

First Baptist Church Merritt Island

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So That Your Joy May Be Complete – a study of First John

Living in Relationship with Jesus

1 John 1:1-4

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Last year, a mom in Hillsborough County received a call from one of her adult children. The daughter was sobbing on the other end of the phone and explained that she had been arrested for a serious offense and was being detained by the police. After a brief explanation, the daughter handed the phone to her attorney who helped the mom with arrangements to post \$15,000 in bail. The mom was understandably shaken. As she relayed the news to her grandson, he felt like something was off. So, he picked up his phone and called the daughter...who answered. She was at work and was perfectly fine. It was a scam. Someone had used AI to clone the daughter's voice and deceive the mom out of a good chunk of her savings.

Scams like that are increasingly part of the world we are living in. It makes me want to build a time machine and go back to 1980-something before AI and smartphones and the internet. I want a phone with a cord, a newspaper, free television, and watchable NBA basketball. But seriously, as time goes by, I grow a little more uneasy. Every story I hear about how scammers are finding new ways to deceive people makes me a bit more paranoid that I might be next. We are living in an age of deception and uncertainty. And I don't like how that tempts me to feel. Anxious. Fearful. Cynical. It's like you don't know if you can believe anything anymore. It drains the joy right out of you. We want certainty. We want assurance. We want to know that we will be ok.

And listen, that isn't a new phenomenon. As a matter of fact, there's an entire book of the Bible that is written to address that dynamic. It's a letter to Christians who are living in an age of deception and uncertainty. It's a letter filled with bedrock truths that can make us confident in our relationship with God and other people. It's the letter of First John. And it's our next book of study as a church family. Since this is our first Sunday in this book, let me give you a little bit of context. Who wrote 1 John? I'll give you one guess – John!

John was one of the 12 Apostles of Jesus and is sometimes thought of as Jesus' closest friend during Christ's earthly ministry. He was the human author of five books in the New Testament: the Gospel of John, the letters of 1, 2, and 3 John, and the vision of Christ in the book of Revelation. And, while his name isn't mentioned in this letter, early church leaders – including some who knew John personally (Papias, born AD 60) – have always acknowledged John as the author. Even more, when you compare the letter of 1 John with the Gospel of John, there is an unmistakable connection in style, vocabulary, and subject matter. So, while John's name isn't directly mentioned in the letter, for nearly 2,000 years there has been no serious doubt that he is the one God used to write it.

Why did John write this letter? While we don't know all the background, it's clear that false teachers were trying to scam these believers and lead them astray from the truth about Jesus.

1 John 2:18–19

Children, it is the last hour, and as you have heard that antichrist is coming, so now many antichrists have come. Therefore we know that it is the last hour. They went out from us, but they were not of us;

1 John 2:26

I write these things to you about those who are trying to deceive you.

1 John 4:1–2

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. 2 By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God,

When you put those pieces together, it's pretty obvious that false teachers were trying to deceive them by claiming things about Jesus that weren't true. Like, Jesus didn't really come to earth in a human body. The majority of Bible scholars agree this was a form of early Gnosticism.

Gnosticism was a system of belief rooted in the mingling of philosophical and religious ideas. The word Gnostic comes from the Greek word "gnosis," which means "knowledge." Gnostics essentially taught that the suffering and evil of this world could be escaped through acquiring secret, divine knowledge. You want to know what that knowledge was? Good luck figuring it out. It's a secret!

Some components of Gnostic teaching were:

- **Dualism:** The belief that the spiritual realm is inherently good and the material realm is inherently evil. They believed in many gods and that the one who created this world was an imperfect being who is not the true God.
- **Docetism:** The belief that Jesus was not truly human but simply appeared to be human. They thought if Jesus really became a flesh and blood human, He would be inherently evil as part of the material world.
- **Asceticism:** Was the strict self-discipline and the denial of physical pleasure. This stemmed from the belief that the physical world is inherently evil. However, some Gnostics took a completely different approach.
- **Hedonism:** The unhindered pursuit of physical pleasure. Some Gnostics believed it didn't matter what you do in the physical realm since it is all inherently evil. So, if it's going to be evil, it might as well be as enjoyable as possible.

So, the recipients of John's letter were being influenced by teachers of Gnosticism. It was an age of deception and uncertainty. These believers were becoming confused and fearful, like they didn't know what to believe anymore. It was sapping all the confidence and joy out of the Christian life.

So, John writes this letter to expose the scam and assure them of truths that will cast out their fear and anxiety and restore their joy. With that in mind, let's look at the opening lines of John's letter.

1 John 1:1-4

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, 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, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. 4 And we are writing these things so that our joy may be complete.

