

The Gospel Is Transforming

1 John

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Bible Text: 1 John 1:3-4

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John started out in verse 1 talking about his personal experience, right? What we saw with our eyes, what we touched with our hands, what we heard with our own ears. We've looked at this, and he says that it's concerning "the Word of Life" there at the end of verse 1. Then he goes on a tangent in verse 2 and he expands on the person of Christ and he expands on the incarnation and who Jesus was in verse 2. Now, that's really crucial, it's really important obviously. Jesus is at the center of the Gospel, but that's not his main point that he's writing here in the introduction. He's writing to describe what it is that he has seen and heard and so in verse 3, he picks up where he started in verse 1. Look at verse 3, he says, he picks it up and says, "what we have seen and heard we proclaim to you also." He's expanded on the person of Christ and he says, "Now let me come back. What I'm going to tell you is what I have seen and heard, what we as the apostolic circle, this is what we have heard." He mirrors the language from verse 1 as he picks it up in verse 3 and so we see that he's picking up his train of thought again. He's coming back to his eyewitness experience, his personal experience as an apostle of Christ.

Now, remember something important from a few weeks ago. He's writing this to counteract the influence of false teachers that were influencing this flock that he was writing to; false teachers who were saying that Jesus was a disembodied spirit, not a real human, not a real person. We talked about the significant implications of that. Well, the false teachers had never seen Christ. They had no involvement with him. They were spinning stuff out of their minds and out of thin air. But John had seen him. John had been with Christ and his experience gave him the basis to silence the opponents of the Gospel who were undermining the faith of his flock, and that's why he is emphasizing this. Basically he's got his audience in front of him and he says, "Look, think through what we are saying here. I was a direct eyewitness of Christ. They were not. Who do you think gives you the reliable testimony about the life of Christ, the person of Christ, and the implications of his work on your behalf?" It's an obvious statement. It's an obvious question.

So when he says "we" here, verse 3, "what we have seen and heard, we proclaim to you, notice the first person plural pronouns there. You may have fellowship with us, our fellowship is with the Father. These things we write." When he says "we" here, he's using it in a precise sense. He is using this word, this first person plural, to distinguish the

apostolic circle from his readers. There is a unique authority that the apostles had. The apostles were a unique, nonrepeatable group of eyewitnesses to the person and work of Christ and John here is calling attention to his apostolic authority. He is establishing the basis upon which he writes. What he's doing here, his apostolic experience was not shared by his readers and – follow this – it's not shared by us either. We're living 2,000 years after the fact, 2,000 years after the time that Christ walked on the face of the earth. We have no direct personal eyewitness testimony of our own upon which to base our Christian life. What John is doing here under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, he is giving his readers and he is giving to us by extension the benefit of his apostolic experience. We get to draw upon what John saw and heard and felt. We get to draw upon that and use that as the foundation for our own Christian life. It's like if somebody was at the big ballgame, you weren't there but they were and they can kind of recount the events of the day, the events of the game, you get the benefit by the direct eyewitness testimony there. Well, that's what John is doing here.

So he's emphasizing his apostolic authority as he speaks and he wants to pass it on to those who did not have that, and as he does in these next two verses, we're going to see two significant ways in which the Gospel has a transforming impact on those who believe in Christ and it's so encouraging to see this and it's also very plain. First of all, understand this and we're going to see this lived out in our lives in the days that are ahead of us in Truth Community Fellowship. First of all, you have to understand that the Gospel, stated differently, when you become a Christian, the Gospel transforms your relationships. The Gospel has a transforming impact on your relationships.

Look at verse 3 with me again, we'll read it again. Chapter 1, verse 3 says, "what we have seen and heard we proclaim to you also, so that," there's the purpose, "you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ." He's talking about that horizontal human dimension in the first part of the verse, to the effect of the Gospel, and there are two ways, there are two relationships that are transformed by the Gospel. First of all, there is the transforming impact on your relationship with others. You need to see this. Your relationship with others, particularly emphasizing here the relationships that we have within the body of Christ. Verse 3 he says, "so that you may have fellowship with us." He's talking about human relationships there.

