

First John(2) - The Word Of Life

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Preacher: Rev James Maciver

[0 : 00] First letter of John chapter 1. We began looking at this letter last time as we intend to go through it and look at its main teachings.

So we'll read again from the beginning of chapter 1. 1 John chapter 1. That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and have touched with our hands concerning the word of life.

2 John chapter 1.

We saw last time that the main emphasis in the first passage here in 1 John is on the word of life. There are different ways in which this word of life is spoken about.

And we looked last time at the word of life personified. In other words, that the word of life essentially means Jesus Christ himself, who was with the Father and came into this world and revealed God to us.

[1 : 22] But we noted too, and it's an important connection, that it's not simply or merely Jesus Christ himself and his person. It is also Jesus Christ as he is in the gospel, as he's proclaimed by the gospel.

And as we'll see tonight, that's really the second part of the emphasis is the word of life proclaimed. So it's Jesus, but it's Jesus also, as contained in the gospel message.

You could say that all of that is inside the meaning of that phrase, the word of life. And therefore, tonight we're looking at that word as it's in Jesus and through the gospel.

You can say that in the person of Jesus, incarnate Jesus as he came into the world, Jesus now in the gospel. God is not giving us a very small portrait of himself, not a very small, if you like, passport size photo.

It's really a life size photo, because everything that Jesus is, is revealing God to us. Everything he did, all that he spoke of, or you see what they saw of his person.

[2 : 29] He says here, we've seen with our eyes, we've looked upon, we've touched with our hands concerning the word of life. The life was made manifest, the life that was with the Father from all eternity.

So the life that was personified and is personified in Christ, he's saying now in verse 3, that which we have seen and heard, we proclaim also to you.

So it's the word of life proclaimed. But secondly, we'll need to look at the purpose of that proclamation, because not only is the apostle saying, the apostle John saying, this is why we, apostles, proclaimed this word of life that Jesus is and that the gospel is.

We just, not just that they proclaimed it. When the gospel is proclaimed today, as we are proclaiming the gospel to this day, this is in fact what is happening also.

There is a purpose to that. And the purpose to the proclamation you find here is fellowship and joy. We proclaim it to you so that you may have fellowship with us, and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ.

[3 : 42] And secondly, we are writing these things so that our joy may be complete. Proclamation is towards creating a fellowship and that too involves setting up a lasting joy.

So the word of life proclaimed. Now you notice that John here is speaking about we and us and also contrasting that with you. He's writing as an apostle.

He's writing from a point of view of those that God established at the beginning of the New Testament age to be the founders of the New Testament church. And as he's saying here that we, he and the other apostles, have fellowship with the Father and with his Son.

We're writing these things to you so that you may have fellowship with us. In other words, he wants to incorporate, make sure that his readers are incorporated into this fellowship that he himself as an

apostle is already one of or part of.

So we'll need to look at that word fellowship a little later on. But this we and us is important because there is an important distinction between the apostles and who they were and what God gave them to do and the abilities that God gave them and everything else that then followed on from that.

[5 : 01] Because the apostles were really given the authority and the ability by God to actually establish doctrine, to establish foundational doctrine for the church.

The era of the apostles was unique. That era is now closed. And it's important that we realize that. And I'll mention that in a minute. But in Acts chapter 2 and verse 42, you remember it's written there that the church then, the small group that they were compared to what they became, they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine, in the apostles' teaching.

The teaching that you have in the New Testament is apostolic teaching. Why is that important? And why is it important that we realize that that apostolic teaching, that that scripture, that that revelation from God is now closed, it's now completed?

Well, it's important because you find many, many thousands of Christians throughout the world are not going to say they're not Christians and they're not all within the charismatic churches, though many of them are.

But you'll find that that's something that they don't accept or something that they accept only in part. Because you'll find some people saying, yes, I know what the Bible says, but the Lord spoke to me.

[6 : 27] And the Lord spoke to me in these terms, and therefore this is definitive. And therefore this is on the same level as what you find in the Bible. It's equally revelatory.

It's equally authoritative. It's equally sufficient for human life. It's not. Because God, through the apostles, established that New Testament church and the canon of scripture came to be settled through the apostles, of which John is the last, was the last.

