

Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

Certainties of the Word of Life, Part 2

Scripture: 1 John 1:1-4

Code: 62-3

We live in a time when certainty and conviction about what is true is not tolerated. The politically correct attitude is one of uncertainty with nothing absolute. There's a new hermeneutics, a new science of interpretation called the Hermeneutics of Humility, and this is serious to the people who espoused this and their Hermeneutics of Humility say, "I'm too humble to think that I could ever know what the Bible really means and so I can only offer my opinion and I certainly can't say that this is in fact the truth." They pat themselves on the back congratulating themselves for such intellectual openness. Opinions and feelings tend to rule the mood of our time. And the church as always it does fall prey to this sort of post-modern inclusivism that wants to embrace everything everybody thinks as truth for them. And so the church has lost its convictions, its lost its certainties and this is a perfect time for us to turn to the epistle of John because he is the Apostle of certainties and this is a very certain epistle.

I mentioned to you before that 36 times you're going to find some form of the word "know" here. I know, we know, you know...there is an absoluteness in that. There's no vagueness or equivocation. Also, there's another key word that appears in the epistle and I can show it to you in several verses. Chapter 2 verse 28, "And now, little children abide in Him so that when He appears we may have confidence..." The word is "confidence." Chapter 3 verse 21, "Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us we have confidence." Chapter 4 verse 17, "By this love is perfected in us that we may have confidence." Chapter 5 verse 14, "And this is the confidence which we have before Him." This is the word *parrhesia* in Greek and it just means that. It means boldness. In fact it can mean boldness of speech. But it is the defining Greek word for confidence. John knows whereof he speaks, and so he has confidence. He's absolutely certain about what he writes. He is confident in it and he wants us to share that same confidence. The Bible exalts dogmatism in that sense, confidence, boldness of speech because one knows the truth. This is so contrary to the mood today as to almost seem insensitive, unloving and out of touch. But this is exactly what John in his epistle lifts up and exalts.

More than that, he normalizes it. We should know and we should have confidence. Now the major matters of certainty in this letter could fall into three categories. The first one would be the theological certainty of the gospel...the theological certainty of the gospel. John wants us to know that he is certain about the gospel, that it is firm and that it is true and there are a number of verses scattered

throughout this epistle that affirm that. We're going to see the opening three verses affirm the truths of the gospel. We're also going to find in chapter 2 verse 1 there is an affirmation of the gospel that we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous, verse 2, who is the propitiation for our sins. We're also going to find again that anybody in chapter 2 verse 22 who denies Jesus is the Christ, this is antichrist. Again that's sort of a backward affirmation of the gospel. We're going to find again in chapter 5, "Whoever believes...in verse 1...that Jesus is the Christ is born of God." And again toward the end of the chapter, verse 20, "We know that the Son of God has come and this is the true God and eternal life." So the first category of certainty has to do with the theological certainty of the gospel and John will repeatedly hit that issue.

The second is the moral certainty of the law...the moral certainty of the law. And John wants us to understand that God has given a law and that we are bound to that law and to the obedience of that law. Chapter 2 verse 4, "The one who says I have come to know Him and doesn't keep His commandments is a liar." Theologically we have to be certain about the gospel. Morally we have to be certain about the law of God. And John says I'm not writing, in verse 7 of chapter 2, some new commandment but an old commandment which you have had from the beginning, the old commandment is the Word which you have heard. That is the law of God. Yet on the other hand, I'm writing a new commandment to you. It may be new to you but it's old. Calling you to obedience to that which God has revealed as His law. At the end of chapter 2 and verse 29 he writes, "If you know that He is righteous, you know that everyone also who practices righteousness is born of Him." There again is the moral issue. Practicing righteousness means obeying God's revealed law. And over in chapter 3 verse 9, "The one who is born of God doesn't practice sin because God's seed abides in him, he can't sin he's born of God. By this the children of God, the children of the devil are obvious. Anyone who doesn't practice righteousness is not of God, nor the one who doesn't love his brother..." and so forth. So there is moral obligation which John recites. Again down in verse 22, "Whatever we ask we receive from Him because we keep His commandments and do the things that are pleasing in His sight." All the way to the end of chapter 4, "This commandment we have from Him that one who loves God should love his brother also." Chapter 5 verse 2, "By this we know that we love the children of God because we love God and observe His commandments."

