



Thought for the Week 10th January 2021

READING

1 John 1

The incarnation of the Word of life

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. ² 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. ³ 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. ⁴ We write this to make our joy complete.

Light and darkness, sin and forgiveness

⁵ This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: God is light; in him there is no darkness at all. ⁶ If we claim to have fellowship with him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live out the truth. ⁷ But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin.

⁸ If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. ⁹ If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. ¹⁰ If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word is not in us.

SERMON

The search for something real isn't new with us. In fact, it's as old as Adam and Eve. Mankind has looked for reality and satisfaction in wealth, thrills, conquests, romance, education and even religion. There's nothing wrong with any of these experiences as long as we recognize that they are only a temporary diversion- they don't satisfy over the long haul. Wanting something real – and finding something real are two, altogether different things! It's like eating meringues – they promise a lot but actually deliver very little for reality.

That's why for the next few Sundays we are going to look at the first letter of John in the New Testament. The theme of 1st John is a life that is real. John is writing as an elderly man, and in his possibly almost one hundred years on earth, he discovered that satisfaction is not found in things or thrills, but in the person of Jesus Christ!

First Some Helpful Trivia to Understand John

John is the author of five books - one of the four gospels, three letters and the final and most mysterious book of the Bible Revelation. Matthew's Gospel tells the story of Jesus calling John to become one of his twelve disciples. (Matthew 4:18-22) Jesus saw two brothers, Peter and Andrew, casting a net into the lake and he said, "Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men." Then he saw James and his brother John. They were in a boat with their father, mending their nets. Jesus called them, and they left the boat and their father to follow Jesus.

It's interesting that when John was called to follow Jesus, he was mending nets. John was a mender. John noticed broken people and he helped them put their lives back together. John spent his life restoring what was damaged and ruined.

John was the last surviving member of the original Twelve and one of the few apostles not to be martyred. That means that when John wrote his Gospel and letters, he was writing for second and third generation believers. John was an old man writing to young people, and he was writing from a perspective no one else could have had.

William Barclay writes: *“By AD 100, Christianity had become a thing of habit, traditional, half-hearted, and nominal. John was writing when the thrill was gone and the flame of devotion had died to a flicker.”*

Some of us are 2nd, 3rd or 4th generation Christians, too! If we aren't careful and vigilant our faith can evolve into nothing more than a habit. Our prayers end up powerless, our Bible reading stale and our fellowship will lack sincerity.

Susan Humbert of Cincinnati Christian University writes in the introduction to her book *“Proverbial Secrets”*: *“Just as Snow White was saved from eternal death by true love's kiss, we too were saved by the same life-giving power. Unlike Prince Charming, however, our salvation didn't appear in a red velvet cloak draped over a bent knee before a glass-covered coffin. It came about through the sacrifice of a skin-shredded body nailed to a splintered and blood-spattered wooden cross.”*

God gave the last disciple of Jesus a huge assignment! He wrote three letters to a generation of younger Christians, reminding them of his face-to-face encounter with Jesus and hoping to wake them up from a life of lethargy!

John opens his first letter by explaining to his reader's that they can trust what he has to say. He knew Jesus personally - he had heard Jesus, he saw Jesus, and he touched Jesus both before he died and after he rose from the dead. He tells his readers, “What I have seen, heard and handled I pass on to you.” Why? So we too can experience fellowship with Jesus.

John was writing in a time of fake news. There were other teachers who claimed to have special revelations of the truth but much of what they said was made up. John says in 1 John 2:18: *“Children, time is just about up. You heard that Antichrist is coming. Well, they're all over the place, antichrists everywhere you look.”*

There have always been imposters! Satan equated himself to God and he still masquerades as an angel of light. Just as there were charlatans in the first century, there are plenty of charlatans today, too! So even though John was writing between 95-100 A.D. it's still relevant today! It still speaks to modern Christians and it transcends the centuries – so we would be wise to pay close attention!

A very relevant question for us at this time is “How do we pass on the truth to the next generation?” It seems that more and more are losing our children and younger people to the world? Every generation has a choice to make. The gospel and letters of John may have been written to address this very subject. John writes to build up Christians in faith and love. Over and over again he tells us what and why he is writing these things. Over and over again he also reminds us of what we should already know.

John seems to have written his letters after the first generation of Christians has grown old and passed on and another new generation of Christians is on the scene. This second generation of Christianity is growing up and some are not content with the message they have received. It is always a grave danger that the next generation will want something new and improved and as a result depart from the truth. But when the newness wears off, what happens next?

“Is that all there is to church?” some will say. Others say they are “disillusioned.” This term “disillusioned” technically means, to remove an illusion or false euphoria. In other words, it means to come into reality. But John tells us that the gospel is the only ultimate reality which offers eternal benefits of fellowship with God, with one another, and complete joy.

