

1 John 1:1-4

INTRODUCTION: When I read the first few verses of 1 John I cannot help but think about a person that I met when I was a freshman in college.

His name was Ed. He was saved out of a very wicked lifestyle. Before Ed was saved he rode in a motorcycle gang.

When God saved Ed there was a dramatic and dynamic transformation in his life.

He was still a new convert on saved for less than a year when he enrolled to Bible College. And for some reason, God put Ed and I in the same dorm room.

Ed was the most zealous Christian I ever met. I still have not met his like. He was always filled with passion and energy. When he spoke, he spoke with energy and passion.

He sounded like Hulk Hogan. He was always preaching at someone or praying.

I remember at night in the early morning hours my bed began to shake. I woke up it was Ed. He woke me up so that I would pray with him.

I said, "Ed, it is three o'clock in the morning." He pleaded, "Please!!"

I prayed then he prayed for an hour. Then he ended his prayer like this, "Dear God, Bro. Jerry wants to say something else."

"Pray again, Bro. Jerry!"

One of Ed's favorite songs was, "Drop Kick Me Jesus Through The Goal Posts of Life." He thought since the song had Jesus name in it, it was a great hymn of the faith.

Drop kick me, Jesus through the goal posts of life
End over end, neither left nor to right
Straight through the heart of them righteous uprights
Drop kick me, Jesus through the goal posts of life
Make me, oh make me, Lord more than I am
Make me a piece in your master game plan
Free from the earthly temptations below
I've got the will, Lord if you've got the toe.

Ed incorporated one of the lines of the song into his prayer life. Whenever he felt as if he was cold or backslidden, he would just pray out loud, "Drop kick me Jesus!"

I wanted to help Ed along in his spiritual journey and I would say, "Now Ed, the Lord is not going to drop kick you. I mean do you expect the Lord to just come and give you a kick? No Ed."

One day we were walking to class together. It was early we were going to our first hour class. It was outside, it was winter time. It had been snowing that week. It was icy.

Ed was praying while we were walking. He blurted out, "Lord, my heart is not where it should be. I feel backslidden and cold.

I wish you would just drop kicked me right now!"

When he said that, his feet suddenly slipped out from under him and he just leveled out in the air, both feet straight out in front of him and he hit the ground hard. I

stood over him and I said, "Ed, are you alright!" His eyes got as big as silver dollars. He was so happy. He said, "HE DROPPED KICKED ME BROTHER!"

He was so thankful that the Lord, heard his prayer and dropped kicked him.

When went to the first hour class together and the teacher asked, "Does anybody have a testimony?" Ed's hand shot up.

I said, "No, Ed, don't...." The teacher called on him and Ed gave his testimony out how the Lord dropped kicked him that morning.

Ed said, "Brother, Jerry was there, he saw it!" What was I suppose to say?

But the one thing that I remember most about Ed, was he would walk around campus and in public saying over and over, "Jesus is Real!"

Jesus was so real to Ed. When Ed came to Christ and got saved Jesus became so real to Ed.

This is exactly what John is saying in the first four verses of this epistle.

JESUS IS REAL!

Let me ask you a question is Jesus Real to you?

I think John has the same kind of zeal and excitement as he introduced this letter.

John doesn't bother introducing himself.

To John it is not important who he is, it is important who Jesus is!

JOHN GETS RIGHT DOWN TO BUSINESS IN THE BEGINNING OF THIS LETTER TELLING US WHAT AUTHENTIC CHRISTIANITY IS ALL ABOUT!

Christianity is not essentially a system of thought.

Rather it is a person - Jesus Christ. It is knowing Jesus Christ.

It is not a religion it is a relationship.

Many people know a lot of facts about Jesus but they really don't know Him.

They know the plan of salvation but they don't know the man of salvation.

Authentic Christianity is knowing the reality of Jesus Christ.

So, the question is this: Is Jesus real to you?

How can Christ be real to me?

TRANSITIONAL SENTENCE: John gives us three ways that Jesus Christ becomes real to someone.

Jesus will become real to you when you:

I. Embrace the Historical Reality of Jesus. 1:1

God has revealed Himself to us in the person of Jesus Christ.

