

**Sermon – Word of Life**  
**Sunday December 3, 2023**

Imagine a world where truth doesn't exist. There's no right or wrong – everything is relative. So you decide what's true for you. And I decide what's true for me. I'll do me and you do you.

Imagine a world where character doesn't matter. You don't need to live a righteous life. You don't need to get along with others. All you need is to do is what makes you happy.

Imagine a world where people say the Church and the Bible are obsolete. People say: *The message of the Bible is out of date. The church should be changing it to accommodate a new world.*

All this sounds a lot like the world we live in doesn't it? But here's the thing – I'm not trying to describe our world. I'm describing the early church in the first century.

During this time, Christians were spreading the good news and the church was growing. But as the church grew, it encountered the greatest threat it had yet encountered. This threat was called Gnosticism.

What is Gnosticism? Gnosticism was a false teaching that was spreading throughout the church. It taught that all physical matter is evil and only the spirit is good. So everything – from our bodies, to the food we eat, to animals, plants and trees – all of it is bad because they're physical. The goal is to escape this physical world so that you can enter the spiritual realm. That's what Gnosticism taught about the world.

What did they say about Jesus? They claimed that Jesus was just a man - a good man but he wasn't God. Because how could a transcendent God become human? How could spirit enter matter? Why would God lower himself to being born as a baby and then live as a man? Why would God suffer the ultimate disgrace by dying on the cross?

It's unthinkable! That's why gnosticism claimed that Jesus only appeared to be God. Or else God's spirit came upon him at his baptism but then left him right before he was crucified.

That's why you shouldn't put your faith in Jesus. Because if you want to find life, you won't find it in him. The only way to find life is to learn a secret knowledge. Only then will your spirit be free. Only then will you find life.

This heresy was the greatest threat the early church had faced up. Why is that? Couldn't the believers see through it? Couldn't they simply reject the lies? The reason this threat was so dangerous was because it looked like Christianity. Gnosticism took Christianity and combined it with mysticism and Greek philosophy to make it look like Christian spirituality. So Christians thought that it was the latest upgrade to the Christian faith.

Now we don't live in the first century but we do face many of these challenges. We're bombarded with truth claims that appear Christian. We're tempted to reject the authority of Jesus and his teachings. We're encouraged to find life not in God but in ourselves.

So how can we know what's true? How can we hold on to faith? How can we find and experience Life?

Today, we're starting a new Advent Series. Advent comes from the Latin word *adventus* which means *coming*. Advent is a season of waiting and anticipating the coming of Christ. We anticipate his first coming at his birth leading up to Christmas. And we anticipate his return when he comes back at his Second Coming.

Our Advent Series is called *The Life Appeared*. In this series, we're exploring the letter of 1 John. The writer John was one of Jesus' disciples and he's addressing the growing threat of Gnosticism to a group of churches. To counter the claims that Jesus is not God and that salvation is found in some secret knowledge, John reminds Christians, Remember that Jesus is who he said he is. Life is found only in him.

Our Bible Passage today comes from 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. <sup>2</sup>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. <sup>3</sup>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. <sup>4</sup>We write this to make our<sup>[a]</sup> joy complete. (1 John 1:1-4)**

Today we're talking about how Jesus is the Word of Life. Because life isn't found in some secret knowledge. Life isn't found in some mystical experience. Life isn't found in what you've done or what people think of you. Life is found in Jesus.

John reminds us of this when he states his purpose for writing his letter.

**I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life. (1 John 5:13)**

Today we're going to talk about how Jesus is:

1. The Source of Life
2. The Manifestation of Life
3. The Gift of Life

First, **Jesus is the Source of Life: Jesus is God.**

Remember, John is addressing the false teaching in the early church. False prophets are claiming that Jesus isn't God, he was only a man. They're convincing Christians that the church's version of spirituality is outdated. Theirs is the new upgrade.

So how does John begin his letter?

**That which was from the beginning... this we proclaim concerning the Word of life. (1 John 1:1)**

This isn't the typical way, authors wrote letters. Authors normally identify themselves and name the people they're addressing. So why does John begin his letter this way? Why begin with *that which was from the beginning*?

Well, when's the first time we hear the words *In the beginning*? In Genesis 1:1 where it says, **In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. (Genesis 1:1)**

When's the next time we hear those words? In the first verse of John's Gospel. John 1:1 says, **In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. (John 1:1)**

So what is John doing here? He's bringing us back to the beginning. He's saying that Jesus was there. He created all things. He sustains all things. He's eternal. He was there before anything ever existed. Jesus is the Source of Life because Jesus is God.

You know how kids like to ask, But what was there before God? It's a great question. And not an easy one to answer.

One time religious leaders were arguing about where Jesus came from. And do you remember what Jesus says? He says: "before Abraham was born, I am!"

Why is this significant? It's significant not only because Jesus is saying that he existed before even the patriarch Abraham was born. Jesus is using God's personal name - *I AM*. He's using the name that conveys God's power, sovereignty and eternal nature.