So again you have a theological component in this epistle of certainty, and you have a moral component. The theological component is the certainty of the gospel. The moral component is the certainty of the law of God. We are bound to believe the gospel and to obey the law of God. So there is a theological certainty, a moral certainty, and thirdly there's a relational certainty...there's a relational certainty. John wants to affirm to us the relational certainty of love...of love. And that, of course, as we've already noted in some of what I just read you is scattered throughout the entire epistle. I think most notably chapter 4 features this, starting in verse 7, "Beloved, let us love one

another for love is from God and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God." And then he goes on to talk about this all the way down to the end of the chapter. And then he continues to talk about it into chapter 5 and verse 3, "This is the love of God that we keep His commandments and His commandments are not burdensome." So he ties this love toward God with obedience to the commandments. And then off of that love toward God and obedience comes obedience to the command to love others.

And so you can say that just about everything in this epistle, in fact everything in this epistle, falls under one of those three headings. It is either in the category of theological certainty regarding the gospel, or moral certainly [meant certainty] regarding the law, or relational certainty regarding love.

Now these categories are categories of certainties. They are categories of absolutes. They are categories of unequivocal, unarguable divine truth. But also they are categories of absolutes that become the tests of one's spiritual state. They are categorically the areas in which one is tested as to their spiritual state. And anyone, listen carefully, who fails to pass the test in any of those categories is exposed as a fraud and a liar and a deceiver and an antichrist so that John is going to lay down some absolutes in those three categories, he is going to lay them down as tests by which anyone's life can be measured as to its true spiritual condition. There is, as I said earlier, a graphic illustration of how these tests can be applied in the current scandal of the Roman Catholic Church. If you measure the priests against the theological certainty of the gospel, they fall short, don't they, because they do not believe in salvation by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone, but theirs is a salvation of works, a justification in which grace cooperates with human works to produce a right relationship to God. They failed the theological test. Secondly, it's pretty clear they're failing the moral test, isn't it? It's pretty clear that they're not obedient to the law of God. It's very clear that no fornicator or adulterer or homosexual shall inherit the Kingdom of God. They fail the theological test. They fail the moral test. And they fail the relational test. Believe me, you don't love someone that you sexually abuse.

You can take these tests and you can measure them against any life...any life. And you're going to find out whether or not a person is truly in the Kingdom of God, whether they're truly saved by the measurement of those tests. Certainly all the Roman Catholic priests would claim to belong to Jesus Christ. They would claim not only to belong to Jesus Christ but they would claim to have reached the highest and noblest and purest and most devout level of consecration to Christ. They would claim literally that they stand between sinners and Christ at a higher level. As priests they are able to mediate between the sinner and Christ because of their exalted position. The truth is theologically they fail the test. Their gospel is perverted by works. Morally they fail the test, their virtue is perverted by the flesh. Relationally they fail the test, their love is perverted by lust. No matter what they say,

John tells us they are false teachers, they are deceivers, they are liars, they are antichrists.

So what John is going to give us is categories...categories by which we can measure anybody, not just Roman Catholic priests but anybody. These categories need to be certain in their establishment. If we're going to measure somebody by the gospel, if we're going to measure them by the law of God, if we're going to measure them by love then we have to know that those are in fact established by God. And so John is going to show us through this epistle that indeed these are from God. It is God who has given us the gospel. It is God who has given us His commandments which we are to obey. And it is God who has given us love and the example of love, having first loved us we are to love Him in return, and others as well. So what you have there are the certainties of the Christian faith: theologically, morally and relationally. As we will learn, they are revealed in history, witnessed by the Apostles, and confirmed by the Holy Spirit. You want evidence? There's the evidence, the truths of which we can be certain are basically experienced by the Apostles in history and confirmed by the Holy Spirit in the believer. That takes us then to the first four verses.

