

For Our Joy

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Bible Verse: 1 John 1:1-4
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Well, tonight we start our verse by verse look at the book of 1 John and we are very glad to be able to do that, and we started last time with a bit of an overview as we looked at the purpose of 1 John. He states it very plainly, he writes to give us joy, to give us holiness, to give us assurance of our salvation in the midst of a hostile world with its persecution, with its temptation, with its deception, and one of the ways that we overcome the world is through the promise, the provision of the Father in his love and in his forgiveness and in the discernment that he gives us in Christ and in his word. You see, we have a comprehensive salvation that is sufficient for every need that we might have and we're just so grateful to God for all that he has done in us and the Apostle John writes this letter to unfold it for us, to strengthen our hand against false teachers and to strengthen us in our walks with Christ not only that we would know Christ but that we would know that we belong to Christ; to truly be saved and to know that we are saved are great, great blessings that transcend anything that's happening in the world today.

So tonight what we're going to do is we're going to look at the opening four verses of this letter and the apostle writes for the sake of our joy. Let's read those first four verses together in 1 John 1 and then we'll spend some time unpacking them together here this evening. 1 John 1 beginning in verse 1.

1 What was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the Word of Life-- 2 and the life was manifested, and we have seen and testify and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was manifested to us-- 3 what we have seen and heard we proclaim to you also, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ. 4 These things we write, so that our joy may be made complete.

Well, this topic of joy we're going to break down in three sections here today as we look at all four of these verses here this evening, and John says that he's writing to produce our joy and there's a lot that he says that leads up to that purpose statement in verse 4, and so there's kind of a gathering momentum of the things that John says that leads us to the climax of the passage that he's writing to produce our joy and I want to bring you into that gathering momentum as we go through the text here this evening.

What is it that produces joy, and perhaps more precisely stated, what is the foundation of Christian joy? That is a million dollar question. What is the foundation of Christian joy? What is it that produces our joy? Well, tonight's message is titled simple "For Our Joy" and that's what we want to look at here this evening and the first point that we bring out of the text here this evening is this, is that our joy is based on trustworthy witnesses. Our joy is based on trustworthy witnesses. There is a whole multifaceted argument that John is making here that leads us to joy and John starts out his letter by establishing his own reliability as he testifies to the reality of Jesus Christ. He is establishing his own credibility as a witness to speak about the things about which he has written. When a lawyer is presenting an expert witness for a jury to consider testimony in a case that he's trying, he'll go through the witness's credentials, that what is it about the witness's training and experience and expertise that qualifies him to give reliable testimony that a jury can base its decision on. Well, in a far more important realm, the Apostle John here establishes for us why his testimony can be believed; why what he says is a reliable guide to the truth as it is found in Jesus Christ.

So the main verb in the passage here is not found until verse 3. Look at verse 3 with me for just a moment, in verse 3 John says, "what we have seen and heard we proclaim to you also." That's the main thought or the primary verb in the passage. John is saying, "we proclaim something to you," but before he gets to that, he lays down a lot of groundwork about what the content of that proclamation is and he starts out in verse 1 and starting out with the realities of Christ that he personally witnessed. John was a direct eyewitness with his own human senses of the Lord Jesus Christ and what this tells us is that the ordinary way that you and I accumulate knowledge and come to an understanding of events is through our senses, through what we see with our eyes and what we hear with our ears, what we touch with our hands. We use these God-give senses in order to understand what is happening around us and to secure knowledge in response to that. Well, this is what John is saying to us, he's telling us that he has heard these things. He's speaking about things that he has seen, things that he touched with his hand. He was directly involved with them in a personal way that uniquely qualifies him to speak about matters now as an apostle of Jesus Christ.

Look at verse 1 with me and you'll see what I'm saying here. John says in verse 1, "What was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the Word of Life." Well, that's a pretty involved sentence but at the end of the day he's saying, making a rather simple point, he describes with increasing degrees of intimacy his past experience with Christ. When the ministry of Jesus Christ began, his earthly ministry, what was from the beginning, that is, the beginning of the earthly ministry of Christ, John said, "I was there to see it." And he describes in increasing detail, in increasing levels of direct personal experience what it was that he saw. He heard Christ with his own ears over a period of several years. He observed Jesus Christ closely with his own eyes, is what he is saying, and he touched Christ with his hands to verify his physical reality. You may remember at the Last Supper that John was the one who was leaning on Jesus' chest during this time. He was as close and personally involved with Christ as any man could have been, and so

when he tells us about who Christ is and what the meaning of Christ is, he has a human basis of experience upon which to do this. He's not speculating from a distance like liberal scholars are now who try to reconstruct the life of Christ based on their critical theories that deny, you know, 90% of the Gospel and they say, "Here's the real Jesus. Here's the actual Jesus that took place." And then liberal news outlets will publish stories about their books and all of that. Well, what you and I have to understand is these men that are writing 2,000 years ago, they weren't there. They used their critical theories to deny the reality of what Scripture testifies to, and what you and I as believing Christians have to understand is that we have Scripture from the hands of direct eyewitnesses.

