

The house that Jesus builds

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[0:00] So if you have a Bible, perhaps you can turn with me to 1 John chapter 1. So the first letter written by the Apostle John, page 1225 if you're using a church Bible.

For the next few months, we're going to think about the house that Jesus builds. We're going to think about the life. We'll look at that for the next few months. And to help us to lay the foundations, we come to this section.

We're going to read the whole chapter, but we're going to focus on 1 John 1 verses 1 to 4. And we're going to see spiritual fellowship. And we're going to see the joy that that produces. So let's hear God's words together.

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 testified to it. And we proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and has appeared to us. We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us.

[1:09] And our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son, Jesus Christ. We write this to make our joy complete. This is the message we have heard from Him and declare to you.

God is light. In Him there is no darkness at all. If we claim to have fellowship with Him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live out the truth.

But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, His Son, purifies us from all sin. If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us.

If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. If we claim we have not sinned, we make Him out to be a liar and His word is not in us.

Amen. Let's begin here. We have two different family members doing house extensions at the same time. So there are in two different cities, similar processes happening and probably similar stages of progress.

[2:27] So we have watched the deep foundations be dug in a garden. We have seen steel support beams go into each. And now we've seen a wooden timber frame arrive.

So similar processes, similar progress. But at the same time, there are differences. Design features that differ. So they've made different choices for doors and windows.

They have had the joys of choosing taps and cupboards and handles and all the fine points that go along with extensions. But each house extension, like every building project, it has its own foundation, its own strength, and it has its own particular features, its own style.

Why do we begin with house extensions? Well, the Bible uses an image for the church. It has that idea of God's people being built together as living stones.

They're joined together by the Spirit, united in and upon the Lord Jesus to become a house, a living house, where God Himself can dwell. So the idea of a house that God builds is one that we find in the Bible.

[3:40] So then the question becomes, well, what kind of house is Jesus building? What is the foundation of a local church that Jesus builds? And what kind of features can we expect to find in this house that Jesus is building?

And that's what we're going to be looking at for the next few weeks and months. But what's John's message here? Well, it's mostly about the foundation.

And the foundation that we find in these opening three verses of his first chapter, of his first letter, is spiritual fellowship. The reality that we share and we enjoy life with God together.

And from that foundation, there is one particular feature that John then focuses our attention on. That as Christians believe the truth about Jesus, and as we share life with Jesus, it creates a particular joy in the people of God.

So we're going to look at spiritual fellowship and we're going to look at joy together. So spiritual fellowship. What is spiritual fellowship? Fellowship is one of those, I guess it's a very Christian word.

[4:56] We don't hear it too often in other contexts. Let's say, first of all, what spiritual fellowship is not. So it's not merely a set of church activities. So having a church activity does not mean fellowship, though it might very well provide the opportunity for fellowship.

Fellowship is not, let's put on some programs and have particular places. That doesn't guarantee it, though those programs, places, may very well help.

So it's not simply about being in the same place and doing the same thing. So what do we mean when we talk about spiritual fellowship? Well, the idea of fellowship, as we have it in the Bible, is the idea of a participation in something.

A sharing in something. A communion with someone. Look with me at verse 3. We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us.

So there's a participation, a sharing life with the apostles. So to be a Christian is to share communion with God the Father and God the Son through God the Spirit and to share life with one another in God's church.

[6:18] It's one of those big ideas that perhaps even change the way that we think about life in a local church as we begin to work that out.

Well, John gives us, I think, three helpful truths about spiritual fellowship. And here's the first. It is a personal experience. So look at verse 1.

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. And so the writer is John the Apostle, probably the closest friend of Jesus while on the earth. And he is presenting himself here, isn't he, as a personal eyewitness based on three years spent together sharing in the ministry of Jesus. And he says he is writing about Jesus as, look at the words he uses for Jesus, the word of life in verse 1, verse 2, the life, and also in verse 2, the eternal life.

And what John is making here is a staggering claim. He is saying, I have seen, I have touched, I have handled life. And the word choice he uses is interesting.

[7:33] It's the idea of a blind person carefully handling a face or an object to examine it in order to fully understand, to appreciate what is in front of him.

