

Are you Sure?: The Deep Well

1 John 1:1-4

September 11, 2022

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I was born a PG boy, but in some ways its hard to believe I grew up in this world at all. So my parents, along with two other Christian couples, bought land way up the Hart – which might as well be another world all by itself. But the three couples moved onto the same street with the goal of raising their families together. We lived on an acreage at the bottom of the hill, and the Robinsons and Coulls had land at the top.

And the Robinsons and Coulls had a party line in the early years. Now that might sound fun, but what that means is one phone line, for two houses. So if you called the Robinson's number it would ring once in both houses, and if you called the Coull's number the phone would ring twice in both houses. And the Robinsons and Coulls could never be on the phone at the same time. Somehow that worked. I guess in the cave man days language hadn't fully developed and talking wasn't important.

Anyway, another thing that got shared at the top of the hill was a well. Now most of the time all this sharing worked out fine. But their well wasn't as deep as it should have been. And they were at the top of the hill. And as a result, on particularly hot summers the well would run dry, and the Robinsons and Coulls would have to borrow water.

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Welcome to Fort George. If you are new with us today – online or in person, we are glad you are here. And over the last several years we have been walking through difference books of the Bible. Last year we did Mark. And this year we are going to be looking at a short but incredibly important letter written by the Apostle John.

If you've got a Bible handy please open it up to 1st John 1. And would you stand with me as we come before God's word? Hear now the word of the Lord.

[Read 1 John 1:1-4]

This is the word of the Lord. You may be seated.

Now most books in the New Testament have identified authors. So Romans starts, "Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle and set apart for the gospel of God.... To all in Rome who are loved by God." That's the way it is for most of the New Testament.

But there are four books that aren't identified. 1st, 2nd and 3rd John and Hebrews. And so there is some question as to who actually wrote this, but there is pretty solid evidence that it was John.

So, for example, a bunch of early Christian writers refer to John as the author – guys like Irenaeus and Tertullian if you know them. So that points us in a certain way.

And, also the author identifies himself as an eyewitness of Jesus. He says “we have seen with our eyes... and our hands have touched.” Now to talk like this in the first century would have meant that he had to at least be one of the disciples. And then the style and language is very similar to the Gospel of John. So John begins:

In the beginning the Word already existed. The Word was with God, and the Word was God.... So the Word became human and made His home among us. He was full of unfailing love and faithfulness. And we have seen His glory, the glory of the Father’s one and only Son. (John 1:1;14)

That’s pretty similar to what we get in today’s text. And there are lots of other similarities. So all that together and I’m going to refer to John as the author.

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Alright, let’s look at the text. This is John’s intro where he tells us what his letter is going to be about. And there are three elements that I want to draw out. John says “The Eternal Word of Life, invites us into fellowship, so our joy will be complete.” And that’s what I’m going to unpack today.

First, the Eternal Word of Life. In verse 2 John writes:

We proclaim to you the one who existed from the beginning... **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. (1 John 1:1-2)

The Word of life, who is life itself; eternal life. This is Jesus. He existed from the beginning. He was always there. But notice the way John refers to Him. He doesn’t call Him Jesus; he calls Him the Word.

Now the word of God is one of the central themes of scripture. And that’s because in the beginning God spoke creation into existence. God’s word is His power made manifest. There’s no flexing His arms or straining His back. God simply speaks and light shines into the darkness. He breaths and dust comes to life. God’s word is what He uses to accomplish His plans.

But God doesn’t just speak and step back, He keeps speaking. So God speaks to Abraham and tells him to leave his home. And God speaks to Moses from the bush and from the mountain. Our God is the One who speaks to lead His people to life.

But it’s not just Abraham and Moses. God commands that His words be written down and this became, not simply a record of what He had said, but a continuation of what He is saying. And this is the way Jews have always thought of scripture; the Old Testament is referred to as the word of God. So David rejoiced to know God’s voice. He says:

How can a young person stay pure?
By obeying Your word....
I will study Your commandments

and reflect on Your ways.
I will delight in Your decrees
and not forget Your word. (Psalm 119:9-16)

Our God is the God who speaks to lead His children to life. And this gets carried over into the New Testament as well. So Hebrews says:

The word of God is living and active, and sharper than any two-edged sword (Hebrews 4:12)

This is the Bible. Now this doesn't mean that the Bible is God – like the Trinity is the Father, the Son and the Holy Bible. The Bible isn't God. But it is also more than simply some wise sayings from long time ago. It is God's word, which is alive and powerful to accomplish His will today. That's how the Jews and early Christians viewed scripture.

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Now hear what John says about Jesus. John says Jesus is the Word. There is a parallel here between scripture and Jesus. In Jesus we get to hear God's voice. Jesus is the living scripture. Jesus is the living Word of God. God's voice to His people put on skin. And we saw Him and touched Him. And our testimony is that He is life. He is eternal and abundant life. And because this parallel exists, all scripture is God breathed and is Jesus' word to us today.

