

# Sermon Transcript

## August 16, 2015

### “What Jesus?”

#### 2 John

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## SERMON TEXT

### 2 John

<sup>1</sup>The elder to the elect lady and her children, whom I love in truth, and not only I, but also all who know the truth, <sup>2</sup>because of the truth that abides in us and will be with us forever:

<sup>3</sup>Grace, mercy, and peace will be with us, from God the Father and from Jesus Christ the Father's Son, in truth and love.

<sup>4</sup>I rejoiced greatly to find some of your children walking in the truth, just as we were commanded by the Father. <sup>5</sup>And now I ask you, dear lady—not as though I were writing you a new commandment, but the one we have had from the beginning—that we love one another. <sup>6</sup>And this is love, that we walk according to his commandments; this is the commandment, just as you have heard from the beginning, so that you should walk in it. <sup>7</sup>For many deceivers have gone out into the world, those who do not confess the coming of Jesus Christ in the flesh. Such a one is the deceiver and the antichrist. <sup>8</sup>Watch yourselves, so that you may not lose what we have worked for, but may win a full reward. <sup>9</sup>Everyone who goes on ahead and does not abide in the teaching of Christ, does not have God. Whoever abides in the teaching has both the Father and the Son. <sup>10</sup>If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not receive him into your house or give him any greeting, <sup>11</sup>for whoever greets him takes part in his wicked works. <sup>12</sup>Though I have much to write to you, I would rather not use paper and ink. Instead I hope to come to you and talk face to face, so that our joy may be complete. <sup>13</sup>The children of your elect sister greet you.

## INTRODUCTION

When we say that we are Christians, fundamentally what we are saying is that we are followers of Jesus Christ. I like the way John Stott puts it. He wrote a helpful little book called *Basic Christianity*. Early in the book he said this: “Christianity should begin with the person of Christ. . . . essentially Christianity is Christ. The person and work of Christ are the rock upon which the Christian religion is built. If He is not who He said He was, and if He did not do what He said He had come to do, the foundation is undermined and the whole superstructure will collapse. Take Christ from Christianity, and you disembowel it; there is practically nothing left. Christ is the center of Christianity, all else is circumference.”<sup>1</sup>

When we claim to be Christian, we are claiming to believe in Jesus Christ, the Son of God. Our confession mirrors the confession of the Nicene Creed that says we believe “in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, begotten from the Father before all ages, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten not made; of the same essence as the Father. Through Him all things were made. For us and for our salvation He came down from heaven; He became incarnate by the Holy Spirit and the virgin Mary, and was made human. He was crucified for us under Pontius Pilate; He suffered and was buried. The third day He rose again, according to the Scriptures. He ascended to heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again with glory to judge the living and the dead. His kingdom will never end.” This is the glorious Jesus we believe and follow.

The creeds of the church are important because they give historical definition to what we mean when we say we believe in Jesus. I just quoted from the Nicene Creed that was established by the church back in the fourth century. Do you know why this creed came about? It was the result of a century long debate in the church over the nature of Jesus. It sought to answer the question, “what do you mean when you say you believe in Jesus.?” Some, like a man by the name of Arius, would say that they believe in Jesus. But what he meant by that is entirely different than what was passed down to us by the apostles in the Scriptures. What Arius meant when he confessed faith in Jesus was that Jesus was “like God” but not fully God. The Nicene Creed responded to this heresy by saying, “No, that is not the Jesus of the Bible. The Jesus of the Bible is “God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God . . . of the same essence as the Father.” So really, when someone says they believe in Jesus, you need to ask the question; “What Jesus?” Paul warns, in 2 Corinthians 11, that some will come and “*proclaim another Jesus.*” Christianity is about Jesus. My question to you is, “What Jesus?” This is not a side issue. This is not a trivial issue. This is an issue that supports the entire structure of faith and without the biblical Jesus, “there is practically nothing left.”