Think about it this way. Maybe you've never really considered it this way, but I find this thought very exciting, humbling and just remarkable to realize that when we read John's account of the meaning of Christ, we are only one human witness removed from Jesus Christ. We bridge 2,000 years and we have the words, the living words of a living witness of Christ that we are reading, we are hearing from somebody who was right there with Christ. When you read Scripture like that with that mindset, understand that you are bridging 2,000 years of going back to what those who saw Christ had to say and it's not just their human testimony, they were writing with the help and under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit so that when we read the word of God, we are brought into face-to-face contact with the Lord Jesus Christ on perfectly reliable testimony.

Now John, therefore, is a trustworthy eyewitness and so, as we saw last time, here's what we want to tie together in our thinking about this, when the Apostle John tells us in chapter 5 that our faith is the victory that overcomes the world, my friend, my brother and sister in Christ, what I want you to recognize is that his words can be trusted. He is a trustworthy eyewitness and the testimony of this trustworthy eyewitness provides the foundation for our joy.

Now let's think through this a bit theologically here so that we stay on track. We are used to talking about the authority of Scripture from the perspective that it is divinely inspired. The 66 books of the Bible are an inerrant, infallible testimony to the word of God. Better stated and what I said there was very imprecise, better stated it is the infallible, inerrant word of God. That's what it is. It doesn't simply testify to the word of God, it is the word of God as we read the Bible. And so we're used to grounding the authority of Scripture on the divine inspiration of the Scriptures and that is the right place to begin and that's why we emphasize it so many times from this pulpit the Bible is God's word. The Bible is God's word. The Bible is God's word. God speaks to us through the Scriptures and he speaks to us through the Scriptures alone. That is the ground and the basis and the cornerstone of the authority of Scripture as we saw a few weeks ago, Jesus Christ himself testifies to the authority of both the Old and the New Testament and that's the ground upon which we receive this as the living word of God. The Bible is trustworthy based on the testimony of the Holy Spirit himself and that is the highest form of authority that we could appeal to.

That said, alongside that and working within that sphere of God's inspiration of his own word, here's what I want you to see for tonight is that the Bible, and this book of 1 John

in particular, is also trustworthy from a human perspective. What we have here is somebody who was there during the ministry of Jesus Christ. He was not only there during his earthly ministry, he saw the resurrected Christ as well which was an indispensable and absolute requirement to be an apostle. You had to be with Christ during his earthly life and you had to see the resurrected Christ and John fulfills that. He was with Christ for three years during his earthly ministry. He saw Christ die on the cross and Christ committed the care of his mother to the Apostle John. Then after the resurrection, he saw Christ on numerous occasions, and then as he wrote this letter some 60 years later, he was writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit and the Spirit, as Jesus promised the apostles, the Spirit brought to mind and reminded John as he was writing these things of the things that he had heard and that he had witnessed.

So we have a man with all of his faculties writing to us about things that he personally witnessed and we have the guarantee of the Holy Spirit at work in him as he wrote this letter to give us an added dimension of certainty that what we are reading is absolutely accurate and absolutely reliable. And so, my friend, here's what I want you to see and sometimes we get so caught up in our lives, in our work, our jobs, our families and all of the earthly things that we have to give attention to, sometimes it's easy for us to lose sight of the basis upon which we live. We live life and we believe in Christ and we stand on a foundation of reliable testimony that is given to us, and it's not simply that the Spirit of God inspired this word, it's that John himself was an eyewitness who would be a compelling witness of any court of law to the things that he testified. He has all of the qualifications of an eyewitness who should be believed in his own human experience. He was there and therefore he is to be believed. He is telling us the truth under the Holy Spirit's guidance and therefore he is to be believed. So when he says that, "I write to promote our joy," yours and mine, when he says that he is telling us things that he has established his qualifications as an absolute expert witness to the things about which he writes. So our joy is grounded in reliable eyewitness testimony. We do not believe in silly fables. We do not believe in a religious leader whose tomb can be found today. No, we believe in the resurrected Lord Jesus Christ based on his personally appointed apostles who give us the testimonies that we find in the New Testament, and so we are on certain, solid, foundational ground that will not shift or change and your hope and your faith in Christ is, therefore, well-grounded, my friend, and when you understand that your faith is well-grounded, you are sinking the roots of your life deeply into soil that can produce joy as a fruit of that.

