

1 John 1:1-4

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[0 : 0 0] Shall we pray together? Let's pray. Father, I pray you speak to each of us through this passage, that these aren't just words from a letter 2,000 years ago, but this message may contain the words of life.

I pray that you give each of us joy and fellowship as we hear these words. And I pray you give me strength as I proclaim and testify to its truth.

We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Well, thank you, Aaron. What an introduction. I'm overwhelmed. That was really mean.

Just kidding. Aaron and I have known each other a long time. He did my wedding 14 years ago. And he was even more inappropriate then. You asked me if I'd hidden a wife in Kamloops, I think.

And I hadn't. And I'm used to it. Well, first, let me congratulate John and Abby and Zion and Brayden on their baptisms tonight.

[1 : 1 9] It's a big deal, guys. It's a really big deal. Tonight is a night of joy. And I think the joy in this room, especially if you're a visitor with us tonight, and I know there's a lot of you, the joy we're feeling might be a little bit surprising.

Because today has not been a very joyful day. The world we live in right now is not a very joyful world. Aaron and I grew up in the 90s, right?

You act like you were born in the 90s. Yeah. Aaron and I grew up in the 90s. And in the 90s, people called that decade the age of optimism. So cute.

So naive. It was the end of the Cold War, the beginning of the Internet, and digital innovation, and global communication and collaboration. It was a really optimistic time. It was a simpler time.

I don't think many people are calling the age we're in right now the age of optimism. I don't think there's very many people who are very optimistic about the future. A really, really great, terrifying book last year about young people, and it was called The Anxious Generation.

[2 : 3 7] There's a feature article of the Atlantic magazine this February that was titled The Antisocial Century. We read news headlines, and we realize we live in an age of uncertainty and fear and isolation.

And yet, miraculously, tonight, in this place, this is a night of joy. And tonight, I want to answer the question, how is that possible? How can any of us be joyful when it feels like everything is going wrong in the world?

That's what our text is about. In the passage Josh just read, it'd be helpful if you have the Bible open in front of you. That's the black or blue book, page 1021.

This is 1 John. In that passage, as we flip to it, we hear that the God of the universe offers each of us two gifts. So I don't know what you've come in from tonight.

I don't know what you believe about God. But the message I want you to hear tonight is that God offers all of us two things. He offers us joy, and he offers us fellowship.

- [3 : 56] That's what God offers you this evening. I want to define those two terms quickly. Those are churchy words, certainly fellowship, that we don't use very often. Fellowship means when two people share in something that is beyond themselves.
- So I'll give the example of marriage. When two people get married, in a marriage, two individuals, before that day, were completely distinct from one another.
- But at the marriage ceremony, the wedding, they join into a new thing together. They're married. And this new thing is now a shared life that they did not have before, and they cannot have without the other person.
- You can't be married if you're single. That's an example of fellowship. It's when two parties come together, and the new thing they enjoy, the new relationship, is so intimate that it completely changes who they are.
- It redefines them. They're transformed in the process. At marriage, we say they become as one. So to have fellowship fellowship is to have a common life together, something you didn't have before on your own, but now you do enjoy with somebody else or with a group of other people.
- [5 : 14] It's a shared life. That's the biblical picture of Jesus' earliest followers. They had everything in common. We read that they shared their life. They shared their possessions. They shared in sorrow and in suffering and also in joy.
- And that's what the passage tonight invites all of us to receive. It's a shared life with other believers and a shared life with God himself.
- A life that once you enter into it, you will be transformed in the process. You will never be the same. If your Bible's open to page 1021, verse 3 says, listen, I write these things so that you may have fellowship with us.
- And indeed, our fellowship is with the Father and His Son, Jesus Christ. That's the first thing God offers you tonight, fellowship. All of us can leave here experiencing the fellowship of God.
- But wait, there's more. Call now. We aren't just offered fellowship through these words. We're also offered joy. Look at verse 4.
- [6 : 21] We are writing these things so that our joy may be complete. Joy is not the same thing as happiness. Happiness is an emotion that bubbles up and then dissipates quickly.
- So you feel happy when you're eating ice cream. But if your ice cream falls on the floor, your happiness drops with it, right? Joy is different. Joy is not a momentary emotion.
- It's a state of being that's not shaken by your instant circumstances. So you can experience joy even if you're feeling sad. Though I remember being with one of our kids at Children's Hospital when they were really little, holding them in my arms as we awaited a diagnosis from a doctor.
- And if you've been in that place, you know that is not a happy moment. The parents are scared and exhausted. But as I held my child in my arms and had them look up at me with total dependence and total trust, I was filled with an inexpressible joy.
- I was sad, but I was joyful. Joy is a state of being that has the ability to transcend your immediate circumstance. It's not just an emotion.
- [7 : 40] It's something bigger, something grander. We're told in the Bible that it is joy that enabled Jesus to endure the cross. For the joy set before him, Jesus endured the cross, despising the shame.
- And that's what all of us are offered tonight. Perfect fellowship with God and one another and perfect joy, regardless of your circumstances. That's what God offers us.
- That's what Jesus offers. That's what our faith is all about. That's what baptism points us to. Perfect fellowship. Perfect joy. Well, who wouldn't want that?