And when John begins to write he skips all the amenities, all the introductory material, doesn't identify who he is or who he's writing to, he just launches into this. But his theme here is the Word of Life. You notice the Word of Life mentioned at the end of verse 1, it's about the Word of Life, it's concerning the Word of Life that John writes. The Word of Life, of course, is the person of Jesus Christ and the gospel of Christ, all there is about Christ, His person, His work and the gospel. John then is going to tell us about the Word of Life. This is where he starts. He starts with the theological category of certainty. And as he speaks of the Word of Life, as he addresses the living incarnate Word who is the theme of the written Word, as he addresses the person of Jesus Christ he presents to us some of the features of the certainty of the Word of Life.

First, I'm just going to give you some words that you can kind of hang your thoughts on, the first way that the Word of Life is certain, that the Lord Jesus Christ is certainly the Savior and the gospel is certainly the saving message is indicated by its permanence...its permanence. He starts out in verse 1, "What was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we beheld and our hands handled concerning the Word of Life."

The first thing he says is it was from the beginning. Not new, John says, not new. The Word of Life has not and never will change. John says, and you remember now he's an old man, this is the last decade of the first century, he's the last man standing among the Apostles, the last living Apostle, he's near the end of his life and he's saying what I'm going to tell you about the Word of Life is what

was from the beginning. The beginning of what? The beginning of the proclamation of the gospel, the beginning of apostolic proclamation of Christ. I'm giving you the same old message that was preached by the eleven, and probably by Mathias, and certainly by Paul, the same old message that really was launched by John the Baptist and then by Jesus, repentance, the Kingdom is at hand, forgiveness is available, reconciliation with God. Nothing changes. This is a direct shot at the heretics with their new truth. He's saying I'm not giving you anything new, avoid anything new, new is wrong. Stay with the apostolic proclamation of Christ. Always the heretics have something new, some new revelation, some new vision, some new insight. And I told you last time that there was developing at that time around the churches an incipient Gnosticism which was an elevated knowledge in which people thought they had transcendent knowledge, access to divine information that the hoi-polloi the common people didn't have and they were trying to come into the church and tell them they had been given secret knowledge, new things from God.

John says...I don't have anything new, what I have is the same old message. When somebody comes along and says there's a new revelation, it's called the book of Mormon, or the Pearl of Great Price, or the Doctrines and the Covenants, run! When somebody comes along and says there's a new revelation from God through Mary Baker Eddy called Science and Health and Key to the Scriptures, turn and go the other direction! When Pastor Russell and Judge Rutherford come along with their studies in the Scripture and tell you they are the true Jehovah's Witnesses who have received down from heaven a document called The Harps of God, turn and leave! Anybody comes to offer you some new revelation, it's not going to be true. This is the first thing John wants to establish that this is the message that's been given from the beginning. It's the permanent timeless and eternal message.

If you look over at Jude which is just a few little books to the right, after 3 John, Jude in verse 3 writing to believers called "beloved in God and kept for Jesus Christ," in verse 1 says, "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 which was once for all delivered to the saints." What you're going to have to do, Jude writes, is you're going to have to fight for the once-for-all, delivered-to-the-saints faith. That's the apostolic faith, that's the New Testament. You have to fight for that. "You have to earnestly contend for that for certain persons, verse 4, have crept in unnoticed who were long beforehand 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." There are always going to be people coming in with new information and the new information is that the Apostles were wrong, and Paul was wrong, and Jesus is not God. We must guard this once, *hapax*, once-for-all, delivered-to-the-saints faith. There never will be another faith given. Mark that. The faith was once-for-all given. *Hapax* means once for all, never to be repeated. We have been given the once-for-all faith, there never will be another faith. Hebrews 13:8 says, "Jesus is the same yesterday, today and forever."

