

A Firsthand Witness

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[0 : 00] Good morning. We're taking a break today from the Gospel of Luke as Pastor Thompson is filling the pulpit in Greentown for Pastor Dave Johnson who we just prayed for who's on a missions trip so you can be keeping Pastor Thompson in prayers he preaches there.

The last time I preached here we wrapped up the book of Colossians and so this morning we're going to be looking at and starting a new book which is the book of 1st John and we're going to cover the first four verses today but due to the nature of the passage and the similarity of the Gospel we're going to spend some time in chapter 1 and chapter 20 of the Gospel of John as well. So I'll encourage you to take your Bible or your Bible app and turn to 1st John and I'm going to read the entire first chapter 1st John chapter 1.

1st John chapter 1.

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[1 : 55] 1st John chapter 1.

Lord, we ask that you would apply these words that John has written to these churches to us, that your spirit would encourage us with the truthfulness of the gospel, that our hearts would be drawn to you as we look forward to seeing you one day.

In Jesus' name, amen. So 1 John, as the title might suggest, was written by the Apostle John, the same author that wrote 1, 2, and 3 John, the Gospel of John, and the Book of Revelation.

And there's some debate about what came first. Was the Gospel of John written first, or was these epistles written first? But regardless of the order, the gospel was written as a testimony of what John had seen.

He's explaining to the people what he saw, what happened. This is the good news about what Jesus did. It was written so the reader would believe in Jesus. John actually says that at the end of his gospel.

[3 : 24] I wrote these things so that you would believe. This epistle was written so that those that believe in Jesus would know that they believe. They would have true knowledge of Jesus.

So John's gospel calls unbelievers to faith, and his epistle reassures believers that their faith is truly genuine. If you've read this book before, which I hope is the case, you'll know this book can be very repetitive.

I joked with someone this week that I could be accused of preaching the same sermon over and over and over again because there are so many themes that John just keeps revisiting.

John has a unique style when he's writing this book. I like how one commentator put it. They wrote, John's pattern of thinking does not involve sequential logic in the manner of normal arguments, so much as the literal equivalent of musical variations on a theme.

There's a constant circling around the basic issue, coming at it from different angles, developing now this aspect and now that aspect, balancing one statement with another to clarify what is and what is not entailed, turning to a point already made so that it can be seen afresh in light of what has been said subsequently.

[4 : 41] So really, the statement is saying, this book is written not in an eyesological progression. John revisits things and restates things multiple times. You'll see the theme of love and light and fellowship come up and up over and over again.

You'll see the idea of sin and walking in light and fellowship coming up again. But this message in this book, while it's different, it's not at odds with other scripture. It's just presented differently than other books by other authors.

And while this book doesn't call out who he's writing to specifically, we do know that John has written to multiple churches in the past. In the book of Revelation, he calls out seven churches that

he wrote to, all within an area of Asia Minor.

He wrote the church of Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea. And it's likely that John wrote this letter to the book, sorry, to the church at Ephesus, but planned that it would go to all these other churches he cares for.

It wasn't uncommon for this last disciple of Jesus to be somewhat of a celebrity. And so, John is writing letters. He's taking, he's being taken by people to different churches and speaking.

[5 : 54] And so, John's impact here is quite broad. But John's writing this epistle to a church and churches who are struggling with a heresy.

Struggling with the heresy of Gnosticism. That was very prevalent in the first century. The core of Gnosticism is the idea that people, through some sort of secret revealed knowledge, could be saved, or could finally escape the trouble that they have today.

That if they could just understand the true secrets of the world, that they would have happiness and joy and salvation. It held this negative view of the physical world.

It said everything physical was bad. That the physical was evil. And it believed that salvation was achieved if you could just escape and shed your physical nature.

If you could find that divine spark inside, they would say, you've been saved. You've reached enlightenment. The secret knowledge that they were promoting was this. how to guide.

[7 : 00] How to get rid of all your problems. How to escape pain. How to escape suffering. How to... But all those things missed the gospel. They laid aside the physical and they embraced some sort of divine, spiritual, ethereal self.

And I love to say that this isn't the case anymore. I love to say this heresy is gone and we don't see it in the church, but that's not the case. Today there are myriads and myriads of ways that this shows itself up in and outside the church.

