

The Beginning of the Gospel

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[0 : 00] It's good to be with you this evening.

There is an Old Testament passage.! I couldn't get my hands on it, but I've read it many times. And it says, that which I feared the most has come to pass.

I can't find my lesson. I think I left it at home. So I'm going to make this up as I go. We'll muddle through.

Many years ago, I was a young, thin FBI agent and had hair. I was...

I'm not even looking that way. She's your problem tonight. I was 30 years old and Diane was 29.

[1 : 07] Now I'm 72 and Diane's... 29. 39. And... Actually, I don't know, surveillance for bank robbers.

They'd been tearing up Oklahoma City. and I was with an FBI agent partner. I actually knew him in the academy. He was a couple of classes ahead of me. And we were talking about Christianity.

And I assumed I was a Christian because when I was seven years old, I'd gotten baptized. He talked to me for quite a while and I came to the conclusion that that wasn't necessarily so.

I remember he took me to a bookstore, a Christian bookstore, after the surveillance was over. And he bought me a bunch of books. And he paid for them.

I was impressed with that. And one of them was How to Study the Bible by Dr. Tim LaHaye. Now you probably associate that name with the series of Left Behind that he wrote with Jerry Jenkins, but Dr. LaHaye had written this.

[2 : 19] He wrote a number of books. And I'll never forget, I opened that and I read, started reading, and I didn't get through the whole book. I didn't need to.

But it said, if you're a new believer, go to 1 John and read that every day for a month.

It's five chapters. So, I went to the index to find 1 John. Finally found it. I think I went to John first and I said, that's more than five chapters.

But I ended up in 1 John. And I did. I did that. And I've kind of been reading it ever since. Really, really like 1 John. One thing that drew me to 1 John, and remember, I was an FBI agent at the time, had been a detective for the previous eight years, worked very complex cases in Fort Worth area. But the thing that really grabbed me in these first four verses, which I'm going to, we're going to talk about this evening, well, I'm going to talk, you're going to listen, was John's talking here about evidence.

[3 : 46] And that was my world. Pretty much my whole adult life. And he's talking about the best kind of evidence.

There's two kinds of evidence. Direct and circumstantial. Circumstantial is, you know, I saw a guy come out of the bank in a red shirt and he sped off so I wrote his tag number down while the bank was robbed by a guy in a red shirt.

That's all they had and so it's kind of, you're backing into it. But eventually you hope you get enough to charge somebody. Direct evidence is I was in line at the bank and the guy in front of me robbed him.

And he turned to leave and I knew him. We went to, we go to church together. I started to say he's on staff but I better not because Mike and Dan are both in here so we won't go that way unless we blame Evelyn or John Likens.

But that's direct evidence. I saw this. John's going to deal with some direct evidence here. And he starts out here and he says verse 1 of 1 John chapter 1 what was from the beginning.

[5 : 14] And I remember when I read that I'm thinking beginning of what? You know? And because you know there's a beginning in Genesis 1.1 there's a beginning in John 1.1 and now we come to this beginning.

And this more has to do with the beginning of the gospel being preached. The good news concerning Jesus Christ.

What was the beginning of gospel preaching and readers and listeners were hearing it many of them for the first time.

They're hearing about Jesus. And so John says when the gospel started going out in that beginning we were apostolic witnesses to the Lord's ministry.

He was bringing the gospel to earth from heaven and we were witnesses. And they were not only witnesses in the life that he lived they were witnesses to his death.

[6:38] Now they weren't actually there. The women were there some of them. John was there because the Lord said John behold your mother talking about Mary Mary behold your son take care of my mother.

They were witnesses to his resurrection sort of. You remember the women went to the tomb and they found the tomb open and there's an interesting theological reason why the women were there and not the men.

The men were in hiding. The women went. They didn't care. But they went. And so we have here the incarnation Jesus coming in the flesh gospel being preached and John says we have heard. We have heard. John heard. And he's writing this 60 years after he heard with precision. Really impressed him.

Plus he has the Holy Spirit whispering in his ear. But he remembered. 60 years he starts writing it down. And he said we heard the Lord's speech.

[8:03] We heard what he was telling people. They heard his sermons. They heard the Sermon on the Mount. They heard the high intercessory prayer of the high priest.

If I had to be the flower on the wall of anything I think that would have been my choice. To listen to John 17. The high priest interceding for all believers in every age down to and including our age. I pray not only for these 2,000 years ago but for those who will believe through them. So they heard. And he also says we have seen with our eyes. They were physical observers to all this that transpired for three and a half years.

They heard but they also saw and it almost sounds like it's redundant but it's really not. He says and not only did we see with our eyes but what we looked at.

