

"this is how we know..."

1 John 1:1-4 on January 25, 2026
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1 John 1:1-4

1 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— 2 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—3 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.
4 And these things we write to you that your joy may be full.



Everyone has a story. We all are stars in a movie of our own making. We can tell others of the accounts of our lives and of the adventures we embraced. But any second person account will never be the same as having been there. Having experienced it all first hand. We saw it...we smelled it...we touched it. Having been one with the event, the details remain vivid as the moment of the actual experience. We can hear the accounts of those who were present at history making events...9-11, Pearl Harbor, Iwo Jima. Rosa Parks on that bus that day when she wouldn't give up her seat. The driver of the car the day Kennedy was shot. Those in the audience when Charlie Kirk was assassinated. V-day in 1945 when the Nazis surrendered. Living witnesses of Hiroshima, and survivors of the Holocaust.

We have our own stories here. Past missions ventures indelibly stamped upon our lives. Witnesses of redemption...baptisms...second-chances. Faces of those who entered our lives and forever left their mark upon us. Chuck Smith's dedication of our church here...the day we took possession of the church house...the first sound of our radio station broadcast. Handing out hundreds of our first commentary translation amongst a tribal people...weddings...children born...that early morning phone call back to the United States to Jesse and Chelsey, "want to come to the Philippines and stay?"

We have our stories. And to most people...however incredible they might be, it was a totally different thing having been there. It was and is a whole other reality when you experienced it yourself. Because you were there.

The author of this letter...the apostle John...*he was there*. Can you imagine? He was there when Jesus called from the shore "*come and follow me...and I will make you fishers of men.*" He was there and personally witnessed people being healed...the lame walked again, the blind could see. He was there when Jesus fed 5000-plus with just a little bread and fish. He was there when Jesus calmed the storm, ...when he walked on the water... when he rode into Jerusalem to "*Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest heaven!*" He was there on that mountain top and saw Moses and Elijah talking to Jesus. He was there when Lazarus walked out of that tomb. He was there when they crucified Jesus. And He was there at the empty tomb. He saw it all. He touched it, smelled it, felt the reality of all of it.

The memories of all of it must have flooded his mind as he sat down and put those first words to paper: "*We proclaim to you the one who existed from the beginning, whom we have heard and seen. We saw him with our own eyes and touched him with our own hands. He is the Word of life. This one who is life itself was revealed to us, and we have seen him. And now we testify and proclaim to you that he is the one who is eternal life. He was with the Father, and then he was revealed to us. We proclaim to you what we ourselves have actually seen and*

heard so that you may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ. We are writing these things so that you may fully share our joy."

This was no mere story, or legend, or rumor that John was seeking to communicate. He was there for it all.

Matthew 4:21-22. *Going on from there, He (Jesus) saw two other brothers, James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother, in the boat with Zebedee their father, mending their nets. He called them, and immediately they left the boat and their father, and followed Him.*

When the apostle John was called by Christ he was found mending his nets. John was a mender. When John began to write these letters, the church had been in existence for several decades, and like now, time had subtly allowed both false doctrine and apathy to creep in. There was a need of a voice to call people back to those events...back to that "all-in" intimacy with Jesus...back to a relationship so close that we can again touch him with our hands and hear Him with our own ears. That voice would be the Apostle John. He would write these letters...he would share his accounts of the events in both His gospel and these letters before us. Oh how we need a John today!

The apostle John probably wrote this letter sometime around AD90 and probably wrote it from the city of Ephesus. John and his brother James had been referred to by Jesus as "the sons of thunder." Although it seems their nature was calm and gentle, apparently when their patience was pushed to its limits their anger became wild and thunderous causing them to speak out like an untamed storm. These two brothers, along with Peter, were the 'inner circle' of Jesus' ministry. At the last supper, we read how John, "the disciple that Jesus loved," was seated next to Jesus. John would follow Jesus into the audience with the high priest before his crucifixion, and was the sole apostle who remained at the cross while Jesus died. There is no doubt that John was special to Christ, as Christ was beyond special to John.

