

# OpenTheo

## Jesus Christ: Tried, Tested And Proven - Part 2

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### **The Bible for Today with John Stott - Premier**

John Stott shows that although we have never seen Jesus, there were many who did when He was on earth. Some of those people wrote down eye-witness accounts of what they saw. Stott investigates some of these accounts.

### **Transcript**

We Christians can speak to others out of our own living testimony to Jesus, our own experience of Him. But listen, our testimony to Jesus, my testimony to Jesus tonight, is secondary. The primary testimony is the Biblical testimony because it is the witness of the individual.

The apostles who saw the historic Jesus with their own eyes. Welcome to the Bible for Today with John Stott. As the most respected clergyman in the world, according to Billy Graham, and one of the 100 most influential people in the world, according to Time magazine, there has perhaps been no one who has raised the standard of Biblical teaching in the 20th century as John Stott.

An extremely humble man, known affectionately to many as Uncle John, he was a pastor to pastors and a servant of the Global Church. From his home church of all souls Langham Place in Central London, he preached over 600 sermons. And during this his centenary, we're bringing you some of his very best teaching from nearly 60 years of ministry.

How the Christian churches groan is well documented, and its origin, of course, is Jesus Christ. But it's important to know how and when the church went from Jesus Christ to its embryonic state of a few dozen followers. Last week, John Stott showed us how this happened through those first disciples actually seeing Christ with their own eyes.

And this week John continues by showing how the things those first disciples recorded for us is therefore a credible testimony. You'll find it helpful to have your Bible open to John chapter 1. It's very important to understand the nature of faith. Faith is not a leap in the

dark.

It's not screwing yourself up to believe something you jolly well know isn't true. Faith is not a synonym for credulity or for superstition. Faith is a reasoning trust and reasonable faith rests on credible testimony.

Now for us today, the credible witness that we need for a reasonable faith is found in the Scriptures because it is there in the Scriptures, particularly in the New Testament, that the testimony of the eyewitnesses of Jesus has been recorded for us. The earliest disciples followed Jesus we've just seen because they heard the testimony of John the Baptist. Well, there's nobody exactly equivalent to John the Baptist who is alive today because there is no living eyewitness of the historic Christ.

So what we have been given in the New Testament and particularly in the Gospels is precisely the written testimony of the apostolic eyewitnesses. And that's what they claim, take John himself. He begins his first letter that which was from the beginning, which we have seen with our eyes, which we've heard with our ears, which we've handled with our hands, we proclaim to you.

This life was manifested in Jesus and we've seen it and we've heard, we've handled and we are proclaiming to you from our own eyewitness experience. He says the same at the end of the Gospel here in chapter 20 verse 31. He says, "The signs of Jesus that we saw with our own eyes are written here in order that you may believe as a result of our testimony to Jesus and what Jesus said and did." So faith you see as a response today to the written testimony of the apostolic eyewitnesses.

I am saying that we mustn't forget the Old Testament. The Old Testament you know is also testimony to Jesus. Jesus said, "The Scriptures bear witness to me," and he was referring there to the Old Testament.

So did you notice in the lesson? Look at verse 45. Philip found Nathaniel and said to him, "We have found him of whom Moses in the law and of whom the prophets wrote." Jesus of Nazareth. John the Baptist spoke of him, "Moses and the prophets wrote of him." So in fact, God has given us a double testimony to Jesus in the Scriptures of the old end of the New Testament and we can never dispense with this biblical testimony to Jesus Christ.

Of course, we Christians can speak to others out of our own living testimony to Jesus, our own experience of him. But listen, our testimony to Jesus, my testimony to Jesus tonight is secondary. The primary testimony is the biblical testimony because it is the witness of the apostles who saw the historic Jesus with their own eyes.

Once we get heard of this, that the primary testimony is of the apostolic eyewitness is now written in the New Testament, we will realize at once that the single most effective thing any of us could ever do to persuade unbelievers to believe is to get them to read

the New Testament. It's the single most effective thing we can do. It's far more effective even than our own testimony.

There, of course, we have to back it up with our own testimony, but get them to read the New Testament, get them to expose themselves to the testimony of the first followers of Jesus who saw him with their own eyes and listened to him with their own ears, touched him with their own hands. That's why all of us ought to have several copies, maybe of the good news for modern man, the today's English version on our bookshelves, so that we can give a copy to our friends or lend a copy, get them to read the New Testament. Faith depends on testimony, biblical testimony.

Now that brings me to the second foundation for faith. I move from testimony to experience. From biblical testimony in the first century to personal experience in the 20th century.

We've already seen that the two disciples of John the Baptist, Andrew was one, the other is named, but maybe John the beloved disciple, the writer of the gospel. Anyway, these two follow Jesus because they heard the testimony of John the Baptist. Then as they started following Jesus, Jesus turned around and said to them, "What are you doing? What do you want?" So they said, "Rabbi, where are you staying?" And Jesus said, "Come and see." In other words, vital as it was for them to listen to John the Baptist's testimony, they couldn't rely entirely on his say.

