



**SERIES: Authentic Christian Community**

**By Pastor Bryan Clark**

**Message Title: The Joy of Authentic Christian Community**

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I invite you to turn with us to 1 John, Chapter 1. John is the author of this letter. He is the same John who wrote the Gospel of John. He is the Apostle John and there are a lot of similarities between the Gospel of John and his letter here. John is writing to the churches in Asia Minor that, at one time, were flourishing but at the time of the writing of this letter, they are coming unraveled. And they're coming unraveled because of false teachers who have questioned both the person and the work of Jesus, and everything is starting to fall apart. So it's like John doesn't feel like he has time to say, "Hey, how's it going? Grace and peace." It's like right from the first sentence, "Here's the deal."

All right, Verse 1:

**What was from the beginning...** (\*NASB, 1 John 1:1a)

Now if you are familiar with the Gospel of John, a very similar start. The Gospel of John, Chapter 1, Verse 1: **In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.** It's a very similar introduction here. The idea is that John is going to be talking about the person and work of Jesus. And quickly he identifies that Jesus did not start at Christmas—that Jesus is the eternal God. He has been from the beginning and that will be an important part of this theology. It reminds us of His deity, that added humanity. In theological terms, we refer to this as the *hypostatic union of Christ*. Probably write that down; share it with a work associate tomorrow; they'll be very impressed. But it actually is the fullness of the doctrine of the *deity* of Christ and the *humanity* of Christ.

**What was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands,** (Vs. 1a-d)

So John is saying, "This isn't second-hand information. I heard this directly out of the mouth of Jesus." Second of all **...what we have seen with our eyes...**they're eyewitnesses to the events that are recorded...**what we have looked at...** Now we would say in English, "Isn't *what I have seen* and *what I have looked at* the same thing? But these are two distinct Greek words. *What I have looked at* is a translation of the Greek word from which we get our English word *theatre*. It means to *look intently*; it means to *scrutinize*. You think about when you go to the theatre; you aren't really going there to carry on a conversation. You're going there with the intent to watch. And you're not just going to watch; you're going to be a bit of a critic, and you are going to decide if you like it or you don't like it. That's kind of the roots of this word that John is saying: "We didn't just see it; we scrutinized it. We studied it; we determined whether it's true or not." And then finally **...what we have touched with our hands.** That's a Greek word used to describe a blind person touching and feeling something to figure out what it was. It's a

multisensory experience: we *heard* Jesus; we *saw* Jesus; we *scrutinized* Jesus; we *touched* Jesus. There is a reminder that the record of the Gospels and the record of the New Testament are about those people that were eye-witnesses—that saw, heard, touched and scrutinized the person and work of Jesus. It's very easy for somebody two thousand years later, pushing an agenda, to say, "I don't think it's true." But what would be the basis by which that claim could be made? The Gospels are outstanding records of history. No matter how you scrutinize them, they emerge as more credible and more reliable than any other historical document of ancient history.

So what would be the basis by which we would say they are not true? You also have to wrestle with the fact that virtually all of the New Testament was written within the lifetime of the eyewitnesses to the events that are recorded. If what's recorded in the Gospels and in the Epistles was not true, the message of Christianity would have been quickly discredited, and the movement would have faded into the sunset. But actually, just the opposite happened. Christianity virtually exploded, and the biggest explosion was in Jerusalem itself where the events took place. The only explanation for that is, that the events recorded were so believable, the evidence was so overwhelming, even Pharisees and priests by the thousands turned to Christ.

So, John is saying, "Hey wait a minute. I heard it directly out of the mouth of Jesus. I saw it; I scrutinized it; I even touched Him and I'm telling you this is what's true." So he's kind of establishing those credentials. It's all true!

End of Verse 1:

### **...concerning the Word of Life - (Vs. 1e)**

Now John is the only New Testament writer who refers to Jesus as **the Word**. The Greek word is *the Logos*. In his Gospel, **in the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God**. And then Verse 12...**the Word became flesh**. When he's talking about **the Word**, he's talking about that which has manifested or revealed the invisible God. It's exactly what Paul says in Colossians, that Jesus is the visible manifestation of the invisible God. He is God's *living Word* to us.

Think of it this way: If you've come in and I'm just sitting there, you can assess a few things about me—but it's very limited. But when I start talking, the more you understand me, the more I reveal *me*. And in an oral culture, that would have been the idea of *the Logos*—the Word - that Jesus was God's revelation to us, that we might know Him more fully. It's the **Word of Life!**

Now that's something to ponder. "Where does life come from?" It's nonsensical to think that something comes from nothing—that life just suddenly *poofs* into existence. There has to be some explanation for why there is *something* rather than *nothing* and, "What is the origin of life? What is the fountainhead? Where does it come from?" Oftentimes Christianity is portrayed as a bunch of non-thinking people who just believe stuff by faith and the rest of the world goes kind-of-by science and the facts. But we would totally disagree with that.

