

## CHRISTMAS AND THE FLOW OF KINGDOM HOPE - Part two

Sunday, December 24<sup>th</sup>, 2023 - 10:00 a.m.

Pastor Don Horban - Cedarview Community Church, Newmarket, ON

**IPAD TEXT - 1 John 1:1-4 - "That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we looked upon and have touched with our hands, concerning the word of life— [2] 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— [3] 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. [4] And we are writing these things so that our joy may be complete."**

Most Christians don't realize John wrote this letter *after* his experience on the Island of Patmos, just off the coast of modern Turkey, where he had written the book of Revelation. It is generally believed after he wrote Revelation he was released from imprisonment by the Romans, returned - probably to Ephesus - and finally wrote 1 John at the very end of his life.

And so, at about ninety years of age, he writes this letter to the early church scattered around Asia Minor. We should bear in mind as John writes this letter his heart is freshly stirred by the great vision of the dramatic events of this world's history and the end of the age. He writes about the importance of Christ's *first* advent as he still freshly ponders his revelation of the *second* advent still to come.

This presses **urgency** into John's words. He is keenly aware of the unbreakable link between the **first** coming of Christ and the **second** coming of Christ to close up this world's fallen history.

John lived long enough to know how spiritual passions cool and wane. Not everyone **sees** the things he saw in his vision on Patmos. We're so prone to **distractions**.

And we're also prone to **doubt**. Trials can wear us down. Imagine how the early church felt as she began to witness the death of all of those apostles from whom they had received so much. The ministry of these apostles had brought many of these Christians to the Lord. Now, as time wore on, their leaders were beginning to die off. None of the things they said about the coming of Jesus had happened. A sense of discouragement would settle on to their souls. We can easily succumb to the same sense of spiritual inertia. Look at all the fallen spiritual leaders. Look at the countless spiritually declined Christians. Look at all the deconstructors pretending honest people can't know the truth John so boldly proclaims.

All of this is driving the words of our opening text. In the first three verses John lays the foundation for all that is to follow.

1) THE MESSAGE JOHN HAS IS A PROCLAMATION

**IPAD TEXT - 1 John 1:1-3 - “ That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we looked upon and have touched with our hands, concerning the word of life— [2] 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— [3] 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.”**

Two times in three verses John uses the news broadcaster’s term, “*proclaim.*” “*We proclaim to you the eternal life*” (2). “*We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard*”(3). *John has an announcement.* He wants people to know that he is not dealing in speculation. He’s not sitting in some cathedral with candles and stained-glass windows composing poetry and religious jargon.

This *announcement* of the gospel confronts the whole tone of religion and tolerance and the quest for truth in our age. The strategy of the spirit of the age in our day is not to *deny* the claims of the Christian faith but to reduce the New Testament message to *one* of *many* possibilities.

Very subtly the Christian revelation is discussed by our world as though it were nothing more than a **helpful, positive product of man's own mind**, a series of religious insights and moral aspirations put into pleasant sounding speech and positive life principles. We simply refer to Christians (like all religious people) as “**people of faith**,” as though it was the **inward process of their minds** rather than the **object** of their faith that mattered.

This is the **broad-minded, tolerant approach** to appeasing all religions equally and embracing none passionately above the other. And in giving **equal** credibility to **all** religions and philosophies (and after all who doesn't want to appear tolerant?) our world has efficiently silenced the unique truth claims of the Christian message.

The Christian gospel is betrayed when it is considered as an option only to **unbelief**. It is that, but it is more than merely an opposite to **atheism**. It is also the God- given refutation and judgment to **false** religious belief and **false** religious devotion. The Bible says far more about **idolatry** than **atheism**.

See the passion John has about this. He's about 90 years old. He's been loving and serving Jesus for a long time. He's been through the fire many times. He's been imprisoned and beaten and exiled on the Island of Patmos. Finally he gets **one more kick at the can - one more chance to proclaim his heart for Jesus**.

***What are you going to say in your last letter, John?*** He's quick to tell us. He doesn't even take time to say "Dear friends" or "This is a letter from John." He's sprinting out of the starting gate. There's an underlying ***Christmas passion*** - a proclamation that still burns in his heart after all these years - and he can't wait to get to it - ***"I have seen something! I know it for sure! I'm not crazy or delusional. It is still the most important thing I know! There are no equals to this. My message is about the Lord and from the Lord. I'm not searching for truth. I've found the truth! He has come right here. We've seen Jesus in the flesh!"***

God forgive us for ever growing cold to the wonder of Christmas revelation! ***"The life of God was made manifest to us! We have seen it and we have touched it with our hands!"*** God forgive us for taking this marvelous announcement and reducing it to something ***sentimental, or speculative, or ordinary.***

Let me stay on this idea for just a minute longer. John is starting at the beginning. We would have to be slow to miss his point. ***The church is in the proclaiming business.*** She has a message to deliver. Her task is a unique task in this world. Paul said in **1** ***Corinthians 2:1 "And I, when I came to you, brothers, did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of God with lofty speech or wisdom." - IPAD TEXT***

There is a place for **“lofty speech and human wisdom.”** You have political meetings where people put forward their ideas. You have scientific forums where people present varying theories. You have public forums where leaders try to find the pulse of the people and then set forward a proposal that will appeal to the majority and keep them happy.