So our joy is based on eyewitness testimony. Secondly, as you continue reading in this passage, you see that our joy is based on a trustworthy Savior. Our joy is based on a trustworthy Savior. We have trustworthy witnesses, John and the other apostles, we have trustworthy witnesses testifying to us about a trustworthy Savior and John goes on a bit of a tangent in verse 2 to expand on the person of Christ. He's talking about what he has seen and what he has seen was the person of Christ. Now in verse 2 he expands on that and so he circles out to expand on Christ before he comes back to verse 3 to say, "this is what we're proclaiming to you." So in verse 2 he gives us an expanded testimony about the person of Christ.

In verse 2, he is now focusing on Jesus Christ, not his personal experience of him. John opens talking about his personal experience but now he shifts in verse 2 to talk about Christ. Look at verse 2 when he says this, he says, "and the life was manifested, and we have seen and testify and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was manifested to us." You see, his emphasis here in verse 2 is the fact that the life was manifested. At the end of verse 1 he had spoken about the Word of life and the fact that what he has experienced concerns the Word of life, in other words, it concerns the message about that life, and the life here, as we see in verse 2, is Jesus Christ. The life that was manifested from God, that life, that second person of the Trinity who became Incarnate, who came to earth in human flesh and made God known to us on our own turf, so to speak, made God known to us in a living human reality. That's what John is speaking to here in verse 2.

The life refers to Christ. Jesus Christ had been with the Father before his birth. Jesus Christ is the eternal Son of God. He existed forever before he was born to the virgin Mary and so he was manifested, that which was previously hidden in heaven was now manifested on earth. That's why he could say in John 14:9, Jesus could say that, "he who has seen Me has seen the Father." You are seeing the very essence of God in human flesh when you see Jesus Christ, and when we see him today, we don't see him physically but we read about him and we understand him and the Spirit makes him known to us in the pages of Scripture. Well, what John is talking about is that he was there when Christ was manifested like that. This life who was with the Father in eternity past had been made known, had been manifested, had appeared on earth just a few short decades prior to the time that John was writing, and so the life was manifested, the life was made known to us, and what John is doing here in 1 John, what the four Gospels and the epistles and the book of Revelation do for us in the pages of the New Testament is this, what do they do for us? They do this for us, they interpret for us the significance about the historical facts of Jesus Christ. The Gospels with four different independent witnesses declare to us what Jesus Christ did and what Jesus Christ said during his earthly life. As you go into the book of Acts, you see the proclamation of Christ as the Gospel spread through the known world at that time through the testimony of the apostles, and then what follows in the 20 or 21 epistles that follow there, 21 of them, the letters of Paul and the general epistles, what you have there is an interpretation of the significance and what the historical facts of Christ mean and what the Gospel is, and all of these things are laid out for us.

So what we find John doing here is he says, look at it there in verse 2 with me again, he says, "the life was manifested, we proclaim to you the eternal life which was with the Father and was manifested to us." In those brief clauses at the end there, he speaks about the pre-eternal, the pre-temporal existence of Christ and the fact that he became Incarnate. He was with the Father, then he was with us, and the utter simplicity helps us overlook the profound significance of what that means. Jesus Christ who was with the Father had been with us and John says, "That's what I'm writing to tell you about." And this Gospel message that is about Christ is based on historical reality that eyewitnesses saw for themselves.

So as we read the significance of the Gospel in the New Testament, what is laid out for us about the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ is this, is that Christ provided an exclusive means of salvation through his atoning death for sinners like you at the cross of Calvary, and that everyone now who believes in him can find the complete, full forgiveness of all of their sins, immediate reconciliation with God that is good throughout all of eternity. You can be saved from your sin by believing in Jesus Christ and so what John is doing here is, in verse 1 he says, "I saw all of this for myself," and he said, "What I saw was Christ, that Christ who was with the Father beforehand and now is with us," he says, "that's what I'm telling you about."

