

I John 1:1-4 - A Letter Testifying to Glorious Truth

To Read:

1. Colossians 1
2. II Corinthians 3:1-4:6

Introduction

A. This morning we are going to look at the first four verses of I John - John's introduction to his letter

1. Last week we looked at an overview of I John and the organization and themes of John's letter
2. And we saw that I John was written in response to heretical teachers in the church that were denying the basic truths of Christianity - especially the truths of who Jesus Christ is
3. And the result of their heretical teaching was becoming plain in the church - the church was dividing against itself and the heretics were not valuing the teaching and command of Christ to love
4. So, John wrote a letter warning the true believer of 'what you have heard from the beginning' and encouraging them to continue in the faith, putting their trust fully in the completed work of Christ for them and to live lives that demonstrate their faith

B. It is unsurprising, therefore, that John's introduction to His book focuses on the value of His testimony

1. The false teachers felt that they had a better testimony to give to the church - a deeper knowledge, a better understanding of the Spirit's witness
2. In response to this, as John opens his letter he reminds the reader of what his testimony is and why his testimony is important - why should we listen to John and not the knowledge teachers?
3. In fact, John introduces his letter as a letter of testimony, a letter that is testifying to glorious truths
4. The false teachers may be claiming that they have a deeper knowledge, but their so-called 'deeper knowledge' cannot touch the depths of what John has seen and is telling us

C. 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 looked upon and have touched with our hands, concerning the word of life - the life was made manifest, and we have seen it, and testify to it and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was made manifest to us - that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. And we are writing these things so that our joy may be complete.

D. Proposition and Outline

1. **Proposition:** To open his letter John points to the reality and the glory of what he has testified to and calls us to receive and rejoice in that testimony.
2. **Outline:**
 - a. The basis of John's testimony
 - b. The authority of John's testimony
 - c. The purpose of John's testimony
 - d. The result of John's testimony
 - e. Applications

I. The basis of John's testimony: the incarnation

A. At the core of the heretics message was a misperception of the person of Christ

1. The knowledge teachers could not accept that God could be man, it was not only an impossibility but a travesty for the pure light of God to mingle with the corruption of flesh
2. In response John says, no, it's not a travesty, it is a glory and it is the center of my message
3. The incarnation is what John testifies to and what John celebrates - it is no message to be explained away or denied but to be rested in and rejoiced in
4. So John tells us, "*That which was from the beginning... concerning the word of life, the life was made manifest... that... which was with the Father and was made manifest to us.*"

B. John begins by reminding us that Jesus was from the beginning with the Father and was full of life

1. This is John's way of emphasizing the deity of Christ
2. As God, Christ was present in the beginning at Creation
 - a. The introduction of I John echoes John 1:1 - *In the beginning was the word and the word was with God and the word was God*, which itself echoes Genesis 1:1 - *In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.*
 - b. The only one present at the beginning was God, and Christ was there so Christ is God!
3. As God, Christ is life, eternal life and specifically the Word of life- having life in Himself, He is the means by which God speaks life into the world
 - a. So again, John echoes the introduction to His Gospel - John 1:4 - *In Him was life and that life was the light of men*, which again calls us to ponder the creation account in Genesis 2:7 - *then the LORD God formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living creature*
 - b. The only one who is and has life is God, and Christ is and has life so Christ is God!
4. John is celebrating the deity of Christ, His oneness with the Father, which is important as we reach the second half of this thought

C. John doesn't leave us with a reminder that Christ is God, the false teachers could agree with that, John goes on to tell us that Jesus has manifested Himself

1. The center of John's message is that Jesus Christ as God has manifested Himself to the world
 - a. To understand John's point, we need to start by asking what John means by the word 'manifest'?
 - b. The Greek word here translated 'manifest' means to make shine, to make seen, or to show
 - c. It has the idea of shining a light in a dark place so that you can see what is really there
 - d. So, John is saying that Jesus is shining Himself into the world, Jesus is God and in entering the world, Jesus has shined the glory of God at us - *the life was made manifest and we have seen it*
2. Jesus shining the glory of God at us is the constant theme of John's testimony
 - a. John 1:5 - *The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it*
 - b. John 2:11 - *This, the first of his signs, Jesus did at Cana in Galilee, and manifested his glory*
 - c. John 9:3 - *Jesus answered, "It was not that this man sinned, or his parents, but that the works of God might be displayed in him.*
 - d. John 14:21 - *He who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and manifest myself to him.*
 - e. John 17:6 - *I have manifested your name to the people whom you gave me out of the world.*
 - f. John 21:1 - *After this Jesus revealed himself again to the disciples by the Sea of Tiberias,*
3. And Jesus can shine the glory of God at us because Jesus is God, Jesus is the light of the glory of God
 - a. I'm not even going to try to read all the times that John calls Jesus the light, but I'll give you a list just to give you a sense of how important this is to John
 - b. John 1:4, 5, 7, 8, 9 - Jesus the light from God came into the dark world
 - c. John 3:19-21 - (Nicodemus) Jesus, the light, has shined in the darkness
 - d. John 8:12 - Jesus, at the feast of booths, says "I am the light of the world"
 - e. John 9:5 - Jesus says, "As long as I am in the world I am the light of the world"
 - f. John 12:35-36, 46 - Jesus claims He is the light and whoever comes to Him will be delivered from darkness