So how do we get it? This is the next point. So if God offers us two things, we're shown in the text, there are now two ways to receive them. Two ways to receive these two gifts.

According to John, we receive these gifts of God through two things. To receive fellowship and joy first, we receive it through what John calls the life. And then secondly, we receive joy and fellowship through the word of life.

[8 : 49] So the life and the word of life are how all of us tonight are offered joy and fellowship. Listen to our passage again. I'll begin right at the beginning. Verse one. That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which 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 we testify to it, and we 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. It's a very long, poetic sentence. And if you're an English Lit major, the question you might be asking is, what's the subject of that sentence?

Harder than you think. The subject is right at the beginning of verse two. It's the life. This passage is about the life.

So what is the life? Again, let's put on our detective hats and let's see what we can learn. So if the subject of the sentence is the life, see what we learn about the life in this sentence.

So right at the beginning, verse one. That which was from the beginning. So the life was from the beginning. The life has been around since the beginning. In the beginning was the life.

[10 : 14] Keep going. Verse two. The life was made manifest. We've seen it. The life manifested itself. To manifest means to appear.

It's like at a concert or a play when all the lights go out and then one light, a spotlight turns on to illuminate an actor or a singer on the stage. That's to manifest, to appear, to shine forth, to be illuminated and seen in the darkness.

So this week, Lionel Messi was made manifest in Vancouver. People were so excited. He came. We saw him. Taylor Swift was made manifest in Vancouver last year.

If you prefer that. In the same way, the life, which predates time, has appeared and was seen by John, the person who's writing this letter.

Three times in three verses, the author mentions that they have seen the life. Did you mention that? Did you notice that? One sentence, and he says three times, I've seen him, I've seen him, I've seen him.

[11 : 18] Two times, they mention the life was manifested. See, the life is not some vague philosophy or spirituality or disembodied, airy-fairy belief to help you sleep at night.

The life is something real. Something seen and touched and heard and known. The life was before the beginning and was made manifest and was seen.

Let's keep going with these clues. Look in verse two again. We're told the life is eternal life. So the life was in the beginning, the life was made manifest, and the life never ends.

It's undying life. Then says, the life was with the Father. The life was with the Father, God the Father. The life comes to us from God.

If you're trying to figure out who the life is, verse three finally tells us who he's talking about. It ends, our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ.

[12 : 22] The life is the Son of God, Jesus, the Christ. So this passage is about the life. And the life, we find out, is Jesus.

So you could reread the whole thing and say, in the beginning was Jesus. And he was with God, and he was God. In him was life. Is this familiar?

And the life became flesh, manifest, and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory. Jesus is the source of all life.

That's what the passage is saying. He comes from God. He is God. He comes way before there was ever a beginning, and he has appeared on earth. The person writing is emphatic that Jesus is the life, and that he's seen him.

I've looked upon him. I've touched him. He's the life. I testify to you. I proclaim it. Jesus was with the Father, and Jesus has been with me. He's the life.

[13 : 26] And so the way to experience perfect fellowship and perfect joy is to receive the life, to receive Jesus Christ. Christ. But there's a problem.

This is very nice for John, that he saw and touched and heard. Sounds like a scientist. I come from a science background. I like this. It's observation. This is like a thesis.

But I haven't seen Jesus. I wasn't there 2,000 years ago, 10,000 kilometers away from here. I don't think any of us were. Maybe you, Aaron. I'll stop.

I'll stop. I'll stop. It's not funny how old you are. I'm sorry. It's really inappropriate. None of us have seen Jesus like John did.

So how can any of us believe in Jesus like John did? How can any of us have any certainty that Jesus is the life that he sent from God to bring perfect joy and perfect fellowship?

[14 : 34] What's the proof that this isn't just some myth, some ancient, fabricated fairy tale? The proof is at the end of verse 1. This is the second way that we receive the joy and the fellowship.

And what John refers to at the very end of verse 1, he calls the word of life. The word of life literally means words about the life.

So if the life is Jesus, then the word of life means the words about Jesus. The words that reveal Jesus. The message that shows us Jesus and tells us who he is.

So the guy writing, John, our author, saw Jesus. He was there. He was an eyewitness. He touched him. He heard him. He saw Jesus die. He saw him crucified.

From the cross, Jesus said to John, he said, John, look after my mom. John heard it. He saw it.

[15 : 40] He heard Jesus cry and he saw him die. John saw Jesus' dead body buried. And then three days later, John ran to the same tomb and he saw that it was empty.

That night, John heard Jesus calling to him past the grave, peace be with you. John saw Jesus risen from the dead. He touched him.

He beheld him. And then John shared with the whole world what he had seen and touched and heard. And he wrote this letter and now we're reading it. And what John is saying is that the way for us to receive this gift of joy and fellowship is by receiving his testimony.

We don't have Jesus physically here with us like John did, but we do have the eyewitness accounts of what happened. The word is how we experience and know the life.

Notice how John ends the passage by saying at the end of verse 3, we proclaim the word of life so that you too may have fellowship with us.