So John is a trustworthy witness about a trustworthy Savior. Jesus Christ is God in human flesh. Jesus Christ has divine power to save. Jesus Christ is the only one with divine power to save. He is the only one who can reconcile a sinner to a holy God. And so what do we see about the Gospel as we contemplate these things? We see this, these things are just so very basic and yet it's the basics that sometimes we forget and that confuse us, and you know, when you get confused about the clarity of the Gospel, do you know what happens? You start to lose your joy. You start to depend on self. You start to worry about your own self-righteousness rather than resting in the righteousness of Christ and finding peace in the fact that he has made a full atonement for all of your sins. So it's very important to understand what the Gospel is because that is foundational for our joy.

So to state it negatively here, the Gospel does not tell you how you can save yourself. The Gospel is not a program of works that you must do in order to gain the favor of God. No, quite the opposite. The Gospel tells us what God has done in Jesus Christ to save sinners. Christ lived, Christ died, Christ rose again to pay for the sins of everyone who would ever believe in him. So we understand the facts of the Gospel and from that factual understanding we proclaim to people in order to receive that forgiveness that is offered in the Gospel you must repent of your sins and receive Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior; that you must embrace him; that you must believe these truths about the Gospel, you must believe the truth of the Gospel and then with your heart, soul and mind submit yourself to Christ and embrace him as he is presented to you freely in the Gospel offer that says that if you believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, you will be saved.

So the trustworthy eyewitness is telling us about a trustworthy Savior who has the power to save you to the uttermost, and for those of us that are Christians, for those watching as you're watching tonight and you are confident of your salvation, let me just refresh you once more with an understanding: now that Christ has accepted you, now that Christ has saved you, you are fully reconciled to God and nothing can separate you from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. Yes, you and I, we stumble along the way in our Christian lives but that does not diminish our justification by one iota. That does not change our salvation. It does not change the security that we have in Christ because your acceptance with God, you must understand this and you must come back to this again and again, my friend, God accepts you not for your righteousness, God accepts you for the sake of the righteousness of his own Son. Christ saved you and shared his righteousness with you, his infinite, perfect righteousness he gladly shares with everyone who believes in him so that God accepts you for the sake of the righteousness of Christ, not for the

sake of any righteousness in you whatsoever. Your best of righteousness, Isaiah says, is a filthy rag. It's the best that you do is not fit for God because it's marred by your creaturely sinfulness. No, God accepts us in Christ and when we are in Christ, we are in the Beloved and God said about Christ, "This is My Beloved Son in whom I am well-pleased." That means that for all of us that are in Christ, God accepts us for the sake of his Beloved, he loves us in the same way and with the same kind of acceptance that he gives to his own Son. That is the basis on which he receives us and that means, my friends, that you do not need to trouble yourself about losing your salvation simply because you've stumbled along the way. If you are in Christ, all of your sins are forgiven and do you know what that means? If you understand that all of your sins are forgiven, that God loves you despite the ways that you fall short, what that means is that there is a foundation of joy, there is a fountain of joy from which you can drink. So clarity on the Gospel, clarity on the Lord Jesus Christ is directly related to your experience of joy during your earthly time of life and that's why John writes to us.

So we have a trustworthy eyewitness who has told us about a trustworthy Savior. Now let's go to point 3 here this evening and answer this question: what happens when you trust Christ as he is offered to you in the Gospel, what is the consequence of that? What are the blessings that attend the one who believes in the Lord Jesus Christ? And that brings us to our third point here, is that joy is based on a transforming Gospel. A transforming Gospel and it's important for you to understand the sense in which I use the word "transforming." The Gospel itself does not change, the Gospel itself isn't transforming into something else. When I use the phrase "a transforming Gospel," this is what I mean, I mean the Gospel transforms you. The Lord Jesus Christ has a transforming impact on everyone who believes. When you are saved, God imparts new life to you. He gives you a new heart. He makes you a new creation, 2 Corinthians 5:17, and whereas before you were spiritually dead and under the judgment of God, now that you've become a Christian, now that God has saved you, you are now alive in Christ and you have a new heart with new life impulses and life affections, and that works itself out in your life and changes you. You see, you're not simply declared righteous at the moment of your salvation, God literally gives you new life, he regenerates you. Regeneration and justification happen at the same time. They're different aspects of the one gift of salvation. In justification you are given a legal status that guarantees that God will not judge you for your sins on that final day, that your sins are forgiven, and that's rooted in justification. Your sins are pardoned and God accepts you as righteous for the sake of Christ, and that's a legal matter. That's a forensic matter, to use the theological term.