Right out of the gate, John drops an atomic bomb on the teaching of the Gnostics. He doesn't focus on Gnosticism. He focuses on Jesus. He says that Jesus is God.

Verse 1 starts with the phrase “that which was from the beginning.” What was from the beginning? He says it is the “word of life.” Verse 2 says that the life was with God the Father. That’s nearly identical to the opening verses of John’s Gospel.

John 1:1–2

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God.

Jesus is the Word. Just think about what words are to us. They are the representation of what is in us, our thoughts and feelings and inner being. Jesus is the representation of the thoughts and feelings and being of God. Jesus is God.

John also says that Jesus is a man. In verse 1, he says, “*which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we looked upon and have touched with our hands,*” In verse 2, he says, “*the life was made manifest, and we have seen it.*” In verse 3, he says, “*that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you.*”

The Gnostics can say whatever they want about Jesus only appearing to be a man, but John says, “I saw Him. I heard Him talk. I touched Him with my own hands.” Jesus didn’t just appear to be a flesh and blood man, He really became a flesh and blood man.

John says that Jesus is Life. Notice how John describes Jesus in verse 2: *the life was made manifest, and we have seen it, and testify to it and proclaim to you the eternal life,*

Jesus isn’t just alive. He is life itself. He is eternal life. Remember what the Gnostics said about how we escape the suffering and evil of this world? They said it comes through secret, divine knowledge. John says that’s not it at all. Eternal life and salvation don’t come through knowing a secret, they come through knowing a person named Jesus who is fully God and fully man.

1 John 5:11–12

And this is the testimony, that God gave us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life.

1 John 5:20

and we are in him who is true, in his Son Jesus Christ. He is the true God and eternal life.

If you want true life, if you want abundant life, if you want eternal life, then you need Jesus. That’s why He came. You don’t experience real life through asceticism by working as hard as you can to deny yourself the pleasures of this world. And you don’t experience real life through hedonism by indulging in all the pleasures of this world. You experience real life by placing your faith and trust in Jesus, the Son of God. He came to this world as one of us to live the perfect life we have all failed to live. As one of us, He died the death we all deserve to die as a payment for all our sin. Chapter 2 says Jesus died as the propitiation for our sin – or the atoning sacrifice that pleases God on our behalf. And since He is life itself, He didn’t stay dead. He rose again and is alive forevermore. Real life is only found in Jesus. He is our life. That’s a huge theme we will unpack throughout our study.

But John doesn’t stop there. The life that Jesus came to give us isn’t just a life that lasts forever. It’s a life that’s shared with God and all those who are in Christ. That’s the next thing John says. Jesus brings us fellowship.

1 John 1:3

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.

We were made for relationship - relationship with God and relationship with each other. But sin has broken those relationships. That's what's wrong with our world today. All of our relationships are broken because of sin. Lying, greed, pride, perversion, selfishness...sin destroys our relationship with God and our relationships with each other. That's how we find ourselves at odds with God and each other. That's why we don't have peace. It's why our marriages suffer. It's why we are estranged from our kids. It's why we are in conflict with our coworkers. It's why there is distance between us and God.

But Jesus came to restore those relationships by the power of His life flowing in us. He came to enable us to live in victory over sin so that our relationships can be restored. That's going to be a big part of our study of this book. So, come back next week and the week after that and learn more about God's design for relationships.

But, in our text for this morning, the point is that when we live in a right relationship with Jesus, we can experience fellowship with God and each other. And that brings us to the last thing John says... Jesus brings us fulfilled joy.

1 John 1:4

And we are writing these things so that our joy may be complete.

Have you ever been in a conversation with someone and wondered, "why are they telling me this?" Like when someone randomly tells you that they know a really good diet plan. Are they trying to tell me I need to lose weight? It can be unnerving for people to beat around the bush in a conversation. John isn't like that. He tells you why he's telling you something. And, in verse 4 he says he is writing this so that our joy may be complete. The purpose of this letter is so that our joy may be complete. And I certainly think that means we find joy in knowing what he's saying. It's good news and good news always brings joy. If you hear you've just gotten a promotion at work, that's good news and it brings you joy. If you hear that the Cleveland Browns are going to the Super Bowl, that's probably a scam created by artificial intelligence. Seriously, when we good news that we believe to be true, it produces joy in us.

And there's no better news than what John tells us throughout this letter.

- You can know you will spend eternity with God in heaven...
- You can know you have an intimate relationship with God...
- You can know how your relationships with people can be made right...
- You can be forgiven of any and all sin (that's coming next week)...
- You can overcome sin by the power of Jesus (that's coming in chapter 2)...
- You can live as a child of God (that's coming in chapter 3)...
- You can live without any fear in life or in death (that's coming in chapter 4)...
- You can be confident that God will hear and answer your prayers (that's coming in chapter 5)...