And that, as I say, is important because you come across, either in your reading or on TV channels, something that would suggest that actually nowadays there are apostles in some churches.

And these apostles can speak with the authority of God, and they can speak in such a way that gives you things that you believe that are equally valid alongside of what you find in the pages of the Bible already.

Well, this is John saying to us, we have fellowship with the Father and with the Son, and that which we have seen and heard, we proclaim to you so that you may have fellowship with us.

[7 : 38] Now, it's not specifically stated there that there's a uniqueness to the apostolic period, but it's behind the scenes there. And you then go to other parts of the New Testament where you find, obviously, that the apostles were given an authority and an ability even to work miracles through God, God's ability given to them, the ability God gave to them so that they came to have the truth of the gospel established.

And these miracles were there so as to actually verify or authenticate the truth that they were proclaiming. Once that's gone, once the apostles died out, once that era was over, so that came to a close.

Now, that does not mean that God cannot work miracles today. That does not mean that God does not answer prayer in miraculous ways at certain times.

What we're saying is we mustn't think that that has to be normative for the church's life today or for the preaching of the gospel today. Here is something that belonged to the apostolic period.

And apostolic ministry, as it says here, involved both testimony and proclamation. See what he's saying here? Verse 2, The life was made manifest.

[9 : 00] We have seen it and we testify to it and proclaim to you. Apostles needed to be witnesses of Jesus. That's one reason you cannot have an apostle in the church today because an apostle such as John himself needed to be able to say they had actually seen Jesus.

They were witnesses of Christ personally. And so was Paul who met him on the way to Damascus. When you read the letter to, the first letter to the Corinthians especially or to the Galatians, the apostleship of Paul was called into question by those who were his opponents, by those who wanted to wreck his ministry and called into question his authority.

But one of the ways that he establishes that he was indeed an apostle of God is that he had seen Jesus himself. He had met with him. And so that was your early chapter in Acts there when they had to replace Judas with another person to make up the twelve.

You can see there how it had to be somebody who was a witness to Christ himself, a witness of Jesus who had seen him. So the testimony is important. And the testimony of John is not second hand.

The testimony of John is not something passed on to him by someone else speaking about Jesus. He had been with Jesus. He had met Jesus. He touched Jesus and touched by Jesus. He had heard him for himself.

[10:27] He was a witness. And that was part of his apostolic credentials. And the second thing was the apostles' ministry involved along with testimony, proclamation.

Proclamation. Now, of course, there's still proclamation. That's what we're trying to do, proclaiming the gospel. But it goes back foundationally to the proclamation of the apostles themselves who were proclaiming the truths of God in an authoritative way that we're not.

We're taking apostolic truth and trying to explain the meaning of it to you in preaching. But the apostles themselves proclaimed things which God was giving them firsthand.

Similar to the prophets of the Old Testament where you find that God was using them to establish his truth in writing, especially now as John came to write this epistle.

Now, saying that on the way past, it's not something we're going into in any great detail. But it is important that John could say that Christ himself had sent them to be testifying to him and to be witnesses to and to proclaim his message.

[11:34] John 17 and verse 18, the prayer that Jesus uttered in the upper room where he prayed to the Father and one of the things he said there in verse 18 was, Father, as you sent me into the world, even so I am sending them.

And then in the upper room after his resurrection from the dead, Jesus came in amongst them. You remember in chapter 20 and verse 21 of John and what he said there was effectively the same as he'd had in his prayer.

As the Father sent me, even so I am sending you. He was commissioning them to go in his name to be witnesses to him and proclaimers of his truth.

And everything that came after that is founded upon that apostolic authority and ability. The word of life, proclaim. Now that's what we say, as we say, we seek to proclaim also today, still the word of life, it's still Jesus, it's still the message of the gospel of which Jesus is the substance.

And that proclamation today is still that proclamation of or concerning the word of life. Let's look at the purpose for that proclamation.

[12:48] What he says is that we have proclaimed this to you so that you too may have fellowship with us and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with the Son, Jesus Christ.

Purpose, as we said earlier, is fellowship and secondly, joy. Let's deal with them in turn because the word fellowship is hugely important in the New Testament.

