

Sermon “The Word of Life: Joy Complete” 1 John 1:1-2:2

I will begin with a bit of background before digging into today’s message. In the rigor of preparing Christian seminary students in New Testament Greek, all students start with the theological study of the letter of 1 John because it contains plain and simple words. The words are more than simple because they contain deep, flowing thoughts of vital importance—primarily to challenge us to reflect upon our own lives, emphasizing the importance of fellowship, transparency, confession, and forgiveness. Evangelists have often used the first letter of John to contrast two kinds of Christians—those who walk in the light and those who do not. John’s words remind us that God is light, and to truly fellowship with Him, we must walk in the light, live in truth, and willingly admit our shortcomings. As the apostle Paul would say, we should examine ourselves to see whether we are in the faith.

In total, John wrote five books of the Bible: His Gospel, the letters I, II, and III John, and the book of Revelation. In summary, John’s message emphasizes that in order to have “joy complete with one another,” the total joy of fellowship begins with God the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ. Thus, we need to encounter, experience, and testify about eternal life manifested in the Savior Jesus.

Reading through this morning's focus scripture, we see that John highlights three things for us: a relationship, a fellowship, and the joy that follows. First, we must notice that John is concerned with relationships as the family of God. Plainly, John writes to us where the ties of Christian fellowship are bound to share the life of God with the only person who has that life, the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God. Foremost, John’s letter describes an intimate life with God the Father on the earth. John’s reasoning stands behind the joy of companionship, which aims to find a solution to the problem of loneliness. Loneliness is now a pandemic, and in most cases, there is nothing more helpful in curing loneliness than a family circle. What happens when we get lonely? We want to go home—home to the family. So, John writes, “I write this that your joy may be full,” answering the fear and problem of loneliness.

I will share a recent real-life comparison. I think about my grandson, who, after completing his studies and spending six months away from home, desired to come home. Haven’t we all experienced similar desires at one time or another? But then John writes, saying, “I write this so that you may not sin.” Sin is a significant threat to human happiness. The other threat to happiness is guilt. John is writing to protect us so that we might be free from deception. Where do we find assurance and security from all of this, freedom from failure? We find freedom “from the beginning.” “In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.” Since the beginning, the very dawn of creation.

In the Gospel of John 1:1-3, there is another “beginning.” “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made.” That beginning goes back to before creation. That is the

eternal beginning, simply meaning the starting point before the universe was. Before there was anything, there was the Word, a person, and he was with God, and he was God. But now, in this letter, there is a third beginning, “that which was from the beginning., which we have heard, seen and touched.” John is referring to a definite continuous beginning, which is eternal. John is referring to a beginning that has been available for all time, a constant experience for Christian life that is eternal, but for you and I, it only began when we came to know Jesus Christ. The writers of the New Testament first experienced fellowship when they came to know him, and John began when he first knew him. It relates to him who is from the beginning, a timeless beginning that is right now, an eternal now. John’s reminder to us: go back to that which is from the beginning. Let’s pray.

Merciful God, as we gather in fellowship, we invite Your diving grace to be present among us. Pour out your grace upon each person, covering us with Your love, forgiveness, and compassion. Help us to extend grace to one another, recognizing that we are all in need of your mercy. Unite us together as one in prayer and praise, sensitive to the needs of one another. Help us all to walk in the light as you are in the light. In this, we pray, Amen.

There are at least three “beginnings” in the Bible. The Bible opens in Genesis 1:1 with, “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.” The beginning of material creation and how far back the dawn of creation goes are impossible to determine. Now, in the Gospel of John, there is another beginning with these words, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” That beginning goes back before the material creation, the eternal beginning. Before there was anything at all, there was the Word, the farthest point backward we can go. But now, in this letter, there is a third beginning, “that which was from the beginning.” John is not referring to the time of creation or the timeless beginning. No, instead, John is referring to a message of a different matter—a timeless bond of fellowship.

