

Our Word of Life

This evening we will be spending most of our time in 1 John. 1 John was written during a time of great challenge to the Christian faith. This was the time when a variety of human philosophies and theology began to enter into the church, challenging the historic foundations of the faith. The seeds of Gnosticism planted decades before were beginning to germinate, the effects of which we still suffer from today.

Gnosticism takes its name from the Greek word *gnosis* that means “knowledge”. Followers of this philosophy claimed to possess a special, higher knowledge than others, thus making them more spiritual. Worse, it cast doubts upon historic Christianity because Gnostic beliefs directly contradicted the teachings of the Scriptures inspired by God. The result was that many who did not follow these pre-Gnostic teachings were left with doubts, insecurities, and the nagging idea that they were somehow missing something in their faith.

John wrote this epistle with several purposes in mind, many of which are stated in the book, but I think we might sum up his purposes by saying that he wanted to reassure believers of the truth of historic Christianity based on historical facts, and grounded in the reality of Jesus Christ. John was not interested in the re-interpreted Jesus of the Gnostics. He was concerned that people be secure in that which had been taught by him and the other apostles of Christ.

Today, we still have many of the same concerns as those first recipients of John’s epistle back in the First Century. There may be different specific philosophies and theologies, but the effects are similar because they come from the same bitter, false root. We still need the reassurance that is found within this wonderful letter. We still need confidence in the Person of Jesus Christ so that we can strengthen our faith, and never waver.

We do not need a theology of human discontent with what God has done and revealed. No, but we do need to be sure that salvation is found only in God’s Son, Jesus Christ. Why? Because everything about the life we are called to live flows from that fact.

1 John can be a bit challenging because John is a deep thinker. This means that he will not leave us on the surface skimming up the easy things. I believe you will also find this epistle very encouraging, for you will be challenged with the meaning of the fundamental truths concerning Jesus Christ and their meaning in your life. This evening, we begin with a look at the Word of Life, Jesus Christ.

John writes in 1 John 1:3 [RSV], ***“that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you may have fellowship with us; and our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ.”*** John starts off by saying fellowship always suffers when people miss the truth of Jesus Christ.

Please note that if the purpose was only to have fellowship with “**us**” (that is, John and those who believed as he did), it actually might not be such a big deal. However, note what John claims – “**our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ.**” That changes the entire prospect of having fellowship with John, for to be in fellowship with John also means to have fellowship with the Father and Jesus Christ.

John continues, saying, “**And we are writing this that our joy may be complete**” (1 John 1:4 [RSV]). John was writing to encourage his readers to continue in their faith in the Lord. John understood that insecurity over one’s faith always brings worry, concern, and even despair. Joy is the essence of Christianity. Joy in knowing that one is saved, and all that being saved entails! Salvation in Christ means one has the hope of spending eternity in the presence of the Lord and Creator of the universe! Salvation means no longer suffering from the guilt of one’s sins that separated one from the Father! Salvation means one has received the mercy of God, instead of what one truly deserved, which is His wrath! But because God loved us so much He spent His wrath that was due us literally upon the body of His son, Jesus Christ!

It is this knowledge of what it means to be one of the Lord’s own children, forgiven of one’s trespasses, that the Apostle Paul was able to write, **8. Indeed I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For His sake I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as refuse, in order that I may gain Christ 9. and be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own, based on law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith; 10. that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and may share His sufferings, becoming like him in His death, 11. that if possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead.** (Philippians 3:8-11 [RSV]) What makes this statement from Paul even more amazing is that it was written while he was in prison! So Paul was found to be in complete agreement with John. They both wanted all people everywhere to experience first hand the complete joy that only comes from being in fellowship with God!

John also wanted his readers to know that faulty doctrine always leads to the practice of sin. John writes, “**My little children, I am writing this to you so that you may not sin; but if anyone does sin, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the Righteous;**” (1 John 2:1 [RSV]). John does not suggest (as did the Gnostics) that we can be sinless, but he does teach that faith ought to help us *sin less*!

John also does not dance around who is at the root of these problems. He tells us the whole trouble begins with false teachers, so we need a way to sift through all the junk to get to the real truth. John writes, “**I write this to you about those who would deceive you;**” (1 John 2:26 [RSV]).