In other words, he's saying that he's eternal because he is God. He didn't begin to exist when he was born in Bethlehem. He didn't even begin to exist when he was conceived in Mary's womb by the Holy Spirit.

Jesus is eternal. He's always existed. He will always continue to exist. He was there in the beginning and he will be there at the end.

So why does John begin his letter this way? He's basically saying to those who've heard this false teaching, You guys are falling for this new "spirituality." You think it's an updated version of the gospel.

But the gospel we preach is eternal. It's rooted in Jesus who's God. We didn't make it up. We didn't just invent it yesterday. This is God's truth. It's rooted in Jesus who is God. And it goes back to the very beginning.

Then John goes on. This word of life, this life that was from the beginning, this Jesus who is God...

**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. (1 John 1:2)**

Jesus is the Source of Life because Jesus is God. But then John goes on to say that **Jesus is the Manifestation of Life: Jesus is human.**

This is the Christmas story right here! This is God's plan of salvation. God came into the world to save sinners and to reconcile them with God. The infinite God became man. What's the theological term for this?

It's incarnation. Incarnation is a Latin word. It's made up of the prefix *in* and the Latin word *caro* which means flesh. Literally it means to be made flesh. The incarnation is God becoming flesh.

Now where have we heard this before? In the prologue to John's gospel.

**The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth. (John 1:14)**

In his letter, John calls Jesus the Word of Life. In his gospel, John calls Jesus the Word. What's the significance of this?

The term for Word is the Greek word *logos*. Logos, or the Word refers to a message, thought or reason. Greek philosophers used it to describe the rational mind of God. It's the logic (which we get from the word *logos*) that orders the universe. It's the principle that makes sense of life.

But here's the thing. In Greek philosophy, the Word never gets involved in the lives of people. It's transcendent. It's impersonal. That's why Gnosticism claimed that Jesus couldn't be both God and human. Because an infinite God could never become a man.

Yet here is John making this earth-shattering announcement: God has become human in Jesus! The word has become flesh.

How many of you like Christmas music? There's a Toronto radio station that's been playing it all day, every day.

Maybe you like fun upbeat songs like Mariah Carey's *All I Want For Christmas*. Maybe you like the classics like Bing Crosby's *White Christmas*. Maybe you like jazz like Vince Guaraldi's *A Charlie Brown Christmas*. Maybe you like Christmas carols.

Many Christmas carols were adapted from classic hymns. How many of you know the Christmas carol *Hark the Herald Angels Sing*? It's a hymn written by Charles Wesley who was the founder of the Methodist movement and a prolific hymn writer. In this song, he captures the breathtaking beauty of God becoming man.

Veiled in flesh the Godhead see,  
Hail th' incarnate Deity!  
Pleased as man with man to dwell,  
Jesus our Immanuel.

Jesus is fully God. Jesus is also fully human. In Jesus, God became human, the Word became flesh and lived among us. He is Immanuel – God with us. And as if John knows how hard this is to believe, he says:

**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. (1 John 1:2)**

In other words, we were there, we can testify that it's true. Then like a courtroom lawyer, he proceeds to lay out the evidence.

This Jesus **...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. (1 John 1:1).**

What kind of evidence does he then give?

First he says, We heard him. The verb to hear is used by John in the present tense. This means not only did the apostles hear Jesus when he was on earth. But they continue to hear him even now.

In the Gospel of John, Jesus says that he is the shepherd ...and the sheep listen to his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out...his sheep follow him because they know his voice John 10:3-4

Those who belong to Jesus know his voice and hear it. They follow Jesus because they belong to him.

Second, John says We saw him. How many times does he say this. Not just once but three times – in verses 1, 2 and 3. In other words, we really saw him! Jesus wasn't just a ghost that looked like a man – as the gnostics claimed. Jesus was a real human being. And just for emphasis, John says We saw him *with our own eyes*. In other words, it's really true!

Third, John says We looked upon him. But didn't John just say, we saw him? Why does he add we looked upon him?

You see, seeing someone and looking upon them isn't the same. So what's the difference?

I first *saw* Jo at a Jack and Jill and I was instantly attracted to her. We talked and hit it off right away. But she left the party before I could get her number. So I got it from a mutual friend and I called her and asked her out on a date. If you ask Jo about it, she'll say it was a "ministry appointment" but it really was a date.

Anyway, we met up for coffee and we talked from 8PM to 2:00 in the morning. I couldn't remember how much time had passed. All I could remember was that as she talked, all I could do was *gaze* at her – not in a creepy kind of way – but in an awe-struck, spellbound and captivated kind of way because I couldn't believe I with someone so beautiful, so charming, so incredible. And years later, I still feel the same.

That's kind of what John is saying. We looked upon Jesus. When we were with him, we were awe-struck, spellbound and captivated. We couldn't believe the incredible things he did.

- We've never seen anyone heal people with just a touch, raise the dead with just a word or calm the storm with just a command.
- We've never seen anyone pray like him, live like him, love like him.

We know that Jesus is the Word of Life by the way he lived because we knew him, loved him and looked upon him.