And this word "fellowship," it's easy for us to think about it superficially and just think about it when we gather together and have some kind of social event together. John is not talking about that at all, he's talking at a much more profound level. This word "fellowship" indicates a joint participation and a joint sharing in the common faith with others. There is a spiritual, not an external dimension to the word as he uses it here. It's much deeper than social activities. And follow this, John is emphasizing his apostolic experience as he writes this, and what he is saying here and what he is illustrating is that true Christians unite around apostolic teaching. They unite around the teaching of the Scripture. They unite around the common life that we share in Christ. So as a church teaches the Bible consistently week after week, month after month, the people that are involved with that fellowship, that share in that life, are going to naturally grow and

become more united because the unifying impact of truth as people become of like mind under scriptural teaching, they are going to become more unified and share in that life in ever deepening, greater ways together. That's what's ahead of us here in this fellowship. As we unite around Bible teaching, we are going to become ever closer together as we become more like-minded. As our affections are unified and shaped by the same truth together, we horizontally are going to become even more unified than we are here at the start. That is something to look forward to. There is a greater depth and experience and joy of our lives together that we are going to share as a result of being in this place than if we hadn't been here. And when teaching is superficial and humanistic and done outside the Bible and based on a preacher's experience, there is nothing to unify around that, but when multiple hearts are shaped by the same truth, there is a sense in which there is a greater heart that is being joined together as we share in that life and teaching together. That's what's ahead for us. I'm excited about it.

Now, just to clarify here, some people have suggested, some commentators have suggested that John in this passage is evangelizing his readers. He wants to bring them to salvation. It's not that some people think that John is not writing to Christians here but he's trying to evangelize them so that they can come in to the faith. I don't think that's the best way to read this passage and it's really important for you to understand who it is that is John's audience. Elsewhere in the letter, John makes it clear that he is writing to true Christians. You need to see this, look at chapter 2, verse 21. He says, "I have not written to you because you do not know the truth, but because you do know it." He's writing to these people specifically because they are Christians. In chapter 5, verse 13, he says, "I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know that you have eternal life." So he's writing here not to evangelize a group of people but rather he's writing to bring true Christians into a greater depth and experience of the realities of the Gospel. And if you're here today as a believer in Christ, this is written to you; these benefits, these spiritual benefits are written for your sake as well.

Now, keep in mind the context. We always have to go back the context. He's refuting false teachers, right? We've said that repeatedly. I'll say it another 5,000 times before we get through the five chapters, 1,000 times per chapter, you can think about it that way. He's writing to refute false teachers. Now, if they are already Christians, if his readers already belong to Christ, why is it that he's talking to them about this common participation in the life of Christ? Why don't they just go on with life and why do you need to emphasize it? Why do you need to explain it? Well, let me give you something that may give you some retroactive understanding from experience that you've had in the past. When there is very weak teaching in a church or when there is false teaching in a church, it has a negative impact on believers. It has a destructive impact on believers. The natural growth that should take place under consistent Bible teaching is stunted, if not compromised almost irreparably. It has a negative impact. For some people, false teaching and for the impact that it has, is that it undermines their spiritual confidence. They start to have doubts because the truths of the Gospel are not being formed in their minds and being developed in ever deeper greater ways. So even if you are a Christian under superficial teaching, it leaves you vulnerable to the influence of bad teaching. It undermines your spiritual confidence. Deep Bible teaching leads to deep assurance. It

leads to deep confidence. Superficial teaching leads to superficial confidence that is easily shaken when other winds of doctrine come or when life circumstances come. It undermines spiritual confidence because the deep root that hasn't taken place in the heart.

For others, and this is more of what John was dealing with here in his letter, false teaching makes people arrogant and divisive. If you think that you have a unique perspective on truth that only you and a couple of other people have and you elevate your own sense of importance, you think that you have something that other people don't and you become arrogant toward others, you become divisive, "Why don't you know what I know? You need to know what I know." And they think that they know more than other people do. There are multiple impacts, multiple ways that poor teaching, false teaching fracture a body.

