

# John's Prologue: The Purpose of God from Eternity to Eternity

*Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.*

Date: 09 October 2016

Preacher: Don Coleman

[ 0 : 00 ] Take your Bibles and open your Bibles to the first of three letters penned by the Apostle John.

! I don't even have to tell you what book it is, you know, don't you?! The beloved Apostle actually wrote five books in the New Testament, didn't he? We have the Gospel of John, the fourth of four Gospels, at least fourth in order.

We have the book of Revelation, go to the end of the New Testament, the book of Revelation, the revelation of Jesus Christ, also penned by the Apostle John.

And then three short letters, two of them very short, just one chapter each. And so John has contributed a great deal to the New Testament, and God used him in that way, in a very mighty way.

So this morning, I'm going to start a new series of sermons. You know that my desired method of preaching is not just expository preaching, but a certain kind of expository preaching, where we preach through books of the Bible, or I preach through books of the Bible, verse by verse, chapter by chapter.

[ 1 : 34 ] And so we've been away from that for a little while to deal with some things that needed to be dealt with, going through our doctrinal statements and finishing that up last week with a message on church discipline.

So now, having finished that, I'm ready to begin a new series, preaching series through the book of the Bible. And I've chosen the first three books, or the three books, of John.

Now, obviously, we're going to begin with the first one, right? I'm not going to begin with John 3, so we're going to begin with the first of these three letters, epistles. In fact, in my copy of Scripture, that's how they are entitled, the epistles of John.

And if it means anything to you, my Bible is page 1,398. Obviously, it will not be the same for you, unless, of course, you've got the same Bible.

But if you have found that, hopefully you have, I want to read this morning the first four verses. We'll cover the first four verses of the first epistle of John. That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, concerning the word of life.

[ 2 : 59 ] The life was manifested, and we have seen, and bear witness, and declare to you that eternal life, which was with the Father and was manifest to us.

That which we have seen and heard, we declare to you that you also may have fellowship with us. And truly, our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ.

And these things we write to you that your joy may be full. All right? Before we get into these first four verses, allow me to give you just a little bit of an introduction.

Not an introduction, per se, to the sermon this morning, but an introduction to the book. I don't always do that when I'm preaching through a book, give an introduction.

It's not going to be a lengthy one or, you know, some kind of a scholarly look at all of the various elements of the book. But I want to share with you, by way of introduction, at least some things that I think are key, things that are important.

[ 4 : 02 ] In the first place, the book, if you notice, the book does not identify its author by name. You say, well, it's right there in the title. Well, the title is not part of the letter.

Okay? That's been added. And so when you look at the letter itself, the author is not identified, not by name. Which is somewhat unusual, you know, because all of Paul's letter, all of his letters open

with his name.

Paul. Except for Hebrews. But for the exception of Hebrews, Paul signs all of his letters. Paul, an apostle, or Paul, a slave or bond slave of Christ.

James. The letter of James. Half-brother of Jesus. He opens his letter with his name. James. Peter. Opens his two letters with his name.

Right there at the beginning. Jude, likewise. Opens his letter with his name. And yet, the author's name does not appear anywhere in 1 John.

[ 5 : 10 ] It's not there. But not to worry. Okay? Because there are so many similarities in this letter, this first letter of John. So many similarities to the gospel of John, whose authorship is really not seriously disputed at all.

So many similarities between the two that it would be difficult to imagine that anyone other than the apostle John could have been the author of this letter. And, for example, and just one example, and by the way, it is an example that we'll come back to as I get into my message because it has some implications there as well.

But here's a good example of the similar way in which the two books begin. The gospel of John and the first epistle of John. Chapter 1 of the gospel of John begins by really identifying Jesus, the subject of the gospel, who is the gospel, identifying Jesus in this way.

In the beginning was the word. And the word was with God. And the word was God. That's right out of verse 1 of John, chapter 1.

And then we go on a little bit further. In that first chapter, John writes, And the word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld his glory. We saw him.

[ 6 : 32 ] The glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth. Verse 14 of John, chapter 1. Now, similarly, chapter 1 of 1 John, as I just read a moment ago, it begins by identifying Jesus in much the same way, doesn't it?