And John is saying, this is what I have done with the eternal Son of God. And so he begins his letter saying, the one who is from the beginning, the one who is uncreated, the one who is eternal, he entered time and space.

And he entered into John's frame of reference. John spent time with the one who is eternal life from the beginning. He is telling us that the immortal and invisible God at a point in time took on flesh and bone and ate food and drank with John.

That John's best friend, Jesus, is life itself. The source of all life. The one who came so that we could enjoy the life of God in our lives.

And so what he has witnessed, he proclaims. And that's the second thing about spiritual fellowship as John talks. He says it's a personal experience. And then he moves immediately to say it's a personal experience that he is proclaiming to others.

[8:59] End of verse 1, 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.

We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard. So the idea of proclaiming is the idea of being a herald. This is a task that John has been commissioned to by Jesus.

An eyewitness who's now commissioned, go and tell others. Having personally met the source of life and the source of joy, what we discover now is that John finds his joy in sharing Jesus with others.

He has found for himself that the power source spiritually, and now he wants to pass it on that others, including us, who read this letter, that we might find it too.

And it's all tied up with a personal experience of the living God. Francis Schaeffer, he spoke about Christian joy as communion with God, something that was a day-by-day reality, a personal living relationship.

[10:16] That's our source of spiritual power. You know, it's like an electrical socket. We need to be plugged in in order to draw on God's power.

We need to stay close to this one who is the life if we are to enjoy the life of God in our lives.

Because if we don't, like our phone or any other device, we will lose power.

And with that, our spiritual joy will stop. And so John, who has this personal experience of knowing the one who is life and the source of joy, he proclaims it to others so that they and we might have it too.

Because here's the third thing that becomes clear. This is to be a shared experience. Look at verse 3. We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard so that, purpose, you also may have fellowship with us and our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son, Jesus Christ.

I imagine all of us were watching in the last couple of weeks the unfolding tragedy of the Nepal floods. And in all the bad news and all the horrible news, there was one good news story that hit the headlines.

[11:34] You may have seen it. There was the school teacher who, 10 minutes before the water was due to hit the school, got a report. And so immediately, he sounded the alarms and he evacuated pupils and teachers to higher ground with the effect that 900 lives were saved.

A life-saving message came. It created a sense of purpose. And he shared that message so others could have life too.

That's the pattern we see in 1 John. And it's the pattern of the local church. It's why we preach the gospel. That in Jesus, we come to know the God who is life, the one who gives eternal life through His death and resurrection.

He shares life with us. And because this news is so good and so life-transforming, that we proclaim also so that others may share fellowship with God and within the church.

John is reminding his first readers and us by extension of this massive privilege that our standing is not less than the apostles.

[12:50] We too share in the life of God that by God's Holy Spirit, we are united to Jesus. Our Savior is our brother. And we have God as our Father.

And we have the certain hope of true life, eternal life, because the source of life has now come to live within us. And this spiritual fellowship that John talks about, it's the strength and the foundation of the church.

We are cemented together with a new identity, which at the same time gives us a new purpose. We are a worshipping people because we have come to know God.

And we are also a people on mission to make God known so that others might share it. In John 17, this is what Jesus prays for. Jesus prays for a people who hadn't yet heard the good news about Him, people yet to be born, people like us, but that they would be a people united in knowing the love of the Father and the Son, sharing the life of the Father and the Son, and that unity being made visible.

That's why Jesus came, so that we could share life with God. That's a concrete reality in God's plan for His church.

[14:10] And because Jesus prayed in John 17 for it, and because Jesus, now risen and ascended and glorified, continues to pray, we get to enjoy this breathtaking privilege together, real relationship with the living God.

So that's the foundation that John wants to present for us about our life together, that we share fellowship together as we share fellowship with God, Father and Son.

And that then produces something. And the feature that produces, it's there in verse 4, is joy. We write this to make our joy, or we write this to make your joy complete.

Again, just to go back to the picture of family extensions for a moment, even when those extensions are not yet complete, you can tell very quickly, either by looking at the plans, or just by looking at what's on the ground at the moment, why they're being built.

More space to cook and to eat with others, more living space for a growing family. There's always a goal for a building project. The goal for Jesus' building project is joy.

[15 : 27] What he's looking to cultivate in the family of God is joy. Jesus came to give us life with God so that you and I could share what John calls complete joy.