What we're talking about here in point 3 about the transforming effect of the Gospel is this, is that when you are saved, you are born again. God gives new life to you and takes away your old, cold heart of stone that was dead and lifeless to the things of Christ and to the testimony of God's word, and in regeneration God instead gives you new life with a nature that is like after his, that is receptive to truth, that now hates the very sin that you used to love, and loves the righteousness that you used to hate, and as those things work themselves out in your life, your life changes. That's why when we have membership applications and people apply for membership at Truth Community Church, or if they

apply to be baptized, we ask them to give their testimony, to give a testimony, a brief testimony of their understanding of what the Gospel itself is and then to talk about how has Christ changed you, how has the Gospel transformed you. And a true Christian is able to describe that there is a life that is taking place, that he has affections for Christ and a desire for Scripture that is in accordance with the nature of what the word of God testifies will mark the fruit of a true Christian. That's why we have those aspects of testimony in the waters of baptism and in our membership class, we are looking for somebody that can identify the fact that Christ has had an impact on them and has now inclined their heart and life toward righteousness in ways that are observable within their heart and manifested in their outer man. And so the Gospel has a transforming impact on us and joy is based on a transforming Gospel as we've defined it there.

Look at verse 3 with me. He says this, "what we have seen and heard we proclaim to you also." So in verses 1 and 2 he's been talking about the content of what it is that he proclaims. Now in verse 3 he says, "with all of that content laid out for you, that is what we proclaim to you. What I've been talking about is what we proclaim to you." And so he's resuming his thought from the first verse and when he says this, when he says, "what we have seen and heard," it's very important for us to understand who the "we" is there. John is speaking there as a member of that finite number of men who were apostles of Jesus Christ, the 12 apostles plus the Apostle Paul. John is speaking "we" as a representative of the apostolic circle because they were the ones who saw Christ and heard him in the manner in which he is speaking here.

The scholars, the authorities tell us that John was writing this around AD 90, some 60 years after the death and resurrection of Christ, and here's what you need to understand and why this is so critical is that it means when he says "what we have seen and heard we proclaim to you," he's not speaking to his audience and saying, "what you have heard and what I have heard, that's what we proclaim to you," because most of his audience here would not have been alive at the time of Christ, they would not have been eyewitnesses of Christ. So he's using "we" in a more restricted sense to talk about the experience and the eyewitness accounts of the apostles that he is drawing upon, and so he's talking about the apostolic testimony and so what he is doing, what he is doing is that if you could think about it this way, the things that he saw in the past and the things that he heard and the things that he touched, he's bringing them forward now to be able to share them with his audience and to bring the past into the present to help them spiritually and to provide them with joy.

So John is using that apostolic experience to help his readers and what we're going to find is this as we continue on through this book over the next three or four weeks, is that John is opposing false teachers in this letter. You see that over and over again, his concern about the false teachers that are influencing his readers and he's writing to protect them and to protect his readers and to refute those false teachers. Well, what we have here in the first four verses is that John has laid the foundation to show that he has the authority to speak to these matters. The false teachers were talking about things that were speculations in their mind and they had not seen Christ for themselves, they had not heard him in the way that John did, they had not touched him in the way that John had. John

had all of those experiences and so he had a credibility to refute those false teachers. So he comes to these readers who are troubled under the influence of false doctrine and he says, "what we've heard in the past, we proclaim to you now as a living reality that can bring you into truth and out of error."

So he wants his readers to be safe and to have joy, and in verse 3 here, look at it again, he expresses what he is trying to accomplish for them and why he is doing this. He says, "what we have seen and heard we proclaim to you also, so that you," you see, he distinguishes "we" from "you" here, "what we have seen and heard we proclaim to you also, so that you too may have fellowship with us." He wants his readers to participate in the life of Christ with him. He wants them to share in the blessings of salvation and to share them to the uttermost. He wants them to have a fullness of joy that comes from being a Christian.

