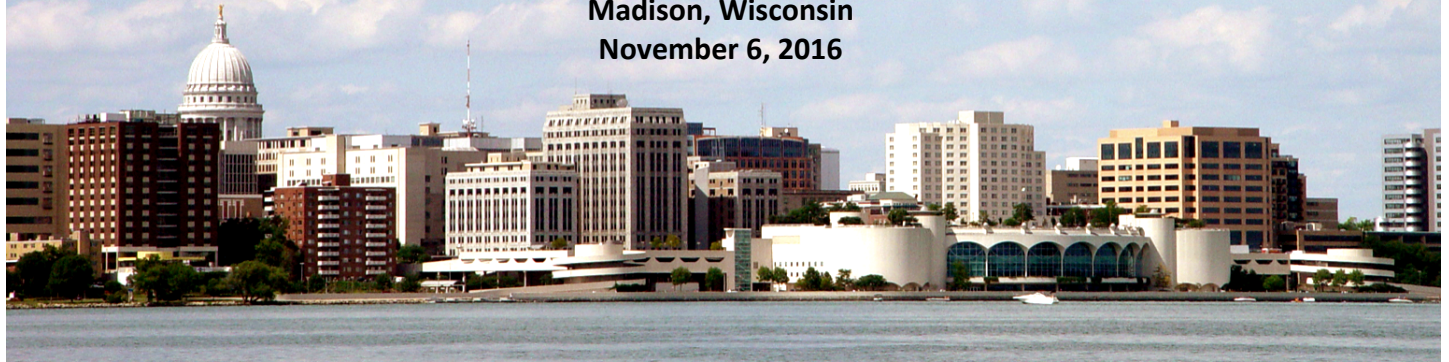


It's All About Jesus

1 JOHN 1:1-4

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We are living in a time when every person thinks that he or she can have his or her own truth. And the idea surrounding us in modern culture is that what is true for you might be true for you, but it is not necessarily true for me. And in the same way, what is wrong for you might be wrong for you, but it is not necessarily wrong for me. Well, this has obviously created an interesting challenge for those of us who are trying to pass along the good news of Jesus Christ, because as we share the good news, who is to say that this news is actually true? And I know we might be tempted to think that we are unique in facing some of these challenges. And yet, that is not really the case.

This morning, I would like for us to begin a series of lessons based on a document written by one of the Lord's closest friends – the book of 1 John (found near the end of the New Testament). And as we are about to discover, the book seems to be John's response to a rather unusual teaching that was just barely starting to gain a foothold in the last few years of the First Century. We will touch on this more over the coming weeks, but the idea going around at that time basically said that certain people have some very special knowledge about the Lord, and if you do not have this knowledge, then that is pretty much too bad. But the general idea is that there is a separation between body and spirit, that the spirit is good but the body is bad. But some of these people came to two very disturbing conclusions. First of all, some were saying that since the body and spirit are separate, I can do whatever I want to do with my body, and my spirit doesn't care, my spirit will not be affected. Isn't that just the most awesome and convenient doctrine ever? I can go to worship God on the Lord's Day with my spirit, but on Monday morning my body can go back to doing whatever it wants! I think we can see the appeal in that! Like many today, they were saying, "I am a spiritual person," but their faith was not really reflected in the way they were living. But there was another big issue with this theory, and that is: What do we do with Jesus? Did God (who is a spirit) really come to this earth to inhabit a body that is inherently evil? And one way they thought they had solved this problem was to suggest that Jesus was nothing more than a spirit, a ghost, and that he never really had a physical body. So, as we move forward in our study of 1 John, I want us to keep these ideas in mind, because John hits them both, head on, and he does it from the very first verse!

1 John, therefore, is one of the most relevant books in the Bible, especially when it comes to sharing the good news in a culture that often rejects the idea of there being any "absolute truth" concerning Jesus. And I say this, because the book is all about Jesus.

The book of 1 John is also a simple book, often the first book to be translated when students start learning New Testament Greek. The words and the grammar are not the words of a religious scholar like Paul, but they are the words and phrases of a fisherman, a man in love with the Lord and his people. The book is so simple, in fact, I would encourage you to try to read through it twice this week if you can. Read it alone, read it with your children, read a chapter each night at the dinner table, read it in several different translations, read it out loud or to yourself – whatever works for you. But I believe that we will have a much deeper appreciation for this book if we would actually read it.

I want us to start this morning, though, with the first four verses – 1 John 1:1-4 – and I want us to try to picture John as an old man now (80 or 90 years old), he’s been through so much, he loves the Lord, he loves the church, but he sees this threat, he sees this false doctrine start gaining ground, and John cannot let that happen. He hears people start saying that Jesus was nothing more than a spirit, and he responds with these words – 1 John 1:1-4,

¹ 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 — ² 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 — ³ 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. ⁴ These things we write, so that our joy may be made complete.