Now, the point of all of that is this: when believers lack clarity about Christ, when they lack clarity about the authority of Scripture, when they lack clarity about the realm of salvation, it hinders relationships within the body. There isn't the same capacity to develop a deep profound unity that is built around truth because it's superficial. It's like an eggshell that's ready to fracture at the first time the right pressure is brought upon it. A lack of clarity then, here's the point of all of that, a lack of clarity on truth thus hinders the outworking of that common shared life in Christ. We share a common salvation, we have the same Spirit dwelling within us, but that life that is within us is cultivated and grows under the influence of Bible teaching; where Bible teaching is drawn out, that life doesn't develop as God intended it to do.

So John here is writing, now you can see this, he is writing to clarify the nature of Christ, clarify the nature of salvation so that that roadblock and hindrance that was hindering fellowship, that roadblock could be removed so that the fellowship could develop as God intended it to do. So he comes back to truth to cultivate that shared participation in the life of Christ that his readers all had together. That's what's going on here. He's wanting to reestablish his readers in the faith. He wants them to be partners with him in the true faith rather than departing with the false teachers. So as they are established, their spiritual lives will mature and it will solidify the spiritual life in the body.

Look over at chapter 4, verses 7 through 11 in 1 John says this, "Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. The one who does not love does not know God, for God is love." You see the word "love" through here all about. "By this the love of God was manifested in us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world so that we might live through Him. In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us," here he's making an application from the Gospel. He has just been talking about the work of Christ in verse 9 and 10. He's saying, "This is a manifestation of the love of God for his church, that Christ died to turn away the wrath of God from our sins." And he says, "If God so loved us," he clarifies with doctrine the nature of the atonement, and then he goes from the atonement and says, "If God loved us like that, if we've received that kind of vertical love, then there should be a horizontal impact on the way that we deal with one another." We should be so

humbled by the grace of God in our salvation, so humbled by the sacrifice of Christ on our behalf, that we willingly and gladly love those who are in the body around us because we understand that this is just meant to flow through my life. And as you gather together, beloved, as you gather together, a group of people who understand the sacrificial love of Christ on the cross and who have received the Spirit of God in salvation and they are motivated by that and they love Christ and they understand the work of Christ on their behalf and they realize what a selfless act of love that was for an unworthy sinner and they realize that they have been redeemed at the cost of the lifeblood of the eternal Son of God, and, oh, what great love that is for my soul. When you gather together a group of people who understand that, then that same spirit of loving self-sacrifice is going to animate their relationships around them.

So the love of Christ becomes the basis upon which we love one another. It's more than just an example, it's a motivating factor, the very life principle that animated the sacrifice of Christ is now animating the work in our own hearts. And together as we come together and we are the people that God has given to one another to live that out, that understanding of the Gospel has a transforming impact on our relationships here in the body. If you don't have an appreciation for Christ, you're not going to have the same approach to shared sacrifice, shared love for one another, but when you understand the Gospel, it places us in a relationship with other believers as a natural fruit of true salvation. It's a natural fruit. It's what naturally happens.

I think of my own conversion in that regard. My own conversion, every conversion is unique but I had no Christian friends when I was converted. There wasn't anyone that was witnessing to me. I found some Christian materials and I was reading them and that's what God used to bring me to Christ. I was totally isolated from any other Christian. I had no Christian influence in my life at all when God converted me, when God saved me. Now, here's my point in that, not to rehearse my own conversion, but within a matter of a few months, really almost a few weeks, I had a circle of Christian friends in a Bible teaching church. All of a sudden my relationships, the realm of my relationships changed as I started to meet other Christians and people started to realize that I had been converted, we naturally were drawn together by that shared life that we had in Christ. I didn't seek that. I didn't think, "Oh, I need to go out and find Christian friends." I didn't know anything about Christian fellowship.

