

## “A Life Like No Other: Jesus the Incarnate Word”

### I John 1:1-4

**Introduction:** 1) Christianity stands or falls on the person and work of Jesus Christ. It succeeds or fails on whether or not a true and genuine incarnation actually took place in space and time.

2) The options as to who Jesus is and what Jesus did can basically be reduced to 4:

- 1) Liar – He was not who He claimed to be and knew it.
- 2) Lunatic – He was not who He thought He was but did not know it.
- 3) Legend – He was not who others later imagined Him to be.
- 4) Lord – He is who He said He is and His birth, life, death, and resurrection prove it to be true.

3) In our 21<sup>st</sup> Century context we constantly face confusion, distortions, inaccuracies and outright denials of the Jesus revealed in the Bible. This is nothing new. The apostle John faced the same challenges in the 1<sup>st</sup> century and penned First John to “set the record straight”. He knew that it was absolutely essential to get the “Jesus question” right!

4) John, the son of Zebedee and a brother of James, the first apostle to be martyred (Acts 12:2), wrote 5 books of the N. T.

- The gospel of John to convert sinners
- The epistles of John to confirm the saints

- The Revelation to John to coronate the Savior

5) John is a wonderful author who always gives us his purpose for writing. In his gospel the key is located at the end in John 20:31 where he writes, “but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name”. In Revelation the key is deposited at the front in Rev. 1:19 where he says, “Write therefore the things that you have seen, those that are and those that are to take place after this.” In I John, however, there are 4 keys that are scattered throughout the 5 chapters and 105 verses that help us unlock this much beloved letter:

- 1) I John 1:4 - to promote full joy in the family of God
- 2) I John 2:1 - to prevent sin in the family of God
- 3) I John 2:26 - to protect from false teachers in the family of God
- 4) I John 5:13 - to provide assurance of salvation in the family of God

6) In this book, written from Ephesus in c. A.D. 80-95 most likely to churches in Asia Minor (modern Turkey), 3 important themes are linked to the 4 keys that open the doors to the wonderful truths we discover in this letter:

- Right belief in Jesus
- Right obedience to God’s commands
- Right love for one another

These themes provide what I call “avenues of assurance”, concrete means whereby I can know that I am a Christian. You see the gospel of John was written that we might have eternal life (John 20:31). I John was written that we might know we have eternal life. By repeatedly applying these avenues of assurance, John will expose those who profess Christ but do not know Him and He will assure those who know Christ but may have doubts that they do. In other words it is possible to know Christ and have doubts. It is also possible to profess Christ and be a liar.

7) I John 1:1-4 constitutes the introduction to this general epistle. The book mentions neither a specific author nor a specific audience. There is great timelessness to the truths we will encounter in this letter that are true anywhere, anyplace, anytime and under any circumstances for the community of faith that confesses Jesus is Lord, keeps the commandments of the Father, and loves one another. John begins in this prologue by putting before us 3 great truths about Jesus. In so doing he says, “Look! Here Is A Life Like No Other!”

## **I. Have a passion to know this life 1:1-2**

- These verses are 1 of 4 great beginnings in the Bible:
  - Genesis 1:1 → Creation
  - Mark 1:1 → The Gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God
  - John 1:1 → The Word who is God and was there in the beginning

- 1 John 1:1 → The incarnate Son who became a man in the person of Jesus of Nazareth
- John wants us to know and know rightly this “word of life” who invaded space and time and who makes it possible for us to have fellowship, an eternal intimacy, with the one true God (v. 3).
- Four times the word “which” occurs in vs. 1 allowing John to draw attention to 2 important truths concerning this life that is like no other.

#### 1) He is divine

- The Son Jesus Christ (v. 3) is “that which was from the beginning” (v. 1) and is “the eternal life, which was with the Father” (v. 3). Jesus Christ, who is the Father’s Son (v. 3), has always eternally existed with the Father as God. There has never been a time when the Son was not. Never. He was before the beginning, in the beginning, and from the beginning. This is what John believed. This is what Jesus taught.
- Jesus Himself boldly declared in John 8:58, “before Abraham was, I am” (the God of Ex. 3:14), in John 10:30, “I and the Father are one”, and in John 14:9, “Whoever has seen me has seen the Father.”