They had to come and see for themselves. And it seems of verse 39 that they spent a whole day in the company of Jesus, the one to whom John the Baptist had sent them. So now they had an opportunity to know Jesus firsthand for themselves.

And as a result of this experience of Jesus, Andrew was able to go to his brother Simon, verse 41, and say, "We have found the Messiah." We've seen him with our own eyes. And all they probably, he blurted out without really knowing what he was saying. And probably the content that he gave to the word Messiah was pretty minimal because we know that it was some years later that he came to understand the Messiah's ship of Jesus, yet nevertheless he did blurted out.

We found the Messiah. He felt sure that Jesus was the one long promised in the Old Testament. Now what Andrew said to Simon Peter, Philip was able to say to Nathaniel, verse 45, "We have found the Messiah." We found the one of whom Moses and the prophets wrote.

When Nathaniel retorted scornfully, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" Probably out of petty jealousy because he lived in another Galilean village, Kana of Galilee, only a few miles away from Nazareth. And there was a petty rivalry between the Galilean villages. So he said, "Can anything good come out of that? A sordid village of Nazareth?" Philip used the same words as Jesus had used to the others and said, "Come

and see.

Come and see." Now I can't think that it's accidental that twice in this passage, John records the invitation to come and see. Or that twice in this passage, the words of personal testimony are used, "We have found the Messiah." Because they went to see and having gone to see, they found, because he who seeks does find according to the promise of Scripture. Now this sequence still recurs again and again in our own experience today.

First comes the biblical testimony, backed up, no doubt by our own testimony, then follows personal experience, the coming and the seeing for ourselves. And then the confident affirmation is possible, "We have found." We have found the one to whom the biblical writers bear witness. We have found the one whom we have come to see for ourselves.

So we can't bear witness to Jesus till we've found him and we can't find him till we come and see for ourselves. Some years ago, good many years ago, now about 2025, I think, it was my privilege here at all cells or in the other church of St. Peter's to teach the children in what they're used to be called the children's church. Now remember one year I taught them or tried to teach them from the gospel of John.

We'd spent the whole year on the gospel of John. And because they were very intelligent children, we set them a written exam at the end. And having asked them about 25 academic questions, we asked them a final personal one which went like this.

It was based on the passage here. Andrew brought Simon to Jesus. "Filly brought Nathaniel to Jesus.

Who have you brought to Jesus?" One little girl whose name was Gillie and was only 10 years old, wrote down in her answer, "I've brought myself to Jesus." She was quite right. She couldn't have brought anybody else until she'd first brought herself, until she'd come to see or to turn from a child of 10 to the wisdom of an archbishop of Canterbury. You know the great words of William Temple? It is futile saying to people, "Go to the cross." We've got to be able to say, "Come to the cross." There are only two voices that can issue that invitation.

One is the voice of the sinless Redeemer with which we cannot speak, and the other is the voice of the forgiven sinner who knows himself forgiven. And that is our part. So the first foundation for faith is the biblical testimony, and the second is personal experience as we come and see and find.

And the third, I don't want to leave out foundation for faith, I'm going to call transformation and use the adjective radical from biblical testimony to personal experience to radical transformation. I want to ask you to try and imagine the converts

at this stage in the story. Simon Peter had heard Andrew's testimony, we found the Messiah, and he had been brought to Jesus.

Nathaniel had heard Philip say, "We have found the Messiah, and had been brought to Jesus." Both of them have heard the testimony of a friend or relative, and both of them had come to Jesus and seen for themselves. Now is that all there is? Where they to rely all their lives on those two initial things, the testimony of others, and their initial introduction to Jesus. If so, then as the years passed, their testimony would have become increasingly stale as a longer and longer time separated them in the present from their initial conversion.

There are many Christians like that, they got no up-to-date testimony, they are still relying on their initial introduction to Jesus years ago, and their first experience of him. It won't do, it's not enough. There is a third foundation for faith.

So Jesus addresses both of them personally about his ongoing work in their lives. He gives both of them, that is Simon Peter on the one hand and Nathaniel on the other, the promise of what I've called a radical transformation. Verse 42, "You are Simon, or Simon is your name is it? You shall be called Kefas, Saramek, Peter, Greek, meaning a rock." Verse 51, "To Nathaniel, you believe, do you? You'll see greater things than this.

You will see the heavens opened, and you will see the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Mary." And both those promises, the one to Simon, the other to Nathaniel, speak of a radical change in these men's lives. Let me enlarge on it. Peter's was a radical change of character.

Now a change of name in the Old Testament scriptures was always significant. Abraham, meaning the exalted father, had his name changed to Abraham to indicate that he was going to be the father of many nations. Jacob, the cheat, had his name changed to Israel, which means a prince with God.