Finally, John adds, We touched Jesus with our hands. Why does John say that?

Did the disciples remember the hugs Jesus gave? Did Peter remember Jesus pulling him out of the water with his strong hand? What John probably has in mind is a different moment – one he'll never forget.

After Jesus rose from the dead, he appeared to his disciples. But one of them wasn't there? Who was it? John tells us in his gospel that it was Thomas. So the disciples tell him the good news, We just saw Jesus! He's been raised from the dead. And how does Thomas respond?

"Unless I... put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe." (John 20:25)

In other words, I need to touch him to believe it. So what happens? A week later, the disciples are together, but this time Thomas is with them. Jesus suddenly appears and walks straight towards Thomas,

"Put your finger here... Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe." (John 20:27)

John testifies to the Word of Life. We heard him, we saw him, we looked upon him and we touched him. Jesus really is God. He really lived among us. He really died on the cross. He really rose from the dead. Jesus really is who he claimed to be.

Jesus is the Source of Life. He really is God.

Jesus is the Manifestation of Life. He really became man.

But John has saved the best for last. He wants us to know one more thing – why all this matters.

The word of life is a message about life. It answers the question, Where do I find significance, meaning, peace, hope, healing, belonging?

This question is a question everyone of us have tried to answer. Some of us have tried to find it in our work. Some of us have tried to find it in our family. Some of us have tried to find it in our accomplishments. Some of us have tried to find it in what others think of us.

But the reality is, people can search all their lives and never find what they're looking for.

And that's why John is writing this letter. He wants to tell people, This is where you find life. This is where you find what you're looking for.

**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. ...God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. <sup>12</sup>Whoever has the Son has life... (1 John 1:3, 5:11-12)**

You see, life isn't found in a thing. Life is found in a person; it's found in Jesus the word of life. And we can have this life when we have a relationship with God through Jesus. We can have this life when we have relationships with other believers through Jesus. We can have this life when we receive our new identity as beloved children of God, as members of God's family and as agents of his kingdom mission.

If you don't have this fellowship, if you don't have this identity, if you don't have this mission, John says, You're missing the point, you're missing Life.

Because Jesus is the Source of Life. Jesus is the Manifestation of Life. But **Jesus is the Gift of Life: He invites you to know him, enjoy him and find Life in him.**

A couple weeks ago, I took a week off to go on a spiritual retreat. I've never taken a whole week before but I knew I desperately needed it. So I called the retreat centre I went to last year. But they said they were fully booked that week. They said, This has never happened before but a large group is doing a retreat here and they've booked all the rooms.

So I thought I wouldn't be able to go. But then someone from this congregation mentioned to me that they had a place. And they invited me to have my retreat there. So I went.

And I went feeling tired. I went feeling discouraged. I went feeling confused about some things I was trying to figure out. So on the first day, I wrote in my journal a prayer asking Jesus to give me strength, encouragement and vision.

And do you know what he did? He gave me all these things and more. But do you know how he did it? He did it by meeting with me. He met with me in my tiredness, he met with me in my discouragement,

he met with me in my confusion. Jesus met in the places in my heart where I most needed his touch. And there he spoke tenderly, he spoke words of love, words of encouragement, words of life.

I came back from that retreat and Jo said I was a different person. You should do this every year!

**I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full. (John 10:10)**

Some of you are thinking right now, But my life doesn't feel full, it doesn't feel abundant. When you think of your life, instead you feel discouraged, overwhelmed and empty. You're disillusioned, angry and hurting.

- School has been stressful.
- Finances are tight.
- Your marriage is on the rocks.
- You're struggling with your mental health.
- You have a loved one who's not doing well.
- You wonder if you'll ever be in a relationship.

You want a better life. You want Jesus to upgrade your iOS to give your life new features and fix some of the bugs.

But here's the thing. Jesus doesn't just offer you a better life. Jesus offers you a new life. It's a different kind of life. It's replacing your whole operating system. Because when you have Jesus, you have:

- His Spirit is living in you.
- His armies fighting for you.
- His power energizing you.
- His word strengthening you.
- His touch healing you.
- His presence comforting you.
- His love transforming you.

When you have Jesus:

- You have hope even when you're uncertain.
- You have peace even when the storms rage.
- You have joy even when things don't work out the way you want.
- You can love even when people are hurtful.
- You can persevere even when it's hard.
- You can trust even when you don't understand.

How is this possible? It's possible because Jesus is the Gift of Life. And he invites you to know him, enjoy him and find your life in him.

Christmas is when we remember that God came into the world. He didn't come as an idea. He didn't come as a self-help book. He didn't come as a warm fuzzy feeling. God came into the world as a person, as a baby. He came into all the mess, brokenness and pain. He came as a sacrifice to reconcile sinners to God and to bring his kingdom to earth.

**God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. <sup>12</sup>Whoever has the Son has life... (1 John 5:11-12)**

- Jesus is the Source of Life because he's God.
- Jesus is the Manifestation of Life because he became human.
- And Jesus is the Gift of Life. And he invites you to know him, enjoy him and find life in him.

Let's pray.