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Now just stop there for a second. We live in a strange time where access to scripture is easy. I've got 40 different English versions of the Bible in my office and 70 different versions on my phone. Access is so easy that we take it for granted. It's boring. That's often our experience. Is it just me? But that's because we are reading the Bible like a book instead of reading to hear God speak. Do you fall into that?

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Jesus is the Word of God. And God had His word recorded so that He can speak directly into our today. So Paul says:

Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly (Colossians 3:16 ESV)

The Eternal word of life has put on skin. And He did this so that we could know Him. And this is the second element in John's intro. The Eternal Word of Life, invites us into fellowship. Now notice the plural language here. John says:

This one who is life itself was revealed to us... 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. (1 John 1:2-3)

Queen Elizabeth passed away this week. And she was one who would often speak in the third person. "Now, we, Elizabeth, by the grace of God, Queen of the United Kingdom, would like some tea." She probably never said that. But that's the Royal We. But that's not what John is doing here. John's not bolstering his authority by pretending there is a group of people talking. The "us" and "we" here is the Apostles. We saw Him. We touched Him.

But then he takes the plural to another level. He says “We proclaim to you what we’ve see so that you may have fellowship with us. And **our** fellowship is with the Father and His Son, Jesus.”

Now with the “our” here John stops talking about himself and the Apostles and includes us – it’s all Christians. But it’s even more than that. John is not just interested in coffee time after the service – or the smokies and hot dogs – his main passion is that our fellowship together is with the Father and the Son.

Now two things are important here. First, this is God’s plan. This has always been God’s plan. In the beginning God created the world good. This is His world. And He made it because He wanted to increase His glory by inviting us into His presence to enjoy Him. Think about it. How can an infinitely glorious being increase His glory? The only way is by creating beings who can come into fellowship with Him and worship Him and enjoy His glory. We exist to increase the infinite glory of God.

But sin shattered that purpose. Sin is stepping out of fellowship with God to be our own gods. It’s saying, “I’m not that impressed with Your glory God, I’m more impressed with mine.” But the problem with being our own gods is that in doing this we separate ourselves from God who is life. And death enters the picture.

And the Bible says this is where we are all at. That’s the bad news. But guess what, our rebellion didn’t catch God by surprise. He’s not making the best of a bad situation. One of the glorious things about our God is that He isn’t just the Creator, He’s the Re-creator. And from the very beginning He wanted to show us who He is. And so He planned to redeem humanity so we could come back to the abundant life centered around His glory that He created us to enjoy. That’s “Plan-A.”

And all history points to this. Jesus is the redemption of God. Jesus is God’s word of creation and recreation. He stepped down into our broken world and died in our place to enable us to regain fellowship with Him. We were created for relationship with the Fellowshiping God – Father, Son and Spirit, and Jesus makes that possible for us.

So are you there? Are you living out the purpose you were created for? Are you in relationship with the fellowshiping God?

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But there is one more thing in the plural language that is incredibly important for a bunch of Canadians to hear. And that is that our fellowship with God is a fellowship we enter together, not by ourselves.

Now this is hard. We are individuals. We love to be on our own spiritual journeys. And so maybe you have come to church with the hope of finding some good teaching or a good worship experience. And then you go home. And you might know a couple people, but basically it is you and God. Your spiritual life is a private thing.

But John says it's impossible to fellowship with the Fellowshiping God by yourself. That's not how God designed it to work. John says "Our fellowship is with the Father and the Son." Faith in Jesus is something we have together or we don't have it at all.

I wonder how this hits you. Are there people in your life that get to speak into your relationship with God? There are people in this room that do that for me. In fact I got called to account this week for an idea I was pushing insensitively. And God used these people to expose some pride in my life. And I got to apologize and eat humble pie – nobody likes that flavor. But guess what, it was awesome because I want to grow to look more like Jesus. And I can't do this myself because I can't see my blind spots.

But this is why the Word of life doesn't invite you or me into fellowship, He invites us. So are you doing your spiritual journey your way or Jesus way? And this leads us to the third element in this text. "The Eternal Word of Life, invites us into fellowship, so our joy will be complete." Verse 4 says:

We write this to make our joy complete. (1 John 1:4)

Here's that "our" again, and here is where all the plurals come to their climax. This is the point. John writes his letter so that our joy might be complete.

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Now what does complete joy look like? Some will say, "Well, obviously complete joy isn't possible on earth. I mean there is always something going wrong in this broken world. So John must be talking about the end of the world when Jesus comes back."

