

FELLOWSHIP AND THE CROSS
1 JOHN 1:1-4

Many years ago (while in seminary) I was an evangelism trainer on a team of people from our church who went out weekly to share the gospel. One of the people on my team was a good friend from seminary. As we were headed back to the church one evening, he asked me something like, “I know the gospel gets us to Heaven in the when we die, but what is the value of the gospel *now*? What good is the gospel *today*?”

I have no recollection of what I answered him, but how many things we could say to that question!

- ✓ The gospel gives *purpose* for living and satisfaction in life
- ✓ The gospel provides *hope* for living
- ✓ The gospel *frees* us from the power of sin
- ✓ The gospel enables people to genuinely *change*
- ✓ The gospel equips us to *love*
- ✓ The gospel *removes the blinding influence* of Satan and gives discernment for life
- ✓ The gospel *restores* relationships

As we come to the communion table this morning, I want to lead us in a consideration of one of the blessings of Christ and the gospel — a “message of the cross,” a declaration of the power of the cross. This is a series which we have done intermittently through the years, considering various aspects of the cross and its importance in our lives. Today we will look together at 1 John 1, discovering that —

THE MANIFESTED CHRIST IS OUR MESSAGE.

In this passage John reminds us of **two great realities** of Christ and the gospel for us to declare —

1. The **MESSAGE of the Gospel (vv. 1-2)**

- ✓ Christ is **OBSERVABLE** God
- ✓ Christ is **LIFE**

2. The **VALUE of the Gospel (vv. 3-4)**

- ✓ Full **FELLOWSHIP**
- ✓ Genuine **JOY**

1. The **MESSAGE** of the Gospel (vv. 1-2)

- John begins his letter with a statement about Christ in v. 1, but doesn't include a primary verb. He then inserts a parenthetical thought in verse 2 before providing the primary verb in v. 3 — ***we proclaim...***
 - ✓ Something has been revealed about Jesus Christ (that's verses 1-2).
 - ✓ And that revelation is what John and the Apostles proclaim as the gospel. These verses contain the gospel message in condensed form. This is what needs to be known and believed about the Christ.
- Christ is **OBSERVABLE** God
 - ✓ As we read verse 1, we are reminded of John 1. And that actually helps us understand John's meaning with the phrase ***what was from the beginning***.
 - This phrase could refer to "what was from the beginning of time/creation," suggesting Christ's eternal pre-existence. Or it could refer to "what was from the beginning of Christ's ministry" referring to His incarnation.
 - It seems that John is emphasizing Christ's incarnation because he repeatedly emphasizes the physical presence of Christ on earth — He can be heard, seen, and touched, and He was!
 - This is the same emphasis of John 1 — while Christ was and is eternal God (Jn. 1:1), John's point in the gospel is that Christ has been revealed (Jn. 1:10, 14, 18).
 - And this phrase also suggests the unchanging nature of the revealed gospel (Heb. 13:8). Salvation by grace through faith ("repent & believe") is the eternal gospel.
 - We also see this in the verb ***manifested*** (2x in v. 2). The word has the sense that something that has already existed was suddenly revealed. It points to the genuine reality of Christ on earth, but that He also was coming as eternal God, not just created man. It allows for and points to the hypostatic union of His divine and human natures (cf. also 2:19, 28; 3:2, 3:5, 8; 4:9; Col. 3:4).
 - "In every way possible, John stresses that the eternal and heavenly...has made himself corporeal and historical in a definitive way [in the incarnation]." [Yarbrough]
 - ✓ What is unique and significant about Christ in His humanity?
 - He has been ***heard***. He has a real voice and spoke audibly just like any other human being. But John would also have us understand the uniqueness of what Jesus spoke — that His message was different and more profound than the message of other men (e.g., Jn. 1:37; 4:42; 5:24ff; 8:47; 10:3ff). The unbeliever does not hear or listen to Christ's authoritative word (Jn. 8:38).
 - He has been ***seen...eyes***. They physically saw Him, and they continued to contemplate what they had seen in their mind's eye. What did they see? Cf. Jn. 4:29; 9:35-41; 11:40ff. That sight must be turned to faith or the sight is worthless (Jn. 6:36). They saw the Father, a repeated theme (Jn. 1:18; 11:40; 12:45; 14:7; 17:24).

- He has been **looked at and touched**. They have seen, considered, examined, and touched Christ.
- There was genuine physical contact with Christ. Perhaps Thomas' experience is most prominent among many examples (Jn. 20:27-29; cf. also 21:12-14; Mt. 9:20-21). Notably, two of ill's of them touching Jesus are post-resurrection, affirming His physical resurrection body.
- This is what they **testify and proclaim** — virtually a sworn deposition about Christ.
- All these statements demonstrated that Jesus was a genuine, true, observable Man. With every sense, the disciples experienced Christ and were able to affirm His genuine humanity.

