

Text: 1 John 1:1-4

Background to the book of John:

Paul's warning in Acts 20:28-32 has come true decades later. Wolves in sheep's' clothing have crept their way into the church and are beginning to cause confusion.

There is a movement afoot that is declaring new doctrine and new special knowledge from God that is causing divisions in the church and leading people into sin.

John writes his letter as a pastor who loves his flock, to guard them against the dangerous teachings of these wolves. What he wants more than anything for his flock is perseverance I genuine Christianity.

They lived in an age of wolves and deceit. They needed to know what was right. The controversies and heresies have changed, but the truth remains that we live in an age of wolves and deceit.

I can say without hesitation that your elders' hearts yearn for your perseverance in authentic Christianity.

This is a letter about tests. Tests of true doctrine, tests of love for each other, tests of love for God. As we journey through this book together over the weeks, we are called to test ourselves against true and authentic Christianity. Perhaps you will come to the realization that you are not, in fact, in Christ. My hope is that you will see and believe the true Jesus and come to know him and be found in him. Perhaps through this book you will be encouraged in your faith and emboldened to stand strong against the attacks of the enemy and the tides of culture by the power of God in you and the Word of God as our sword.

My hope and prayer is that we all together, as our church family here, engage in nothing less than authentic Christianity.

Text: 1 John 1:1-4

Exegetical Big Idea: The right proclamation of the gospel is the proclamation of the eternal Word of Life made physical and offering the joy of fellowship with God and his family.

Homiletical Big Idea: Authentic Christianity does not change. Never has, never will.

Fallen Condition Focus: We are too often swayed by novel ideas and movements, but anything that is declared "new" about Christianity is most certainly false and will lead Christians away from authentic Christianity.

Intro:

I know you've received this call before. You're sitting at home, or at work, and your phone rings and it's a local number that you don't recognize. So you pick it up and the lady or gentleman on the other line goes on a bit of a rant about how your Social Insurance Number has been suspended. Oh no! That's not good!

See the first time I received one of these calls, I was genuinely confused! I had a feeling something was fishy but in my mind I'm wondering if this might be legitimate.

Of course after a dozen agents tell me the RCMP is coming to my house and nobody shows up you get the hint that this is completely bogus. So now I just play along and have some fun until they hang up.

Many people now know that these calls are bogus, but they keep coming, and you want to know why? Because some people are still being cheated by fraud.

It's one thing to be taken advantage of and be led astray by other people and have your money stolen, but the same thing has been happening on a spiritual level since the dawning of Christianity.

Fraudsters have always been slipping their way into the church with so-called new and novel Christian doctrine and ideas. And as long as there are fraudsters, there will be those who are taken by their new ideas and led away from authentic Christianity. Here's the problem with all those new doctrines:

Authentic Christianity does not change, it never has, and it never will.

Verse 1 – The eternal is tangible in the person of Jesus

It's impossible to read this first verse here and not be reminded of the opening verses of John's Gospel. Here we read "That which was from the beginning...this we proclaim concerning the Word of Life". John opens his Gospel with the words "In the beginning was the Word and Word was God and the Word was with God".

So what is it that was from the beginning? What is it that John heard and saw and touched? Well it's the Word of Life. But wait a second, how can you touch a "word"? That's like describing what the number 12 tastes like.

Unless...unless that eternal Word has become flesh. A few verses down in the first chapter of John's Gospel he writes "and the Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us."

John here starts off his letter with the proclamation that the eternal Word of Life, God himself without beginning and without end has come in the flesh. And John has heard him, seen him, and touched him.

John was there! He was involved in the ministry of Jesus. It wasn't a spiritual movement, or feeling, it was a real life person. The Word of Life is not an idea, it's a person. He walked, he talked, he ate and drank, he slept, he maybe even had a favourite pair of sandals. John knew him, he touched him, he heard him speak.

"From the beginning...this we proclaim" Eternal Word of God becoming flesh is the grounding of the Christian faith, and it is this message that we are tied to. We cannot go beyond it or expand or change it. It has been the message from time immemorial and it shall be our message for eternity.

