

INTRODUCTION

From the time I started preaching 51 years ago, I have loved studying and teaching the Bible. Early on, I admit, I didn't know the Bible as well as I do now. It reminds me of the story I heard about a Baptist church who was looking for a new pastor. The committee was interviewing a young man and the chairman said, "Son, do you know your Bible?" He said, "Yes, sir!" The chairman asked, "What's your favorite Bible story? Would you share it with us?" The young preacher, who was pretty nervous, thought for a minute and said, "I'll tell you the story of the Prodigal Son." He took a deep breath and continued: "There was a man of the Pharisees name Nicodemus, who went down to Jericho by night and he fell upon stony ground and the thorns choked him half to death. The next morning Solomon and his wife, Gomorrah, came by, and carried him down to the ark for Moses to take care of. But, as he was going through the Eastern Gate into the Ark, he caught his hair in a limb and he hung there forty days and forty nights and he afterwards did hunger. And, the ravens came and fed him. The next day, the three wise men came and carried him down to the boat dock and he caught a ship to Nineveh. And when he got there, he found Delilah sitting on the wall. He said, 'Chuck her down, boys, chuck her down.' And, they said, 'How many times shall we chuck her down, till seven time seven?' And he said, 'Nay, but seventy times seven.' And they chucked her down four hundred and ninety times...And, she burst asunder in their midst...And they picked up twelve baskets of the leftovers...And, in the resurrection whose wife shall she be?"

There was silence for a few minutes until the Chairman spoke up. He said, "Folks, I know he's not good looking, but he sure knows his Bible. Let's call him as our pastor!"

We've been studying the Gospel according to John for the past thirty months. Last fall as Michael and I were talking about a preaching plan for 2021, we decided to keep on studying the writings of the Apostle John by studying First Second and Third John.

We believe John was the youngest of the original disciples and he was the only one who died by natural causes. According to the early church pastor, Tertullian, John was arrested in Rome and was sentenced to die by The Emperor Domitian on by being boiled in oil in 95 A.D. This is a painting that you can see in Basel, Switzerland today. It is by Hans Frieze and was done in 1514. Tertullian was writing about the church in Rome and said: "How happy is its church, on which apostles poured forth all their doctrine along with their blood; where Peter endures a passion like his Lord's; where Paul wins his crown in a death like John [the Baptist]'s; where the Apostle John was first plunged, unhurt, into boiling oil, and thence remitted to his island-exile."

Miraculously, John survived being boiled in oil because God wasn't finished with him yet. He was exiled to the Island of Patmos where he had a vision and wrote The Revelation of Jesus Christ. He later traveled to Ephesus where he spent the last years of his life writing his Gospel Account and these three epistles. Someone said once that an epistle is the wife of an apostle. But they are letters.

1 John is filled with basic truth for new Christians. John is writing like a Father to his children. That's why we've named this series CHRISTIANITY [defined]. Before you study a book in the Bible, you always look for the key verse or key verses. There are four key verses in 1 John. Let's preview them.

Key 1: To promote joy.

This is in our passage today. 1 John 1:4 reads: "We are writing these things so that our joy may be complete." We will talk more about this in a moment.

Key 2: To promote purity.

1 John 2:1 says: "My little children, I am writing you these things so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father—Jesus Christ the righteous one." Key 3: To protect from error. There was so much false teaching in the church, as there is today. 1 John 2:26 says: "I have written these things to you concerning those who are trying to deceive you."

Key 4: To provide assurance.

Some people say you can't know for SURE if you're saved. They're wrong. 1 John 5:13 says: "I have written these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life." The fourth and perhaps the main purpose of the book is to provide assurance of our salvation. The word "know" appears over 30 times in these five chapters and I hope by the time we end this study of 1 John if somebody asks you if you're going to heaven when you die, I hope you won't say, "I hope so" or "I think so." I hope you'll say, "I KNOW so!"

