

**December 6, 2009**

**1 John Series – 1 John 1:1-4**

Alright good morning. Welcome back. For those of you who may be guests this morning, for the past 3 months of Sundays, God has been using our bible study time to develop our vision – the reason we as a church exist and what we will be about for the foreseeable future. We exist to be moving people to life in Christ one step at a time together. And those steps – the very basic processes of being a Christian – of growing as a disciple of Jesus Christ – that God has called us to as believers and therefore what we as a church are going to be about are to be worshipping Jesus, learning truth, building community, and reaching our world together.

Before that, we spent the previous 4 months studying through the book of Titus and we got through chapter 2 before the vision series started. Now we are at the end of the year and rather than jump back into Titus, we are going to save that for the beginning of the year and take the next 4 Sundays and Christmas Eve to take a look at the little book of 1 John. We'll take basically a chapter at a time together though we will focus in on just a few verses in each chapter to really camp out on. So turn with me to 1 John. And let me introduce this letter to us for a minute before we get into it.

If you are familiar with the New Testament you know that it is a 1<sup>st</sup> John because it is followed by a 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> John – those two are only a chapter long each. John – the author of these letters as well as the gospel of John and the last book of the Bible, Revelation – is one of the sons of Zebedee along with his brother James that we read about in the gospels. These guys were nicknamed the “sons of thunder” by Jesus because of their, we'll say, vehement personalities. But John was also one of the so-called ‘inner circle’ of intimate disciples that had a special fellowship with Jesus Christ when he was on the earth along with the other two, James and Peter. So as one of the twelve – one of the inner three – John had a unique eyewitness experience of the ministry and earthly life of our Savior.

We also need to understand something about the dating of John's letters here. They were written towards the end of the first century – probably somewhere between AD 85 and 95, which means John was a very old man at this point. You say ‘why is that important?’ – because **when he writes this letter, what that means is that John is speaking with great authority and influence because at this point he is the ONLY APOSTLE still living. He's the only human being really who has had this intimate communion with Jesus in bodily form while he was on the earth.** So this is a big deal.

And yet as you read through 1 John, in one sense at least, it is hard to analyze because it doesn't really develop a specific argument like say Romans or Colossians would. Instead, as John writes these 5 chapters, he repeats the prominent themes that are in his heart and mind – the themes of righteousness, love, and truth. And each time he circles around to one of those themes, he adds a little more to it but you may find yourself thinking “I've already heard this – he already said that” as you read it through.

Nothing wrong with that. In fact one piece of advice from many old preachers is pretty much along those lines – goes like this – tell them what you're going to say, say it, then tell them what you said. So it will be helpful for us before we dive into chapter 1 to look at what I believe is John's primary reason for writing this letter. I think it is best found in **chapter 5 and verse 13.** Look at that with me.

*“I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life.”*

That's why **he is writing – so that those who have believed on the name of Jesus Christ might KNOW that they have eternal life.** Now you can turn there or just read it on the screen, but compare that to the gospel of John and why he says he wrote it according to **John 20:30.** *“Jesus did many other miraculous signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.”*

See the distinction? When John writes his gospel, he is writing to a people in general who as yet are not converted. He is trying to lead them to faith in Christ. But when he comes to this little letter, he is talking to a people who have come to faith in Christ but he's trying to lead them deeper – to further their maturity. Over and over in 1 John you find him saying “that you may know.” He wants them to know they have eternal life. Apparently they were struggling with a lack of assurance. Now why would that be the case?

I promise we'll get to chapter 1 in a second, but we need to understand what is going on before we get there in order to see why John says what he says there. And in **chapter 2**, he explains the situation – listen to **verse 19**.

*“They went out from us, but they did not really belong to us. For if they had belonged to us, they would have remained with us; but their going showed that none of them belonged to us.”*

As you read the whole letter you figure out what is going on in that statement. It appears within this church at Ephesus – which is where 1 John started – that an intellectual or spiritual elite had risen up and this little group of so-called Christians were claiming they had some superior anointing or knowledge from God. Later they were given a name and came to be known as the “Docetists.” And Docetism is just an early version of Gnosticism that we have talked about before but I'll explain all that right quick. Docetist comes from a word that means “I think” or “I appear” or “I seem.” They taught about Jesus that when he was on earth he only appeared to be a man. He only looked like a man and seemed to be human or physical but was not. The Gnostics took that and developed it more in the next century. The term Gnostic comes from a word that means “knowledge.” They believed they had a superior knowledge to those that were only Christians. And one of the things they taught in a nutshell was that it was at the baptism of Jesus – when he went down into the waters and was baptized by John the Baptist and the dove came down from heaven – that the spirit of the divine Christ came down upon the man Jesus. And that same Christ-spirit left Jesus before his crucifixion.