That which was from the beginning. It sounds very similar, doesn't it? That which was from the beginning, which we have heard. And he goes on to say, and have seen, and looked at, and handled.

Concerning who? The word of life. The word of life. All right, so in terms of authorship, we can say confidently, I think, that the apostle John is the author of 1 John.

And though some of our modern liberal scholars today have questioned Johannine authorship of the letter, you can take comfort in the fact that it was unanimously affirmed by all of the early church fathers and even those who were near contemporaries of John.

All right, so John is the author, the apostle John, the beloved apostle, the one whom Jesus loved. He's the author of not only 1 John, but all three letters.

[ 7 : 48 ] Now, in addition to this, by way of introduction, just so that you'll know, John likely wrote this letter from Ephesus, the city of Ephesus in Asia Minor.

He was responsible for a number of churches, tradition tells us, there in that region of the world. He likely wrote it somewhere in the early 90s A.D., all right?

Though we can't say that dogmatically. Certainly he wrote it between 85 and 100 A.D. He had a lot of evidence to support that internally as well as externally. And so this is quite late, isn't it?

One of the latest books that had been written that we have in our New Testament. And he wrote for a Gentile audience.

Now, that's important for us because that's who we are. We're Gentiles. I mean, there might be an exception. We might have a Jew present. I don't know. But it was written to Gentiles.

[ 8 : 50 ] And it was written to believers. And that's even more important to note. Especially when you compare 1 John with the Gospel of John. Gospel of John, he wrote to unbelievers.

First Epistle of John, he wrote to believers, to Christians, just like us. And why did he write this letter? For what purpose?

Well, we really don't have to dig very deeply into the letter to find the answer to that. As a matter of fact, John states his purpose or purposes four times in the letter.

Very clearly states them. This has been written to you that. Four times in this letter. And let me give those to you. This is a good way to introduce the letter and to maybe look at the letter as a whole.

And so in 1 John 1, verse 4, read this just a moment ago. And these things we write to you that.

That is for this purpose. Your joy may be full.

[ 9 : 53 ] So we could say that John wrote to produce fullness of joy in the lives of the believers. And then in 1 John 2, verse 1, and it's a small book.

If you want a thumb to these, you can very quickly. But in 1 John 2, verse 1, John writes, My little children, these things I write to you so that you may not sin.

That's a purpose statement. And so we could say that John wrote to prevent believers from sinning. Prevent them from sinning.

And then when we get to 1 John 2, verse 26, toward the end of that chapter, These things I have written to you. There it is again. Same formula.

I've written this to you, that. I've written these things to you concerning those who try to deceive you. And so we could say that John wrote to protect believers from false teachers.

[ 10 : 58 ] And indeed he did. In fact, this is a purpose for the letter that becomes very clear over and over again as we read through the letter. And this was the problem of the day.

And it's a problem in our day as well. It's been a problem in the church from the first century. But in the first century church, there were false teachers that had come into the church.

They weren't on the outside trying to lure members away or believers away. But they were on the inside. They had become members of the church. They had become leaders and teachers within the church.

And this was a big problem in the New Testament church all over. And especially, apparently, because we have this letter, that this was the case in many of the churches that John was overseer of.

False teachers. And we shouldn't be too hard on the believers of that day, unless we want to be hard on ourselves because you know that they didn't have their own personal copy of God's Word in that day, like we do.

[ 12 : 01 ] They didn't have their Bibles open as their teachers were teaching and preachers preaching and looking at the Scriptures and comparing what they were teaching with what was right there in the Scriptures. That doesn't mean that they weren't without excuse.

But they needed encouragement. They needed instruction. And this is what John is doing. And there were false teachers in the church. And these false teachers were causing many of the true believers in the church.

I really believe the true believers, because John is writing to believers, that these false teachers were causing many of the believers in the church to be confused about what they believed.

And not only that, but to come to some place of doubt. To doubt what they had believed. To question what the apostles had taught them and handed down to them.

