

Easter 2 / April 7, 2024

John 20:31

“But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name.”

Written that you may believe in Jesus and have life in His Name

What kind of books do you like to read? People have different tastes in reading. Books come in many different genres. Some people like romances, historical fictions or science fiction. There are books on gardening, self-care and quantum physics. You name it and there are probably books written about it. The author of Ecclesiastes observed, “Of the making of many books there is no end.” If he said that 2600 years ago, when people were writing on clay tablets, what would he say today with the advent of the printing press, the internet and hypertext? Despite advancements in technology, the word, written as a physical document in books, remains the most widely used form of communication. Hundreds of years from now when emails, texts and electronic documents have disappeared or otherwise become inaccessible, the word written in books will remain,

Books are written for many reasons, to impart knowledge, to entertain and stimulate our imagination. People write autobiographies to ensure they are remembered and are remembered as they want to be remembered. History books preserve the memory of people and events that are important to individuals, families and nations. Books are written for the preservation and advancement of knowledge. People write books about noteworthy people to raise them up or tear them down and as a vehicle to voice their own point of view. John says the purpose for which he wrote his book was so that people would know that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, believe in Him and have life in His name. No book contains more important information than the bible. It has the words of eternal life. In the bible we learn about Jesus our Saviour, that believing, we may have life in His Name.

More books have been written about Jesus than about any other person. Sermon collections, theological works and personal devotions. One of the most influential Christian devotional books of the medieval period and still widely read today, was Thomas a Kempis’ “The Imitation of Christ.” It was essential reading for Christians seeking to pattern their lives after the behaviour of Christ, for the purpose of becoming more Christ like. In the 19th and 20th centuries, scholarly books were written in search of the Jesus of history, as opposed to the Jesus of faith. There is only so much we can know about the Jesus of history. The most important sources for information on His life, the gospels, say very little about His life in and of itself. Two gospels don’t even mention His birth. Only one gospel gives details about the time and place He was born. There is only one recorded incident of His later childhood. The gospels weren’t written for the purpose for which modern biographies and histories are written, to give information about the places and events in a person’s life. The gospels were written so we would learn about how God fulfilled His purpose of human salvation through Jesus. They were written so we would believe Jesus is the Christ, our God and Saviour and have life in His name.

John must have sensed Jesus would inspire the writing of many books. At the very end of his gospel he said, “Now there are also many other things that Jesus did. Were every one of them to be written, I suppose that the whole world itself could not contain the books that would be written.” Libraries have been written about Jesus. More could have been written from the start. John didn’t try to write an exhaustive account of Jesus’ life. He wrote about the significance of Jesus’ life for human salvation. He wrote so we would believe Jesus is the Christ and have life in His name. He told the story of Jesus’ life in terms of seven signs, by which Jesus showed Himself the God and Saviour of all people, especially of those who believe. Jesus did more than seven miraculous signs. John chose seven to highlight His divinity and the divine purpose for which He came into the world, our salvation. Jesus did many things not written in John’s book, but He wrote these things so we would believe Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, our Saviour and have life in Him.

This is important to remember for all the gospels. None of the gospels were written in terms of our assumptions about biographies or histories. Ancient authors, Christian or secular, didn’t write according to our modern presuppositions, such as a linear, chronological history with a definitive perspective of the order of events. The evangelists wrote to make a theological point about our need for salvation and God’s gift of salvation through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. The evangelists wrote to make a theological point about Jesus; that He is the Son of God, the Saviour of the world, especially of those who believe. This is true of John in particular. John doesn’t order his account of Jesus’ life the same as the other three gospels. Rather than a linear history of Jesus’ travels, John employs a more episodic pattern. He begins with the cleansing of the temple, which the other gospels

place at the end of Jesus' ministry. Although what he writes really happened, he is not writing a history. He is writing to show that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, coming into the world. He is writing so we would believe in Jesus, so He may come into our hearts as our God and Saviour. He is not writing a biography. Although he is recounting real life events in the life of Jesus. He is not writing a life of Christ. He is writing so we would have life in Christ. He is writing about Christ, so we would believe in Him as our God and Saviour and have life in His name.

John wrote about the life of Jesus the Christ, so we would see Him as the way and the truth and the life and know that no one comes to the Father except through Him. He wrote so that through faith in Him, we would come to the Father in peace. He wrote, so that through Jesus' words and wonders, we would see Him as the Christ and believe in Him as our God and Saviour. He wrote these things, so that believing in Him as our God and Saviour, we would have life. And not just life in time, but eternal life in His Father's presence. John wrote, because it is through the word, written and spoken, that Christ comes to us and shows Himself as our God and Saviour. St. Paul said, "Faith comes by hearing and hearing through the word of Christ." We see Him first with eyes of faith, enlightened by the Holy Spirit through the hearing and reading of the word. These are written so we would believe in Jesus as the Christ and have life in His name.

Jesus chastised Thomas, not simply because he didn't believe. He chastised him, because he would only believe when he had touched and seen. He chastised all of the disciples because they didn't believe His own words or the words of the prophets who said He would suffer, die and rise, or the words of the women, who said they had seen Him alive. He chastised Thomas in particular because He demanded visual, tactile proof before he would believe Jesus was risen from the dead. When he saw, Jesus asked, "Have you believed because you have seen me? We see Jesus truly not with eyes of the flesh, but with eyes of faith. We see Jesus first and foremost through the words and witness of the holy scriptures. Jesus said to Thomas, "Blessed are those who have not seen and have believed." John wrote his gospel so we would see with eyes faith and believe Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. It is through faith that we see Him and through faith that we have life in His name.

God wants us to believe. Abraham believed God. When Abraham believed, he saw God could be trusted in all His promises. When it comes to God, believing is seeing. When we believe the words of scripture, the Holy Spirit opens our eyes to see Jesus in every part of our lives. When we believe God's holy book, the Holy Spirit opens our hearts to receive Jesus and the gifts He gives in the water of baptism and the bread and wine of Holy Communion. When we believe, the Holy Spirit opens our eyes to see Jesus in our worship and fellowship with other believers. Of the making of books there is no end. Books are written for many reasons. The bible is written to make us wise unto eternal life through faith in Jesus our Saviour. There is no greater wisdom. All who believe have life in His name. God bless us with His Spirit in the word and sacraments that we may believe in Jesus, have life in His name and see Him in His resurrection on the last day. In Jesus' Name. Amen