

John 1:1-18: Prologue

Good morning everyone! Happy New Year. Please turn with me in your bibles to John chapter 20. We'll be in verses 30-31 this morning.

Being the first sermon of the New Year, it's going to be a little different this morning. I'm going to spend a little time giving an update about our church, and then we're going to do a quick introduction to the book of John. So let me pray and then we'll get started.

Father, we continue to stand in awe at your faithfulness. You are such a good Father. We thank you for the reminder at Christmas that you love us very much. So much so that you sent us your Son to be our example and to die in our place. What further evidence do we need? Lord I confess that I sometimes question your love for me based on my circumstances or my feelings. Forgive me for that, Father. We thank you for giving us your Son, the greatest demonstration of love for sinful humanity that could ever happen. As people who have been saved by your Son, may our lives be a beacon of light into a dark world, announcing the good news that our King has come and will come again. Help us as we study the gospel of John. Make it come alive to us. As we study the life of Jesus, make us like him more and more. We need your help, we can't do it without you. We love you. In Jesus' name, amen.

Psalm 71:15 says, **My mouth will tell of your righteous deeds, of your saving acts all day long-- though I know not how to relate them all.**

And I want to do that right now. So **First of all**, some really good news. The Vision 20/20 campaign is our capital campaign to pay down our debt in the year 2020. I wanted to let you know that as your pledges came in in December, we were able to put an additional \$46k down onto our mortgage, which now stands at right around \$230k, which is just amazing.

But wait, there's more! Through your year end giving on top of the capital campaign, our general fund is essentially right back where it was a year ago, which is a huge, huge blessing.

So we're still going to be especially careful with spending this year, but budget wise we are in a really good place, and some of the more drastic measures we were needing to consider are off the table, which is awesome.

Our God is the same God in a budget surplus as he is in a budget shortage. Our desperation for God to provide for us has nothing to do with what's in our bank account. But we are so thankful to him for providing for our church in this way, and we want to give him all the praise and glory for that. And thank you to so many of you who have continued to give sacrificially, or maybe even started the practice of tithing. I don't know who you are—thankfully the pastors are completely in the dark regarding who is giving what—but the Lord knows and he will reward you for your faithfulness.

Secondly, I want to let you know about something we're going to start doing next week.

My main job as your pastor is given to me in 1 Peter 5:2: “shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly.”

And my goal is given to me in Colossians 1:28 **Him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature in Christ.**

So what's the job of a Pastor? Shepherd the flock, in order to present everyone mature in Christ.

What does it mean to be mature in Christ? At Rock Prairie, we say it like this, we want every member to know Christ Truly, Deeply, and make him known Widely.

Truly Deeply Widely.

All that to say, as I'm in my 10th month as Pastor, I want to let you know about 3 issues that we need to fix so that we can better shepherd you according to 1 Peter 5 and Colossians 1.

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As I try my best to shepherd you well as the Lord calls me to, and even as I find myself falling short in many ways, there are three issues we need to solve. Three problems with one solution.

The first problem is that we don't have a good church management system to keep track of the sorts of things we need to keep track of. The way we've been keeping track of everything like your addresses and phone numbers and birthdays, as well as things like who's serving where and who's involved in what small group, excuse me, life group, has been mostly by hand.

For example, Whenever I've needed to find one of your emails or phone numbers, if Lisa hasn't had it in her phone she's needed to go digging through old files to try to find a paper form that you may or may not have filled out 8 years ago. So we need to have a better way to keep track of people's information and involvement.

The second problem we've been having is a pretty common one, which is that it's hard to keep track of if people are coming to church. Part of the way we need to shepherd you is to make sure that you, like it says in Hebrews 10, don't neglect meeting together. We need to know if you're in church.

Now, that doesn't mean I'm going to send Jerry to knock on your door on Monday if you're not there on Sunday. There are times when kids are sick, or you're on vacation, or whatever. The problem is that our only system right now is to ask each other, "Hey have you seen so and so at church recently?" And that works somewhat, but people fall through the cracks. And our job isn't to shepherd some of the flock, but all of the flock that's among us.

So we need to be able to keep track of if people are coming to church in order to better shepherd you.

Third, we want to know how to better pray for you. Right now, we get two or three prayer requests a week in that little box. As your Pastors we want to know how we can be praying for you, and spend time praying for you by name each week.

So Keeping track of information, keeping track of attendance, and keeping track of prayer requests, three problems, one solution. Here it is. They're called connection cards.

Each week you'll find one of these books at the end of each row. Here's how it will work. For the first week, every single person will fill out the top information with name and address etc. That will be the last time you need to give us that information unless it changes. We have a couple volunteers who will enter that information into our new church management software called Breeze.