Secular history tells us that all of the apostles except John would die martyrs' deaths. They did not get into this thing with some guarantee that theirs would be a 'Cinderella story.' They gave their all, even their lives. They understood, *as we seldom do*, that to be a real disciple is the surrender of everything to the Lordship of Jesus Christ. There are records of attempts to kill John, including one to put him to death by placing him in a huge pot of boiling oil, and yet he lived. So why was John spared? While the apostles died when each of their missions in God's eyes was complete...just like it will be with all of us who seek to be disciples, John had the island of Patmos waiting yet for him. It was there that he would be banished, but not without pen and paper apparently, because it would be from there that he would pen the "revelation" of Jesus Christ. A letter that would have its manifest poured out some 2000 years later. A letter to *us*...a letter that would have its reality expressed in our own day. A letter calling us not just to a story, but to the experience that he personally had with Christ, He wanted us not just to *hear the story*, but to actually live it out ourselves.

John would open this letter in a poetic highpoint. In the kind of prose that would grab the reader and send us immediately into top-of-the-mountain epic views of the valley below. Martin Luther spoke concerning this letter saying "*I have never read a book written in simpler words than this one, and yet the words are inexpressible.*"

John says we "*heard Him*"...we "*saw Him with our own eyes*"...we "*touched Him*." Jesus was flesh and bone. He was a living being. He walked this earth. And yet He was all God. John was testifying that it was all true...all that we have heard...all that we have come to believe. He was witness to this Jesus and all that He did, and he was writing this letter to declare it all as fact, so that we might be bound together with the apostles in unity and fellowship of brotherhood. But it seems he was not here to just share a grand experience, but rather to call us to actually participate in the story itself.

John takes us to the 'bottom line' of our stance with Him. Christ is real. He was here. John says "*We saw it all and witnessed the miraculous... we were there.*" Psalm 46:10 tells us to "*Cease striving and know that I am*

God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth." Sometimes we can allow all of the fluid ideas of our culture and the philosophical searching's of why, and 'how did that all work,' to keep us from sitting at his feet and experiencing His presence! Christ has been placed under the microscope of doubt and submitted to the scalpel of human reasoning and earthly science. And why not? For if He and His claims are real and genuine, then our whole world is turned on its head.

This letter will take many to task. For in it, we will find a 'head on' dealing with that which...like no other book in scripture, separates the *professors* from the *possessors*. John wants to be sure that while we are secure in our salvation, that we actually *have* salvation in the first place in which to be secure. For false security is one of Satan's greatest tools of way-laying those who believe intellectually but have never truly been reborn and thus the power and transformative aspects of rebirth are never known...never experienced. They *believe* the story, they just have never personally *experienced* the story. Thus the soul of many shall be lost for eternity because they never actually surrendered their life to the Lordship of Jesus Christ. Scripture is clear that even demons believe that Jesus is the Son of God and the Savior of humanity, but they will not be joining us in eternity.

Tom Wells (a pastor and respected Christian author) amplifies this warning to all evangelicals who would seek to accurately interpret and apply the important Epistle of First John..."*The first letter of John has often been used to create a contrast between two kinds of Christians. The contrast is put in the following ways: 1. Those who walk in the light, and those who do not. 2. Those who confess their sins, and those who do not. 3. Those who are worldly, and those who are not. 4. Those who abide in Christ, and those who do not. 5. Those who are overcomers, and those who are not. The point (of this letter) is to show that John is not thinking of different categories of Christians when he uses those divisions. It is very important to recognize this because the sustained contrast between Christians and non-Christians is the main theme of the letter. If we misapply it, we effectively pervert the teaching of the letter as a whole. Yet this has been done times without number....*"

