

First John (1) - The Word Of Life

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Date: 06 October 2019

Preacher: Rev James Maciver

[0 : 00] looked upon and have 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. And we are writing these things so that our joy may be complete. I'd like to do a series of studies on 1 John.

It's not a very long letter, but yet it's a letter that's packed with very important teaching for us. Let me just begin firstly by pointing you to chapter 5 and verse 13.

In chapter 5, 13, we find the apostle's purpose in writing this letter to those that he's writing to. He says, I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life.

[1 : 14] In other words, this is an epistle or a letter that's directed towards assuring God's people that they do in fact here and now possess eternal life.

John was the last of the apostles to live, and we understand from historical writings that he spent his last days as an old venerable man in Ephesus.

And as he lived out his life, the final part of his life in Ephesus, he lived at a time of crisis in the church. Crisis to do with false teaching that had come from within the church and had spread out from that.

And indeed, if you look at Acts chapter 20, let me just read to you there what Paul said to the elders of Ephesus. This was the last time that Paul would see them as he met with them on his journey. And he says, verse 28, pay careful attention to yourselves, to all the flock, which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood.

[2 : 21] And then he says this, I know that after my departure, fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. For from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things to draw away the disciples after them.

Therefore, be alert, remembering that for three years I did not cease night or day to admonish everyone with tears. In other words, Paul was warning the elders at Ephesus of what was coming. He knew that false teaching was going to arise from within their own ranks and that it would cause great damage. And you go, of course, to the book of the Revelation, the final book of the Bible, and you'll find that Ephesus is one of the churches that are written to and called and named in the first three chapters there, where you find a church in Ephesus beginning of chapter two.

And the Lord is calling upon that church in Ephesus to repent from where they had fallen and do the works that you did at first.

And he had this against them especially while they were faithful in some things. He says that, I know, he says that I have this against you, that you have abandoned the love you had at first, your first love, what was the case with you, is changed.

[3 : 46] So all of that gives us glimpses into the kind of situation or context in which the Apostle John lived out his final days on earth.

And he doesn't say here, we don't have his name, but it's traditionally associated with John, John is very like a gospel of John, and we from that conclude that it was written by the same John that wrote the gospel.

But we get a glimpse, as we say, into the context in which he was writing, and although he doesn't tell us who he's writing to, it's obviously a flock of people, a group of people, a group of Christians that he's very, very attached to.

He calls them my little children. The letter is full of references to them as people that he dearly loves and wants to actually guide in the ways of the truth that they may be not led away.

So that false teaching arose, and you can see from chapter 2 and verse 19, where John is there saying that these people who had come up with these false teachings had actually gone out from the church there that he was aware of, that he belonged to, or knew these people belonged to children.

[4 : 58] He says, it's the last hour, and as you have heard that Antichrist is coming, so now many Antichrists have come. Therefore we know it is the last hour. They went out from us, but they were not of us.

For if they had been of us, they would have continued with us. But they went out, that it might become plain, that they all are not of us. In other words, this crisis in the church, this split that took place in the church, was over serious defection from the truth.

These people actually left because, it looks like, they weren't actually managing to persuade others of the heresies that they had actually come up with and were following for themselves.

And as we'll see, going through the letter, God willing, that false teaching was false teaching primarily about Jesus. And when you find false teaching about Jesus, and the person of Jesus inevitably, you're going to find false teaching about salvation, and about sin, and about holiness, and about the church, and about fellowship, and all these things that follow on from a distortion of the truth about Jesus Christ.

And we'll find, as we go through it, that what the Apostle John is doing especially, is drawing our minds to Jesus, and to who he is, and to where he is, in relation to God's salvation, and in relation to God.

[6 : 18] Nothing is more important for us, than that you know Jesus, but that has to be the Jesus of the truth, the Jesus of the Bible, Jesus of the Gospel, the Jesus that is revealed to us, in these pages of the Bible.

Because here were people who had come to distort the teaching, that traditionally through the Apostles was given about Jesus, and therefore so much else had followed on from that, that was wrong.

