**CHRISTMAS**

**THE LIFE MADE MANIFEST**

**1 John 1:1-4**

**INTRODUCTION**

Today I’m beginning a three-part Christmas series on the book of 1 John. 1 John was written by the Apostle John, who wrote five books of the New Testament: the Gospel of John, the book of Revelation, and the three letters that are known as 1 John, 2 John, and 3 John. John was in the inner circle of Jesus’ twelve apostles and was known as “the disciple whom Jesus loved.”

John actually became known as “The Apostle of Love”, because he speaks about love more than anyone else in the New Testament. The word “love” is used 26 times in 1 John, and even though it’s only five chapters long, that’s more than any of the other books in the New Testament, with one exception. The Gospel of John, which John also wrote, mentions love 39 times. Love is *the* central theme of the Apostle John’s writings.

When I say that, however, I have to define what I mean, because the meaning of love today is very different than the meaning of love in Scripture. Today, love has nothing to do with truth. It’s simply a matter of accepting and celebrating people for who they are: who they define themselves to be, and what they choose to do with their lives. But in the Bible, love has everything to do with truth. Think of Paul’s most famous description of love in 1 Corinthians 13. He says that “Love does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth.”

Truth and love are always meant to go together. You can’t truly love someone if you don’t care about truth, and you can’t say you know the truth unless it results in love. John shows us this connection in 1 John 3:18-19:

“Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth. By this we shall know that we are of the truth and reassure our heart before him.”

Christians are to love in truth, and they know that they are in the truth by their love. And so, as the Apostle of Love writes about love, he also writes about truth. In fact, the reason why he wrote this letter was because truth was under attack amongst the churches he was writing to. We saw this in 1 Timothy as well, and it reminds us that false teaching was present in most of the early church. But John didn’t respond by saying, “Truth doesn’t matter. Only love matters.” Instead, he defends the truth, because truth is what produces love.

We don’t know the exact nature of this false teaching, but we can make several inferences based on what John says in this letter. Some were saying that Jesus isn’t the Christ, that he isn’t the Servant King or the Saviour of God’s people whom God had promised (2:22). They were saying that how you lived didn’t matter. You could keep sinning and God wouldn’t care (3:6-7). And most significantly for our purposes today, they were claiming that Jesus hadn’t actually come in the flesh, but had been a kind of “spiritual saviour” who had come invisibly and mysteriously. They were denying the incarnation.

John had strong language for those who taught that Jesus only came spiritually and not physically in 4:1-3:

“Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, for many **false prophets** have gone out into the world. By this you know the Spirit of God: **every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God**, and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God. This is **the spirit of the antichrist**, which you heard was coming and now is in the world already.”

He calls them “false prophets”, because they were denying that Jesus had actually come in the flesh. John says that they weren’t listening to the Spirit of God. They were listening to the spirit of the antichrist. They had the spirit of the evil one, the one who is opposed and hostile to Christ and is directing all his energy and efforts to making sure that no one believes in him and receives eternal life.

This is what’s at stake when it comes to the incarnation. Your views on what actually happened at Christmas reveal whether you’re listening to God or to the devil. Stephen Wellum writes (*God the Son Incarnate*, p. 269):

“John is clear that anyone who denies the humanity of Christ denies the gospel.”

This is why I’ve chosen to preach from 1 John this Christmas season. John helps us to see why the incarnation is so important. Christmas isn’t just a sentimental time to reflect on God’s love and blessings in our lives. It’s a matter of life-altering, love-producing truth: the truth that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh to die as a man so that we could be reconciled to God.

John’s reflections on the incarnation begin in the first four verses of his letter, and they are some of the most beautiful verses written in the New Testament about the incarnation. That is where we will begin today.

The title of this sermon is **The Life Made Manifest.** We will have three points today:

1. The Word of Life
2. The Eternal Life
3. The Proclaimed Life

(1) **THE WORD OF LIFE**

John begins his letter with, “That which was from the beginning.” If you’ve read the Gospel of John, you’ll know that he began that book in a very similar way. John 1:1:

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.”

“The Word” is one of the titles that John gives to Jesus. We see it at the end of 1 John 1:1 as well when John calls Jesus “the word of life”. Jesus is the word, and as the word, he was in the beginning with God, and he was in the beginning *as* God.

This reference to the beginning has echoes of Genesis 1:1:

“In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.”

So when John says that Jesus is the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God, he’s making a statement about his divinity. Jesus was *with* God at the very beginning of creation, but he also *was* God at the beginning of creation.

This is Trinitarian theology at its best. The Father and the Son, along with the Spirit, are one God, but they are also distinct persons. They can be *with* one another. The Father is God, and the Son is God, but the Father is not the Son, and the Son is not the Father. Jesus was with God, and Jesus was God, and together with the Spirit, the three persons of the Trinity lived in eternal fellowship as one God.

John alludes to that in verses 1-2, but his emphasis here isn’t on the divinity of Christ, but on his humanity:

**1**That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we looked upon and have touched with our hands, concerning the word of life— **2**the life was made manifest, and we have seen it…”

See how he piles up all of this sensory language. “We have heard”, “we have seen with our eyes”, “we have looked upon”, ‘we have touched with our hands”. John was overwhelmed by the fact that he was a personal witness to the Word who became flesh and dwelt among us. He wanted to make it absolutely clear that the who was with God and who was God in the beginning entered time and space as a man and walked among mankind.