John clearly wrote this letter to serve as the distinction between the true Christian and the pseudo-christian. Ignoring this premise can have eternal ramifications! Quote: *Twentieth- century evangelicalism, on the other hand, has often used this book to distinguish between two categories of Christians. In my judgment this reflects one of our present-day misunderstandings of Scripture. It seems to me that Scripture is more concerned about whether we are genuinely Christians than it is about what kind of Christians we are. Modern evangelicalism has reversed this. I think that the reason is this: we have made becoming a Christian so easy that there is really no need to ask whether we are really Christians or not. This is sometimes referred to as easy-believism, and it appears to me to be rampant. But you need not accept my analysis of modern evangelicalism to see where the emphasis lies in 1 John. John would heartily join in Paul's admonition: "Examine yourselves, whether you are in the faith!"* (2Cor 13:5-note) (Some Pitfalls in Understanding First John - Banner of Truth Magazine, May, 1983)

Vs 4 tells us "*And these things we write to you that your joy may be full.*" One can easily and wisely see that that one cannot be truly full of joy unless he or she is truly sure of one's salvation state. And frankly it is not enough to *believe it*, one must *know it*.

John's words herein echo those of Christ in His "Upper Room Discourse" to His disciples the night before His crucifixion..."*These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may be in you, and that your joy may be made full.*" Those words were given right after Jesus spoke of our being a branch connected to Him; **the vine**. He remarked there that if we fail to remain connected ...fail to "abide in Him," we become the branch that is "*cast out...and is withered; and they gather them and throw them into the fire, and they are burned.*" As we read those complete words of Christ, it becomes very clear that as we abide in Him, His joy abides in us. And it is inarguable that we cannot abide in Him unless we are indeed truly, absolutely, forever radically reborn as a new creature! Not merely hearing the story...but being there ourselves.

John will say in chapter 2, verse 26 that "*These things I have written to you concerning those who are trying to deceive you.*" (1Jn 2:26) Obviously people were and are out there who will try to deceive you. It is a sad reality

in the world we live in! That is why we cannot simply believe what we are told and adhere to doctrines because a pastor somewhere told you such was fact. We must be what Paul called "good Bereans." Acts 17:11 "Now the Berean Jews were of more noble character than those in Thessalonica, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true."

John says "...our hands have handled... the Word of Life." Thomas questioned the reality of the resurrection of Christ and the gang did not gather 'round him to talk him into the idea or to intellectually argue the point. No, Jesus came to Him personally and told him "*Put your finger here, and look at my hands. Put your hand into the wound in my side. Don't be faithless any longer. Believe!*" His point was that Thomas had to believe, not because someone told him...but because he experienced it himself. John said he was a "witness." Again, not of what he had been *told*...what he had *learned*...but what he *saw for himself*.

John says he is in "fellowship" with both Christ and other believers. This was no club or social gathering. This was a unity...a "bond" of communion that was beyond anything the world could offer. It still is. How many confessing folks will never understand this and will treat this "fellowship" dynamic with trite and a casualness and have quickly tossed it aside when they did not get their way or were not the center of attention.

Any of you who have had any contact with my dog, know that my dog lives to play fetch. A tennis ball is the center of her world. Catching that ball is her purpose in this life. It's what she *lives* for. Doing anything else is a colossal waste of time! Many of us have a sense that there is something out there that is meant to make our life meaningful. Something that will make us realize that this is what life is for – this is why we are here. Much of life for so many people is spent trying to discover what that something is, and coming to terms with the haunting realization that we can't seem to find it.

Along comes John, who says it *is* possible. We *can* know. That the ultimate life with meaning...the kind we've we have been endlessly pinning for, isn't a cause or religion, or even a relationship with those closest to us in this life. It is a *person*. To find it, we must find *him*.

John begins this letter with a principle...and in truth fills the totality of the letter with it, wherein the critical aspect of one's faith isn't that God exists, but that He *appeared*. That he came not to pass a message to us, but to personally engage us. He then gave us the Holy Spirit...God in Spirit, to continue that same engagement! We can come to church and hear the truth...but God wants us to actually *experience* that truth. To *experience* Him.

Because *telling* you the story is one thing. But living it out...experiencing it for yourself is quite another...!