I think we will find it amazing who is considered a deceiver and a false teacher in the Bible and who is often tagged with that identity today – it is not always the same. Too often those with different opinions are labeled a false teacher when the Bible tells us who the false teachers are: Those who deny that Jesus came in the flesh. **2. *By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit which confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God, 3. and every spirit which does not confess Jesus is not of God. This is the spirit of antichrist, of which you heard that it was coming, and now it is in the world already.*** (1 John 4:2-3 [RSV])

John wrote this epistle because he understood turbulent times for Christian faith produces the need for some assurance. John states in 1 John 5:13 [RSV], ***“I write this to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life.”*** This is the crux of the matter, is it not? Even today, we need to get our spiritual priorities straight so that we can know we are saved.

It is strange that many Christians today follow the thinking that destroys any possibility of confidence that they are saved. It is so terribly sad that so many in the church today live their lives in constant fear as if we cannot know whether or not we are saved. If we have come to the Lord in obedient, saving faith and followed after Him as He walks in the light, then, we, too, can be just as assured as John was that God will be faithful to save us! Is that not just what John said? Listen again: ***“I write this to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life.”*** John wrote this epistle to help us for he knew that secure people are faithful people.

I want to take a further look at how John opens up his first letter. He says,

1. 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 – 2. the Life was made manifest, and we saw it, and testify to it, and proclaim to you the Eternal Life Which was with the Father and was made manifest to us – 3. That which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you may have fellowship with us; and our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ. 4. And we are writing this that our joy may be complete. (1 John 1:1-4 [RSV])

These first four verses are very powerful.

I read a story of young Teddy Roosevelt that went like this. Mittie (Teddy's mother) had found he was so afraid of the Madison Square Church where they attended that he refused to set foot inside if alone. He was terrified, she discovered, of some monster there called the 'zeal.' It supposedly was crouched in the dark corners of the church building ready to jump at him, he said. When she asked what a zeal might be, he said he was not sure, but thought it was

probably a large animal like an alligator or a dragon. He had heard the minister read about it from the Bible. Using a concordance, she read him those passages containing the word 'zeal' until suddenly, very excited, he told her to stop. The line was from the *Gospel of John*:

“His disciples remembered that it was written, ‘Zeal for Thy house will consume Me.’” (John 2:17 [RSV]) The little word ***“zeal”*** was powerful to young Teddy Roosevelt – so powerful that it scared the living daylights out of him!

In 1 John, it is a phrase that carries the power – and here it is not intended to frighten us. Rather, it is a phrase that sets the stage for the entire book. The focus of these introductory verses is what John calls, the ***“Word of Life.”*** Watch how he develops the idea he wants to communicate to his audience.

Beginning in verse 1, John tells us:

- 1) That which was from the beginning;
- 2) Which we have heard
- 3) Which we have seen with our eyes
- 4) Which we have looked upon
- 5) And touched with our hands
- 6) Concerning the Word of Life

Now, turn to verse 2:

- 1) The Life was made manifest
- 2) And we saw it
- 3) And testify to it
- 4) And proclaim to you
- 5) The Eternal Life
- 6) Which was with the Father
- 7) And was made manifest to us

Verse 3 says:

- 1) that which we have seen
- 2) And heard
- 3) We proclaim also to you

It is obvious that John has something to say about the Word of Life, and whatever it is, there were two important reasons for proclaiming it to his readers:

“So that you may have fellowship with us” and ***“that our joy may be made complete.”***

John is laying the foundation for all that he wants to say, and that foundation is Jesus Christ.

In 1 Corinthians 3:11 [RSV], the Apostle Paul states, ***“For no other foundation can any one lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.”***

The foundation is based upon John’s own personal testimony, something that goes all the way back to Jesus Christ Himself. Just before He was taken from them at His glorious ascension, Jesus said in Acts 1:8 [RSV], ***“But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the Earth.”***

This is one of the most important of distinctions between historic Christian doctrine and faith and the imaginative theology and philosophy that tries to satisfy all of mankind’s questions. John is going to tell us what really happened. Others will suppose, imagine, postulate, guess, offer conjecture and satisfy only their own limited, finite minds, but what John wants us to know at the outset of this letter is that he has **heard, seen and felt** Jesus Christ ***in the flesh***.

