

Ben Libby

Sermon

December 27th, 1st Sunday after Christmas

In the name of Jesus Christ, who came to redeem us from our sins so that we might become the children of God, Dear fellow Redeemed... Our sermon text this morning is taken from John's first letter, chapter 1, the first 4 verses.

That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have observed and our hands have touched regarding the Word of Life— 2 the life appeared, and we have seen it. We testify and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and has appeared to us. 3 We are proclaiming what we have seen and heard also to you, so that you may have fellowship with us. Our fellowship is with the Father and his Son Jesus Christ. 4 We write these things to you so that our joy may be complete.

This is the Word of The LORD!!! The congregation may be seated...

Mercy, Grace, and peace our yours through your God and Father, and through His Son, Jesus Christ, true God and Man, dear fellow Sons and Daughters of God...

Christmas is a very special time. It is a time for giving and receiving. It is also a time of hectic hurrying. No doubt, you have felt it too. We hurry to make it on time to Church. Or, we hurry to buy all the gifts that we need. The date of Christmas never changes. Yet, it somehow always sneaks up on us...

If you were like me, you might have spent time on December 24th trying to prepare for things on December 25th. There I was, like many other procrastinators, trying to buy gifts and food so that my Christmas plans could go off without a hitch.

But, our modern times have changed to suit us. Now, we don't have to go out to stores to buy gifts. We can now order them online. But sometimes, even this can prove to be stressful. They tell you a day when you can expect your delivery. Yet, this is not always a guarantee. What are you going to do if that delivery does not arrive on time?

Thankfully, we also have been giving tracking for these packages. We can tell when your item goes out. When it ships to a transfer station. In some cases, you can see how many houses/stops away your package is. This amount of information is helpful. It can be the difference between having a gift to give or having to rush out and buy something else on December 24th.

When it comes to the ultimate gift of Jesus Christ on Christmas, we don't ever need to worry. We know He was born in Bethlehem some 2,000 years ago. The gift has been given and will stand forever. And yet, it is still nice to be able to look at the tracking. Here, in our sermon text, we are able to track and trace the path of the Savior. We know when He started out, we know of those who had a part in the delivery of this gift, and we can see what it's deliverance means. Namely, our spiritual deliverance. I invite you here today to track the fellowship between God and Man. For truly, this is an important process to track because it leads us to heaven! And so, we pray - MAY THE WORDS OF MY MOUTH AND THE MEDITATIONS OF OUR HEARTS BE ACCEPTABLE IN YOUR SIGHT O LORD, OUR STRENGTH AND OUR REDEEMER, AMEN!!!-

John starts out his epistle in a similar way to how he started out his gospel. We read about it on Christmas Day, **In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2 He was in the beginning with God. (Joh 1:1-2 NKJ)** Here in John's first letter, he also starts out back at the beginning. After all, it's a very good place to start. **That which was from the beginning, which we**

have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have observed and our hands have touched regarding the Word of Life—

In this first letter of John, a big topic that he addresses is that of fellowship. We see that word mentioned twice in our text. He was writing to warn Christians everywhere about the dangers of not being in fellowship or agreement with the teachings of the Apostles. There were many false teachings, even in the days of John, from which the church was under attack. Some were saying that Jesus was not really a man, or that He did not really die, or rise from the dead. It was dangerous to believe these things that went against their teachings because it would place people outside of the fellowship of believers. This whole first chapter is talking about the relationship between God and man, and of course, the most vital piece of that relationship is the God-Man, Jesus.

And when it comes to Jesus, the beginning is a great place to start. Why? Because in the beginning Jesus simply WAS... This speaks to His holy nature of course. As John made abundantly clear in His Gospel, Jesus is the Word, the Word was with God, and the Word was God. **In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. (Joh 1:4 NKJ)** Jesus, in His relationship with the Holy Triune God, made the world and all that is in it. He is the way, the truth, and the life. As Jesus would say later in that very same Gospel, **"I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me. (Joh 14:6 NKJ)**

Every good hero has an origin story. The origin story is so vital to the hero narrative because it lets us know where this individual started out and how they became what they would become. Every comic book hero worth their salt has an origin point, and something typically happens to them to start them on the path of becoming a hero.

