

## **“Certainty in an uncertain world”**

I hate uncertainty, don't you? When I was learning to drive, I really struggled with overtaking. It wasn't I was frightened to overtake; no, I was simply uncertain how to do it properly. In fact, my overtaking worried my driving instructor so much, he constantly reminded me that I was far too keen to overtake and needed to learn more restraint commenting, “This isn't a race!” . My uncertainty was about when to pull back in after I had overtaken the car. This uncertainty left me alternating between two dangerous extremes of either pulling in too soon and risk hitting the car I had just overtaken or staying in the wrong lane so long I risked hitting oncoming traffic. I just wasn't certain. Well, that was until my driving instructor gave me a way to be certain when to pull back in. The solution was very elegant and simple; all I had to do was wait until I could see both of the headlights of the car I had just overtaken in my rear-view mirror and then, with absolute certainty know it was the right point to pull back in. The rear-view mirror became my fixed point of reference for when to pull back in. Simple as the Meerkats say.

The Apostle John wrote this letter from Ephesus to Believers in a group of churches in northern Turkey who were facing uncertainty about their faith. A group of false teachers had arisen in these churches challenging the nature and character of Jesus causing the believers uncertainty about their faith and even their salvation. What is more these false teachers were leading the believers in to a sinful and destructive lifestyle. The believers were wracked with uncertainty as to what and who to believe. Their uncertainty was made worse as they saw many of their fellow believers led astray to follow these false teachers.

John's letter predominant theme is Christian certainty marked by assurance, knowledge, confidence and boldness. The two certainties that John expounds to these believers are the Christian faith is true and that they have been born of God and possess eternal life. John's teaching about Christian certainties, their nature and the grounds on which they are built, urgently needs to be heard and heeded today.

Doesn't the uncertainty that the Believers were experiencing in the churches John was writing too echo all too closely the uncertainty that Believers experience today. The Believers faith is denigrated and reduced to one lifestyle choice among many equally valid lifestyle choices. The voracity of the Bible and its reliability are constantly challenged and dismissed. Jesus is dismissed as a "good man", "lunatic" or worse. Perhaps worst of all those who are charged to speak God's truth to Believers seem themselves to be uncertain as to what is the truth. False Gospels, which are no Gospels, like the Prosperity Gospel teach lies and lead Believers to ruin and destruction. Yes, the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Believers life is as full of uncertainty as 1<sup>st</sup> Century Believers lives were.

We are going to spend some weeks working through John's letter to discover for ourselves the Christian certainty marked by assurance, knowledge, confidence and boldness that John writes about. This morning's thought, indeed, the whole series could be titled "Certainty in an uncertain world". It is my prayer that as we work through John's letter you will have a fresh certainty about our faith, Christ and eternal life. I also pray this certainty will lead you into a boldness of approach to God and of testimony to the world which is sorely needed in Hurst Green and beyond.

First let's start with some good news in **1 John 2: 20,21** John writes *"But you have an anointing from the Holy One, and all of you know the truth. I do not write to you because you do not know the truth, but because you do know it and because no lie comes from the truth."* John here is asserting that all the believers in the churches he is writing to individually know what the truth is. They know the truth because they have an anointing from God, that is the Holy Spirit within them. This is similar to **John 16:13** *"But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all the 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."* This is the good news that each Believer has the Holy Spirit within them to reveal the truth, each Believer is being guided into the truth by God. William Tyndale, the great Bible translator paraphrased John's words *"You are not anointed with oil in your bodies but with the Spirit of Christ in your souls; which Spirit teaches you all truth in Christ, and maketh you a judge what is a lie, and what truth and to know Christ from antichrist."*

John's purpose in writing, he says is not to inform them of a new truth but to confirm the truth they already know. Because the Believers already know the truth, through the Holy Spirit they can conversely know that these false teachers are lying. John deals with the Believers' uncertainty by assuring them that they can know what is truth or what is a lie.

So how is this applicable to us here this morning? Firstly, these verses give us an assurance that we as believers can differentiate between truth and lie because of the Holy Spirit within us. The good news is we don't have to rely on our own reason or instincts or someone's opinion to know the truth or spot a lie, rather we can depend on God indwelling in us through the Holy Spirit to know the truth. Like me using the rear-view mirror as my fixed point of reference for when to pull back in when overtaking, we have the Holy Spirit as our fixed point of reference as to what is truth and what is falsehood. And secondly, we can be confident that if we are unsure of the truth, the Holy Spirit within us, "*will guide us into all the truth*" all we need to do is ask and listen. You can read Matthew 7: 7 or James 1: 5 for assurance about God giving generously when we ask Him for something.

