

## ***WHAT WE HAVE SEEN WITH OUR OWN EYES***

Every judge and every attorney knows the powerful impact that can be made in a case by the testimony of an eye-witness. Unless the motive or character of that witness can be called into question, what they have to say is pretty hard to discount.

And so it is with the case concerning God and Christ. How do we know, and know for sure that God really exists? How do we know, and know for sure that the person we call Jesus was truly the eternal God? How do we know that He is someone we ought to put our faith in, and that we ought to respect and obey as Lord, as opposed to the idea that he was just some good man who lived, and died some two thousand years ago?

These are the types of questions that are generally found in the discipline we call “Christian evidences.” This is where we study or pursue evidences for what we believe—belief in God, in Christ as the Son of God, in miracles, and in the divine inspiration of the Bible.

In that pursuit, we certainly ought to be thankful for the testimony of eye-witnesses, such as John claimed to be in our reading this week. We have moved along in our New Testament Studies to the first epistle of John. Hopefully you are keeping up with us in this, but do you remember what John wrote? Let’s open our Bibles this morning to the **1<sup>st</sup> chapter of 1<sup>st</sup> John**, and read together **verses 1-3**:

*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.*

Notice the claims that John makes in this text. First of all he speaks about “that which was from the beginning.” There is little question that John is talking about the beginning of time, the beginning of the physical creation which we call the universe. He writes about “that which was from the beginning.” Secondly, whatever John is talking about is also what John claims he and the other apostles heard with their own ears, saw with their own eyes, touched with their own hands.

What is John claiming? He is claiming to be an eye-witness, isn’t he? Notice that strangely enough John uses impersonal pronouns throughout this context. Those who study the Bible know that John is talking about Jesus, but instead of using pronouns like “he” and “him,” he uses words like “that” and “which” and “it.” He does that in verse 1, he does that in verse 2 and he does that in verse 3. John does that because what he is writing about is more than just a person. It is something that transcends the fact that God became a man; that God came in human form.

In verse 1 he calls it “the word of life.” In verse 2 he calls it “the life,” and “the eternal life.” And John writes that he and others—referring to the apostles—saw this “word of life,” this “eternal life” with their own eyes; heard it with their own ears, touched it with their own hands!

We recall similar claims that John made in several places throughout the gospel which he wrote. In the **1<sup>st</sup> chapter of that gospel**, John writes:

*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. 3) All things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made. 4) In him was life, and the life was the light of men. (John 1:1-4)*

Again, those who are students of the Bible know that John was writing about Jesus. Here he calls him “the Word.” But notice what he says about “the Word.” In these four verses, John says seven things about “the Word.”

1. He says, he was in the beginning. Sounds very similar to 1 John 1:1 doesn't it?
2. He says, the Word was with God.
3. And then he goes on to say something that almost contradicts what he just said. He says, “the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” Now, that gives some people fits, but even if you cannot fully understand or explain, for the sake of understand what John is writing, just pay attention to what he said. He said “the word was WITH God,” and He said “the Word was God.” If the Word was WITH God, then logically he has to have some sort of separate nature or identity from God. But if the Word is God, then logically it follows that he is of the same nature and identity as God. This can only be explained, or understood when you understand the Biblical teaching concerning the Godhead. That is, there is one being we call God, but this one God exists as three distinct, but perfectly united identities. We call them, “God, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.”
4. Back to the John 1 text. John says, the Word was in the beginning with God.
5. He says, everything that has been made, or came into existence, was made through the Word.
6. He says, in this one we call the Word, is life. Again that sounds a lot like what John said in 1 John 1:1, doesn't it?
7. He says, in this one we call the Word is life, and the life was the light of men.

Those are some pretty amazing claims! Maybe they are not so amazing to us because most of us I'm sure are already believers, but think about John's gospel being copied and read and talked about by people who didn't have the background we have.

John understood that what he was writing probably bordered on the unbelievable, and so again and again, he emphasizes that he is writing about what he personally knows. I saw something that caught my attention a couple of weeks back when we were reading in **John 19**. You have the passage where Jesus is hanging on the cross, and the soldier comes to break his leg in an

effort to hasten death, but finds Jesus already dead. Nevertheless, in order to make doubly sure, the soldier pierces his body with his spear, and immediately blood and water came out. Because there were some already in John's day who were beginning to claim that Jesus really didn't die, but only appeared to die, John's testimony had the effect of saying, *"there was no doubt that he was really dead."* And then John adds—**verse 35**: *"He who saw this has borne witness—his testimony is true, and he knows that he is telling the truth—that you also may believe."*

At the close of John's gospel, in **chapter 21, verse 24**, John writes, *"This is the disciple who is bearing witness about these things, and who has written these things, and we know that his testimony is true."*

So, John made some remarkable claims about Jesus, both in his gospel and in his first epistle which we have been reading this week. And what is even more interesting about that is, that not only did he make some remarkable claims, but he was very emphatic about the fact that he was telling the truth. In other words, he was really putting his credibility out there on the line!