There's not going to be any change in the gospel. So Hebrews 13:9 says, "Do not be carried away by varied and strange teaching." If it's new, it's wrong.

In writing to the Galatians the Apostle Paul in chapter 1 says, "I am amazed," verse 6, "you're so quickly deserting Him who called you by the grace of Christ for a different gospel, which is really not another, only there are some who are disturbing you and want to distort the gospel of Christ." And then he says, "Even though we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to that which we have preached to you, let him be accursed." He repeats it, "As we said before I'm saying again, if any man is preaching you a gospel contrary to that which you received, let him be accursed." There's no room for another gospel...none whatsoever. Paul says, "I absolutely marvel, I am *thaumazo*, do you know, I'm stunned. I'm astounded. I'm astonished that you've transferred your allegiance to another gospel rather than the once-for-all, delivered-to-the-saints faith.

So John starts out in a simple statement, "What was from the beginning," affirming that the Word of Life, the message concerning the Word of Life, Christ and the gospel is the same message preached since the Apostles began, since our Lord began, since John the Baptist began to preach it. It is the *hapax*, the once-for-all, delivered-to-the-saints faith and there will never be another one delivered. The Word of Life then is permanent...permanent.

Secondly, it is sensible. And I mean that in this sense, it is perceived by the senses. It is perceived by the senses. There were some, of course, who wanted to cast religion into a mystical paradigm, who wanted all religion to sort of exist only in some ethereal imagination, neo-orthodoxy has done that in more modern times in the Hileiga-Shick-Dalickta[????] the super-duper history that somewhere other than the real history we live in. But John wants us to know that our senses can apprehend this Word of Life, that it's not mystical, it's not transcendent, it's not reserved only for the gnostics, the people in the know, the people with super knowledge, elevated knowledge. Always those kinds of people are around us, religious gurus of all sorts who think they have the transcendent knowledge. But John wants us to know that the Word of Life is available to our senses. So he says, "What we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we beheld and our hands handled concerning the Word of Life and the life was manifested and we have seen and bear witness and proclaim to you the eternal life which was with the Father and was manifested to us."

In verse 3 he goes on. "What we have seen and heard we proclaimed to you also." John is saying, "I'm not talking about some transcendental experience, I'm not talking about some mystical thing, I'm not talking about some secret *gnosis*, I'm telling you this Word of Life I experienced, I heard Him, I

saw Him, I looked upon Him, I touched Him." And the gnostics, of course, would come along and they would talk about all these mystical kinds of things and John is saying...Reject all of that in favor of a true manifestation of God in human flesh, the living and breathing Son of God, the Word of Life personified, made manifest." John 1:14, "And the Word became...what?...flesh and dwelt among us and we beheld His glory." The truth was real and incarnate and He was here. God became man, divine life was manifest in human flesh. And John says, "Don't let any heretics sway you from that real incarnation." We have experienced it, he says. It was manifest. The Life, the Word of Life, verse 2 He calls Him the eternal Life who was with the Father and was manifested to us. The eternal one entered time and was manifest.

And there are sort of four steps in John's sensible perception, four ascending features in verse 1 suggesting a deepening degree of personal experience. First, what we have heard...what we have heard. What did they hear? They heard Him speak. You know, we're having the wonderful adventure of going through the gospel of Luke and every Sunday when we come together we hear Jesus speak the words that come out of His mouth, the parables, the stories, the sermons. Well John was there. This old man was there when he was young, he was there with Jesus for the duration of His ministry from the beginning of it to the end of it. He was there post-resurrection for 40 days on occasion meeting with the Lord and hearing Him. We have heard. Perfect tense indicating the reality in past time with present impact. And what he's saying here, "We have heard," the way it's structured in the Greek indicates that the hearing was not confined to one single occasion. He's not saying, "You know, one day, one time I was in a certain place and I heard something come out of Jesus' mouth." No. We have heard...we have heard in a progressive and a complete and continuous sense.

