

FRIDAY 07 October 2022 "1 John begin" (1 John 1:1-4)

Good Friday morning my "Walking with Jesus" friends,

Today we're going to shift to a new path for the next several days in our "Walking with Jesus" journey. Since Easter, I've been leading us on a chronological journey of tracing what happened in the immediate weeks and months after the death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ. We have traced the chronology of the birth of the Jesus movement in Jerusalem and then the spread of that movement first to Samaritans and then Gentiles in Caesarea. We've witnessed Saul's encounter with Jesus on the Damascus Road and Saul's tutoring by the Holy Spirit. We have visited Syrian Antioch and seen the remarkable multi-ethnic, multicultural Jesus movement there, and we've even accompanied Barnabas and Paul on their first missionary journey, first to Cyprus and then into central Asia, as recorded in Acts 13 & 14. We've witnessed the Jerusalem Council of Acts 15, and we've watched as both the apostle James wrote his letter to first century Jewish Christians and the apostle Paul wrote his first letter to first century Gentile Christians.

In response to the request of a few of you, my "Walking with Jesus" fellow pilgrims, today let's journey with the apostle John and his writing of his little letter called 1 John. You'll find it near the end of your New Testament. John, we know was the brother of James, and they were in the fishing business with their father Zebedee. (Mark 1:19) John was one of the very first disciples to meet and follow Jesus. John gives us that story in chapter one of the fourth book of the New Testament which bears his name, the Gospel of John. In fact, John is the human author of 5 books in our New Testament: The Gospel of John; 1st, 2nd and 3rd John; and the Revelation. John was the disciple who evidently became the best human friend of Jesus and the only disciple standing at the cross when Jesus was crucified. You'll recall from the cross Jesus entrusted His mother Mary to John's care, according to John 19:26.

Evidently John spent many years in the great city of Ephesus, and from there we presume he wrote this letter we know as 1st John. John does not indicate any specific audience to whom he is writing and as we read the letter, we see it really applies to all of us. We don't know exactly the date of John's writing this letter but the reason seems clear: *many people felt confident they had trusted in the Gospel news of Jesus, but they were not absolutely certain they were in fact 'born again'; nor were they confident that their relationship with God was all Jesus had promised it could be nor were they confident that they would go to heaven at the time of their death.* Perhaps it was because of the very special friendship John had with Jesus that the Holy Spirit led John to write this letter which has brought assurance to millions of Christians over the generations who are struggling with these same questions.

Let's gather with John, as we did with both James and Paul, and watch him write. We were with James in Jerusalem, then Paul in Syrian Antioch, and now we're with John in the great city of Ephesus.

Paul had visited this city several times and we can assume several house churches of Christians were meeting all across this large, very multi-ethnic city. Paul even lived here in Ephesus for several years, leading these churches himself.

But as powerful as Paul's preaching and writing were, there was something very special about John and John's relationship with Jesus, *which Paul did not have*. While John had been a best friend to Jesus, Paul had been an enemy of Jesus, doing all he could to stop Jesus and even strongly persecute the followers of Jesus in the months after Jesus ascended back to heaven. We have no record that John and Paul actually met together in Ephesus. Even though they both lived in Ephesus, it was likely at different times. What we do know is that the combined influence of Paul and John on the city of Ephesus and Christians all over the Roman empire was very significant.

So, let's sit down my friends, and watch and listen as John rolls out his parchment on the rough little table before him, and dips his stylus in the ink for the first time. I imagine John leaning back, closing his eyes as he remembers so many, many memories of his time with Jesus. Also, because Jesus had given John care of His mother Mary, we can imagine John had heard stories from Mary *that no other ears had heard*. Ok look, John is leaning forward now, he's ready to write:

"That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our own eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched - this we proclaim concerning the Word of life: 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. 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. We write this to make our joy complete." (1 John 1:1-4)

Have you noticed John begins both this little letter and his lengthy story of Jesus, we call the Gospel of John, from the same perspective... **the beginning!** I find that fascinating. No other New Testament author does that. Why, I wonder? I think it may be because of the stories Mary told John about how it all began for her... Gabriel's visit to Nazareth with the incredible news of the incarnation of God, and Mary's visit with Elizabeth, the old woman who was the miraculous mother of John the Baptist, the forerunner of Jesus! You'll find those stories in Luke 1. Maybe it was because John was a professional fisherman and spent many, many long nights on Lake Galilee fishing and looking up at the night sky with all the stars and watching the daily miracle of pitch-black night slowly turning to daylight and a new day.

If you are fascinated by the creative and sustaining power of God who made all things, and holds all things together, then maybe you too find yourself looking up at a night sky and wondering how it all began, way back ***in the beginning***.

Now friends, don't let it bother you that John writes about Jesus in the non-personal pronouns of "that" or "it".

John was not in any way dehumanizing or belittling Jesus. Rather *John was calling us to recognize the remarkable, miraculous reality that God came here to planet earth, and took on human flesh, and lived among us!* While we often refer to God as "Him" or "He", John I think was calling us to consider that God is so big, so far beyond the limitations of our understanding, our languages, our vocabulary, that John was simply calling us to stand back for a moment and look in amazement at the night sky, the early morning sun rays, the sunset, a thunderstorm, a hurricane, a volcano and consider this: *all these amazing things that we see with our eyes or hear with our ears, are evidences of an Almighty (omnipotent), all knowing (omniscient), everywhere present (omnipresent), Creator God; the author of all LIFE, who actually loves the human race HE created so much, that He limited Himself so He could be seen and heard and understood and even touched as He came and lived among us human beings!*

Do you notice John makes it very clear Jesus, who is God and was with God the Father in the beginning, came here to earth and was a personal friend of John's. John knew him well. John spent lots of time with Jesus. John was far more than simply an eyewitness to the miracles and messages of Jesus. *John lived for several years in a friendship relationship with Jesus and now as John writes, his objective and his hope is that those of us who read this letter will have a desire to know Jesus and have a friendship relationship with Jesus as John did!* That picture in John's mind, of millions of people all around the world, having the same friendship relationship with Jesus as he did is so exciting, brings so much joy to John's heart, that he simply has to set down his stylus and throw his arms up in the air and say, *"thank you Jesus, that what you and I experienced really is possible for anyone."*

Now I know what you are thinking my friends. *"There is no way I could have the same relationship with Jesus that John had. Jesus was physically here, John could touch Him, eat meals with Him, go fishing with Him, take walks alone with Him and ask any question John wanted to ask. Jesus isn't physically here with me... so how could I possibly ever have a relationship with Jesus that is in any way similar to what John had?"* That's a fair question, and we're going to look closely at that over the next few days. But for today let me give you this thought my friends. You and I have something John did not have when he was with Jesus... *we can have the Holy Spirit of God living WITHIN us, every moment, every day and that can be even more powerful than the tangible friendship John had with Jesus!*

I think we'll pause with John right here and ponder this first very powerful paragraph John wrote. May I urge us today to read through it again, pausing after each phrase, asking ourselves one simple but powerful question: *do I really believe that this is God honoring, unwavering truth?*

Today's Scripture is 1 John 1:1-4.