God became a man. That man is Jesus.

He was eternal God in human flesh.

The only way that we can come to God or come to know Him is through Jesus Christ.

John 14:6 - "I am the way the truth and the life; no man comes unto the Father but by me."

John 17:3 - "This is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent."

Here in this verse John emphasizes the humanity of Jesus.

He was a real man. He was a historical figure.

EXPLANATION: This is important to understand because the heresy that had infiltrated the churches in the region of Asia Minor where John ministered taught that Jesus was not a real man.

A group in the church in John's day believed some of this heresy.

This breakaway group had a name - they may not have been given that name actually in John's day, but a little bit later they came to be known as the "Docetists".

The Docetists really were an early form of Gnosticism.

Docetist comes from the Greek word "doceo", which means 'I think', 'I seem', or 'I appear'.

They taught, concerning the person of the Lord Jesus Christ, that Christ, as He came to earth, only appeared to be a man.

He only looked like a man and seemed to be a man, but he was not truly human or physical.

This form of Gnosticism was around for a long time. In fact the early church fathers saw this as a dangerous heresy.

ILLUSTRATION: Ignatius of Antioch wrote against one who took this view of Christ, and he said, I quote: "This one blasphemes my Lord by denying that He ever bore a real human body. In saying that he denies everything about Him."

THIS WAS A DANGEROUS HERESY THAT UNDERMINED THE VERY FOUNDATION OF CHRISTIANITY.

IT ATTACKED THE INCARNATION THE CRUCIFIXION AND THE RESURRECTION.

QUOTE: As James Montgomery Boice put it: "Gnosticism produced a type of philosophical religion that was divorced from concrete

history, for concrete history tells us that Jesus was born as a man in Bethlehem's manger."

Notice the ways that John verifies the historical reality of Jesus in the first verse.

This is one of the greatest verses in the NT.

A. His Message

Notice v. 1 - "That which was from the beginning..."

What beginning is John talking about here?

Conservative scholars are divided over what beginning John is referring to.

1. Some think this is referring to the beginning of Creation.

Genesis 1:1 - "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth."

2. Some think this is referring to the beginning in the Gospel of John 1:1

"In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God.

Some note the parallel between John 1:1 and 1 John 1:1.

So, they interpret this as a reference to the eternality of Jesus Christ.

3. The beginning is referring to the beginning of the gospel.

The beginning of the teaching and preaching of the gospel.

Notice: 1 John 2:7, 2:24, 3:11

I believe what John is talking about is the beginning of new life for a person...”

When a person first began to learn the faith and preaching. The beginning of the Gospel.

The fundamentals of the faith that one first learned.

In other words what is going to keep a person from wandering off the path and into doctrinal error?

Going back to the beginning and reaffirming what you learned. Reaffirming the foundation and fundamentals of your faith.

JOHN SIMPLY REINFORCES AND RE-EMPHASIZES THE BASICS! JOHN IS SAYING LET’S GO BACK TO THE BASICS.

ARGUMENT: These believers had become perplexed and confused over the new and improved form of teaching, just like believers today get confused today over these new fads that come along in the church.

SO, JOHN SAYS “GET BACK TO THE FOUNDATION”

For believers, the beginning is Jesus Christ. He is the foundation.

So, John’s point would be that his message is not the new message of the Gnostics.

Rather, it is the old message, which has been proclaimed from the earliest days of Christ’s ministry. It is the same message that his readers had heard and believed from the beginning of their Christian experience. (F. F. Bruce, *The Epistles of John* [Eerdmans], p. 35; A. W. Pink, *Exposition of 1 John* [Associated Publishers & Authors], pp. 7-8; and Robert Law, *The Tests of Life* [Baker], p. 369, argue for this view.)

A. His Message

Also:

B. His Teaching

Notice v. 1 - "which we have heard..."

1. “heard” – “akouo” where we get the word “acoustics.” John heard Jesus speak.

John and the other apostles (the “we” of 1:1-4) had heard the very words of Jesus, and what amazing words they were!

Even His enemies testified (John 7:46), “Never has a man spoken the way this man speaks.”

How true! I would love to have heard Him. One day we will.

