



We live in a society where everybody is peddling joy. People wearing fancy suits on TV try to sell you religion and of course there is a multi-billion dollar marketing industry telling you that joy can be found in a bottle, pill, or new car. Take a look at some of these ads for example:

- » Drink Pepsi and you'll find joy!
- » Have an Absolute martini and you'll really find joy!
- » Buying a BMW is the secret to lasting joy!
- » If you can only buy new furniture from IKEA, then you'll have joy! (I guess they've never assembled anything from IKEA either—that's misery!)
- » Wear this perfume for joy!
- » Read this book and you'll find joy!
- » And finally—this is the best one—the joy of not being sold anything!

What is the secret to finding joy? Why is it so elusive? Many of those things will bring us happiness, but not long lasting joy. I think we'll find the key to unlocking joy in these four verses we are looking at this morning in the book of the Bible called 1 John.

Today we begin a 13-week teaching series we've entitled Love Letters. The epistles of John read like a love letter from an elderly saint, an Apostle, who writes from long years of experience with Christ and his message. Imagine having a grandpa who has loved Jesus for decades write a personal letter to you. In this letter, John the Apostle is warning these young Christians about the false teachings that have infested the church in and around Ephesus. Some are teaching that Jesus was not really God while others say Jesus was not really human. There were some who believed they could do whatever they want because there is no such thing as sin. They believed the body is evil and the spirit is good. Therefore, do whatever you want in this life because it won't affect your spirit.

In this short letter, a sermon really, there are three major themes John will touch on over and over again: truth (right doctrine), obedience (right living) and love (right relationships). The letter is written in a cyclical manner which means each of the themes John will emphasize in different ways throughout the letter.

Today John will be touching on truth and the right doctrine of the incarnation of Jesus Christ. Let's read 1 John 1:1–4:

That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched—this we proclaim concerning the Word of life. The life appeared; we have seen it and testify to it, and we proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and has appeared to us. We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ. We write this to make our joy complete.

Jesus Christ Really Lived

The first thing John wants to tell us is that Jesus Christ really lived. This letter was written between 70-90 AD, so it's been about 50 years since Jesus of Nazareth walked the earth. The first generation of believers, those who actually encountered Jesus, have just died off. John was the last living Apostle. He's writing to what we might call 2nd and 3rd generation Christians. Because of the false teachers, these young Christians are starting to doubt their faith. They are wondering who Jesus really was, did it really happen, is it all true? I bet some of you are struggling with those same questions. Who was Jesus? Who did he claim to be? John's writing for you too.

John starts at the beginning, echoing the words of Genesis 1 and his own Gospel, John 1. He says God's message and messenger has come to men. Most philosophies and religions are based on speculation. It's man speculating about God or spiritual things, trying to figure who he is and what he is all about. The only way we know anything about God is because God has chosen to reveal himself to us through his Son Jesus Christ. Theologians call this revelation. John tells us this message appeared as the **Word of life**, not a word **about** life, not an addition to your already full life. Jesus is the source of real and meaningful life. Jesus Christ **is** life. Jesus Christ is both the message of eternal life and the source of eternal life. Listen to what John wrote earlier in his biography of the life of Jesus, *"In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind"* (John 1:4).

Jesus was big on life. John tells us Jesus was the light of life, the bread of life, living water, and the water of life. Have you found real life yet? I'm not talking about living and just sucking in air. I am talking about abundant life. God himself entered into our world in the person and work of Jesus, as the Word of life, as eternal life, so that you could experience life.

In these opening verses, John ventures into a theological conversation here, what theologians call the Incarnation of Jesus. The Incarnation is the embodiment of God the Son in human flesh as Jesus Christ. That word literally means *in carne*, in the flesh. John is reminding the believers that Jesus came to earth as fully God and fully man. The issue many of the false teachers had were about Jesus' humanity, not his deity. How could God live in an evil human body? All one has to do is read the Gospels to see how human Jesus really was. Jesus preaches a phenomenal sermon on top of a hill and afterward heals a few people. We never see him stop to take a break. But, while the disciples are traveling across the lake Jesus gets tired and falls asleep in the boat (Matthew 8:24). Jesus was human; he needed sleep.