A Mormon will tell you that Mormons believe in Jesus. In fact, they are called “The

Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.” But the Jesus they believe in is different than the Jesus of the Bible. They have a high regard for Jesus and they acknowledge the cross and the resurrection. But, in their teaching, Jesus, though highly exalted, is still a creature with a beginning in time. His oneness with God the Father is a oneness in purpose and not in essence. This is exactly the nature of the controversy that led to the Nicene Creed and it diminishes the deity of Christ as the unique God-man.

Jehovah Witnesses believe in Jesus, but it is a different Jesus than that of the Bible. They believe He was created by God as the archangel Michael before the world began and is a lesser god. They believe when He was born, He was a mere human and not God in the flesh. They believe in Jesus, but it is a different Jesus.

There are a lot of celebrities who espouse the beliefs of Christian Science. You see the word Christian and it sounds good. They believe in Jesus. They believe that Jesus was a mere human; but as an adult He embodied “the Christ.” That is another way of saying that He had a “manifestation of deity” which is also something they claim other human beings can embody as well. That is basically the thought of the New Age Movement. It wasn’t too long ago that Oprah Winfrey was touting Eckhardt Tolle’s New Age book *A New Earth*. She even held a ten-week, worldwide internet course to promote his teaching. Listen to what Oprah said about Jesus. She believes in Jesus. She said that Jesus came to “show us Christ consciousness.” He embodied “the Christ” and now we too can embody that same “Christ” and experience a higher plane of spirituality. That is not the Jesus of the Bible.

In the nineteenth century, there was a movement in the western world that made its way into the Protestant Church. It came out of the Enlightenment of the eighteenth century and it called into question the existence of supernatural revelation. Knowledge could only be gained through what you can see and reason. This called into question the supernatural revelation of God through the Bible and ultimately through Jesus. And so, today, we have liberal Protestant churches that confess faith in Jesus, but He is not a supernatural Jesus who is God and man. They do not believe that the Scriptures are authoritative and inspired by God, thus they rely on their own reason to determine truth. Consequently, they pick and choose what they consider to be reasonable when it comes to Jesus. So naturally, miracles and a bodily resurrection from the dead and the deity of Christ come into question. They believe in Jesus, but not the Jesus of the Bible.

## **2 JOHN**

I share all of this by way of introduction to the New Testament letter known as 2 John. This month, we are looking at three of the four letters in the New Testament that are one chapter long. Last week we looked at Philemon and discovered the power of God’s love. God’s love can change your life. God’s love can defeat racism. God’s love can

impact culture, one person at a time. Next week we will look at 3 John and consider the kind of impression we make for Christ. And so, if God had a Twitter account, these small letters would be “tweets from heaven.” And yet, though they are short, they each have something meaningful for us to consider.

You would be right to conclude that the author of this letter is none other than John, one of the twelve disciples of Jesus. He wrote the fourth gospel and also the last book of the Bible, the book of Revelation. He, along with Peter and James, belonged to Jesus’ inner circle. He is referred to in the Gospel of John as “*the disciple whom Jesus loved.*” He lived longer than any of the other disciples, living well into the last decade of the first century. In fact, this letter, 2 John, was probably written between A. D. 85 and 95.

When you study the life of Paul, you have the advantage of rummaging through the book of Acts, which enables you to piece together the chronology of his life as an apostle. Acts even sheds some light on Peter and what he did after Jesus ascended into heaven. But the Scriptures really don’t give us much of a hint as to where John went after the ascension of Christ. John lived a good 60 years beyond the time of Christ. What did he do for those 60 years? Where did he go?

We do have testimony from the early Church Fathers as to where John landed. When we talk about the early Church Fathers, we are talking about that generation of church leaders that came after the time of the Apostles. There was a man by the name of Irenaeus, who lived from A. D. 130 - 200 and he tells us that John was a leading church figure in Asia Minor, which is present day Turkey. He said that clergy would travel to Ephesus just to hear John talk about his personal experience with Jesus. I love how John begins 1 John. “*That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we looked upon and have touched with our hands, concerning the word of life—the life was made manifest, and we have seen it and testify to it and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was made manifest to us—that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ.*” Do you catch what John is saying here? He is saying, “I saw Jesus! I touched Jesus! I heard Jesus! Therefore, I proclaim to you none other than Jesus—who is eternal life.” Every year I find myself attending some kind pastoral conference or seminar. If I was a pastor during the first century, I would spend my money to go and sit at the feet of John in Ephesus just to hear first hand what it was like to walk with Jesus on a daily basis!