And this was what the false teachers were doing. And from the content of John's letter, we'll talk a whole lot more about this as we go along. But from the content of this letter, we pretty much understand that these, what these false teachers were teaching.

[ 13 : 11 ] Their heresy. And the technical term for us today would be Gnosticism. But it was kind of an incipient kind of Gnosticism.

It was in the beginning stages of what later would be termed, would be called, defined as Gnosticism. Which really is a term, a very broad term, that really encompasses a number of heresies that have taken place in the early church and still exist in our day-to-day.

And I think perhaps the most damning of their heretical views, and it's the view that John is going to address in his letter, is their views pertaining to the nature of Christ.

The nature of Christ. In fact, most heresies and most cults, that's one way to identify them. What they teach, what they believe about the nature of the Christ.

And so, since in their views, what they were teaching, in their understanding, since in their view, all physical matter is evil, this is what the Gnostics taught, that all physical matter is evil, including our own flesh, our own bodies.

[ 14 : 29 ] That's why one of the problems with Gnosticism is they could just sin all they wanted, be as immoral as they wanted to be, and it didn't matter because the flesh is evil anyway. But since they viewed the flesh, all physical matter is evil, only the spirit is good, then Christ could not have been flesh and blood.

This is the problem with Gnostics. Could not have been flesh and blood. Because flesh and blood is evil. So, how could Christ be evil? He's not evil.

So, in their rationalistic, logical way, this is what they believed and what they taught. And so, quite naturally, they'd have to deny the Incarnation, which is a big deal. You can't deny the Incarnation and be Christian.

We covered that when I walked us through our basic doctrines of belief, the essentials of Christian theology. You must believe in the Incarnation. It must be true.

So, they denied the Incarnation. They denied, specifically, the humanity of Christ. That he was not flesh and blood. Now, this Gnostic view is called docetism.

[ 15 : 42 ] You can write that down. You're probably not going to remember it according to the name, but let me tell you what it means. Docetism is from the Greek word *dokēn*, and it means to seem.

To seem. All right? And so, Jesus just seemed to be human. That was what they were teaching. He wasn't really human.

He just seemed to be. He just appeared to be human, but he really wasn't flesh and blood. And when he went to the cross, guess what? He only seemed to suffer.

And when he died, he only seemed to die. But he didn't really die. There are some offshoots of docetism, of course, and very likely the brand of docetism that John is addressing was something that was taught by a contemporary of his.

And that contemporary of his taught that actually the Christ did not come into the body of Jesus until his baptism.

[ 16 : 53 ] And then he left. Christ left just before the cross, just before his suffering and his death. All right, so this is the false doctrine that was being taught in the churches, those churches under John's watchfulness, his watch care.

And so he wrote to combat this heresy. Because the incarnation of Christ is essential. Do you understand that? It's not just something we believe.

You say, well, that's just what the church, this church believes. It's essential to Christianity. The incarnation, the doctrine that Christ came in the flesh, it's fundamental to biblical Christianity.

And why is that? Because if we do not have a Messiah who has come in human flesh, then we do not have a God-man as our Savior. And that's crucial.

Because we must have a God-man as our Savior. One whose sacrifice can save because he is eternal God.

[ 18 : 01 ] God, otherwise, he might have been able to die for himself, but not for all of those who would believe. Past, present, and future.

Had to be God. All right, no denying that. But he also had to be man. His sacrifice works for us because he was man, too. That is, he could represent us on the cross.

All right, so if you don't have a God-man, you don't have a Savior. Because you don't have the atonement. And this heretical teaching of the Gnostics of John's day and still being taught in our day in full-blown Gnosticism denies the very atonement.

And John wrote to combat this. And we'll get to this passage, but let me go ahead and read it to you. John wrote, for example, in chapter 4 and verse 2, By this you know the Spirit of God, as you've bonafide believer in the one true God.

By this you know. Every spirit that confesses that Jesus has come in the flesh, and by the way, it's little s spirit, probably talking about either every teacher or leader or any professing believer who confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God, he said.

[ 19 : 26 ] That and every spirit that does not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is, guess what? Not of God.