Now think about the implications of that for just a minute. That means in the gospel of John when John says *“the Word became flesh and dwelt among us”* – well, he didn't. When Colossians talks about the fullness of the Godhead dwelling bodily in Christ Jesus, well that's wrong too. It means that whenever you see Jesus in the gospels eating and drinking and getting weary and sleeping in the bottom of a boat, he is just acting. It is all a façade because He wasn't a real man.

But here's the fatal implication. Those ideas mean that when Jesus went to the cross, and this Christ-spirit left him and went back to God, it was then not the Son of God who died there. Christ – God's Son – did not die on the cross, he did not die as a substitute for sinners, and we are all lost!

There are a lot of implications there, but **what's going on in 1 John is that this little group of self-proclaimed spiritual elite created a schism in the church in Ephesus over a wrong view of JESUS**, they broke away from the church and **these other believers were left there** on their own confused and hurt **wondering** what is this all about? Are they better than us? Is there some knowledge we don't have? Have we really got the truth? Is the message we've believed really the gospel or is it deficient in some way? **Are we really SAVED?**

So their assurance was at a low ebb and folks that is so important. As Dr. Martin Lloyd Jones once said, “Assurance is not essential for salvation, but it is essential for the joy of salvation.”

See you could be saved and not have assurance, many people are. You could even have what you call assurance and not be saved, many people are that too. But the best and biblical position that we all strive to do life in is to know that we are saved and to have the assurance of it that brings the joy that can only come through that certainty. And that's what John is trying to communicate in chapter 1 – is trying to bring these hurting people to see. And I love how he does it. Look with me at **1 John 1:1-4**.

TEXT

He says there in the first couple of verses we know that Christ has come in the flesh because we saw Him with our eyes, we touched him with our hands, we heard him with our ears. He was there. And

the warning there is this – that if we do not have the historical Christ of Christianity we do not have the Christianity of Christ. It is the historical Christ, the Christ of the Bible, the Christ of church history that we must preach.

As Charles Spurgeon put it, “The truth – the old truth that Calvin preached, that Augustine preached, is the truth that I must preach today, or else be false to my conscience and my God. I cannot shape truth. I know of no such thing as pairing off rough edges of a doctrine. John Knox’s gospel is my gospel, that which thundered through Scotland must thunder through England again.”

**This is the test: is the Christ that you have and believe in the Christ of the BIBLE and not something of your own making?** That’s the personal test to your salvation: **do you believe that He is God the Son, that He also came as a MAN among men and died as the substitute for sinners?** That is the test of Christendom.

And folks this is so important for us today. We live in a culture that is eager for religious experience. In our post-modern age we have evolved out of the skeptical society to a large extent that there aren’t as many atheists or agnostics today but there are a lot of people around who are yearning for a particular religious experience – and it doesn’t have to be Christian. The label you take doesn’t matter as long as it seems to work for you. It’s religious pragmatism – it throws out the idea of truth and right and wrong and accepts that “as long as it gives me a buzz – gets me to my desired end – I’ll embrace it – doesn’t matter whether it is really the truth or not.”

In fact – these figures are a little old but that just makes them more scary – the Barna poll reports that in the US over 80% of people believe in God or in gods. When asked if all religions essentially prayed to the same god, 64% of adults said ‘yes.’ But listen to this – among those who called themselves “born again” 48% said we all pray to the same god. And among regular church attenders – whether they consider themselves born again or not – 62% within American churches believed that everyone in the world, whatever religion they belonged to, pray to the same god in heaven. That means in the pews of America, two thirds of church going people believed that the exclusive character of the Christian message is obsolete.

So the question that must be asked today just as in John’s day is, in the midst of the confusion, what is Christianity? What makes you a Christian? What makes a church Christian? And the answer begins back in **verse 1**. Look at it.