“Hey, John, tell that story again of when Mary Magdalene came running to you and Peter because the stone had been rolled from the tomb and the body of Jesus was missing. What were you thinking when you outran Peter to the empty tomb? Why

didn't you go into the tomb until Peter got there and went barging into the tomb ahead of you? (At this point, John would probably roll his eyes at the mention of impetuous Peter and he would simply say with a fond memory and a wry smile, 'Ah, Peter.')

So was it at this point you really believed that Jesus rose from the dead? What was it like when He appeared to you and the other disciples as you huddled behind locked doors and He showed you His hands and His feet? What did he teach you during those forty days as he opened up the Old Testament before he ascended to heaven? Tell us again, John, what you saw and heard and touched with your own hands." Can you imagine?

Much of this information about John's years in Ephesus comes directly from Polycarp, who, in his younger years, was a disciple of John. It is widely held that John had been in Jerusalem until about A. D. 67, just three years prior to the fall of Jerusalem. Along with many other Christians, he left the city of Jerusalem and resumed his ministry in the city of Ephesus; and conducted a rather extensive ministry throughout Asia Minor. This makes sense when you come to the book of Revelation and, in Revelation 2-3, John begins by addressing seven churches of Asia Minor, beginning with a letter to the church of Ephesus.

So here you have John with a rather long church planting ministry in the city of Ephesus and the surrounding area. You might be tempted to think, with John at the helm, this ministry was a widely "successful" one. I use the word "successful" in a rather worldly way. You might think that John's presence in the church automatically made for a united church and a church that was continually growing and advancing. If you were in a church looking for a pastor and the resume of the Apostle John made its way to the committee, you would rightfully think them foolish if they passed on John's resume. The very thought of the Apostle John coming to pastor your church may give you dreams of great "success" and the anticipation of a season of growth. If that is what you think was going on in John's churches in Ephesus, these three letters of John will put that impression to bed rather quickly. When John wrote these three letters, the churches he presided over were in conflict; and, in due time, this conflict led to the demise of this church. They simply disappeared into the pages of history.

What was the conflict these churches were facing that John was addressing? It wasn't over the color of the carpet. It wasn't over the style of worship. It wasn't over the gifts of the Spirit or the timing of the return of Jesus. The nature of the conflict that John was dealing with had to do with the very person of Jesus Christ. John knew that if this doctrine was compromised, the whole nature of their faith would crumble and they would cease to be the church of Christ.

Look what it says in verse 7 of the second letter of John. *"For many deceivers have gone out into the world, those who do not confess the coming of Jesus Christ in the flesh. Such a one is a deceiver and the antichrist."* Those are strong words issued by

John. But here was the problem. There was a teaching that made its way into the church that denied the truth that Jesus is the Christ. When you go to 1 John 2:19, John talks about how these teachers were once a part of them but they have now gone out from them. So this was an erroneous teaching that emerged from inside the church. We read, in 1 John 2:22, that these teachers denied that Jesus was the Christ; and, in verse 26, we learn that these teachers were aggressively seeking to persuade others to their teaching about Christ. In these letters, we find John fighting this heresy with every ounce of his strength. It is no accident that the word “*truth*” is mentioned five times in this short letter and 22 times in the three letters combined. John is standing for the truth, that Jesus is indeed the Christ, the Son of God.

It is hard to discern exactly what specific group of thought John is speaking against here, but there is some conjecture as to who these people are who are compromising biblical orthodoxy. There are three possibilities. There was a system of teaching known as *docetism*. This group denied the humanity of Christ, because they claimed that Jesus just “appeared to be human” but was not in actuality human. It was kind of like angels in the Old Testament who appeared in human form to various people, but in actuality they were not really human. This is what some believed about Jesus.