The frauds and wolves in John's time were denying this very thing. They made the proclamation that Jesus was not truly human, only that he *appeared* to be human. John here is laying down the groundwork for authentic Christianity. Now we don't see this same teaching much today. Today our culture and religious movements posing as Christianity tend to go in the opposite direction. We more often see a denial of Jesus' deity. The Jehovah's witness deny that Jesus is truly God, and they will call themselves Christians, but they are not. I've talked to a minister in the United Church (and notice that "church" is in the name here) that tells me his belief was that Jesus was a good teacher and moral and

spiritual leader but not that he was God, and his bodily resurrection probably didn't happen, but what does it matter as long as we love each other?

[I've never had surgery, but I know many of you have. Suppose for a moment that you have some pain and you head to the doctor and after he or she examine you they tell you that there is something wrong inside and you need surgery. Now imagine for a moment the doctor then turns to you and *says "other doctors would use real tools for the surgery but I have a new approach. I visualize my tools in my mind. I journey with my tools to conduct an emotional surgery. This thinking that we need scalpels to cut is just painful. Who want to be cut? I have taken out the painful and made the experience much easier and more enjoyable."* What will I say to such a doctor? *"you're not a doctor, you're a fraud, I want a new doctor"*

What does it matter if we change the doctrine of the incarnation?

Actually it matters a lot.

Going past it, adding to it or subtracting from it will lead us into error, and our eventual destruction. The Word of Life is from eternity past, not an evolving doctrine. There is no change in the Word of Life. The Word of Life has been with the Father for eternity past, before even his manifestation as human.

No faith that is labeled "Christian" can deny either the eternal divine nature of Christ, or his historical coming in the flesh as truly human. Christ is BOTH truly God AND truly human. **The message of the gospel is embodied in a person.** You can't have the gospel without the real Jesus and you can't have Jesus without the real gospel.

My message to you, Mike's message to you, our message to you as elders, is nothing more than what we have heard from the beginning. This we proclaim concerning the Word of Life. Is your Christianity based on ideas? Or a real person? Where is your hope? If your Christianity is based on good feelings and ideas and moral teachings, then you are building your faith on sand. When the storms come you are doomed.

Is your hope built on the real, physical, tangible, person of Jesus? You are building your faith on a solid rock. Feelings and emotions and so called "self-truths" are fleeting and changing, Jesus is eternal. His work is real. He and his message never changes. That's genuine Christianity.

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Verse 2 –Eternal Life has been made known and needs to be proclaimed.

Twice in this verse John tells us that the life (who is Jesus) appeared. Once at the beginning of the verse and once at the end. You think maybe he's trying to say something? I think he's saying that the life "appeared".

The thought here is that this is a matter to "proclaim". Christ has become human for a purpose, and that purpose has been set since the beginning of time and that purpose has never changed. And because that purpose has never changed, it is a matter of proclamation.

[At around 7pm at my house a proclamation is heard. Bedtime for the kids. Now this proclamation is not as often as I'd like responded to with enthusiasm, but it's the proclamation that is made. You know what

it's not? A vote. Currently Alana and I are outnumbered, and although the little doesn't know what a vote is, eventually he will. If something like bedtime was a vote we would be outvoted I'm sure every night. But bedtime isn't a vote. Because bedtime I not a conversation, it's a reality that is proclaimed. It's a reality that does not change whether or not the hearers agree or like it, or even chose to listen to it. Now I love my kids and I give them this proclamation for their own good of course, even if they can't understand it, but it's still a proclamation.]

You don't get to vote for King Jesus. Jesus is king, he has redeemed his people by coming in the flesh and dying on the cross for the sins of the world and rising again to life. He sits now at the right hand of God the Father almighty and he will come back again soon to judge the living and the dead and bring his own to himself.

Whether it fits within your worldview or personal preference or your identity or not it makes no difference. The gospel of Jesus is a proclamation. You don't like parts of it? Too bad. You think you would rather it a different way? Too bad. You don't believe it to be true? Too bad. This is a proclamation, not a vote.

