

WHO JESUS IS MAKES ALL THE DIFFERENCE IN WINNING OUR SALVATION**Sermon for the 6th Sunday of Easter, 2021****1 John 5:1-8**

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is our Second Reading from before, 1 John 5:1-8: **¹ Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born from God, and everyone who loves the Father also loves the child who has been fathered by Him. ² This is how we know that we love the children of God: when we love God and carry out His Commandments. ³ For this is love for God: that we keep His Commandments. His Commands are also not burdensome. ⁴ For whatever has been born from God conquers the world, and this is the victory that has overcome the world: our faith. ⁵ Who is the one who conquers the world but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God? ⁶ This is the One who has come through water and blood: Jesus Christ. He has not come by water only but by water and by blood. Moreover, it is the Spirit who bears witness, because the Spirit is the Truth. ⁷ There are three who are giving witness: ⁸ the Spirit, the water and the blood, and these three have one purpose.**

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth, Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

John writes, **“This is the One who has come through water and blood: Jesus Christ. He has not come by water only but by water and by blood. Moreover, it is the Spirit who bears witness, because the Spirit is the Truth. ⁷ There are three who are giving witness: ⁸ the Spirit, the water and the blood, and these three have one purpose.”**

These remarkable words are essential to our faith! For without the water, the blood, and the Spirit all testifying to this one Saviour, we would have no salvation at all! John is writing about the person and work of Christ, who He is and what He has accomplished for us. Surely, this is the heart and centre of our faith.

This whole Letter of 1 John was written to encourage the believers to hold firm to the faith delivered to them, in the face of a challenge that was now coming from false teachers whose one desire was to lead them astray. Remember how last week John had said to *“test the spirits to see whether they are from God!”* (1 John 4:1). It was vitally necessary for his hearers to examine the words and actions of teachers in light of the whole testimony of Scripture, and while John doesn't refer to the false teacher or teachers by name in this letter, we do get some clues about the nature of the group and its teaching by what John says and emphasises in contrast to that group.

In reading this Letter, it soon becomes clear that John is writing against a group that has trouble with Jesus as the Son of God come in the flesh - that is, as the incarnate Christ, taking on our flesh, suffering and dying for our sins, and then rising, bodily, from the dead. They don't believe that. It's too much for them. That is why John had opened his Letter by saying, *“That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched, concerning the Word of Life... What we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, that you also may have fellowship with us. Our fellowship is also with the Father and with His Son, Jesus Christ”* (1 John 1:1, 3).

The fact that Jesus, the eternal Son of God, had died for the sins of the world, and had shed His blood, was repulsive to this group who did not think that their sins were so bad that they needed the Son of God to die for them in order to be saved! To them John had said, *“If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves, and the truth is not in us”* (1 John 1:8).

They thought religion was about attaining to some superior secret knowledge, making one super-spiritual, more enlightened than the rest. And so these people would withdraw from the church, from the fellowship of the congregation, to form their own special group. In so doing, their love for the brothers was lacking. They were not living in kindness, patience, generosity, forgiveness, and helpful service to each other.

But before we get too far in condemning John's opponents here, maybe we should take a hard look at ourselves. We can all name people, fellow children of God, to whom we have been rude and unkind. Sometimes we make it a habit

with some of them because we just don't like them. It often happens that we become impatient and angry with other believers and resent the things that they do. They rub us the wrong way. They do all sorts of stupid things and we think they should have to pay for their mistakes. *"Why should I help them out? They dug the pit they're in. Let them live in it. How are they going to learn otherwise? And yes, I can name one or two who have offended me greatly. By their sinful behaviour and hurtful words they have caused me a lot of harm. Am I angry about it? You bet I am. I don't want to have anything to do with them. Forgive them? Forget it."* If this sounds all too familiar, then repent of this "I don't need you" attitude.

John writes, **"Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born from God, and everyone who loves the Father also loves the child who has been fathered by Him."** Anybody who believes that the man Jesus of Nazareth is the Christ, that is, everything the Old Testament predicted about the Christ, must have been born by God's initiative and power. Paul states in 1 Corinthians 12:3 that *"no one can say, "Jesus is the Lord," except by the Holy Spirit."* In his Letter John is summarising his earlier message that if one has been born from God¹, then he will love God, and if he loves God, then he will automatically love people. If we love the Father, we shall love His children too,² and see past all their faults and short-comings.

