

Just the Basics

The Basics About Jesus

1 John 1:1-4

Introduction

Today we begin a series of messages on Basic Christianity based on teaching by the Apostle John. We'll use a letter John wrote to help believers understand the basics about faith in Christ. 1 John is our text, and it is found almost at the end of your Bible.

As one of Christ's original Apostles, John was a credible witness of the resurrected Savior. John begins his first letter by declaring he had personally seen, heard, and touched Jesus Christ. He invites his readers to join him in fellowship with the Father and his Son, Jesus Christ.

Love is a central theme of John's letter. He emphasized that those who say they love God but do not love those around them are liars. He also teaches that Jesus' love for us can best be seen in His atoning sacrifice.

Through obedience, we can come to know God, have fellowship with Him, and become like Him. But many choose to live in disobedience to God, and John also warns that in the last days, many antichrists will arise. Before diving into this letter, let's look at some information that will help us understand its message and relevance.

Although he doesn't specifically identify himself as the author, we recognize John as the same person who wrote the gospel of John, the letters 2 and 3 John, and the Revelation. The author is the same John who was one of Jesus' 12 disciples. John was also the last living disciple of Jesus and was probably about eighty years old when he wrote this letter. His audience was the Christian communities in and around Ephesus.

These churches had initially been planted by the Apostle Paul some thirty years earlier. At some point after Paul's death, John moved to Ephesus and became a spiritual mentor for these Christian communities. These churches were under attack by some false teachers and needed John's spiritual guidance to prevent further spiritual damage.

These false teachers claimed to believe in Jesus, but they taught a message different from the gospel message of Jesus. Some also claimed to know God through a special spiritual enlightenment, but the results of their spiritual knowledge contradicted the claims of the gospel. Even though many of the believers distanced themselves from these false teachers, they were still deeply shaken in their faith. It caused them to question, "Who is the real Jesus," and "How can we know? "What is spiritual enlightenment, and how can we know if we have it?"

Their struggle makes this a very relevant letter for us today. Many Americans are very interested in spirituality but are also confused about what real spirituality is and how to experience it. Our culture is filled with doubt that it is even possible to know if there is a God or if there is any truth that Jesus is God's Son.

But John claims to know the truth about these matters. And he claims that it's possible for us to know it too. John writes in Chapter 5, "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, and that you may *continue to* believe in the name of the Son of God." (1 John 5:13 NKJV)

He writes this letter to assure us that we can know God. John begins this letter by going back to the basics about Jesus, who the real Jesus is, why we know this is the truth about Jesus, and what the truth about Jesus makes available to us.

I. The Real Jesus

Let's look at who the real Jesus is. "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— 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 manifested 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." (1 John 1:1-4 NKJV)

"This is the message which we have heard from Him and declare to you, that God is light and in Him is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin. If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us *our* sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us."

(1 John 1:5-10 NKJV)

Some of the false teachers claimed that Jesus was just an ordinary man, born the same way we were. The Gnostics claimed that "the Christ" came upon Jesus at his baptism to give him secret spiritual knowledge—but departed from him before his death. But John describes a very different Jesus. He says that Jesus didn't come into existence when he was born. He "was there from the beginning," and He "was with the Father." In other words, Jesus has always existed as God—and entered human history through his birth.

Notice how John describes Jesus the same way in his gospel (Jn.1:1,2,14,18).

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God." (John 1:1-2 NKJV)

"And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth." (John 1:14 NKJV)

"No one has seen God at any time. The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared *Him*." (John 1:18 NKJV)

According to the Apostle John, Jesus and "the Christ" are not two different beings. Jesus is the Christ, the Messiah, the divine-human King and Savior of humanity that the Old Testament predicted in Isa.9:6,7. "For unto us a Child is born, Unto us a Son is given; And the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of *His* government and peace *There will be* no end, Upon the throne of David and over His kingdom, To order it and establish it with judgment and justice From that time forward, even forever. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will perform this." (Isaiah 9:6-7 NKJV)

The Messiah had to be both human and divine to forgive our sins by paying for them with his death. In order to represent us as humans, he had to be genuinely human. For his death to have infinite value to pay for the sins of every person, he had to be divine.

John claims that Jesus is not merely an enlightened spiritual teacher or one of many manifestations of God but God-incarnate, the unique Savior of humanity. But how did John come to this conclusion? And how can we know that John's conclusion is correct?

II. The Truth About Jesus

How can we know this is the truth about Jesus?

Notice the "we"—John claims he is only one of the multiple eyewitnesses whose testimony is trustworthy. You can read John's detailed eyewitness testimony in the gospel of John.

Here's the summary: They "heard" Jesus claim to be God.

1 John 5:17,18, "All unrighteousness is sin, and there is sin not *leading* to death. We know that whoever is born of God does not sin; but he who has been born of God keeps himself, and the wicked one does not touch him." (1 John 5:17-18 NKJV)

John 8:48, "Then the Jews answered and said to Him, "Do we not say rightly that You are a Samaritan and have a demon?" Jesus answered, "**I do not have a demon; but I honor My Father, and you dishonor Me.**" (John 8:48-49 NKJV)

John 10:30 Jesus says, "I and My Father are one." (John 10:30 NKJV)

That statement is why the Jews tried to stone Jesus. They "saw" Jesus do works that only God could do. They saw Jesus heal the sick, give sight to the blind, raise the dead, and then link these miracles directly to his claims to be God.