Inherent in a proclamation is a **truth claim**.

This truth is from the beginning. It's not a truth made, it's a truth proclaimed. The eternity of the truth is the point. God is God and we are not.

And what is that truth claim? The Eternal life.

I think there's a double meaning in verse 2, they proclaim Jesus *as* eternal life, and proclaim that the way to *obtain* eternal life. And the object of both of those statements is the same, Jesus. The truth claim is that Jesus alone holds eternal life. He is eternal life, and he offers eternal life to all those who come to him in faith.

This is the point of preaching. It's not a conversation, a chit chat, or a debate. It's the proclamation of the glory of Christ in the Scriptures. That's why the pulpit is way of here and we sit down there. I say "we" because the person in this pulpit changes and will continue to change but what remains sitting atop this wooden stand is the unchanging Word of God called the Bible.

This means that subjective religious experiences based on feeling and "self-truth" are nonsense. Christianity is not just one of many voices adding to the conversation of religious thought. Christianity is the only voice that matters. The Word of Life is eternal, all other claims are made up by imagination and are false by nature.

You see why proclamation is so important? Proclamation is the point. You don't decide it, you accept it. Jesus' message on earth was not "what does the Kingdom of God mean for you?" it was "the Kingdom of God is here!"

In Jeremiah's time, there were false prophets that we prophesying peace to Israel, when in fact they were in great sin and God was about to bring the Babylonians to take them into exile. These prophets were prophesying in the name of God, but their words were not God's Words.

God says to Jeremiah in Jeremiah 23:

²⁸ Let the prophet who has a dream recount the dream, but let the one who has my word speak it faithfully. For what has straw to do with grain?" declares the LORD. ²⁹ "Is not my word like fire," declares the LORD, "and like a hammer that breaks a rock in pieces?"

This is our work as we proclaim the truth of the gospel to the world. Let us speak it faithfully, because it is life-bringing food like grain, it burns away the impurities of sin like fire, and it destroys all falsehood like a hammer.

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Verse 3 – The Proclamation of the Eternal Life is for fellowship with God and those who believe.

Notice the progression here. In verse 2 the appearance of the Word of Life was to “us” meaning the disciples. But it was never meant to stay with the disciples. It is not a secret club or group, as the special group of frauds would say, but look now in verse 3. The appearance to them, has turned into a proclamation to “you” meaning now us! The words “so that you may have” imply that something is available to the people who accept this proclamation. So John proclaims the Eternal life “so that” they may have “Fellowship”, fellowship with other Christians and fellowship with God.

But why use “fellowship” to describe here what it means to be in Christ? Why that term? Being in close fellowship with someone can mean something very significant.

[I have one of these smart phones, and I fully admit it’s probably smarter than me. of all the functions on this phone, I probably only use about 20% of them. One function that I find really helpful however is the customizable vibrating pattern for your contacts. So here’s how I use it. All of you, have the same buzzing pattern. But there is one person in my contacts that has a different pattern. Alana has a different pattern. If I’m sitting in a meeting or out somewhere and I have my phone with me in my pocket, or on the table. If I’m in the middle of something and I hear the first pattern, if it’s inconvenient for me to get to my phone I’ll just check it later. But if I hear or feel Alana’s pattern, I always check it. Why? Because though I love you guys and know most of you, my wife and I have a special fellowship. The fellowship we have means something more than just superficial knowing.]

Fellowship with God means something significant.

What is Fellowship with God if not the forgiveness of sins through the sacrifice of Christ on the Cross, taking the wrath of the Father upon himself so that we are spared it? What is fellowship if not the adoption into God’s family with eternal brother and sisters? What is fellowship if not the indwelling of the Spirit to guide and to lead us to empower us and sanctify us unto good deeds that glorify God? What is fellowship if not the hope of resurrection and eternal life with the Son? See how the apostle here can speak of salvation in terms of fellowship and still mean all that we receive by grace through faith in the gospel of Jesus Christ?

See how John can use fellowship as a description of all that it means to be in Christ?

