

1 John 1:1-4

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Preacher: Rev. Jordan Senner

[0 : 00] Let us pray together. Heavenly Father, we do come to you with heavy and happy hearts.

We ask this in his name. Amen.

So if you would, please, if you closed your Bibles, please open them up again. Page 1021, 1021. As this morning, we begin a new sermon series in 1 John.

It is the first of three letters written by the same person who wrote the Gospel of John. Now, so the one is a biography and the other as a letter, but they both have the same purpose.

Let me just read you the purpose statement that we get from the very end of the Gospel of John.

Don't go there. Just let me read it. John chapter 20, verse 21. Now, Jesus did many signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book.

[1 : 15] But these signs are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ and that by believing you may have life in his name. John has the same purpose in his letter.

If you flip the page over and you look at 1 John, chapter 5, verse 13, Pastor John says, I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have life.

So you could say in one sense the Gospel that John wrote is about bringing people to life-transforming faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. It's about conversion. And the letter that John is writing is about restoring and sustaining and strengthening people's faith in the Lord Jesus when the going gets tough.

It's about strengthening and confidence. Now, many of us have been there before. Times in our life when confidence in Jesus has been shaken. Where we once maybe felt so close to him, those times when we wonder, is Jesus really with me?

Is Jesus really who I thought he was? There are many people that can be experiencing a crisis of confidence right now.

[2 : 28] Maybe it's a book or a university class that has shaken everything they thought they once knew. Or maybe it's a diagnosis that's been received, or last night a death in a family, or last night a disaster in the community, or trauma that has been suffered by a loved one.

There are many reasons where there can be a crisis of confidence. And for the church that John was writing to, Pastor John, their confidence was shaken by false teaching and schism.

Does that sound familiar? False teaching had infected the church, and it made them doubt two things. It made them doubt who Jesus is. Did God really come to us as a human being?

And then this false teaching also made them doubt who they are. Are we really sinners in need of forgiveness and cleansing? And the false teaching, as it worked its way into the church, it divided into two camps, those who were following the false teaching and those who weren't.

And it eventually led to a schism, a split, a parting of ways that tore hearts apart and severed relationships and fractured the communion of the church.

[3 : 42] And so at the very beginning of the letter, John, Pastor John, has a really clear message that he wants to get to for a tired and traumatized church. He wants to say to him, the message that first brought you to Christ is the exact same message that's going to restore your confidence in Christ when you're in crisis.

Pastor John doesn't waste his time or mints his words with a heart full of love and lips full of truth. He doesn't even start with a greeting, an introduction, a prayer.

He just gets straight to the heart of the matter in verse one and says, that which was from the beginning. We have heard, we have seen with our eyes, we have looked upon and touched with our hands concerning the word of life.

The life was made manifest and we have seen it and testify to it and proclaim to you the eternal life which was with the Father and was made manifest to us.

That which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you so that you too may have fellowship with us and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ.

[4 : 49] And we are writing these things so that our joy may be complete. Isn't that a lovely little way to end an introduction? The heart of a true pastor is fully satisfied in ministry only when the hearts of his flock are fully satisfied in Christ.

And so three points I want to go over with you this morning is I think John just wants to hold before us as a church at the very beginning, remember the message. Number two, remember where it came from.

And number three, remember why it came. So remember the message. John tells us in verse one, the Christian message is a message about the word of life. It's something true and momentous and life-changing.

It's something eternal and creative and life-saving. And it is something that is very personal and tactile and human. Now it's really hard to understand how should we understand this phrase, word of life.

But I think the easiest way to get it is to understand the word of life in verse one as saying essentially the same thing as the life in verse two and the eternal life in verse two, which are all referring to the eternal Son of God appearing or being made manifest as a human being in Jesus Christ.

[6 : 10] So in other words, what John is talking about here, what the message that he wants to communicate to his church is that the message is embodied in a person. The message actually is a person.

God became human. He was born in Bethlehem and he was a prophet from Nazareth and he was a king crucified outside of Jerusalem. His name is Jesus.

You know him. We've talked about him. We've seen and heard and touched him. We've told you about him. And we want you to know that what is made visible in his human life is the eternal life of the Son of God.