With those four purposes in mind, let's go back now to chapter 1 and talk about what I'm calling "Our Life in Christ."

1 John 1:1-4: What was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have observed and have touched with our hands, concerning the word of life - that life was revealed, and we have seen it and we testify and declare to you the eternal life that was with the Father and was revealed to us— what we have seen and heard we also declare to you, so that you may also have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ. We are writing these things so that our joy may be complete.

What does it mean to be a Christian? The difference between the epistle of 1 John and The Gospel according to John is that John wrote his account of the life of Jesus for non-believers, so people would believe. He wrote 1 John to believers. In this passage we discover three characteristics of a real Christian.

1. A REAL CHRISTIAN ACCEPTS THE REALITY OF JESUS.

Just about every epistle was written to try to combat a common heresy or error and in the early church there was something called the Gnostic Heresy or Gnosticism. The Gnostics did not believe Jesus was real in the flesh; they denied the humanity of Jesus. They taught that Jesus of Nazareth was a normal human being until age 30. The Gnostics believed when Jesus was baptized and the Bible says the Holy Spirit came upon him was the moment when Christ came upon Jesus of Nazareth and that's when he became Jesus the Christ.

They also taught and believed that when Jesus was crucified on the cross and gave up his Spirit, that's when the spirit of Christ left and no longer was Jesus the Son of God—so there was no literal bodily resurrection. So it was a mystical type of belief and not too different than the New Age movement. So John wrote to Christians to straighten that error. Jesus is real—you've got to accept the humanity and reality of Jesus. John tells us three ways in which Jesus is real.

(1) JESUS IS REAL ETERNALLY.

John wrote, "What was from the beginning." Jesus has always been; of course, Jesus was unique and different. When you go back to the beginning, but you really can't go back to the beginning, because whenever you think you're at the beginning, there's still something before that and this just boggles the human mind. We cannot conceive it. Our mental computers go into overload when we try to think of eternity but John is saying Jesus existed from the very beginning. The Bible says, "From everlasting to everlasting you are God." (Psalm 90:2) Jesus Christ has always existed.

If verse one sounds familiar, there are two other places in the Bible that are similar to this. Genesis 1:1 and John 1:1 both start with the phrase, "In the beginning." Jesus has always been. He is eternal.

(2) JESUS IS REAL HISTORICALLY.

Jesus wasn't just 50% God and 50% man; He was 100% human and 100% God. John is trying to combat this Gnostic heresy by saying Jesus Christ had flesh and blood. Wouldn't it have been something to hear the voice of Jesus? What do you think his voice sounded like? We don't know but John heard his voice and I imagine that voice echoed through his ears for the rest of his life. Jesus must have had a booming voice, because those 5,000 people He fed could hear Him. At the Feast of Tabernacles there were thousands of people who heard him cry out, "If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink." (John 7:37) John said he was real. We heard his voice. We saw him with our eyes. We touched him with our hands. Even after Jesus came back from the dead and appeared in the upper room Jesus invited them to touch Him.

(3) JESUS IS REAL PERSONALLY.

John said he knew him. "What we have seen with our eyes, what we have observed and have touched with our hands, concerning the word of life." John walked with Jesus. He reclined next

to Jesus at the Last Supper. He knew Him personally. John was known as the disciple Jesus loved.

You can say a person is real historically, but not real to you personally. For example, I know that Michael Jordan is real historically, but I've never met him personally. But like John, you can say that Jesus Christ is real historically, and you can know Him personally.

When I was nine, I accepted Jesus as my personal Savior, and since that day He's been as real to me as anyone else I know.

Do you know Jesus Christ or do you just know about him? Is he just some historical figure like Socrates or Plato or do you really know him? That's what the Christian life is all about. Paul says, "I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection." (Philippians 3:10) To do this, you've got to accept the reality of Jesus.

2. A REAL CHRISTIAN APPRECIATES OUR FELLOWSHIP THROUGH JESUS.

In verse three John writes, "What we have seen and heard we also declare to you, so that you may also have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ."