D. Far from an impossible, embarrassing doctrine, John sees the incarnation as the central and glorious truth of God's redemption because through the incarnation the pure light of the glory of God has broken into the world

1. So John wrote in His gospel in John 1:14, 16-18 - *And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth. And from his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father's side, he has made him known.*
2. No one has ever seen God, but Jesus has shown us His glory - we can see the glory of God in Jesus Christ
3. It is interesting that in these verse John points back to Moses, it is almost as though he is recalling the encounter that Moses had with the glory of God in Exodus 33 and 34
 - a. The encounter starts in Exodus 33:18-23 - *Moses said, "Please show me your glory." And he said, "I will make all my goodness pass before you and will proclaim before you my name 'The LORD.' And I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy. But," he said, "you cannot see my face, for man shall not see me and live." And the LORD said, "Behold, there is a place by me where you shall stand on the rock, and while my glory passes by I will put you in a cleft of the rock, and I will cover you with my hand until I have passed by. Then I will take away my hand, and you shall see my back, but my face shall not be seen."*
 - b. Then God appears to Moses on the mountain and proclaims His name and gives the core of the covenant again, and then Moses comes down from the mountain in Exodus 34:29-33 - *When Moses came down from Mount Sinai, with the two tablets of the testimony in his hand as he came down from the mountain, Moses did not know that the skin of his face shone because he had been talking with God. Aaron and all the people of Israel saw Moses, and behold, the skin of his face shone, and they were afraid to come near him. But Moses called to them, and Aaron and all the leaders of the congregation returned to him, and Moses talked with them. Afterward all the people of Israel came near, and he commanded them all that the LORD had spoken with him in Mount Sinai. And when Moses had finished speaking with them, he put a veil over his face.*
4. John is saying that Jesus' coming into the world is like that - like God displaying His glory to Moses
 - a. Except, it's infinitely better - Moses never saw the type of glory that was displayed in the revelation of Christ, He saw a shadow, as God puts it, Moses could only see His back
 - b. But Christ has brought the fullness of God's glory into the world

E. The incarnation is not an optional doctrine, it is central because it is through the incarnation that God has displayed His glory - the incarnation is the basis of John's testimony

II. The authority of John's testimony: experience

A. The knowledge teachers claimed that they had a better knowledge that John and his followers had

1. They had a better understanding of the Spirit of God and people needed to listen to them
2. So why should we listen to John's testimony and not the knowledge teachers? Why would John write?
3. John's answer is very straightforward - I was there! I was an eyewitness, I saw it, I heard it, I even felt it.
4. So he writes - *That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we looked upon and have touched with our hands, concerning the word of life ... that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you*

B. This is what John keeps pointing back to - why should we believe him? Because He was there!

1. So, John tells us during his account of the crucifixion in John 19:33-35 - *But when they came to Jesus and saw that he was already dead, they did not break his legs. But one of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear, and at once there came out blood and water. He who saw it has borne witness---his testimony is true, and he knows that he is telling the truth---that you also may believe.*
2. And John tells us in the last verses of His book in John 21:20-24 - *Peter turned and saw the disciple whom Jesus loved following them, the one who had been reclining at table close to him and had said, "Lord, who is it that is going to betray you?" When Peter saw him, he said to Jesus, "Lord, what about this man?" Jesus said to him, "If it is my will that he remain until I come, what is that to you? You follow me!" So the saying spread abroad among the brothers that this disciple was not to die; yet Jesus did not say to him that he was not to die, but, "If it is my will that he remain until I come, what is that to you?" This is the disciple who is bearing witness about these things, and who has written these things, and we know that his testimony is true.*

C. John isn't the only apostle that based his testimony on personal experience, in fact all of the apostles' testimony is based on their personal witness of the life of Jesus Christ