So the letter is really about an authentic Christian faith, and where you can see an authentic Christian faith in the life of God's people. How does it come to manifest itself?

Well, John gives us three assessments. Some people call them tests, and we're calling them assessments. Pretty much the same thing. But there's an assessment, as you go through the letter, that comes in various circles.

It's a very fluid letter. It's different to Paul's letters in that sense. It doesn't just deal with one thing and move on to the next. It kind of repeats things and reiterate things, and one subject or topic flows into the next, and then comes back to it again.

[7 : 33] And we'll see that that really enriches our whole experience of going through this first letter of John. So the three assessments are, first of all, Christian belief. We assess what is it we believe.

What is it we believe about Jesus, about God, about all that's deposited in Him for our salvation.

That's the first assessment. It's a doctrinal assessment.

It's a doctrinal test. What do we believe? Secondly, it's an assessment about Christian love.

Because John has a lot about Christian love.

And he has a lot about Christian love because it's pretty obvious, reading the letter, that those who had left were not showing Christian love, and were not fulfilling the type of love, and the richness of love that Jesus Himself had taught the disciples, and had shown in His own life.

So that's going to be one of the main strands running through John, and especially how it is for us as people of God that we love one another, that we show that love in various ways, that we love God, that we love His people, that we love His cause.

[8 : 42] That's the second assessment. It's an assessment of love, and especially of Christian love for God and for one another. Third assessment is an assessment of obedience.

First assessment is doctrinal. What do we believe? You could say the second assessment is social, in terms of do we love each other? What's the quality of our fellowship as Christians?

And thirdly, the third assessment is ethical. How are we in relation to God's laws, in relation to the standard of behavior and righteousness, holiness that God requires of us, and that is especially connected with the commands of God, which John frequently mentions.

This is what Jesus commanded, or this is what God commands. So these are the three areas of assessment. And as we go through the letter, the three assessments are repeated, or reiterated, and overlap, as we make our way through this very rich short epistle.

It's a bit really, I suppose, like you were sitting at a fireside, if you make a picture of being with the aged Apostle John, this venerable man, this man who had known Jesus so well, this man who was so noted for his own love, and for the quality of his life, and this holiness of life.

[10:06] And you're sitting there having a fireside chat with him, and this is him telling us what it is we have to believe, and why we have to believe it, and what it is we have to actually do in terms of loving one another, and why is that important, and what sort of testimony does that give to the world, and thirdly, what it is we need to be in relation to obedience to God, and to his commandments, and following that holiness of life that seeks to be like Christ, and have that Christ-likeness about us, so that people will say that they see something of Christ in us.

Well, these first four verses are really his introduction to that whole exercise of these assessments, if you like, as we'll call them. And in this, we're going to take it over two studies.

First of all, tonight, we're looking at the word of life personified, and then next time, God willing, we look at the word of life proclaimed, because that's what he's saying about it.

Let's look at the structure of these four verses, first of all, as we look at this word of life personified. It's important always, when you're reading through the Bible, that you do it with sufficient pause, just to reflect upon the verses that you've been reading.

And for John, it's important we read the epistles as a whole, yes, but here's an obvious introductory passage, and we ask ourselves, now how is this put together? Because it's only as you see how it's put together that you're then able to extract something of the meaning that John actually gave to these terms that he's using, and the way the sentences are constructed, and all of that, even if we're not grammar experts, which I'm not.

[11:44] Nevertheless, it's important to see the structure of the verses. So let's look at it. The structure is, first of all, verses one to two. He's here giving us a note of something.

Verses, in verse one, he's talking about this word of life. The main feature is the word of life. That's the main subject. The word of life.

He's going to talk about the word of life. We'll have to see what exactly he means by that. But that's the main topic. Keep that in your mind. That's really what he's dealing with. And then you have verse two.

You notice there's a little dash before verse two, and then there's a little dash after it as well. And that tells you it's actually in parentheses, as we call it. If you imagine brackets, it's the same sort of thing.

