

Sunday, September 11, 2022

The Words of Life

(Series: Life, Light and Love; a series on 1 John)
(Message One)
(1 John 1:1-4)

Message:

One of the privileges of teaching the Bible is to introduce friends to friends. This morning I get to introduce you to my friend, John, a **disciple** of Jesus. We often remember him as “*the apostle whom Jesus loved*” (cf. **John 20:2**)

But John’s peers knew him as one of “*the son[s] of thunder*” (**Mark 3:17**). Translated, that means he was an earthy guy, a fisherman, young and still rough around the edges.

But Jesus had loved him anyway; John had a lot to learn; he had to learn how to live; he had to learn how to love. And Jesus was a great teacher.

John would learn. After Jesus died, John would move with Jesus’ mother Mary to pastor the Church of Ephesus. Under his leadership and the seeds he’d sow, Asia Minor would become predominately Christian by 200 AD.

Over the next few weeks, we’ll get to know John, his **pastoral** heart and his **passion** for living out the Gospel as we consider **1 John** together over the next few months.

This “epistle” was likely written from Ephesus around **90AD**, after he finished his Gospel, and before he was exiled to Patmos and wrote Revelation. John was concerned about the wrong thinking and wrong living that had crept into the church (i.e., the **heresies**) so like a concerned grandfather, he offers some advice and warning to the “children” about “right living.”

John is aware of troubling trends where believers are increasingly focusing on **themselves** [what they like/want] rather than on loving **Christ** and serving **others**. John reminds us life is about “the” relationship: our “*fellowship with each other*” and our “*fellowship with the Father and his Son.*” (cf. **1:3**)

As soon as the Apostles started preaching the Gospel, Christian teaching started mingling with Greek philosophy (that is, with the world’s thinking).

John's first Epistle is a response to **three heresies** that infiltrated the early church:

- **Gnosticism** (lit. "knowledge") taught salvation is not found by **faith** alone in what Christ did but required a special "**knowledge**" that had to be "discovered." It promoted an elitism that drove a wedge through early church fellowship.
- **Docitism** (lit. "to seem") said everything in the universe was either **spiritual** (good) or **material** (bad), so salvation requires escaping the material (evil) world (they denied Jesus was fully human or "like us").
- **Nicolaitanism** said there were no distinctions between Christians and the world so you can live **anyway you want**; your lifestyle doesn't make you a Christian, only what you believed. You could be a Christian and commit adultery, watch pornography, lie, cheat, steal.

We live in a world where toleration for and acceptance of what another believes is not only politically correct but considered a virtue. The dictum "*You believe your way, and I'll believe mine*" is sacrosanct. There is no longer any agreed "absolute" truth (The Ten Commandments are barred from public venues lest people think everyone should follow them).

The results have been devastating. We are in an **ethical** and **moral** crisis. It didn't start in abortion clinics, the media, or the courts. It started in our **pulpits**; it spread to our religious colleges – most of which are no longer religious; it slowly moved into people's lives – we let it happen. We love to point fingers at others – play the blame game, but John will remind us we are responsible for what we think and believe and our actions that follow our thinking and believing.

Heresy first impacts the way people **think**; then their thinking becomes the way they **live**. We eventually do what we think. **Proverbs 23:7 (KJV)** says "*As a man thinks in his heart, so is he.*" The principle is, "*What one **believes** eventually becomes how one **lives.***"

That is why we should be concerned about heresies we believe and the ethical standards we follow.

So John writes with a sense of urgency. (She called a local insurance company: "Can I ask you a question?" Agent: "Of course." "Can you insure my house against fire?" "Absolutely!" "Can I insure it with you over the phone?" "I'm sorry, Ma'am, but we have to come and look at your house." She said, "Okay, can you hurry.") **John is looking at the church and he sees a fire burning.**

Read I John 1:1-4

That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched—this we proclaim concerning the Word of life. ²The life appeared; we have seen it and testify to it, and we proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and has appeared to us. ³We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ. ⁴We write this to make our joy complete.

Eugene Peterson in his introduction to 1 John in “The Message” says the two most difficult things to get straight in life are love and God. Peterson suggests that when someone messes up in life, it is almost always a failure in one or both of those areas.

Commentators suggest **1 John** is a study that promotes our love for **Truth** (1:5-2), our love for **others** (3-4:6) and our love for **God** (4:7-5:12); I John also focuses on God and reminds us God is **Life**, God is **Light**; and God is **Love**.

