

**JOY IN GOD'S REVELATION**  
**(SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 16, 2018)**

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**INTRODUCTION**

Psalm 119:18 reads:

**18** *Open my eyes, that I may see Wondrous things from Your law.*

What an appropriate prayer and desire we should have every time we read and study God's Word.

We want to see the marvelous things that God has revealed to us in His Word and in the Word, our Lord Jesus Christ.

What we might call the basic truths of Scripture are amazing.

- The Eternal existence of God
- That God has spoken and revealed Himself in both creation and special revelation
- That the eternal Son of God took on a human nature and came in the likeness of human flesh
- That God has provided salvation from sin and judgment and this is not just a matter of religious or spiritual feelings

Some might say that John's letters are more basic than the letters of Paul.

No doubt there is a difference in style. It might be easier to outline some of Paul's letters than 1 John, but what unites the writings of Paul and John is the fact that they are Scripture, the God-breathed Word given to us.

We recognize how blessed we are in terms of access to God's Word and all sorts of resources to help us understand.

And yet we know the sad reality. Probably there has never been on average such low knowledge and appreciation for God's Word among professing Christians.

According to some literature I recently received, although the average American household owns 4.5 Bibles, we are losing 700 Bible readers every day.<sup>1</sup>

I used to quote from A. W. Tozer who wrote long before the age of cell phones and Facebook that we too easily rush through the reading of God's Word to our own detriment.

I say this as part of our introduction to 1 John.

If you read different commentaries, you might recognize that there is no agreement on how exactly 1 John should be organized – two parts, three parts, seven parts, or even ten parts.<sup>2</sup>

Now it is certainly not wrong to try to think of how we might outline 1 John and think of the different themes, but I would say that John's style calls not for an outline of the book but for **slow reading and thinking about what he has written**.

John MacArthur suggests there are three sub-themes that are repeated throughout the book: joy, holiness, and security.

And another commentator and one of my former professors at Trinity also suggests three main themes: truth, holiness, and Christian love.<sup>3</sup>

Indeed, John does repeat these things. And we often repeat things to our own family and friends.

It is not strange that John would weave together these great themes in his writing.

Last week I presented a brief overview of the life of the Apostle John.

And one thing that we observe from this first letter of John is that John does not give his own name or even identify those who first received this letter.

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<sup>1</sup> According to Gallup and Tyndale House Publishers.

<sup>2</sup> Yarbrough, Robert W. *1-3 John* (Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament) (p. 21). Baker Publishing Group. Kindle Edition.

<sup>3</sup> Yarbrough, 30.

This is interesting. Yarbrough suggests one reason is that “John’s own personality is observed by the divine person to whom he has so thoroughly subordinated his thoughts, actions, and affection. He writes like someone well might whom perhaps sixty years earlier Jesus taught to pray, ‘Your will be done,’ and in composing these letters as a very old man has become an instrument of answer to his own daily petition.”<sup>4</sup>

A study of church history and the language of John’s letters and gospel show ample evidence testifying that John the son of Zebedee is their author.

John doesn’t include his name, but he must have been very well known to those who first received his letter.<sup>5</sup>

And the evidence is that John also knew very well those he was addressing as the first readers of this letter.

Our focus today is on the very profound first four verses of this letter.

These opening verses call us to **rejoice in the overwhelming revelation of God and the coming of Jesus Christ.**

We will look at verses 1-4 in two main parts, verses 1-3 and verse 4.

### **1) WE WERE THERE – EYEWITNESS TESTIMONY, 1 JOHN 1:1-3**

In Greek, verses 1-4 form one sentence.

Some English translations have verses 1-3 as one sentence and verse 4 as a separate sentence.

The structure and style of John in these verses emphasize the incredible truths that are being presented.

The writing here can be considered almost poetic or epic.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Yarbrough, 28.

<sup>5</sup> Yarbrough, 33.

<sup>6</sup> Yarbrough, 29.

The truths presented in these opening verses we will see are important in the rest of the letter. These opening verses are truly a grand introduction.

I trust that these opening words are familiar to you, but they call for a careful reading and for our deep consideration.

I want to present five main points from verses 1-3.

First, we consider the eternal nature of God the Son and the fact of the incarnation.

As you hear the opening words, what other passages of Scripture come to mind?

Hopefully you would say John 1:1 and Genesis 1:1.