- This life is the life of undiminished deity made flesh in Jesus of Nazareth. There never was a time when the Son was not and there will never be a time when He will not be.

## 2) He is human

- John now presents a rigorous defense of the real and genuine humanity of Jesus as an apostle and friend of Jesus, as one who was an eyewitness of all that He said and did. This is neither hearsay nor is it a second hand account. The apostle presents what John Piper has called “the stumbling block of the incarnation” (“Eternal Life Has Appeared in Christ”, 1-27-85). John says concerning this word of life 4 things: 1) We heard (W.A.R) Him with our ears. John repeats this in v. 3 for emphasis. 2) We saw (W.A.R) Him with our eyes. John states this 3 times for emphasis in each of the first 3 verses. Furthermore, we “looked upon” Him. There was an intentional, intense and continuous gazing, contemplation of this man named Jesus. For 3 years we watched and observed his every move. 3) We touched Him with our hands. He was a real flesh and blood human being. He was no ghost or phantom. 4) We testify (pre. tense) and proclaim (pre. tense) with our mouths, as bonafide eyewitnesses this “eternal life, which was with the Father and was made manifest (*NIV*,

“appeared”) to us. Notice again how John uses repetition. Twice he says the eternal life was manifested to us in Jesus Christ. We present for anyone to consider an audible, visible and tangible witness of Jesus the word of life, the eternal life.

- Let me make both a historical and theological observation at this point.
- Historically John is countering an early form of what is called “gnosticism”, a word that means knowledge. Gnostics appeared in a number of varieties but they all had 2 basic convictions in common: 1) matter is evil (or at least inferior) and 2) salvation is by mystical, even secretive, knowledge. This bred extreme arrogance and pride among its tribe and it led them to deny with great fervency a true and genuine incarnation of the Christ. One camp called “docetists” (meaning “to appear”) claimed Jesus was a ghost or phantom. He only appeared to be human. Another camp led by a man named Cerenthus said the Christ-spirit came upon and empowered the man Jesus at His baptism, but left him at the cross. John deals with the docetists here in 1:1-4. He will take on Cerenthus in 5:6-12.
- Theologically it is imperative that we understand the essential nature of the doctrine of the incarnation. The biblical Jesus is no myth, fairy

tale or fable. He is no ghost or illusion. He is indeed the God who took on full humanity. “The Word became flesh” (John 1:14). And, Jesus Christ is fully God and fully man. He is not ½ God and ½ man, all God and no man, all man and no God. He is not simply a man uniquely in touch with the divine. No, He is the God-man who is like no one else who will ever live. He has always been with the Father and at Bethlehem He came to be with us. This is the scandal, the stumbling block of the incarnation. John Piper says it so very, very well: “Many are willing to believe in Christ if he remains a merely spiritual reality. But when we preach that Christ has become a particular man in a particular place issuing particular commands and dying on a particular cross exposing the particular sins of our particular lives, then the preaching ceases to be acceptable for many.

#### When God Becomes Man...

I don't think it is so much the mystery of a divine and human nature in one person that causes most people to stumble over the doctrine of the incarnation. The stumbling block is that if the doctrine is true, every single person in the world must obey this one particular Jewish man. Everything he says is law. Everything he did is perfect. And the particularity of his work and word flow out into history in the

form of a particular inspired book (written in the particular languages of Greek and Hebrew) that claims a universal authority over every other book that has ever been written.

This is the stumbling block of the incarnation – when God becomes a man, he strips away every pretense of man to be God. We can no longer do our own thing; we must do what this one Jewish man wants us to do. We can no longer pose as self-sufficient, because this one Jewish man says we are all sick with sin and must come to him for healing. We can no longer depend on our own wisdom to find life, because this one Jewish man who lived for 30 obscure years in a little country in the Middle East says, “I am the way the truth the life.”