In John 4, Jesus heals the Nobleman's son.
In John 5, He heals the man at the pool of Bethesda.
In John 9, He heals the man who was blind from birth.
And in John 11, Jesus raises Lazareth from the dead.

The disciples also "handled" (suggesting prolonged and investigative touch) his body after he was raised from the dead. John records the disciple Thomas in Chapter 20 saying, "Now Thomas, called the Twin, one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. The other disciples therefore said to him, "We have seen the Lord." So he said to them, "Unless I see in His hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe." And after eight days His disciples were again inside, and Thomas with them. Jesus came, the doors being shut, and stood in the midst, and said, "Peace to you!" Then He said to Thomas, "Reach your finger here, and look at My hands; and reach your hand *here*, and put it into My side. Do not be unbelieving, but believing." And Thomas answered and said to Him, "My Lord and my God!" Jesus said to him, "Thomas, because you have seen Me, you have believed. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed." (John 20:24-29 NKJV)

The New Testament truth is that we can know that Jesus was God-incarnate, the unique Savior, and the rightful King of humanity because John and the other disciples left this eyewitness testimony about Jesus.

The term "witness" is the Greek word "martyreon," from which we get our word martyr. John uses it to remind us that Jesus' disciples paid for their testimony with their lives. Christianity is firmly anchored in the eyewitness accounts of Jesus' birth, life, death, and resurrection. Anyone who teaches about a different Jesus has departed from true Christianity.

But there is more to Christianity than these historical events. You can know and believe in all of these historical facts about Jesus and still miss the whole point as to why He came.

III. The Fellowship of Jesus

What does the truth about Jesus mean for us? In verse 3, John writes, "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." (1 John 1:3-4 NKJV)

John shifts from the past to the present tense and from the historical to the current. Jesus came to earth, died on the Cross, and rose from the dead *so that* we could experience the priceless gift of eternal life.

John describes this spiritual reality in three ways. First, He wants you to know that Jesus came so you could have fellowship with him and his Father. Secondly, he wants you to know that Jesus made it possible for you to experience God's love and develop a relationship with Him. Thirdly, he tells us in 3:24 that Jesus' Spirit comes to live in us when we put our trust in him as our Lord and Savior. It is His Spirit that enables us to experience God's love and know Jesus in a personal way.

There are still many people today who long for spiritual reality, but they can't find it in much of what we call Christianity. Some people search for spiritual reality by reading philosophy and enlightenment literature, pursuing psychedelic drugs, or practicing New Age techniques. Still, they cannot find spiritual reality or lasting peace.

People need to come in contact with an authentic believer who can tell them that Jesus is alive, that he loves them, and that they can actually meet him and experience his love for themselves. It is a relationship that will change your life forever. In Revelation 3:20, John pictures Jesus saying, "**Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me.**" (Revelation 3:20 NKJV)

John challenges you to open the door of your heart to Jesus and ask him to come in.

God created us with a desire and need to know Him. We try to fill this need with many carnal and material things. But the only thing that can ever truly fulfill your life is Jesus. It's like coming home to your true and fulfilling purpose in life.

Only God can reveal Himself to us. His chosen means is through His Son, Jesus Christ. Because of Christ's sacrifice for us, we can experience God's love and forgiveness, and guidance.

When you meet Christ, you can talk to God as a friend with your own words. When you build a relationship with Jesus, something else happens. You also discover that you have a deep spiritual bond with others who also know Jesus. You feel a bond because you share a similar experience.

Meeting Christ is something like this but is something much deeper. A profound journey begins when you discover the spiritual reality the Holy Spirit reveals in a personal relationship with Jesus. You are also drawn to others with the same spiritual reality and enjoy sharing the fellowship you have in Christ with them.

We are spiritually strengthened when we share how Jesus has changed us. We love to fellowship with God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Our faith increases as we experience greater depth in our relationship with Jesus and one another.

This is what "fellowship" is—sharing the life and love of Jesus together.

Conclusion

When you know Jesus, you experience a rich joy in sharing him with other people. It may involve helping those who already know Jesus to know him better or introducing people to Jesus for the first time.

In Christ, there is always a joy that is deeper and more energizing than any other joy. It's something you can't fully explain in words. It's something that resonates deep within you and challenges you to reach out and experience it. Some of you already have this spiritual reality and want to deepen it. I believe John will show us how to do this in the coming weeks. Most people come to realize and understand that the most essential things in life are not things at all; they are the relationships and friendships we build.

God has put within each of us a desire for relationship. It is a desire He intended to be met in relationships with other people, but most of all, to be met by a relationship with Him. In this remarkable letter, John tells us the truth about relationships and shows us how important it is to develop enduring relationships for now and eternity.

But if you're here and need to lay hold of it today, all you need to do is call out to Jesus and invite him to come into your heart and expect Him to reveal Himself to you!