Now look carefully at verse 1.

What does the word **that** refer to?

In Greek, the word translated as **that** is neuter and relative not personal.

Our text does not read **Him** but **that**...

So what is **that** referring to?

Here we look at the end of verse 1 and the phrase **the Word of life**.

The Word of life that was from the beginning, which we have heard, etc...

So, what is the Word of Life?

**Word of Life** can refer to Jesus Christ or the message of the gospel concerning Jesus.

Arguments can be given for either, but the focus is certainly on the person of Jesus Christ.

So even though John uses the word **that**, we can say he opens his letter by speaking of the eternal nature of the Son of God.<sup>7</sup>

Here we see how this verse is very much like John 1:1 – In the beginning was the Word.

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<sup>7</sup> John MacArthur takes a different view on this. It is a difficult subject.

And just like John 1:1, the emphasis is on the eternal nature of Jesus Christ.

As we will see, the person and natures of Jesus Christ were under assault by false teachers during John's day.

In both chapters 2 and 3, John speaks of those who deny that Jesus is the Christ and those who deny that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh.

So, with good reason we can say, John first speaks of the eternal person and nature of Jesus and then speaks of the incarnation.

The doctrine of the Triune nature of God is based on many passages including what we have here in the opening words of 1 John.

From eternity, John moves to history.

How does John speak of the incarnation?

He speaks of the incarnation by using four verbs showing that Jesus Christ had a real, physical body.

Now what also stands out in the four verbs used in verse 1?

One thing you probably notice is that they are all plural – we, we, we, and our hands.

At least eleven times you find a plural pronoun in 1 John.

Who is the we?

Just as the author is not clearly stated so it is not stated who exactly is the we, but a moment's reflection on who this would be indicates John is speaking of himself and the other apostles.

Now thousands and thousands of people saw Jesus, but the disciples or the apostles were the very closest to Jesus for over three years.

The powerful witness of the apostles was that they heard, they saw, they looked upon, and their hands touched Jesus Christ.

We will consider these four verbs in a moment, but here we see how John stresses the fact of the incarnation. This was not a vision or dream that they had for 3 years, but they lived with the incarnate, eternal Son of God.

Second, let us consider the validity of these eyewitnesses to Jesus.

Why does John use four verbs, two of the them similar?

Together they emphasize the key senses – hearing, seeing, and touching.

It is possible that these four verbs should be taken in two groups – hearing and seeing, observing and feeling.

They are separate actions but also actions that go together we can say.

They did not just hear Jesus, but they heard and obviously could see Jesus.

They did not just see Jesus, but they could also feel him.

The two verbs for seeing are similar but the first one is a much more common verb in the NT, used over 450x while the second verb is used only about 24x.

Listen to Luke 24:39.

After His resurrection, Jesus said to His disciples:

**Luke 24:39** Behold My hands and My feet, that it is I Myself. Handle Me and see, for a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see I have.”

The verb handle in Luke 24:39 is the same verb used here in 1 John 1:1.

Listen to 1 Peter 1:8-9.

**8** whom having not seen you love. Though now you do not see *Him*, yet believing, you rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory, **9** receiving the end of your faith—the salvation of *your* souls.

It is obvious that none of us has ever seen Jesus. One aspect of faith is that we are called to believe and trust even when we can't always see the evidence or proof with our eyes.

However, we also consider that what we are called to believe is **based on full evidence**.

Saving faith is not simply a wish that something might be true, it is based on the clear testimony and witness of the apostles.

The words of verse 2 as one commentator stresses are not just words of conversation **but like the testimony of an eyewitness in a courtroom**.<sup>8</sup>

Notice that John again repeats some of the verbs from verse 1 again in verse 2 and 3.

There is emphasis on the direct and physical witness to the incarnation.

Third, let us consider what the incarnation revealed.

This John discusses in verses 1 and 2.

Notice from these verses the familiar words: word of life, life was manifested, and eternal life.

**Life** is the key repeated word here.

The word **life** is used over 130 time in the NT and John uses the word in all his writings **64 times**, almost half of the uses.

The word **life** speaks of our Lord and the gift of eternal life and salvation found in Him.

**John 1:4** In Him was life, and the life was the light of men.

**John 3:15** that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life. **16** For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.

If we had time we could look at another 54 verses where John speaks of life all of them connected in some way to Jesus Christ and God's gift of salvation.