In heaven we will heard Jesus teach.

The words of Jesus bear witness of who He is.

The historical reality of Jesus is verified in

- A. His Message
- B. His Teaching

But also:

C. His Life and Miracles

Notice v. 1 - "which we have seen with our eyes..."

John saw Jesus with his own eyes.

This phrase shows that John is not talking about some mystical vision of Christ, but of actually watching Jesus as He lived before them.

The apostles saw Jesus turn the water into wine, feed the 5,000, walk on water, heal the multitudes, and raise the dead.

The 35 miracles recorded in the four gospels are only a fraction of those that the apostles witnessed.

John (21:25) ends his gospel by stating that if all the things that Jesus did were written in detail, the whole world couldn't contain the books.

Jesus' sinless life and the powerful miracles He performed validate that He is the unique Son of God.

The historical reality of Jesus is verified in

- A. His Message
- B. His Teaching
- C. His Life and Miracles

But also:

D. His Glory

Notice v. 1 - "which we have looked upon..."

This is not just a repetition of "we have seen with our eyes..."

This verb takes it a step further.

looked upon - refers to seeing with attention and careful examination.

It implies that there is something unusual in what is seen.

The preceding verb [seen] refers to physical sight, while this verb [looked upon] refers to understanding the significance of what was seen.

It means to interpret what you see.

We derive our English word “theater” from it.

It is the word that John uses in his gospel, John 1:14 - “And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we **saw** His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth.”

John was especially referring to his experience on the Mount of Transfiguration, when he and Peter and James saw Jesus’ glory unveiled.

Peter refers to that event when he states (2 Pet. 1:16), “For we did not follow cleverly devised tales when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of His majesty.”

The historical reality of Jesus is verified in

- A. His Message
- B. His Teaching
- C. His Life and Miracles
- D. His Glory

But also:

E. His Bodily Resurrection

Notice v. 1 - "Our hands have handled of the Word of life."

John said we touched Him. Our hands handled Him.

Greek word here means to feel after in order to touch, like a blind man handles things for understanding.

This verb is used in Luke 24:39 of the risen Christ, “handle me and see for a spirit has not flesh and bones as you see that I have.”

John here is saying, “I know Jesus was a real man, he was human because I touched him, saw, him, heard him, studied him.

He was historically validated by the apostles in all of these objective ways, both before and after the resurrection.

The historical reality of Jesus is verified in

- A. His Message
- B. His Teaching
- C. His Life and Miracles
- D. His Glory
- E. His Bodily Resurrection

ARGUMENT: These are all perfect tense verbs in the Greek.

Perfect tense – is action that was completed in the past but has continuing results in the present.

ILLUSTRATION: 9/11 was an event that happened in the past but we are still feeling the effects of that historical event.

John is saying Jesus was a real historical figure, a real man of history who walked the earth and I saw, heard, and handled Him.

The impact of his life is still being felt today.

JESUS DIDN'T JUST ENTER INTO HISTORY HE CHANGED HISTORY.

Some people are still questioning and wrestling with the idea of the Historical person named Jesus.

But Jesus will never be real to you until you

I. Embrace the Historical Reality of Jesus.

But also:

Jesus will become real to you when you:

II. Experience the Spiritual Reality of Jesus 1:2

Notice v. 2

Notice two times in this verse John uses the word "manifested."

EXPLANATION: Notice some important words in this verse.

manifested - phan-eroo - "to reveal..."

"we have seen it and bear witness"

These words are legal terms used in the courtroom in John's day.

They are terms used in a courtroom deposition, where one not only gave evidence from eyewitness experience but also vouched for the truthfulness of what others said.

John's argument is simple.

1. Jesus Christ was manifested to us. He was revealed to us.

God the Father revealed His Son to us. We know who He is.

2. We are giving you all the evidence of our eyewitness testimony.

So that Jesus will be manifested to you too!

A. You Must Have Proper Knowledge

ARGUMENT: In order to know who Jesus is you must hear the testimony about Him.

It starts with knowledge and facts about Him.

John gives firsthand testimony about Jesus.

You have to know about his virgin birth, His sinless life, His miraculous works, His atoning death and His bodily resurrection and ascension.