I mean, there's no gray area there. It's black and white. You must believe in the incarnation, that Jesus has come in the flesh. And he goes on to say, And this is the spirit of the Antichrist.

These kind of teachers are of the Antichrist, which you have heard was coming, and is coming, by the way, the Antichrist with a capital A. But John says, and is now already in the world.

And he was in the spirit of Antichrist already in the world in John's day and certainly in our world today. And so here's the purpose of John in writing, to protect the churches that were under his care from this kind of burgeoning, budding Gnosticism in the church called Docetism that had infiltrated the church through false teachers and they were teaching, of course, against the incarnation.

John had another purpose in mind. And I would say that it was his chief purpose in writing. And I would say that all of these other purposes that he has stated here in his letter, all these other

purposes have as their goal this overarching chief purpose.

[ 20 : 59 ] And what is it? Well, John then wrote to produce fullness of joy. He wrote to prevent believers from sinning. He wrote to protect believers from teachers who were denying the incarnation.

And here's John's overarching purpose comes toward the end of the letter, very much like the purpose of John's gospel. It comes toward the end of the gospel in 1 John chapter 5 and verse 13. These things I have written to you. So there it is again. These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God that you may know that you have eternal life.

That's the overarching purpose. And so we could say that John wrote to provide believers, true believers, the basis for assurance in their salvation.

Assurance that you may know. That's what we mean by assurance. That you may know. To know for sure is the idea behind that phrase.

[ 22 : 13 ] To know for sure. And we could add because of the verb here to keep on knowing. To know for sure and to keep on knowing what?

That you hope one day you'll have salvation. Is that what he said? No. That you have salvation. You have it.

You have it right now and always will have eternal life. This is full assurance. Adrian Rogers, my favorite preacher in my lifetime, used to call it a no-so salvation.

Liberals poked fun at him about that. But it's true from Scripture. And this is John's purpose. That's the overarching purpose under which really those other purposes stated contribute to this overall purpose.

And that is full assurance of salvation. Full assurance of it. And you know this is in harmony with the intent of John's gospel.

[ 23 : 26 ] So we need to again compare 1 John with John's first writing the gospel of John. And what he's saying is purpose here in 1 John perfectly harmonizes with what he states as his purpose in the gospel of John.

In the gospel of John you find the purpose in chapter 20 and you can jot this down look at it later but in chapter 20 verses 30 to 31 John in his gospel states his purpose for writing.

And this is what he said. He said and truly Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples which are not written in this book but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ the son of God and that believing you may have life in his name.

That's the purpose of the gospel of John. And so the gospel of John clearly was written to unbelievers with an unbelieving audience in mind.

And so it's clearly evangelistic in its purpose that you may believe believe and believing that you might have life in his name.

[ 24 : 43 ] That is eternal life is what he's talking about there. And then John writes his letter not to unbelievers but to Christians. to Christians to believers those who have believed as he said in his gospel those who have believed that Jesus is the Christ the son of God and that believing that those who have life because they have believed in his name.

He's writing to that kind of audience. So his intent is that they would have full assurance of it. No doubting full assurance of it.

A no so salvation. That's what he said. That you may know fully know that you have eternal life. That's the overarching purpose of this letter.

Full assurance of salvation. Because here's the problem. Not every true believer that John wrote to not every true believer today is experiencing the assurance of their salvation.

Though they can can be experiencing that. And though they should be. And though it is God's intention that we experience full assurance of our salvation.

[ 26 : 14 ] salvation. And so the question is why not? I don't think there's any denying the reality of that. But the question is why not?

When every believer can, every believer should, it's the intention of God that every believer should. So why not?

Well, that's the question John is going to answer in this marvelous letter. All the way through. In fact, all of those purpose statements that we read a moment ago, they all come together to answer this question.

Not just answer the question why, but give the remedy for it. And we're going to get to John's first answer to that question here in John chapter 1, 1 John 1 verses 1 through 4.

So this is an introduction to the letter and I think that makes sense. And what we read a moment ago, these first four verses comprise what would be called the prologue to the letter.

