

1 John 1:1-4 (NKJV)

1 That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, concerning the Word of life--

2 the life was manifested, and we have seen, and bear witness, and declare to you that eternal life which was with the Father and was manifested to us--

3 that which we have seen and heard we declare to you, that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship *is* with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ.

4 And these things we write to you that your joy may be full.

Suppose you want to go to Denver Colorado. You are trying to map out your course. Which would you rather? Would you rather someone saying, you know what? I believe that Rt 40 goes to Denver. I received it in a dream. And it makes sense. Rt 40 goes west in just the right angle to reach Denver. And I know people who agree with me that Rt 40 should go to Denver.

Or would you rather be in a truckers convention where, when you ask the question 500 truckers tell you, I go to Denver every week and I take Rt 70?

In our text today, we have the gnostics telling us all about Rt 40. And we have the Apostle John telling us about Rt 70.

That is the essence of our text in a nutshell.

Now, the question for us is- **are you in Christ?** Are you a believer? Can you be sure that what Christ did counts for you?

There are two things you need to know.

1. Is there a highway that leads to eternal life? Is there a path that leads to eternal life?

2. Are you on it?

1 John answers both of those questions. Verses 1 through 3 answers the question if there is such a highway. The rest of the book, on and off, answers the question if we are on that road or not.

So we can see right from the onset that this is a very important book that answers questions that are vital for us to both **ask** and **answer**.

John is countering a false teaching that was based on mysticism, based on human experience and imagination. And probably based on doctrines of demons influencing human beings.

And John wants to lay down, **right from the onset**, an argument that **cannot** be countered.

1 John does not even begin with the niceties of human interaction and introduction. It does not even tell us who is writing. It does not say hello. Do you get irritated with people like that? Well John was a **people person** and he skipped all of that. Why? What he had to say was too important to him to delay.

He goes right to this.

1 That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, concerning the Word of life—

We need to start with the second word “which”. This is a neuter singular relative pronoun. The fact that it is singular and a pronoun gives us much to go on. It is referring to **one** and it is referring to a **person**. Those tell us everything we need to know in the text. This is not talking about some **concept** or some **group of people**. This is talking about Jesus Christ, and those listening to John would have **gotten that point**.

So if we change the word “**which**” to “**Jesus Christ who or whom**” we get even more clarity.

Jesus Christ who **was from the beginning**, Jesus Christ who **we have heard**, Jesus Christ who **we have seen with our eyes**, Jesus Christ who **we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, concerning the Word of life—**

Ok, John is laying out **the right road** and the way to be sure you are **on the right road**. And he gives the first fact. This Jesus Christ was from the beginning. This sounds similar to this verse-

John 1:1-2 (NKJV)

1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2 He was in the beginning with God.

Essentially John lays out that Christ was there at the beginning. He preexisted the beginning as we know it. He was there **prior to** creation. That is the point. This Jesus is God. We could make a study about exactly how that is true. There are a lot of beliefs with a lot of nuances how God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit interrelate. My firm belief is that we must explicitly believe every verse about them from scripture. As long as we are believing scripture, even if we have differences about how the three relate, we will all be in the fellowship of the faith.

John must lay out that this Jesus does not have the history or character of just a normal human being. Jesus is deity. As such He must be regarded differently than just another human story.

Then watch the progression. Jesus who we **heard**. Jesus who **we saw**. Jesus who **we touched**.

First note the word WE. A lot of cults and even Islam is based on the eyewitness of one person. One person with a so called experience with God. No evidence. No way of verifying it. No way of testing it. Just one man's word for it.

When John says "**we**", he is talking about an **extensive** we. There were 500 human beings who saw Jesus Christ **AFTER** the resurrection. Any one of them could have been tracked down and interviewed. And they all would have told the same story from their perspective. They saw the real Jesus Christ, the same one that was seen prior to His death.

That is a powerful **we**. There is nothing like this in the other religions. There is no time and space event with hundreds of witnesses for verification. This was a **we** that God had planned to give skeptical minds some powerful evidence. There was no such proof for the Gnostic teaching. A great degree of blind trust without proof would be required for believing the gnostic teachers. And John lays out the gauntlet right at the beginning. The gnostics cannot stand up to the **WE** that John begins with.