And when he uses this word "fellowship," my friends, it's important for us to understand that he's talking about it in a sense that is different from the way that we often use it. We talk about fellowship and we think about having, you know, having a picnic meal with some other believers and participating in a meal that way and it kind of has a social connotation. Well, what John is talking about here is far more profound than that, it's far more than social activities. Look at verse 3 again with me and follow closely the thought here. John is teaching them in this letter and he is teaching them about what he has seen and heard, "we proclaim to you." In other words, he says, "I have teaching you about the things that I have seen and heard myself." Here's what I want you to understand, he goes on to say, "so that you may have fellowship with us," and the significance is this: true Christian fellowship gathers around, unites around apostolic teaching. Without the apostolic teaching of the Bible at the core of what is being done, you do not have Christian fellowship. It is not enough for people who claim the name of Christ to come together and just involve themselves in social activities with themselves or getting involved in social matters and, you know, just feeding the poor and all of that without regard to doctrine. That's not Christian fellowship. That's not even Christian service. You see, the core of Christianity is based on apostolic teaching and so what John is saying here is, "I want you to have fellowship," by which he means, "I want you to participate, to share with me in the realities of our faith, that you would believe them and that you would be changed by them, and therefore share in the fellowship of it all."

So Christian fellowship is based on Christian doctrine which is found in the pages of the Christian Scriptures. That is just so important for us to understand and, you know, a church grows in genuine fellowship as it grows in the word of God, and the more that a so-called church marginalizes biblical teaching, biblical doctrine for the sake of producing feelings or experiences or just focusing on the here-and-now apart from the doctrines of the faith, they are cutting the nerve center of what Christian fellowship is meant to be.

Let me invited you to turn to the book of Acts 2 where you can see this foundationally in the beginning of the church in Acts 2. In Acts 2, Peter preached and souls were added to the church and look at verse 40, for example. Actually, let's go all the way back to verse

38 and just get into it this way. "Peter said to them, 'Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off, as many as the Lord our God will call to Himself.' And with many other words he solemnly testified and kept on exhorting them, saying, 'Be saved from this perverse generation!' So then, those who had received his word were baptized; and that day there were added about three thousand souls." Now that was a long context to emphasize the point of verse 42. Once they were saved, once they had been baptized what did they do? Verse 42, "They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer." The apostles' teaching was central to everything that was happening. As they shared in fellowship, they shared in prayer, they shared in the communion table, it was all a response to that apostolic teaching that they had been devoting themselves to.

Well, that is the sense in which we find John speaking in 1 John 1:3, he says, "what we have seen and heard we proclaim to you also, so that you too may have fellowship with us." John says, "I want you to have a like mind with us that leads to a common life in Christ." And just to emphasize the point, beloved, false teaching is so dangerous, it is so destructive, it is far more than a difference of opinion over theological matters that doesn't have any real-life consequences, false teaching undermines church unity, false teaching undermines your own joy and that's why it's so important for you to be a student of God's word and to learn biblical doctrine so that you could be grounded in the unshakable kingdom realities of true Christianity.

You see, false teaching always has a negative impact. For some, false teaching undermines their spiritual confidence. You know, if you're told repeatedly that you can lose your salvation or, you know, and you listen to teaching like that, well, you know how you live your life? You live your life in fear thinking that the next misstep you have might be the one that costs you your salvation and costs you your eternal soul, and which causes God to cast you away forever. Well, listen, that's a horrible way to live. That's an awful threat to have hanging over your head and ultimately there can't be real joy that's grounded in false teaching that would threaten you like that. On the other side, on the other side of false teaching that tells you that your own righteousness contributes to your salvation, you know, that it's part Christ and part you. Well, if you start to believe that and you start to believe that there are aspects of goodness in you that form the basis upon which God accepts you, well, what that's going to produce in you is a spirit of pride that loses the majesty of God and the fear of God because of the self-righteousness of your own spirit.

So that's just a couple of very simply brief explanations that false teaching has real-life consequences that affect a person's experience of the nature of true Christianity, the nature of true salvation. You know, on the one hand it either leads you into fear, another one that leads you into pride. Either way it's undermining true joy and the true reality of being in Christ. The other thing that I would say that I have had sad opportunity to witness over the years is this, is that false teaching has a way of making false teachers arrogant and divisive, and you see this woven throughout the book of 1 John, we'll see it

in days to come, but that false teachers have a divisive impact on the local church and they have a way of suggesting that they have the true knowledge that has been withheld from everybody else, and so it makes you dependent upon them rather than upon the Scriptures for your understanding of truth. So for all of those reasons and many more, false teaching hinders relationships in the body of Christ and it hinders the experience of true joy in the Christians, and so John writes to help his readers with that.