Sometimes we think of fellowship, it's not exactly wrong perhaps to think of fellowship as just having friendly relations with each other and sitting around and enjoying one another's company, coming to, for example, in the hall to a congregational fellowship or the 55 plus fellowship where you meet in company, where you enjoy certain company, where you hear a talk or whatever, but you just enjoy being with each other and you can rightly call that fellowship.

But the word fellowship in the New Testament is much deeper than that. It's much wider than that. It has a theological significance. It has to do with the idea of sharing in something or sharing out something, particularly sharing together in something.

Now think of what he's saying here. This is what we have seen and heard. The life that is in Jesus, the life that Jesus came to reveal from God and to be in himself, that life that we have seen and heard we proclaim to you so that you may have fellowship with us and indeed our fellowship is with the Father, with the Son, Jesus Christ.

[14:17] In other words, the apostle is saying we actually share as apostles the things of salvation that are in Jesus in our relationship with the Father and with the Son.

And he says, we're writing these to you so that you too may have fellowship with us, that you may become sharers, if not already, of these great matters of salvation.

So fellowship, we're just dealing with it very briefly, but fellowship is to share in the things of God, of his salvation, not just in a casual way, not just in a sort of friendly relationship type of way, but it means sharing together in something that's really precious.

Think of John and James, his brother, for a moment. Think of them with their father, Zebedee. And as you find in the gospel writers, we find Matthew, for example, you find that they're brought out there as having a fishing business.

Their father, Zebedee, owned the business, but John and his brother also were with him in the boat. In other words, Zebedee was still involved in the fishing business actively.

[15:37] But there you have it. You see, there's a sharing together in something that's common to each of them. The father is the owner of the business, we believe, or had taken the sons with him into that business.

So that itself gives you a clue because the relationship that they had with their father, the relationship they had to each other as brothers, and the two brothers with the father, that's what gave them that common share in this business.

That common share in that fishing business. They had a fellowship in which they shared together those things of that fishing business, whatever was called Zebedee and sons, whatever you might say nowadays would be called.

But that's what it meant. And that's what fellowship actually means spiritually as well. We share in the things, things that are proper to the father and to the son, but he brings us to share in those things of salvation that are in Jesus, that have come from God himself, belong to God himself.

So, think of what that means. Well, you can say that that fellowship, this sharing, this sharing together, has an upward dimension to it and also a horizontal dimension.

[16:55] There's an upward dimension when you think of, or a vertical dimension, when you think of that fellowship involves a living relationship with God. And there's a vertical dimension when you know that fellowship too involves a relationship with each other among Christians.

So, fellowship is rich and precious. It brings in that sharing, it brings in sharing in a vertical sense, sharing what God the Father and God the Son and God the Spirit has to give us, to share out with us if you like, and also a sharing together on the vertical level in terms of the church and the life of the church.

Let's look at those two just very briefly again because it means, first of all, that fellowship involves a living relationship with God. A living relationship with God in Christ.

Of course, some people will say, I'm a Christian, but that's just in distinction from saying, I'm a Muslim or I'm a Buddhist or I'm a secularist or I'm an atheist. People will say, no, I'm none of these things.

I'm a Christian. But you can have that statement made without actually knowing a living relationship with God. Some people use the term Christian just to say, well, I'm brought up in the church.

[18:17] I know something of the gospel. That's my heritage. That's what my family have always had an involvement in. So from that point of view, I'm a Christian. I'm following them in that tradition. No, but fellowship actually means a living relationship with a living God because sharing things together means a living relationship, a meaningful relationship, a relationship where there is from God to us things which He will have us to share together and with Him as our Father.

Think of what that means. Tonight, as a Christian, as a born-again person, that's what you are tonight and this is your great privilege. You have access to God as your Father.

You have His fatherly care, His fatherly companionship. You have access to Him through the Son, through the ministry of the Spirit. You have His forgiveness. You have His care.

You have His correction. You have everything the Bible tells you belongs to God as the Father of His people in relationship with you tonight. What a great privilege that is.

Let's just stop for a moment and think what it means as far as we can to have God in a living relationship with you as your Father in Heaven. And as we said this morning, to know that that unchangeable God is absolutely dependable.