And here is another surprise: God's commands now become joyful to obey. John writes, **"This is how we know that we love the children of God: when we love God and carry out His Commandments. ³ For this is love for God: that we keep His Commandments. His Commands are also not burdensome."**

The Law of God is indeed bad news to people without faith in Christ, but to believers who love to hear God's will and do it, His commands are not burdensome. His yoke really is easy, and His burden really is light.³ A yoke was a wooden crosspiece fastened over the necks of two animals. Jewish rabbis would speak of the "yoke of the Law" as glorious obedience to God, which freed one from obligations to the world and gave rest.⁴ Not so Jesus. He described that kind of yoke as heavy,⁵ and offered His alternative, namely, to be yoked with Him to the Gospel. One yoked to Jesus will find rest because Jesus is pulling alongside, daily assuring us of forgiveness for our failures and giving us strength and stamina for each new day. Psalm 119:35 says, *"Lead me on the path of Your Commandments! For I have been taking pleasure in it."* We come to see that all the Commandments of God really are good for us and actually lead to happiness. Imagine how much better our lives would be if everybody kept God's Commandments - imagine how much more fun life would be if we no longer had to experience disrespect for authority, violence, adultery, stealing, bad-mouthing, and evil desires.

However, because of our sinful human nature which continues to cling to us, life is not so easy and God's Commandments a joy to obey. This is precisely why we need a Saviour who has come by both **water and by blood**, the one to whom the Spirit **bears witness** and about whom John writes.

When John wrote his Letter in Ephesus in the late first century, it was being falsely taught that Jesus was just another man - a really good man, but a mere man, nonetheless. At His baptism, the Spirit of the Christ came down and rested on this man Jesus, which enabled Him to do the miraculous works He did. But before Jesus suffered and died on the cross, the Christ spirit left the man Jesus, since of course God cannot suffer.

But do you see why that kind of false teaching would be so deadly to our faith and render our salvation null and void? If it was not Jesus as the Christ, the very Son of God incarnate, both true God and true man, all the way from His birth to His baptism to His suffering and death to His resurrection - if it is not this One and the same Jesus who is our Saviour, then we have no Saviour!

If Jesus were just a man - a really righteous man perhaps, who suffered and died on the cross - well, good for Him, maybe God would reward Him by raising Him from the dead. But that wouldn't do us any good. On the other hand, if Jesus is indeed the very Son of God, and He sheds His holy blood for us and for all other sinners of the world, well, then His suffering and death have infinite value, sufficient to cover the sins of the whole world and to win our

¹ 1 John 2:29; 1 John 3:9. See also John 1:13; John 3:3-5

² 1 John 4:7-21

³ Matthew 11:28-30

⁴ Ecclesiasticus 24:23; 51:26 (An apocryphal book)

⁵ Matthew 23:4

forgiveness and thus our eternal life. Which they do. So you see, who Jesus is makes all the difference in winning our salvation.

And so to emphasise the point that it is this same Jesus Christ, the God-man Saviour, both in the water of His baptism and in the blood of His crucifixion, John wrote: **“This is the One who has come through water and blood: Jesus Christ. He has not come by water only but by water and by blood.”** And then to drive home the point that the Holy Spirit testifies to the truth of this in our preaching, John added: **“Moreover, it is the Spirit who bears witness, because the Spirit is the Truth. ⁷ There are three who are giving witness: ⁸ the Spirit, the water and the blood, and these three have one purpose.”**

That one purpose is to continue to work through the Word of the Gospel to create and sustain faith in our hearts whenever we hear it, to remind us of the waters of Holy Baptism by which we have been reborn as children of God, being baptised into Christ’s death and resurrection, and to continue to feed us with the life-giving blood of Jesus that we receive in His Holy Supper whenever and as often as we join the whole family of God in the great communion of saints who live by faith in Jesus Christ the Son of God. For the Holy Spirit, the water of Christ’s Baptism, and the blood of His death on the cross all bear witness that this Man, Jesus of Nazareth, is the Christ of Israel and the divine Son of God.