The word life speaks to a very deep concept. Life can only come from something else that has life.

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<sup>8</sup> Yarbrough, 36.

One of the many embarrassments for the those who believe in evolution is explaining how life came from non-living things.

You are mocked if you don't believe in evolution today even though they have no evidence for believing that somehow on its own life came about.

God is the source of both physical life and eternal life.

**John 14:6** ¶ Jesus said to him, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.

Fourth, let us consider further the truth and significance of the incarnation.

Consider how many unbelievers are troubled by the fact that they don't see God in anyway and are not willing to recognize the evidence that God has given.

We know that Paul in Romans 1 deals with this subject.

**Romans 1:19** because what may be known of God is manifest in them, for God has shown *it* to them. **20** For since the creation of the world His invisible *attributes* are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, *even* His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse,

The other response that we have to the questions of the unbeliever is that God the Father who cannot be seen was made known by Jesus Christ in the flesh.

**John 6:46** Not that anyone has seen the Father, except He who is from God; He has seen the Father.

**John 8:42** Jesus said to them, "If God were your Father, you would love Me, for I proceeded forth and came from God; nor have I come of Myself, but He sent Me.

Fifth from verses 3, we consider the first goal John sets forth in writing this letter.

Look at verse 3 – **that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ.**

The word fellowship or *koinonia* is used just 4 times by John in his writings and all four times are here in 1 John 1.

We often define the word fellowship as time together. That is part of it, but we enjoy something much richer than just time that we spend together.

One lexicon defines fellowship this way - Christians are partakers in common of the same mind as God and Christ, and of the blessings arising there from.<sup>9</sup>

It is this fellowship that we celebrate in the Lord's Supper or communion which is this same word *koinonia*.

**Acts 2:42** And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers.

One of the goals as we make our way through 1 John is to consider how it encourages us in our fellowship with the Triune God and with His people.

Is this something you seek?

In this word fellowship we have one of the key themes in John – we must know the truth and we must live consistently in the truth before God and with others.

We see this developed in verses 5 and 6 and in other parts of John's letter.

May the Lord work in the life of this congregation to encourage true fellowship and partnership in all the blessings we have in Christ and our work together for His kingdom and glory.

## **2) ANOTHER GOAL: SHARED JOY IN THE TRUTH, 1 JOHN 1:4**

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

This goal is certainly connected with the previous goal. True fellowship is connected with full joy.

In 2 John, John says something very similar.

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<sup>9</sup> Thayer, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, s.v. "κοινωνία," paragraph 5664.

**2John 12** ¶ Having many things to write to you, I did not wish *to do so* with paper and ink; but I hope to come to you and speak face to face, that our joy may be full.

The word full in verse 4 is a verb that is used 19x by John and a number of times the words joy and full are brought together.

**John 15:11** ¶ “These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may remain in you, and *that* your joy may be full.

**John 16:24** Until now you have asked nothing in My name. Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full.

**John 17:13** But now I come to You, and these things I speak in the world, that they may have My joy fulfilled in themselves.

These three verses are just some of the evidence linking together John’s gospel and his three letters.

Now Paul also said something very similar in terms of joy.

**Rom. 14:17** for the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.

Now we keep in mind that John is not writing a happy-clappy book.

The message is not **don’t worry just be happy**.

Yes, he writes in the introduction of joy but as we will see there are great dangers that his readers were facing in terms of false teaching and compromise with the world.<sup>10</sup>

Joy does not just come in the absence of problems. But joy also doesn’t mean the ignoring of problems and challenges.

The book of 1 John speaks a great deal also of love. Both as a verb and as a noun, love is mentioned about 50 times just in 1 John.

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<sup>10</sup> Yarbrough, 43.

It might be significant that love and joy are the first two virtues that are part of the fruit of the Holy Spirit.

May both love and joy be evident in our own lives and the life of this church so that we will bring a faithful testimony of our great God – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

**May you rejoice in the overwhelming revelation of God and the coming of Jesus Christ.**

#### CONCLUSION

1) Read, think, and treasure

2) Truth – joy and proclamation

**Close in prayer and a song – 439**

#### **BENEDICTION: 1 JOHN 5:20-21**

And we know that the Son of God has come and has given us an understanding, that we may know Him who is true; and we are in Him who is true, in His Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God and eternal life.

Little children, keep yourselves from idols. Amen.