It starts with proper knowledge about Jesus. That is vital.

But it doesn't end there. If all you have is head knowledge about Jesus He will not be real to you.

ARGUMENT: The false teachers emphasized "knowledge" and having secret knowledge.

They believed that is all you needed was knowledge. To them knowledge was esoteric (brought salvation).

All you needed was this secret knowledge.

ARGUMENT: There are a lot of people who have a lot of knowledge about Jesus but they don't know Him.

Jesus is not REAL to them.

Remember what Jesus said in Matthew 7:22-23

"Many will say unto me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name" and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works?

And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me ye that work iniquity."

God has to open one's eyes spiritually to see Jesus.

You must have Proper Knowledge

But also:

B. You Must Have Spiritual Revelation

God must reveal Jesus to your heart. He must open your eyes.

There must be a spiritual revelation. Unless that happens you will not see Jesus for who He is.

Notice again v. 2

"and shew unto you that eternal life which was with the Father and manifest unto us."

"that eternal life" - literally reads in the Greek "the life, the eternal one."

God the Father has to show you that Jesus Christ is the eternal one the Savior.

ILLUSTRATION: Remember when Jesus fed the multitudes loaves and fishes. The next morning they followed Him on the other side of the Sea of Galilee.

They were waiting to be feed again. Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life which came down from heaven."

The Bible says they "Murmured" because he claimed to come down from heaven.

Jesus did the miraculous in feeding Him and they still didn't see Him for who He was.

Jesus said this:

John 6:45 - "It is written in the prophets, And they shall all be taught of God. Every man therefore that hath heard and hath learned of the Father, cometh to me."

Jesus was saying unless the Father opens their eyes to see who I am they won't see it.

John states (1:2), "the life was manifested," and then repeats that this eternal life "was manifested to us" (the apostles).

In other words, the apostles not only had Jesus Christ revealed to them in an objective, historical way; but also, He was manifested to them in a spiritual way as "the life, the eternal one" (literal translation of the Greek).

God opened their eyes to see that the man, Jesus, was not just a godly man or a great teacher.

It was revealed to them that He is "the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Matt. 16:16-17).

Why didn't the multitudes that heard the same teaching and saw the same miracles as the apostles also see and believe in Christ as the life-giving Savior?

Jesus explained (Luke 10:21) that the Father had hidden these things from the wise and revealed them to infants (see also, Matt. 13:10-17).

Then (10:22) He added, “All things have been handed over to Me by My Father, and no one knows who the Son is except the Father, and who the Father is except the Son, and anyone to whom the Son wills to reveal Him.”

In a similar vein, Paul explained (2 Cor. 4:4), “... the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving so that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.”

Unless God shines into our hearts to give sight (2 Cor. 4:6), we cannot and will not see the truth about who Jesus Christ really is.

At its core, true Christianity is Jesus Christ revealed.

Jesus will become real to you when you"

I. Embrace the Historical Reality of Jesus.

But also:

Jesus will become real to you when you:

II. Experience the Spiritual Reality of Jesus 1:2

But also:

III. Enjoy the Personal Reality of Jesus 1:3-4

Notice verse 3-4 Here John gets to the bottom line.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND: The Gnostics claimed that the truth about Christ was a deep mystery or secret, known only by the few.

They were deliberately exclusive.

But John counters their error by showing that true Christianity is not exclusive and hidden.

Rather, it is a message that by its very nature must be proclaimed.

THE MESSAGE OF JESUS IS NOT TO BE HIDDEN IT IS TO BE HERALDED!

A. The Proclamation

He uses three words to describe how the apostles communicated the gospel:

1. v. 2 - "bear witness" or "testify" - We already noted that this is a legal term used in the courtroom in John's day.

When you testify in court, you swear to tell all the truth about what you saw and heard.

John Stott calls this "the authority of experience." The apostles spoke the truth about what they had seen and heard during their time with Jesus.

2. v. 3 - "declare"

Declare is a strong word – It means to report or announce as a messenger.

John Stott calls this the "authority of commission" in that it implies that Jesus Christ appointed the apostles to proclaim the good news about Jesus' life, teaching, death and resurrection.