May we who have thus been **born from God** continue to hear the voice of these three witnesses, for it is by listening to them that our heavenly Father is even now completing in us the great work He has begun: to make us His children who live in His love in time and eternity. And we can be confident that He will bring His work in us to completion on the Day of our Lord Jesus Christ. In His holy name. Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.

PRAYER FOR THE SIXTH SUNDAY OF EASTER.

Lord, our God, You alone know the plans that You have for us and our world, but we rejoice and worship You because we know that they are loving plans. In Your goodness, You spread life, love, beauty, and joy throughout Your creation. In Your grace, You lighten the misery of our sinful lives, and bless us with pardon and peace. If it is your will that we must pass through troubles, enable us to turn them into opportunities, for Your glory.

We give You our warmest thanks for the precious gift of Your Son, Jesus, whom You have sent that we may have life in all its fullness. We praise You that He has humbly come into our world, has taken on Himself our sins, and has carried them to death on the cross. We glorify Your name for our release from the power of death, and for our sure hope of heaven through His resurrection.

Heavenly Father, we thank You for the privilege of being Your spiritual priests, as we pray in Jesus’ name. We thank You for Your promise to hear all our prayers. Keep us close to Jesus each day in faith and love, gladly hearing His Word and following Him, wherever He leads us. Send Your Word out into the whole world, that it may achieve what You have planned for it. Let us as Your representatives, whom You have called out of darkness, proclaim Your light in this dark world. Give us the courage also to speak Your word of judgment when people reject Christ, the Cornerstone.

Bless Your Church on every continent. Renew Your people to be a loving fellowship of believers, a family of trust and prayer, and people who are ready to serve the needy in love.

Lead all the nations of the earth along the ways of justice, righteousness, and peace. Look with special favour on our country. Give to our Prime Minister, to the Premiers of each State, to our cabinets and parliaments, to our police and to our courts, such qualities of heart and mind that they may carry out their duties earnestly, wisely, and fairly. Protect us from all enemies, both within and without our country. Remove all strife from us. Inspire obedience to all law and order. Fill all citizens with love of holiness and moral purity. Grant that all who work in industry may find joy in their work and receive proper rewards for their efforts. Give satisfaction to those who work in the professions, as they work for the good of all. Give those who farm the soil favourable weather. Bless their work of feeding the world.

Bless all our loved ones, and make our homes places of peace. We remember especially the sick, the troubled, and the bereaved. In Jesus’ name free them from the burdens of their pain and sadness.

Keep us standing strong and steady in faith. Since serving You is never useless, give us the opportunity to be busy in Your work. In Jesus' saving name we offer You these prayers. Amen.

SIXTH SUNDAY OF EASTER

Acts 10:44-48

⁴⁴ While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit fell on all who were hearing the Word. ⁴⁵ The believers who had been circumcised, namely, all those who had come with Peter, were astonished that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on the Gentiles. ⁴⁶ For they were hearing them speaking in tongues and glorifying God. Then Peter said, ⁴⁷ "Surely no one can refuse water, that these people should not be baptised? They have received the Holy Spirit just as we also have."

⁴⁸ He ordered that they should be baptised in the name of Jesus Christ. Then they asked him to stay for a few days.

1 John 5:1-8

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John 15:9-17

⁹ "As the Father has loved Me, so I have loved you. Remain in My love! ¹⁰ If you keep My Commandments, you will remain in My love, as I have also kept My Father's Commandments and remain in His love. ¹¹ I have told you these things that My joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete. ¹² This is My Commandment, that you should love one another as I have loved you. ¹³ No one has greater love than this, to lay down his life for his friends. ¹⁴ You are My friends if you continue to do what I command you. ¹⁵ I no longer call you 'servants,' because a servant does not know what his master is

doing. However, I have called you 'friends' because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from My Father. ¹⁶ You have not chosen Me, but I have chosen you and appointed you that you may go and bear fruit and that your fruit may remain, that the Father may give you whatever you ask for in My name. ¹⁷ This is what I command you: Love one another!