So we say that the Gospel is transforming. Look at verse 3 with me again, he says in verse 3, "what we have seen and heard we proclaim to you also, so that you too may have fellowship with us." Now you see, what happens when a person, a man or a woman become a Christian is this, is that God has given you the exact same life in Christ that he's given to everyone else that he saves also. We have a common life in Christ and what salvation does is it not only places you in a right relationship with God, it also places you into a relationship with the rest of the body of Christ and that's what John is referring to when he says, "so that you may have fellowship with us," that you might share and participate in the life that we are enjoying as a natural fruit of your salvation.

So the Gospel – watch this, my friends – the Gospel changes you. One way that it does that is that it brings you into a sphere of relationships with other believers who have the same life in Christ that you do, and God does this in one way or another, in one manner or another for those that he saves. You know, I look back when I was converted, in the days before I was converted I had no Christian friends whatsoever. Zero. I did not know a Christian in my sphere of relationships in the days before I became a Christian. When God saved me, therefore, I spent a few weeks on my own reading my Bible and growing in that way, but eventually what happened was is that providentially God brought me into contact with a few Christian friends, they led me into a Bible teaching church, and then the nature of my relationships changed and I had all kinds of new like-minded friends that I wouldn't have dreamed of having a year earlier. It wasn't something that I intentionally sought out, it was simply the fruit of the work of God in my life as he providentially brought me into a circle of new relationships and the whole trajectory of my life changed as a result of that, and so that unfolded as my faith grew.

Well, beloved, in one way or another, God saves us and he puts his love in our hearts, he puts his Spirit in our hearts and as that transforms us, it eventually brings us into fellowship with other Christians who have also been born again. When we know Christ, he draws us to men of like precious faith and in addition to that, it's not just that horizontal level of fellowship, we enjoy that horizontal level of fellowship because there is a common rope of fellowship that is taking place vertically.

Look at verse 3 with me again there at the end. He says, "what we have seen and heard we proclaim to you also, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ." John says, "I'm bringing you into fellowship with us but understand that the real reality, the foundational reality of our horizontal fellowship is a vertical fellowship with God the Father Himself and with Jesus Christ Himself." There is a vertical reality to Christian fellowship that John says, "I want you to share in." And so he says, "I'm proclaiming these things to you so that you

would be brought into our participation of life in Christ," and he goes further and he says, "understand that that Christian fellowship of which I'm speaking is a real participation in the life of Christ in which we share in the very life of Christ Himself in our salvation." So Christian fellowship on a horizontal level occurs because we share in the resurrection life of Christ together.

John Stott said this in his commentary on the epistles of John and I quote, he said, "Fellowship denotes that common participation in the grace of God, the salvation of Christ and the indwelling Spirit which is the spiritual birthright of all Christian believers. It is their common possession of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit which makes them one. Our fellowship with each other arises from and depends on our fellowship with God." And so on an individual basis, God saves individual people. On a vertical level, he acts upon them and brings life where death had once prevailed. As he does that in many people, those many people who are saved start to share in life together that is premised on the fact that we have received a common salvation from God himself. And that's why when we gather together, we gather around the teaching that tells us about the God who saved us, and as we do that, it informs our fellowship and as our fellowship grows, beloved, our joy grows as well. Spiritual life, sanctification flourishes as we appropriate apostolic teaching.

So the Gospel transforms our relationship with God and as it does that, it transforms our relationships with others. That's what John is saying there in verse 3, and now having done that vertical aspect and the horizontal aspect, what we see is this as John just drills deeper and deeper into our hearts with the good things he has to say, that vertical transformation and that horizontal transformation has an inner transforming effect upon us as well, and that's what we see in verse 4 here. John says, "These things we write so that our joy may be made complete." We've look at this verse enough in the last time and tonight that we don't need to spend much time here. John is writing to promote an inner response of joy in his readers and for you and me here in the 21st century, the purpose of this letter is exactly the same. God brings this letter to our attention in order to draw us out of fear and into peace, out of despair and into hope, out of discouragement and into joy.

You see, God loves us enough that he wants to transform our inner heart so that we would walk through this life in a joyful, peaceful spirit that gives praise and gratitude to him as we enjoy the blessings that he has poured out upon us in Christ. May I remind you of what Galatians 5:22 and 23 says? Those are two good verses for you to memorize if you've never done that, "the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control." One aspect of the fruit of the Spirit is joy and so if you have been born again, God intends you to learn and to grow into the nature of inner joy as being central to your Christian experience. Is that happening in you? Do you know something about that? Is there a sense of joy that pervades your life? Well, if it's missing then I would suggest to you that this book of 1 John is precisely the place where you need to be. If you know something of that joy, you ought to be able to look at this passage and say, "O God, thank You for all that You've done and I know an

experience of joy that is a direct result of the gracious way that You've granted salvation to me."