Others think John is addressing an early group of *Gnostics*, who believed that ultimately anything physical was evil and that the escape from evil came from a higher spiritual knowledge. In verse 9, he speaks of these people as one who “*go on ahead and do not abide in the teaching of Christ.*” They have obtained something new. Therefore, Jesus could not be Christ in the flesh, because the flesh to them was considered evil. This really became a popular thought that dominated much of the culture from the second to the fifth century. This is the time when the Gospel of Thomas and the Gospel of Judas were both written. You can go to your local Barnes and Noble and pick up a copy of these ancient writings. A few years ago, when the book *The Davinci Code* came out, there was a lot of debate over which gospel writings truly represent the early teaching of the church. The Gnostic Gospels of Thomas and Judas were posed in this book as evidence to what the early church taught about Jesus. They presented a view of Jesus that contradicted the four Gospels we have in the New Testament, denying that Jesus is the Christ. It is similar to the New Age thinking of our day that speaks of attaining a “Christ consciousness” that leads to a higher spiritual knowledge.

There are others who think John is specifically addressing the heresy of a man by the name of Cerinthus. There is a famous anecdote attributed to Polycarp, who was a disciple of John. Apparently, one day John was going to the public bath in Ephesus and got wind that Cerinthus was also there taking a bath. As the story goes, John ran out of the bath-house without bathing, saying “Let us fly, let even the bath-house fall down,

because Cerinthus, the enemy of truth is within!” This man taught that Jesus, the man, was a good man and at His baptism the spirit of Christ came upon Him and then left Him prior to His suffering on the cross.

Do you see the common denominator between all three teachings? It is the same thing that is common among the teachings I mentioned at the beginning of the sermon. They all deny the nature of Jesus. They deny that Jesus is fully God and fully man. Earlier in our service this morning, using a portion of the doctrinal statement of the EFCA, we confessed what we believe about Jesus. “We believe that Jesus Christ is God incarnate, fully God and fully man, one Person in two natures. Jesus—Israel's promised Messiah—was conceived through the Holy Spirit and born of the virgin Mary. He lived a sinless life, was crucified under Pontius Pilate, arose bodily from the dead, ascended into heaven and sits at the right hand of God the Father as our High Priest and Advocate.”

If Jesus is not fully God and fully man, then there is no atonement for sin. This issue is not just a difference of opinion, rather our hope for forgiveness of sin and eternal life rests upon this truth. If Jesus was not fully God, then there would be no atonement for sin for there is no one outside of God who is truly good. You can't stand in my place and take the punishment for my sin. You have your own “stuff” to deal with. Not so with Jesus. He is able to atone for our sin because he is God and there is no sin in him. But he is not just God. He took on human flesh and became like us. Joan Osborne asked the question in the popular song from a few years ago, “What if God were one of us?” The Christian faith not only says, he is one of us, in the person of Jesus. But because he is one of us, he can be our priest and advocate and represent us before the Father. He can take the punishment for our sin and his victory over sin and death becomes our victory over sin and death. Because of Jesus, we can stand before God without any guilt. “If He is not who He said He was, and if He did not do what He said He had come to do, the foundation is undermined and the whole superstructure will collapse. Take Christ from Christianity, and you disembowel it; there is practically nothing left.”

## **WHY THIS MATTERS**

Let me give you two reasons why this matters. Why is it essential to our faith to get Jesus right? It is because it is this Jesus, the God-man, who saves us and shapes us.

Jesus Saves Us: This past May, the Pew Research Center released their findings on the waning influence of Christianity in our culture. Not surprisingly, their statistics found that overall, in our culture, the church is in decline and those who don't affiliate with any church is on the rise. And yet, what was fascinating to me was that the one group that held their own in the past seven years was evangelicals. In fact during this time,

evangelicals saw an increase of 2 million people, while Mainline Protestant churches saw a decline of 5 million people.