When God becomes a man, man ceases to be the measure of all things, and this man becomes the measure of all things. This is simply intolerable to the rebellious heart of men and women. The incarnation is a violation of the bill of human rights written by Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. It is totalitarian. It’s authoritarian! Imperialism! Despotism! Usurpation! Absolutism! Who does he think he is!

GOD!”

- In a letter dated March 9, 1790, Benjamin Franklin said, “As to Jesus of Nazareth...I think the system of morals and his religion, as he left them to us, the best the world ever saw or is likely to see; but I apprehend it has received various corrupting changes, and I have, with most of the present dissenters in England; some doubts as to his divinity; tho’ it is a question I do not dogmatize upon having never studied it, and think it needless to busy myself with it now...”
- I would submit it is never needless to busy ourselves with Jesus. We should all have a passion to know this life. And we should...

## II. Have a passion to share this life

1:3

The impact that Jesus has on his followers cannot be put into words. They were radically changed and really did “turn the world upside down.” The impact of “this life like no other” compelled them to take Him and His gospel to the nations. They simply believed they must. They had no choice. What they had experienced in Jesus they wanted others to experience too.

### 1) We want to invite everyone into our fellowship

- Verse 3 begins with a repetition of the phrase “that which we have seen and heard.” As we noted earlier, “seeing” is highlighted in each of the first 3 verses. Interestingly, the main verb of the prologue does not appear until now in verse 3. It is the word “proclaim.” It means

to “declare” (*HCSB, NASV*), “announce” (*GNT, NET*). John says we cannot remain silent about this eternal life-giving word. What we have heard, seen, looked upon and touched we must share with others. We will testify and bear witness to Jesus Christ, and we will proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ. And to what end?

- “So that you too may have fellowship with us.” John speaks of fellowship 4 times in his letters, all in 1:3-7. The word is *koinonia* and it speaks of a common sharing in something significant and important. It entails the joy and oneness in a group of people who are together on something that really matters. You share common values, beliefs and goals. You love the same things. You pursue a common agenda. John so loved the church, the believing community of faith in Jesus, that he wanted to invite everyone to become a part. No one was to be excluded from this invitation. No one would be denied entrance who came by the way of Jesus, the word who gives life, eternal life (a life of both quality and quantity). The moment you enter into a personal relationship with Him, this life is yours. And, this fellowship is yours too.

## 2) We want to invite everyone into our family

- The fellowship that exists between followers of Jesus is far richer and deeper than that of a college fraternity or sorority. It is far richer and deeper than of a favorite sport's team or community club. It is far richer and deeper than even that of national identity or ethnic heritage. It is the "fellowship of family" that transcends any and all artificial barriers that have afflicted the human race since the fall.
- By means of the incarnation and His perfect atoning sacrifice (2:2), we are now a "fellowship family" with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ. When Jesus becomes our Savior, God becomes our Father. And, it is a package deal. Later in 2:23 John will write, "No one who denies the Son has the Father. Whoever confesses the Son has the Father also."
- Unlike every other religion in the world, Christianity brings us into intimate relationship with a God who is Savior and Father. And, He is a perfect Savior and a perfect heavenly Father. Further, you get a whole bunch of brothers and sisters thrown in as well, "from every tribe and language and people and nation" (Rev. 7:9).
- It is important to never forget you and I have more in common with a Chinese Christian, an African sister and a Hispanic brother in

South America than a next door neighbor who does not know Christ. And never forget, this eternal life that has transformed us is the eternal life we must proclaim to our neighbor here and among the nations that they might become family! We continually want to add more.

### III. Have a passion to enjoy this life **1:4**

- God is glorified in us when we find our joy in Him. A common theology, a common Savior, a common Father and a common experience of joy unites all who have come to know this life that is like no other, Jesus the incarnate Word. These common blessings are woven into a beautiful tapestry throughout 1 John and they are highlighted by the 4 keys we noted earlier, keys that are introduced with the common phrase “we (or “I”) are writing these things...”

#### 1) Promote joy that is full **1:4**

- John wrote this letter “so that our joy may be complete.” Not partial. Complete! Full! All we could want or ever need. John is echoing the words he had heard from Jesus:
  - John 15:11: “These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be 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.”