That's good news that should bring you great joy and all of that comes through Jesus. But, John isn't just talking about us having joy. He says that our joy is made complete when it's shared with someone else. That's why he is writing this letter. He already has joy, but it isn't complete until it's shared. Joy is completed, or fulfilled, when it's shared.

You know this even if you don't know that you know it. Here's what I mean. When you are eating supper with your family and you taste something really good, what do you say? You say, "You've got

to try this.” And then you let them have a bite (if you are a genuine Christian). And when they enjoy it, your joy is complete.

Or, when you watch a really good movie. You don't just enjoy it, you tell your friends they have to watch it so they can enjoy it. Your joy is complete when they enjoy it, too. Or, when you hear someone say something really funny, you automatically look at someone else to see if they're laughing, too. You are already enjoying it, but your joy is complete when someone else enjoys it, too. That's how God has designed joy. Jesus came so that we can enjoy the life that only He can give. And, that joy is completed when it's shared. When you find out something amazing about Jesus and tell someone else and they find joy in Him, it completes your joy. That's the kind of life Jesus wants to enable in you.

For those of you who were here at our gathering at 9, that's what Pastor Carey was talking about. Building intentional relationships with people that are all about sharing the truth about Jesus with each other. Your joy won't be complete until you share it with someone else.

That's what “Who's Your One?” is all about. Who is that one person in your life that is far from God but close to you? Jesus wants you to experience the joy of telling them the greatest news in all the world: they can know Jesus and have abundant and eternal life through Him.

Joy is only found in Jesus and Jesus fulfills our joy in Him when we share Him with the people in your life. I can't help but wonder how many of us are short-circuiting our joy because we aren't sharing Jesus with others. Jesus came to reach the people of this world with His joy-producing love...and He wants to reach them through you. And when you put everything we've talked about together, you get our big idea for this morning.

Big Idea: Jesus came to us so that we can have eternal life, authentic fellowship, and fulfilled joy.

Even though we are living in a world that is filled with deception and uncertainty and fear and anxiety, we can know and experience eternal life, authentic fellowship, and fulfilled joy. And it's all found in Jesus.

And as we close, let me give you a few points of practical application.

PRACTICAL APPLICATION

1. Believe in Jesus

We don't experience the life of Jesus by simply knowing the truth about Jesus. We experience His life by believing and depending on Him.

1 John 5:13

I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life.

You can know that you have life by believing in Jesus. If you have never placed your faith and trust in Jesus as your personal Lord and Savior, don't leave this room today until you do.

2. Be Focused on Jesus

When John confronts the false teachers that were deceiving these believers, he doesn't draw our focus to their lies. He draws our focus to Jesus. We focus our attention on Jesus is by listening to the testimony of the eyewitnesses, like John, who wrote down the truth about Jesus. That testimony is preserved for us in the Bible.

1 John 4:5–6

They are from the world; therefore they speak from the world, and the world listens to them. 6 We are from God. Whoever knows God listens to us; whoever is not from God does not listen to us. By this we know the Spirit of truth and the spirit of error.

I want to encourage you to read through 1 John during this series. It only takes 15 minutes to read the whole book. If you read one chapter a day, it will only take 3 minutes. For those of you who want something more, read through the Gospel of John. It's all about Jesus. If you read one chapter of John every week, you will finish right about the time we end this series and you'll have a wealth of knowledge about who Jesus is. Stop filling your mind and heart with the junk of this world and fill them with Jesus.

3. Be Committed to Community

Jesus wants to enable you to live in relationship with other believers. He made you for fellowship.

1 John 4:12

No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God abides in us and his love is perfected in us.

So, step into His design for your life by committing to a community of Christians. If you don't have a church home, we'd love to be that for you. In the foyer are tables with information on small groups you can be a part of that will provide you with opportunities to grow in your relationship with Jesus with other believers.

Even more, would you consider getting together regularly with one other person that you can pray with and share your journey with? Don't just attend church, be the church. Live in community.

4. Be in Prayer for Fulfilled Joy

1 John 5:14–15

And this is the confidence that we have toward him, that if we ask anything according to his will he hears us. And if we know that he hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests that we have asked of him.

Pray for God's Spirit to teach you the truth about Jesus so that you will find joy in Him. We want to invite you to come to our time of worship and prayer this Wednesday. We'll be praying through parts of 1 John, praising God and asking for His work in our lives through this study. But you don't have to wait for Wednesday. Ask God to fill your heart with the joy of Jesus today. Ask Him to give you the opportunity to share that joy with someone else in your life who is far from God but close to you.