You have Richard Rohr, a Franciscan priest who claims to be a Christian, writing on the mystical concept of a cosmic Christ. It teaches that Christ is some sort of universal cosmic presence that's in all things and available everywhere.

not just the son of God, but some sort of positive force. We have this new age spirituality that people say, I'm spiritual, but I'm not really religious.

They might look for some sort of power in the universe or finding some sort of higher self. You've got Eckhart Tolle's Power of Now, right? A book that claims that enlightenment comes from transcending thought and realizing your own unity with the divine conscience.

[8 : 19] You've got secret knowledge movements like Freemasonry and Scientology that say that you can learn enough secret truths to be saved. You've got books that are popular like The Secret or before that, Norman Vincent Peale's Power of Positive Thinking, which teach that fulfillment and happiness comes when you can master these hidden laws.

You can manifest things by just thinking about them. We see this in the church today even. We see this week after week on TV and in churches where preachers claim that Jesus died for our physical needs.

He died to make us rich. And so they will claim, we just need to say it, claim it, and you can learn the secrets. You can claim all the good stuff that God has promised you.

And while these all provide some sort of range of teaching and thoughts that reflect Gnostic teaching, they all cheapen or reduce the gospel.

They all reduce it to something that ignores the incarnation, that ignores the truth of what God says in his word. And while they don't all reject the idea of a physical world outright, most of these teachings reject reject the biblical truth of sin and hell.

[9 : 39] They reject the reality that we're sinners before God. They say that their problem is just our ignorance and we need to learn more.

But they rebel against God. They promote the idea that, see, salvation can be found outside of Jesus coming and dying. So against that backdrop of a culture and a heresy that is teaching the physical world is bad and all you gotta do is learn the secrets of good wisdom to be saved, keep in mind that rejection of the physical when we reread John chapter one, first John chapter one, verses one through four.

And Paul is telling these churches that which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we've seen with our eyes, which we looked upon, we touched with our hands, concerning the word of life, the life was made manifest and we have seen it and we testify to it and proclaim to you

eternal life, which was with the Father and was made manifest to us.

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 the Son, Jesus Christ. We are writing these things to you so that our joy may be complete.

So John's writing this to them to give them a true knowledge, right? The Gnostics said, I have knowledge for you. You gotta learn the secrets of the universe and learn all the secret knowledge.

[11 : 15] And John is saying, the true knowledge is what I'm proclaiming. The reality of what I have physically seen heard and touched, which is Jesus Christ, God made manifest.

And so that's what John is saying. John's saying, I'm gonna proclaim to you what I actually saw. But he uses this phrase, we, this plural pronoun over and over and over again.

He says, we have heard, we have seen, we proclaim. He says, us and our, our fellowship, our joy.

And John's just not forgetting how to use pronouns.

He's demonstrating and appealing to his apostolic witness, his apostolic witness. So when the apostles were to choose a replacement for Judas, there was a requirement.

What was a requirement for someone to be an apostle? They had to have spent with Jesus and had to have witnessed his resurrection. And so, John is saying, we have seen him, we have heard him, we have touched him, we know that Christ was physically here.

[12 : 32] Jesus told his disciples that they were gonna have to bear witness to the world about him.

He told them in John 15, 26 and 27, but when the helper comes whom I, whom I will send to you from the Father, the spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father, he will bear witness about me.

And you also will bear witness because you have been with me from the beginning. So John's use of we and us and our is meant to convey that he's going to tell them, sorry, that what he's gonna tell them comes from his experience as a disciple of Christ, an apostle among the other apostles.

He's speaking with apostolic authority and he appeals to that and to the collective, literal, firsthand, visceral, physical interactions with a real, physical Jesus.

He's saying, I know these Gnostic teachers say that Jesus was some sort of phantom, whether he was just there and not really real, but he's saying, hey, he wasn't just some vision, he wasn't some ethereal presence or a phantom.

I, we touched him. We heard him, we saw him. He was truly man and truly God incarnate. He was made manifest in the flesh.

[13 : 58] actually what he's proclaiming. He says, the life was made manifest and we have seen it and we testify to it and proclaim to you the eternal life which was with the Father and was made manifest to us.

That which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you so that you too may have fellowship with us. Indeed, our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ.

And then in verse 5 he says, this is a message we have heard from him and proclaim to you that God is light and in him is no darkness at all. Excuse me.

See, John's concern is that they really understand this. He wants them to really, truly understand that John and the other apostles saw, heard, and touched a real Jesus.

