

Pastor Jonna Bohigian
It's All About Jesus
1 John 5:9 – 15

Dear friends in Christ, grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

On maternity leave, I called a pastor friend for help with discernment. He has this comforting presence, *years* of living in the trenches of the pastoral life, and is *completely* unassuming. And the wise person that he is, he humbly told me that he wasn't sure how much help he would be. But he would try.

I shared with him that I was discerning this new season in my life. I was a new mom and my husband had recently become a campus pastor with Menlo Church. Was there something specific that God had in mind for me at St. Timothy's?

He gave me some questions to consider, and then he said something that stopped me in my tracks. "It's all about Jesus," he said. His statement was so fundamental that it almost seemed comical. *It's all about Jesus*. In my quest for a specific answer to my question, his statement felt jolting and important, reorienting. It's *not* about me. It's about *Jesus*.

It's such a simple statement, and yet so hard. If we are honest with ourselves, our egos, agendas, fears, and desires so quickly crowd in and take center stage. It's natural, actually. Our natural disposition is to be focused on ourselves, to be self-centered and desire to be sufficient in ourselves.

The author of 1 John wrote to a church (or perhaps churches), who had lost people due to false belief. It's unclear what the false belief was, but it centered around the Person of Jesus. *Was Jesus really human, or did he only seem to be human? Did Jesus' divinity leave him before*

he died, so that he died as a human only – and not as God? Whatever their belief, they seemed to conclude that they no longer needed Jesus. They were no longer sinners and didn't need to receive the forgiveness of God. It therefore didn't *matter* how they lived their lives.¹

The Christians left behind needed encouragement. They were likely tempted to also leave, to believe that they were no longer sinners and didn't need Jesus. Who *wouldn't* be attracted to a gospel of self-sufficiency? But self-sufficiency was *not* the truth; it was *not* the gospel. So John wrote to the church to encourage them in Jesus. He *didn't* encourage them that they were somehow better or smarter people, but reminded them that they had eternal life in Jesus. They had eternal life, because they believed the testimony of God, that Jesus is God's Son.

Perhaps it's surprising how blunt this letter is – it's all about Jesus. It's not about John or some complicated theology or perspective. It's not about "being nice" or smart. It's about Jesus, the Son of God, whom God revealed through his baptism, death, and the Holy Spirit. At his baptism, the Spirit descended into Jesus and the voice of God spoke: "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased."² Jesus was revealed as God's Son at the end of his life. He obediently died to forgive the sin of the world. His death was no illusion; water and blood poured out of his side. He had died, fully human and fully God. Three days later, God raised His Son from the dead, and Jesus showed himself to many people. When Jesus ascended into heaven, the Holy Spirit came, and has continued to give testimony to the truth of Jesus.

¹ Marianne Meye Thompson, *1 – 3 John*, 15.

² Matthew 3:17

All who believe in Jesus have eternal life. This is a life that goes beyond our imaginations – it has no end. But it is not simply a life that never ends; it is a qualitatively *different* life. It is the kind of life of which Jesus described in John 3:16: “For God so loved the world, that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in him should not *perish* but have *eternal* life.” It is the reason Peter remained with Jesus as his disciple when many walked away in John 6: “Lord, to whom shall we go? *You* have the words of *eternal* life.”³ *Eternal* life, *true* life, is found in Jesus.

It’s so simple and unambiguous, that it’s tempting to make it difficult. It’s tempting to say that there *has* to be more, that the truth of life is really more complicated than that. But when we’re honest with ourselves, we recognize that anything more – and anything less – is *not* the truth. *Eternal* life, *true* life, is found in Jesus. It’s *all* about Jesus.

Karl Barth was a Swiss pastor and prolific theologian, known especially for his commentary on the book of Romans. His influence was, and is, so consequential, that he has been referred to as the “most important theologian of the twentieth century.” In his one visit to the U.S. in 1962, he was asked to “summarize the essence of the millions of words he had published.” “He replied, ‘Jesus loves me this I know, for the Bible tells me so.’”⁴ Nothing more. Nothing less. It’s about the love of Jesus. *It’s all about Jesus.*

So what does that mean? What does it look like? Well, we quickly know what it *doesn’t* look like. It *doesn’t* look like self-focus, the church amassing for itself – making money, concerned with having the most members, protecting like-minded people, or being flashy. It

³ John 6:68

⁴ <https://www.christianitytoday.com/history/people/theologians/karl-barth.html>

doesn't look like the church's leaders building their egos and living safe lives. It *doesn't* look like our natural selves.

A criticism of Christians is that we make Jesus to be like us. In other words, we make Jesus in *our* image. He has our personality, our likes and dislikes, and he even *looks* like us.

(picture) We recognize that this criticism is valid when we look at Scripture, and feel a tension within us.

Being all about Jesus means that we receive Jesus *as he has been revealed*. You and I don't set the agenda or determine who Jesus is; we look *outside* of ourselves. We look to the primary source of revelation, and ask that God inform and shape us. We look to *Scripture*.

Scripture reveals that being about Jesus means being *disciples*, following not a set of rules, but the *Person* of Jesus. And it's unquestionably *not* the easy path. It means being *honest and attentive in prayer*. As Jesus *desperately* prayed that he might not have to suffer and die, he got up, knowing that his Father was calling him to do just that. It means *obedience to the call of God*. It means being *uncomfortable*. Jesus called his disciples to leave everything they had known to follow him. Jesus was often found with the outcasts and "sinners" of society. He ate meals with them, loved them, and called them to repentance. It means *repentance*, turning from the trajectory we would prefer, and following Jesus. It means *humility and sacrifice*, recognizing our sinfulness and placing others above ourselves. And finally, it means *death*. You and I *cannot* follow Jesus unless we die to ourselves. We *cannot* follow Jesus if in truth, we are following our own desires. As Jesus said, "Whoever does not carry their cross and follow me cannot be my disciple."⁵

⁵ Luke 14:27

As we look to the example of the disciples in Scripture, we recognize that this calling is a *lifelong* journey. The disciples *constantly* got it wrong. They constantly *said* the wrong thing, *thought* the wrong thing, *did* the wrong thing. And yet the calling remained, to carry their cross and follow Jesus.

It is not a safe or predictable calling. It is unsettling and risky. But it is good. And it is the way to eternal life. It is like Jesus, mirrored in C.S. Lewis' characterization of a lion named "Aslan" in his novel, *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*. "Aslan is a lion – the Lion, the great Lion.' 'Ooh,' said Susan, 'I'd thought he was a man. Is he – quite safe? I shall feel rather nervous about meeting a lion'... 'Safe?' said Mr. Beaver... 'Who said anything about safe? 'Course he isn't safe. But he's good. He's the King, I tell you.'"⁶

Jesus is the King of kings and Lord of lords. He is the Son of God and the way to eternal life. He is worthy to be praised and he is worthy to be followed.

So expect to be challenged. Expect to be humbled. Expect to be surprised. Because it's not about you, and it's not about me. It's all about Jesus.

⁶ <https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/344456-aslan-is-a-lion--the-lion-the-great-lion-oooh>