That's a bold claim. In his message, and the one that he speaks about, John is saying there is a capacity for a joy that has no limit.

Now, there's a question, who is this joy for? So you can see there's a little footnote in verse 4. Or we write this to make our joy complete. Some manuscripts say your. Is it the delight of the apostles to know Jesus and to share Jesus?

Or is it the delight of the church who receive the good news message of Jesus? And truly, the answer is both. Because every Christian shares in the life of God. And so every Christian gets this joy.

And what John is saying to us is that there is within the good news message of Jesus, his forgiveness, the reality of peace with God, a restored relationship with God, the renewal of all things, including us, the prospect of eternal joy.

[16 : 46] There is something within the gospel message that can inflate and overflow and expand our capacity for joy. In Hebrews chapter 12, verse 2, we come upon a very striking idea.

Because the author there says, Jesus, who for the joy set before him, endured the cross, scorned its shame. Think about what the author of Hebrews is saying there.

That Jesus faced the agony of Calvary, physical and spiritual. Jesus went under the wrath of God against sin as the sin bearer.

Jesus became a curse for his people. Jesus went to his death with joy.

With joy. Because he knew death was not the end. He knew he would return to the glory of his father. But joy too, because he knew in those actions, he was achieving the redemption of his people.

[18 : 04] Jesus has joy in saving a people for himself, inviting us into the joy of God. Why is joy so important?

Where does it come from? We'll think about that for a few moments. Sometimes preachers are really clever and they have nice mnemonics. I would have loved to have given you the ABCs.

I'm not that clever. You're getting the FGHs of Christian joy. Make of that what you will. But let's begin with faith and joy. So what's the connection between faith and joy?

If you use the Solid Joys devotional, you might have seen this a few days ago. John Piper uses the image of a house, very timely. He says this, Picture salvation as a house you live in.

And this house offers perfect protection and shelter and it's fully provided for. Every cupboard is well stocked. It's got beauty and it's got strength.

[19 : 01] And wherever you look, whichever window you look out of, if you're sitting in the garden, it's just perfect, it's beautiful. Everything is what you would want. God built you that house. That house of salvation.

And it comes to us free of charge. And there is a contract to guarantee that. It's called the New Covenant. In Jesus' blood.

We have forgiveness. We have peace with God. We have fellowship with God because of Jesus' death and resurrection and the New Covenant. And Christian joy comes as we receive the gospel of God's free grace.

As we come to discover that we are saved not because of anything we have done but because of what Jesus has done. And there is joy for us as we live in that reality day after day.

It fuels our faith and that fuels our joy. And just to extend his image. So we're in this wonderful house where everywhere you turn, on every wall, every picture that you look at, you are surrounded by happy facts about God to strengthen our own happiness and joy.

[20 : 17] So you turn one way and you remember that God is all wise. And we find joy in knowing that God, God, He knows us and He knows all that we need.

We turn this way and remember God is all powerful. And we find joy as we recognize that He can meet all our needs according to His sufficiency in Christ.

God is in control. And so we find joy even in hardships knowing everything somehow works for His glory and our good.

We remind ourselves that God is love. And He sent Jesus to forgive and to purify and to bring us home. God is life. And in Jesus, He shares life with me now and forever.

For John, it's the gospel, it's the good news of Jesus. That's where complete joy is found. And that's why He has joy in sharing it.

[21 : 25] And as we live by faith, as we grow into the gospel, as we stay close to the gospel, through faith, that's where our joy is found too.

So our faith in Jesus and the good news of the gospel, that helps to cultivate Christian joy. G, let's think about God and joy.

So we have heard John. He is saying, here is my joy. Here is your joy to enjoy living, personal relationship with God the Father and God the Son through God the Spirit.

We heard Paul at the beginning in Philippians chapter 3. I consider everything a loss compared to surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus, my Lord.

There is nothing greater, says Paul, than knowing God, than knowing Jesus. I want to know Christ, he said. And then we read Jesus' words in John 14.

[22 : 29] And he said, anyone who loves me will obey my teaching. My Father will love them and we will come to them and make our home with them.