But just as the words “so that you may have” imply that something is available to those who accept the proclamation, it is just as true that those who will reject this proclamation will not receive what it brings. A rejection of the proclamation of the gospel means you do not have fellowship with God.

If you do not have fellowship with God, you have fellowship with the world. Everyone has fellowship with someone. There are dire consequences to rejecting fellowship with God.

There is no forgiveness of sins, no adoption into God’s family, no Spirit to guide and help you, no eternal family bond with others, ultimately it means no hope for resurrection life but instead an eternity without God in hell.

It’s this fellowship that we have in God that is the basis of unity that all authentic Christians share together. We share too with John who writes this. It’s our heritage as believers in Jesus.

With the death of the apostles, has the proclamation of the Word of Life ceased? Certainly not. The proclamation of the gospel continues with the Church. True, we have not seen or touched the eternal Word of Life as John had, but since we too have fellowship with the Father and the Son, we are empowered by God to continue to proclaim this salvation in Jesus.

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Verse 4 – Fellowship with God is ultimately for our joy.

John concludes this opening section with the simple phrase “we write this to make our joy complete.”

John is sitting down and putting his pen to paper for the encouragement of the Ephesus churches, to proclaim to them the good news of fellowship with the eternal God who has become human and with all those who believe in his name, he writes this with an ultimate purpose, and that purpose is the ultimate joy of both himself and his Christian family.

But this joy is unlike any other joy. This isn’t a joy on the same level as other joys. Lots of things can bring you joy. Even things that aren’t good for you can bring temporary fleeting “joy” if we can call it that. But the joy of fellowship with God is eternally better.

[I don’t know if you watched some of the Olympics while they were on a few weeks back. I caught some of the events. I like the classic events like the track and field, and rowing is pretty cool too. One evening we were at my in-laws seeing what events were on that evening and men’s diving was scheduled to play. So we switched to that channel and watched men’s diving for a while. There was a Canadian diver but he didn’t do all that well. You know how tall the tallest diving board is that they dive off of? About 32 feet. That’s about the height of a three story building. I wouldn’t jump off of that feet first let alone doing backflip and twists. But consider the pool for a second. Pretend for a second there is someone in charge of filling the pool that day. Pretend for a second that this person this person had the mentality that “whatever, water is water right?” They are of the mentality that while other people may get their water from a hose, they prefer to get theirs from a spoon. After all, water is water, there is still water in the pool whatever you use. Here’s the problem though, one of the things is going to *fill* the pool with water, and the other will get it nowhere close to full. And for the man or woman who is standing on the

edge of a platform 32 feet up in the air above the pool, guess which one they would prefer? Of course they want that pool *filled*.]

That's the picture of the joy here that John writes about. The word literally means filled up. He writes to the churches to press on to authentic Christianity that leads to fellowship with God and each other for the ultimate goal of *filled up to completion* type of joy.

The joy of fellowship with Christ is not a momentary fleeting happiness that leaves you wanting. Only fellowship with Christ is a complete, not lacking anything, never ending type of joy.

And why is the joy of fellowship with God this type of joy? Because there is no more glorious and amazing and fulfilling thing in all of existence than God himself. And get to share this joy with each other as we share in the fellowship of belief in God.

But here's the thing, John doesn't say here that our joy is already complete, he is writing to *make* our joy complete. It's a future reality. Our Joy will always be lacking here on this earth, not because God is not joyful, but because we live in a broken, sinful world that numbs this joy.

This joy will only be realized in the New Heavens and the New Earth. And so we've come full circle haven't we? The Word of God who is eternal, was made physical, the message of the eternal life is proclaimed, believed, fellowship received, and eternal joy, face to face with the eternal Word of God, together as his glorious Church, is our destination.

I don't know about you, but that's my heart's desire, and it's my heart's desire for you to share in that.

The wolves that have slipped in, and will continue to until Christ returns, they cannot not deliver this joy. They can offer it...but that offer is false.

There is one road to God and his glorious Kingdom, and the road to this, is nothing less than authentic Christianity.

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