

John's Letters: Bearing Witness – 1 John 1:1-4, 5:18-21 – Lesson Summary

Think about the most amazing thing that you've ever witnessed or experienced. My guess is that moment is a clear memory in your mind but I am also guessing when you tried to share it with someone else it didn't create the same feelings for them. There's something about witnessing extraordinary things that just don't translate as clearly to others. My wife and I honeymooned in Telluride, CO where they received 7ft of snow the week leading up to our wedding, 4ft of snow the day we landed, and another 2-3ft the week we were there. We took hundreds of photos to share with family and friends but when we looked at them back home, we realized the scale was impossible to experience. 1 John begins with John's clear desire to help his audience know how amazing it was to witness Jesus as God in the flesh. He desires to share his witness because the very truth of God is under attack and it's his experiences that he uses to call people back to truth.

John will focus on two types of witness in these passages. The first is that he **physically witnessed Christ**. John walked with Christ for 3 years. He was one of His closest friends. At the Last Supper he reclined next to Jesus. He experienced Jesus' miracle firsthand, sat at His feet as He taught, and even experienced Christ's transfiguration. At a time when the church was being led astray by a teaching that all matter was sinful which then made it impossible for Christ to be fully man, John wanted to remind people that he witnessed Christ's humanity. John even uses language that refers to physical senses as he says, "we saw, touched, heard" all of which refer to opportunities to experience the humanity of Christ.

The second witness that John refers to is the fact that **Jesus bore witness to the Father**. Jesus wasn't only fully man, but He was also fully God. Jesus' relationship to the Father reaffirms His deity. Jesus is God. His actions, words, power, presence, understanding, grace and mercy are all a direct representation of God. John is acknowledging that to know and experience Jesus is to know and experience God our Heavenly Father. John is speaking to a specific audience at a specific time in history in which the truth was under attack. I believe we are experiencing the same today. People seem to separate the physical and the spiritual. We talk about sacred things and secular things. We label some art as Christian and some worldly. The reality is that everything is spiritual because God is the creator of all things. That doesn't mean that everything is good. Sin has led to the brokenness of all of creation. People, situations, things, and experiences either reflect the glory of God or the brokenness that sin has created. There should be no divide between what we deem physical and spiritual. We need this reminder as much as the church John was encouraging with his 1st letter. John wrote this letter in order for the church to respond. He wanted them to stand firm in truth and denounce the lies being taught. He wanted them to live with confidence in the promises of God through Christ. And, he wanted them to experience true joy in Christ.

So, how are we to respond? If you were to continue reading 1st John he addresses how this truth impacts our fellowship with one another, our fellowship with God, how to follow God's commands, a warning to take sin seriously, the return of Christ, remaining in Christ, being children of God, putting our love into action, discerning truth from lies, knowing God, the trustworthiness of God, and prayer. Understanding the humanity and deity of Christ influences how we interact with every aspect of our life. Because of this, John concludes his letter with a reminder that "we know". His physical witness of Christ, and his ability to share his experiences with others, should lead to knowing truth. God has revealed Himself through Christ. Christ accomplished what was necessary to provide for our salvation. Christ's physical body experienced death as His blood was shed. His physical body was buried. But praise God that Christ's physical body was raised from the dead bringing new life to all who believe. Because of this, there is nothing else on which we should set our eyes or affections. Let us remember John's concluding words, "Little children, guard yourselves from idols".

Discussion:

- 1) Consider all that John got to experience while walking with Christ for 3 years. What would you have liked to witness if you had walked physically with Christ? Why?
- 2) How have you seen the church divide the spiritual (sacred) and worldly (secular)? Do you believe there is a spiritual reality in everything?
- 3) John concludes by telling us to guard ourselves from idols. What are some idols in your life?