*“That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched-- this we proclaim concerning the Word of life. The life appeared; we have seen it and testify to it, and we proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and has appeared to us.”*

The answer is the life that the apostle John and the other apostles encountered. It is the life encountered. What John is giving to us is the objective foundational historical basis for the faith we have. That from the beginning – what a statement! It is reminiscent of how John began his gospel in chapter 1 verse 1 *“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.”*

It is even reminiscent of how Genesis began when it says that in the beginning was God and God created. **What John is doing is laying a foundation that this is HISTORICAL, this faith we have is founded in the Christ of God who came before the world** – who was with God before the world was.

And that’s what we see John emphasizing in **verse 2** – this life appeared – or was made manifest – and we proclaim to you this eternal life. That is that the eternal Christ became visible and the manner in which he was made manifest was in verse one when John says – that which we have heard, which we have seen, which we have looked upon and touched with our hands. **John is making the point of the INCARNATION. That the eternal Christ who was with the Father from the beginning and indeed was God, this Christ appeared in the FLESH, he became a man.**

And folks that's the great stumbling block. So many talk at Christmas-time about the baby Jesus in the manger. But they – and often we in the church don't get it. In fact many are willing to believe in Christ if he remains a merely spiritual entity. But when we preach that Christ has become a particular man in a particular place giving particular commands and dying on a particular cross exposing particular sins of our particular lives, then the preaching ceases to be acceptable to most.

The stumbling block is this – that if this doctrine is true – then every single person in the world must obey this one particular Jewish man. Everything he says is law. Everything he did is perfect. And the uniqueness of his work and word flow out into history in the form of a particular inspired book which claims universal authority over every other book that has ever been written.

See when God becomes a man, he strips away every pretense of man to be god. We can no longer do our own thing, we must do what this one Jewish man wants us to do. We can no longer pose as self-sufficient, because Jesus says we are all dead in sin and must come to him for life.

As John Piper says, “when God becomes a man, then man ceases to be the measure of all things, and this Man becomes the measure of all things.” And that is simply intolerable to the rebellious hearts of men and women. And that is why **this doctrine of the incarnation has always been and will always be at the heart of truth and spiritual AUTHENTICITY. Because only the Holy Spirit of God can break our rebellion against the authority of the incarnation and cause us to gladly submit to this one Jewish man as our absolute KING.**

And that's why in **verse 3** John says *“our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ.”* **No one can have fellowship** – have relationship – **with Jesus unless you believe He is who HE says He is in His Word.** (And all that He says He is.) **And no one can have fellowship with the Father – with God - except through the SON** – through Jesus Christ. Christianity as a faith is more than a conglomeration of ideas, it is more than a philosophy, the greatest miracle of Christianity is the very Christ of Christmas, and if we don't have him, we don't have anything.

But look at me – don't misunderstand what John is saying. Yes **Jesus was a physical reality and the foundation of our faith is a historical fact – but that does not exonerate us from exercising PERSONAL FAITH in Him.**

Not to say that the apostles weren't greatly privileged to get to see with their eyes and hear with their ears and touch with their hands – and their witness give the witness to the authenticity of Christian faith today – but it doesn't diminish at all our personal experience of faith and salvation in that same Lord Jesus Christ. In fact as Peter himself put it in **1 Peter 1:8**.

*“Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy.”* Because **our FAITH in the historical physical eternal Jesus SAVES us just like the faith of the apostles saved them.** John and James and Peter and the apostles were not saved because they were with Jesus, but because they put their faith in Him. And so are we.

So here is where we get to the bottom of not only what makes a person an authentic Christian – but here we see the grounds for fellowship and unity within the Christian church.

Verse 3 says, *“We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ.”*

Read that verse backwards to get the point. “Since our fellowship is with the Father and his Son, the only way we can cultivate fellowship with you is to proclaim to you what we know about the Son whom we have seen and heard.”

**The grounds for FELLOWSHIP in a Christian church can only be with those who are authentically Christian – who hold to the doctrine of who Christ is and what he has done.** John

is explaining that fellowship with one another is only derived from fellowship with God and fellowship with his Son. In other words, tradition cannot provide a basis for church unity. Even common experience cannot provide a basis if it is unrelated and divorced from the historical reality of who Christ was on earth. **There is no significant fellowship among people who do not share the same view of JESUS CHRIST.**

And that is what we see John writing about. Do you see it here? Look back at **verse 4** – and actually 1,2, and 3 as well.

Verse 4 – we write this to make our joy complete – but also back up to

Verse 1 – this we proclaim concerning the word of life.