And yes, John knows Jesus is coming back; he wrote Revelation. But that's not what he's talking about here. He says Jesus is life; He is eternal abundant life. He is life that starts now and lasts forever. So yes, there is an aspect of this that isn't going to come to fruition until heaven. But that's not John's point. John's point is that we can have complete joy right now. And we can have that when we are connected to the deep well.

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So the problem with the Robinson's well wasn't that there was no water. In fact there is tons of water up the Hart. There are rivers of water under the ground up the Hart. The problem was that their well wasn't in those rivers, it was in some surface ground water. And so, in the hot summers when it got dry that water went away.

But down the hill we dug a deep well. It was 100 meters deep, and it went right into the depths of the underground water. And so even on the hottest summers we could turn the taps on full blast and even water the neighbours.

John says it's possible to have a complete joy right now which can't be stopped and provides life even in the driest season.

Now there are other joys in life. So sometimes people are patting you on the back and saying, "way to go, you're awesome." I love those days, and joy is easy on them. But that joy dissipates with humble pie, and so John's talking about something else.

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Jeremiah was known as the weeping prophet. When he brought God's word to God's people they didn't like it and threw him in a "cistern" where he sunk into the "mud" past his waist. And there are hints in the text that this "well" may not have been a sanitary place. That was not a good day. But Jeremiah wrote:

Blessed are those who trust in the LORD and have made the LORD their hope and confidence. They are like trees planted along a riverbank, with roots that reach deep into the water. Such trees are not bothered by the heat or worried by long months of drought. Their leaves stay green, and they never stop producing fruit. (Jeremiah 17:7-8)

That's joy disconnected from circumstance. Now this doesn't mean Jeremiah was happy in the "mud"; he was the weeping prophet. So don't go plastering some fake smile on your face because you think it's godly to look happy when you are miserable. "Mom just died of a heart attack – praise the Lord."

No! Grief is a real thing. Jesus weeps when Lazarus dies. It's godly to grieve and weep in the face of death and sickness. But Jesus also has a profoundly deep connection to a river of joy that ran underneath. Hear this: Jesus encountered the most discouragement any person has ever faced, and yet never got depressed.

Jesus was constantly discouraged. His friends were constantly letting Him down. His inbox was full of messages from haters and trolls. And the night before His death He was sweating blood and weeping, and yet there was a river down deep that He was tapped into. And this is what John wants for us.

John says "We write to make our joy complete." John wants us together to tap into the same well Jesus tapped into. A well that doesn't run dry even in the darkest and hottest seasons. And this is where I want to end today.

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Here's the deep well. It is knowing the Father and the Son who is eternal life. This is how we can have complete joy. Ultimate joy comes from fellowship with God.

This means there is something more than saying your prayers, there is an exchange. We can interact with God. Everything is interactive right now. You've got a smart TV. And you can DM the people you are following on social. But here's the thing, you can also have an interactive relationship with the God of the universe.

But I wonder if you are enjoying this? Is God teaching you things and restraining you from things? Is He training and counseling you? Are you learning and growing closer to God? Do you have fellowship with the Father and the Son?

And the second part of this is, do you know you have this fellowship? Are you sure?

This is one of John's main passions in his book – an assurance of knowing God. A little later he is going to say:

And we can be sure that we know Him... (1 John 2:3)

John says there is an assurance that you are loved and accepted. So we can not just know God, but we can know that we know Him.

So here is a question you can assess yourself with: when someone asks you “Are you a Christian?” Do you say “I’m trying to be a Christian. I really want to be a Christian. But nobody knows for sure.”¹

If this is where you are at then you aren’t tapped into that deep well, and here’s why: Christianity is the only religion in the world where you can have assurance of where you stand with God. Do you know why? It’s quite simple.

Every other religion says you are saved by your life. And people love this. People are always saying, “Well, it doesn’t matter what you believe or what rituals you follow. What matters is how you live. Are you a good person? If you are then you are in. All that matters is how you live.” And every other religion says this.

But when your life is the standard then you can never know you are in until your life is done and all the chips get counted. So you can never know for sure.

But Christianity says you are saved by someone else’s life. You are saved by the life and work of Jesus. He is the one who brings you into relationship with the Father. And because our fellowship with God is based on His life we can know where we stand with God. Christianity offers you what no other religion can.

And there is incredible joy, complete joy, in knowing the Father and the Son – and knowing that you know. Not because you are good enough, but because He is good enough. He paid the price to bring you back into the relationship with the Father that He created you for in the beginning.

So you can be sure. Even though the world is full of wickedness. Even though you see yourself with all your flaws. In spite of all your struggles and wrestling and failings. You can be sure if you’ve trusted in Jesus. Because your connection to God isn’t based on you, it’s based on Him. And He is a deep, deep well.

¹ This section adapted from Tim Keller <https://gospelinlife.com/downloads/knowning-god-7757/> (Accessed September 8, 2022)