First, 1 John is marked by an AUTHENTICITY (1 John 1:1-3)

By 90 AD, as John writes his epistles, all the other apostles have died. James was run through with a sword. Bartholomew was hacked to pieces; Peter was crucified upside down; Philip watched his seven daughters tortured and killed before he was killed; Andrew was crucified in Greece; Matthew martyred in Ethiopia; Thomas, tradition says, was killed by a shower of arrows while praying.

But John is now in his mid-seventies as he sits down to write. To paraphrase an old advertisement, *“When John spoke, people listened.”* He is the lone remaining disciple of Jesus.

John had been there: *“We **proclaim** to you what we have **seen** and **heard**...”* (1:3). He is the only one left who heard the blind beggar call out to Jesus: *“Son of David, have mercy on me.”*

He was the only one left who'd seen Jesus transfigured on the mountain. He was the only one left who'd seen the nails driven into Jesus' hands and feet. He was the only one left who witnessed the empty tomb three days later; the only one left who touched him and ate with him after his resurrection. He was the only one who watched Jesus physically ascend into heaven

When John spoke, people listened. His testimony was true. He had **experienced** it first-hand. The truth of the Christian faith rests on real, observable **events** that actually happened in human history.

Where does that **leave** us?

A man survived the Johnstown flood of 1889 - one of the worst floods in American history. Over 2200 people in the town of 30,000 died. This man started telling his story everywhere. He was there. He survived. He loved to tell his story. At every party, he'd tell his story. At senior gatherings, he'd tell his story. In the coffee shop, he'd tell his story. He told it until the day he died. When he met St. Peter at the gate, he insisted on an opportunity to tell his story. Peter finally relented and made the arrangements for him to speak to a heavenly assembly. As he was about to go on, Peter wished him well and reminded him, "Just so you know, Noah will be in the audience."

Our **experience** authenticates our **witness**: There are two facets of the term "witness:" the first is "to **observe**;" the second is "to **declare**." The first without the second is nothing more than hot air; but the second without the first is hypocrisy. Being a witness for Jesus is simply reporting what we have heard and seen - that is, personally experienced.

So the question is: Do you have a healthy relationship with Jesus? What have you experienced? Where have you seen him at work in your heart and life (lately)?

First, we need an **authentic experience** like John, i.e., if you haven't been with Jesus, don't talk about him with others; don't say you're a Christian. First, spend time with him; first, learn to listen to him; first, join him where he's working.

Second, 1John is marked by **AUTHORITY (1:1-4)**

No less than nine times in 1 John 1:1-4, John uses the authoritative and royal "we". You want to say, "John, who is this 'we'?" John would say that "we" is "us." John would tell you, "*I'm speaking with the authority of the whole church.*"

John has not only **been with Jesus; he had **stayed** with Jesus (been faithful).** If Judas had not committed suicide and had lived as long as John, do you think people would be as eager to listen to him as they were to John?

John had been good; he had messed up; he had been wounded; but most of all, he had stayed with Jesus...he was still with Jesus at 75+. He could speak with authority.

There is a difference between authority and power. Power is like a **hammer**. Authority is like a **magnet**. They both move matter, but they move it in quite different ways

In his old age, John has little money and little freedom; he has been banished by the political and religious establishment to a small island. But when this

man of no account spoke, he spoke with tremendous authority. John's authority came from having been with **Jesus** for a very **long** time.

Steve Brown tells of a young pastor who called him for counsel. His elders had been giving him a difficult time. Steve admits he gave him bad advice. I said, "Tell them where they can go." The next day, the pastor called Steve again: "I did what you said. Now they're really angry. What should I do?" Steve said he spent hours trying to fix the mess he'd caused. It dawned on him: "*There is no power in the pastorate...only authority and that authority has to be earned.*"

The church today lacks [political] power; our only hope is our *authority*. Our authority is rooted in our **faithfulness** to Jesus; everything else is suspect.

Money can bring your power, but not authority. A gun can give you power, but not authority. Spiritual authority comes only with an authentic lifelong walk with Jesus. Do you have spiritual authority?

Third, 1 John is marked with **ASSURANCE (1:2)**

John wrote this letter just a few years after the widespread persecution of Nero and just before the Dominican persecution of believers. While John is writing, Christians were dealing with horrific issues, major persecutions, intense suffering, martyrdom. John wants believers to see the reality of God's assurance and presence.