The dust that he made covered his feet. The air that he created filled his lungs. And the men and women he made in his own image walked with him, talked with him, and felt his touch upon them.

Words can’t capture the wonder of this mystery. The Dutch theologian Herman Bavinck expresses this wonder when he writes,

“It is completely incomprehensible to us how God can reveal himself and to some extent make himself known in created beings: eternity in time, immensity in space, infinity in the finite, immutability in change, being in becoming, the all, as it were, in that which is nothing. This mystery cannot be comprehended; it can only be gratefully acknowledged.”

There are truths in the Christian faith that aren’t so much to be understood as they are to be admired. Yes, we are to stretch all the power of our minds to grasp the truths of Christianity, but at some point, we have to sit back and stand in awe at the mystery of God and the wonders of the gospel.

That is certainly true of Christmas. The wonder of Christmas isn’t the trees, or wreaths, or lights, or presents. It’s the incomprehensible mystery that the Creator God manifested himself in the weakness of a created vessel. All the imagery of Christmas is meant to be precisely that – images that point us to the reality of the incarnation. It’s a mystery that can never fully be understood.

Consider why John calls Jesus “the Word”. What do words do? They communicate a message. We communicate messages to one another by using words, and so does God. But here, the Bible reveals that the means that God uses to communicate his message isn’t found in letters and syllables. It’s found in the person of Jesus Christ. *Jesus* is the Word. *Jesus* is God’s message to the world. Jesus came to give us God’s Word in his teaching, but more than that, he came to embody it. God’s message of love, forgiveness, redemption, and reconciliation is captured and expressed in the person of Jesus Christ.

Picture a soldier being away from his wife and children for several months. He writes to them often about how much he misses them, and how much he loves them. He sends them gifts from the far off land where he’s stationed, and of course all of that is meaningful. But then he decides to give them the best gift of all. He gives them the gift of himself. He knocks on the door of his own house, and his wife and children run to him and embrace him with shouts of joy and tears in their eyes, because they know that he loves them, and he doesn’t have to say a single word.

That’s what God has communicated to us through the gift of his Son. The coming of Christ into the world tells us more about God’s love than anything else God could say or do. Jesus is God’s Word to us.

John also says that Jesus is “the word *of life*”. He’s God’s message of life to spiritually dead sinners like us. In fact, in verse 2, John calls him “*the* life”:

**1**That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we looked upon and have touched with our hands, concerning the word of life— **2the life** was made manifest, and we have seen it…”

Jesus doesn’t just have life. He *is* life. If you’re alive, you have life. If you have breath in your lungs, and you have blood flowing through your body, you have life. But none of us can say that we *are* life. Life is only something that we possess. It’s not something that we are. We have to receive life from the one who is life, because we don’t have life in ourselves. Every breath we take is a gift of life from the one who is life.

John refers to Jesus as “the life” several times in his gospel:

“In him was life, and **the life** was the light of men.” (John 1:3)

“For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have **life in himself**.” (John 5:26)

“I am the resurrection and **the life**.” (John 11:25)

“I am the way, and the truth, and **the life**.” (John 14:6)

Jesus is the life, and here in verse 2, John says that *this* life was made manifest. Life himself became flesh and dwelt among us. When human ears heard Jesus speak, they were hearing life speak. When human eyes saw Jesus, they were seeing life itself. When human hands touched Jesus, they were touching the one who had put breath in their lungs.

Jesus is the life. That explains the resurrection. Jesus died on the cross. He offered up his spirit to the Father in death. But on the third day, he rose, because the grave couldn’t hold him. Death couldn’t extinguish the burning flame of his life because he *is* life.

This is the message of Christmas. The life was made manifest in the person of Jesus Christ. The one who created all things and sustains all things by the word of his power became a man, a real man, a man who could be heard, seen, and touched. Truly, “This mystery cannot be comprehended; it can only be gratefully acknowledged.”

(2) **THE ETERNAL LIFE**

John also calls Jesus “the eternal life” in verse 2:

**2**the life was made manifest, and we have seen it, and testify to it and proclaim to you **the eternal life**, which was with the Father and was made manifest to us…”

We know that John is still talking about Jesus because he says that the eternal life that he proclaims was “with the Father and was made manifest to us”. Eternal life isn’t just a thing we either have or we don’t have. It’s a person we either know or don’t know. When John saw Jesus, he saw eternal life. Eternal life isn’t just a duration of time. It’s a quality of life that is defined by relationship with God himself.

My daughter Lily recently asked me if people in hell live forever. My first response was “Yes, people will live in hell forever.” But when I thought about it a little more, I had to tell her that, “Actually, no, they don’t *live* forever, because there’s a difference between living and merely existing. People in hell will exist, but they won’t truly be living, because they won’t have Jesus. You can’t truly live if you don’t have the one who is life.”

This is why the book of Revelation says that those who are sent to hell experience the “second death”. They are banished, not to eternal life in hell, but to eternal death in hell.