[ 27 : 23 ] Prologue to the letter. And in this prologue, John is going to give us, I think, the big picture of this thing called assurance. Even though the word assurance doesn't appear there in those first four verses, it is the prologue to John's full answer about what we might call the doctrine of assurance.

And so, he's going to give us the big picture. I think we could say that he's going to give us the root of assurance as well as the fruit of it.

The root of it, the fruit of it. This assurance of our salvation, this no-so salvation. salvation. The root of our assurance, I'll just go ahead and tell you here in the front end, is the incarnation of Christ. It's rooted in that reality. The incarnation of Christ. That which was from the beginning, John says, and was manifested to us. The incarnation.

So our assurance, our no-so salvation is rooted in the incarnation. That's where John begins. And we could say that the fruit of it, and I say in the sense of the ultimate fruit of our full assurance of salvation, is something that we will experience in glory.

[ 28 : 47 ] It is glorification. Glorification with Christ in heaven. Verse 4, he says, that your joy may be full. Complete.

All right, so that's why I've entitled my message this morning, God's purpose from eternity to eternity. From eternity to future. And here is how we could state it.

The life that we live in between eternity to eternity, this life we're living here, right now, is to be a life filled with assurance.

Assurance of our salvation in Christ. A no-so salvation. Now let's get to the text. Our assurance, assurance, as I've said, our assurance of salvation is rooted in, number one, the incarnation.

That's number one, if you take notes. The incarnation, the physical manifestation of God in human flesh, and key phrases that we find there in verses 1 and 2, that which was from the beginning, the word of life, was manifested to us.

[ 30 : 02 ] I'm just picking out key phrases that define the incarnation here in the first few verses of 1 John 1. That which was from the beginning, and who is it?

The word of life was manifested, manifested to us. Now again, that sounds similar to John's opening to his gospel, doesn't it?

But there's an important difference between the two, not only in its purpose, one being evangelistic, the other being more of a discipleship nature.

But there's a huge difference in what John is focusing on. In John 1.1, the gospel of John, chapter 1, verse 1, he's focusing on the creation. He's taking us all the way back to the creation, in the beginning, he says.

In the beginning, the beginning of all things, the beginning of the creation. And who was there in the beginning? The Word, that's what he says.

[ 31 : 03 ] He says, in the beginning was the Word, who John, of course, later identifies as Jesus. So he was there at the beginning. Now he was there not in the sense that he was part of the creation, that is in the sense that he was one of the many things created.

He was not created. He was there when everything was created. He was the agent of creation, and we don't have to doubt that, because John, in verse 3 of John chapter 1, he says, all things were made, that is, they came into being through him, the Word, who's Jesus.

All things came into being through him, by him, and without him nothing was made that was made. Very clear statement. You can't dispute it. You may choose not to believe it, but you can't say it's not in the Bible.

It's very clearly told. So John's taking us to the creation, and the one who was there at the creation, in the beginning, and who was the agent of that creation.

But now when we get to 1 John, 1 John 1, 1, he's not focusing on the creation, but rather on the incarnation. The incarnation.

[ 32 : 16 ] That which was from the beginning. See the difference? from the beginning. He was there at the beginning, but the one who came from the beginning is the word of life.

And really this is amazing. The one who was in the beginning, the source of all natural life, the creation, is the one who is from that beginning the source of spiritual life, true spiritual life, the new creation.

And he did so through his incarnation. And so the beginning in John 1, 1 is the creation. The beginning in 1 John 1, 1 is the incarnation.

The creator becomes flesh and blood human man, someone who can be heard, seen, touched, handled.

And so there can be no assurance of salvation indeed no salvation at all apart from the incarnation. Our assurance of salvation is rooted in the incarnation and in our belief in it, of course.

[ 33 : 34 ] But how can we be assured of something that happened over 2,000 years ago? We weren't there, were we? How can we be assured?

Well, we have the testimony of John and all the apostles. And so number 2 then, what I want to call the verification. We have John's verification of it.

Verse 1, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled concerning this word of life.