In his life, all the perfect bliss and love and joy and holiness and peace that God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit have enjoyed for all eternity is revealed for all the world to touch and see.

And if you want to know God, John is saying at the very beginning, if you really want to experience life in him, if you want to have confidence restored in the middle of crisis, you need look no further than the Lord Jesus himself.

[7 : 12] The message that I am sending you is a person. And John says it beautifully at the end of his letter. Don't go there. Just let me read it. He says, this is the message. This is what we're bearing testimony to.

That God gave us eternal life. And this life is in his Son. Whoever has the Son has life. And whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life.

I think this is very clarifying for us when we're going through some sort of crisis of confidence. because we need to be reminded of the central message that can be a firm rock for us in the storm. We need the scriptures. We need the prayers of God's people. We need testimonies like we just heard. We need songs that lift our hearts to the Lord and remind us of who Jesus is and that life is to be found in him.

See, in suffering, I think we often want to know what's the meaning of this. So what happened on 41st and Fraser last night? Why, Lord? What can possibly be the purpose of this?

[8 : 20] Or in suffering, we often want to know the duration. How long, O Lord, will this go on forever? But so often in scripture, God rarely gives us the purpose of the suffering.

Much more, he gives us the person that we can cling to in suffering. He says, this is the Lord Jesus. This is the one who is in your midst as the resurrection and the eternal life.

Remember the message that I first preached to you. But he goes further. Pastor John is well aware that the message is not on its own enough for some people.

There are some skeptics and intellectuals among us who want to know where did this message come from? How can we trust the messengers? How do we know that what they say about Jesus is really true and really happened?

If I'm going to bank my whole life on this message, I want to know that it's valid. And this is where John goes to great lengths to reassure his skeptics about where the message came from.

[9 : 26] He says, the message wasn't made up. It rests on firsthand eyewitness testimony. And here you notice the layering of language about physical sense perception.

Four times sight imagery is described. Two times hearing imagery and once touching. Verse one, which we have heard, which we have seen with our own eyes, which we have looked upon and touched with our own hands.

And he just layers it one upon the other. What John is trying to say is that this message is not based on oral tradition. So, have you guys ever played that game of telephone around the dinner table before?

Do you know what that is? So, my kids and their cousins sometimes like to do this, like a Thanksgiving or something like that. It's where one person at the table chooses a message and they whisper it to the next person in the table and they whisper it to the next person, next person, and it goes all the way around the table.

And then at the end, you compare what the original message was to the final version. So, you start with like the dog ate his lunch. And as it goes all the way around, it ends up being he ate hot dogs for lunch.

[10 : 38] And some believe that the message of Christianity is based on oral tradition. So, what we have now is so far from the original that it can't be trusted. But John says, not so.

We heard it ourselves, straight from the source itself. Nor is this message based on church tradition. Some scholars have famously argued in recent centuries that the historical Jesus never actually claimed to be God.

That a century or two after his death, the church slowly started worshiping Jesus as divine, and so the human Jesus became the divine Christ over time. But this really wasn't the original belief of Jesus or conviction of the Christians.

This was the church developing their thoughts about who he was over time. But not so, says John. We saw him with our own eyes.

We touched eternal life with our own hands. And this word for touched is the exact same word that Dr. Luke uses in Luke chapter 24 when the risen Jesus suddenly appears to his disciples and says, why are you troubled?

[11 : 48] And why do doubts arise in your heart? See my hands and feet. It is I myself. Touch me and see. See, the message about Jesus comes from those who had direct personal contact with him, and it means their testimony about Jesus can be trusted.

So Pastor John is writing to his flock, wanting them to be encouraged in the faith. He says, remember the message, remember where it came from and why it can be trusted, but above all, remember why it came.

Or better, remember why the message is being proclaimed to you by us. He says, the message is never just about facts. In verse 3, we see that the message is about fellowship.

It's something that establishes and nurtures fellowship with God and with others. But did you notice the order of this? It's not the order that we would expect.

He says, human fellowship first, divine fellowship second. Notice this, verse 3. That which we have seen and heard, we proclaim also to you this good news, so that, here's the purpose, you may have fellowship with us.

[13 : 07] And indeed, our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ. Now, I would have expected the opposite order to happen, so that you may have fellowship with God and anybody who has fellowship with God has fellowship with us.