John claims one can know for sure the **Truth which he believes.** Certitude is possible, John says, even in such a mixed-up time as the first century (or the twenty-first century).

Today, most people who believe in heaven (including those who call themselves Christian) think there are multiple ways to get to there. Two-thirds of "Christians" don't know the Ten Commandments, the names of the four Gospels, or the Apostles Creed. So many Christians don't what Truth is.

John says: "*We can know...*" We **must** know! Forty times in the mere 105 verses of 1 John, John presses the verb "to know" into service. Why is John so insistent? Because he understands without *knowing* there is no "**joy**" (1:4) or what Calvin calls "*the complete felicity we obtain from the Gospel*"

But John says, we can be as sure of **heaven** as if we're already there. The only way to get there is by going through the **fire**.

We don't choose cancer; we don't choose divorce; we don't choose our kids walking away; we don't choose the pain, but when these things happen, we discover He is there and always has been.

You will never know **Jesus** is all you need until **Jesus** is all you have.

Fourth, 1 John is marked by **AFFECTION**. (1 John 1:3)

Throughout these letters you'll hear John saying "Beloved" often. You'll hear him say, "*Little children. Brothers and sisters. Mothers and Fathers.*" You'll see John's **pastoral** heart as he talks about the intimate fellowship that ought to be taking place among Christians.

Maxie Dunnam tells of an elderly man and woman. Although in their mid-eighties, they each lived alone. After dating for five years, the man realized he was in love with the woman so he mustered up his courage and said, "*I think we should get married.*" Her face lit up and then fell: "*That is great idea, but who'd have us!*"

We live in a time when the (church) **community** is more important than any other time in history and yet the church is as divided as ever (even individual congregations are splitting).

People are giving up on and leaving their church in greater numbers than ever before (I know congregations who lost half their membership in last three years); thousands of pastors are leaving the ministry every month.

Sadly, the deepest wounds inflicted come from within the body of Christ

We are all we have; love (**fellowship**) is one of the major themes of **I John**.

Someone said, "***Home is the place that when you go there, they have to take you in.***" Church is the place that when you go there, they have to take you in...and love you. It wasn't John's idea. It was not my idea, either. It was His.

Fifth, 1 John is marked with **ABANDONMENT** (I John 1:4)

Remember 1 John 1:4 - "***We write this that your spirituality may be deep.***" (Doesn't say that!)

"We write this to keep you theologically right and pure." (Doesn't say that!)

"We write this that you might judge one another and determine who is really a Christian and who isn't." (Doesn't say that!)

"We write these things so you people will honor and look up to you." (No)

"We write this to make our [your] joy complete [Yes!]."

Someone once told me an important principle. In poker, they say, there is a direct correlation between how much you can **afford** to lose and how much you enjoy the **game**.

I've seen the slot machines, black-jack tables, and roulette tables in Las Vegas [I was there for a church conference ☺]. But I have never seen anyone there who actually looked happy [except in the commercials]. I've never lost

any money at the slot machines or the tables. I've never played. But apparently, if you have a huge bank account, you can actually *enjoy* losing money. [Doesn't make much sense to me. I don't see the correlation.]

But there is a correlation between how much you can **afford** to lose in life and how much you **enjoy** life.

They came to John: "*We're going to take all your stuff away.*"

John: "*That's fine, it's not mine anyway.*"

"We are going to destroy your reputation."

"Fine. I profess to be a sinner; I'm only saved by grace."

"Okay, then we will take your life away."

"You can't take my life away. It's eternal. I am going to live forever."

Followers of Jesus can afford to **lose it all** – because, he promised, if we lose the whole world, we will **gain** our **soul** (cf. **Luke 9:25**). That's a great trade.

A follower of Jesus will enjoy life based on how **big** their sense of God is, how well they know him, and how much they're willing to give up to follow him.

People who take John's words to heart will **laugh** a little more, **love** more, and **live** with a whole lot more joy. They will hold the things of this world lightly, and find their **joy is complete** in the Father and the Son.

Prayer:

Father, we acknowledge our world is a mess and that all too often we have allowed the world to impact our faith rather than our faith impacting the world.

Father, give us a sense of urgency for the Truth, for Jesus, for the Gospel, for growing in love, for the Harvest.

Mark our lives with an authenticity that comes only from being with Jesus, an authority marked by faithfulness, an assurance from knowing the Truth, the affection of being loved by you and your community, and a complete abandonment to you and your mission.

In Jesus' name – our life, light, and love - we pray. Amen.