And this tense also has the idea that the past process was a complete one. We were there for the complete hearing. The evidence is all in. I was there, I heard Him. I heard the Sermon on the Mount, I heard the whole thing. I heard the parables, all of them, didn't miss any of them. I heard Him preach in synagogues and in valleys and on hillsides and in thoroughfares. I heard Him teach in houses. I heard it all. I didn't miss any of it. I heard it firsthand. Sixty years ago for John, but it was still a living truth in his heart.

Secondly he said, "We heard," and then he said, "What we have seen with our eyes." The word is *horaō*, refers to the physical act of seeing. It's just reality, nothing mystical about this. He's not saying, "You know, I had a vision, I saw a ...I saw a phantom appearance of the living *logos*." It's not that kind of double talk like the Docetists. He says, "We have seen with our eyes," not with our minds, not with some transcendental visionary kind of thought. We saw Him with our eyes. Why does he add "with our eyes"? So that everybody knows that he's talking about his physical sight. I saw Him there...again the tense is perfect tense, which suggests a complete seeing with ongoing impact. He saw the whole

perfection of the revelation of Christ for himself, he saw it with his own eyes. He was there when Jesus cast demons out of people time and time and time again. He saw it with his own eyes. He was there when Jesus reached out a hand and helped a lame person up and that lame person walked away. He was there when Jesus touched the eyes of the blind and they saw. He was there when He put his hand over the ears of the deaf and they heard. He was there when He touched the funeral procession, touched the casket or the bier of the young man whose mother lived in Nain and he was there when that young man came to life. He was there...he was there. He was there when Jesus called demons out of people and they came flying out of the people and they were delivered. He was there. He was there when Jesus walked on water. He was there when He multiplied the loaves and the fishes. He saw it with his own eyes, this is his own personal experience. And he was there for the full completion of what Jesus did. He experienced it first hand. This is so wonderful, so wonderful.

John says you can be certain about this. You can be certain about Jesus Christ. Not because I had a vision, now you hear people say, "Well, you know, I saw the Lord and He told me this..." I don't...I don't put any confidence in that at all, do you? Why should I? It's not verifiable and it's not repeatable. John, that's different. He was there. All you have to do is go back and read the gospel record, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, and you'll know that.

Going a little further, not only what we heard and what we've seen with our eyes concerning the Word of Life, but what we beheld...what we beheld. It sounds like maybe he's repeating what he just said, "What we saw with our eyes." No. It means to look long at, to look long at, not just a glance, not just a sort of objective look, but a searching gaze. It's, by the way, used...it's the verb used in John 1:14, "The Word became flesh and we beheld His glory." We looked closely at it. We looked deeply at it.

You can imagine that. You know, I mean, there was the reality in the travels of the Lord with His Apostles that they were seeing what was going on with their eyes. They were experiencing all of it. But there was another level in which they were looking more deeply into what it was that was happening. They were seeing and they were hearing not what was apparently superficial, but they were seeing and hearing what was behind. They were looking deeply into the realities of who Christ was, His power to forgive, His power over demons, His power over disease, His power over death. So John says I not only saw the events, saw the man, but I saw the meaning...I saw what was going on. I saw that it was God in human flesh.

And then he adds one more. "What we beheld and our hands handled," *psellaphason* [?] in the Greek, means to grope, to feel after like a blind man. A blind man takes a page of Braille and the smallest little bumps and bends that he feels translate into meaningful words. That's John. Jesus used this

word in Luke 24:39 when He said, "Handle Me...handle Me and realize that a spirit doesn't have flesh and bones as you see Me have." And they handled Him. And He told Thomas, "Reach hither and touch My side and see the nail prints and touch them." John says, "This is no apparition, this is no phantom. I had Him in my hands." And we know enough about John to know that John even leaned on His chest, didn't he? He describes himself that way in his own gospel. He had three years to touch Jesus, to handle Him, to be near Him, to...as it were...grope like a blind man, to really understand who He was. This is remarkable.