John is saying all that I have seen and heard about Jesus I now declare to you.

ARGUMENT: If you have truly encountered Jesus, and experienced Him, you cannot help but to express Him.

John says “Declare we unto you”

That is a Christian’s responsibility to declare Jesus.

ILLUSTRATION: Lloyd-Jones on one occasion in his book 'Preachers and Preaching' expressed how a preacher is not to be simply an advocate.

An advocate is someone who stands and represents another, and looks for evidence and then presents it, historical evidence.

But an advocate, or a lawyer has not been there at the events, whereas a witness is the evidence - and that's what an evangelical preacher ought to be!

That's what a Christian is: a witness!

3. v. 4 - "write" - John and some of the other apostles wrote under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, the words that God wanted us to receive.

This is God's Word and it is all about Jesus. It is the message that we proclaim.

This is firsthand, eyewitness testimony about Jesus.

Peter called this a "more sure word of prophecy."

Some question the Bible as a reliable source.

ILLUSTRATION: A few years ago there was an ABC News Documentary on the Search for the Real Jesus!

They used all these sources to try to find the real Jesus. It was an insult to the Word of God.

The whole search was based on the idea that the Bible was not really a reliable source. They felt it necessary to turn to historical documents.

Are there historical documents outside of the Bible that talk about Jesus? Yes!

Outside the Bible, there are several secular writers who make mention of the Lord Jesus Christ:

ILLUSTRATION: Tacitus—in Book XV, Ch. 44—writing in A.D. 114, tells us that the founder of the Christian religion, Jesus Christ,

was put to death by Pontius Pilate in the reign of the Roman Emperor, Tiberius.

ILLUSTRATION: Pliny the Younger wrote a letter to the Emperor Trajan on the subject of Christ and Christians (Book X—96).¹

ILLUSTRATION: Josephus, the famed Jewish historian, lived from A.D. 37 to 95. He seems to record the death and resurrection of Jesus as a fact. In Vol. II, Book XVIII, Chap. III, page 3 of his *Jewish Antiquities*, he wrote:

“Now there was about this time Jesus, a wise man, if it be lawful to call Him a man: for He was a doer of wonderful works, a teacher of such men as receive the truth with pleasure. He drew over to Him both many of the Jews and many of the Gentiles. He was Christ. And when Pilate, at the suggestion of the principal men among us, had condemned Him to the cross, those that loved Him at the first did not forsake Him; for He appeared to them alive again the third day; as the divine prophets had foretold these and ten thousand other wonderful things concerning Him. And the tribe of Christians so named from Him, are not extinct at this day.”²

These are wonderful sources, but I have something far greater. We have a more sure word of prophecy!

¹Tan, P. L. 1996, c1979. *Encyclopedia of 7700 illustrations : [a treasury of illustrations, anecdotes, facts and quotations for pastors, teachers and Christian workers]*. Bible Communications: Garland TX

²Tan, P. L. 1996, c1979. *Encyclopedia of 7700 illustrations : [a treasury of illustrations, anecdotes, facts and quotations for pastors, teachers and Christian workers]*. Bible Communications: Garland TX

Do you realize this morning you are reading a letter from an eyewitness of Jesus Christ?

John's testimony is far greater than any other historical document that man has.

YOU WILL FIND NO BETTER WITNESS THAN WHAT YOU HAVE IN FRONT OF YOU!

All that we know of Jesus comes from the written Word!

YOU EITHER BELIEVE IT OR YOU DON'T

Not only

A. The Proclamation

Which leads to:

B. The Partnership

Notice v. 3 - "...that ye also may have fellowship with us and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ."

EXPLANATION: This word *fellowship* is an important one in the vocabulary of a Christian.

It simply means "to have in common."

As sinners, men have nothing in common with the holy God.

But God in His grace sent Christ to have something in common with men.

Christ took on Himself a human body and became a man. Then He went to the cross and took on that body the sins of the world (1 Peter 2:24).

Because He paid the price for our sins, the way is open for God to forgive us and take us into His family.

When we trust Christ, we become “partakers of the divine nature” (2 Peter 1:4).