My point is that it happened naturally. The love of Christ, Christians naturally come together like opposite poles of a magnet coming together and join together and are bound together because of the shared life that they have in Christ. That's what should happen and that is no superficial association as if you were joining the Rotary Club. This fellowship comes out of individual lives that have been profoundly transformed by the Gospel, that have been transformed by regeneration, by being born-again. God saves us, puts new life in us, puts his love in our hearts and that creates a natural attraction to others who have that same life within them. And that's why you can move 2,000 miles across the country from the most liberal state in the union to the great state of Kentucky and feel right at home just like I do. I speak from personal experience to that truth and reality. This is great because, and what makes it great is not because of who we are

individually, what makes it great is the shared life that we have in Christ and that's what John is writing to promote. If we truly know Christ, we'll be drawn to others of like precious faith.

You see, the Gospel transforms our human relationships because of the greater reality of another relationship that it transforms, and that is your relationship with God. There is this horizontal dimension that John is mentioning. Go back to chapter 1, verse 3. There is this horizontal human dimension to the fellowship. He says in verse 3, "I am writing so that you too may have fellowship with us. I want you to be in union with us." But he goes on and points to the greater spiritual reality that makes that horizontal reality attainable. He says, "and indeed our fellowship," watch this, he goes from this human dimension to a vertical dimension. "Our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ." This is remarkable. He's saying, "As I'm calling you into fellowship here with us as the apostolic circle," speaking as the Apostle John here, "as I call you into fellowship, shared participation of life with us, understand that there is a greater dimension to this than what happens on a human level." He says, "Our fellowship is greater than this horizontal dimension. Our fellowship, our shared life, what we participate in, is the shared life of God the Father in his Son Jesus Christ." There is a totally transforming vertical dimension to this fellowship that he is talking about. This fellowship, it's more than a human dimension, it's ultimately a true communion with God himself. That's what John is saying here.

Christian fellowship occurs on a horizontal level because individually believers share in the resurrection life of Christ. The very power that raised Christ from the dead, the very power that enabled him to come out of the tomb, is the same power that is at work in your life and in mine if you're a believer in Christ. It is the same resurrection power. We share in the resurrection life of Christ. I like what one writer said and I'll quote it here, 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 upon our fellowship with God." The reason that we have a common affinity for one another is because there was a prior sharing in the life of God before we came together. As we come together and we realize that, then that resurrection life of Christ starts to filter through our human relationships. That's what John is saying here. The earthly fellowship that we enjoy on a human dimension is fueled by, informed by, and empowered by the shared life that we have and that shared life comes from God himself.

So God saves us from sin. God places us into a supernatural union with the Lord Jesus Christ and that spiritual life pulsates through our innermost being. It pulsates through our hearts and it flourishes as we appropriate apostolic teaching. Truth is the basis of the common life that we're cultivating together here, and that principle that we are doing here has been true throughout the Christian church for 2,000 years. That's why you can go to foreign places, meet Christians and feel right at home more than you do with your own biological family that doesn't know Christ, right? You've all experienced that. You've met new Christians and in 30 minutes you have a commonality with them. It's because there

is that inner connection of the shared life of Christ. So the Gospel has transformed your relationship with God on a vertical dimension and that works itself out on a horizontal dimension. That's why, that is why we find such joy in our time together. That is why we enjoy one another. That is why you are drawn together and you want to share time with other believers. You don't have to apologize for that, that is what is supposed to happen, and what John has done here is he has explained to us why that occurs so naturally without you even trying to make it happen. You don't even think about it, and that shows how deep and natural it is.

Now, the Gospel transforms your relationships, your relationships with each other, your relationship with God, and that leads us to another transforming effect of the Gospel as we move into our second point here this morning. It's not just that the Gospel transforms our relationships, it's that the Gospel transforms your heart. The Gospel transforms your inner man in a very powerful way. The knowledge that all of your sins have been forgiven if you have put your faith in Christ and if you haven't put your faith in Christ, I invite you to do so. I invite you to Christ right now, to come to Christ for salvation. But what happens is that the knowledge that all of your sins have been forgiven, the knowledge that you are secure in Christ, the knowledge that heaven awaits the end of your earthly life, the knowledge, the certainty, the assurance that death simply is the vestibule through which you enter into eternal glory, that knowledge should produce in you an attitude of joy.