Now you will notice that John doesn't say, "I have heard," and "I have seen," and "I beheld," and "My hands handled." He says, "We," and "Our," because he's including himself with the Apostles. We all were there. We all heard, saw, looked intently into and handled the Word of Life. I want to hear from this man. He's an expert. He's a firsthand eyewitness. I was there, I saw and I heard and I looked deeply into and I felt all that He was. And then in verse 2, "And the Life was manifested, the Word of Life was manifested." He said, "What's my conclusion...what is my conclusion? It is that this is the Life, the Word of Life." Large "L", upper case, you see it there? Divine Life. Verse 2, "The Life was manifested, we've seen and bear witness and proclaim to you the eternal Life, the very eternal Life which is with the Father and was manifest to us."

You know what my conclusion is? My conclusion is that what I heard and what I saw and what I looked into and what I touched was the eternal life of God manifest in flesh. It was manifest, *phaneroo*, to make visible what is hidden. God was hidden until Christ and the divine Life became visible, that eternal Life, that Word of Life was none other than that eternal Life who was with the Father and was manifested to us. Fallen creatures could never ascend to heaven to seek that life, so the Son had to descend to earth to bring that life. The Word of Life, and the Eternal Life are the same. The Word was God, the Word was with God. John 1:4 says and "In Him was life...in Him was life." I wish I had time but I'll leave it to you to go through all of the occasions in which Jesus referred to this Life. John 5:26, "Just as the Father has life in Himself, even so He gave to the Son also to have life in Himself," that is to say He has an equal life with the Father, He is equal in essence. And then he says in 5:40 of John, "You are unwilling to come to Me that you may have life." He is life, He brings life, He gives life. John 11:25 and 26 he says, "I am the resurrection and the Life, whoever believes in Me though he were dead yet shall he live." In John 14:6 He says, "I am the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to Me except by the Father." He is life. That's John's conclusion. In 1 John 5:12, "He who has the Son has the life, he who doesn't have the Son of God doesn't have the life."

So John says...I was there, I heard Him, I saw Him, I looked deeply into Him, I groped after and I discerned and I felt and I touched and I'm telling you, this is divine life in human flesh." This is the testimony of John and a wonderful testimony it is. He is that divine life. He is that very divine life

which was with the Father. Literally in the Greek, "Toward the Father." This is that very life that was face-to-face with the Father. This is God. This is the eternal One.

So John is certain. He's certain about the permanence of the Word of Life. He doesn't bring a new message. He's certain about the sensibility of that eternal life, the Word of Life because he personally experienced it and repeats it again and again, even in verse 3, "What we have seen and heard we proclaim to you."

And that brings us to a third thought. Certain about the person of Christ, the permanent Word of Life, the sensible Word of Life, and here he talks about the proclaimed Word of Life. My responsibility, he says, is to bear witness and proclaim to you the eternal life. As a witness, as a one who saw Him, I am to bear witness, personal witness from the standpoint of experience. You know, if you're going to be a witness in a trial, legitimate witness, not some kind of an expert witness comes in to talk about some technical aspect of the trial, if you're going to be a witness you have to have experienced something that comes to bear upon the court and the case. John says, "I'm going to bear witness. I can come in and give a firsthand testimony of Christ because I bore witness. I have seen and bear witness and I proclaim to you the eternal life which was manifested to us. We saw it, we heard it, we proclaim it."

And that is really the simplest possible process for us to understand how John viewed his ministry. It's the old message which I personally experienced, the old truth, the revelation which I personally experienced which I'm called to proclaim. It is this to which I was witness that I proclaim. The manifestation then becomes a proclamation. The manifestation becomes a proclamation.