The term translated “partakers” in Peter’s epistle is from the same Greek root that is translated “fellowship” in 1 John 1:3.

What a thrilling miracle!

Jesus Christ took on Himself the nature of man that by faith we may receive the very nature of God!

John is inviting us to be partakers of the fellowship that he enjoyed.

Notice who it is with, “The Father and his Son Jesus Christ.”

John is inviting us into that Trinitarian fellowship, the same fellowship that Jesus had with the Father in eternity past.

Look at John 17:20-23

ILLUSTRATION: It would be like this my family is having such a good time enjoying each other we decide we want to share it with someone.

We say lets adopt someone and invite him to share our love and fellowship.

That's what salvation is, it is an invitation to join the fellowship shared between Father and Son.

WHAT A PRIVILEGE!

- A. The Proclamation
- B. The Partnership

Notice also:

C. The Purpose

v. 4 - "And these things write we unto you that your joy may be full."

John gives the purpose of writing this letter. This is one of his purpose statements in 1 John.

There are several purpose statements and this is the first.

John's whole purpose of writing this letter is so that you can know Jesus personally.

This fellowship that we have with Jesus is a very real fellowship! We experience His love, His presence, His joy.

The result of knowing Jesus personally is JOY!

ARGUMENT: You see we were created to enjoy Him.

The reason people today are unfulfilled is because they seek there joy and fulfillment in things rather than in God.

God gave you Jesus what does the world have that can match Him?

A believer should find all their joy and fulfillment in Christ.

ARGUMENT: You may think that joy in the Lord is a nice extra, but not essential.

But as John Piper often points out, we cannot glorify God properly unless we enjoy Him thoroughly.

A. W. Pink (*ibid.*, p. 28) observed, “Now this joy is not to be regarded as a luxury, but rather as a spiritual necessity. We are obligated to be glad in God.”

He goes on to cite several Scriptures that command us to be glad and rejoice in the Lord.

Then he points out that we will not glorify God apart from such genuine joy in Him.

Our aim in proclaiming the gospel to others should be that they, too, would come to share our joy in Jesus Christ.

SUMMARY: Jesus is real to those who will:

- I. Embrace the Historical Reality of Jesus. 1:1
- II. Experience the Spiritual Reality of Jesus 1:2
- III. Enjoy the Personal Reality of Jesus 1:3-4

CONCLUSION: John calls upon us to examine ourselves.

So I ask you examine your heart right now!

Is Jesus Real to you?

Is he just a person in the Bible?
A Person in History?
A Person out there in eternity?

The Bible tells us to examine ourselves it is healthy, so do it now.

What does Jesus mean to you?

1. Is your life dominated by Jesus?

Look at the response of John to Jesus, look at people in Scripture.

They were amazed at Him, they adored Him, they fell at His feet.

Look back at the past – It is a good thing to do. The Bible is always doing this...

2. Is your knowledge of Him the greatest thing that has ever happened to you?

THAT WAS TRUE OF JOHN

John said, “I’ve seen Him, heard Him, touched Him”

John is saying my relationship to Jesus is the greatest thing that has ever happened in my life.

3. Is He the biggest factor in your life?

As we look back we can say that many great things have happened in our lives:

Family upbringing, relationships, people we have met, associations, schools, universities, many people who have influenced us.

BUT WHAT HAS BEEN THE BIGGEST INFLUENCE IN YOUR LIFE?

4. Are you more proud of your association with Him than anything else?

Are you willing to declare Him?

We are proud of many things in this life. Perfectly legitimate. The Bible doesn’t condemn this.

But are you more proud of your association with Jesus than anything else?

If called upon would you be willing to sacrifice all other associations and relationships.

Jesus said, "If any man follow after me and hate not his father and mother he is not worthy to be my disciple."

5. Is the greatest rejoicing in your life based on what He has done for you?

You have rejoiced you have known great happiness.

Is the real source of your rejoicing your knowledge of what Jesus has done for you?

DO YOU KNOW YOUR SINS HAVE BEEN FORGIVEN?

IS YOUR MIND AT REST?

Jesus is real to you when He becomes

The most important factor

The greatest influence

The greatest source of your joy

Greatest source of your satisfaction