And then every week after that, all we need you to fill out is your name at the top-fill out one per family-and prayer requests at the bottom. Each week the pastors will get together and pray through each of these. We'll pray for you whether you write out a prayer request or not, but it will really help us if you jot down a praise or a prayer request.

Then you tear off the sheet, place it face down in the book, and pass it down the row.

After a while, this will just be in the normal routine of coming to church. Every week, write your names at the top, and prayer requests at the bottom.

This will really help us as pastors as we try to be faithful shepherds of the flock the Lord has entrusted to us. So starting next week, we're going to build this into the habit of our worship services. It might feel weird at first, like all habits, but after a while it will be our normal rhythm.

Sound good? Alright, that's all I have for our church update. Now let's look at the book of John.

But this week, to introduce John, we're strangely starting in chapter 20. We'll see why in a minute. But let's read John 20, verses 30 and 31:

³⁰ Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; ³¹ but these are written so that you

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may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

Let's pray again.

God, thank you for your awesome provision for our church. We know that what you give us financially pales in comparison to what you give us Spiritually. But we praise you for the resources you give us to spread the good news of Jesus Christ to our neighbors and the nations. Help me and the other pastors of our church continue to be faithful shepherds of the flock. Help us as we look to your Word to see what it means to believe that Jesus is Christ, and to have life in his name. Amen.

When I was in seminary I went to church with a couple other seminary students, and every once in a while we would get together on Saturday mornings with our pastor, and we would give a 15 or 20 minute practice sermon and he would critique it.

Looking back, this is probably the number one thing that helped me learn how to preach, and I'm really thankful for it. However, at the time, it was brutal because he would hold nothing back. He wasn't interested in making us feel good about being mediocre preachers, he was interested in helping us become better preachers.

One of the things he would ask at the end that would kill me every time was, "What was your sermon about?" If I couldn't answer that question in 4 or 5 words, I knew I had preached a dud.

It's something that Kent Hughes in his book "Christ Centered Preaching" calls 'The 3 AM test.' Basically it means that you should be able to wake me up at 3 am the night before I preach and ask "What's your sermon about" and I should be able to give you a short answer and fall back asleep.

Now, please don't do that. You do not have my permission to wake me up before my sermon and do that. But the point still stands that if it's not clear to the preacher what he's trying to communicate, there's no way it will be clear to the congregation.

One thing I like about the book of John is that it passes the 3 am test. John is explicitly clear why he wrote the book, he comes right out and says it.

John chapter 20, verses 30 and 31 say:

30 Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; 31 but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

These things are written that you may believe, and that you may have life in his name. Belief, and life.

That's what I want for us. That's what I want for each member of Rock Prairie church.

As we study John, I want us to believe that Jesus is the Christ, and I want us to have life in his name. We're going to look at each of those things this morning.

Belief

First, Belief. What does John mean by believe? The book of John is first of all an evangelistic book. John was a preacher, and some commentators think that the book of John is actually a collection of his sermons all arranged to tell of the life of Jesus.

The audience for his sermons would have been primarily Jewish, specifically Jews who had not yet become Christians. And John says he writes so that they would believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. But actually, a better way to render that sentence is, "That you would know that the Christ, the Son of God, is Jesus."

Meaning, he wasn't trying to answer the question, "Who is Jesus?" But "Who is the Messiah."

We talked about this in our Christmas series. The Old Testament tells about a Messiah who would come. And the nation of Israel waited for centuries for that Messiah to arrive.

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They wondered, who would be the one who would crush the head of the Serpent, like it says in Genesis 3. Who is the one who would be the king who would reign forever like it says in 2 Samuel 7. Who would be the one who would be perfectly righteous, yet killed for our sins like it says in Isaiah 53. Who would be the one who would be served by all peoples, nations and languages like it says in Daniel 7? Whose dominion would be an everlasting dominion. Whose kingdom would not be destroyed?

Who was this man? Jesus. The Messiah.

But he's not only the Messiah. John says he's the Son of God. Only someone who was fully and completely God could be the perfect sacrifice for our sin, and for the sin of the world. And only someone who was fully man could be our example of how to live.

He wrote these things so that the Jews at the time would know that Jesus was the Messiah they had been waiting for.

For us, while we're not Jewish, we too need to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God. Because in believing there is life.

And even in the mystery of it, even in the fact that the depths of this truth are so far beyond what we can even begin to comprehend, we as Christians are people who say, "We believe this reality, we believe that Jesus physically came into the world, and literally died and literally rose again, so that we can have life in his name."

We need to believe that Jesus is the Messiah. By grace, we have been saved through *faith*.

And yet true faith is more than just agreeing to facts, isn't it? The devil believes that Jesus rose from the dead, but that doesn't save him. It's not enough to say, "I believe that happened."