The word for fellowship is *koinonia*. *Koinonia* means sharing, intimate affection. It's a relationship that goes deeper than friendship.

Every time I gather together with believers, I think about what a wonderful fellowship we have in Christ. This kind of fellowship doesn't exist in a fraternity, sorority, country club or a civic club. You don't find this kind of fellowship anywhere else on the face of the earth except the fellowship among Christian believers. This fellowship can be understood in two directions.

(1) WE HAVE FELLOWSHIP WITH THE FAMILY.

Someone said fellowship is just two fellows in the same ship. And together we're all in the Lordship of Jesus. We have entered into him and were in it together now. Because we all share this Lordship together, we share fellowship as brothers and sisters in Christ.

Years ago, Bill Gaither wrote a great song entitled "The Family of God." We all know the chorus, but let me share the first stanza with you. "You will notice we say 'brother' and 'sister' 'round here. It's because we're a family, and these folks are so near. When one has a heartache; We all share the tears; And rejoice in each victory; in this family so dear. I'm so glad I'm a part of the Family of God. I've been washed in the fountain; cleansed by His blood; Joint heirs with Jesus; as we travel this sod; For I'm part of the family; the family of God."

(2) WE HAVE FELLOWSHIP WITH THE FATHER AND THE SON.

What does our fellowship with the Father represent? There is a horizontal *koinonia* we have among ourselves. We enjoy getting together with our Christian friends and enjoying fellowship. But there is also a vertical relationship that we have with our Creator. God created you to have a loving relationship with Him. In James 2:23 the Bible says that “Abraham believed God—and it was credited to him as righteousness. And he was called a Friend of God.”

One of the most exciting truths you’ll ever discover is that God exists, and that He exists because He wants to be your friend. We will dig into this fellowship with God in the next message.

3. A REAL CHRISTIAN ACTIVELY REJOICES IN JESUS.

The first key of the book is in the fourth verse where we read, “We are writing these things so that our joy may be complete.” The Christian life is characterized by joy. Years ago I undertook a study to find every time the Bible spoke of joy or rejoicing. I discovered that there are 794 verses that speak of joy, rejoicing, or being of good cheer.

When Paul was chained in prison wondering every day if this would be his last day, he wrote these words, in Philippians 4:4, “Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!” When you’re sick, you shouldn’t rejoice in your sickness, but you can still rejoice in the Lord. When you are discouraged, it would be odd to rejoice in your discouragement -but you can still rejoice in the Lord. Whatever tough situation you are in, you can still rejoice in the Lord. Let me remind you of three reasons we can rejoice.

(1) JOY IN OUR SALVATION

Joy is the birthright of a Christian. Salvation isn’t a religion to be endured, it is a relationship to be enjoyed.

Way back before email and social media, there was something called pen pals. It’s where two strangers would write snail mail letters to each other. During World War II many soldiers would write pen pals back in the states, and many marriages resulted from their correspondence. There were no phone calls or personal visits—they might exchange photos, but their only contact was by mail. But many of these couples fell in love without every seeing each other. You can imagine the joy when they would finally meet face to face.

That’s a little like the Christian life. The Bible says in 1 Peter 1:8-9, “Though you have not seen him, you love him; though not seeing him now, you believe in him, and you rejoice with inexpressible and glorious joy, because you are receiving the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls.”

I’ll let you in on a little secret. It takes me about ten minutes to drive from my house to our building on Sunday mornings. And for many years I’ve sung the same song. “I’ve got the joy joy

joy joy down in my heart. Down in my heart. Down in my heart. I've got the joy joy joy down in my heart. Down in my heart to stay!"

(2) JOY IN GOD'S WORD

Have you found that if you're ever feeling worried or discouraged, that you can read the Word of God and your sadness is replaced with joy? The Bible says in Psalm 19:8: "The precepts of the Lord are right, giving joy to the heart. The commands of the Lord are radiant, giving light to the eyes."