I think we need to inject an application here. Many in our world speak about Christianity as fiction, as a crutch that weak people need, as a foolish belief. Yet the **historical evidence** for the existence of Christ is overwhelming. And the evidence of his resurrection, when regarded **closely** and **logically** is very compelling. The evidence comes from both secular historians and the Biblical record. A moment in human history is described when Christ was **born**. There were **witnesses** to his arrival. Then there was a moment in human history when He was **crucified**. There were many **witnesses** to His death. Then after His resurrection there were **many witnesses** to Him being alive. The resurrection has as much proof as any other thing we believe about that period of history.

Yet one of this world's darling theories, the one that gets the best press, is **non theistic evolution**. And at the core of that belief is this idea that random chance created complex order. And that idea is made plausible by the fact that random chance had millions of years to get it right. After all, how many mistakes could be made in millions of years before everything fell together. But something strikes me as very interesting here. I doubt that any normal functioning adult really believes that random chance creates complex order in their day to day lives. Not in real life, not in our frame of reference. Let me illustrate.

If you were to place a monkey in a room with a typewriter and a week later you found a 10 page paper written in perfect English with no grammatical errors, who would believe that the paper was written by the monkey? How about 10 years later? How about 50 years later? No one would believe that. **Could it have happened?** Yes. A monkey has the possibility of typing a paper. But our frame of reference tells us that **it wouldn't**. It would require intelligence.

How about if you found a deck of cards perfectly stacked on a table by suit and by card value order. And suppose you found it in a room with an open window. Who would believe that the wind stacked the cards? No one. Could the wind do that? Yes. Absolutely. But none of us would believe it did. Because we have a frame of reference in our short lives that tells us that **random chance does not create complex order**. Intelligence is required. And if a child were to try to tell us that the monkey typed the paper or the wind stacked the cards, we would find it humorous, at least.

Yet many in our world scoff at the idea that a bunch of people believe a verifiable event in human history that has a source outside of itself, an event that was a display of Supernatural Intervention. I see that one of these positions we are looking at requires blind faith. But it is not Christianity that requires blind faith.

Now back to our text.

Then they heard, saw and touched Jesus.

First they **heard**. The verb tense is such that there was a completed occurrence in the past with an impact in the present. The hearing they did had a huge impact even when First John was written. And the impact is not based on what the disciples philosophically added to what they heard. It was not from some new revelation about it. It was the **words** their ears heard from Christ's mouth that made the difference.

But also think about hearing. Someone can be far away and you hear them. You may think you know who is talking. You may think you heard what they said. But there is better proof.

Hearing is an absolute necessity. With hearing we get the cognitive content we need for our minds. We receive words. And words communicate thoughts. This is needed. But for **proofs of authenticity**, there are better ones. And each mention keeps getting better for that purpose.

Next comes sight. **we have seen with our eyes**, Jesus Christ who **we have looked upon**

John made it clear here that the witnesses saw a physical person with their physical eyes. The gnostics knew all kinds of things and saw all kinds of things

but they were figments of their imaginations. Not so with the Christian witnesses. This is **reality** we are talking about.

And now sometimes a bunch of people can see one thing **very briefly** and the story they might all tell might be different. To **look briefly** is not nearly as good for proof purposes as to look continually. Well the phrase “we have looked upon” is the **long term** looking.

The disciples watched for 3.5 years while Jesus did all kinds of things. They saw Him with their eyeballs. They watched this human being over and over again do **miraculous** things, **mind blowing** things, things that humans cannot do but Jesus did. This is better proof than hearing. It is better proof that this human being is real and is doing these things. He is not an illusion or a ghost. He is a person. He is a human being. But there is one better proof.

and our hands have handled, concerning the Word of life—

This is the same word that Luke quoted Jesus as using in this passage in Luke. **Luke 24:39 (NKJV)**

39 Behold My hands and My feet, that it is I Myself. Handle Me (that it the word. Handle me) and see, for a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see I have."

This is the point here. Jesus Christ was handled by the disciples. And not just **prior** to His resurrection. He was touched **prior** to his baptism by John and after His resurrection by John. These are both periods when the Gnostics said that **the Christ** was no longer with **Jesus the human**.