Instead of the little dash, you had a bracket there at the beginning and at the end. In other words, verse two is really by way of an aside. It's not unimportant. It's connected very much with what he's saying in verses one, three, and four.

[12:47] But it's something of a by the way thing. It's something that he's saying as an aside or a parenthesis and putting it in brackets. So you read verse one and then you can connect verse three.

You see, coming to the end of verse one, concerning the word of life, verse three, that which we have seen and heard, we proclaim also to you. I'll come back to verse two again and see that that parenthesis is itself important.

Then verse three, you come to the purpose for which, verse four, you come to the purpose for which he was writing these early parts of the chapter.

and indeed the whole epistle as well. We are writing these things so that our joy, some people translated your joy, may be complete.

Now then John, as indeed with the gospel of John, uses very simple imagery. And it's only as you begin to study the very simple imagery that John uses in the epistle here and also in the gospel that you think for a start, well that's going to be fairly simple.

[13:53] It's not going to be very profound. He thinks that, he speaks in terms of light, he speaks in terms of illustrative aspects from the natural world by which he illustrates things.

And you begin, once you go into it, you think, actually this is quite profound. Because as we'll see later on, this is, he says, what is true about God, that God is light.

And in him is no darkness at all. Well, light, you know something about what light is, but then God is light. And there's all of that rich imagery that we have that we're so used to, and yet we really find it's so much a profound truth as he explains that to us.

So there's verse, there's the structure of the verses then. Verse 1, then verse 3 especially tied together, and then there's the brackets in verse 2. So let's look at this word of life.

It's about the word of life. That's what, that which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen without eyes, which we have looked upon, and have touched without hands, concerning the word of life.

[15:03] That's the main topic and subject that he's dealing with. Now what is this word of life? What is meant by it? Is it the gospel? Is it the written word? Is it Jesus who's described in John's gospel?

As the word which was with God and was and is God. What is this word of life? Well of course there's a sense in which the gospel itself is the word of life because the gospel is the means by which life in Jesus is, by which we're informed of it, that it's proclaimed to us.

It's something that is actually brought to us in the announcement of the gospel. It announces to us the life that is in Christ, the life that God has provided in his salvation and so you could say in that sense the gospel is the word of life.

It's through that word, that written word and that preached word, that proclaimed word that we hear about and even come to know the word of life and indeed you could go so far as to say that the gospel is the word of life because that's what God uses to bring us alive, to bring us to know himself when he blesses this word to us, this truth.

So yes, the word of life could be taken as the gospel. But then you see what he's saying here. That which we have heard, well that could be the gospel, but then he says we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon and have touched with our hands concerning the word of life.

[16:40] So there's obviously something more than just the written word or the preached word. He's talking about someone. He's talking about something very personal. He's talking about that which we have seen and heard and handled with our hands.

It's a person and that means it is Jesus primarily that's spoken about as the word of life. Similar to the way the gospel speaks about him as God's word to us.

In other words, the word of life is essentially Jesus himself. Look at verse 2. The life was made manifest, was revealed to us 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.

How like the opening words of the gospel that is. So it's the gospel of John. So it's really primarily the person of Jesus himself as the one who has life in himself who is God's word to us and who is indeed God's full revelation to us as no one else is.

If you go to chapter 5 again and verses 9 to 12 there's something connected something important there connected with it. chapter 5 and verse 9 where he says that this testimony that God has given if we receive the testimony of men the testimony of God is greater for this is the testimony of God that he has borne concerning his son.

[18:15] Whoever believes in the son of God has the testimony in himself. Whoever does not believe God has made him a liar because he has not believed in the testimony that God has borne concerning his son and this is the testimony that God gave us eternal life and this life is in his son.

Whoever has the son has life whoever does not have the son the son of God does not have life.

Now you can see in that that the word testimony is repeated there and as testimony that's connected with the person of Jesus the testimony of God is in fact in the person of Jesus himself primarily.