Verse 2 – we have seen it and testify to it – we proclaim to you

Verse 3 – we proclaim to you what we have seen and heard

When we get this – **when we believe Jesus is who he says he is – when our faith is grounded in the Jesus of the Bible – we have not only the responsibility, but the joy of DECLARING it to others!** Not just the historical – the doctrinal – but the experiential – to express what Jesus has done for us – the experience of our personal salvation! In fact our joy will not be complete – will never be what it could be – until we do – until we share it. That's what a Christian is – a witness – we are evidence in ourselves of the truth we believe. We have touched – we have known – we have seen the Word of life and we want you to do so as well.

Folks before I wrap up the application today, I don't want to sound like a broken record, but do you see what we've been hearing for 3 months in these 4 verses?

Listen – that when our life is in Christ – we will truly worship Jesus – the Christ of the Bible – and as we worship him, we will learn truth – we will want to know and will know that he is who he says he is and will do what he says he will do. And that truth that we learn – the truth of Jesus Christ is the foundation for the community that we build – the basis of the fellowship we have in relationships and the service we give to each other – and the more we live in that biblical community the more we will want others to experience it to which means we will have an urgency, a need, for our joy to be completed by reaching our world with the truth of Jesus that they might worship him, learn his truth, live in his community, and reach others with us.

Don't you love the word of God?!

Wow. Well as we step back and look at what God has shown us in these 4 verses, let me just point out a few lessons or applications for today.

First – **you must be on your guard** individually and we must be on our guard as a church **against attempts among so-called believers to preserve fellowship on the basis of a shared EXPERIENCE rather than on the basis of a shared THEOLOGY.** That's not what the Word lays out for us. And it will result eventually in the diminishing of a poorly founded experience or in the development of heretical theology to smooth over the differences.

Second – **clearly this text implies that no Christian should marry an UNBELIEVER. Deep fellowship in the things that count most is not possible where we can't share the same understanding and therefore affection for Jesus Christ.** And students and singles – remember, dating leads to marriage.

Third – **there is an increasing trend in churches to cultivate growth and fellowship and members by avoiding theology** – by not speaking the difficult truths – by emphasizing fast food individualized ministry – by increasingly eliminating real Bible study or replacing it with sound bites and feel good ear tickling euphemisms – by taking words like “Baptist” out of the church and **concealing the very distinctives that fill us with passion and zeal for the glory of God.** But

church the last thing I want to do – **the last thing we should ever do is to water down BIBLICAL theology to the lowest common denominator of acceptability.** That is the death blow to worship and truth and orthodoxy and mission and morality and growth that matters to God. You and I instead must do the very opposite – let's **be like John in verse 3:** what we have seen – what we have heard – the truth – we proclaim to you so that you can have fellowship with us. **Here is what we believe about Christ. Do you CHERISH what we cherish?**

And that really is number 4.

I said earlier that **the greatest miracle of Christianity is CHRIST. And this is what Christmas is all about.** That this life, the Son of God, the Word of God, this Christ was actually manifested in the flesh. ***Unto you is born this day a child who is Christ the Lord.***

**The whole of Christianity stands or falls on that TRUTH.** It falls to pieces without it. Christ's teachings mean nothing, they fall to the ground and rot if he was not the Son of God in human flesh. His miracles mean nothing – they are not signs – they do not point to anything. His death was not for sinners, it did not atone for your sins. His precious blood was worthless because on the cross he was not the Son of God nor the Christ of God. His resurrection didn't happen, his promises to raise the dead are all empty and futile. And therefore we will not rise from the dead and we will rot too. Our sins cannot be forgiven and he is not coming to judge the world and bring his own to glory. Everything in Christianity rests on the person of Christ and who claimed to be. If we have not him, we have nothing.

But we do! Praise God, we do! The Word that became flesh is the life that appeared is the baby in the manger is the child in the temple is the teacher on the mountain is the healer in the streets is the savior on the cross is the victor over the tomb is the king coming in the clouds and his name is Jesus Christ and He is God. And on that rock we will be his church.

What God is saying to us today through John is please,

**Don't miss Christ this Christmas** – the truth of the incarnation, of the Christ in human flesh, - because **in Him is the ASSURANCE of our salvation – of our life – of our forever.**

That which was from the beginning but which we have seen and heard and touched – this we proclaim to you. Jesus Christ is God and has come in the flesh. Do you cherish what we cherish? Church do you live to proclaim that truth every single day?