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## Facing 2021 With Confidence

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TEXT: John 1:1, 10-14 (ESV)

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him. He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.

And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.

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Dear friends,

2020 is now behind us. Phew. That was one challenging year, wasn't it? I don't believe in wishing time away, but I'm kind of glad to have 2020 in the rearview mirror.

The question I would like to pose to you today, though, is where does one find confidence to face 2021? After all, there are so many unknowns, so many challenges and uncertainties. We're wondering, when will a vaccine be available for all of our people so that this pandemic can be overcome? As a new president takes office, we wonder, what will he be able to accomplish in the year ahead – will Congress play ball with him and will the government gridlock be broken? And there's the economy: will recover from the ravages of this pandemic? And questions like: will we ever feel safe and normal

again? And then there's issues like climate change and distrust and divisiveness in our land. All of these things are challenging question marks at this point, aren't they?

So where can someone turn in order to gain some confidence for the future? We might turn to technology, and that's good, but it can't solve everything. It's both bane and blessing. As Americans, we might place our confidence in American ingenuity: commitment, goodness, patriotism, which are wonderful things, but I wonder if those attributes are really enough to carry us. After all, this kind of confidence is grounded in human capabilities and we know from experience that people can be (including ourselves) disappointing. We have our limits and fall short of expectations. I don't know about you, but I need something more than that in 2021. I need reliable, dependable, solid footing to carry me through next year and give me confidence.

Well, John's gospel gives us some insight as to where we can find that in our reading for today. Here are his words again:

In the beginning was the word and the word was with God and the word was God. And the word became flesh and dwelt among us. And we have seen his glory, glory as of the only son from the father, full of grace and truth.

John points us to Jesus, tells us who He is, first of all: He was with God and was God. He's the second person of the trinity, of one being with the Father, "begotten, not made," as the creed tells us. And then John testifies that He became one of us. And he says, "And we have seen His glory." He's saying, "I've been with Him, I've seen Him, I've walked with Him, I've touched Him, I've listened to Him, I've witnessed His glory, God's glory, as I've watched Jesus." And His glory is full of God's grace and truth, John goes on to say.

Let's look at that word: truth. It's an important word – if there's anything that has stood out this past year, it is the importance and value of truth for our living of these days. When objective truth is taken away from us and everything is treated as relative or subjective, it sends us into a state of disorientation, which leads to fearfulness and uneasiness and life gets confusing and unsettling, and we have nothing solid, absolute to place our trust in. When truth becomes relative like that, and we begin to hear talk amongst ourselves about alternate truth and so on, chaos kicks in, and fear, all around us and within us. So where can I find some real, solid truth to rely on and build my life upon in the midst of the unknowns? John's saying: it's in Christ. Life-changing truth has arrived in Jesus. The word "truth" in New Testament Greek, that means reality. When

you turn to the Old Testament, which is written in Hebrew, it's used to describe God and it means reliable, dependable. So, John is saying, "Jesus Christ is full of God's grace, His loving kindness, and God's divine reality and dependability and reliability."

Now, as human beings, we might have gracious, loving kindness, we might express truth, but none of us are continually full of grace toward others or consistently true, right? Only Jesus, the son of God, is like that. With Him there is always grace and always reliability and true reality. And here's a bit of the true reality Christ came to bring us: it's never-changing, reliable truth is about ourselves and our sinfulness as we stand in Christ's glorious purity and perfection, as we see ourselves for who we really are: sinful beings in need of a Savior, not as smart as we think. We see that we need help. We were created for a relationship with God, but that relationship has been broken by our sin, our rebellion against God. And we're helpless to do anything to fix the predicament and make things right. Only God could do that. The gap between ourselves and God is too wide and impossible to bridge for us. Without God, we perish now and forever. In the present, we perish because we have this God-shaped void within us, as someone described it, we know something's missing in our lives. There's an emptiness. And we perish forever – we spend an eternity without God.

But fortunately for us, that's not the end of the story. Jesus also shows us the truth about God, the Father. As John says this, "Jesus has made God known to us, He's shown us His holiness, His love and grace towards the sinner. God is holy, Jesus has pointed out, He's perfect and He's pure, He cannot and will not tolerate our sinfulness. It separates us from Him and keeps us out of His Heaven. But He is also the God of love and grace. He gave His only son, Jesus, to take our sinfulness and punishment upon Himself at a cross so that we could have forgiveness of sin in a saving relationship with God. As that familiar verse tells us, "God so loved the world that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life." Jesus also points us to the truth about where to find real freedom and purpose and joy in life: it's found in trusting Him and obeying His word. He says, "If you continue in my word, you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free."

