

Sunday 10<sup>th</sup> October 2010

I John 4.

## Believers in Assurance

Good morning and welcome!

### Introduction

This morning, I want to suggest that as a culture, we live in the great age of anxiety.

For my mother and her generation, perhaps the assassination of President John F Kennedy is the defining event. She told me that she heard the news on her car radio. She and most of the people on the road pulled over to the edge and just sat in their cars, simply in an effort to absorb the shock. President Kennedy represented a dawning of a new age of hope and with his death, it seemed that that hope had died also.

More recently, the events of September 11, 2001 – those images of planes crashing into the Twin Towers in New York – thousands of lives extinguished in a second. I will never forget feeling oddly compelled to turn on the television, even though I had no news of the attack. It took me months to accommodate the shock that I felt.

Added to these kind of events (and there are many) our culture has to deal with the postmodern idea that we cannot be certain about anything. Our culture tells us that we are alone in the world – without God, without meaning, without purpose. The effect on our culture of these events and of this thinking is devastating. It leaves us thinking that our safety and our security is all up to us. And since we cannot control what happens to us, we are faced with the impossible – we must guarantee our own safety in a world where nothing is guaranteed. And that makes our culture very, very anxious.

AND I'm wondering whether this cultural anxiety has spilled over into our Christian culture? If I may make a personal observation, it seems to me that anxiety colours the way in which we teach and interpret our Bibles. How often it seems to be that our growth as Christians is all up to us. Books of the Bible written

for our comfort are read in such a way that they only seem to burden us with extra rules and regulations. We become trapped between all the competing arguments about the best way in which to live the Christian life.

AND it is at this point that I welcome you to the world of 1 John Chapter 4. Here is a church in the grips of anxiety. Powerful voices had spoken out in the church. Jesus was not God, they said, Surely God would not become a man? How could God be in sinful flesh and blood. A church trapped between competing ideas about God. Who to listen to? How can I know? What to believe???

How does John answer these questions? John answers doubt not with words so much as a reminder of the flesh and blood realities of history. With the material presence of the every day – with time and place and person. God himself chose to become like us so that we might know him. Jesus Christ, the Son of God. Flesh and blood.

So let us investigate each of these questions in turn, remembering that these verses were written to comfort us – to relieve our anxieties, not to increase them.

### **Who to listen to – verses 1 – 6**

John is asking his readers to make a choice – between those who say that Jesus was not both God and man and John himself, who says that Jesus Christ has come as a man.

#### **Verses 1-3**

<sup>1</sup>Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world. <sup>2</sup>**This is how you can recognize the Spirit of God: Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God,** <sup>3</sup>**but every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God.** This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you have heard is coming and even now is already in the world.

John's teaching is set out in verse 2. The false prophet's teaching is v3. John's is the spirit of Christ. The false prophet's is the spirit of the anti-Christ. ***Notice how there is no middle ground!!!***

But why should we listen to John instead of the others? What if he's the false prophet and they speak the truth. **Who do we listen to?**

Well John's answer is a bit like this...If you wanted to know about Colombo in Sri Lanka or about Singapore say, would you listen to someone who has lived there most of their life, or someone who hasn't? If you wanted to know what a famous person was like, would you ask their friends and relatives, or would you read a paragraph in a gossip magazine?

He sums it up in verse 6

<sup>6</sup>We are from God, and whoever knows God listens to us; but whoever is not from God does not listen to us. This is how we recognize the Spirit<sup>[a]</sup> of truth and the spirit of falsehood.

John says, you listen to me because I was there. I was with Jesus. I saw him heal, I saw him raise Lazarus from the dead, I watched him die, I saw the empty tomb, I saw him after he had risen from the dead not just once, but several times. I know that Jesus is the Christ!!!

This is how he opens his letter:-

<sup>1</sup>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—this we proclaim concerning the Word of life. <sup>2</sup>The life appeared; we have seen it and testify to it, and we proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and has appeared to us. <sup>3</sup>We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us.

John answers the lies and the falsehoods of the false prophets with the flesh and blood reality of Jesus. And this is what we preach here at All Saints – what the apostles taught, not because they had some special wisdom, but because they were witnesses.

## **How can we know? Verses 13-16**

This is John's answer to the question of how we can know. Because God gives us his spirit. Lets look at verses 13-16

**<sup>13</sup>We know that we live in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit.** <sup>14</sup>And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world. <sup>15</sup>If anyone acknowledges that Jesus is the Son of God, God lives in him and he in God. <sup>16</sup>And so we know and rely on the love God has for us.

In the end, it is not what we know, it is who we know. Ours is not a tick-a-box religion of rules and compliance with rules. It is a day to day living experience of God's spirit within us, confirming in us the truth about Jesus. It is primarily God at work within us. What a relief!!

## **What to believe.**

John asks us to believe that Jesus is the Son Of God. For John, it is quite simple:-

V15 – 16

<sup>15</sup>If anyone acknowledges that Jesus is the Son of God, God lives in him and he in God. <sup>16</sup>And so we know and rely on the love God has for us.

Once we acknowledge Jesus, once we invite him into our lives, then He comes into our life and lives in us and we live in Him. And we are able to rely on this love. Have you seen or do you remember those life-size cardboard cut-outs of famous people, outside of camera stores? John is saying that's the difference. Not a different philosophy about Jesus – that would be like offering you a cardboard cut-out. Jesus himself takes up residence – lives – in our hearts. That's the real person, not a cardboard cut-out.

And John promises that God will work his love for us out in our lives. Let's look at verses 16b – 18

God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in him. <sup>17</sup>In this way, love is made complete among us so that we will have confidence on the day of judgment, because in this world we are like him. <sup>18</sup>There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love.

It is God that is love and it is Him that makes his love complete in us. And it is His perfect love that drives out our fear. Not immediately, but over time and as we learn that we are not subject to punishment but that our sins have been forgiven.

AND note how it is not up to us. We are to respond to his love. Let's look at v19

<sup>19</sup>We love because he first loved us.

He loved us first!!

### Conclusion.

Do you take comfort from your Bible? Is it a relief to know that if you put your trust in Jesus, God places his Spirit in you in order to teach you that first of all he loves you as you are. That he will teach you how to love others? To love them like he does? Can I let you know that it is O.K. even desirable to go to your Bibles for comfort? To rest and rejoice in what God has done and will do in the lives of those who believe.