

## **The Word of Life**

### **1 John 1:1-4**

We are taking a break from 1 Corinthians during the month of December to focus on Jesus' birth, and as I was thinking about what to preach on, I ended up in the book of 1 John. John has a unique way of writing about Jesus that I think will help us grow closer to Christ during this Christmas season.

When you think about Christmas and Jesus coming into the world, what comes to mind? I'm thinking that most of us probably think about a baby in a manger. (Picture) We think about the Christmas story with Mary and Joseph and their little baby boy. We think about angels and shepherds and wise men and how the Son of God humbled himself and came as a tiny baby. There's something comforting about the Christmas story and we love coming back to it every year.

But this morning I want us to look at Jesus coming in a different way that captures more of the awe and wonder and magnitude of his birth. I want us to see how the apostle John thought of it. And it's a lot different than a baby in a manger. John's perspective helps us to see the immense significance of what happened. Like the difference between seeing a postcard of Arches National Park and actually being there to see the massive arches, cliffs and canyons and understand how they were formed. That's what I hope John's perspective does for us this morning.

John grew up in Galilee, which was in northern Israel next to the Sea of Galilee. (Picture) He and his brother James were fishermen along with their father until one day when Jesus came and invited them to follow him in ministry. The two boys jumped at the chance and the Scriptures record they dropped their nets right there.

John was a student of Jesus for about three years and became one of his closest companions. He went on ministry tours with him and saw all the amazing miracles that we read about, he heard Jesus' teaching and witnessed his way of life. He also went through the horror of watching him suffer and die on the cross and was right there when Jesus asked him to take care of his mother. When Jesus rose from the dead it changed his life forever and for the next seventy years he was devoted to telling people about Christ until he died at about age 100.

When John thought about Jesus coming into the world, I don't think he pictured a baby in a manger. He wrote about his thoughts in two different books in the New

Testament and I want us to see what he wrote this morning. One place is his eye-witness account of Jesus' life and the other is a letter he wrote to Christians he was ministering to, and that's where I want to start.

Read 1 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, concerning the word of life—<sup>2</sup> the life was made manifest, and we have seen it, and testify to it and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was made manifest to us—<sup>3</sup> that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. <sup>4</sup> And we are writing these things so that our joy may be complete.*

I want us to think about what John was writing about in these verses. He begins with a very sensory description of something he calls "the word of life." He says this word of life was "from the beginning" – it was something that was ageless, timeless, and eternal. But if you look at verse 1, it was also something that he and the other apostles were very familiar with from personal experience. It's something they had heard with their very own ears, seen with their very own eyes, looked upon and observed, and touched and handled with their very own hands. So even though this thing was ageless, timeless, and eternal, it was also something they had experienced very personally and were very familiar with.

He calls it "the word of life" and talks more about it in verse 2. He calls it "the life" at the beginning of the verse, and "the eternal life" at the end. He says, "the life was made manifest," in other words, it became known – it was revealed. Previously it wasn't known. It had been "with the Father" – hidden with God and unknown by man. But John is pointing out that during his lifetime it was revealed. He says in verse 2 that he and the other disciples had seen it, and they were testifying to it and proclaiming it to others. They were eyewitnesses of the timeless life that had been hidden for ages, but made known to them, and they had experienced it very up-close-and-personal.

He goes on in verse 3 to say that this life that they had seen and heard they were also proclaiming to the people reading this letter. And they were doing that for a reason – so they might join in fellowship with them, and not only with them, but together with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. So John is saying that the way into fellowship with God was through this thing that John was proclaiming to

them that he calls the “word of life.” John was writing to proclaim the word of life to them so that through that life they would join in fellowship with God. And if that happened, he says in verse 4, his joy would be complete.

So what is he talking about? John assumes his readers know exactly what he’s talking about, and most of us do, but I want us to look at another passage he wrote to see the answer so we can try to appreciate what he’s talking about the same way he did. At the beginning of the book of John he uses similar language to describe this “word of life” and at the end of his description he gives it a name.

Read John 1:1-18 (not on screen)

*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. <sup>2</sup> He was in the beginning with God. <sup>3</sup> All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. <sup>4</sup> In him was life, and the life was the light of men. <sup>5</sup> The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.*

*<sup>6</sup> There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. <sup>7</sup> He came as a witness, to bear witness about the light, that all might believe through him. <sup>8</sup> He was not the light, but came to bear witness about the light.*

*<sup>9</sup> The true light, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world. <sup>10</sup> He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him. <sup>11</sup> He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. <sup>12</sup> But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, <sup>13</sup> who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.*

*<sup>14</sup> And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth. <sup>15</sup> (John bore witness about him, and cried out, “This was he of whom I said, ‘He who comes after me ranks before me, because he was before me.’”) <sup>16</sup> For from his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. <sup>17</sup> For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. <sup>18</sup> No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father's side, he has made him known.*

This “word of life” that John has been describing in these two passages is Jesus Christ. And when John thought of Jesus coming into the world, he didn’t think of him as a little baby in a manger. He thought of him as the eternal life-giving Son of God who had been hidden with God, coming down from the glory of heaven to shine his light into a world that was filled with darkness and sin. And that happened during John’s lifetime, right in front of his face.

The world John grew up in had been trapped in spiritual darkness since Adam and Eve turned away from God in the Garden of Eden. Sin entered the world through Adam and corrupted all of mankind. One of the best descriptions I've found that describes that darkness is Ephesians 2:1-3: *"And you were dead in the trespasses and sins<sup>2</sup> in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience—<sup>3</sup> among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind."*

Gloom, misery, corruption, and fruitless deeds of darkness – that was the world that John grew up in. Sin reigned on earth with all its corruption and devastation and death. Rom. 5:12 says, *"Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned."*

But John came to understand that throughout all that time of darkness on earth, something was hidden with God – the "word of life" that would give light to the world. He was always there but had not yet been made manifest on earth – until John's lifetime. And then he came. *"The true light, which gives light to everyone, came into the world." "In him was life, and the life was the light of men." "The Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth." And "from his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace."*

That's what John thought of when he thought of Jesus coming to earth. And that's what John was eager to proclaim to others because he knew that anyone who would receive him and believe in his name would receive eternal life. They would enter into the fellowship of God. They would become his children and receive grace upon grace. And that's what would make John's joy complete.

Jesus is the word of life, and oh how precious that life is for all who have received him. So I want to ask you, have you received that life? Have you received Jesus? He isn't just a baby in a manger. He's the light in the darkness that brings us life and brings us into fellowship with God. Let us worship him in his fullness this Christmas season, and let us be like John who not only found great joy in experiencing that life, but also in proclaiming it to others that they too might live.