In other words you can think of if you like with respect of God giving his own testimony. It's as if you put God in a court of law where you think about testimony being given to the truth where people are called in as witnesses to something that's been dealt with by the court.

The Bible uses that imagery and God himself uses it especially in the prophets of the Old Testament to actually say that he is testifying to his own veracity to the truthfulness of what he has given these prophets.

And here is John using this word testimony the testimony of God. Imagine just picture for yourself with all respect as we think about God just imagine him there in court being called in to give his testimony about the truth and about himself and about salvation.

[19 : 44] And he says here is my testimony here is my full testimony and in walks his son Jesus Christ the one who died on the cross who rose from the dead who ascended to heaven who is seated at God's right hand and God is saying that's my testimony that's my testimony for you to believe that's the provision I have made as a testimony to myself that is my word that is my declaration that is my great speech to you as human beings it's in the person of my son unless he produces that evidence so as we've read in chapter 5 we have that great declaration there this is the testimony that God gave us eternal life and this life is in his son and then he crowns that or comes to a conclusion dynamically with verse 12 whoever has the son has life whoever does not have the son of God does not have life now that's obviously against the kind of teaching we don't have access to it exactly we can pick it up from the gospel from the epistle itself as to the kind of false teaching that John was facing teaching that was very warped about Jesus and who he was and so John is saying

I want to assure you God's people whoever has the son of God who is Jesus has life and whoever does not have does not have life however clever he may be whatever alternatives he may come up with whatever the forms of teaching he may actually involve people in and however much he may be respected and even revered whoever does not have the son does not have life you see that's a point isn't it right at the beginning of our study of this epistle that you and I have to take to heart because that's something that will come across again and again the person of Jesus and the word of life that's in Jesus that is Jesus himself do you have the son of God through trusting in him is he yours do you have eternal life is that something that's still missing from your experience from your relationship to God to eternity see that's critically important isn't it amongst all the false teaching that we face today it's so plain and so demonstrably powerful as John puts it you have the son you have life you don't need anything more than him you mustn't have anything less than him but when you have him all is well you have life and without him you don't so that brings us to the person of Christ if that's the word of life yes it involves something of the written word where the message is conveyed to us about the life that's in Jesus but then it doesn't fit as we say just to leave it at that we have to come to the person of Jesus which he then here says it's something that we have heard he says we have seen with our eyes we have looked upon and have touched with our hands we're very often accused aren't we as Bible believing people that contrary to what so many in the world actually now believe or live by we're told you're surely not you're surely not still stuck with that book of fairy stories you're surely not still stuck with all of that that you call evidence which really isn't verifiable at all in the way that people verify things whether it's in a laboratory or scientifically testing it or whatever well salvation they'll say you're just following a set of rules and you know you just have so many arguments among yourselves as you fall out and as you disagree with what the rules are and what the rules state and what this rule is and that rule salvation is not merely following a set of rules or even primarily following a set of rules salvation is not having a creed that you follow slavishly salvation is in the knowledge that you have of this person salvation is about trusting this person salvation is about having a living relationship with Jesus Christ the Christ who now lives who is at God's right hand whatever people will say of the false teaching of the world that he wasn't even raised from the dead and just remember as it was in John's day so it is in our day that sort of idea comes from within the church as well within the visible church throughout the world you have people preaching and teaching that Jesus didn't rise physically from the dead that's falsehood that's false teaching that's heresy and John was facing the same sort of ideas in his own day that we're facing today so this salvation yes there's obedience to Christ involved in it yes as we'll see there are commands that God has given us that we have to respect that we have to apply our lives to but your salvation is not by slavishly following a set of rules not even the ten commandments your salvation is by trusting in by being savingly believingly obediently related to Christ he is your salvation he is the ground of your hope and if anything else is the ground of your hope then you're not saved and in order to be have that assurance John is pointing us to the ground of our assurance in Christ so it's this person now what does he say about this person well he says this is something he says that we heard seen touched this word and as you look at these words we'll come to them in a minute but he's talking about this eternal life which was with the Father and was made manifest to us very similar to the gospel of John the beginning of John's gospel in other words he's reminding those people that he's writing to that they have to resist the heresies that says actually Jesus was not God was never God he was a very important figure he was a very very powerful figure he was an able person he was somebody that God endowed but you mustn't think

that he was God that's what the heretics were saying because these heretics actually believed that Jesus was real but that he could not be God why?