[9:11] Well they not only saw with our eyes they absorbed it. They looked with a penetrating gaze. They wanted to see it all.

They wanted to look upon the Christ. And then he said something rather interesting. He said and we touched him with our hands.

We could reach out. It talks about that. John leaned on Jesus. Thomas the Lord said Thomas come here.

Feel the nail prints. Touch me here. Touch my side. Be believing. They touched him. So we're talking about something very intimate.

That word saw and looked on means a long steady gaze for a long period of time.

[10:17] Well yeah three and a half years they looked on him. So John's telling us about the evidence here. We heard him with our ears.

We have seen him with our eyes. We looked at him. We've touched him. And let me tell you these are the things of direct evidence. you can go to court with this. This is not hearsay.

It would be hearsay if Mike saw and told me about it and then I went to court and tried to testify to it. They wouldn't allow that. Because I didn't see Mike saw.

They need Mike to testify. And John was an eyewitness and he wrote it down by the power of the Holy Spirit. All of these things that they saw, they heard, all of them were ready to testify as to what they had seen.

And they had done all this concerning the word of life. He is the word of life. This refers to Jesus Christ.

[11:30] But it also refers, it's the word, it refers to the proclamation of the gospel. He's proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Now, there's a very sound reason as to why John begins this great epistle, this great book of we know as 1st John.

John was in a war. war. He was in a battle, an intense battle. Paul had been in that battle, Peter had been in that battle, Jude had been in that battle, and John's in the battle.

John's specific battle was against the Gnostics. Gnostics, and if you want to write that down, it starts with a G, G-N-O-S-T-I-C, the Gnostics.

The Gnostics were these guys that went around saying they were the elite, they were the ascended intellectual know-it-alls, and they knew more than the low class, the untouchables, like they have in India.

[12:57] Said, we're the ascended learners. We have the ultimate truth, and only we have the ultimate truth. That was the Gnostics from knowledge, we know.

Well, they didn't know anything. A bunch of heretics. Gnostics, they're sitting in hell now saying, I wish we had gone another route. But they didn't.

They didn't. So John is battling the Gnostics. Paul had battled the Judaizers, particularly in Galatians, and Judaizers came along and said, well, in order to be saved, you've got to do, you've got to become, adopt the Mosaic law, follow the law, and then you can become a Christian later. No one ever followed the law. No one. No one ever obeyed the greatest commandment perfectly. No one ever perfectly obeyed the second greatest commandment, love your neighbors yourself. No one ever got saved by keeping the law. The law wasn't given to save, it was given to drive people to Jesus, to the Messiah. So Paul fought the Judaizers, John's fighting the Gnostics, Jews, Jude and Peter had their war, and you remember Jude was going to write a book about common salvation.

[14:19] He said, I couldn't do it. I had to contend for the faith. All these horrible people had come in and they were trying to destroy the faith that had once been given.

I think it's verse 3, 3 and 4, Beloved, while I was making every effort to write to you about our common salvation, I felt the necessity to write to you appealing that you contend earnestly for the faith that was once handed down to the saints.

Why? Verse 4, For certain persons have crept in unnoticed, those who are long before marked out for this condemnation, ungodly persons who turn the grace of our God into licentiousness and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ.

So there's Jude's battle. False teachers. They're all fighting false teachers. 2 Peter chapter 2 verse 1, But false prophets also arose among the people, just that there will also be false teachers among you who will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing swift destruction upon themselves, and then he goes on from there.

That whole chapter is devoted to false prophets and false teachers. Now why is this important to us? I mean, we're 2,000 years later. It's important to us for this reason, because there's more false teachers walking around this earth today than ever at any time in history.

[15:59] Ever at any time in history. Again, when I was an FBI agent, Jim Jones killed all those people down in South America, I almost went down there. They called me later and said, we didn't remember that you had worked homicides.

We would have sent you down there. And I'd have gone. But Jim Jones, you know, he killed all those people. At the time he killed those people, it was estimated by the FBI, there were 1,600 men in America that believed they were the Messiah and had followers.

Had followers. Probably the worst of them was the Bhagwan Sri Rajesh. Remember him? In Oregon, had a huge ranch, 100,000 acres, had 90 Royals Royces.

They were even hauling hay around in Royals. He had 90 of them. Where'd you get all that money? People were sending him money. They thought he was God incarnate. Reverend Sung Young Moon, remember him?

He said he was the Messiah. He said he came to earth to fix what Jesus had failed to do. He's gone to his reward now. All these guys are dead.

[17:19] Anyway, that's the battle. John, is fighting the Gnostics. Paul had his battles, Peter had his, Jude had his, and we have them today.

And so 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 or revealed to us.