1. This becomes clearest when Paul, the only apostle who you might question his eyewitness testimony, strongly affirms his eyewitness status in I Corinthians 15:3-10 - *For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me. For I am the least of the apostles, unworthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me was not in vain.*
2. Paul affirms this so strongly because Christ appointed those who were to be His witness - He appointed those who had been with Him and witnessed His resurrection to go and proclaim His truth to the world in Acts 1:8 - *But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."*
3. Why does any of the New Testament have authority? What defines the New Testament? Why are John's writings and not the knowledge teachers' writings part of the New Testament?
4. It comes down to this - John was an eyewitness of Christ's life and especially an eyewitness of the resurrection and the resurrected Christ and, as a witness, Christ gave them authority to testify to what they saw and heard

D. So John's argument is very simple but also profound

1. His argument is simple - I was there. I saw Him and heard Him and felt Him. If you can't say that then you should listen to me.
2. But His argument is also profound because really He is citing His authority as an apostle to enunciate the truths of Christ and to rightly display His gospel to the world
3. John's witness of Christ came with a warrant from Christ to witness to Christ and this is the apostolic authority

III. The purpose of John's testimony: fellowship

A. The false teachers didn't only have bad theology, their bad theology had practical results

1. Their errant theology was causing division in the church, the false teachers did not want or need fellowship with John and his followers so they were creating their own sect, their own exclusive set of followers
2. In response to this, John explains the true nature of fellowship and writes, "*that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ.*"
3. John makes a subtle three point argument in this statement
 - a. First, he says that the incarnation has to be the basis of fellowship between John and other believers, "*we proclaim also to you, so that you too may have fellowship with us.*"
 - b. But, more importantly, the incarnation is the basis of fellowship between God and John, "*and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ.*"
 - c. So, the implication is that fellowship with John and affirmation of John's witness to the incarnation is the only way for other believers to have fellowship with God - if you aren't in fellowship with John through the incarnation then you aren't in fellowship with God

B. John affirms this because fellowship is a natural and unavoidable result of the incarnation and all true fellowship is based in the incarnation - In the incarnation, Christ has joined two parties that have been enemies since the fall

1. At the fall, the relationship between God and man was destroyed, there was no basis of fellowship between the perfect Creator and the sinful creature
2. But in the incarnation, Jesus joins God and man in a perfect relationship once again in His own person
3. In Christ, God and man are unified again; in Christ God and man have perfect fellowship

C. And through His perfect relationship, the incarnation has provided for us to have fellowship with God in Christ

1. So Paul joins incarnation and reconciliation in Colossians 1:19-22 - *For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross. And you, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death, in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him,*
2. So, in Christ, we are called back into fellowship with God as Paul tells us in I Corinthians 1:9 - *God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.*

D. The most important fellowship we have is with God but, as a natural result, the incarnation has also provided for us to have fellowship with each other in Christ

1. If Christ has reconciled all of us to God in Himself, then, by default, He has reconciled us to each other - that is, if we all have fellowship with God in Christ then we all have fellowship with each other
2. Paul makes this clear in Ephesians 2:14-16 - *For he himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, by abolishing in his flesh the law with its commandments and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new man out of the two, thus making peace, and in this one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility.*
3. Our fellowship with each other isn't the most important thing, but it is an unavoidable consequence of our most important relationship, so John will say later in I John 5 - *everyone who loves the Father loves whoever has been born of him*
4. Our fellowship with each other is a reflection of our fellowship with God so John continues to testify to the incarnation as the basis of our fellowship so that we can have fellowship with each other because we have fellowship with God

E. So the incarnation calls us to the antithesis of the disunity brought about by the false teachers

1. The false teachers have severed their union with Christ and are therefore severing their union with believers
2. But we are called to embrace the incarnation and to embrace it's results - we must be in Christ and if we are in Christ we should have pleasant fellowship with the people of Christ
3. John testifies so that we will have fellowship with each other and with God through the incarnation of Christ!