Now, some of you might be thinking, "Yes, but that doesn't prove that he was telling the truth." And that is true. Just because someone claims something, doesn't make it true. And even if someone is emphatic about what they claim, that doesn't make it true.

And of course that goes to the credibility of the eye-witness, doesn't it. As I said earlier, if we throw some doubt as to the character or motive of a witness, we can lessen the force of their testimony. And of course no one today can do that because no one today knows John, and neither can they say much about him one way or the other.

But that wasn't true back then, when John wrote these things. There were a lot of people who knew this man, who had known him, and had known him perhaps all of his life. There had to be multitudes of people whose lives had become intertwined with his in some way. So if anyone had any reason to suspect that John wasn't all there, or that he was making stuff up, or that he had some sort of ulterior motive, there was plenty of opportunity right then in John's own day to cross-examine him and poke holes in his testimony. And if that had happened, I don't think we would be sitting here today, two thousand years later, reading these things that he wrote!

And speaking about motive, let's consider what was John's motive in writing this epistle? We know what his motive was in writing the gospel that bears his name. In **20:30, 31**, John tells us,

*Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; 31) but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.*

So that was his purpose in writing his account of Christ's mission to earth, but what about this epistle we call First John? Well again he told us, didn't he? Right there in **verses 3 and 4**:

*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.*

Does that sound like John's motives were driven by some sort of selfish desire? John said he was writing to them about this life, this eternal life that was from the beginning, which they had seen with their own eyes, heard with their own ears, touched with their own hands, so that those who read these things might have fellowship with them—again referring to the apostles, “and indeed,” he says, “our fellowship is with the Father and his Son Jesus Christ.” Furthermore John says, we write these things so that *our joy may be complete*. That is, that John and others might have the joy of seeing more and more souls come to a knowledge of salvation through Christ.

Over in **3<sup>rd</sup> John, verse 4**, John wrote, “*I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth.*” John wasn't thinking of himself in writing the things that he did. He wasn't pursuing some selfish, evil desire in making the claims that he did, and in laying himself open to all kinds of counter-attacks.

The joy John was going to receive from writing these things and in knowing that others were being helped by them was all the reward that John was seeking.

Think about it! Here was an eye-witness to the coming of Christ. Here was a man who it appears was probably an early disciple of John the Baptist, but who became a devout follower of the one called Jesus the Christ. He followed him and listened to him closely and watched him closely for a period of at least several years. He became one of that man's chief messengers, called the twelve apostles. He was there when Jesus, from the cross entrusted his own mother Mary to John. He was there a few hours later when Christ died on the cross, and emphatically says, “I know what I saw. The man was dead!” Then he was there three days later when the first word came to the apostles that the tomb was empty, that Jesus had been raised from the dead. In fact, this sacred history we call the New Testament tells us that John was the first apostle to go into the empty tomb.

He was there when Jesus first appeared to the apostles, and was there several more times when Jesus spoke with them. He was there, another writer tells us, when Jesus began ascending back into heaven. He saw and heard all of those things himself.

John watched as his very own brother gave up his life for preaching about Christ, the ruler Herod cutting his head off. He could tell us about time after time when he and his fellow apostles worked miracle after miracle. And for the better part of the next seventy-five years, this man watched as what he had become a part of, in fact a major player in, went from just a handful of believers in Judea and Galilee to where there were hundreds and thousands of Christians and churches all over the Roman Empire and beyond.

He himself suffered many things for the things he was now preaching. He preached them because he could not do otherwise. He would not stop until the Lord came or he breathed his last. Would you live all of those years in that manner, would you suffer all of those things that he did, if what you were proclaiming you knew wasn't true? Would you?

John is known as the apostle of love. He is called that because none of the other apostles seemed to embrace Jesus' message about love so fully and so firmly as John. Here was a man who majored in love. How could he preach and write about that if he himself was a peddler of things that he knew were untrue?

He couldn't have, could he?

Somebody says, "I can't believe in God if I can't see Him with my own eyes." Well, did you know there is one who did see God, God the Father with his very own eyes. That was Jesus. "Yes," someone might say, "but how do we know Jesus was real? How do we know that he was anything other than just a man like you and me?" Well, here is how we know: We have an eye-witness; and one of impeccable credentials. That man, stood up in history and said, "I know what I've seen with my own eyes. And Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. Believe that and you will live forever. Refuse to believe that and you will pay with the everlasting destruction of your soul!

And what was the testimony of this eye-witness? Hear it again:

*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.*

I don't know if you needed this lesson this morning, but I hope it has strengthened in each of you a deep, deep conviction about your God and your Lord. If you are not a confessing, repentant, and baptized believer, can we just close this time together by inviting you, and imploring you to do what you surely know now is the right thing, and the only sensible thing you can do, and that is to come making Christ your Lord and Savior. If you need to come, please do it as we stand and sing!