When you meet someone for the very first time, do you sometimes forget their name even in the first few seconds? I do, and it’s terrible, and I think I’m getting better, I keep working at it, but I think part of the reason is, we are so excited to meet this person, we might miss some of the very important details. I don’t want us to do that with the book of 1 John! Did you notice how this book is different from the very beginning? Most New Testament books start off with the name of the author, and then the name or location of the church the book is addressed to, and then there is some kind of greeting. But did you notice that we have none of that here? It seems, then, that this is perhaps some kind of a sermon, or maybe this was some kind of letter that was meant to be circulated. It was meant to be passed around immediately. This is urgent. Get the message out! And the message is all about Jesus! According to John, Jesus is **“from the beginning,”** he is the **“Word of Life,”** he has been **“manifested”** (or made known), Jesus is the subject of our testimony, Jesus is the one we **“proclaim.”** This message is all about Jesus. So I want us to take a few moments to make sure, this morning, that we do not miss this very important message right here at the beginning.

And to do this, I want to divide our thoughts into two parts: First of all, what is it (according to John) that makes him so qualified to teach on this subject. And secondly, what is it that John really wants us to get out of this message?

I. **But first of all, let us go back and notice WHAT IT IS (ACCORDING TO JOHN) THAT MAKES HIM SO QUALIFIED.**

Why should we listen to these words? What makes John such a good source? If I go looking for a book on hiking in the Pacific Northwest, I want to know: Is this guy sitting at a desk in New York City, or does he actually live in the woods? And so in a similar way, we want to know what makes John a good source. What are his credentials? What is it that makes John uniquely qualified to write about Jesus? Well, if we cannot experience something for ourselves, if we are too far away either by time or by distance, what is the next best

thing? Obviously, we can read and study what others have said who were actually there. We think about a character like Abraham Lincoln. We never met Mr. Lincoln, but to learn about his life we can go down to the presidential library in Springfield, Illinois, and we can read letters and documents from those who knew him best. And that is what John does here. He is explaining in these opening verses that he is a reliable witness. He is uniquely qualified.

First of all, John is describing Jesus as someone he had personally **“heard.”** John had heard the Lord’s voice. He had heard him teaching and preaching, calling men and women out of lives of sin. John had heard the parables. And this is not something John had heard second-hand, this didn’t come through a friend of a friend, but John himself had actually heard the Lord’s voice. John had personally heard Jesus say, **“I am the light of the world,” “I am the good shepherd,” “I am the resurrection and the life.”** John had heard Jesus say, **“Unless you believe that I am He, you will die in your sins,”** he had heard Jesus say, **“He who has believed and has been baptized shall be saved.”** The book of John, by the way, records more words spoken by Jesus than any other gospel account.

But then he moves on beyond hearing, and John then explains that he had also **“seen”** the Lord. He had **“looked at”** him with his own eyes. John had seen Jesus immersed in the Jordan River. He had seen him stand on the mountain with Moses and Elijah. He had seen Jesus calm storms on the Sea of Galilee. John had personally seen Jesus interrupt funerals and raise the dead. He had seen Jesus weeping at the tomb of Lazarus. John had seen Jesus hanging on the cross. John had seen Jesus eat a piece of broiled fish, even after the resurrection, proving that he was more than a spirit or a vision. All of this comes from the same John who ended his gospel account by explaining that if he had continued writing about everything Jesus had done, that even the world itself would not be able to contain all the books that could be written.

And then he moves on even beyond hearing and seeing, and he explains that he had also **“touched”** the Lord; he had touched him with his own hands. John had felt the Lord’s hands as he washed his feet. John in particular had leaned on the Lord’s chest during that last meal together before the crucifixion. This Word of Life we have touched with our own hands.

And so of all people, John is uniquely qualified to tell us more about the Lord. And as an old man now, John is uniquely qualified to clear up any misunderstandings people might have about Jesus. Jesus is from the beginning, he is God in the flesh, and John has not only heard him and seen him, but he has also touched him. When it comes to knowing Jesus, John, we might say, is an expert; he is an eyewitness. John has experienced Eternal God, in the flesh, the Word of Life, and he continues to proclaim this word in this inspired document. So, first of all, then, John is uniquely qualified to explain Jesus in this book.

II. Well, that leads us to our second big idea this morning as we answer the question: WHY SHOULD WE LISTEN? IN OTHER WORDS: WHAT IS THE MAIN POINT OF THIS BOOK? WHAT DOES JOHN WANT US TO GET OUT OF ALL OF THIS? WHY IS HE WRITING?

And thankfully, he tells us! As I see it, this book starts out with two main objectives (in verses 3-4). First of all, John is writing so that we might have fellowship – fellowship with him, fellowship with each other (of course), but ultimately, that we might have fellowship with God and with His Son Jesus Christ – we see this in verse 3. Now, when we hear the word **“fellowship,”** what do we think of? If I were to say that this afternoon we are having a **“fellowship,”** most of us would understand that we are about to eat together! There will be food involved! And yes, Biblical fellowship often involves food, but the word itself refers to a **“sharing,”** sometimes the sharing of food, but sharing – the sharing of a common experience, the sharing of working together

toward a common goal, a partnership, the sharing of being able to lean on somebody for support while going through a difficult time, sharing the same life with somebody, a participation.

