

Lesson 2: “The Word of Life”**1 John 1:1-4****Craig Crawshaw**

Today we launch into the text of this relatively brief, but most revered book of 1 John. And I do so with a sense of anticipation, for in it we will find a great boon to bolster CONFIDENCE in our faith.

Dr. J. Vernon McGee calls this book a “family letter” as opposed to the many “church letters” of Paul, for it speaks to the universal family of God of how we can KNOW with confidence our standing in the family of God. 1 John begins with no salutation, nor ends with final greetings, but it launches into a personal testimony, more like a friendly, but serious family talk around the dinner table.

Dr. J. Sidlow Baxter calls it the book of “No Compromise” – for with John, black is black and white is white and there is no grey between – the apostle tells it like it must be for the true Christian.

Professor William Barclay calls this book of 1 John a “great defense of the faith.”

Dr. Warren Wiersbe entitles his commentary on 1 John “Be Real” – because the apostle John challenges us to look hard at the authenticity our faith, both in belief and practice. (*This is the book I encourage each of us to purchase as a companion to this sermon series.*)

TO PONDER AT THE OUTSET

√ John is undoubtedly the last living eye-witness apostle of the Lord Jesus on earth. If there was anyone on earth at that time who could verify the indisputable credentials of Jesus as the God-Man Messiah, it would have been John. He personally heard, saw and handled this Jesus.

√ 1 John is considered to be one of, if not the last of the New Testament books to be written. Most modern scholarship agrees that his Revelation was written earlier, when he was exiled to the isle of Patmos. Then upon his release he was pastor of the church at Ephesus, from where he wrote the message of 1 John – probably around 100 A.D., when John would have been in his 90’s.

√ The first-generation Christian era of fervent excitement, as revealed in the book of Acts, had waned. And now a second and third generation of Christ-followers were living on the fading memories of their parents and grandparents.

√ According to John’s writing in Revelation, the church at Ephesus had “lost its first love” (Rev. 2:1-4). So this letter is written to his own church, and ours, to rekindle first love of Christ above all else.

√ The church was not so much being attacked from without – that is, from non-Christian persecution that would want to destroy it. But it was being attacked from within – from those who would want to modernize the church, keeping it current with present-day trends, to change it. Today the church is pressured to adapt and “come around” to accept abortion, same-sex marriage and “co-existence” with all other belief systems. This “no compromise” and “defense of the faith” message of 1 John is indeed needed and applicable today.

TODAY’S TEXT

1 John 1:1-4 *What was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the Word of Life – and the life was manifested, and we have seen and testify and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was manifested to us – what we have seen and heard we proclaim to you also, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ. These things we write, so that our joy may be made complete.*

THE “BEGINNING”

John’s first words, “what was from the beginning,” makes us recall two other “beginnings” mentioned in Scripture.

1. In Genesis 1:1 we read, “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.” This “beginning” is the commencement of the creation of the physical universe we know. From these cursory words the creation could have been a few thousand years ago or a few million or billion years ago. The

time frame is not as important as our understanding and belief that God created, and that the universe was not a cosmic accident. This verse asserts that if we can't take God's creation of the universe as fact, the rest of the Bible won't make much sense.

2. In the gospel of John, verse one, we read, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God." This "beginning" predates the creation. It goes back as far as the human mind can fathom, and then continues beyond that to the infinity of timelessness. "The Word" – who John later reveals in verse 14 to be the One who "became flesh and dwelt among us" – Jesus the Christ – was the timeless God from eternity past, co-existing with the Father as both separate ("was with God") and one with the Father ("was God").

Both these references are meant to rush into our minds as we begin reading in 1 John, "What was from the beginning..." This Jesus, the word of life, is the creator of all (Colossians 1:16) and the God from eternity past (John 1:1). But in this instance, John is particularly referencing the "beginning" of Jesus' earthly ministry, when John first met Jesus as He approached him at the seashore at bid him "come follow me." (Luke 5:10-11).

HEARD, SAW, GAZED UPON, HANDLED

Can you sense the excitement and confidence in John's words as he relates how he has heard, seen, gazed intently upon and handled this Jesus? He had heard first hand the Sermon on the Mount, the many parables, the Olivet discourse and the Upper Room Discourse. Perhaps even more, he had heard Jesus' loving words to the prostitutes, demon-possessed and lepers – the outcast of society. And he had heard Jesus' scalding words to the religious elite who were the "blind leading the blind." He had heard Jesus' words on the cross as He forgave the multitude. And every sermon, story and conversation he heard from the lips of Jesus had astonished him and cut him to the core.

He had seen Jesus feed the thousands with but a few fish, seen him walk on water, and heal the hundreds that had come to him. He had seen with his own eyes the dead raised to life and the transfiguration of Jesus as he talked with Moses and Elijah. He had watched Jesus die on the cross, as he held the hand of Mary His mother. He had gazed into the open and empty tomb and saw the grave clothes neatly folded. And He had seen with his own eyes, the man who he had seen die on the cross walk through a wall in His resurrected body – alive again!