Because if Heresy was saying that Jesus was truly God but not truly man, John wants them to know he personally saw, heard, and touched a true human Jesus.

[15 : 11] And if the Heretics were saying that Jesus was not, was a human but not really God, John wants them to know Jesus was with the Father and he was made manifest.

He was revealed at the right time. Truly God and truly man. That's the point of the opening of the Gospel of John. Turn with me in your Bible to John chapter 1.

It's a very familiar passage to many of us. John chapter 1. The first 18 verses really is a good summarization of what John is saying here.

He says, In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God.

He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him and without him was not anything made that was made. In him was life and the life was the light of men.

[16 : 09] The light shines in the darkness and the darkness has not overcome it. There was a man sent from God whose name was John. He came as a witness to bear witness about the light that all might believe through him.

He was not the light but came to bear witness about the light. The true light which gives light to everyone was coming into the world. He was in the world and the world was made through him yet

the world did not know him.

He came to his own and his own people did not receive him. But to all who did receive him who became sorry who believed in his nature in his name he gave the right to become children of God who were born not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man but of God.

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.

John bore witness about him and cried out this is he of whom I said he who comes after me ranks before me because he was before me for from his fullness we have all received grace upon grace for the law was given through Moses grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.

[17 : 27] No one has ever seen God the only God who is at the father's side he has made him known. So these verses beautifully mirror the opening of 1st John and proclaim the same truth that John writes in his epistle.

Jesus Christ has entered the physical world that he created as a human being yet without sin. He was with God and he was with God and he entered into his creation.

Paul proclaims this same mystery and power of the incarnation in his epistle to the church at Philippi he writes have this mind among yourselves which is yours in Christ Jesus who though he was in the form of God did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped but emptied himself by taking the form of a servant being born in the likeness of men and being found in human form he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death even death on a cross therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed in him the name that is above every name so that the name of Jesus every tongue should bow in heaven and on earth and under the earth and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father so to John and to Paul and to the other apostles these aren't just nice little details that'd be good if we believed they're not just little details that don't matter because it really does matter who you believe

Jesus is it matters who you believe Jesus is maybe as you sit here you've attended this church for a while maybe you've been here for years maybe you've attended for weeks maybe today is your first time in church for a very long time but what matters right now is who do you say that Jesus is who do you believe Jesus is Lord willing next week we're going to look at Luke chapter 9 when Pastor Thompson returns verses 18 and 20 where Jesus asks his disciples including John who do you say that I am people around that Jesus had interacted with they had some answers Peter said that some of them thought that he was John the Baptist or maybe he was Elijah or one of the old prophets Jesus asks them who do you say that I am Peter responds that Jesus is the Christ of God which means the anointed one the Messiah and John is here in that discussion

John is hearing Peter's response and he's there a bit over a week later when he sees the transfiguration when he sees Jesus talking to Moses a prophet of old and Elijah and so if there was any doubt that Jesus was a prophet of old or was Elijah here is Jesus Christ talking to them not an incarnate Moses not Elijah or John the Baptist in fact at the transfiguration God the Father spoke from heaven and said this is my son my chosen one listen to him and so the question goes to you who do you say that Jesus was maybe you hear that and you think Jesus was a pretty good teacher maybe even he did some miracles maybe he healed some people but maybe you have difficulty with the idea that he could be

[21 : 19] God John told us that he has seen touched and heard Jesus what's so special about the fact that John saw a real Jesus see John witnessed Jesus life in his ministry he witnessed the transfiguration and eventually witnessed the crucifixion he probably witnessed his burial so John has seen all of these things happen in John 20 the very end of John he recounts that he had seen the empty tomb where Jesus had been buried and then in chapter 20 verses 19 onwards Jesus appears to his disciples multiple times in John 20 19 and 21 it says on the evening of that day the first day of the week the doors being locked where the disciples were for fear of the Jews

Jesus came and stood among them and said to them peace be with you when he had said this he showed them his hands and his side then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord Jesus said to them peace be with you as the father has sent me even so I am sending you and then a bit later now Thomas one of the twelve called the twin was not with them and Jesus came so the other disciples told him we have seen the Lord but he said to them unless I see the hands in his so that let's I see his hands the mark of the nails and place my finger in the mark of the nails and place my hand into his side I will never believe eight days later his disciples were inside again Thomas was with them although the doors were locked Jesus came and stood among them and said peace be

with you then he said to Thomas put your finger here and see my hands put your hand and place it in my side do not disbelieve but believe