So John is saying, essentially, listen people, don't doubt me on this. Take my word for this. John is saying that the Jesus you have believed in was no phantom posing as a human man. man. He's no spiritual illusion, no figment of our imagination.

[ 34 : 47 ] And he certainly was no mere symbol of some religious or righteous cause or movement, some new religion in the world. He's not just simply the poster child for some new religion that has come into the world.

world. And he was no mere man who just kind of exemplified godliness. He wasn't God himself, but he exemplified it.

And on and on we could go. He's not at all. He's the word of life. The word of life manifested to us. God in human flesh, the very source of all life, created and recreated, physical and spiritual.

And we verified it, is what John is saying. How so? We've heard with our own ears. We heard him. And we have seen him with our own eyes.

And he said we have looked upon him. You say, isn't that just the same way of saying that we saw him? No, this goes a step further. That means we considered him.

[ 35 : 57 ] We considered him. We pondered him. We thoughtfully watched every move and heard everything he said and we thoughtfully evaluated him as to whether or not he is the Christ and we verified that he is.

Be Christ. God come in the flesh. And then John said not only that but we have with our own hands we've handled him, touched him.

And John could say that very clearly. I mean we picture the upper room and as described and there's John the beloved apostle with his head leaning against the very bosom of Christ, of Jesus. You know when you put your head against someone's body you hear them breathing, you hear their heart pumping. What terms of intimacy here?

We've handled him. And you also remember in John chapter 20 verse 27 it was after the resurrection and Jesus was talking to doubting Thomas and what did he say to Thomas?

[ 37 : 08 ] He said reach your finger here and look at my hands. Don't see it but touch it. See the scars? My hands. And then he said and reach your hand here.

I guess he just pulled aside his robe and you know and said reach your hand here and put it into my side. Touch me. Handle me.

And he said do not be unbelieving but believing. And Thomas believed in he said my Lord and my God. And then Jesus said to Thomas Thomas because you have seen me you have believed. Blessed are those who have not seen. That is with their physical eyes like you have and yet have believed. And that is a statement about assurance.

Full assurance of salvation. And so John is saying you can have full assurance of your salvation. You can know that you have eternal life and the root of it is in the incarnation.

[ 38 : 16 ] the manifestation of the word of life. And it is verified by his own testimony. John's testimony. And in another place he said my testimony is true.

And third the proclamation. There's a proclamation here. Verse 2. And this contributes to assurance.

not just a personal testimony but now a declaration of what it will mean to you if you believe. And he said in verse 2 the life was manifested and we have seen and bear witness and what?

Declared. Or some versions have proclaimed and that's really a better translation. Proclaimed to you that eternal life. Almost personifying eternal life because it is to be personified.

Jesus is not only gives it but he is eternal life. We've declared to you, proclaimed to you that eternal life which was with the Father and was manifested to us.

[ 39 : 28 ] That is made clear to us so much so that we could hear and see and touch. Again a statement about the incarnation. But we've proclaimed the significance of it to you and you believed it.

That's why I'm writing this to you. So John is saying we not only verify that Christ was indeed come in the flesh but we declare to you, we proclaim to you what it means for all who will believe it. And we declare the same thing today, don't we? We declare a living Jesus. Not some dead prophet, some dead would-be savior or martyr.

We declare the living Jesus to you. And if you believe in him, you'll be saved. That's what he proclaimed to them. And now we get to the, I think, the real crux of the matter.

What I would call the invitation. The invitation, verse 3, that which we have seen and heard, we declare to you that you also may have fellowship with us.

[ 40 : 41 ] That's the invitation, to have fellowship with us. And truly our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus. Now this takes us back to the question I asked earlier.

Very important question. The answer is extremely important. Why is it not all true believers, and I mean true believers, why is it not all true believers are experiencing full assurance?

Full assurance of their salvation. Why is that? And here is the answer. Because not all believers are enjoying the level of fellowship with, as John says, the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ, that they could be enjoying.

and should be. And God intends for them to be experiencing. Why is it? Because they are not at a level of fellowship with God as they ought to be.

We need to understand something about the Christian life. And I think we all know, but maybe we just need to consider it again.