A few years ago, I came across an article about the state of the church in Maine. From *Downeast* magazine, a secular publication covering life in Maine, comes this hugely unexpected news: Maine, one of the spiritually “darkest” states in New England (America’s least Christian region), is apparently experiencing a revival. Evangelical churches emphasizing biblical literacy and doctrinal solidarity (the nature of Jesus) are seeing up to 20% increased attendance. This, to say the least, is a shocker. Here’s what Cynthia Anderson writes in *Sanctuary*, the article covering this seeming phenomenon. “The three Sunday services at Calvary Chapel regularly draw more than two thousand people. Turnout is similar ten miles away at Bangor Baptist Church, which has on its grounds two radio stations and the largest Christian school in the state. A few exits down Route 95 in Waterville, Faith Evangelical Free Church also draws large crowds. Indeed, attendance at the state’s evangelical churches has swelled in recent years as mainline denominations have continued to struggle.”

For several years now, there has been talk about a “Quiet Revival” taking place in Boston. Since the 1970’s, growth in the number of churches in Boston and Cambridge has outpaced the growth of the population. Since 1989 they went from 406 churches to 675 churches in 2006. Over the last 35 years, an average of one new church has been planted every 45 days in Boston and Cambridge. This trend of church planting in Boston was so noticeable, just two years ago the Boston Globe took notice of this trend and wrote an article about it.

Do you know what this tells me? It may be the trend of secular culture and even religious culture to deny the unique nature of Jesus. But when I read these statistics, I see the power of the gospel and I am reminded that when the true Jesus is lifted up God is still drawing people to himself. So, in 2 John, John is imploring his church to stay true to the teachings of Christ because this is the Jesus who brings hope and changes lives and can save us from our sin. And we are here for such a time as this!

Jesus Shapes Us: Truth is not just something relegated to the mind. The two major themes of John’s writings are “truth” and “love.” They are not separate topics. The truth of Jesus forms within us the love of Jesus. John writes in verses 5-6, “*And now I ask you, dear lady—not as though I were writing you a new commandment, but the one we have had from the beginning—that we love one another. And this is love, that we walk according to his commandments; this is the commandment, just as you have heard from the beginning, so that you should walk in it.*”

When you consider the nature of Jesus as God and man, we learn what love looks like

and it forms love within us. The call for us to love is anchored in the fact that we serve a God of love. The fact that God is Triune, three persons and yet one God, tells us that God has eternally existed in love. This is who God is. In fact, in 1 John 4, where we are commanded to love one another we are told where this love comes from. Here we are told both that *“God is love”* and that *“love is from God.”*

We also discover and see this love by looking at Jesus. Jesus, who was eternally and fully God, “of the same essence” - humbled himself and took on the form of man and died for us so what we could know God. Is there any greater love than that? In fact, it is this love that forms the basis for how we are to treat others. Paul instructs us in Philippians 2 to be *“of the same mind, having the same love.”* Did you catch that? We need to get the nature of Jesus right so that our minds and our hearts will be properly aligned with God. And so the result is that like Jesus we are to *“do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only on his own interests, but also to the interest of others.”*

This truth about Jesus, fully God and fully man, does not just form the mind and what we are to believe. But it shapes the heart and leads us to a life of love. On the night Jesus was betrayed he said, *“A new commandment I give unto you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”*

One of the traits of the early church was the ministry of hospitality. It was a natural expression of the love of God formed in their hearts by Jesus. There are several places in the New Testament where we are exhorted to be hospitable to strangers and particularly to those who travel and bring the ministry of teaching to the local church. Because of the road system in the Roman Empire, when Christians would travel, they would depend upon the hospitality of brothers and sisters in Christ. Hospitality is a trait that has been somewhat lost in our culture. One of the benefits of home community groups, is that it brings us into each other’s homes. When we open our homes to each other, there is an opening of the heart that takes place as well.