Thomas answered him my Lord and my God Jesus said to him have you believed and then Jesus appeared to his disciples again on the sea of Tiberias in John chapter 21 4 through 7 it says just as day was breaking Jesus stood on the shore yet the disciples did not know that it was Jesus Jesus said to them children do you have any fish they answered him no he said to them cast the net on the side of the boat and you will find some so they cast it and now they were not able to haul it in because of the quantity of fish that disciple whom Jesus loved John therefore said to Peter it is the Lord the son Peter heard that it was the Lord he put his outer garment on for he was stripped for work and threw himself into the sea so we have these apostles these disciples who have seen heard and

Jesus says I will send you as the father sent me even so I'm sending you so my question for you again who do you say that Jesus is who do you say he is to John and the other apostles he's not just a great teacher he's not just a great human he's both God and man the word of God made flesh sent into the world as both God and man sent into the world as both the shepherd to redeem his sheep and the lamb to be the sacrifice the God and creator of the world totally outside creation for all intents and purposes no need to enter in to creation for all intents and purposes could be totally far away as he wanted to be but this high and mighty and glorious

God took on flesh the far junior God became incarnate and dwelled among men this is a testimony in the proclamation of the apostle John and it matters whether or not you accept it it matters whether or not you believe that Jesus has come in the flesh has lived was died and rose from the dead because John says that belief leads to fellowship belief leads to fellowship with the father and the son fellowship with God requires belief in what these apostles have been proclaiming they have fellowship with the father and son they proclaim the gospel so that you can be a good company with them proclaim the gospel so that you too could have fellowship with them and with God he says in John chapter 1 1 John 1 3 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 his son

[26 : 49] Jesus Christ remember Jesus prayer in John 17 we'll have to refer to this as the high priestly! before he was arrested and in John 17 20 and 21 he's praying to the father and he says I do not ask for these only but also for those who believe in me through their word John John have been preaching people have been believing in God because of John's preaching of the word so these churches John's writing to are people who have believed in him through John's word Jesus is asking I ask for them that they may all be one just as you father are in me and I in you that they may also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me do you see this connection between what John heard Jesus praying for and he was with him and what his heart is for the church he's writing to

Jesus prayed for those that would believe in him through the words of the apostles specifically in this verse he prayed!

communion be together as one in the same way that the trinity has fellowship that we as Christians would be in them and them in us and the result of that would be that the world would see our love but they would see our fellowship with each other and with God and believe that God had sent Christ let me read this again he says I ask not only for these but for those also who believe in me through their word that they may all be one just as you father are in me and I in you that they may also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me our fellowship with one another our fellowship with God is proof to the world that Christ has come into the world!

Jesus is praying that they would believe that Christ was the incarnate Son of God that they would proclaim it to others who would proclaim it to others who would proclaim it to others so that generation after generation of gospel proclaimers who heard it from Christ who then heard it from his apostles who then heard it from those who heard it from the apostles would believe and that's what it means to have fellowship with John and the apostles believing and proclaiming the truth that's taught by Christ that was then proclaimed by the apostles hearing the truth that's been declared today John saw Jesus desire and prayer for fellowship and it drove his desire to see truth defended heresy defeated and union with Christ enjoyed by the believer as well as the church as a whole see

God made us to fellowship with him he made us to have fellowship with each other and John says you have fellowship with us and we have fellowship with God and we're writing these things so that

you would believe that you would have fellowship with us John also says in chapter four chapter one verse four we're writing these things so that our joy may be complete writing these things so that our joy may be complete now your Bible may note what we call a textual variant in verse four if you've got the King James version it probably says that your joy may be full and ESV and many other translations say our joy may be complete we recently discussed this in our young adult study school class there are a few reasons for textual variants like this why does one version say that our joy may be complete and one version say your joy may be complete whose joy really is being discussed here the oldest

[31 : 13] Greek manuscripts we have of John 1st John has this phrase our joy and the ones have your joy and just like it's one letter difference in English it's one letter difference in the Greek and when translators look at these manuscripts and try to figure out what is the real intent the author was trying to say what does the original manuscript have with the newer ones having a different one than the older ones they look at the words they look at human understanding what's human nature what would cause someone to write this differently and the thought is like a scribe was copying this down from a manuscript and read the phrase our joy may be complete and thought that's weird your joy makes more sense than our joy maybe the prior scribe miswrote it and so they tried to fix it and they changed what was our joy to your joy but I think the ESV and the NASB and the NIV render it correctly not just because our joy appears in the oldest manuscripts but because it shows