John writes in a series of circles. See if you can figure out the beginning. Listen to 1 John 2, verse 7, he says, “Beloved, I am not writing you a new command, but an old one, which you had since the beginning.” Then, in verse 14, he says, I write to you, fathers, because you know the him who is from the beginning.” Then, in verse 24, he says, “As for you, see that what you have heard from the beginning remains in you. If it does, you also will remain in the Son and in the Father. And, this is what he promised us-eternal life.” Continuing in chapter 3, verse 8, “The one who does what is sinful is of the devil; because the devil has been sinning from the beginning.” Verse 11, “For this is the message you have heard from the beginning: we should love one another.” WOW! Are you confused yet? What is it that John wants us to see? Where is the beginning? Here is what I believe. The beginning is what we are experiencing right now, at this very moment. John is referring to the continuous experience of the Christian life of fellowship, which is contemporary all the time, new and fresh and vital, a constant beginning that is eternal. It has been available for all time, but only when you and I came to know him. For John, the beginning began when he first came to know him. It relates to him from the beginning. A timeless beginning that is right now, an eternal now.

An overwhelming theme of John is fellowship. To define fellowship, we can discover two things. Fellowship is both friendship and partnership. Friends share intimate things and secrets, and God wants to tell us secrets. Fellowship is based upon the relationship, and we cannot have fellowship until we first come to Christ and receive him. When we have fellowship, we have the third thing that John mentions. These things we are writing, he says, “that your joy may be full.” Perhaps it is more helpful for us to understand what John means if we use the word, excitement. “That your excitement may be complete.” Life intended to be lived, filled with joy complete.

I find a binding thought with the late evangelical Christian pastor and author Ray Stedman’s understanding of fellowship. He says, “In the Navy, we used to say it was two fellows on the same ship, and there is a sense that that is true. They do have something in common -- the same ship. That is the basis of fellowship, for essentially, this word means "to have all things in common." When you have something in common with another, you can have fellowship with him. If you have nothing in common, you have no fellowship. We all have things in common. We share human life in common. Most of us share a common American citizenship. We have many things in common. But John is talking about that unique fellowship, which is only the possession of those who share life in Jesus Christ together, who have this different kind of life, this new relationship. This makes them one, and that is the basis for the appeal of Scripture to live together in tenderness and love toward one another. Not because we are fundamentally wonderful people or remarkable personalities or because we are naturally gracious, kind, loving, and tender all the time -- for at times, we are grumpy, scratchy, and irritating to others. But we should still love one another. That is his point. Why? Because together, we share life. We have something in common. We share the life of the Lord Jesus, and therefore we have fellowship with one another.”

I want to share my thoughts with other like-minded pastors who see a weak link in the overall body of Christ’s church when it comes to Christian fellowship. Why? Unlike John, who had a mutual and loving personal fellowship with Jesus, it appears that the body of Christ has lost its way to encouraging and stretching the faithful to stand up and share their struggles and sins so the body can share one another’s burdens and thus fulfill the law of Christ. If we say we are Christians, then we are united in fellowship with God and Jesus Christ in a mutual bond of spiritual and compassionate love with other Christians. Our calling echoes from the book of Hebrews 3:13. “Exhort one another every day, as long as it is called today, that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.”

In closing, all of us are related to someone. We live in families. Children are related to their parents, and parents to their children because they share the same life. As Christians, we share the life of God by a relationship to a person, the only person that has that life, the light of the world, the Lord Jesus, the Son of God. We do not have life if we do not have Jesus, for Jesus came to show us the lost secret of humanity—a new way of living, a continual dependence upon the life of the Father. The hymn writer expresses that the God of old, the God from the eternal

beginning, is our dwelling place in which we now place our Christian fellowship with one another and the triune God. What a fellowship, what a joy divine, leaning on the everlasting arms. What a blessedness, what a peace is mine. What have we to dread? What have we to fear? Safe and secure from all alarms. Leaning on the everlasting arms. Friends, our fellowship comes from the beginning, the begotten Son, the atoning sacrifice for the sins of the world. Thanks be to the testimony of John, who keeps us centered on the word of life in us to make our joy complete. Amen.