IV. The result of John's testimony: joy

- A. Although John's letter is, in some ways, a response to false teachers and the division they are causing, John does not consider his letter to be first and foremost a polemic or an attack against the false teachers**
1. The false teachers may have provided an occasion for him to write, but they aren't really the reason
 2. And, in the letter, John is going to disprove their teachings, but that's not really the point
 3. The reason and the point of the book are much deeper than that, John's purpose is so deep that the false teachers really can't effect it at all
 4. John is writing this letter because he wants his joy to overflow, he wants to be full of joy in Christ and he wants the reader to be full of joy in Christ so he writes, "*And we are writing these things so that our joy may be complete.*"
 5. In fact, there is a curious wording in this verse, he says that he wants, "our joy" to be complete
 - a. This could refer to himself and those who testify with him
 - b. Or it could refer to himself and those who read his letter
 - c. As I think about it, I think he means both, he wants to have joy and he wants his reader to have joy
- B. First, John writes for his own joy, so that he can have joy in sharing his testimony**
1. John's joy has been in the incarnation and the glory of God that he has seen through the incarnation of Christ, but now he is completing that joy by sharing it with others, by continuing to testify to the
 2. In fact, John doesn't write about completing his own joy first, he is actually echoing something he wrote in his gospel about the other John, John the Baptist - John 3:29-30 - *The one who has the bride is the bridegroom. The friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly at the bridegroom's voice. Therefore this joy of mine is now complete. He must increase, but I must decrease.*"
 3. John the Baptist's joy was complete when he testified to Christ so that Christ was exalted and John faded
 4. And now, John the Apostle is following the same path, finding that his joy is complete not only in seeing Christ but testifying to Christ so that Christ is exalted and John fades into the background
 5. So John is writing for his own joy, his joy in seeing Christ continue to be exalted even through his testimony
- C. But John also writes for our joy, so that we can have joy in receiving his testimony**
1. John's joy in his testimony was a reflection of John the Baptist, but John's purpose to give joy is a much greater reflection because, in writing for our joy, he is imitating the source of joy, Jesus Christ
 2. Christ came to testify to the truths of God and redemption so that His followers would have joy
 - a. John 15:11 - *These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full.*
 - b. John 17:13 - *But now I am coming to you, and these things I speak in the world, that they may have my joy fulfilled in themselves.*
 - c. Christ spoke the truths of God so that we would have joy
 3. And now John is imitating his Lord and doing the same thing, re-speaking the same truths
 - a. John is testifying to the truth of Christ so that the pipeline of joy will continue
 - b. Christ testified to Him and gave Him joy, now He is going to continue testifying so that we can have joy
 - c. And all of this joy is centered in Christ, God incarnate come to be with us and to display the glory of God
- D. So John's words aren't meant to be received as facts - they are facts, but we can't receive them as merely facts**
1. John's words, to have their full effect, must elicit joy in our lives
 2. But not any joy, specifically joy in Christ, joy in His incarnation, joy in the fellowship that we share with Him and His Father and His people through His incarnation
 3. If John's letter doesn't cause you to rejoice in the things of Christ, then you are missing the point - the point isn't to be able to prove what is right and wrong, that's important, but not the point
 4. The point is to glory in Christ Jesus, to have a joy that overflows because we have fellowship with Him

V. Applications

A. As we turn to think about what we should take away from our study I want to return to the five desires that I listed last week during our overview of I John

1. You'll remember that I listed five things that I hoped to get out of our study of I John, and, in order to constrain myself, I'm going to let those desires guide my applications this morning
2. So, from those five desires, I want to see that this passage can encourage us in three of those goals
3. It encourages us in my first goal: I want you to understand and appreciate the person and work of Christ more
4. It encourages us in my fourth goal: I want you to have a renewed ability to distinguish truth from error
5. It encourages us in my fifth goal: I want you to devote yourself to loving one another in genuine caring fellowship within our local church

B. First application: Understand and appreciate the person and work of Christ more

1. This morning we've seen how John understands the incarnation as the basis of his testimony
 - a. And if the incarnation is the basis of his testimony, then we ought to value the incarnation of Christ more
 - b. So, as my first application, I would challenge you this week to meditate on the truth of the incarnation of Christ, to meditate on what it means that God became man
 - c. Meditate on how Christ in His incarnation has revealed the glory of God to us in a way that we never could have seen otherwise
 - d. Meditate on how Christ in His incarnation has reconciled us to God so that we can have a fellowship that we have no right to
 - e. Meditate on how Christ in His incarnation has demonstrated love beyond imagination in humbling Himself, emptying Himself and taking human flesh, being found in human form
 - f. Meditate on how Christ in His incarnation has shown us what it means to be two-in-one, a small picture of what God is in Himself as the three-in-one
 - g. And there is much more to meditate on - think about all that Christ has done and has shown us through His incarnation - spend time this week devoting yourself to understanding and appreciating Christ as the incarnate one
 - h. So, as a response to our first point this morning - the basis of John's testimony, I call you to value the incarnation of Christ more
2. But, I don't want to stop there, not only do I want you to meditate on the incarnation, I want you to have joy in the incarnation, I want you to rejoice that Christ came to be a man, I want you to rejoice that we have seen the glory of God
 - a. John says that his testimony is for our joy, don't let that pass you by
 - b. Instead, as your meditating, allow the truths of Christ to affect your Spirit so that you can rejoice before God in Christ because of who Christ is
 - c. Meditate so that you not only understand the words of John 1:14 but that you feel the words of John 1:14 - *And the word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen His glory, glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.*
 - d. So, as a response to our fourth point this morning - the result of John's testimony, I call you to rejoice in the incarnation of Christ more
3. As John testifies to the incarnation of Christ, I want you to understand and appreciate Christ more