“Although the eternal Son, as God the Son, obeyed the Father and fulfilled what the Father willed for the Son to do prior to the incarnation, yet it was only the God-man, the human Jesus, who could obey in this way [Phil. 2]. To obey to the point of death requires the ability to die, and for this, Jesus had to be human. To be placed on a cross required that he be in a human body, and so again, this obedience required that he be fully human. But is this not the very point Paul is making—this eternal Son who was himself in very substance God and was fully equal to God, took on our human nature precisely so that he could undergo the suffering, affliction, rejection, crucifixion, and death that he experienced, all because the Father had sent him to fulfill this saving mission? What a Savior is our Lord Jesus Christ. How amazing was his obedience, and how great was his love.”
[Ware, *The Man Christ Jesus*, 26.]

- Christ is **LIFE**
 - ✓ Three times in vv. 1-2 John refers to Christ as **life**. He is the **Word of life, life, and eternal life**.
 - ✓ The **Word of life** refers to the one who *is* life and who brings life. He is the source of life, the One who gives life (cf. Jn. 17:3). There is vitality of life in Christ This is a repeated theme of John, who uses the word “life” almost 50% of its uses in the NT (66 of 135x).
 - ✓ The phrase **eternal life** that John and disciples proclaim is a reference back to “Word of life” (v. 1).
 - ✓ That Christ is life is hopeful for us in two ways:
 - It is hopeful for us because death is our enemy. Death is not our friend. Death is opposed to us and we are opposed to death. But if Christ is the source and giver of life that also means that He is not defeated by death but in fact defeats death and redeems death, making it into something good for us (the means by which we are transferred to Glory). Cf. 1 Cor. 15:25-26, 55-57. This victory is secured at the cross (Jn. 16:33).
 - That Christ is life is also hopeful because He provides a reason for living *now*. David Brainard said, “I never got away from Jesus, and Him crucified.” He is everything we need and He is the One for whom we live (Col. 3:11).
 - When I say, “This is living...” what do you think of? What is living for you? A vacation to a new place? Relaxing meal with friends? Blanket, book, and beach? Fire in the fireplace? Walk with your spouse on a cool evening at sunset? Babysitter for kids on overnight stay?
 - John would have us to know that nothing is better than Jesus. No matter what we *don't* have, when we have Him, we have everything worthwhile.

- If you are a Christian, this is the gospel you already believe. And if you are not a Christian, this is what you must believe in order to avoid God’s wrath and in order to enjoy God’s blessing and favor.
 - ✓ You must believe that Christ is a real man who lived a real life and fulfilled everything God demanded of mankind and died a real death.
 - ✓ You must believe that He is also real and true God — infinite in His nature and power and able to absorb God’s infinite wrath without being overcome by that wrath.
 - ✓ You must believe He did not die because He needed to die, but because He died in your place. His death was substituted for your death. His life was substituted for your life. He suffered what you and I could not endure (death) and gave us what we could never accomplish (life).
 - ✓ You must believe that He is worth living for — that He *is* life. We don’t just believe that He gives us life; we believe that He is everything in life. There is nothing else apart from Him (Col. 3:4).

2. The **VALUE** of the Gospel (vv. 3-4)

- Full **FELLOWSHIP** (v. 3)
 - ✓ Why do John and the apostles focus on the proclamation of Christ? ***So that you also may have fellowship with us.***
 - ✓ Biblical fellowship isn’t food (although it might happen while eating). It is also more than friendship (though fellowship will happen with all genuine friends). It is a full sharing of life, a mutual togetherness and a common bond. It is communion and intimacy; there is a vital bond between two parties when they are in fellowship with each other.
 - That sharing of life is what believers have with each other — sharing life and ministry (2 Jn. 11; 3 Jn. 5-6). Cf. also Acts 2:42; Rom. 15:26.
 - That sharing of life is the product of living according to Christ’s light (v. 7).
 - This also affirms (again) that body relationships are not secondary; they are primary. They are not optional, they are necessary. We’ve seen that in Romans 12; we are learning that in COVID.

“The Christian life is not meant to be lived privately in isolation from other believers. It is to be lived as members of the Body of Christ. God wants us to use our times of adversity to deepen our relationship with other members of the Body — to create a greater sense of sharing together the life we have in Christ.” [Bridges, *Trusting God*, 190.]

- ✓ But not only is the believer’s fellowship with other believers; it is also with ***the Father and His Son*** (v. 3b). John emphasizes this with ***and indeed***. This fellowship with the Father is the very meaning of eternal life (Jn. 17:3). This is the very thing for which Christ prayed (Jn. 17:21-24). And this fellowship was unimaginable for us, who were God’s enemies and worthy only of His wrath.

- ✓ We don't think often of this, but God has saved us for the purpose of making us His friends. The One who is sovereign over all, infinite, and transcendent, wanting and needing nothing, *wants* and desires and works for us to have fellowship with Him. He wants us to have Him as our Friend. We know that in part because in the Garden, Adam did not go looking for Him, but He went looking for Adam (Gen. 3:9). The Shepherd looks for the missing lamb, not the lamb for Him (Lk. 15:4-7).
- ✓ Listen to what John Owen says: "Christ is our best friend, and 'ere long will be our only friend."