The true Christian says, "I believe that actually happened, *and* I believe it's implication in my life. I believe that Jesus died and rose again, *and* I believe my only hope for salvation is to throw myself on the mercy of God. To trust in him completely, to long for intimacy and relationship with him. To recognize my utter desperation without him.

Belief in facts isn't enough. It's necessary, but it's not enough. True faith means we believe the facts and we believe what it means for us.

My goal for you in this series is this: If you don't believe that, I want you to believe that. And if you do believe that, I want you to continue to believe that. I want your belief to be strengthened.

If you don't believe that Jesus is the Son of God, I want you to understand just how hopeless you are apart from your Savior. Just how hopeless all of us are apart from our Savior.

And if you do believe, Praise God, and I want your belief to be strengthened.

Because as Christians, we're not immune from going down the path of making one tiny, wrong decision after another. One small sin here, one tiny slip up there, one subtle doubt in something God says here, one subtle rejection of his Lordship over there. All while keeping on a happy face and hiding what's actually going on in your heart.

When we do that, we give the enemy a foothold, and doubt starts to creep in. And time and time again we see examples of people rejecting their faith and walking away from the Lord not because of some grand new enlightenment, but simply because of one tiny wrong decision after another.

No person is immune to that. If you don't believe, my prayer is that you will believe. And if you do believe, my prayer is that your and my belief will be strengthened.

John wrote this gospel so that you might believe. But not only that, he wrote it so that you might have life in his name.

Life

What does he mean by life here? Well, first of all, he's talking about eternal life.

The glorious fact is that we don't need to fear death, because our Savior has secured eternal life for us. Death is not the end, because our Savior has promised that we will be resurrected and spend

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eternity with Him. Apart from the fall, apart from sin, apart from suffering, apart from sickness, in our new bodies that won't get sick and break down like the ones we have now do.

If you believe in Jesus with the kind of faith that we just talked about, you will have eternal life.

This isn't just a cold transaction. It's not like going to get Pizza Hut after church. You walk in, you hand them your credit card, they swipe it and hand you a pizza.

Some of you are trying to get by with faith like that. Here Jesus, here's my belief card, now I'm going to take my eternal life and walk out the door.

We don't just have life *because* of his name. We have life *in his name*.

Jesus says in John 15, "I am the vine, you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.

Life in Christ is life, *in Christ*. There is no life apart from Christ. Jesus isn't interested in just making a faith transaction, he wants your life.

Your new life doesn't start when you die. It starts when you believe. It's like getting a new family.

Imagine right now if you were plucked from your current family and dropped into a new family. How much would change in your life?

Now for you, that might be a good thing or that might be a terrible thing.

But in Christ, you have gone from a terrible family to a perfect one. Colossians 1:13 "He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son."

You're not walking in darkness anymore. You're in His kingdom now.

So what needs to change? What do you need to do differently because you're in God's family now? Not "what do you need to do

differently to *earn* your way into God's family," but what do you need to do *because* you're in God's family?

Let's say you grew up in an orphanage and then you got adopted by a super wealthy family. When my family was on vacation in Florida we went by a house that had like an 8 story yacht docked, and it said "Top Dog" right on the side. We looked it up and it was a 40 million dollar yacht.

So like imagine you got adopted by that family. You know that eventually you're going to have a ridiculous inheritance waiting for you.

Imagine that you're adopted by this family, and you decide to go back to the orphanage and wait for your inheritance check. That would be crazy right?

Your new life doesn't start when your inheritance comes, your new life starts when you're adopted!

That said, some things are going to have to change once you move into your new house. You're not going to live like you're still in the orphanage. It might take a little bit, but eventually you're going to have to learn the rules of your new house.

And as you do that more and more, you won't become any more of a *son*, because you're already adopted. But your life is going to change drastically. After a while you wouldn't even be recognizable. Your new life changes you.

Christian, don't treat the Christian life like you're just sitting around waiting for your inheritance to come. Your new life starts *now*!

So here at the beginning of John, and at the beginning of a new year and a new decade, ask yourself this morning. What needs to change? How do I need to grow? What do I need to do to live less like my old life and more like my new life, adopted into Christ's precious family.

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My prayer is that together, as brothers and sisters in this new family, we will grow more and more into the image of our Savior, the one who brought us into this family, Jesus Christ.

Jesus came, that by believing you may have life in his name.

If you're not a Christian, you need to believe. And I pray that our time in John awakens that belief in you.

And if you are a Christian, I'm praying that this time strengthens your faith. That it reminds you of the greatness of your Savior. And that it renews your joy that you have now that you have life in Christ. Now, and forevermore.

Let's pray.