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ. ⁴These things we write, so that our joy may be made complete.

If you give your life to Christ and then just attend church for the next 40, 50, 60 years and never really experience Him in any real way, never sharing the gospel with another human being and experiencing His work in and through you, then you will have settled for second-hand religious experiences you hear about from other people, and your life will be filled with doubt because you never experienced the adventure for yourself. Don’t miss the joy that is yours in being one of His witnesses!

When you surrender your life to Jesus, His claim on your life is absolute. You become His, His agenda becomes your agenda, your life literally becomes His life to do with what He wants. **Luke 9:23-24**, *“If anyone wishes to come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it.”*

It is the calling of every disciple of Jesus to lay down their lives and to bear witness to the gospel and share it with everyone around us.

Our job as pastors is to equip you and teach you how to do this effectively. That’s what Jesus did with the first disciples when he called them in **Mark 1:14–18**, He said to them, *“Come follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.”* Jesus took these fishermen and others and turned them into fishers of men, in other words, into disciples who bring other people into God’s kingdom, into His church.

That is how the gospel spread from the beginning, and that is how it still spreads today...as we follow Jesus and fish for men. As the youth minister here I want to see every student in this church fully equipped to abide in Christ and share the gospel in such a way that the world is turned upside down...so that their joy might be complete. Students, we meet every Sunday morning in the Go Center at 9:00am.

Peter and John said in **Acts 4:20**, *“For we cannot stop speaking about what we have seen and heard... verse 29, “And now, Lord, take note of their threats, and grant that your bondservants may speak Your word with all confidence.* These men couldn’t stop talking about what had happened to them...Even when John was writing 1 John when he was an old man, he hadn’t gotten over what Jesus did in his life.

Have you gotten over what Jesus has done in your life?

Has someone convinced you that only an elite few in the church with the gift of evangelism are to spread the gospel worldwide and everyone else gets to do less stressful acts of serving Jesus. There are 100's of millions who have never even heard the name Jesus, yet alone the Gospel.

We are surrounded by those who have never heard the gospel and by those who have been turned off by church because they feel judged and rejected, or they had a bad experience.

Is it right for people to serve inside the church? Absolutely Yes! Is it right for those same people to not share the gospel outside the walls? Absolutely not! It is obedience to the command of Jesus in Matthew 28:18-20 and an amazing adventure to share the gospel with people.

Guys, the job is not finished. In Luke 10 Jesus sent out the 72 and told him that the harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few, therefore pray to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into the field.

Why do we share the Gospel? Because God loves people! It's the Father's heart and Jesus commanded us to share it. When we do good things for people by giving them food or backpacks or houses it is to open the door for them to hear the gospel and know Jesus. There are many organizations that do good things for people, but the Church's purpose in doing good is so that people will come to know Jesus through hearing the gospel.

Bryan told me that when they were in Zambia and water well was completed and water flowing out, that he stood up and said, you will get thirsty again drinking this water, but Jesus gives you water that will quench your thirst, living water, eternal life.

With whom do we share it? Everyone everywhere. We share it with the lost who don't know Him yet and We share it with the saved who know Him, but just don't know that they are to tell others too.

How do we share this life? By loving people and telling them the Gospel and our story of how we have experienced Him.

We have the Word of Life living in us! He wants others to have His life as well, so we must tell everyone.

This is not just the job of pastors; we are all laborers in the field bringing in the harvest. **John 16:15**, Jesus said to his disciples, *"You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last."*

That lasting fruit is the harvest. The harvest is the host of people that we share the gospel with and they are brought into God's kingdom, into his church and they become fellow laborers with us. It is how the gospel is spread.

The Lord can use you to reach people that your pastors will never meet. People are afraid of preachers! They're not afraid of you!

I recently met a young man named Brad who was a marine and had drank himself almost out of the Marines and was deeply addicted to pornography and suicidal with PTSD. He was reached with the gospel of Jesus, not by a preacher, but by his wife!

Mark Boyle would not be a disciple of Jesus right now if Abby Bullard and others had not reached out to him, and then Kenneth Mouser spending 3^{1/2} hours with him sharing the gospel. Preachers cannot lead everyone to Christ. Our next step counselors cannot lead everyone to Christ.

People are reached as you and I go out and bear witness to what we have seen and what we have heard and what has touched our lives. I firmly believe that so much doubt is created when you never experience for yourself God's power when you are obeying Him and sharing the Good News.

We love people with the most radical, life-changing message in the history of the world – God loves sinful people so much that He gave His one and only Son to come down here to save us from sin, hell, and eternal separation from God, if we only surrender our lives to Him and let Him have full control.

Romans 10:9, *That 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."*

I want you to know Jesus deeper than simply coming to church. So deeply that you can't help but speak out what you've seen and experienced. So that your doubt will be swept away as you abide in Christ and make Him known.

Don't forget the 21 Day Challenge

Let's Pray