We would say the Christian worldview is the lens through which everything else in the world makes sense. It's the most reasonable explanation for everything in the world. One of those would be, "Where does life come from?" It would have to come from someone who has always existed—in **the beginning**—someone who is eternal, who actually is the fountainhead, who is the very source of life. So when Jesus is introduced as the **Word of Life**, it's saying, "Jesus isn't just alive. Jesus is the essence of life. Jesus is the fountainhead of life. Jesus is the source of

life.” When you are talking about quality of life, the life that is found in Jesus is the ultimate that life has to offer. So, it causes us to think about life in a little different way.

**...concerning the Word of Life—and the life was manifested...** (Vs. 1e-2a)

That Greek word translated *manifested* is a word that means *to make known something that previously existed*. So it’s saying: Jesus and this life have always existed but, in a moment in time, it **was manifested**; it was made known.

**and the life was manifested, and we have seen and testify and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was manifested to us -** (Vs. 2)

So what is the descriptive of this life, which is the essence of life, which is the fountainhead of life, which is life at its finest? And the answer is: *eternal life*.

This is one of those phrases that we throw around a lot in Christianity. I’m not sure we always understand what we’re saying. What do we mean by *eternal life*? There is a *duration* of life and that’s what most people think about. But there’s also a *quality* of life that defines *eternal life*. It’s the very life that defined God for all eternity. It’s as pure and as right and as fulfilling as could possibly be. And that’s **eternal life**—it’s a quality *and* a duration of life.

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Verse 3 then:

**what we have seen and heard we proclaim to you also,** (Vs. 3a)

Now from Verse 1 all the way through Verse 4, it’s one long, run-on sentence in the Greek language. And interestingly enough, you don’t get the main verb until Verse 3. If you have an NIV, they put it in Verse 1, but in the Greek language, it’s Verse 3—and I think John intended it that way. There’s a building effect, and then kind of this crescendo, that he’s an eye witness: he has heard; he has seen; he has scrutinized; he has touched this One, who is the very essence of life, who has always existed, who has now been made known to us.

And the reason we proclaim Him to you is, Verse 3:

**so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father,  
and with His Son Jesus Christ. These things we write, so that our joy may be made complete.** (Vs. 3b-4)

What John says is, the reason we proclaim this to you is because of what has happened between us and God, and it is so magnificent, that we are inviting you to share the same. What they have experienced with God Himself is *Koinonia*—the Greek word translated *fellowship*. Now when we think of fellowship, we maybe think of cookies and punch in the Fellowship Hall, or something like that. It’s really not a term most of us use a lot. But the Greek word basically meant *to share in common with*. It was used to describe business partners; it was used to describe two people who owned the same piece of property. It was used to describe intimacy in a marriage. It was used to describe anything that people shared in common, but it’s used in this

context to say that the apostles were invited in, to experience the life that exists between the Father and the Son.

Now the emphasis here is between the Father and the Son, because Jesus is the one being questioned. But in all its fullness, it would be the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. To understand the doctrine of the Trinity, is necessary to understand God is a relational being. God didn't *become* relational—it's the very essence of who He is. God didn't *become* love—it's the very essence of who He is. God didn't, at some point, *give*—it's the very essence of who He is. It's the very defining mark and essence of God. Basically, when you read through the Bible from Genesis to Revelation, what you find is this consistent message that the Father glorifies the Son; the Son glorifies the Spirit; the Spirit glorifies the Son; the Spirit glorifies the Father. In other words, there was this relationship between the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, that defined the *essence of life*, and it's always defined the essence of life. It has always been.

To understand to *glorify the Son*, you might think in terms of *celebrating*. The Father celebrates the Son; the Son celebrates the Spirit; the Son celebrates the Father. The members of the Trinity celebrated one another. The very essence of that is: *to give oneself away*. And, as the Father, the Son and the Spirit have done that for all eternity, that is life at its very best. That is the very definition; that's the very *essence of life*!

Theologians down through the years have referred to this as the *Dance of God*. What John is saying, is that for all eternity, this is the life that has defined God—that at a point in time, through the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus, that God has actually invited the apostles to join in the dance and now they proclaim the message as a way of saying, "We're inviting you to join us in the dance!" That's what he's saying in Verse 3. "This is why we proclaim this to you, that you too might experience the life that your soul so longs for."