And John wants his readers to have the same glorious knowledge that he and the other Apostles had. The people to whom he wrote surely had never seen Jesus. They were living in Asia Minor for one thing, Jesus never went there. There's nothing to indicate that anybody in the churches there had met Jesus Christ. They wouldn't be then witnesses of Christ, they wouldn't have heard and seen and looked upon and handled the Word of Life. But John is there to be the eyewitness to proclaim that truth to them. He is credible because of his life and his character and his apostleship and it is known by everyone that he is the John who was with Jesus. So in a very real sense, Christ manifested Himself to the Apostles to qualify them as firsthand eyewitnesses so that they could pass that on to others in the proclamation of the gospel. And when received by others, it would be again passed on to a next generation.

We can't be Apostles, none of us can be an Apostle, but we have the Apostles' eyewitness account right here. Peter gives us an eyewitness account. Peter says in his epistle he was an eyewitness to the manifest glory of Christ at the transfiguration. All of the books of the New Testament written by Apostles or those who were associated with the Apostles give us the apostolic eyewitness account. The book of Acts says that the Apostles' doctrine was what was the content of the preaching and teaching and study of the church. And so Christ manifested Himself to them, had them as eyewitnesses write down the record. Matthew wrote it down, Mark wrote it down, Luke wrote it down and John wrote it down. And they are the eyewitnesses who have given us their account. It is such a ludicrous and such a terrible thing for people to come along whether they call themselves scholars or whatever and attack the scriptural accounts and attack the honesty and the integrity not only of God the Holy Spirit but of the eyewitnesses, the Apostles. John says it is certain that this is the true message and the true manifestation and the true proclamation.

There's another certainty here that is an interesting certainty, it is the certainty of a true fellowship...of fellowship. And he says this in the end of verse 3, the reason that we proclaim all of this is, "That you also may have fellowship with us and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son, Jesus Christ."

There's a progression here. It was the old message which John personally experienced in its fullness which he proclaims for the purpose of including people in the fellowship. It's a *hina* with a purpose clause, "In order that you also may have fellowship with us." And we talk about fellowship...I don't know what you think about, some people think about...you know, I grew up in a church where they had a place called, "Fellowship Hall." Did you ever have one of those in the church when you were a kid? Yeah, it was down in the basement, it had linoleum on the floor and shuffleboard and metal chairs and we drank red punch and ate stale cookies. You know, that was fellowship, right? But when we talk biblically...when you talk biblically about fellowship, it's something very different. Fellowship is the word *koinonia*, basically means partnership---partnership. It's not about...it's not about a relational connection, it's about a real partnership. When we talk about fellowship today we use it in a sense of socializing.

That is not what it means. *Koinonos* meant partner, some joint participation held in common. A fourth century inscription finds it used this way. A doctor in medicine...a doctor of medicine inscribed to his wife who also studied medicine but had died as "With you alone I shared my life." Well the only thing I want to draw from that is the fact that for him the word "shared" meant marriage, it's that kind of

partnership. It's more than just socializing, it's being linked together in a common life. It's not just a social exercise, or a social engagement, it is a true partnership.

John is not saying, "You know, I want you to have some social interaction with me. I want you to have social interaction with us, the Apostles," because the people in the churches of Asia Minor wouldn't be able to have social interaction with the Apostles. It's unlikely they would have much social interaction with John who very soon would be in exile. And certainly it wouldn't relate to us as we read it, how am I going to have social interaction with John? He's in heaven. It is not a reference to some mystical companionship either. It is a real partnership.

So the way to understand this is that the preaching of the gospel produces faith and a person who puts their faith in Christ enters into a real partnership with other believers. It is a real sharing of life. First Corinthians 1:9 uses it in this context, "God is faithful through whom you were called into fellowship with His Son Jesus Christ our Lord." That is partnership. When you were saved you were called into partnership with Christ. "He that is joined to the Lord is one spirit," 1 Corinthians 6:17. "I am crucified with Christ, nevertheless I live yet not I but Christ lives in me." This is the partnership. And this fellowship, verse 3, is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ.