There is a fullness of joy that is ours in our shared life with Jesus.

That fullness of joy is ours thru our friendship with one another and with God who is now our Father. And, all of it made possible by the gospel of Jesus Christ, God’s Son.

## 2) Press on in holiness 2:1

Christians never became “sinless” in this life but they should “sin less” as they enjoy their new life in Christ. This striving to be more and more like Jesus (and note the incredible promise of 3:2!) is a life of joy lived not out of obligation, but gratitude, gospel gratitude, because Jesus died the death we should have died (2:2) and He lived the life we should have lived (2:6). This life of holiness is marked particularly by joy keeping Christ’s commandments (2:3) and loving one another (2:10).

## 3) Pursue correct doctrine 2:26

When John wrote a letter to help us enjoy Jesus, the word of life, he filled it with theology. This theology is doctrinal and it is practical. It is also pastoral. Thus he warns us concerning those who would deceive us, those he marks in the most striking manner with the designation “antichrists” (2:18, 22; 4:3; 2 John 7). John believed theology mattered

and so should we. Our joy which is made complete in fellowship with the Father, His Son Jesus Christ, and one another is grounded in a shared theology. To enjoy this life we must believe the theology about this word of life. There can be no cafeteria approach to Jesus Christ, where we pick what we want and leave what we don't. John had no interest in a "Jesus minus theology" or a "Jesus plus theology." Thabiti Anyabwile says it like this, "To receive the Word of life is to embrace Jesus as He offers himself in the gospel. That phrase—"as He offers himself in the gospel"—is very important. We must receive Jesus—the Word of life, the eternal life, the Son of God—not as we imagine Him to be, or as we like to think of Him, or as someone else believes Him to be. We do not truly receive Jesus if we do not accept Him as He defines himself.

We know that we are Christians and have received God's salvation when we humbly accept the Word of life, which means to believe in Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who appeared in our flesh, was crucified to take our punishment for our sin, was raised from the grave three days later for our justification with God, and is coming again to bring the fullness of God's kingdom. Is that the Jesus you have received?"

- John knew it was possible to be saved and doubt. Those who deny this must deny 1 John 5:13. I believe he also knew that doubt will discourage us, cause us to fear, lose confidence, and negatively impact our joy. So he wrote these 5 chapters to provide assurance that we are in the family because we have believed, trusted, Jesus the Son of God.
- Anyone who says “if you are 99% certain you are saved you are 100% lost is a false teacher, at least they are concerning this important theological truth. John does not want us to wonder if we are saved. He wants us to have assurance that we are saved. First and foremost look to Christ and believe. Look to the cross and trust. Then examine your obedience. Examine your love life. Avenues of assurance are found on every corner in 1 John.

**Conclusion:** In A.D. 325 the church gathered in Nicea (in modern day Turkey). The issue on the table was “who is the Son? A popular Presbyter from Alexandria named Arius said, “the Son had a beginning...the Son was not always...there was a time when he was not. God was not always Father.” Two men named Alexander and Athanasius strongly opposed this view, believing that biblical truth and the doctrine of salvation itself hung in the balance. In God’s providence the Arians were defeated, and what we know as “The Nicene Creed” was set forth as the biblical and orthodox understanding of who Jesus is. A beautiful balance is struck

between His deity and humanity. A beautiful balance is struck between His person and work. In glad confession and worship, may we also confess with our spiritual fathers that this too we believe!

### The Nicene Creed

I believe in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and Earth, and of all things visible and invisible.

And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, begotten of the Father before all worlds; God of God, Light of Light, Very God of very God; begotten, not made, being of one substance With the Father, by whom all things were made.

Who, for us men and for our salvation, came down from heaven, and was incarnate by the Holy Spirit of the virgin Mary, and was made man; and was crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate; He suffered and was buried; and the third day He rose again, according to the Scriptures; and ascended into heaven, and sits on the right hand of the Father; and He shall come again, with glory, to judge the quick and the dead; whose kingdom shall have no end.