Let's look at another example. One day Jesus is delivered horrible news that one of his closest friends has died. When he arrives Lazarus has already been placed in the grave. Standing outside the grave Jesus breaks into tears, crying for his friend (John 11:35). Jesus was human, he cried real tears. I don't mean to be irreverent, but Jesus probably stubbed his toe and bled, Jesus experienced hunger and yes, he even used the restroom. But Jesus was more than human. He was also God. The author of Hebrews tells us he was tempted in every way yet never sinned (Hebrews 4:15). Jesus was 100% God and 100% man both at the same time. John wants his beloved church to know—Jesus Christ really lived as God in the flesh.

We Really Experienced Jesus

The second thing John wants to tell us is that we really experienced Jesus. He writes in verse 1:

That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched—this we proclaim concerning the Word of life.

This same Jesus is the Jesus who called John that spring day on the shore of the Sea of Galilee. He testifies to being a firsthand eyewitness to hearing the voice of Christ, to seeing Christ and he even touched Jesus with his own hands. John really experienced Jesus.

I want you to notice that John uses the pronoun "we" several times throughout these verses—we hear, we saw, we looked,

we touched. John was not the only eyewitness! There were 11 other Apostles and hundreds of others who saw, looked, and touched Jesus Christ both before and after his resurrection from the dead. "We" also means the entire first generation of believers who might have still been alive. Whose testimony will you believe? Hundreds of eyewitnesses or some guy with a PhD in religion who writes a book about how Jesus was just a good moral teacher? Some may argue, but the testimony comes from the Bible, how do we know its true? What you'll find, if you do the research, is that there is more manuscript evidence to back up the reliability and historicity of the Bible than any other book of antiquity. We have four eyewitness accounts about the life of Jesus. In addition to Scripture, we have several remarkable non-biblical references to the life of Jesus Christ—the Jewish historian, Josephus; the Roman historians, Tacitus and Suetonius; and Pliny the Elder. John is proclaiming the truth of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Here we are some 2,000 years later and he wants you to believe the same thing. We are not two or three generations removed; we're 50 generations removed!

We Really Want You to Experience Him Too

Jesus Christ really lived. We really experienced Jesus. And the last thing John wants to tell us is we really want you to experience him too. John uses a key verb in verse 3, the word "proclaim." There is a reason for the proclamation. John proclaims, announces and testifies to the incarnation of Christ so the believer can experience fellowship and complete joy with God. Let's look at both those words—fellowship and joy.

Fellowship is a word you generally hear used in the church. When was the last time your neighbor invited you over to BBQ, watch the Niners and have fellowship? They wouldn't say it like that! This word fellowship comes from a Greek word *κοινωνία*. Maybe you've heard that term? It means to "to share or to have something in common." In most classical Greek writing *κοινωνία* is used to describe the marriage relationship, the most intimate bond found in human relationships. It's not enough for John to be experiencing this life himself; he wants others to share the experience with him. John says this intimate fellowship is only possible through fellowship with God and His Son Jesus Christ. Until you experience Jesus and have personal relationship with God, you will not enjoy true fellowship with other Christians. I like to say, until you get this relationship right (vertically with God), you will have a hard time getting these relationships right (horizontal with people).

I'm somewhat addicted to the TV show, *Locked Up*, where a camera crew spends weeks at a time in America's prisons. That show taught me something about fellowship. In America we

have a judicial system with different levels of security and offices to help protect our citizens. Generally, the smaller crimes are enforced by local police officers and these criminals are taken to county jail where they are released or spend less than a year for a misdemeanor. As the crimes increase so does the enforcement of those crimes. If you are arrested and sentenced for a felony, you will typically go to prison for longer than a year. As the severity of the crime committed increases so does the security around you. Most people think the worst punishment is capital punishment, but it's not. I think the worst punishment a criminal can experience is solitary confinement. In the show *Locked Up* it was those inmates in solitary confinement who were by far the worst off. Why is that? We were created to do life in relationships with others and the judicial system knows the worst punishment a person can experience is no human contact.

You may feel like your Christian life is being lived in solitary confinement. You're not experiencing fellowship with God or with other believers. There is something special about having Christian fellowship but that fellowship is secondary to fellowship with God. This morning may be your first time in a church or this could be a regular part of your week. No matter where you are in life I want to share four ways you can break the feeling of solitary confinement in your life.