This is also why the book of Ephesians says that everyone who is apart from Christ is “spiritually dead”. No one who is spiritually dead has ever truly lived, because they don’t have Jesus. And if they never repent and believe the gospel, their spiritual death will stretch on forever.

But for those who are in Christ, for all who have trusted in him as Saviour, eternal life isn’t something you have to wait for. You have it right now. Or to be more accurate, you have *him* right now. By faith, you have been united with Christ, the eternal life who was with the Father and was made manifest. And that means that you can taste the joys of eternal life right now, in this moment, and throughout your lifetime.

When Jesus prayed the high priestly prayer in John 17:1-3, he prayed:

“Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son that the Son may glorify you, since you have given him authority over all flesh, **to give eternal life** to all whom you have given him. **And this is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent**.”

When Jesus gives us eternal life, he gives us himself, because that’s what eternal life is. It’s knowing the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom he has sent.

Christmas reminds us that we don’t have to work our way up to earn eternal life, because eternal life has come down to us in the person of Jesus Christ. And this gift can be received freely by grace to anyone who calls on Jesus to be saved.

(3) **THE PROCLAIMED LIFE**

Third, John tells us that Jesus is the proclaimed life.

Twice, he mentions that this Word, which he has heard, seen, and touched, is the same Word that he now proclaims to others:

**“2**the life was made manifest, and we have seen it, and testify to it and **proclaim** to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was made manifest to us— **3**that which we have seen and heard we **proclaim** also to you…”

This Word of eternal life isn’t meant to be kept to ourselves. It’s meant to be proclaimed. God’s message of salvation is meant to be shared with others. If you’re a Christian, you know that. But the wonderful thing about these verses is that they remind us that when we share the word, we’re not just sharing a bunch of theological propositions. We’re sharing a person.

We’re giving people the good news that life itself – life abundant, and life eternal – was made manifest in our world. The first Christians knew this, because they heard him, saw him, and touched him. They tasted the sweetness of his physical presence in this world. And they proclaimed him so that all could know him as well.

That was John’s great desire. In verse 3, he writes:

**“3**that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. And we are writing these things so that our joy may be complete.”

For the Apostle John, there was no greater joy than to see people enter into fellowship with him and the apostles, because by entering into fellowship with them, they would enter into fellowship with God. They would enter into fellowship with life itself – life eternal – and be completely transformed by that relationship.

I can only imagine the joy that the Apostle John would feel if he were here, what he would feel if he were here to see all these people from so many different nations, and ages, and backgrounds all gathered in the name of Christ thanks to *his* faithful testimony. What joy he would feel to see us rejoicing in *his* Saviour and putting our trust in the one that he proclaimed.

Now we have the opportunity to do the same. We may not have seen Jesus, but by God’s gracious gift, we have seen him with the eyes of faith. We may not have heard Jesus speak, but we have heard his words in the Holy Scriptures. We may not have touched Jesus, but we have felt the touch of his Spirit in the depths of our souls. And now, what we have seen, and heard, and touched, we also proclaim.

Like John, we have the opportunity to make our joy complete by proclaiming the eternal life who was with the Father and made manifest, first to the apostles, and now to us. And as we do, we can take great comfort in knowing that we don’t just proclaim a message to those around us. We proclaim a man. We proclaim a man who was fully human but also fully God. We proclaim a man who was from the beginning but entered time. We proclaim a man who was with the Father but left his heavenly home so that he could be with us.

When we proclaim Christ, we’re not just offering heaven. We’re offering life: true life, abiding life, overflowing life that begins now and will stretch on into eternity.

**CONCLUSION**

Have you received this life? If you’ve never put your trust in Christ before, the Bible says that you’ve never truly lived. You’re alive, but you’ve never lived, because true life is only found in Jesus Christ. And so, I proclaim him to you, not only so that your joy may be complete, but so that my joy would be complete.

I proclaim to you that the life was made manifest in the person of Jesus Christ; that he lived a perfect life to satisfy the law; that he died as our substitute on the cross for the forgiveness of our sins; that he rose from the dead to defeat sin, Satan, and death; that he ascended on high to sit at the right hand of the Father; and that he is coming again to judge the living and the dead, when the righteous will rise to eternal life, and the wicked will be banished to an eternity of death.

I proclaim to you that the one who has come is coming again, and that eternal life is only found in his name. Believe in him, put your trust in Christ as your Saviour and Lord, that you might fellowship with us and with God.

And for my fellow Christians, this Christmas, let us remember what we have in Jesus Christ. We have in him a shepherd and a saviour. We have in him a king and a master. But John reminds us that we have in him a friend and a brother. He has tasted our weakness. He has felt the weight of our temptations. He has suffered from within our broken world. And because of this, we know that he understands.

He understands our weakness. He understands our suffering. And because he understands, he doesn’t look upon us with anger or impatience, but with sympathy and compassion.

And so, don’t be afraid to come to him. Don’t let your sins keep you from running into his arms again and again and again, but trust him. Come and receive from him the eternal life that is reserved for all who are united to him by faith, so that your joy, and our joy, may be complete.