

“A DEAR FROM JOHN LETTER.”

Rev. Robert T. Woodyard

First Christian Reformed Church

September 23, 2018, 6:00 PM

Scripture Texts: I John 1:1-4

Introduction.

Preachers and commentators alike tend to avoid I John. It's hard to outline, it's repetitive, ideas overlap, there doesn't seem to be a clear flow or direction. It reads like a patchwork of favorite verses and memorable lines. There seems to be an over emphasis on God and love.

But if you think about it, two things that people most often get wrong in this world are God and love, so maybe it needs some over emphasis.

The bottom line is clear. The writer wants us to know the joy of intimate fellowship with God, the kind of fellowship there is between a child and his father.

The opening three verses are enough to scare off many writers and preachers. It is a grammatical tangle of phrases piled on top of each other. I like the outline one commentary uses that captures this confusing opening paragraph. What is “which”, who is “we”, and what does “we” have to say about “which” to “you”?

What Is “Which”?

What is “which”? Six times the writer uses this non-descript relative pronoun.

“That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen ... which we looked upon ... which was with the Father ... which we have seen and heard.”

What or who is “which”? The answer isn't named until the very end of this very long run on sentence.

He who was from the beginning, who is the Word of life, who was made manifest to us, who we have seen and heard and touched is God's Son, God incarnate, the man Jesus Christ.

He is two things at once.

He is pre-existent and divine, He is from the beginning.

He is historic and human, He was seen, heard and touched.

Eternal life which was with the Father.

John 1:1-3 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2 He was in the beginning with God. 3 All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made.

Jesus was from the beginning. He is not part of creation, He was before creation. Think about what this means and what it says about Christ.

He had no beginning. There never was a time when He was not. Before Abraham, I am. Jesus knew He was the Son of God. This was a claim to deity. This Jesus will come again to judge the living and the dead.

Jesus wasn't created. He is the one through whom all things are created.

Colossians 1:16-17 For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. 17 And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together.

Was made manifest to us, life in the flesh.

I John 1:1-4 That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we looked upon and have touched with our hands, ... 2 the life was made manifest, and we have seen it, ... 3 that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you.

The life was made manifest. The invisible God became visible. The eternal, exalted Christ became a man, one touched and seen and heard by others.

We heard the voice of the one who spoke the universe into existence. We touched the incarnate Christ. Jesus is the visible, audible, touchable God.

He who was without limits, who existed in all eternity and was outside of time and space, who was omniscient, omnipotent and omnipresent, stooped down and became man and took up residence here on earth.

This event is empirically verified by human senses. That which is eternal has become historically manifested to us. Through this event the very life of God has been given to us, the Word of Life.

The importance of this eye-witness testimony and proclamation will become more evident when we get further into the letter where John deals with false teachers who say Jesus didn't come in the flesh, that His body was not a real flesh and blood.

The confession that God has come in the flesh is John's doctrinal test of whether we are of God.

1 John 4:2 By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit which confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God, and every spirit which does not confess Jesus is not of God.

Jesus is the pivotal person in history, Jesus entered into history to forever change history, Jesus is the one all of history points to and the one who will bring history to a climatic conclusion.

Jesus is the theological center of our faith, our faith which we call Christianity. He is central and core, if we lose Jesus, we lose our faith and our identity. We cannot compromise of this point.

This is a life like on other.

1 John 5:11–12 God gave us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. He who has the Son has life; he who has not the Son of God has not life.

We can't ignore the one who says, "I am the way the truth and the life."

Who Is "We"?

First John is like a short letter, but a letter without a beginning or an ending, and no personal references or names. Like Hebrews, it's the only other letter without the usual opening formalities, no "John an apostle of Jesus Christ to the saints at Ephesus, grace and peace."

But the early church acknowledged the apostle John as the writer, he identifies himself as an eye-witness, and the beginning and the style of the letter closely matches the Gospel of John. It sounds like John, many of the same words repeated.

This is John, the son of Zebedee, the brother of James. This is the same John who wrote the Gospel and Revelation and the other two letters after this one.