So the joy of the apostles, knowing God and his love, is the joy that Jesus came to bring. the joy of sharing life and love from the Father and the Son, shared with us by the Spirit. In God's house, joyful love is a mark of God's people.

It's the promise of Psalm 16. We'll sing it. You will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand.

Psalmist understands our eternal future is perfect pleasure in the perfect presence of our perfect God and Savior. Jesus will be our complete joy.

[23 : 37] But in everyday life, we're invited to experience the joy of God, joy in God today. God's people are in the perfect house.

We've seen some perfect pictures. Now let's imagine the kitchen table and on that kitchen table there is a glorious meal. I don't know what would be your glorious meal.

Perhaps it would be a nice piece of steak or a piece of salmon. Perhaps it would just be a nice pizza, whatever it might be. But imagine a perfect meal laid out on that table.

What is our normal reaction to seeing something good and delicious? We don't want to take the museum or art gallery critic approach.

Some nice shapes and shades there. I appreciate the composition that the chef has put on the table. there comes a point where we want to tuck in.

[24 : 34] Where we want to taste and to see how good it is. God wants us to take that approach to life with Him.

To find our deepest joy in God. To be greedy as it were for more joy in Jesus.

Knowing that He gladly gives it. united to Jesus. We never want to settle. There are infinite supplies of blessing and life and love on offer.

So we always want more. That we would delight in Him more completely as individuals and as a church. Jesus invites us come to the feast.

He says to us choose to find your joy in me and my love. So we thought about faith and joy. We thought about God and joy.

[25 : 33] The one last thing to think about is holiness and joy. Because that's where John goes next in the rest of the chapter. Look with me at verse 5. This is the message we've heard from Him and declared to you.

God is light. In Him there is no darkness at all. That's a metaphor for holiness. God is holy and pure. He is untouched by the darkness of sin and evil.

If we claim to have fellowship with Him and yet walk in the darkness we lie and do not live out the truth. But if we walk in the light as He is in the light we have fellowship with one another and the blood of Jesus His Son purifies us from all sin.

So He's saying to us to share fellowship with God. To enjoy life with God. To enjoy the full measure of joy that Jesus came to bring we need to walk in the light.

There is a particular path that we need to choose and it's the path of holiness wanting to be set apart for God. And so He goes on to talk about the importance of not covering up our sin.

[26 : 41] Of not deceiving ourselves and saying we don't have a sin problem rather part of being holy involves when we mess up when we sin we confess quickly and we return to the light rather than keeping our sin in the darkness.

One of the marks of church life is a desire to walk the path of holy joy together. That growing closer to Jesus we would become more like Jesus together.

That we'd be growing in everyday holiness. And when we do we'd find that to be our true joy as we understand who Jesus is and the life that He offers.

God is all light. God is all holiness. And all that is eternally joyful comes from Him and when we walk in the light we are drawn towards Him as the source of eternal joy.

We're drawn together and that creates a holy fellowship sharing the love of the Father and the Son.

A church life positively overflowing with our appreciation, our experience of God's love.

[28:01] A love that overflows from us to the people around. So what kind of house is Jesus building here and in us?

John reminds us that there is a foundation and that foundation is spiritual fellowship. It's a sharing in the life of God. It's personal relationship with the risen Lord Jesus and that's something that we share with one another.

To put our faith in Jesus is to be stacked and cemented and joined and raised together as a house that God lives in. A house in which God's glory is put on display.

And a key feature of this house that Jesus, the architect, architect, builds what Jesus wants in our lives together. Well, it's nothing less than a deep joy in God himself that we would love and delight in God the Father and God the Son together.

Let's pray to that end. Let's pray. Our God and our Father, we thank you for this wonderful reality that John reminds us of, that there is in Jesus, the way into life with God the Father and the Son through God the Spirit.

[29:21] And we thank you that Jesus came, that we might have this complete joy, the joy of being restored to personal living relationship, the joy of being part of the people of God and the family of God.

And so we pray that you would cultivate within our hearts that sense of gratitude and joy for what you have done for us in the Lord Jesus.

And we pray that our faith would expand and that our joy would expand at the same time. And we pray that you would enable us to walk in the light as we come to recognize that what you offer is so much greater than what this world offers.

And so help us and teach us and build us together together upon Jesus and his word. And we pray in his name. Amen.