First, if you have not **placed your faith in Christ**, what in the world are you waiting for? Here we have eyewitness testimony from someone who saw, looked at, and even touched Jesus Christ. John experienced Jesus as both God and man. John saw how Jesus treated people and how he loved people. For three years John walked with, ate with, slept next to and traveled with Jesus. He saw Him raise dead people, calm the raging seas and cry when his close friend died. John wants more than anything for you to experience the Word of Life like he did. When you trust in Christ, you have fellowship with God and with other Christians.

Another way you can experience fellowship with God is by **reading Scripture**. Think about reading Scripture as a way of sitting down and having a personal time with God. This is an opportunity for you to learn about the character and nature of God through his written word, his love letter to you. If you rarely spend consistent time with God, just start by reading one chapter of the Gospel of John every day. It will change your life.

Another way to experience fellowship with God is spending **time in prayer**. Prayer is the believer's personal connection to God. You may prefer to set aside some time in the morning for prayer or maybe with your schedule it would work better to pray in the night. You may have a long commute and instead of listening

to talk radio you might choose to pray. Prayer isn't a privilege reserved for the elite Christians; prayer is for everyone and can be used at any time. All too often I think we come to God with a laundry list of prayer but never stop to listen for his response. Think about prayer as a conversation with your best friend; conversation involves talking and listening.

The last way I'd like to share is **corporate and personal worship**, like what we've already experienced this morning. You may want to download some songs on your iPhone and go for a walk while you listen to the music and worship God. Worship isn't limited to singing. Worship is our opportunity to give God all the praise in our lives. You may prefer to drive to the beach and worship God for his creative ability in creation. You might want to go on a hike and worship God for the beautiful trees and amazing smells all around you. This isn't an all inclusive list; we could add being in a small group or serving the church to the list, but my hope is this will spark some ideas for you to experience the intimate fellowship John writes to us about.

John ends the passage in verse 4 by telling us the reason he's written these things

We write this to make our joy complete.

Theologians debate if John means "our joy" or "your joy." I think it's both. As an elder and Apostle, John gets great joy when the church understands the message of Jesus Christ and lives it out. On the other hand, as followers of Jesus, we get great joy when we are growing in our knowledge of the gospel and living it out. It's both! Because Jesus Christ came, we have a joy that transforms our lives. But happiness and complete joy are really different. Happiness is an emotion we feel for a period of time. If you drink a Pepsi or buy a new BMW you'll be happy for a moment, but it doesn't last. Several months ago we took our kids to Disneyland and California Adventure and just had a blast! We rode all the great rides and because we had a baby with us, Brenden, we got to ride every attraction twice. It was so sweet! Missy would stay with Brenden and I would take our older kids on the ride. Then, I would switch with Missy and watch Brenden and she would take our kids right back on the same ride. We all experienced great happiness at Disneyland. Unfortunately Disneyland closes and we needed to drive home. It was over. The happiness was temporary.

When we experience the life John writes about is when we find complete joy. Because Jesus Christ came, we have a joy that transforms our lives. Unfortunately, all too often, most of us don't experience complete joy in our lives. That's because some of us are looking for happiness in things the world has to offer.

We neglect our personal relationship with God or we look to material things to bring us happiness. Maybe you've listened to teachings that are contrary to what is found in Scripture and this week you find yourself in a rut longing for joy. Maybe you've turned your eyes from your first love and have looked to others things, people, or circumstances to bring you joy. If you've been longing for complete joy and have not found it, maybe you need to renew your commitment to Jesus Christ. Like John's churches you've wandered a bit and need to get realigned with Jesus.

There have been many times in my own life when my soul felt dry and joyless. I felt like a baseball player in a hitting slump. And when I get stuck in this joyless state I turn to Jesus and ask him to give me his joy again. Joy is a fruit of the Spirit, which

means he develops that fruit in us. Learning to choose joy takes time and maturity. When I am feeling joyless, I go to Psalm 86:4, "*Gladden the soul of your servant, for to you, O Lord, do I lift up my soul.*" Even in the midst of painful life circumstances, the Psalmist seeks joy for his life. And to find his joy, the psalmist prayerfully lifts up his soul to God. Like a child wanting to be held by mommy or daddy, we can ask the Lord to lift up our soul. We renew our trust and faith in God. We regain the confidence we once had of living for God. We eagerly wait for him to do a work of joy in our hearts.

This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.

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