He probably wrote this letter from Ephesus in western Turkey around 85 AD. Like Peter's letters this one may have been passed around the churches of Asia Minor.

John saw, heard and touched the Son of God. This is the message to us from a man who saw and touch the eternal Lord of glory.

Peter said it this way,

II Peter 1:16 For we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty.

As Paul says

I Corinthians 11:23 For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you.

Ephesians 2:20 [we are] built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone

My message, my authority rests completely on the apostles. No apostles, no message, no authority. My message and my authority are based on what John says he heard and saw and touched. The whole foundation of the preaching ministry of the Church rests on this.

Our faith is an apostolic faith and our message is an apostolic message. We proclaim this, we don't have to persuade, influence, convince, argue or debate, just proclaim.

What Does “We” Say About “Which” To “You”?

This brings us the why of the letter, to the purpose of this apostolic message. There are two reasons that are both marked by “so that.”

I John 1:3-4 *so that* you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. 4 And we are writing these things *so that* our joy may be complete.

Fellowship

So that you may have fellowship with us? Why not so that you may have fellowship with God?

Those who want to have fellowship with God, must first have fellowship with the apostles, that is with the apostolic testimony concerning the incarnate Christ. We can only be in Christ because of the apostles, through the apostles.

I believe in one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church. Without this there is no communion of the saints.

What does it mean to have fellowship with? To fellowship with is to be a partaker with.

II Peter 1:3-4 His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence, 4 by which he has granted to us his precious and very great promises, *so that* through them you may become *partakers of the divine nature*, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire.

We are partakers of or sharers in the divine life, the life of God. This is an astonishing and staggering truth. The being of God is inside of us, by His Holy Spirit.

In human terms it is like Christian marriage, or a very close friendship. It means sharing something significant in common, shared values, shared interests, believing what they believe, loving what they love, wanting to spend time with them.

With Christ it means fellowship in His Word and in prayer, meditating on Him, thinking about Him, praying for the grace to obey everything He says.

Fellowship with God comes only through Jesus Christ. When Jesus is our Savior, God becomes our Father.

I John 2:23 No one who denies the Son has the Father. He who confesses the Son has the Father also.

We are the only group of people on earth whose fellowship is with the Father and the Son. There is something here that no one else has and cannot be found anywhere else. This is the only fellowship with the Father and the Son.

The strongest Christians are those most actively committed to and involved in the body of Christ. Those most connected to the head are those most connected to the body.

If Jesus is who He says He is and who we believe Him to be, then our greatest desire should be to have fellowship with Him and with all those who are in fellowship with Him. And we should want to invite those on the outside into that fellowship.

Joy

And out of this Christ-centered fellowship flows joy.

We are writing this so that our joy may be complete. Why not so that your joy may be complete?

Joy increases as it is shared and multiplied.

Part of our joy in going to Catalina Island this time was being able to share it with others. I have no greater joy than to see my children walk with the Lord. This completes my joy. I have no greater joy than to see you, this flock walking with the Lord. This is pastoral joy.

John 15:11 These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full.

The fullness of all human joy is found in fellowship with the truth, with the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

God is most glorified in us when we find our greatest joy in Him. When He is supreme, our joy is full.

Implications and Applications.

What are the implications of this message for us who have not seen, heard or touched Jesus? Is our faith less real? Is our relationship less personal? Is the ascension of Jesus the end of His presence with us and our ability to experience Him in a personal way?

By Jesus' own Holy Spirit, we are able to have an on-going personal relationship and experience of Jesus, He is with us and He is in us.

I John 3:24 Whoever keeps his commandments abides in God, and God in him. And by this we know that he abides in us, by the Spirit whom he has given us.

I John 4:13, 15 By this we know that we abide in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit. ... 15 Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God.

What does this look like?

Through this letter may we all have a greater desire to know this Jesus who abides in us and with whom we will spend eternity. Let's spend time in this letter together for the sake of our joy.

I John 1:4 We are writing these things so that our joy may be complete.