This is why it is so important to understand The Gospel is not merely a *ticket to Heaven*. That would be the equivalent of thinking the purpose of having a baby is to merely go through delivery. So I have three girls. You say, "Do you have three girls?" "Yes, we've had three babies." "What are they doing today?" "I don't know; we left them at the hospital. (*Laughter*) The whole purpose was to just have a baby and we didn't even bother to bring them home." I mean, we would say, "That makes no sense!" The whole point of having a baby is to have a baby. It's to bring the child home; it's to love on the child. It's to pour into the child, to give yourself away to the child, to experience this deep, honest love and connection with that child, that's unlike any other relationship. It is to experience the joy of all that. That's the whole point! It's about the relationship that flows out of having a child.

What John is saying is that Jesus didn't offer a *ticket to Heaven*. He offered an invitation into a passionate love affair that has defined the very essence of God for all eternity - the invitation to the apostles - and the apostles proclaim to us today an invitation to join the dance. The result is Verse 4—a life of **joy**. The end result of true community is our souls are filled with joy. We have found the life that our souls have been longing for, and the result is joy; it's the satisfaction, the sense that, "This is what I've always been thirsty for."

And I want to raise two questions for you to think about. Number one: Would you honestly, in your heart of hearts, define your relationship with Jesus as a passionate love affair? "This is what gets me out of bed in the morning; this is what puts a smile on my face; this is what puts joy in my heart; this is the very essence of my life. This defines life for me: I'm madly in love with this One who's redeemed me and invited me into the dance." It's very easy over time to

reduce The Gospel down to a *ticket to Heaven*. If that's true for you, my question would be, "Are you going to settle for that? Is that really all you want, or is it possible that you would open up your heart to consider maybe there's something more—something deeper, something richer, something far more satisfying?"

My second question would be: Honestly, in your heart of hearts, do you really have deep, authentic, meaningful relationships with other people—relationships that breathe life into your soul? I'm not asking, "Do you know people?" I'm not asking, "Do you invite people into your living room once a week?" I'm not asking if you have an accountability partner. I'm asking, "Do you really have deep, authentic, meaningful relationships with people that breathe life into your soul?" If not, why not? And if not, are you willing to settle for that? Or are you willing to open your heart to the possibility there could be so much more?

If what you're hearing me say is, that people need to be nicer to me; people need to love me more; people need to accept me into their group; people need to be better to me; I need to belong; you have totally misunderstood me. And if that's how you are going to pursue community, I guarantee you, you will never find it. You will suck the life out of every relationship you are involved in. You cannot experience deep, authentic community as a consumer. The very essence of the life of God itself is to *give yourself away*—not to passively sit back and hope somebody loves on you, but to actively say, "I'm going to be that person, flowing out of my passionate relationship with Jesus. I'm going to be that person that loves on other people. I'm going to be that person that seeks deeper, more authentic relationships with people. I'm going to be that person that breathes life into another person's soul. I'm going to be that person that helps motivate people to love Jesus more."

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So all of us are impacted by our culture, probably a lot more than we realize. That's just what it is. And one dramatic change I think in our culture has been the loss of community. There's lots of different ways to talk about this, but it is interesting to think about. There was a time when communication was all oral. That went basically up to about the First Century. Just the nature of oral communication is people had to be relational. You had to be face to face with people to communicate. The Greeks kind of brought in a different communication, which was a literate style. And so you think about the difference of a group of people, around a fire, telling stories and communicating. And you contrast that with a person all alone, reading a book in front of a fireplace. It's not to say one is better, but that's the level of change that's happened over time. So then in more modern history, you think about the television, which now people don't go out. They stay home. We have air conditioning, we have heat, we have garage door openers. So more and more we get isolated. When I was in college, if you wanted to use the computer, you went to a computer lab. Now you have your personal computer, even the name of that's interesting. Now you have a personal phone. Again, it's not saying that's right or wrong, it's just think about what's changed. There was a time when games were something we played to be together. Now games in many ways isolate us, as people play video games, or games on their phones by themselves. Music used to be something we gathered to do together. Now, we put on headphones to isolate ourselves. Used to be pictures were something you took together. To me, what kind of signifies the culture we live in, is the selfie. I go on vacation; I take pictures of myself on vacation. Again, it's not to say any of that's right or wrong, but to understand what has changed. So now we're talking about artificial intelligence. We're talking about robots and it's like, are we going to isolate ourselves so much that our relationships now are with machines? And it does make you wonder, but the reality is we were made for community - that's how God has made us - with God

and with one another, and we're going to learn more what that means in our study of First John together.