[ 41 : 59 ] salvation is a constant. Fellowship is a variable.

Do you understand that? Salvation is a constant. Salvation is the sovereign work of a gracious God. And once you have it, nothing can violate it.

Nothing can diminish it. Nothing can change it in any way. nothing can end it in any way. Salvation is a constant. The fellowship is a variable.

And even if you don't know that theologically, you certainly know it experientially, don't you?

Fellowship is a variable. fellowship is Now, I would go further to say that with a true child of God, fellowship with God is never non-existent.

And if it is non-existent, then you don't really have any warrant to believe you are saved. I don't think fellowship is ever non-existent. Even in the example of a family and relationships between parents and their children, even though there are sometimes, many times, examples of children being estranged from their parents, they never ever really reach a place of non-existent fellowship, even if it just simply exists in their hearts, in their minds, even in remote desires.

[ 43 : 31 ] And so with a child of God, there's never a case where there's non-existent fellowship, but nor is their fellowship with God, is fellowship with God ever absolutely perfect.

It's never absolutely perfect. And so the point of it is that we all experience varying degrees of fellowship with God, and there is somewhat of an ebb and flow of our fellowship with God throughout our lives.

It doesn't have to be, but it is. Fellowship is variable. And so what is John's invitation to us?

look at it closely. He said, that which we have seen and heard, we declare to you that you also, that you also may have fellowship with us.

It doesn't mean fellowship with us personally. We could have fellowship with the apostles. It's not the idea here. But he's talking about the same fellowship we have.

[ 44 : 46 ] That you would have the same fellowship we have. And he says, and truly our fellowship, the same fellowship we have, the same fellowship that we invite you to have, our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ.

And so he's not talking about salvation. They already have that. as most of you have. He's not talking about salvation. He's talking about fellowship.

Fellowship. And how did John describe his fellowship with Jesus? Well, he described it in terms of intimacy. Didn't he?

Intimacy. Intimate fellowship. Hearing. Seeing. Touching. Pondering. Considering. Focusing. So here's the lesson, really, from these first four verses.

And really it's the larger lesson in the entire letter. Here's the lesson. Our level of intimacy with Jesus, how close we are to him, will determine our level of fellowship with him.

[ 46 : 04 ] And our fellowship, the higher our level of fellowship with Jesus, the more assurance we have of our salvation.

And the reverse order, I think the reverse order is how we begin to understand why so many believers have doubts. because they lack assurance.

They lack assurance because they lack fellowship. And they lack fellowship because they have very little intimacy with Jesus. Intimacy.

Closeness with him. that's described by John metaphorically hearing and seeing and touching and intimate fellowship.

And that leads us to one final thing this morning in this text, and that is what I would call the destination. the ultimate destination, the ultimate goal here.

[ 47 : 17 ] And I think verse 4 is all about this ultimate destination. See, the root of assurance is the incarnation, as I've said. The fruit, the ultimate fruit of it is joy.

joy. And complete joy is something we'll have when we get to heaven. Full joy. Complete joy. Verse 4 says, And these things we write to you that your joy may be full.

Some versions have the word complete. That's the idea. Complete in the sense of nothing else but joy. No measure of it but full joy.

And when will that happen? In heaven. Now, I think John intends, and later we're going to discover, for us to understand that this really is the fourth thing after assurance.

What comes as the fruit of assurance begins with intimacy that leads to fellowship, greater levels of fellowship that leads to assurance of our salvation that produces in us joy.

[ 48 : 42 ] And one day it'll be full. Complete. Psalm 16, verse 11, presence. In thy presence is fullness of joy.

At thy right hand there are pleasures forevermore. forever. So this is the purpose of God. From eternity to eternity.

The life that we are to experience in between, in the here and now, is a life of intimacy, fellowship, assurance, and continuing greater amounts of joy.

Until one day we'll experience the completion of it in his presence. This is my story. Is it yours?

That old hymn, blessed assurance Jesus is mine. Oh, what a foretaste of glory divine.

[ 49 : 57 ] Is that your story? your story?