Does Jesus have an origin story? Some would say that is what Christmas is all about. Jesus Christ is born in Bethlehem. The Gospels of Matthew and Luke paint all the details that went into that story. But John starts back even farther than Bethlehem at the time of Caesar Augustus. Christ's true origins are before time itself existed.

Jesus is true God. That is why His origins cannot be seen. His point of origin is outside of time itself. There was never a time or moment or instant when Jesus was not. In the beginning, He simply was.

What started Him down the path of the hero? Well, it wasn't something that He did. Instead, it was something that His creation did. Mankind fell away. They rebelled against God. This sin corroded and destroyed the fellowship between God and Man. Sin is the opposite of Holiness, and God cannot tolerate it. Holiness destroys sin. From the moment man fell away, they would never again be able to have a relationship with God.

But then, God did something about it. Jesus, who was before the beginning, would come down to earth to save us from our sins. That is another important thing to realize about His origins (which can't be seen) and our origins. We were born dead in our trespasses and sins. We were brought forth in iniquity. But just like Jesus was before creation, so too was the salvation He would provide. Paul writes in Ephesians, **Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, 4 just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love (Eph 1:3-4 NKJ)**

If you want to track and trace the beginning of the gift of Jesus, then you need to go back to the very beginning. Before the world began, Jesus was. Before the very beginning, we were chosen and saved. Our minds may not comprehend these truths, but it doesn't make them less true!

That is John's whole point here. The hero that we needed to restore us and heal our relationship to God WAS before the beginning. But He did come, and He was witnessed! **That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have observed and our hands have touched regarding the Word of Life— 2 the life appeared, and we have seen it. We testify and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and has appeared to us**

John was an eyewitness to Jesus and His ministry. As he says here, **life appeared, and we have seen it.**

Not only was John a witness of Jesus, but he is also THE witness. Think about all that John saw... Whenever Jesus departed from the disciples and only took a few with Him, John was always part of that. He saw His ministry, His miracles, and teachings. He saw His glory on the mount of transfiguration. He saw His entrance into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday. He was there in the upper room. He even saw the crucifixion while most of the disciples were hiding. He saw the empty tomb. He saw the ascension. He saw the Pentecost. He saw the church grow substantially. He lived the longest of all the Apostles. Tradition says he was the only one not to die a martyr's death. And, finally, John would see the revelation on the isle of Patmos. John saw it all!

Not only did John see these things, but he also heard what Jesus said. He wrote down those things for others. He observed His teachings in practice. His hands touched Jesus, before and after His death. John witnessed these things and wrote about them so that we, and other Christians like us, could also see, hear, observe, and touch.

John is really confirming here all the things that were really real. Why is that important? Well because John was part of the process of something that started before the beginning of the world! John was there. He saw, he heard, and he touched. While the origins of Christ were not able to be seen, (as were our salvation), the part when He came to earth was. And John saw it! He could verify all these things because he was there!

We have been given a way to track and trace the entire process of our salvation by the gift of Scripture and faith. We see that Jesus was in the beginning. We then see Him in the manger, then on the cross, and then we don't see Him in the tomb but rather risen, and then raised to heaven. John and the other apostles (and others) all saw this. They even felt His wounds. Thus we know it happened for a fact, and thus we can be sure about our salvation.

John goes on to show us the implications of what all of that really means. **3 We are proclaiming what we have seen and heard also to you, so that you may have fellowship with us. Our fellowship is with the Father and his Son Jesus Christ. 4 We write these things to you so that our joy may be complete.**

Tracking is important because it lets you know when you can expect your package to arrive. But it also lets you know once it has been delivered. If you are not at home, and you get the notification that your package was delivered, then you would expect to find it once you got back.

The package that was delivered to us on Christmas was eternal life. The package was delivered. But now the notifications needed to be sent out. People needed to know what John knew. What he had seen needed to be spread across the nations. The Savior had come! People needed to know that!