Look at 1 John 1:4. He says, "These things we write, so that our joy may be made complete." John is writing these things, again, it's his purpose. His purpose is to advance your spiritual life. And understand that John writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, he is advancing the cause of God as he writes, and the cause of God, the purpose of God in your life, one of the many purposes in his multifaceted work in your life, one of the purposes of God in your life is to see you grow in joy; to see you grow in the glad cheer of being a Christian; to go from being discouraged to having this sense of a joy that transcends the earthly circumstances in which you live. John is writing to promote that inner response of joy, of gladness, settled contentment, enthusiastic praise toward God.

Now, there's something embedded in that that should be a great encouragement to you. If John is writing to make their joy complete, then the readers to whom he was writing, the readers that he affirmed as Christians, we saw that earlier, these readers were obviously incomplete in their joy. They needed to have their joy made complete because somewhere along the line they were lacking joy. John is writing to increase that, not to heap guilt upon them because of their spiritual condition. There were some of them that are just like some of you today, that know they knew discouragement and doubt. They were subject to confusion and sin, and they were stuck from time to time in the same spiritual slop that you find yourself in. Well, take heart in the fact that the purpose of God in that is to lift you up out of that slop, to clean you off, as it were speaking metaphorically of course, and to promote greater joy in your life. John wrote to transform them from the lowly state to the higher state of this experiential joy. And what you need to see is that the devotion that you give to biblical truth is worthwhile. It is worthwhile because it honors God, but it is also worthwhile in an experiential sense that those who

devote themselves to truth over time will find themselves in the end, in the long run, over time, more joyful than those who do not; more settled in their contentment because of the impact of truth on their heart. It's not that it's an unbroken placidity, it's not that it's unbroken happiness. That's not the point. It's a joy that transcends the ups and downs of earthly life because biblical truth moves you to a consciousness of the love of Christ for your soul and that understanding of the love of Christ for your soul settles a reaction of joy in your heart that cannot be moved. It's not a passing emotion that goes away an hour after church is over.

Over the years, I love the time gathering together on Sunday, there is a different joy that we share in during the week as well, and it's realizing it's the joy of walking with Christ during the week and you realize that as you have walked with Christ during the week, as you walk with Christ and you pursue and persevere through trials in the midst of the difficulties that come into your life, and you're motivated when no one is watching, you're motivated and you love him when you're not present in the church, you realize then that your salvation is real; that it's not a matter of external conformity to a Sunday morning, that you are pursuing Christ because this is real and there is such a profound joy in that. There is such an intimacy to Christ in that that says it's not because other people are watching, this is the reality of my heart. That's the kind of joy that John is writing to promote, and what I want to tell you is that that kind of joy is attainable for every one of you that know Christ. This is where the realm of Christian living is meant to occur. It is a gift that God gives to his children as they respond to his truth and it's a present joy now that yields to an even greater joy at the consummation of our salvation in glory. We go from one level of joy to a greater level of joy. We're just getting a foretaste, we're just getting appetizers right now, and those appetizers are wonderful, and then you sit down at the full banquet of joy with Christ in heaven in face to face communion with him, and this joy will be dwarfed by the joy and the glory that is yet to come. That's the promise of God to every one of his children and it shows the greatness of our salvation.

Well, let me just point one other thing out for the sake of the full understanding of the text. John says, "These things we write, so that our joy may be made complete." Our joy. You could read that and think that he's being selfish. "Well, I'm writing these things because I want our joy to be complete." Ours as opposed to yours. But actually he's using the word "our" here in an inclusive sense. He says, "I want our joy to be complete," and what he means by that is, "My joy and yours. Ours collectively together." This is the open heart of an apostle who loves his flock. He's not speaking selfishly, he's including his readers. "I want my joy to be complete. I want your joy to be complete."