Now slick and sloppy Simon has his name changed, a man who is as shifting as the shifting sands, and he was called the rock man. That's what you're going to be, Peter, the promise of a radical change. Now I have no doubt at all that Simon Peter often remembered with gratitude the promise of Jesus, because Simon's temperament was volatile and his character impetuous, and he failed Jesus badly at the end when he denied him three times, but gradually, in spite of his faults, Jesus was changing him, and especially through the power of the Holy Spirit of DePentecost, cowardly and fickle Simon, became that bold and steadfast Peter.

The read became a rock. So if Simon Peter's change was a radical change of character, Nathaniel's change was a radical change of outlook. Jesus saw him under the fig tree, incidentally a characteristic of the Old Testament picture of the Messianic age, when every man will sit under his own fig tree and under his own vine.

So it was a picture of the Israelite in the Messianic age. And Jesus called him a guileless Israelite. Notice the emphasis on Israel.

Astonished by Jesus' knowledge of him, Nathaniel called him the son of God in the king of Israel. Notice the word again. Messianic titles said they're all then limiting the rule of the Messiah to Israel.

Jesus said to him, "Beth did you believe? You will see greater things than these, that is your outlook is going to be enlarged." You're going to see heaven opened. You're going to see the reality of the angels of God ascending from earth and descending from heaven and the ladder on which they go up and down. The ladder that Jacob saw in his dream but never identified, the ladder is the son of man.

That is Jesus himself. Jesus is the link between heaven and earth. Nathaniel, you're going to see heaven opened and you're going to see this constant flow of traffic, this communication between heaven and earth and I. You're going to see as the link, the mediator between heaven and earth.

Well, how wonderful that Nathaniel's narrow, nationalistic perspective was going to be changed. He was no longer going to be interested only in Israel. He was going to see Jesus as the link between heaven and earth, between God and the whole of mankind, the only ladder by which anybody can come to God.

So you see, his little narrow perspective became universalized. Now, what I'm wanting to argue is this, radical change. A radical change of character, a radical change of outlook is the third foundation for faith.

You see, the biblical witness is indispensable. Again and again in our Christian life, we return to our foundation documents to the testimony of the original eyewitnesses of Jesus. We can never give that up.

Again, personal experience is indispensable. We shall recall again and again our first fresh encounter with Jesus when we came and we saw and we found him for ourselves. But it's not enough.

What should finally reassure us in our trembling faith is some objective evidence of radical change. Not just the ups and downs of emotional experience, but a change of character and a change of mind and perspective. As Jesus by his spirit transforms us, turns us from reeds into rocks and makes unseen reality real to us.

So I conclude, I want to thank God with you tonight for this cumulative evidence that God has given us as the foundations for our faith. Just as a scientist begins with a theory that seems to him correct, then verifies it by a series of laboratory tests and finally builds his whole life and work upon it when it's been verified. So the Christian begins with faith resting on testimony, then verifies it in his own living experience and finally discovers

that his whole life is being transformed by his conviction.

First, faith is aroused by biblical testimony. Secondly, faith is nurtured by personal experience. And thirdly, faith is confirmed by a lifetime of radical transformation.

Thank God for this three-fold witness that authentic acts the truth of Jesus. It's all what theologically we would call the witness of the Spirit. It's the witness of the Spirit through the Scriptures because God still speaks through what he has spoken.

It's the witness of the Spirit through our experience because Jesus still says, "Come and see and find for yourself." And it's the witness of the Spirit through objective change. As Jesus by his Holy Spirit changes, reads into rocks and opens the heavens to our gaze. Lord, increase our faith.

I hope that's your prayer tonight. So let's pray it. Let's pray it together.

We're very different people here. Some are unbelievers. Some are new believers.

Some have been believers for weeks, months, some for years, decades. But all of us need to say to Jesus, "Lord, increase our faith." And as we pray that, let's think of the foundations for faith that he gives us. Lord Jesus, we thank you for the foundations, the solid foundations that you give us for our faith.

And on those foundations we humbly pray, "Lord Jesus, increase our faith," that we may learn to put our trust in you wholly and out of our confidence, bear witness to you and say to our friends, come and see. For the glory of your great name, amen. You've been listening to the conclusion of a message by John Stott on what the early disciples saw in Jesus and how we too can be witnesses to what we have found for ourselves through trusting in him.

Jesus truly is the incomparable Christ. And that's also the title of one of John Stott's many books that's your benefit from reading. Details of this and also videos of John Stott preaching can be found by going to our website [premierchristenradio.com/JohnStott](http://premierchristenradio.com/JohnStott) The legacy of John Stott lives on and is growing, touching every level of society across the world.

Today, Christian leaders throughout the majority world are being equipped to provide pastor training and resources in their own countries thanks to the vision of John Stott, who donated all his book royalties to support this ministry through Langham Partnership. To find out about this and other ministries, John Stott founded, go to [premier.org.uk/JohnStott](http://premier.org.uk/JohnStott). Join us at the same time next week for more from The Bible for Today with John Stott.

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