When it comes to the topic of fellowship, we often think about it in only one way: that we all agree upon what we teach. This is certainly an important aspect of it. Paul writes in Philippians, **Therefore if there is any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and mercy, 2 fulfill my joy by being like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind. (Phi 2:1-2 NKJ)** We are to teach and say the same thing. If the notifications are going out, they should be the same notification. If you get a notification that your package has arrived, and then you get a notification that your package is going to arrive late, you would be confused, wouldn't you?

But there is another aspect that goes into the principle of fellowship. It is important that we agree on the teachings of the scriptures. This provides unity. This is called "horizontal fellowship". But there is another aspect to fellowship about which John is talking about here. There is also "vertical fellowship", which is fellowship between you and God. John would talk about that more in the following verses: **6 If we say we have fellowship with him but still walk in darkness, we are lying and do not put the truth into practice. 7 But if we walk in the light, just 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.

It is that vertical fellowship that allows us to have fellowship with one another. We need to have fellowship with Jesus first and foremost. If we continue to live in darkness, that is being devoted to sin and the ways of the world, then our fellowship with Jesus is a lie. But, if we walk in the light as Jesus is in and is the light, then we have fellowship with one another and we have forgiveness from our sins. The teaching of fellowship is often seen by some as another teaching that is stressed too hard by our Church body. But as we see here, fellowship in its truest sense is how we are able to have forgiveness. It is vitally important!

And really, that is what Christmas is all about. "Pastor, are you really saying that the birth of Christ is about fellowship? Isn't that a stretch?" Well, no, and yes. The birth of Christ is not about us all agreeing on the same thing. Jesus was born. Whatever you think about it doesn't change the fact that He was born. But, why was He born? He was born to save us from our sins. He was born to reconnect us to God. Before Jesus, there was no way we could repair our relationship with God. Jesus was born, lived, died, rose again, and ascended to the right hand of God so that we could also have a place there. There is nothing now that separates us from God because God came down to us. That is why the birth of Jesus was so important. It was the first step of reconciling us to our Father.

And now, we do have fellowship with Him! Paul writes **Now all things are of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation, 19 that is, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation. (2Co 5:18-19 NKJ)**

The only way in which we can truly be happy is to be reconciled to God. If you're not, then no matter what you do in life, there will be a hole. An incompleteness. The only way to be completely happy is to have that vertical fellowship with God! And the only way to have that relationship with the Father is by first having a

relationship with the Son. **Our fellowship is with the Father and his Son Jesus Christ. 4 We write these things to you so that our joy may be complete.**

It is unclear from the text if John writes here "so that **our** joy may be complete", or if he says "so that **your** joy may be complete". But, in the context of fellowship, it is truly one and the same. We rejoice when others believe what we believe. No doubt, those who do believe what we have been led to believe by faith have the same joy that we do. It is a complete joy. It is a joy that knows there is nothing left to do. When it comes to the salvation front, if you have that relationship with Jesus, then you have a relationship with God Himself. Jesus is God! But He is also a separate person from the Father, and in that role, He goes to God on your behalf. John would go on in the next chapter: **My children, I write these things to you so that you will not sin. If anyone does sin, we have an Advocate before the Father: Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. 2 He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the whole world.**

That is the whole complete truth and joy we find in Jesus. Through Him, we can go to God. Yet, we fall back into sin time and time again. When we do, we can approach Jesus and repent. Then, our Advocate takes our case to God, and we find forgiveness in His blood and righteousness. This is the complete joy of our relationship with God now!

Tracking is helpful. It lets us know that we don't need to have a backup plan, not that we could ever find or buy one. It lets us know that our gift is on the way, and it lets us know that it safely arrives. Our gift has appeared! It was ordered for us by God from the very beginning. Once it appeared, it was verified by numerous people and multiple sources. Our gift is verified as delivered. And we now get to deliver the same message. That gift that we find at Christmas is not just for us, but for anyone who wants a relationship with God! Jesus reconciles us to God, and we stand forgiven! We don't need to rush out and find a gift. It is given. It has already been delivered. And that delivered gift of Jesus is deliverance itself! AMEN!!!