So for either way that you go, there should be a responsiveness to this theme of joy. Joy is a spirit of glad contentment and that loving praise toward God, and the fact that God has given his love to us, that God has forgiven our sins, that God has given discernment to us to discern false teachers and turn away from them, all of that love and forgiveness and discernment should produce joy in us. And don't miss what John says is his goal here. He says, "These things we write so that our joy may be made complete." Complete, and when he says he wants it to be complete, he means this: he wants it to come to the peak level of expression in your life. He wants you to know joy to the uttermost, a fullness of joy that saturates every attitude and every aspect and every perspective that you have on life, and as you look into the future and you contemplate the realities of heaven, that there would be an overwhelming joy in your life.

The Apostle Peter talks about joy unspeakable and full of glory. In fact, I want you to go back to 1 Peter 1 for just a moment and you'll see this here. 1 Peter 1:6, he says this, "In this you greatly rejoice." Do you see the joy there and the greatness of it, the peak expression of it? This is what Scripture intends to produce in you. This is what the goal of God for you is. Not to bind you down with a lot of legalistic regulations about how you are to live out the details of your life and to constrain you by external forces and rules and regulations. The purpose of the Gospel, the purpose of the transformation that the Gospel brings to us is to bring us to this experience of joy, of glad contentment, of an exultant gladness in God and a gladness in Christ. Peter says it here in 1 Peter 1:6, he says, "In this you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials, so that the proof of your faith, being more precious than gold which is perishable, even though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ; and though you have not seen Him, you love Him, and though you do not see Him now, but believe in Him, you greatly rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory, obtaining as the outcome of your faith the salvation of your souls." The Apostle John said it much more concisely. He said, "I want your joy to be complete, a peak expression of joy." Peter describes it in these more expansive terms, joy inexpressible and full of glory.

So, beloved, if these words are coming to you tonight and you are downcast and you are discouraged, I want to tell you that there is hope for better days ahead as we pursue this book of 1 John together. John wrote to bring joy to us. The Holy Spirit who inspired these words of Scripture, he's the same Holy Spirit that indwells us. And so the Spirit that indwells you wants to take this word that he himself wrote, apply it to your heart and change you, transform you from one of discouragement into a person of abiding continuing joy. I think that's worth pursuing, don't you? I think that's something worth having. John writes to maximize our joy and that's what we're going to find as we study his letter together.

Let me just summarize it this way, my friend, as I say again and again and again, and I could never say it enough, my Christian brother, my Christian sister, you must understand

this: the intentions of God for your life and for your soul are good. God saved you to do good to you and he did that not for anything that was in you but because he is a loving and merciful God by nature. God saved you to show mercy to you and part of his mercy to you is that you would go through life with this experience of joyful contentment and satisfaction in all of the glories and riches of our Lord Jesus Christ. And so to the extent that life weighs you down tonight, to the extent that events around us have gotten you agitated and worked up and concerned and frightened about what the future may hold, friends, I want you to understand that we're not to plunge the depths of discouragements of this world, the answer to those discouragements is to plunge into the depths of Christ and as we do, we'll find that transforming impact of joy of which John speaks. I invite you to continue on with us in this study that those spiritual realities might be yours, and for those of you who are not Christians, I invite you to the Lord Jesus Christ who graciously shares these riches with everyone who humbly repents of sin and comes to him to believe in him for their eternal salvation. My friend, why would you turn away from Christ when all of the riches of joy in him are offered to you without cost here this evening?

Bow with me in prayer as we close this time together.

O heavenly Father, I pray that these friends in Christ who have joined us would find peace for their hearts in what we have said here tonight. I pray that they would look to our brother, our Lord Jesus Christ who is interceding for us in heaven. He who loved us unto death on the cross is the same yesterday, today and forever. If he loved us once, He'll love us forever. If He saved us once, He saved us forever. And oh, the riches of security and confidence that that brings to our hearts, Lord. We know that we're not worthy of that great gift of salvation and yet, Father, in love and mercy from Your own will that's what You've given to us. So as we realize these things, we understand that based on who You are and what You have done and what Your promises in Scripture are to us, that You will surely help us and lead us to our heavenly home and for that, Father, we praise You with a heart full of joy and we ask You to cause that to grow still more within us in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

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