"This is remarkable! As wretched sinners, we have nothing in common with a holy God — absolutely nothing. We are unable even to come into His presence because of the defilement of our sins, and yet the blood of Christ cleanses us of all our sins (1 John 1:7, 9) and provides us access to Him. Because of the Cross, we may enter into partnership with God and daily live in closest fellowship with Christ. By taking on humanity Jesus was able to take upon Himself our sins at the cross (1 Peter 2:24). He came to earth that we might go to heaven. He was born of a virgin that we might be born again. He became the Son of Man that we might become sons of God. Through faith in Christ, we become "partakers of the divine nature" (2 Peter 1:4), and receive His imputed righteousness (2 Corinthians 5:21), life (John 14:21), peace (John 14:27), love (John 15:10), and joy (John 15:11). What a partnership!" [Steve Lawson, Absolutely Sure, 52-3.]

- Genuine **JOY** (v. 4)

- ✓ Here is the second reason John writes — so that *he and the apostles* would have **joy**. That seems unusual, doesn't it? "*We write this so that we can be happy!*" What???
- ✓ He is talking about the joy of the teacher and discipler over the growth and progress and change of the learner/disciple (cf. 2 Jn. 4; 3 Jn. 3-4). The greatest joy any teacher and discipler and pastor and father has is to see that those who have been allotted by God to his care are in union with Christ and living obediently for Him. His joy is that they obey — and rejoice in — God.
- ✓ So John is not excluding the joy of the readers — when he says **our joy** he means he and the apostles, *and* the readers also. This is the source of joy for *all people* — fellowship with the Father and Son and the brotherhood of believers.
- ✓ Believing in Christ will produce **complete** — full, genuine, mature — joy. There *is* joy in sin; but it is temporal, passing, false, and condemning (Heb. 11:25). John wants the readers to have real joy by knowing the true and eternal Christ. "Joy arises out of the fellowship which is produced by the knowledge of the person and message of the incarnate Christ." [Hiebert, 51.]
- ✓ Do you have that joy? Do you have peace and satisfaction and contentment that God is on His throne, ruling the world and that you are His friend and not His enemy?
- ✓ Thirty years ago one writer noted, "Everywhere I go I see people suffering from a lack of whole-hearted, overflowing joy — even Christians. Pessimism and gloom hang like a blanket of smog over the land." How much more is that true today!
- ✓ Yet "joy" and "rejoice" appear more than 550x in Scripture. God has commanded us to rejoice, and He has made joy possible through the provision of fellowship with Christ, which came in His advent.

CONCLUSION: Prayer of Preparation

- Scripture exhorts us as we come to the communion table to remember our Savior. So we remember Him:
 - ✓ *We remember and thank you that He was manifested.* We thank you that He was seen. He has not hidden Himself from us, but instead has exposed Himself to us giving us knowledge of Him and giving us His life and giving us contentment and peace in life. Life is now full and meaningful.
 - ✓ *We remember and thank you that His appearance was not only an act of obedience for Him, but it was for His joy and your joy.* You and He delighted to bring us into fellowship with you. That fellowship has made us friends of God, adopted children of God, a corporate bride of Christ — it has removed every possibility of your wrath and granted fulness of kinship. We know something of happy relationships on earth; they are the smallest taste of His provision for us with you.
 - ✓ *We remember and thank you that His appearance is also for our joy.* We admit and confess that we are too easily attracted by the temporal, secondary, unsatisfying joys of the world. So we thank you that Christ has made a joy possible that is lasting, primary, and satisfying. He will never disappoint us, and we will never regret following Him.
 - ✓ *We remember that He had life, but in order to grant life to us, He had to die.* He had to be the sin-bearer and He had to stand in our spot as a condemned man, though He did not sin. We look at these elements and we see both death and life — we see a death we deserved that He received and a life that we did not deserve and could not attain that we received anyway by grace.
 - ✓ This is our memory this morning — a Savior who appeared and gave us everything we need.
- Scripture also exhorts us as we come to the table to examine ourselves. We now turn to do that:
 - ✓ We take a few moments to examine whether or not we are really in the faith — whether we are trusting and believing only in the incarnated, observable, crucified, and risen Christ for salvation.
 - *If we are in the faith,* we rejoice and give you thanks for this indescribable gift.
 - *If we are not in the faith,* we pause to contemplate the wretchedness of our sin and our hopelessness to appease your just anger against us. We pause to ask you to forgive our sin and for Christ to become our Master so that we might live with Him and for Him.
 - ✓ We take a few moments to consider the trajectory of our lives — if there is unconfessed sin (some sin we are intentionally committing without remorse or some sin that we haven't recognized). We ask you to forgive, cleanse, and restore our fellowship with you. We have missed You and fellowship with You. We want that restoration.
 - ✓ We thank you that we can be confident that whatever we have confessed and repented, has been cleansed and washed and we are restored to you, so that we can come to the table worthily. As the father prepared a feast for his prodigal, so you now have prepared a feast of fellowship for us.

BENEDICTION: **Romans 8:35-39**