

# Deep Truth -Lesson 5

1 John 2:22; 4:1–3; 4:9–10

## Part 1 Identify the Issue

From the first chapter, John connects a deeper life with Jesus and suggests three tests that anyone can apply to his or her own life to determine whether or not he or she is really living deeply. The first test is the ethical test, and for the last few weeks we've been drilling down on this question: How do you live? Do you have a deep walk—a walk of obedience?

The second test is a relational test: How do you love?

The third test is a doctrinal test: What do you believe? This is the test of our passages today, and what we will discover is that to live the deep life is to be rooted and grounded in deep truth. Deep truth has everything to do with our understanding of who Jesus is. At the time that John wrote this letter, there was a crisis in the church. There were those who were leading people away from what Jesus taught about himself, and the nature of their false teaching is found in these verses: “Who is the liar? It is the man who denies that Jesus is the Christ” (1 John 2:22); “Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, but every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God” (1 John 4:2–3).

These teachers were denying that Jesus was God in the flesh, as he claimed to be. There was a certain brand of teaching at this time that argued that Jesus was really just a person who at the time of his baptism became inhabited by the Spirit of God, but God's Spirit left him before the crucifixion. They believed that for God to connect himself with the material world, human beings, and suffering would somehow diminish his nature—that coming down to earth as a human was beyond his station. John's reply to this false teaching is clear, definitive, and filled with conviction! To abandon Jesus' claims of divinity is to let go of the possibility of living the life that God has for you. The Incarnation is the deep truth that John urges his followers to keep at the very center of their faith and at the core of their lives.

### Discussion Questions:

[Q] In a few sentences, tell us who you believe Jesus to be.

[Q] Many of us know Muslims, Hindus, atheists, and agnostics. What are we to do with such a particular view of Jesus in this environment? How do we continue to hold such a view when it puts us at odds with other views held by people around us?

[Q] If believing that God became a man isn't a selfish, exclusive claim intended to put people off, what is it?

## Part 2 Discover the Eternal Principles

Teaching Point One: Through Jesus, God shows us who he is.

Many people believe that God is distant and aloof, that he's too busy, like a father whose thoughts are so preoccupied with the important things he's doing that he brushes past his kids who are starving to know him. This is why Jesus came to earth—why God sent himself to dwell among us. In Jesus' life recorded for us in the Gospels, we have the unbelievable opportunity to see what God is really like! Through Jesus' words we learn what God would say to us. Through his actions we can see what was most important to him. By his loving relationships, we can know his heart for people. In Christ, we see a God who is full of love and compassion, who is ready to forgive and embrace, who is ready to humble himself and stoop down to let us know who he is. In the person of Jesus, God speaks directly, acts visibly, and shows publicly just how he feels about humanity. N. T. Wright puts it perfectly: "Jesus provides exegesis of God. Dare to shape your vision of God around the person of Jesus."

[Q] Read what Jesus says about himself in John 14:9. How does that address what we are talking about?

[Q] Read 1 John 2:22. Why do you think John uses such strong language here?

- Why is denying Jesus really denying the Father as well as the Son?

[Q] Read 1 John 4:1–3. How have you seen this test work for you in determining truth from a lie?

Teaching Point Two: Through Jesus, God invites us to be with him.

There is a problem with our ability to relate to God. The problem is that God is just. That's not a problem, per se, because we want a God who hungers for justice. When we hear of a boy living as a slave, we get angry. When we hear about young girls who have been sold into prostitution, our hearts cry for justice. So God's justice is a good thing. The problem is that if complete justice prevails, eventually the gavel will fall on us as well. When we're completely honest with ourselves, we know that our selfishness and sinfulness have contributed to the problems of the world. And of course, this is where Jesus comes in again. This is where God in the flesh makes all the difference.

As a man, Jesus was the only person to live a perfect life. And as God, Jesus was the only one who would be qualified to bear the burden of the sin of all humanity—the only one whose

sacrifice would be complete and sufficient. At the Cross, God's love and justice kissed each other (Psalm 85:10).

Read 1 John 4:9–10, which sums this up perfectly.

[Q] Name practical ways we “live through him” (v. 9). In other words, what does this look like in our lives?

[Q] How does the Cross help define what love is (v. 10)?

[Q] Read Psalm 85. Why is it so important to understand both God's justice and love?

### Teaching Point Three: Through Jesus, God makes the world right again.

If you do a brief overview of all the religions of the world, you will discover that there are three primary views of the material world. The first view is that the world is an illusion. This view holds that the goal of religious life, enlightenment, or salvation has little or nothing to do with the material world. Rather, the goal is to disregard the physical realm altogether, getting in touch, instead, with the “spiritual.” For some, this means that the consequences of our physical actions are meaningless, so we're free to do whatever we want in our flesh; in the end it doesn't matter.

A second view is that the material world is bad. This view holds that the goal of religious life is to withdraw from the world, because there is no hope to be found there. The physical world is on its way to destruction, and to be entangled by the things of life in this world is to become tainted by its evil.

The third way to view the material world is John's view of Jesus—a Jesus who fully enters into a real physical existence. This view holds that the material world is good; it was created to be a place where God's glory is put on display. The beauty and joy and rich relationships that are possible indicate the goodness of the one who created it. With salvation comes a deep appreciation, affirmation, and engagement with the world in ways that align with its intended purposes. Despite how much beauty, goodness, and truth the world contains, we recognize that something is wrong with creation. Accidents happen. Sickness threatens our lives. Violence and oppression cause people to be displaced and even worse. There's the toil of hard labor and the frustration of limited resources. Natural disasters strike us and leave us lacking food, water, and shelter.

[Q] Jesus did not live like the physical world is an illusion. Give some examples.

**Note:** He takes broken things and begins fixing them. He heals, feeds, and restores.

[Q] How does the restoration of the human heart through the forgiveness of sin have implications for the physical world as well?

### Part 3 Apply Your Findings

What do we do when our friends challenge our belief about who Jesus is, especially when we understand more fully the rescue he provides, not just for us, but for all of humanity and for the world? We find ways to make him known more clearly. We describe more carefully and clearly why he has become so dear to us. We let our love and goodness gain us a voice, and we give testimony through our lives and our words about who he is and what he's done. We learn from Christ who it is that he wants us to be, and we live genuinely in him. We let him lead us to become a part of the solution of a broken world. We faithfully testify that Jesus is the Christ—God made flesh: our greatest hope, and the greatest hope for all the world.

#### Action Points:

- Share with the group one person you would love to better understand who Jesus is. Pray for that person and for ways to demonstrate who Christ is to them by your words and deeds.
- How can you show love and goodness on a daily basis with the hopes of gaining a voice in the world? What new thing might you do? What might you stop doing? Discuss your answers in your group.