But it's reverse order. What's going on here? Well, who you keep company with matters, it seems. But the point here is that the only access or entry point into the fellowship of God is fellowship with John and the other apostles.

Because they are the authorized eyewitnesses of Jesus' life, ministry, death, and resurrection. And Jesus is the only one who is the gift of God's eternal life to us.

Is this making sense? So let me describe this. We don't get God apart from Jesus. Does that make sense? And we don't have access to Jesus apart from the apostles who proclaimed him and wrote about him to us.

Does that make sense? And the only access point into fellowship with the apostles, this is the second thing, is coming to believe and have confidence that their message is true and resting your whole life on it.

[14 : 26] It's believing their words about the word of life. It's trusting in the truth of their message about Jesus. It's the only thing that will draw us into fellowship with them and draw us into fellowship with God.

Now, this is very important. The way in which John is using this language of fellowship is very different than the way we normally talk about it in the church. We normally talk about like there's hot cross puns downstairs.

Let's go have some fellowship together, right? Or there's soup Sunday this coming evening. Let's go have some fellowship together. And those are all really important things because they foster good relationship with one another.

But the language of fellowship that John uses here isn't about direct relationship with one another. It's not something I can create by getting to know you better. It's something that is created between us when we participate in something else.

Does that make sense? So fellowship is not something that we're creating with one another. It's something that's created between us when we participate in something else. And so John is saying that fellowship with him and fellowship with God is something that is created as we come to cherish the message about Jesus Christ together.

[15 : 39] As we are washed by his forgiving and grace and cleansing grace together. As we are clothed in Jesus' righteousness together and purified to become like him and ready to see his face.

As we are filled with his love and captivated by his words. It's as we celebrate the message of Jesus Christ and proclaim it that we are bound in fellowship with one another and we are bound in fellowship with God.

And so the question becomes how do we come to cherish this Jesus? Well that's what one John is all about. Feasting on the words that John is giving us under the anointing of the Spirit which will put us in touch with Jesus and draw us into the eternal life of God fellowship with the Father the Son and the Holy Spirit.

Does that make sense so far? And this is the great privilege of the Christian life and this is the great encouragement of the letter that we're going to be walking through over the next couple months is you can participate in the life of God.

I want you to sit with that statement for a second. You can have fellowship with God. The testimony of John can put you in touch with the real Jesus and the real Jesus can draw you into the real life of the real God.

[17 : 12] There's a point in his book Mere Christianity where C.S. Lewis tries to explain Christianity to the naturalist who believes that science offers us a sufficient explanation for everything in the world.

And he says there is an important difference that he wants the scientist to know, the naturalist to know, and it's the difference between biological life and spiritual life. He says biological life always tends towards death and decay.

It always needs to be replenished and repaired by air and water and food and sustenance.

Whereas spiritual life, on the other hand, is in God from all eternity.

It's not the river that needs to be replenished, it is the fountain that fills the river. It is what the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit enjoy in each other's presence before creation and it is what creates the whole universe with ease and with joy, giving it life.

Now, C.S. Lewis has this really interesting image. He says biological life in some way is like a shadowy reflection of spiritual life. But it's a reflection in the way that a photo is a reflection of a place.

[18 : 26] Or a statue is a reflection of a living human being. And he says a person who has changed from having biological life to spiritual life would have gone through as big a change as being a carved statue to becoming a living human being.

And he says that's precisely what Christianity is all about. The world is a great sculptor's shop, he says. We are the statues and there is a rumor going around that some of us someday are going to come alive.

See, I think C.S. Lewis wants us to see what John wants us to see, that while we may biologically be alive, we may not spiritually be alive as much as we desire or as much as God intends for us.

We've seen living examples of this today. Baptism is a picture of coming alive with Christ. It's a picture of people giving their lives to Christ and being immersed in the Father, the Son, and the

Holy Spirit.

And if you are hungry for that sort of life, you can have it, John says. You can have it. You can ask Jesus for it right now, or in May you can come to Introducing Jesus course to discover more.

[19 : 43] Because this message about the word of life is worth exploring, and it's definitely worth trusting. Brothers and sisters, I speak these things to you in the name of the Father and the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.