But now John is saying to them, when these false teachers come to town, they should not open up their doors to these teachers. They should not extend their common hospitality. He says, in verse 10, *“If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not receive him into your house or give him any greeting, for whoever greets him takes part in his wicked works.”* This doesn’t mean that when a Mormon or a Jehovah Witness comes knocking at your door, you can’t invite them in and share Jesus with them. Rather, the issue here is that through hospitality, granting lodging to false teachers, was lending financial support to such teachers. If anything, John is

instructing us to not support the work of anyone who is preaching another Jesus. Why? Because eternal life is hanging in the balance and the orthodox teaching of Jesus is essential to saving faith. Can I give you this subtle warning. There is nothing wrong with financially supporting ministries you see on television or hear on the radio, but be careful and make sure what you are supporting teaches the true gospel. Some of the ministries you hear on television misrepresent Christ. Let me give you a little test. If you ever hear anyone say that God wants you to become rich and, if you give your seed money with faith, God will bless you ten-fold, stay away from it! It is not biblical Christianity. If it preaches a biblical Christianity and you feel God leading you to support it, by all means, as we will see in 3 John, support it. But make sure it preaches the Jesus of the Bible. Because this is the Jesus who saves us and shapes us.

## IMPLICATIONS

I would like to close with two implications I derive from this study this morning.

First of all, doctrine and knowing doctrine is important. The study of theology and the teaching of the church is not just something for pastors to do. There are so many voices that claim to be Christian that are out there speaking into your ears, and you need to be able to discern truth. I am specifically talking about the major doctrines of the church that point to an orthodox and historical faith in Jesus. If you don't know what truth is, then you are not going to be able to discern what is false.

I would like to plug something for you. This Fall we are going to make our way through the Book of Acts. We are mainly going to look at the sermons recorded for us in Acts. Through this study, we are going to look at the message of the early church and how message shaped their mission and their lives. It is truth and love in action. Do you know what you find in every message in the Book of Acts? You find the proclamation of the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. It is this truth that changes everything. Many of our community groups will do the sermon based model that will allow you some time to explore these truths and be shaped by them.

The second implication is this, Gary Burge puts it this way, "There is one central theological doctrine that over-shadows all else. We have life only through Jesus Christ, God's Son, who truly became one of us for our salvation."<sup>2</sup>

Shortly after 9/11 there was this renewed interest in God and in prayer, though it was rather short lived. It was also an inclusive merging of religions around God, and not Jesus. Joe Stowell remembers how encouraged he was, watching the prayer service that unfolded that Friday after the attack on our Country. During the service, Stowell was stirred in his heart as those attending the service sang the hymn "*A Mighty Fortress Is Our God.*" He was beginning to wonder whether this tragedy was just the thing that

God would use to turn this Country back to Him and it issue in revival. But then a friend leaned over to him and said, “Did you notice they omitted verse 2 from the hymn?” Here is verse 2, “Did we in our own strength confide, Our striving would be losing, were not the right Man on our side, The Man of God’s own choosing. Dost ask who that may be? Christ Jesus, it is He. Lord Saboath, His name, from age to age the same, And he must win the battle.”<sup>3</sup> Stowell rightly concluded that perhaps God is back, but Jesus is not.

This morning I proclaim to Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior. He is fully God and fully man. Through Him, all things came into being. Out of love for us, He took on human flesh, lived the perfect life as our representative and died on the cross to bear our sin and judgment of God. Through His resurrection, He has demonstrated that He has defeated our worst enemies, sin and death. Therefore, He promises that if we repent of our sin, put our trust in Jesus and submit to Him as the good and rightful ruler of our lives, we will be forgiven and we will possess eternal life. There is no other name under heaven whereby a man can be saved. He is mighty to save!

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<sup>1</sup>John R. W. Stott *Basic Christianity* (Downers Grove: IVP, 1971) 21

<sup>2</sup>Gary Burge, *The Letters of John: The NIV Application Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996) 242

<sup>3</sup>Joseph M. Stowell *The Trouble with Jesus* (Chicago: Moody Press, 2003) 33