We might compare it to wandering out in the wilderness and walking up to a campfire at night. There is something about a campfire that brings people together. In a sense, John is saying that Jesus is like that campfire. Jesus is the reason why we have all come together. As Christians, we are part of a family, and no matter how separate or alone we might feel from time to time, we know that we have fellowship. We are in this together. We are in fellowship with God, and we are also in fellowship with each other. The Christian faith is meant to be shared. If we try to live the Christian life alone, we are missing out on it. We are in this together. And this is one purpose of this document – notice how he words it in verse 3 – he is proclaiming Jesus ***“so that you too may have fellowship.”*** As Christians, we are in this together.

From time to time, we go through some of the ***“one another”*** passages in the Bible, and there are many. All throughout the New Testament, we as Christians are told to:

- Love one another.
- Greet one another.
- Show humility toward one another.
- Confess our sins to one another.
- Pray for one another.
- Encourage one another.
- Comfort one another.
- Be kind to one another.
- Serve one another.
- Build up one another.
- Live in harmony with one another.
- Teach and admonish one another.
- Be at peace with one another.

This is fellowship! And this is what John wants us to have as a result of studying this book! He wants us to have fellowship – with him and with God. And John will have much more to say about fellowship in this book. He will go on to point out that there is only one fellowship. As I mentioned earlier, there were some who thought they had their own little fellowship going on, their own super special secret knowledge. John, though, is making the point: If we are in fellowship with God, if we honor and obey the word of God, then we are also in fellowship with each other. In the next book (in 2 John 8-11), John will go on to explain and warn,

⁸ Watch yourselves, that you do not lose what we have accomplished, but that you may receive a full reward. ⁹ Anyone who goes too far and does not abide in the teaching of Christ, does not have God; the one who abides in the teaching, he has both the Father and the Son. ¹⁰ If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not receive him into your house, and do not give him a greeting; ¹¹ for the one who gives him a greeting participates in his evil deeds.

And so, like we learned last week, if someone decides to downplay baptism and insist on a made-up doctrine like the “sinner’s prayer,” then that person is no longer in fellowship with God. That person is not abiding in the teaching of Christ, and we are not to have fellowship with that person. The same goes for any other Bible

doctrine. We have fellowship with God and with each other as long as we are careful to keep ourselves in the word of God, because to go beyond is sin. And that is one major purpose of this book – to encourage and promote fellowship.

As we look back at verse 4, we find a second purpose for John’s letter, and that is: He writes, **“so that our joy might be made complete.”** When we have this fellowship with God and with each other, and when we understand who Jesus really is, when we listen to John’s words, there is joy involved. Obviously, there’s joy for us, but John is writing these things so that his joy might be made complete. In other words, John wanted to see these people really understand who Jesus is. John shared this message for a reason. I think of what he would go on to write in 3 John 4, where he said, **“I have no greater joy than this, to hear of my children walking in the truth.”** There is great joy in teaching somebody about Jesus and seeing that person get it. And this is the second big motivation for writing this book. He wants these people to have fellowship (with God and with each other), and he wants the joy of seeing them hold on to what is right – this message of Jesus, not just a spirit, not a ghost, but the Son of God come into this world in human form.

Conclusion:

Jesus is why we’re here this morning! As we close our thoughts on this first passage, I’d like to read it again, only this time from The Message, basically, a paraphrase – here it is, the opening words of 1 John:

¹ From the very first day, we were there, taking it all in—we heard it with our own ears, saw it with our own eyes, verified it with our own hands. ² The Word of Life appeared right before our eyes; we saw it happen! And now we're telling you in most sober prose that what we witnessed was, incredibly, this: The infinite Life of God himself took shape before us. ³ We saw it, we heard it, and now we're telling you so you can experience it along with us, this experience of communion with the Father and his Son, Jesus Christ. ⁴ Our motive for writing is simply this: We want you to enjoy this, too. Your joy will double our joy!

I am looking forward to our study of Jesus over the next few months! The message of Jesus is very personal. The Son of God came into this world in human form, lived a perfect life, he then suffered and died for us. We accept his offer of salvation by turning away from sin and by allowing ourselves to be buried with him in baptism. If you are not yet a Christian, we would invite you to investigate. We would invite you to read these accounts written by those who knew Jesus best. We would invite you to believe and obey the good news. He offers forgiveness for those times when we rebelled against God. He offers healing for those who have been torn up and abused. He offers eternal life to those whose physical bodies are failing. He offers hope to those who are broken. If we can help in any way, we hope you will talk with one of the shepherds of this congregation either after the service or right now as we sing this next song. Let’s stand and sing...

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