There is an interesting passage found in Jeremiah 37:17 [RSV] that says, ***“King Zedekiah sent for him, and received him. The king questioned him secretly in his house, and said, ‘Is there any word from the Lord?’ Jeremiah said, ‘There is.’”***

This was a wonder, indeed, to be privy as Jeremiah was to the word of God, but John says something even better to his readers. He says there is not just a word from the Lord, there is the Lord Himself Who was heard speaking face to face!

John testified that he has seen Christ. John is referencing here to the physical act of using one’s eyes to see something. He had seen Jesus Christ. Jesus was real and in the flesh – He was no figment of someone’s imagination and He was no spiritualized aeon of the Gnostics. No, Jesus was a Man one could see with one’s very own eyes!

It was not just a fleeting glimpse of the Lord that John was testifying of seeing. No, he makes a point to drive home that he has looked at Christ steadfastly. This is different than just merely looking at something – this is observation of the kind that leads to an understanding of the meaning or significance of that which is observed. It is empirical, scientific proof!

John also brought this point throughout the *Gospel of John*. He says in John 1:14 [RSV], ***“And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth; we have beheld His glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father.”*** John was speaking here of the wondrous transfiguration of Jesus he saw on the mountain with Peter and James, John’s brother, when he saw revelation of Jesus in His true identity as One of the Godhead. ***“And He was transfigured before them, and His face shone like the sun, and His garments became white as light”*** Matthew 17:2 [RSV]. It was following this transfiguration the Father

declared, ***“This is My beloved Son, with Whom I am well pleased; listen to Him”*** (Matthew 17:5 [RSV]).

John was not ashamed to proclaim that his own hands had actually touched Jesus Christ. Remember what Jesus told His disciples following His triumphant resurrection? ***“See My hands and My feet, that it is I Myself; handle Me, and see; for a spirit has not flesh and bones as you see that I have”*** (Luke 24:39 [RSV]). Not only did Jesus the Son of God come in the flesh. He also rose from the dead in the flesh. John proclaimed a living, physical presence and he bears his direct and specific testimony to his readers. Again, it is the classic apostolic witness and we need to hear it today.

Jesus Christ the Word of Life is the source of two of the most important possessions we could ever have: Fellowship and joy.

Fellowship basically is a sharing in common and a sharing together. Would you like to know that you are in fellowship with the Father and with His Son, Jesus Christ? Well, it is the Word of Life Who is the source of that assurance. It is *because* He came in the flesh that He can act as the one and only Mediator between God and man. As the Apostle Paul told Timothy, ***5. For there is one God, and there is one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus, 6. Who gave Himself as a ransom for all, the testimony to which was borne at the proper time.*** (1 Timothy 2:5-6 [RSV]) John’s testimony regarding the Word of Life is essential to the faith that puts us into that fellowship.

Joy is what counters the despair of the world lost in sin as it follows after the ***“prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience”*** (Ephesians 2:2 [RSV]), meaning Satan. Joy, however, is more than happiness because it is deeper and more pervasive than mere happiness. Would you like to have real joy in your life? Well, the Word of Life is the source of true joy! John’s testimony is essential to finding that real joy in life. As Jesus said, ***“I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly”*** (John 10:10 [RSV]).

This evening, let me remind you of the real Jesus, the One Who came into the world, born of a virgin. The One Who grew ***“in wisdom and in stature, and in favor with both God and man”*** (Luke 2:52 [RSV]). I want to remind you of the One Who was Immanuel, God with us, the One people heard, saw and touched. Let me tell you about the Jesus Who loves so much He gave His life as a sacrifice for sin, yours and mine, so that we might find God’s forgiveness. Let me invite you to consider the Word of Life, the Son of God, the Lamb, the Redeemer and Savior. You want to be sure of your stand with God? Be sure about Jesus! Come to Him now in obedient, saving faith, calling on the name of the Lord as you have your sins washed away in that watery grave of baptism, rising up out of that water, clothed in His holy garments, a new child of God!