The best medicine you can take is the Word of God. The Bible says laughter IS the best medicine. If you're feeling a little low, why don't you try a dosage of Psalm 103. Side effects that may occur include a cheerful attitude, a positive outlook, an irresistible urge to smile, a brighter countenance, a sense of inner peace, a grateful heart, and reduced stress and worry. If these symptoms persist, talk to Dr. Jesus and He'll double your dosage.

(3) JOY IN LEADING OTHERS TO CHRIST

Jesus said that there is joy in the presence of angels over one sinner who repents. What creates joy in Heaven should create joy in our hearts. Evangelism is just planting seeds of the Gospel. And the more seeds we can plant, the greater the Harvest will be. Are you planting seeds of the Gospel?

The Bible says, in Psalm 126:5-6 "Those who sow with tears will reap with songs of joy. Those who go out weeping, carrying seed to sow, will return with songs of joy, carrying sheaves with them."

When I was a boy growing up in LA, we had a solar-powered clothes dryer. It was called a clothesline, and the sun dried the wet clothes. My mom worked as a nurse, so all three of us kids had chores. I can remember carrying a basket full of heavy, wet laundry to the clothesline. Then we'd take clothespins and hang them up. It was a lot more fun to bring them back in than to take them out. They were dry and light.

There's a fresh smell to sheets that have been hanging out in the sun to dry. We even had a song at church about those sheets. So as I brought in the laundry I would sing, "Bringing in the sheets, bringing in the sheets. We shall come rejoicing bringing in the sheets." Of course that song wasn't about sheets. But that's what it sounded like to me! The song was actually about bringing in the sheaves but I didn't know at the time that sheaves were bundles of wheat.

When we go out with a burdened heart- weeping for the lost, and plant lots of seeds, there will be a harvest and we will rejoice when we see how many people have come to Christ due to the seeds we sowed.

CONCLUSION

Charlie Green died of COVID and went to Heaven a few months ago. Charlie was my friend and prayer partner for almost 30 years. He had a burden to see lost people saved. He belonged to the Gideons who have given away millions of Bibles. But Charlie had a unique way of planting seeds.

Whenever he got a letter that had a postage paid return envelope, even if he wasn't buying the product, he would put Gospel tracts in there and mail it back. Whenever he paid all his bills, he would put a Gospel tract in with his check. Brenda told me he had been doing that for decades. He planted tens of thousands of seeds.

I can imagine the scene in Heaven recently. Some stranger walked up to Charlie and asked, "Are you Charles Green from Tyler, Texas?" Charlie said, "yes." That person said, "Mr. Green, I'm here because of you. I had a boring job receiving payments at the electric company. You always put a little booklet in there about Jesus. I kept those, and one night I was desperate to find a reason to live, and I remembered your little booklets. I took them out and read them. One of them was about steps to peace with God. I read the booklet and I prayed that prayer, and that's why I'm here today. Thank you for the seed of the Word that you planted in my heart." And I can almost hear Charlie shouting for joy in Heaven.

Because Jesus said, "There will be joy in the presence of angels over one sinner who repented."

A real Christian knows Jesus is real. A real Christian fellowships with God and with the Family. And a real Christian rejoices in the Lord.

OUTLINE

FOUR KEYS TO UNLOCK TRUTH IN 1 JOHN

- (1) To promote joy. (1 John 1:4)
- (2) To promote purity. (1 John 2:1)
- (3) To protect from error. (1 John 2:26)
- (4) To provide assurance. (1 John 5:13)

1. A real Christian accepts the reality of Jesus.

- (1) Real Eternally
- (2) Real Historically
- (3) Real Personally

2. A real Christian appreciates our fellowship through Jesus.

- (1) Fellowship with the family
- (2) Fellowship with the Father and the Son

3. A real Christian actively rejoices in Jesus.

- (1) Joy in our salvation
- (2) Joy in God's Word
- (3) Joy in leading others to Christ.

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For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes



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