We're powerless to make ourselves free. We kid ourselves if we think we can. We are so easily misled by falsehoods and our own human limitations. We are captive and we need to open that spirit-inspired book, the Bible, and let Jesus speak His truth into our lives. It's only then that we could truly be free, He tells us. As John Stott, that great

Christian writer, says, "Scripture bears an unwavering testimony to the power of ignorance and error to corrupt and the power of truth to liberate and noble and refine." We learn from Jesus truth about living real life – what it's all about. "A new commitment I give to you," He says, "love one another as I have loved you. By this, all people will know that you're my disciples." It's about love. And after He washes the disciples' feet the night before His death, He says, "Do this and you will be blessed. Serve one another." That's what life is. He promises also to never leave us. He gives us a life-saving or life-giving promise that He'll never leave us as orphans on our own. But He will come to us and be with us always. I can build a life on that.

So how do I know that Jesus really is the truth and it's not just some fake news, as we talked about on television by politicians. The answer to that is quite simple: it's the fact of the resurrection, God's affirmation and endorsement of Jesus as the truth. After Jesus breathed His last on the cross, He was laid in a rich man's tomb. Three days later, the tomb was empty. There were only His grave clothes left behind in it. The disciples, like John, the author of our gospel, saw Him resurrected and alive on several occasions. They ate with Him. They beheld His glory. Five hundred others saw Him as well. His disciples sat at His feet and were taught again by Him about His being the fulfillment of all scripture. And they were changed from cowards to courageous people who are willing to suffer and die for the gospel. Why? Because of the resurrection. Would you die as a martyr for something that was a lie?

And the apostle Paul encountered Him on the road to Damascus, was changed from Christianity's number one enemy to its number one evangelist. And of course, there's the testimonies of hundreds of millions of people since who have encountered Him and experienced the reality of His resurrection, presence, and friendship in their lives. That is the truth, the solid foundation we need to face 2021 confidently. The truth we need to build our lives upon: Jesus Christ. Put Him at the center of our lives, following Him daily, living with Him in His word, obeying what He tells us to do, leaning on Him in daily prayer. He truly is the way, the truth, and the life that every one of us needs. He's more than a great teacher, though: He is a great teacher, He's the savior of the world, He's the rescuer of your life. He's the solid, never-changing truth that every human needs. Kings will come and go. Presidents come and go. Kingdoms come and go. But Christ's kingdom is forever and ever. Only He is constant and reliable and eternal and Has your back. As the truth, He is our hope, our confidence, and is the hymn writer

says: "My hope is built on nothing less than Jesus' blood and righteousness. On Christ, the solid rock, I stand. All other ground is sinking sand."

So how does one get that truth working in my life, giving me the confidence that I'm lacking? Well, Jesus doesn't leave us in the dark there either. Listen to John's words.

"He came to His own, His own people did not receive him. But all who did receive Him and believed in His name, He gave the right, the power to become children of God – not born of blood, nor the will of the flesh, nor the will of man, but of God." The truth is offered to us as a gift to be accepted, personally received by each one of us. As the Christmas carol says,

How silently, how silently the wondrous gift is given.

So God imparts to human hearts the blessings of His Heaven.

No ear may hear His coming, but in this world of sin,

Where meek souls will receive Him still, the dear Christ enters in.

Receive Him, and then you live with Him in those gospels every day. Let Him speak into your life every day of 2021, and you'll be amazed of what that will do for your soul and your confidence.

And we also need to fire that committee that is in our hearts. Ray Ortlund uses this analogy for receiving Jesus into the center of one's life that I think is very helpful. He writes this:

You and I are not integrated, unified whole persons. Our hearts are multi divided. It's like we have a boardroom in every heart. Imagine a big table, leather chairs, coffee, bottled water, and a white board. A committee sits around the table in your heart. There's the social self, the private self, the work self, the sexual self, the recreational self, the religious self, and others. The committee is always arguing and debating and voting, constantly agitating and upset. Rarely can they come to a unanimous, wholehearted decision. We tell ourselves we're this way because we're so busy with so many responsibilities. But the truth is, we're just divided, unfocused, hesitant, and unfree.

Now, that kind of person can accept Jesus and receive Him in two ways. One way is to invite Him on to the community committee, give Him a vote. But then He becomes just one more complication in life. The other way is to accept Jesus and to say to Him, "My life isn't working. Please come in and fire my committee, every last one of them, I hand myself over to you. I'm your responsibility now. Please run my life for me."

You see, accepting Jesus is not just adding Jesus, it's subtracting all the idols.

So what does 2021 hold for you and me, who knows? But one thing I do know, the way to live with confidence is to have Christ at the center of my life. That's the truth He's shown me. And He'll do the same for you as you receive Him and ask Him to take over your life.

Amen.