[19:39] He will always be a Father to His people. He will never cease to be anything other than fatherly to them. Everything that He needs to do as their Father He will do for their benefit.

Our Father, said Jesus as He taught His disciples to pray, who is in Heaven. And it's important that He began with the word our, not just my or your.

Because it's a collective prayer, a prayer that people use collectively. Indeed, we read through it and said it this morning with the children. But that's how He begins, our Father.

He is our Father. The Father of the family. The Father of those people that He has made His children. And that means while God is certainly from His side absolutely committed to that

relationship, unfailing in that relationship, it follows on into our responsibility that you need to look after that relationship.

that you mustn't ever be casual about that relationship, that you must maintain it, that you must use the things that God has given you so that that relationship is kept up as much as possible for you in such a way as retains all the joys and all the benefits of it in your own experience.

[21 : 06] I'm saying that because we live in a world where things like commitment to a certain congregation or a certain church, we'll see that in a minute, is something that isn't necessarily emphasized as much as we should in the days in which we live.

But if you look after this relationship with your Father, with God, it has to take in, as we'll see in a minute, your relationship with other Christians as well. the last thing the devil wants you to do as a Christian is to look after your relationship with God.

The last thing he wants you to do is to look after your relationship with God. Because he will try and get you to stop reading your Bible regularly.

He will try and persuade you, it doesn't really matter that much if you slacken in your prayer life. He will try and persuade you, it's not really all that important, it's not vital that you go to church every week, that you attend the prayer meeting, that you do as much as you can to fill your soul with the truth of the Bible in the way that it is read, in the way that it's taught.

All of that is designed destructively against your relationship with God. Look after it. It's far too important to treat in any other way.

[22 : 33] that vertical living relationship with God on a daily basis. Look after that relationship.

Don't give in to any persuasions or temptations that would draw you aside from that. Commit yourself daily to going to your Father, to speaking to Him, to praying to Him, to asking for His guidance, to seek His forgiveness.

forgiveness. All the things that come into that relationship, but look after it. And it's not just for your own sake, because if you don't look after or I don't look after my personal relationship with God, it's going to affect the fellowship that God's people are together.

When one suffers, the others suffer with it. Whenever something sets in that's unhealthy, it doesn't leave the rest unaffected. so look after for your own sake and for the sake of the church you belong to.

Look after your relationship to God as I have to as well. So there's that living relationship with God. But secondly, this gives us a biblical view of church or of the church.

[23 : 47] Using the word church in the sense in which we think of church, not just a denomination, but church in the biblical sense of it, here actually helps us to get a biblical view of the church.

And especially you want to focus on the local church that we are. You know yourself that as we read in 1 Corinthians for example, the apostle can use the church of those people that gathered in Corinth and worshipped God there as a congregation of his people.

They are the church in Corinth. And there's a church in Philippi, and there's the church in Ephesus, and a church in Thessalonica, and there's the church in Stornoway. To this day, not just one denomination, but wherever God's people are, there is God's church, whatever the location is.

But for our interest tonight, I'm not saying this in any exclusive way, or in any way of thinking of ourselves as better than others, I'm just simply, as the pastor of the congregation, drawing your mind to the importance of the fellowship that we are, that God has made us to be as a congregation.

And this gives us a biblical view of church, and of the church, and of the local church. What does that actually mean? Well, let me quote from John Stott, who has in one of his books, this about fellowship.

[25 : 11] He says, this statement of the apostolic objective in the proclamation of the gospel, namely, a human fellowship arising spontaneously from a divine fellowship.

This, he says, is a rebuke to much of our modern evangelism and church life. We cannot be content with an evangelism which does not lead to the drawing of converts into the church, nor with a church life whose principle of cohesion is a superficial social camaraderie, instead of a spiritual fellowship with the Father and with the Son, Jesus Christ.

The doctrine and behavior of the heretics was threatening to disrupt the church. The true message, verse 5, he says, on the other hand, produces a true fellowship.

fellowship. In other words, there is a reminder to us from the teaching of this passage itself. When we engage in evangelism, in outreach, in our witness to the world out there, what is it we are seeking to achieve by God's blessing?

