

WALKING IN THE LIGHT- First John and the Path to Living Deeply in Christ - Part one
 Sunday, January 3rd, 2021 - 10:00 a.m. - Teaching #2064
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THREE MARKS OF GENUINE CHRISTIAN EXPERIENCE

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."

Today we begin our *first* study of the *last* book of the Bible to be written. Most Christians don't realize John probably wrote this letter *after* his experience on the Island of Patmos, just off the coast of modern Turkey, where he had written what we now call 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. This presses *urgency* into John's words. This letter is a summary of what must be kept in place - what must be at the very center of our hearts - if we're going to be successful in following our Lord through all that is to come.

After 90 years of life John has been around long enough to observe how spiritual passions cool and wane. Not everyone *sees* the things John saw in his visions on Patmos. We're so prone to distractions. Secondary things become primary and primary things become secondary. This letter is what John, knowing what he knows about the future coming of Christ's kingdom, wants these Christians to keep constantly, consciously refreshed in the front of their craniums.

But there's more. Not only are we prone to *distractions*, but 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 she 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.

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. He makes basic statements about the Gospel that the church must never let slip away. We need to drill down repeatedly into these same truths today.

1) **THE MESSAGE JOHN HAS IS A PROCLAMATION OF ABSOLUTELY RELIABLE DIVINELY REVEALED TRUTH**

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 that news reporter'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. He's not quoting poetry. He's using the language of the BBC or CNN.

This ***announcement*** of the gospel confronts the whole tone of religion and 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 and options and opinions about life, religion and God.

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 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 mis-guided approach of **tolerance** - 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.

This is not to censor opposing views. There is a proper competition of ideas in the marketplace of thought. But 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 answer to **atheism**. It is also the God given answer 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 going to tell us. He doesn't even take time to say "Dear friends" or "This is a letter from John." There's 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 from the Lord. I'm not searching for truth. I've found the truth!"**

God forgive us for sounding so cold and lifeless about Biblical truth. God forgive us for taking this marvelous announcement and reducing it to something **speculative and uncertain**.

Let me stay on this idea for just a minute longer.

John is starting at the beginning. **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."**

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. But 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.

So that's the first point. The absolute rules of truth and knowledge apply to the gospel of Jesus Christ. It isn't an **opinion**. It isn't one among many. It stands on its own two feet as an absolute **proclamation** of fact. People don't change the truth of the gospel by either their acceptance or their rejection. The truth of the gospel judges **us**. We don't judge **it**.

2) **BECAUSE THE GOSPEL MESSAGE IS A RELIABLE DECLARATION IT IS WORTHY OF ABSOLUTE TRUST**

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).

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 so he's doing with his pen what is the equivalent to raising his voice. He's **shouting** on paper, saying, **"Don't ever get the idea that we were deceived or just made this stuff up for some desired effect."**

And 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:

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. **TM** worked for John Lennon. 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**. That way you will always have sure footing in your Christian walk. The Christian proclamation is rooted in what **actually happened**. It's not a matter of some experience for people of a certain psychological make up. It's not a matter of finding what makes me feel better or more at peace.

John says we all saw Jesus come into this world in the same flesh 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."

O, the **arrogance** of people trying to fake **humility by not claiming too much certainty** - who would deny the miracles, deny the divine nature of Jesus Christ, deny His resurrection from the dead. To all of them 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. 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**

There is no way to make God's gospel message a **non-proselytising** faith commitment. This is not rudeness. It is gospel love. John insists on this point:

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 has more about being "**born again**" than any other. But that's not the way he introduces the gospel.

Surprisingly, he chooses first 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**). If I can put it this way, there is a certain glorious **selfishness** in carrying the gospel to others. We are really giving **ourselves** the greatest joy.

Doesn't John believe in **conversion**? We know he does. Perhaps John's goal isn't just **presenting** Christianity, but **testing** it. You've all watched something on TV only to be annoyed by some monotone voice saying "**This is a test of the emergency broadcast system.**"

That's what John is doing here. These are profound words that **test** the depth and authenticity of our position in Christ. John 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. Rather, he simply says, "**I long for you all to have this wonderful life in Jesus Christ. My joy won't be completed simply in receiving God's grace. I'm not able to rest until you have**

entered the same experience with me!"

Again, this was the common experience of all those first apostles upon encountering Jesus Christ.

Romans 1:14 - "I am under obligation both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to the wise and to the foolish."

2 Corinthians 5:14 - "For the love of Christ controls us, because we have concluded this: that one has died for all, therefore all have died"

1 Corinthians 9:16 - "For if I preach the gospel, that gives me no ground for boasting. For necessity is laid upon me. Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel!"

John holds this out as the basic posture of the heart of any and all who have truly encountered Jesus Christ in a New Testament converting way. Mark it down. New Testament conversion always accomplishes ***two things***:

- a) ***There is born in the heart of the convert an intense hatred of sin.*** He fears it like nothing else on earth. Jesus said the truly converted will cut off his hand before he will use that hand to commit sin.
- b) ***The convert will give up any possession - make any sacrifice - to ensure everyone else has the same opportunity to come under the Lordship of Jesus Christ.***

In fact, to make the point more pungently, John says something very important in **verse 4** - **"And we are writing these things so that our joy may be complete."** How is the full measure of joy filled up in your life? What makes a joyful Christian?

"Well, Pastor Don, joy comes from knowing Jesus. Remember the old song, 'If you want joy, real joy, wonderful joy, let Jesus come into your heart.' There you go. Joy comes from knowing Jesus!"

The song is wrong - or at best very *incomplete*. Knowing Christ is just the *entry point* of joy - just the *beginning of the journey* of joy. The *life of joy* - the *fulness of joy* John describes - doesn't just come from *knowing* Jesus, but from *sharing* Jesus. John says that the Christian's joy is *made complete* when he knows the thrill of spending his life reaching others with the same message that saved him.

Why do you think so many Christian lack the joy of the Lord? Don't we have enough material blessing and prosperity in our land? Don't we enjoy the longest lives? Don't we all have the best lifestyles? Don't we have the most churches and ministries to soothe all of our hurts and needs?

No, we have all those things, and heaven to boot. But perhaps we have yet to learn John's lesson. Big joy comes from a big life. And a big life comes from a big cause. There is nothing more boring than just rubbing the outside edges of New Testament life in Jesus. Get into the game with both feet. Don't just *know* Jesus. *Share* him extravagantly with the world. Joy is fine. *Complete* joy is much, much better.