C. Second application: Have a renewed ability to distinguish truth from error

1. This morning we've consider the authority of John's testimony and how the apostolic witness is the basis of New Testament truth
 - a. And John writes this so that it is clear what the difference between his testimony and the testimony of false teachers is - his testimony is true because he was there
 - b. And really this is the test that we can use to distinguish all truth from error - does it agree with the apostolic testimony, does it agree with what the apostles have handed down to us through the New Testament?

2. So, in response to our second point this morning, I want to call you to a renewed vigilance and a renewed knowledge of what the apostles have handed down to us
 - a. If the apostles' testimony is true then we ought to value that testimony and the New Testament ought to be the grounding point of our lives
 - b. Everything we hear, every claim we evaluate must be taken back to the apostles' testimony to see whether or not it agrees with the apostles' testimony
 - c. We ought to be like the Bereans and be diligent to be bringing every claim of truth back to Scripture
 - d. So, as you go out from here this morning, I challenge you to look into your life, look at the truths that you have heard, that you have accepted, that you are following and test them against the apostles' testimony - do these things conform to the truths of Christ
 - e. And make sure you know what the apostles have said so that you can have a renewed ability to distinguish truth from error

D. Third Application: Devote yourself to loving one another in genuine fellowship within our local church

1. In our third point we considered how the incarnation must be the basis of our fellowship with God
 - a. And if the incarnation is the basis of our fellowship with God then it will cause us to have fellowship with each other
 - b. Our fellowship with each other is, as it were, a litmus test to demonstrate whether we have fellowship with God or not
2. So, this morning, I urge to you seek out this true fellowship here in our local church
 - a. Look around this room and see that these are the people of Christ, these are the people who have been joined with you to Christ
 - b. You ought to love these people with a deep, abiding love - their welfare and their joy ought to be your desire and your priority, sharing time with them ought to be a great pleasure to you
3. And I say that specifically about the those here in this room with you as fellow members of this church
 - a. I say that you should have fellowship specifically with your fellow members not to deny that this is true about all believers everywhere - we ought to have fellowship with all of Christ's people
 - b. But a truth from Scripture that John emphasizes particularly in this book, is that fellowship and love must start at home - we can't love the people of God generally unless we can practically love a specific set of the people of God in a local church
 - c. We can't love the people of God and only have marginal acquaintance or loose association with specific groups of God's people
 - d. In fact, the church as Christ's body provides an apt metaphor to see this truth
 - i. The kidney is essential to the welfare of the rest of the body and the rest of the body is essential to the welfare of the kidney
 - ii. But the kidney and the rest of the body can only flourish if all of the cells of the kidney work together in unity - in fact, when you look at the cells in the kidney it's often hard to tell where one stops and the next starts because the cells are so intertwined
 - iii. The fact that the kidney cells are so intertwined within the kidney is no denial of the partnership that the kidney has with the rest of the body, but rather how the kidney has fellowship with the rest of the body
 - iv. If the cells of the kidney decided that they no longer needed to devote themselves to the kidney and could rather seek fellowship with the greater body so they dissolved and just floated through the body from place to place, the kidney would be destroyed and the body would be destroyed
 - v. The greater body is benefited by the kidney's devotion to each other
 - e. A local body of believers is a lot like this illustration of the kidney - our fellowship with God is demonstrated by our fellowship with other believers and our fellowship with other believers is demonstrated by our devotion to fellowship within a local church
4. So I urge you to seek and to value love and fellowship within this church
 - a. Make the welfare and the growth of the brothers and sisters you have in this church your first desire
 - b. Make the people of this church your first friends, make the people of this church your family, your body, those whom you are devoting your love and your time to
 - c. Devote yourself to loving the members of this church, not in exclusion to those in other churches, but as a demonstration of what your love for the people of Christ is and a reflection of your fellowship with Christ