The handling of Christ with human hands would not have been any proof that Jesus was the Christ. But if one assumes that Jesus was God on this earth, the handling would prove that **it was Christ in a real human body**. And that is the important point to prove when dealing with Gnostics. He was not a phantom at any time. Jesus Christ was God in the flesh from beginning to end. And that is beyond wonderful because it means that **we** in human flesh can live forever. We can live a godly life and be translated just like Jesus in the flesh was. He was raised **BODILY**. There is no cosmic mumbo jumbo going on. There was physical reality that could be heard with human eardrums, seen with human eyeballs and touched with human fingertips.

That is the point here.

concerning the Word of life

This Word of Life is the person and work of Christ as proclaimed in the Gospel. The focus here is to **validate the truth of the Gospel**. There is only one message, one truth that saves people. And the Gnostics were not just spreading a **nuance** of it. They were spreading the **opposite** of it. They were spreading a competing message, a doctrine of demons that would save no one.

² the life was manifested, and we have seen, and bear witness, and declare to you that eternal life which was with the Father and was manifested to us--

Manifested means **to make known that which was hidden**. The Gnostics sort of made this backwards. They made **invisible** that with **was manifest**. They made a mystery about that which was clearly visible.

John says that Christ **made visible** that which was **previously hidden**.

Scripture says that no man has seen God. But Jesus said if you have seen me you have seen the Father. Christ was manifesting **who God is** on the planet. He was making that which was mysterious more understandable. The gnostics were making that which was understandable more mysterious.

As for John having seen and bearing witness and declaring to you I will read this from the Expositors Bible Commentary-

The life to which he bears witness, the life that was with the Father, is precisely the life manifested in the historical person of Jesus. That is why John can say he has seen it (*heorakamen*), can bear personal witness to it (*martyroumen*), and can make an apostolic declaration concerning it (*apangellomen*). Westcott (p. 9) says, "The three verbs give in due sequence the ideas of personal experience, responsible affirmation, authoritative announcement, which are combined in the apostolic message." The phrase "eternal life" underscores the divine character of the life described, not its length.

Expositor's Bible Commentary, The - The Expositor's Bible Commentary - Volume 12: Hebrews through Revelation.

John says he has

personal experience, responsible affirmation, authoritative announcement

Again this is the emphasis to form the foundation of all arguments against competing false doctrines. John does not say, I am an impressive person. He does not say he is a tremendous speaker. He does not say he is the best philosopher. He does not focus **on himself** in any way. The focus is all centered on **that which Christ has enabled in him**.

John experienced Christ, he can responsibly communicate what he has learned from Christ, and Christ gave him the authority to proclaim it in such a way that it represents God and holds the same authority.

The Gnostics would have been depending to sway crowds with their **innovative ideas** and their **slick presentation** and their **handling of group psychology** and their **impressive insights**. John says, nope. I just know what

I saw and I can tell you what the truth is. And anyone with any brains ought to be able to compare the two and decide which to believe.

And this **eternal life** is a description of the **life of God**. Christ **had it** in its purest form. He had the quintessential eternal life with no beginning and no end. He holds out to us **that kind** of life. **That quality** of life. But **we** had a **beginning**. We just get to have a life like Christ's with no end. We get to share in the Christ life, a whole different quality of life than we previously had.
³ that which we have seen and heard we declare to you, that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ.

⁴ And these things we write to you that your joy may be full.

Now it is as if we get to John's punch line. Have you ever heard someone start talking and you have no idea where they are going with it? And then all of a sudden they pull it all together and you get it? Well I don't know that the readers of this letter would not have known where John was going. But they understood it when he got there.

Here John lays out **the purpose** for John's profound experience of knowing Christ. He lays out why all of this is **significant to his readers**. It is not so John can sell more books. It is not so they will erect him a statue. It is not for them to join his club and pay his dues. It is not so he can gain status in their group.

No

³ that which we have seen and heard we declare to you, that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ.

Now we need to pay attention here. Notice how clear John is here. John has no trouble defining that which **he has seen and heard that provides fellowship** with God. John speaks of **knowing by experience** that he has fellowship with God. He knows **how** to have fellowship with God. It is clear in his head. He has no confusion in regard to it. **He knows what he has** that clearly shows that what he knows **is knowable**. And he wants it knowable to the people he is offering it to.