We are seeking to achieve that God will bless the message and our lives so as to make converts for himself to be established then in the church. When God converts somebody, it is with a view to having them set within his church, within the fellowship that he creates by his spirit.

[26 : 42] And on the other hand, you have the same emphasis there, that a fellowship is not just a loose cohesion, social camaraderie, as Stott put it, but rather a fellowship in the Son and with the Father and the Son, with his Father, with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ.

And just as we are to look after our living relationship with God personally, so we are also to be committed to the fellowship. The fellowship that God has placed us in or made us part of.

In other words, the idea that you find sometimes spoken about, well, I am a Christian, but I don't do church. Of course, there are places in the world where it's very difficult for individual Christians, perhaps, without traveling a long distance, maybe haven't got access to where the people of God gather, so they use technology that's available to them, such as our own technology in videoing the service, and so on.

I'm not talking about that. It's just that where people have the facility and the ability to gather with other Christians, and they say, well, I'm a Christian, but I don't do church.

And anyway, there isn't really any church around me that I'm satisfied with. That's not an uncommon thing in the world of today. Well, that's not biblical, and it's not good for somebody to actually have that mindset, because it means they're placing themselves in an isolationist position, rather than in a fellowship.

[28 : 23] God has converted his people, and in doing so, has created a fellowship. It is Hebrews 10, chapter 10, verses 24 and 25.

Don't, he says, let us not neglect the assembling or gathering of ourselves together, as is the custom of some, and do it all the more as you see the day approaching.

Well, that's what he's saying there in Hebrews. It's exactly the same that arises from the word fellowship. It's a sharing together in something. You can't share together in something unless you're committed to where it's being shared, and to that fellowship where you find the sharing.

I'm not saying that this evening because I'm thinking of any of you that are not committed to the fellowship that this is, that this congregation is.

I'm just saying I'm reminding myself that it's all too easy to actually have an idea of being somewhat detached from the ongoing life of the church and still think, well, I'm still part of that congregation.

[29 : 39] You know, there are many times, sadly, that we carry out funerals in this congregation of people who have never been to church, never had a living relationship with God, never had a participation in the life of the church.

And that's extremely sad. Why? Because it's indicative of a lack, not only of desire, but of life. Here is what John is saying.

We're writing that you may have fellowship with us and participate in the fellowship we have with the Father and with the Son. What is this tonight that we are part of?

It's a fellowship. It's a sharing together in the gospel and in the life of Christ. The life that Christ gives through the gospel to us.

So, for all of us, ask, ask yourself, ask God, what can I do for this fellowship?

[30 : 42] What should I be doing in this fellowship? It doesn't have to be a very prominent spiritual role. It doesn't have to be something for which you're qualified theologically. But ask yourself, ask God, Lord, show me what I can do in that fellowship and for that fellowship.

How can I use my gifts? What can I do for the congregation? Ask myself, ask any, ask any of the elders, ask any of the Christians, the long, the Christians who have been Christians a long time or whatever, but ask them, let's share together in these issues.

How can we contribute even more to the fellowship that the congregation is together? And that regularity of attendance, believe me, it's something that hugely encourages us in the leadership of the congregation and ministers and session, elders, because it shows a commitment to the fellowship, but something which we see your contribution to the enriching of our experiences as part of this fellowship.

It's so important and it's so important to look after each other in the fellowship that we are in Christ and God having created that for us.

Let me just, before moving on finally to the joy that's mentioned, let me just ask you tonight, do you have this living relationship personally with God?

[32 : 16] Are you able to follow this to an extent tonight? What do you say? I'm part of that congregation. I attend regularly the services of Stornoway Free Church. I like going there.

I like hearing about the Bible and the teaching of the Bible. I like meeting people who go. I share with them and their company. All of that's very pleasurable to me. This is the question.

Do you have a living relationship with God through Jesus Christ? has your life been given over to Jesus? Are you still at a distance from that?

Because you cannot share in these wonderful riches that are in the gospel and in salvation in Christ especially without for yourself an income to trust in him, to receive him, to accept him, and to prize what you have in him.