because we know from records of the time that heretics of that time left the church were saying this God is spiritual and anything physical he cannot have any actual connection with anything that's physical like for example a human body you can't have the Jesus who was real and had a human body he can't be God because that would be impossible for God to be connected with something physical that's what the heretics were saying and that's what John is actually out to destroy that idea that Jesus was anything less than God see if Jesus is less than God there can be no incarnation what is that?

it's what John says in his gospel in the beginning was the word the word was with God the word was God and the word became flesh if Jesus is not God then God did not take a human nature and how important is it that God took a human nature it's critically important because that's what the Bible says is foundational to our redemption our redemption was worked out and accomplished by Jesus Christ who is God manifest in the flesh and if you take away either the humanity or the deity of Jesus you're in trouble because you don't have the saviour the Bible presents to you and you don't have the foundation on which our salvation is based here is John saying this is the eternal life which we declare to you that was with the Father and made manifest to us you see that's how he begins that which was from the beginning some people will say well does that not actually say that this word of life this Jesus this person had a beginning that as his person he began we take the beginning to be the beginning of creation well he says that which was from the beginning surely that says that Jesus did not exist before he was created as a human being but that's not what this is saying what it's saying is actually when the creation had its beginning he was already in existence he existed with God the Father the eternal life which was with the Father and was made manifest to us compare the beginning of the gospel as we say it's so it's so like this passage the word which was with God in the beginning was the word the word was is so important it has that eternal aspect to it and the word was God we are worshipping

[30 : 14] Jesus tonight we are worshipping God the Father the Son and the Holy Spirit one God but this person of Jesus who is God is worshipped by us he was worshipped by his disciples in the early church he received that worship he accepted that worship he never indeed wanted in any way to reject that worship as if it wasn't proper to give him worship they worshipped him and he received it because he was God their God their Saviour in the flesh so when the creation began he was already there and he had been there for all eternity as God you know people will very rightly say you know you believe things you don't understand I'm happy to put my hands up and say yes I believe things I don't understand but God is giving me the faith to believe it because they are truths about himself and the moment

I start thinking with my puny mind that I really need to understand everything about God I have made myself God how can we possibly imagine that everything about God or even the most about God we can fully understand how can I understand God's eternity how can I understand the immensity of God's being how can I understand the deity of Christ the divine nature of Christ Jesus as the son of God I can't understand it I can't get my head around that that this person who walked on this earth and went to the cross and died on the cross is God in the flesh but I believe it and if I don't believe it then I'm lost I have no basis on which to situate my life for eternity and for eternal life you see John is insistent that this word this Jesus this person that he is indeed no unless not less than God and so that's why he says not only so but he's also fully human because he says we heard we have seen without eyes we have looked upon and have touched without hands concerning this word of life now he uses these four terms to describe something of the tangibility of the physical part or nature of this same person not only was he with the father and with the father from all eternity but he was made manifest to us by taking our human nature so we heard him we saw him with our eyes we looked upon him we have touched him with our hands and who was better qualified to speak of both the deity and the humanity the humanness of Jesus but the apostle John the apostle John who leaned on Christ's breast at the supper who looked into Christ's eyes saw the love in Christ's eyes for him and who commended this Jesus so lovingly to so many people who was better qualified to speak about who Jesus is than this John and this is what he says and there's a progression you see in these words to hear something well you might say well the Old Testament prophets heard God but they saw no visible representation of him anything similar to the way that they saw Jesus you might say that's okay well the Old Testament they heard God but then

