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Buried in the mainstream news (BBC) this past week, is one about a Baptist church in central Cardiff (Tredegarville Baptist Church) where 95% of the congregation are immigrants. In the past two years, 300 people, many from Iran, have been baptised in this church by Pastor Phylip Rees, who is in no doubt, the faith commitment of those who attend the church, is both visible and genuine, even among those who are waiting over 8 years with no hope in sight.

Reading this set me thinking, what is it with people, who in their homeland, had a life-changing encounter with Jesus the Christ, then to flee their families and their home because they are unable to engage with, unable to grow in their new found faith, and as soon as they are in a safe place, want to be baptised! This is happening across Europe as it is here in Britain. Despite the insecurity of being sent back to their home country at any time, these men and women, want desperately to be identified with Jesus the Christ through Baptism, because they have personally experienced Him, His love, His power and His protection during their troubled journey.

In the first century after Jesus' resurrection, those who came into the faith that Jesus the Christ is the Son of God, were either Jews who realised that their own Scriptures had been fulfilled in the person of Jesus, or gentiles, who were not Jews, nor were they pagan (idol worshippers), but those who thought Greek philosophy provided a decent framework for life.¹

Jews were persecuted by their own people, for abandoning the time-honoured tradition of their fathers², and both Jews and gentiles were

¹ In Galatians 3:28, some translations refer to Paul saying, "There is neither Jew nor Greek", other translations refer to him saying, "There is neither Jew nor Gentile"

² see the film "Fiddler on the Roof" and listen to Tevya sing "Tradition". Read also the interaction Jesus had with the Pharisees and the teachers of the law where he challenges their "traditions"

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persecuted by the Romans for embracing a religion which the Romans wanted to stamp out, because it presented the population with conflicting allegiances, as the Emperor was considered god, and there could be no other God beside him. People's identity was challenged and they were left confused.

The disciple John is writing to people who left before, or fled shortly after Jerusalem was destroyed and ransacked by the Romans in AD 70.

Like modern day refugees and asylum seekers who want an identity, and find baptism as a powerful identity of their faith, John is writing to this diaspora, consisting mostly of house churches, who are struggling with identity: ***who are we who call ourselves Christians? who are we the followers of Christ? What do we believe, and in Whom do we believe?***

It is a fact that, only when we are clear ***what*** we believe and in ***whom*** we believe, should we embrace the teaching and place our faith in that person.

If we are not clear, nor sure of what we believe, we will end up placing our faith in the wrong person, and will have only ourselves to blame for it.

John's starting point is his own deep-rooted and assured identity as a follower of Christ, which is based on his first-hand experience of having ***heard, seen with our own eyes, touched with our own hands... that which was from the beginning.***

Would you trust the testimony of an eyewitness?

Our courts place considerable weight on the testimony of an eyewitness, ***only after*** it has been determined that the testimony of the eyewitness can be established as valid, that the person was where they claimed to be, and saw/heard what they claim to have seen and heard.

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John delightfully repeats, with whatever excitement he can muster, ***not only have we heard and seen, gazed upon and touched with our own hands, the life of God in the person of His Son, our experience of three intense years living every minute with Him was so real, we have to share the Truth of our experience with you, so that you too might enjoy what we enjoy, and together, we will participate in God's joy, by which we are made complete.***

John starts by declaring what Jesus taught: ***God is light! In Him there is no darkness.***³ This is a fundamental truth on which we can build our identity:

Walking with God, in His light, His Word becomes clear to us. We can safely place our faith in Him, because in Him nothing is hidden; everything becomes clear.

The Psalmist explains this Truth in two ways. He first says, ***Your Word is a lamp for my feet, a light on my path***⁴, and then he says, ***Your Words are a doorway that lets light in, to help even the simple-minded understand your ways***⁵. God is light; In His presence, His light illuminates His Word which gives us wisdom to live today, His light shows us our next step, and His light gives us confidence in the direction in which we should move forward.

At the start of his letter, having declared his witness statement, John tells us why he is writing this letter, ***My little children, I am writing things to you so that you may not sin***⁶. Without the presence of God, there is no

³ 1 John 1:5

⁴ Psalm 119:105

⁵ Psalm 119:130

⁶ 1 John 2:1

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light; where there is no light to illuminate His Word, we will stumble and fall, and end up going down the wrong path. This is sin, when in the absence of God, we end up believing the wrong things and following the wrong person.

John wants us to know that we can live a life pleasing to God. **Whoever walks in God's light and as a result lives by His word, in that person truly, the love of God is made perfect.**⁷

There is nothing new in what I am saying, emphasises John. You have heard this in the past, but what I am writing to you, is new. As more and more people live in the light of God's presence, **darkness is passing away and the true light is shining through!**⁸

John has rehearsed this message ever since the resurrection of Christ. He has spoken it, taught it, lived and written about it: **In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God ... in Him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness and the darkness has not overcome it.** These are the opening words of his Gospel!

John has been living and walking in this True Light, and shares it with us. As we unpack this first section of his letter we discover something very special. John reveals to us why Jesus came.

When John says, **in the beginning**, he is referring to the beginning of time, which is when God created this earth. God existed before He created time, which is why we refer to Him as **eternal**.

⁷ 1 John 2:5

⁸ 1 John 2:8

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We do not know God before He created time, and we still do not know God because sin filters our view of Him.

John explains it this way. ***The life we have seen, heard, touched and lived with, was with the Father, eternal and before the beginning. This life was made known to us, THAT we may get to know the Father.***⁹

We did not know the Father before the beginning; He sends His Son to us, that through the Son, we may get to know the Father. Why? Because God is going to claim this world back to Himself, and all those who know Him, will recognise Him because they know His Son, and their joy would be complete ***because*** their faith would not have been in vain!

As an honest witness whose testimony can be verified, John wants to tell everyone listening on the jury benches, waiting for the Truth to be revealed, about ***this life*** which ***was with the Father and was made known to us.***

Would you trust the testimony of an eyewitness?

This eyewitness can be trusted, because he has lived with The Light, and in The Light. His witness statement is based on first-hand experience. His desire is that we are not left out of the promise of God, and we do not miss out on the joy that could be ours through a relationship with the One who came to reveal the Father to us, that we might recognise Him when He comes to restore us and this world into His home in eternity.

He invites us to walk in His light, that we may not stumble, fall or be misdirected.

Will you accept this invitation?

AMEN

⁹ | John 1:1-3