John's pastoral and apostolic heart John's desire is that these people know the truth his desires they understand that he saw he heard he touched a real Jesus and his knowledge that they understand and hold to that brings him joy John wrote in 2 John chapter 12 I'm sorry chapter 1 verse 12 though I have much to write to you I'd rather not use paper and ink instead I hope to come to you and talk face to face so that our joy may be complete and in a similar vein in 3 John chapter 4 sorry 3 John verse 4 he says I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in truth so John is saying I'm proclaiming these things to you

I'm telling you what I saw what I heard what I touched because your obedience to the truth your holding fast to what's true brings me joy I want to know that you're holding fast to true doctrine I want to know that people aren't misleading you by heresy and so I have no greater joy than to know my children are walking in truth and in 1 John 1 4 we're writing these things so that our joy may be complete John cares a lot that his churches hold fast to what's true Matthew Henry in his commentary on this passage says the best evidence of our having truth is our walking in the truth good men will greatly rejoice in the soul prosperity of others and they're glad to hear of the grace and goodness of others so it matters if we walk in the truth it matters because it is good it makes it made the apostle

John joyful to know that his children were walking in truth but as we close I think we can look at this and feel a little bit disappointed right we can feel disappointed that we don't get to see hear or touch Jesus we really kind of fall in that group of people that Jesus talked to Thomas about right blessed are those who don't see and still believe where people who have to follow like John's example here his testimony that he saw he touched he heard and believe what he wrote we need to avoid the false doctrine that might sound so positive but in the end it's deceptive lies pull us away from Christ we need to avoid teaching that tells us that we could just know more or do more that we would be happy that we would be saved that our life would go better need to be people that proclaim and proclaim and proclaim the truth of the gospel need to be people that tell others the reality of Jesus Christ coming into the world the word made flesh truly God and truly man to redeem sinners it was John's desire that his church his people continue to grow continue to become more and more like Christ so don't let your hearing of the gospel today be where it stops you can hear you can hear the gospel preached and you can then testify and proclaim to others but the good news really is that Jesus Christ has come he's come and he's entered this world as a baby he lived a sinless life died a death he didn't deserve rose again seen by others seen by many many others Paul attests to this in first Timothy 3:16 where he writes great indeed we confess is the mystery of godliness he was manifested in the flesh vindicated by the spirit seen by angels proclaimed among the nations believed on in the world taken up into glory taken up into glory don't forget that what went up was been promised to come back down

[37 : 14] Christ has come he's been manifested in the flesh John and the apostles saw heard and touched him and then he was taken up into heaven but there was a promise in Acts chapter 1 when men are watching Jesus be taken into heaven the angels said men of Galilee why are you looking

into heaven this Jesus who is taken up from you into heaven will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven see one day one day those who have believed this testimony those who have put their hope in this eternal life one day they'll see him that's promised in Revelation chapter 1 verse 7 it says behold he is coming with the clouds and every eye will see him even those who pierced him all the tribes of the earth will wail on account of him even so amen see every eye will one day see

Jesus whether you put your trust in him today or not every eye if you've died and you're raised from the dead you will see Jesus what will your hope be in what will your hope be in when you see Jesus will you be those of the tribes of the earth that will wail on account of him John later in this epistle in chapter 3 encourages the church with what's going to happen when Christ returns he says beloved we are God's children now what we will be has not yet appeared but we know that when he appears we shall all be like him because we shall see him as he is we will see him as he is and that will make us today who struggle with sin who struggle with fear who struggle in our flesh to be made like him see one day we will see him one day we will hear him and one day we will touch him and so we like the apostle

John at the end of the book of revelation say with him come Lord Jesus let me pray Lord I thank you for your word I thank you that you've given the apostle John a vision of you personally while he was here while you were here on earth that he interacted with you he saw you he heard you touched you and then after your resurrection again seeing you touching you hearing you Lord we look forward to the day when you return and we too our faith will become sight and we will see you and we will be changed to be like you and that our hope and our faith will be in the one who is pierced for our sins Lord help us to reflect on this today to worship you in Jesus name amen