And what I want you to see as we close here, is that this is God's word expressed through his faithful apostle. This is what God has for you. This is what God's intention is for the people of Christ. In the Gospel of Christ, the message that God became a man in order to procure salvation of sinners, the message of the Gospel so that everyone who believes in him would have eternal life and the forgiveness of sin, in that Gospel, understand, step back for a moment, remember your life before Christ, remember as we read in Ephesians that you were separate from Christ, strangers to the promise, dead in your trespasses and sins, unable to save yourself for salvation is not by works, and understand that if you are

here in Christ, it's because God has, figuratively speaking, reached his hand down and saved you and transformed you from the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of his marvelous light and now having done that, he works to promote joy in your life that culminates in glory.

Big picture point here: that shows you as a believer without a doubt that God's intentions for your life are good. There is no questioning the good intentions of God on your life if you're a Christian because he has already done so much to deliver you from sin, he's already planned so much more in the culmination of your salvation in heaven, you look back and you see the great goodness of God, you look ahead and realize there is even greater goodness to unfold, and you understand your present life in that context. It goes from unspeakably great goodness to even more unspeakably greater goodness in glory and that is the whole context in which you live out the realm of your salvation. It is in the realm of the great goodness of God on your life. A great and awesome God who dwells in unapproachable light has shown mercy to your sinful soul and rescued you and brought you into his family with the intention of blessing you simply because he wanted to. Not for anything that you did to deserve it. You don't deserve that. I don't deserve that. None of us deserve that. And since we didn't deserve it, it has to be rooted in a different kind of motivation. And when you understand you look and say, "Well, what was that motivation?" You say, "Ah, the love of God. Ah, he has shown that love to me. He has exercised his love and power to my benefit." And that humbles you. That makes you glory in the cross and it gives you a settled confidence and a settled joy that transcends your earthly circumstances. You get that, right?

The Gospel speaks so powerfully to the great love of God and you measure the love of God, let me close with this, you measure the love of God not by your present circumstances. You can't evaluate the love of God for your soul by the outworking of your present circumstances. You can't see it that way. You have to think differently about it. "If God loves me, why is this happening? I don't know." But that's the wrong way to think about it. The way to think about it is, "God sent Christ and Christ went to the cross to secure the salvation of my guilty soul and I have been transformed from the realm of darkness to the realm of light and I'm on my path to glory. I'm on the path that leads to glory." That is the love of God right there and you think about it in transcendent terms. You walk in joy and you persevere through the incidental trials that may come. I say incidental knowing that some of them are very profound but our trials in this life are temporary. The love of God that has been revealed in the Gospel is eternal and transcends it all and will redeem the trials, even the worst of trials, for the sake of perfecting you in the image of Christ, and there will be no question about the love and goodness of God when you're in heaven before the throne of Christ, and that is the foundation of your joy. That transforms your relationships with others, it gives you grounds for loving God even more, and it transforms your heart by giving your heart what it needs to say, "Yes, I'm going to rejoice even in the midst of this because the Gospel is more important than everything else." My eternal soul is more important than my earthly life and if the realm of my eternal soul has been secured, then as we sing in the hymn, we can truly say, that's why we sing, "It is well with my soul." And that wellness is found in the glory of the

Gospel. God saved you to bless you. God saved you to transform you. He saved you to bring you to glory and that's what we celebrate and remember in the Gospel.

Let's pray together, shall we?

Our Father, we want to tell you that we love this great Christ who gave his life for our soul. We want to tell you that we worship this gracious King. And Father, we want to serve him with gladness. We thank you for a Gospel that brings us into fellowship with like-minded believers and that that is an overflow of a shared common life that we have with the Lord Jesus Christ and from that, Father, we seek the joy that you have promised in your word. We thank you, our God, we thank you with joy for this indescribable gift and for the transforming impact that it has on our lives and on our relationships. We give you honor, we give you praise, and we thank you for this time together. In Jesus' name. Amen.

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