He had gazed intently upon this man for year after year, for that is what the words translated "looked at" mean. He had gazed upon unconditional love, absolute purity, integrity, transparency of person and unlimited grace. And he had concluded that this was God in the flesh. And when Jesus invited him to touch his wounded hands and feet, he had done so with absolute confirmation of the bodily resurrection of this God-man. After all, he had predicted His resurrection on numerous occasions.

If you wanted the best confirmation of an occurrence, you would want a first-hand, credible eye-witness. And here is John – the best eye-witness on the planet – telling you that Jesus is the life.

ETERNAL LIFE IN THE FLESH

What is eternal life, you might ask? John knew the answer, and eternal life was a man – Jesus. He declares this in verse 2: "*we proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was manifested to us.*" And later in the book, John reiterates this in a bold and memorable statement:

1 John 5:11-12 *And the testimony is this, that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. He who has the Son has the life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have the life.*

Simply stated, if you know and have Jesus as your personal Savior and Lord, you have eternal life – the life of God that will never end. But if you have doubts that you know and have Jesus as your personal Savior and Lord, then you do not have eternal life. And the book of 1 John can help give you the **CONFIDENCE** of eternal life as you learn what it is to be a true Christians in belief and behavior.

At the end of verse 1, John calls Jesus "The Word of Life." He is the mouthpiece of God to the world, and thus "the Word." And He is the human manifestation of eternal life, and thus he is "the Life." His words bring life. And His life is the manifestation of the Word of God. This is what blew John away, and he wants his listeners to be blown away as well.

The word “manifested” which John uses to describe Jesus is carefully chosen to combat the assertion that Jesus was not God “in the flesh.” God was fully displayed as a man. This Jesus had been with the Father (vs 2) and then was seen in full view in human form.

Paul is more of an apologist in his writings, whereas John is contemplative. Paul is logical, while John is mystical. Paul is rational, whereas John is experiential – taking you to Jesus in feelings and words of sensory perception. As John writes, you can almost hear, see and touch Jesus for yourself. And the truth is, you can, by faith!

FOR FELLOWSHIP AND JOY

In verses 3 and 4, John relates two of the reasons he is writing:

1. FELLOWSHIP – with others and with the Father and Son
2. JOY – made full

“Fellowship” is the Greek word “koinonia” which only truly takes place when lives and conversations are melded around the subject of God and His Son, Jesus. Just being in the room with other Christians is not fellowship. Eating with other Christians is not fellowship. Even going to a Dodgers game or watching a movie with other Christians is not fellowship. “Koinonia” takes place when we share in worship, ministry & conversation about the deep things of the Spirit. Hopefully this fellowship takes place in our worship services and home Connection groups. And also hopefully, this fellowship takes place as you, in small group conversation, share with one another your joys and struggles and commit them to God in prayer.

One of John’s expressed purposes of this message of 1 John is that true fellowship around the person of Jesus might take place, drawing us closer together in conversation, worship and communal ministry.

And then in verse four, John says that he is writing “so that our joy may be made complete,” The word “our” means “yours and mine.” It is inclusive. Some translations render it “that your joy may be made complete” and that is appropriate. John wanted his joy completed in sharing about Jesus, and his listeners’ joy completed by their hearing about Jesus. This should be our goal whenever we share about our Jesus. We receive joy in sharing, and hopefully the listener receives joy in the hearing.

John was so full of the joy of knowing, trusting and loving Jesus that he wanted all other believers to grow and be fulfilled in that way also. And we all know Christians, maybe even ourselves, who are not as full of joy as they should be in their salvation and relationship with God. He opens this “family talk” by saying in essence, “I am so stoked in the incredible truth that we can have relationship with God and this God-man Jesus, that I want you to share with me in that joy as you grow in your understanding of how fantastic this relationship can be.”

We need to see this old 90 year old saint bubbling with joy at the thought of sharing with us his excitement in having heard, seen and touched this Jesus. And then we sense his heart as he so much wants us to share in that fellowship and joy with him. If you want to grow closer in fellowship with Jesus, and stoke the fires of your joy, then you have come to the right place in 1 John.

Begin here in the opening 4 verses. Feel John’s uncontained excitement, even decades after Jesus has left the earth. Hear his fatherly words to us, his brothers and sisters in the faith, attempting to shake us into like-enthusiasm. And prepare in the verses to follow, to receive fatherly instruction in how to live the Christ-following life in such a way as to instill CONFIDENCE in how we behave and believe.

We are about to hear the incredible message that GOD IS LIGHT, GOD IS LOVE and GOD IS LIFE. Let us sit at the feet of this most beloved disciple of Jesus and learn and grow in confident Christ-likeness.