We have seen and heard and we proclaim to you. He's making a proclamation.

What John did is he walked up to the pond and he took a little pebble and he threw it right in the middle and the ripple started and they're still going.

They're still going out and people are still being saved through the proclamation of the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. Now, why were they doing this?

[18 : 29] Why did John do this? Why did the Lord impress upon John to write this? Well, he did it so that you too, and that's the readers of this epistle that includes us, you too may have fellowship with us.

Wow. People that are part of this, people even in our day that have seen spiritually, looked upon spiritually, touched spiritually, the word of life, we are in fellowship with those that came before us. Those guys aren't dead. They're waiting, they're in heaven, I mean, they're waiting for the next event, which will be the rapture of the church, followed by the tribulation, followed by the millennial reign of Christ, and they'll all be back on earth, all of us, all of them, going to be fun, going to be neat.

Jesus will be in Jerusalem on the throne. And he says, this is so you can have fellowship with us. That's koinonia. That means a partnership.

We are in partnership with each other. And what's the common denominator among us? Christ, the Lord Jesus.

[20 : 02] He's the common denominator. But it goes beyond that. It's still, we can have fellowship with us, and then John says, and indeed, our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son, Jesus Christ.

Wow, we've gone to another step here. Now, fellowship never, in Bible, never means social relations. What's the big thing now?

Social whatever? Yeah, social distance. You and Duylene need to spread out a little bit, Paul. You'll be all right.

His readers were partakers. That's a good word for koinonia. Pardoners, good word for koinonia. and we were partners with John in possessing eternal life.

That's what that means. That's the common denominator. We possess eternal life. There's people going up and down that road. They have eternal life because no one's going to die.

[21 : 16] They'll be changed, but they don't have it with Jesus, a lot of them. And they're content to keep going up and down the road. But now we are in partnership and John is not only writing to affirm the physical reality of Jesus, but also to produce salvation in the readers.

There's people who got saved today by reading 1 John. John got another jewel in his crown. That excites me.

I want to be part of a ministry that will keep going after I'm gone. And you know, you keep, I mean, you take some of the great, the old missionaries, the guy in India, William Carey.

He's getting jewels every day. People get saved, and any are saved because of his ministry 150 years ago. good reformed Baptist boy. A lot of those guys were from Scotland, of all places.

So here we have fellowship, and you know, I used to teach this, and I've backed away. I used to say, yeah, but you can be out of fellowship with the Lord.

[22 : 41] Your sins, you can do something. Fellowship's not broken because it's a partnership. It doesn't mean you can't be in the woodshed. I've been to the woodshed many times since I got married.

You can be in the woodshed. I will be tonight when we get home. But genuine Christians are never out of fellowship because we are in a partnership with the Father, the Son, the Holy Spirit, and each other.

And each other. That's why when we come down with COVID, we reach out and say, what can we do? Do you need food? What do you need?

You know, if Lee Roberts had called me last night, I'd have gone with him. James would have gone. Any of us would have gone to help his dad get back in bed. That's just what we do. It's what we do. So we are never out of fellowship. Fellowship is salvation. It's where it comes from.

[23 : 53] And you're never unsaved once you're truly saved. You're never unsaved. But John had a reason for writing all this.

He always does. All the writers do. trying not to get you guys out of here early. Okay, John, you've got to tell us, why did you write this?

Verse four, these things we write so that our joy may be made complete.

What are these things? it goes beyond the first four verses. The main goal of this epistle, all five chapters, is to create joy in the reader, or readers, plural.

The proclamation of the reality of the gospel produces a fellowship or partnership in eternal life, and in turn, fellowship in eternal life produces joy.

[25 : 20] There's nothing more unsightly than a joyless Christian. That's an oxymoron. My gosh, we have eternal life with the Lord? joy in us.

Now, sometimes I'm not very joyful, but it's usually because I'm mad at myself over something I've done or said or thought or whatever. On the way home, Donald will say, thought what? And I'll say, now Miss Daisy, that's between me and Mr.

Worthen, we won't be riding together, we're in two cars. All of this, this whole book was written to produce joy in us.

That is the main goal of the epistle of 1 John. Now, 1 John, and I don't know if we'll get any deeper in this or not, I'm going to probably teach this in Sunday class this year or early next.

Again, I've taught it before, I love 1 John. But there's a series of tests in there to see if in fact you are saved. I preached on that a few months ago. It's in the catalog thing there.

[26 : 28] But this is the first four verses, direct evidence, we saw, we heard, we touched, he was manifested to us, and we're now proclaiming this to you.

And he just unfolds it all in these wonderful, wonderful chapters. So I hope you'll take some time with 1 John. It's easy, five chapters, you can read it every day. It should. . Thank you.