[16 : 51] And indeed, our fellowship is with the Father and his Son, Jesus Christ. That's an outrageous claim. John claims to have fellowship, to be sharing in life with God.

And he claims that we can have fellowship with God as well if we accept John's words. So without accepting the words about Jesus, which we call the Bible, we cannot know God.

Our fellowship with God is contingent on our fellowship with the eyewitnesses, the apostles, who wrote the words of life, the testimonies about Jesus.

So as Christians, we treasure the Bible because it is how we see and hear and know Jesus. This book is how all of us can know eternal life.

It's how we can receive perfect joy and perfect union with God and with one another. So I want to pause dramatically, not because there's music playing.

[17 : 59] Dramatic pause. To the newly baptized, to John and Abby and Zion and Brayden, many people make commitments to Jesus as you have tonight, but they fall away.

Many people. That's actually one of the reasons John writes the letter we're studying tonight because some Christians have walked away from the church. So John writes the church a letter.

When I was in youth group here with Aaron 15 years ago, there were 100 teenagers every week. Can you imagine? We filled four to six pews every evening service.

And I fear 20 years later that many of them have fallen away. being baptized is the beginning of your life of following Jesus.

It's not the finish line. The way to nurture your faith and grow in Christ is to abide in him by studying the word of life. There is no other way.

[19 : 11] In this great age of uncertainty and isolation, we can celebrate the perfect joy we know through the perfect fellowship with God and with one another that we enjoy.

Now, if you don't know Jesus tonight, if you don't understand the words of life, if you've tried reading the Bible and you think this book is impossible or boring or whatever, we run, I run, three evenings in May where we ask the question, who is Jesus?

Looking at this original historic source material. It's open for everyone. It's open for people who have no faith, people who are Christians, people who believe in a different faith and we meet in the living room, we read passage, we talk about it and it's fantastic.

It is warm and friendly and safe and people can come from any belief and talk about these words of life. He's the most important person who ever lived, whatever you believe about him. No one else has transformed human society or history as this man has.

It's worth three evenings of your time finding out who he is. So sign up for that. It's on our website. I want to finish now with two ways where we can share this gift of God.

[20 : 23] So God has given us two gifts tonight, joy and fellowship. We receive these gifts two ways through the word and through the life rather and through the words of life and now there's two ways to share these gifts.

John mentions the two things he does in response to what Jesus has done. The first thing he says is he testifies. He says it twice. To testify means to bear witness. It means to give testimony about who Jesus is and what he has done.

Don't be ashamed of Jesus. Bear witness to who he is. The Greek word for testify, the original of this letter, it's the word martyr.

Testify means martyr. share Christ even if it costs you everything and it did cost John everything in the end.

So the first thing we can do to share this gospel is we can testify. The second thing we can do, I'll finish with this, is proclaim. This is the root of the word evangelize.

[21 : 32] It means to share good news. John is sharing good news with us, good news about Jesus. He is sharing about the life.

And it's a good thing he does because if John didn't, and if the other eyewitnesses didn't tell anyone what happened, then none of us here would know. And none of us would have fellowship with God or each other and none of us would experience his joy.

There are people in our city for whom you are the only Christian they know. if you do not share the good news of Jesus with them, they may never hear it.

I had a friend in high school who was as close to Christianity as you could possibly be. He would stand up and leave the room whenever faith came up in conversation.

He was one of my best friends. I prayed for him every morning in high school and then I gave up. Two years after I graduated I saw him at a UBC frat house Christmas party which is where evangelism typically happens.

[22 : 45] It's my first one. It was my last. I was leaving. He was coming. So we met each other in the foyer and the first thing he said to me after not seeing each other for two years was this.

I need to start going to church. And the first thing I said back was why? It was crazy. What's happened? You're so closed.

He became a Christian. He is still a Christian. He has a PhD in theology teaching future pastors about the Bible. He gave his testimony at a retreat we still have called the All In in 2008 and it was a holy moment I'll never forget.

I have goosebumps just sharing it just mentioning that evening because afterwards he gave his testimony how he'd come to faith and he came up to me and he looked me in the eyes and he said I thank God for you.

And we both bawled our eyes out and hugged in perfect joy and perfect fellowship. A joy and fellowship we still share 20 years later.

[23 : 54] This is the invitation for all of us. God can raise the dead. He can bring anyone to Jesus. I've seen it.

I've heard it. I testified to it tonight. Who is the person in your life who he is inviting you to testify and proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ to?

Who is it who throughout eternity with God will look you in the eye and say I thank God for you. We share Christ with our city so that nights like tonight will happen again where we celebrate new lives joyfully entering into the fellowship with the life so that they too may have fellowship with us as indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ and so that all of our joy may be complete.

Amen. Let me pray for us. our Father in Heaven we thank you for Jesus who is the life and we thank you for the words of life the words about Jesus.

I pray for all of us you would help us to see and to know and to love him to understand what he has done for us. Help us to testify and proclaim him to our city and our world and I pray you'd fill all of us with perfect joy and perfect fellowship.

[25 : 30] In his name we pray. Amen. Amen. Amen. Thank you.