

The Books of 1, 2, and 3 John

Lesson 1: The Word of Life Made Manifest -- 1 John 1:1-4

Imagine an old man, the last of the apostles still living, sitting down with pen and parchment. His friends are gone. Peter and Paul were executed years ago. The eyewitnesses who walked the dusty roads of Galilee with Jesus have nearly all passed from the scene. And now strange teachers have slipped into the churches he loves, whispering that the Christ was never really flesh and blood, that the spiritual and the physical could never truly mix. John has heard enough. Before he says one word of correction, he wants the church to remember what he himself touched.

Listen to how he opens. He does not begin with “Dear friends” or even with his own name. He begins like the book of Genesis and like the Gospel he wrote: “That which was from the beginning.” Then the verbs start to pile up, and they are deliberately physical. We heard Him. We saw Him with our eyes. We looked at Him. Our hands handled Him. This is not a man describing a feeling or an idea. This is a witness in a courtroom, laying his hands on the evidence and saying, I was there.

The thing John keeps circling is a Person, and he calls Him “the Word of life.” The eternal life that was with the Father has stepped out of eternity and into a body you could embrace. The God who flung the stars into place took up residence in a frame that could grow tired, weep at a grave, and bleed on a cross. John is not offering a religion of nice sentiments. He is testifying to something that happened, to Someone he knew.

And he tells us why he writes it down. Not to win an argument, though the truth is at stake. He writes so that you may have fellowship, real shared life, with the Father and with His Son, and so that joy, his and ours together, may be made complete. That is where this study begins: with the staggering claim that the life of God came near enough to touch, and the invitation to share in that life today.

Group Discussion: John insists that he and the other apostles actually heard, saw, and touched Jesus. Why does it matter so much that our faith rests on real eyewitness testimony to a real Person, and not simply on inspiring ideas about God?

Personal Reflection: John says he writes “so that our joy may be complete.” Where are you looking for a joy that feels complete right now, and what would change if you looked for it in fellowship with the Father and the Son?

Read 1 John 1:1-4

Study Questions

1. John opens by calling Jesus “the Word of life” who was “from the beginning” and who “was made manifest” (vv. 1–2). What does this passage teach us about who Jesus is, both His eternal existence with the Father and His coming in real flesh?
2. John stacks up the words “heard,” “seen,” “looked upon,” and “touched” to describe his experience of Jesus. When it comes to your own walk with Christ, does He feel real and near to you, or more like a distant idea? Be honest, and name what has made the difference.
3. John says the eternal life “was with the Father and was made manifest to us” (v. 2). How does the truth that eternal life is found in a Person, and not in a philosophy or a religious system, shape the way we should think about salvation?
4. John wrote because false teachers were denying that Jesus came in the flesh. Where do you see our own culture trying to keep Jesus as a nice idea while quietly removing the demands of the real, living Lord? Where are you tempted to do the same?
5. John says the purpose of his testimony is “that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ” (v. 3). What does this teach us about the nature and the source of true Christian fellowship?
6. Fellowship here means a shared life, not just shared seats in a building on the Lord’s Day. Where is your own fellowship with other believers thin or merely social, and what would it look like to share genuine life with them this week?
7. Notice that fellowship with one another flows out of fellowship “with the Father and with his Son” (v. 3). Why can there be no true unity among Christians that is not first grounded in a shared relationship with God through Jesus?
8. John ties his joy directly to the spiritual health and fellowship of the people he is writing to (v. 4). Whose walk with Christ has God tied to your joy, and how faithfully are you investing in them?
9. John presents Jesus as the eternal Word who became flesh, was handled by human hands, and reveals the Father (vv. 1–2; compare John 1:1–14). Why is a right understanding of who Jesus is, fully God and truly man, the foundation that holds up everything else we believe and how we are saved?
10. Look back across these four verses. John moves from what he touched, to the fellowship it creates, to the joy that is made complete. Name one specific way you sense Jesus inviting you, through this passage, to move from knowing about Him to sharing real life with Him.

Now or Later

Reflect on these passages: John 1:1–14, the eternal Word who became flesh and dwelt among us; John 20:24–29, Thomas touching the risen Jesus and believing; Luke 24:36–43, the risen Christ showing His hands and eating before the disciples; 2 Peter 1:16–18, apostolic witness as eyewitness testimony and not clever myths; John 17:20–23, the fellowship and unity Jesus prayed His people would share.