We read in the Acts of the Apostles how Christians of the first generation were filled with glorious and inexpressible joy, spreading the message of the Gospel even as they faced the trials of opposition, persecution and suffering. But many years have passed by the time John writes and a new generation of Christians is now in the church and there is a severe doctrinal struggle with many false teachers leading people astray. (Look at 2:19 & 26). Who are these false teachers? The church has faced the suffering of persecution, but that seems to have lessened. Now, while it is peaceful some of the Christians of the new generation begin to want to make Christianity fit into the world around them. They want a faith that fits, you know, one that works well in the philosophy of the times. And, of course that is not a problem unique to the first century. It has been a recurring theme throughout church history and it is still an issue today. Many in our own day have rejected fundamental teachings of the Bible to fit in with contemporary ideas, particularly in the area of morality.

Someone has described the church as a group that is separated from the world, yet moving in the same direction as the world does, but from a distance. John warns us about the influence that the world can have on the church in the second chapter of his first letter: *“Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.”* That tells us how the apostle of love felt about tampering with the truth of God’s word!

In the latter part of the first centuries three major type of new teaching arose which came into full bloom in the second century. They were the Docetists, the Nicolaitans, and the Gnostics. Each of these groups used Greek philosophy and worldly wisdom to try to update and (as they saw it) improve on the basic teaching of the Gospel as taught by the Apostles. John addresses these new teachers and calls them liars, deceivers and antichrists and we will point out more about what they taught as we go through John’s letters over the next few weeks.

I think that it is relevant and timely for us to study through John’s letters together. They are some of the most simple and practical New Testament books on living the Christian life especially in difficult times – and we find ourselves in difficult times for many reasons. These letters explore grand themes of the Christian faith that can help us to refute and correct false teachings. They have beautiful positive messages for every Christian and offer clear assurance of eternal life to obedient believers. As John himself puts John 5:13 states it concisely in his Gospel (5:13): *“These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, in order that you may KNOW that you have eternal life.”*

PCI Let’s Pray

Sunday 10 January

Moderator

We pray for the entirety of the implications of the UK’s new relationship with Europe, recognising that PCI is an all-Ireland church. Thank God that he is in control of our future.

Thankful worship

Today as we worship, ask God to help us to do so with thankfulness for who he is and all he gives despite ongoing hardships.

Monday 11 January

Diane Cusick (Global mission worker)

Pray for Diane as she continues to serve in Zambia, working with the Church of Central Africa Presbyterian Synod of Zambia in early childhood development. Pray that the teachers who attended Diane's teacher training course in December will implement what they have learned.

Church of North India (CNI)

Pray for the church as it seeks to be an effective witness. Pray too for the people of India during the pandemic. India currently has the second highest number of cases worldwide.

Tuesday 12 January

Michelle Purdy (Deaconess in Ballyclare)

Give thanks for the generosity that has enabled the foodbank and Together Ballyclare to assist families. Pray that the leaflet 'Christmas hope in a COVID world' given to families will lead people to Christ. Pray for Michelle as she begins working with Rev Jonathan Moxen.

Alt Presbyterian Church

Pray for Rev Colin McKibbin and the elders of Alt in these difficult days. Pray too for Clodagh Dickson, Alt's youth worker, as she prepares and leads youth work online.

Wednesday 13 January

Edwin and Anne Kibathi (Global mission workers)

Pray for Edwin and Anne as they continue to minister to the East African expatriate community in the UK and lead the congregation in London. Pray for them as they continue doing so during changing Covid-19 restrictions.

Evangelical Christian Church in Timor (Indonesia)

Pray for the work and witness of the church, including its social-economic development work in the community. Pray too for wisdom for church leaders.

Thursday 14 January

Roberta Irvine (Deaconess in Greystone Road, Antrim)

Pray for seniors linked to the congregation who have received special activity packs. Pray that they will be used by the recipients to make decisive steps in their journey of faith.

Arklow Presbyterian Church

Give thanks for excellent attendances when the congregation has met. Pray for pastoral contact to be well maintained during the new lockdown and for plans for a summer Bible Club.

Friday 15 January

Social Witness

Pray for all who are living with an addiction, that they may become receptive to advice and help at this difficult time in their lives. Give thanks for all those working in the area of addictions – in offering therapeutic programmes and a place of safety to stay and recover.

Debt

Give thanks for organisations like Christians Against Poverty and others who support people overwhelmed by debt and financial challenges. Pray that those who are in difficulty will find ways to access the support they need.

Saturday 16 January

General Council

Pray for those who represent PCI in discussions with the NI Executive and the Irish Government, especially in regard to issues linked to Covid-19. Pray for wisdom and understanding, both for Church leaders and for Government Ministers and Officials..

Council for Training in Ministry

Dr Stafford Carson has retired as Principal of Union. Give thanks for his clear leadership over the past seven years and pray that he will know the Lord's blessing in retirement. Professor Gordon Campbell has succeeded Stafford, pray that the Lord will equip him for this demanding role.