That's the final thing. The purpose for the proclamation is in verse 4. We're writing these things so that our joy may be complete. It's really strictly the writing of these things, whether you take this as the whole epistle or just these words in the opening part of it.

[33 : 33] It really comes to the same thing. This is the purpose. We're doing this so that our joy may be complete. And by that it means our is a better translation than your joy, which is in some translations, because what the apostle has in mind is that he as an apostle and as a leader under God wants to share with them in the joy of salvation.

He wants them together to have this joy made complete or this joy in its fullness. And you can see the pattern, the order in fact that God has established proclamation leads to the creation of the fellowship, leads to the joy that's part of that.

Proclamation, fellowship, joy. That's the natural progress of gospel blessing. That's what we want to experience more and more of.

There's a sense in which we could ask the question, why do we preach the gospel? Many reasons, many answers to the question, but confining it to verse four, we preach the gospel so that by God's blessing a fellowship is created and added to and so that the outcome of that is a sharing together of joy, the joy of salvation.

What Jesus is saying is that our joy, and what John is saying is that our joy may be complete. And Jesus, in John chapter 15, put it remarkably this way.

[35 : 03] In chapter 15 of John's gospel, in verse 11, remember the imagery there is of the vine and the branches. They are the branches. He is the vine.

Jesus is the vine. The branches draw all their life from the vine. In verse 11, it says, these things I have spoken to you that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be full.

I'm not saying I can understand everything to do with that or convey all that's built into that wonderful statement by Jesus. But he says that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete.

It means essentially what gives Jesus joy is the joy that we share in when we come to know him. he takes his joy from all that he has done for the father, all that is in the father, all that the salvation is, the salvation of his people, everything that gives Jesus joy.

[36 : 16] He is saying my joy may be complete in you. What greater privilege is there for us as we are the branches and Jesus is the vine.

as we draw our life from him and to experience this joy of salvation. Millions of people in the world are trying to find lasting joy and they are looking in all the wrong places for that joy, human joy, a joy created out of worldly things.

happiness. But here is a joy above all of that, the joy of Jesus and the joy that Jesus brings and gives and that becomes our joy as we come to know him.

And tonight for you and for me, let that be the joy that you and I want more and more of and let that be the joy that would fill our lives from day to day, the joy that belongs to the fellowship that's created by the word.

Let's pray. Almighty God, we give thanks for your gospel, for the substance of it in your Son, and we give thanks for that word that has come to be made flesh, that is now announced in the gospel as the source of life.

[37 : 53] We thank you for the life that you bring and you give to your people. Lord, we pray that our concern tonight will be to have that life known to ourselves and for ourselves.

Help us individually and help us collectively as a gathering of your people, as a congregation, as a fellowship, to know of that joy being more and more made complete in our experience.

Grant us, Lord, that we may combat all that is in the world, all that causes us at times to be filled with grief and with sorrow and with anxiety.

Help us, we pray, to know of a return to that joy, the joy of your salvation, and to realize that nothing can remove that joy that you give, for it is placed in our hearts permanently.

And even though our own awareness of it may at times not be what it should be, yet we thank you for it and that it overcomes circumstances of life.

[38 : 55] So we pray that you bless us now, bless us throughout this week, and receive our worship, we pray in Jesus' name. Amen. Let's now conclude our service singing again in the same psalm, Psalm 57, and we're singing from verse 7, this time on page 75.

June is Dennis, my heart is steadfast, Lord, with music I will sing, awake my soul, wake harp and lyre, my song the dawn will bring. Among the nations, Lord, to you I will give praise, among the peoples of the earth, my songs of you I'll raise.

Verses 7 to 11, Psalm 57. verse 7. My heart is steadfast, Lord, with music I will sing, awake my soul, wake harp and lyre, my song the dawn will bring.

Among the nations, Lord, to you I will give praise.

among the peoples of the earth, my songs of you I'll raise.

[40 : 46] Great is your steadfast love, which reaches to the sky.

Your constant faithful hand, O Lord, extends to heaven high.

Above the highest heavens, O God, exalted me, and over all the air below display your majesty.

majesty. I'll go to the door to my right this evening after the benediction. And now may grace and mercy and peace from God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit be your portion now and evermore.

Amen.