Scripture is very clear about this. A person can know that they are right with God. It starts with believing what God says about the bad news. All of us have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. We have sinned and fully earned the wrath of God by our declaration of independence against Him.

But God so loved the world that He sent His only son to take the wrath that we deserved upon Himself. He suffered the wrath of God that we deserved, so

that we can be declared NOT GUILTY in the court of God. And He resurrected so that we can have new life in Christ.

And we receive all this by believing in Christ. **John 3:16-18 (NKJV)**

16 For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.

17 For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved.

18 He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.

So Christians are people who know what they have. It is not a unclear vague sense of something. It is an understanding that can be clearly communicated. John is talking about knowing that one has salvation.

Martyn Lloyd Jones has some great quotes here. He says **There can be no true joy of salvation while there is a vagueness or an uncertainty or a lack of assurance with respect to what we have.**

He also says **Assurance is not essential to salvation, but it is essential to the joy of salvation.**

Now once we know what **we have**, that which **we have** drives us to want others to have what we have. If we do not have that, we probably do not have salvation.

We see that John is very clear. He is talking, he is proclaiming, he is taking on the false teachers because he wants as many as possible to have fellowship with God and with the family of Christ.

Here is one more quote from Martyn Lloyd Jones

Christian people, here is the question that comes to us at a time like this. What is our attitude towards men and women around and about us who are not concerned about these things, who are heedless about them. Have we a sense of compassion for them? Do we know what it is to feel that we will do anything we can in order to make them have what we have got? That is the Christian position, so that, by nature, all who are in Christ have this missionary spirit, this desire for others to have and to share with them the thing that they themselves possess; it is inevitable by definition.

Are we still praying for 3 unbelievers? Who are they? Can you name them? Have you been looking for opportunities? Or have we forgotten about it? Do we really want to play a part in the kingdom of God expanding? What will we do with our time and effort to see that happen?

Another thing to notice here is that everyone who comes to Christ comes to Christ by the **same method** through the **same message**. There isn't room for the gnostic so called "gospels". There is no good news that saves that comes from anywhere but the truth about Christ and His incarnation, His death, His resurrection and the truth about what all that accomplished.

So in that sense salvation becomes testable. We can ask questions of those who call themselves Christians to find out if they really came through the door of Christ. We can find out if they truly have fellowship with God and with us. Oh there will always be good fakers. But those who are open with **alternative ways** can be discerned and corrected. It isn't like people come to Christ through mysterious and alternating understandings. There is only one message of the gospel, not many.

Look at the goal here. **Fellowship** with us and **fellowship** with the Father and His Son Jesus Christ. **Fellowship** is going to be a very important topic in First John. And it is a wonderful focus.

Now notice too the wording in verse 3. The fellowship is with Jesus Christ. It is not just Christ. This is the God Incarnate- Jesus Christ God/Man. This would have been offensive to the Gnostics. John could care less. This is the fellowship he is calling everyone into.

The word for fellowship is koinōnia

The word means **a share that one has in something**. It is fellowship, community, joint participation. And we see in our text it is the fellowship of Christians with God and Christ. I often say we are all in this together. That is the essence of fellowship. But the thing we are **in together** is not based on us or about us. It is fellowship with the Father and the Son.

We talked a lot about forgiveness. And what is forgiveness about? Restoring fellowship with God and each other. Restored fellowship is the goal of forgiveness. So it is no wonder that John speaks much of both topics.

And the last verse

⁴ And these things we write to you that your joy may be full.

We laid out our outline last week and in it said that joy is the focus. This is the first thing that is written to describe the purpose of writing it. And as such, it may be the most central.

We spoke of this before.

Do we want joy? Do we want those who know us in the world and in the church to know us as people of joy? Would we like people to say, I know Jon and there is something about him that I cannot understand. Things may go well in his life or they may go very badly, but there is something about him

that does not change. He has an unshakable sense that all is well. You cannot break him. You cannot bring him down. He thinks that as long as he has Christ he is ok.

I am afraid that this is not what they would say about me. But I want to be the person for whom this is true. How about you. Do you want to take on an identity like that in Christ? I do.

Next week we will take an in depth look at joy as we continue on in our text.