John is separating the Church from all of that. The church doesn't live in those realms at all. She declares a **settled, revealed message**. She doesn't **invent** it. She doesn't **alter** it. She **proclaims** it.

2) **BECAUSE THE GOSPEL MESSAGE IS A RELIABLE DECLARATION IT IS VIOLATED AND SMUDGED BY ANYTHING LESS THAN ABSOLUTE TRUST AND COMMITMENT**

Again, John puts this all in his opening three verses: **“...which we have heard”(1) - “...which we have looked upon with our eyes”(1) - “...we have looked upon”(1) - “...we have touched with our hands”(1) - “...we have seen it”(2) - “...was made manifest to us”(2) - “...that which we have seen and heard we proclaim to you”(3). - IPAD TEXTS**

That is really terrible writing. How many times can you say the very same thing over and over in three sentences? What is John doing? He's making sure you and I don't miss his point. He is willing to risk endless repetition - ***"Don't ever get the idea that we were deceived or just made this stuff up for some desired effect."***

And notice another very important point. When he says, ***"we*** have seen," he means all of the apostles had the same kind of background and experience with Jesus. ***Each could validate the other. There were sound historic checks and balances,*** just as other passages in the New Testament reinforce:

**IPAD TEXT - 2 Peter 1:16 - "For we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty."**

This is always the thrust of the New Testament revelation. Don't come to Jesus and put your trust in Him because of some feeling or mood or need or vision or dream. Believe the message for one reason only - it's true! Don't come to Jesus because the Gospel ***works***. The ***cults*** have worked for many people. ***Drugs*** work for others. ***Kabala*** works for Madonna. ***Scientology*** works for Tom Cruise. There are scores of ideologies and religions that ***work***, if by ***"work"*** you mean produce the desired inward effect.

But this is not the approach John begins with as he proclaims the gospel of Jesus Christ. He calls us to believe the Gospel, first of all, because it is **true**.

John says, "We all saw Jesus come into this world with the same flesh and blood you and I have. We saw Him do what He did. We heard Him say "I am the way, the truth and the life, no man comes to the Father but by me." We all heard Him say "I go to prepare a place for you and will come again and receive you unto myself". We saw Him call Lazarus out of that grave near Bethany. We all heard Him say "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die."

To all the scoffers and doubters John would say, "Listen, I've given my life to this. I was there. Were you? I rested my head on His chest at the Passover celebration. Did you? I saw His hands and side when He came to us resurrected - after we saw Him die on the cross. I hugged that scarred body. Did you?"



John is piling up words to make clear to us that what he declared, even though it seems too good to be true, is not something he is guessing about. He knows what he is proclaiming thoroughly - inside out. There is not a doubt in his mind. His words are important because they urge all of us to listen to the appeal of sane reason. In light of John's words the testimony of the doubter isn't worth much. Will you listen to an eye witness or someone who was never there?

So the message we have is a **revealed** message. Second, it's a **trustworthy** message. That leads to the third mark of a distinctly Christian religious experience:

3) **THE GOSPEL MESSAGE IS A MISSIONARY DECLARATION ABOUT JESUS CHRIST AND WHAT HE ACCOMPLISHED**

**IPAD TEXT - 1 John 1:3-4 - "...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. [4] *And we are writing these things so that our joy may be complete.*"**

There is something striking about the way John presents the converting, grace-filled message of Jesus Christ in these two verses. When you ponder it you will notice it's quite different from the way we conceive of Christianity today. Here's what's different. John knows full well the power of Christ to change a life. John's gospel says more about being "**born again**" than any other. But that's not the way he introduces the gospel here.

Surprisingly, he chooses to talk more about **proclaiming** the gospel than **receiving** it. Notice again, he's not writing these things to make the joy of **others** complete (though it certainly will do that), but to make **his own** joy complete (4b). It's as though the **sharing** of his message completed the joy of **receiving** it.

We sing so often, "**Joy to the World - the Lord has come!**" Do we ever stop and ask **how** does that joy come? What are joy's roots?

That's what John is proclaiming in our Christmas text. Joy comes from **not** just **knowing** the Lord has come (though that's precious for sure) but by **proclaiming** the Lord has come.

The joy is in the **telling**. Look at it again - **1 John 1:4** - "**And we are writing these things so that our joy may be complete.**"

Here's what I mean. Consider the Apostle John. He has had an incredibly rich heritage in the Lord. Think of the blessings he could have recounted at the age of ninety. But there's no dissertation of all those things here. That's not John's Christmas message. Rather, he simply says, ***"I live to proclaim the God I've seen and heard and touched with my hands. Christ Jesus has come! There is no One else. And I'm not able to rest until you come to trust in Him alone. And you can know this Christ too!"***

John is wearing his ***"What Has Jesus Done?"*** bracelet. That's the true glory of Christmas. An invisible God makes Himself plain and observable. We can ***handle*** the truth. We have something firmer than our feelings. And this is what makes the revelation of Christ Incarnate - the ***Christmas revelation*** - such a damning thing to reject. With such a revelation of Christ, we ***know*** better.

You've just heard what God has done to take you to heaven when you die. This doesn't depend of some inward mystic state of mind. This is ***knowable***, historic, factual truth. Don't let your heart pretend it hasn't heard.