It is surprising that in light of these verses so many Believers are so uncertain, you would think that given the testimony of the Holy Spirit within there would be more certainty in the Believers' faith. Ask any group of Believers a fundamental question about their faith and you will get a wide range of responses. Even those who claim to be Born Again are not necessarily firmly grounded in the truths of the Christian faith. In his book which provides a statistical analysis of religious beliefs in America, George Barna cites several fascinating statistics which are based on a national survey.

In chapter four of his book George Barna asks those who have identified themselves as being Born Again, "Do you agree strongly, agree somewhat, disagree somewhat, disagree strongly or don't know with this statement, "The Devil, or Satan, is not a living being but is a symbol of evil."

The Born-Again population, that is those who claimed to be a Believer, replied with 32 percent agreeing strongly, 11 percent agreeing somewhat, and 5 percent did not know.

Thus, of the total number of professing believers responding, 48 percent either agreed that Satan is only symbolic or did not know!

For the record, the Bible reveals Satan as a living being. He is a rebel angel, a spirit creature who opposes God. The Bible calls Satan “the ruler of this world.” (John 12:31) He uses “lying signs” and “deception” to accomplish his aims.— (2 Thessalonians 2:9, 10.)

The Bible records a conversation in heaven between God and Satan. If Satan were a mere symbol of the evil that doesn't really exist, then who is God speaking to? (Job 2:1-6) Clearly, Satan is a living being and not merely a personification of evil.

So why are so many Believers unable to discern truth from lie? The answer is simple, because Believers do not listen to the voice of truth within, the testimony of the Holy Spirit or indeed God's written truth, the Bible. We are so uncertain because we do not take time to listen to the internal testimony of truth through the Holy Spirit or the external testimony of truth through God's word. Life is busy, life is noisy, life is confusing, life is demanding it is easier simply to let others tell us what to think. That is exactly what the false teachers were doing to the Believers in the Churches John was writing to. The Believers had stopped listening to the voice of truth within and allowed the false teachers to tell what to think. In effect they had allowed the false teachers to define the truth for them which was of course no truth at all.

The first step for certainty in a Believers life is to listen to the voice of truth, that is the Holy Spirit within and God's Word without. The second step is to believe, that is to act on what you heard. Please note that there is no certainty to be found in merely listening. Certainty happened when we put what we have heard into practice. Listening and believing are the beginning of Christian certainty.

So why if we have such a powerful testimony to the truth within, you may be asking, did John feel he had to write his letter to remind the Believers of the certainties of their faith. Well perhaps this story will help make matters clear.

A father was putting his six-year-old son to bed. The boy was frightened of the dark, so his father prayed with him that Jesus would be with him and stand guard over him as he slept. The father kissed his son and went downstairs, a few minutes later his son came down saying he was frightened. His father took the boy upstairs and prayed with him again and then asked if he believed Jesus was going to stand guard over him as he slept? The boy said that he did believe Jesus was going to be with him and guard him. The father kissed his son and went downstairs.

A few minutes later the son appeared downstairs again saying he was frightened. The father took him up prayed the same prayer again and asked the same question to which the boy answered with some indignation that, "of course I know Jesus is going to with me and guard me as I sleep!"

This happened again and again until the father was losing patience and asked the boy, "if you really believe Jesus is going to be with you and guard you as you sleep why are you still frightened?" The boy thought about this for a moment and answered, "I know Jesus will be with me I just prefer Jesus with skin on."

God understands us better than we understand ourselves. God understands that sometimes we need "Jesus with skin on". God understands that we sometimes need to have the testimony of the Holy spirit within confirmed by "Jesus with skin on". We are not to however accept all those who claim to be Jesus with skin on, who claim to speak the truth, who claim to speak in God's name. No, we are to compare what they say to our fixed point of reference, the Holy Spirit to determine if they are speaking truth or lies. This applies to all that claim to speak the truth, even me. Don't take my word for it ask God.

Christian certainty is not just for zealots or a select few or special Saints no Christian certainty is available to all by the indwelling of the Spirit of Truth. So, this week if you are uncertain refer to your fixed point of reference; why not ask God's Spirit to lead you to the truth. Spend time this week talking too and most importantly listening to God. Go on, I challenge you to take five minutes each day to talk to God about the things of faith you are uncertain about. Just remember to listen to His reply, I am certain you will find certainty replacing your uncertainty.