he says which we have seen with our eyes and then he says which we have looked upon and that's actually a progression beyond just seeing with your eyes because looking upon is a word in Greek which means having close investigation of something to examine something with the kind of viewing of that that puts it under your examination and wants to reach conclusions about it that's what John is saying he's not just saying you know we just saw Jesus in a general sort of way we were familiar with him we just saw him as any other human being no he says we actually gazed at him we looked in upon him we assessed who is this and we came to this conclusion that it is God with us in real humanity that's what he's saying we handled him we touched him and were touched by him this word of life well then here is just the beginning of John's epistle you can see already just how rich it is how full it is of teaching how interwoven all of these great topics are and they'll be unfolded as we go through God willing the letter as well but let's just say for our setting this is a hugely important letter of course you could say that about the whole Bible we're always saying that about the Bible aren't we very rightly it's so relevant it's so up to date it's so fitting for the kind of world that we're living in and of course it is but when you're looking at this epistle of John that's one thing you have to say about it it is absolutely up to date and relevant for the context in this world in which your life and mine is placed today because you're facing as we say a world that doesn't just have denials about Jesus outside of the church you have denials about certain aspects of Jesus within the church you have heretics who actually say things about Christ that aren't according to scripture and you have a divergence from the truth that is in Jesus we're living in times of the nature of Christ and of his work being questioned but outside of that you are very familiar that you're living in times when biblical morality is being questioned when this ethical assessment that John puts to us is something that you find so largely absent in the world's thinking when people live just by their own idea of what's right and wrong of what humanity is about what gender is about what sex is about what marriage is about that's the world we're living in that's the world that John's gospel shines its brilliant light into its darkness that's why it's not just relevant but important that we understand what he's saying to us about Jesus and how we carry that into the world and assure ourselves as we trust in Jesus all of us who trust in Jesus that we indeed have eternal life that we don't need anything more than what is in Jesus himself and of course what's true of John's day is true of our day as well in this sense that the heretics that John was facing were really just accommodating their ideas to the culture of the world that's basically what it's about the world says this science says this advanced technology shows this therefore we have to adjust our understanding of Jesus and of salvation and of the Bible and of the gospel that's why John and the first John is so important because it's telling us about what's critically foundational to Christian life to a Christian understanding of God to Christian love to Christian obedience and I hope as we go through it that it'll strengthen our faith and we'll be more assured of what we have in Christ and the totality and the sufficiency of what you have in Christ and I hope if you're here tonight and you're not saved and you don't have the son that even these thoughts that we've had arising from this passage tonight will speak to you and will persuade you that the most important thing in your life is to have Jesus for yourself to know him for yourself to love him to follow him to obey him to be one of his willingly as he is lord of our lives so again chapter 5 verse 13 let's just finish with reiterating what it says

I am writing these things to you who believe in the name of the son of God that you may know that you have eternal life may God bless these thoughts on his word let's pray gracious God our father in heaven we thank you for the manifestation that you have given of yourself in the person of your son we thank you lord that this is both profound and yet clear from your word we thank you that you speak to us through this word tonight and that this written word that we have access to speaks to us about this eternal word that was with the father the person of your son our lord and saviour Jesus Christ oh lord we thank you for all that is bound up in him and we pray that tonight our own concern may be to be known that we are found in him and that he is ours receive our thanks and bless us we pray with all that we need of your blessing throughout this week pardon our sin for Jesus sake amen well we're going to conclude our worship this evening singing in psalm 119 scottish psalter that's on page 411 and verses 129 to 133 tuneless airshire thy statutes lord are wonderful my soul them keeps with care the entrance of thy word gives light makes wise who simple are and after the benediction i'll go to the main door this evening thy statutes lord are wonderful my soul them keeps with care thy statutes lord are wonderful my soul them keeps with care the entrance mat com them heart have got children

[41 : 24] My mouth I have wine-opened and planted earnestly, While after thy commandment I long exceedingly.

Look on me, Lord, and merciful to thou unto me, As I art wont to do to those I name who truly come.
O let my Christmas in thy word arise till order thee, Let no equity obtain dominion over me.
Now may the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God the Father, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you now and evermore. Amen.