What happens when you are saved? You are immediately placed into a relationship, an eternal partnership with God and with Christ. The partnership is so intimate that you become the temple of God and you are in some ways indistinguishable from Christ. I live...says Paul...yet not I but Christ lives in me...it is a real partnership. It is a sharing of life. You also, according to 2 Corinthians 13:14, have the fellowship of the Holy Spirit. You become the temple of the Holy Spirit, the temple of God, the place where Christ dwells, the whole trinity takes up residence in your life. You now possess the life of God in your soul, that is your partnership, common participation in eternal life.

So John says....Look, this is where the foundation is, this is the basics. The old gospel message that was preached from the beginning concerning the Word of Life, Jesus Christ, the eternal Life, the One who was with the Father and was manifested to us, that's the message I preach. It's a true message, I was there. I heard, I saw, I studied, I handled that truth. I know whereof I speak. It is that message which I proclaim and I proclaim it in order that those who hear may enter into this fellowship.

We are partakers...we are partakers of the divine nature. That's just an awe-inspiring thought. We are partakers, Peter says, of the glory that is to be revealed. This is our true fellowship. I used to hear people say, "So-and-so's out of fellowship." If you were out of fellowship you just lost your salvation,

that can't happen. You may not be enjoying your fellowship because of sin, you may not experience the full joy of that fellowship, but if you're a Christian you're in the fellowship. It is an inviolable, eternal sharing in the life of the trinity. This is the amazing reality of the Christian gospel that God comes down in human flesh, God becomes a man that we might partake of the very life of God. This is the great reality. When you become a Christian the life of God comes into your soul.

What kind of life is it? What kind of life? Spiritual life. You're awoken to God. You come alive. Before you were dead in trespasses and sin, didn't understand God, didn't know God, didn't understand divine truth, all of a sudden spiritual life comes to you. That's the first aspect of that life and that spiritual life awakens you to divine truth, it awakens you to God. You hear the voice of the Son of God, John 5:25, and you come alive.

It is not only spiritual life, it is resurrection life. In John 5 it tells us also in verse 28 that this life some day is going to bring us out of the grave. There will be a resurrection of life. John 10:10 says it is abundant life, spiritual life, resurrection life, eternal life, abundant life. It's the life of God no matter how you express it.

So, John says here's the foundation. This is what I'm certain about. I'm certain about the message that is the same message from the beginning. I'm certain that the Word of Life was manifest because I was there and I heard and saw and I studied and I touched Him. And I'm certain that this is the message that we are to proclaim and I'm certain that in proclaiming it the purpose is that you might enter into this fellowship, that is that you might become a possessor of the life of God. And finally, I'm certain about something else. The Word of Life will provide joy. This is the results, verse 4, "These things we write so that your joy may be made complete."

I'm proclaiming to you something that will bring you consummate joy, consummate joy. Joy is full satisfaction, total fulfillment that can never be lost. The Kingdom of God, said Paul in Romans 14, is joy in the Holy Spirit. No wonder Paul repeatedly says, "Rejoice always, and again I say rejoice." No wonder Jesus said that even though I'm going to leave you in the upper room discourse, I'm going to leave you joy because joy comes in the truth. A certain message, a certain witness to that message proclaims a certain gospel which brings us into a certain fellowship, produces a certain joy. Hold on to the same gospel, the one that I personally experienced. Proclaim it to others that they might enter in to the common eternal life that we enjoy so that they too can have a complete joy.

Let's pray.

Father, as we have just gone through this very basic and foundational part of John's epistle, we...we're covering some ground that's so familiar to us we even heard explanations of it in the waters of baptism by very young believers who understand so wonderfully and so perfectly the great doctrines of salvation, and we thank You for that. But, Lord, there's nothing like hearing it from John, nothing like hearing it from somebody who was there, an eyewitness. The testimony to the veracity of this epistle has been settled millennia ago. The church for the two thousand years since it was written has bowed the knee to its truth. We thank You for this beloved old Apostle, for his firsthand eyewitness account to the certainty of the Word of Life. And may our lives be built on that same certainty that we too may participate in the fellowship of those with eternal life and in the complete joy that You grant. Thank You in Christ's name. Amen.

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