

I Touched the Word of Life

Part 1

1 John 1:1 12-16-2007

Summary: 1 John is a whole book about Christmas (the incarnation). The incarnation is worth celebrating! Jesus was from the beginning (is the ground of all being), and the Apostles heard, saw, and touched Him(!) John is arguing against error. The incarnation provides proof that not only encourages our hearts, but also shows us God as a self-revealing God (which is the only reason we can know Him). Both His priority of His glory and His love compel Him to reveal Himself (it is the best thing that could happen and the best thing for us for the most glorious thing to be seen and delighted in.

That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have observed, and have touched with our hands, concerning the Word of life-- 2 that life was revealed, and we have seen it and we testify and declare to you the eternal life that was with the Father and was revealed to us-- 3 what we have seen and heard we also declare to you, so that you may have fellowship along with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ. 4 We are writing these things so that our joy may be complete.

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Introduction

We Must Take Christmas Captive

From time to time I get into discussions with people who say we should not celebrate Christmas because it is a pagan holiday. My response to that is December 25 is the day that the Lord has made, and any pagan

who treads on that day is trespassing. And according to 2 Cor.10 it is our job to escort them off the premises of that day.

2 Corinthians 10:3-5 For although we are walking in the flesh, we do not wage war in a fleshly way, ⁴ since the weapons of our warfare are not fleshly, but are powerful through God for the demolition of strongholds. We demolish arguments ⁵ and every high-minded thing that is raised up against the knowledge of God, taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ.

Most of the time you hear people quote verse five in the context of controlling your own thoughts and the principle does apply to that *by implication*, but that is not what Paul is talking about in the context. What Paul is talking about is the warfare going on between him and the false teachers. The false teachers present arguments and high-minded ideas that they raise up against the knowledge of God. Paul seizes those arguments and high-minded ideas, takes them prisoner, and forces them into obedience to Christ (by refuting and correcting them). That is spiritual warfare. Somebody comes along with an unbiblical argument and you demolish that argument by forcing it into obedience to Christ. They try to argue that the world created itself through evolution over billions of years, and we do spiritual warfare by taking the discussion and forcing it into compliance with the truth, which says God created the world in six days. They set up the idea that it is okay to kill unborn babies, or that religion is all a matter of opinion, or that all religions pray to the same God and lead to heaven, and we do spiritual warfare by refuting those arguments, exposing them as false, and forcing them into compliance with the truths about the sacredness of life, the absoluteness of truth, and the exclusiveness of the one, true God. That is what it means to take every thought captive.

So if the ancient Babylonians come along and they want December 25 to be all about some nature goddess celebrated with drunken revelry, or the Romans want to worship Saturn, or European pagans want to worship a sun god on the Winter solstice, our job is not to take a look at those ungodly ideas and duck and run for cover. Treating December 25 as though it were somehow contaminated or tainted because of the pagan celebrations would be superstitious. Those pagan celebrations do not have any power to corrupt a day that the Lord has made. If someone wants to attach pagan ideas to one of God's days, our job is to wrest that day out of their little pagan hands and force it into compliance with biblical truth, and I would say we have done a pretty fair job with Christmas. Yes, the battle still rages, and the enemy does all he can to inject as much secular garbage as he can with materialism and Santa Clause and all the rest, but in large measure Christmas is still mostly about the birth of the Lord Jesus Christ in this culture. I went into a restaurant with Josiah the other day and while all these unbelievers are sitting around eating, there is music in the background about Jesus Christ the Lord reigning as King! Bless God for that! I love that! Easter is another pagan day we have done a fair job of snatching out of their hands – although not quite as successfully as Christmas. Halloween we really have some work to do. But all that to say there is no reason for us to shy away from December 25 or any other day. All the days are the Lord's.

But then someone might respond back and say, "I realize there is nothing wrong with the day – but is celebrating the birth of Jesus really something we should be doing?" The Bible does not command us to celebrate the incarnation. In fact, we are not commanded to celebrate anything except Jesus' death. But nor are we forbidden. God has given us great freedom in the forms of our worship. There is no command to celebrate the resurrection either, and yet, from the very beginning the Church did so by making the first day of the week their day of corporate worship. And that change, I believe, carries the stamp of divine approval in the way it is presented in Acts.

So when it comes to Christmas the real question is, "Is the incarnation worth celebrating?" (The word "incarnation" means "to take on flesh." Christmas is a celebration of the fact that God the Son came to earth and took on human flesh. He became a man.)

Is the Incarnation Worthy of Celebration?

What can we learn from Scripture about whether or not that is something worthy of celebration?

Luke 2:8-14 In the same region, shepherds were staying out in the fields and keeping watch at night over their flock. 9 Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. 10 But the angel said to them, "Don't be afraid, for look, I proclaim to you good news of great joy that will be for all the people: 11 today a Savior, who is Messiah the Lord, was born for you in the city of David. 12 This will be the sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped snugly in cloth and lying in a manger." 13 Suddenly there was a multitude of the heavenly host with the angel, praising God and saying: 14 Glory to God in the highest heaven, and peace on earth to people He favors!

When the incarnation happened it was celebrated in a manner never before seen in human history. A multitude of the heavenly host appeared in the sky praising God and saying "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and peace on earth to people He favors!" This is not a common occurrence in Scripture. The word "host" means "army," and God is called the Lord of hosts almost 300 times in the Old Testament. But had there ever been a time when anyone actually saw the heavenly host worshipping God like this? No. One time there was a prophet (Micaiah) who saw the heavenly host as part of a vision, but even in that vision they were not worshipping God or celebrating anything.

So all through redemptive history we have heard about these hosts – the heavenly armies. But even with all the marvelous things that happened throughout the Old Testament there is never a time when Scripture records them appearing in the sky or anywhere else to celebrate anything. But when Jesus was born heaven exploded with joyful praise in such a way that it could be physically seen from earth. The birth of the Lord Jesus Christ into the world was a uniquely wonderful event. Is it worth celebrating? A great multitude of the heavenly host certainly thought so. These creatures had existed for thousands of years – ever since the creation – yet that night in the fields outside Bethlehem they found themselves doing something they had never done before that we know of – appearing to men and shouting praises to God in the highest because of what was taking place on earth. If we are going to take our cues from heaven I would say the incarnation is indeed something worth celebrating.

And celebrating with joy! Each holiday in our culture has taken on a particular mood. People want to be spooked on Halloween, and they want to relax on Labor Day, and they want to get serious and make resolutions on New Years Day; but more than anything Christmas is about joy. People say "merry Christmas." That is right on. It is exactly as it should be, because it is a day when we celebrate the good news of great joy! The rejoicing of the world is a rejoicing of ignorance. They are blind to the real reason for joy, and so all their joy this time of year is hollow to say the least. They are like the rocks shouting praises to God – they have no understanding of what they are doing. But it is fitting nonetheless that the whole culture should be joyful at the celebration of the incarnation even if they do not understand what they are doing.

My prayer for myself this Christmas season is that I will be one who does know what I am doing. Joyless Christians are a reproach on the name of Christ, and I do not want to be a reproach on His name. I want to be full of joy when I think about the marvelous truth of eternal God coming to earth and taking on human flesh. God save us from thinking of it as a mere doctrine or mere historical event in a way that fails to excite our affections with joy. May God open our eyes to all the marvelous wonders that exist because of the incarnation. Only because of the incarnation can we know God. Only because of Jesus' coming into this world can our sins be forgiven. Only through the Son of God taking on human flesh can you have any of the blessings God offers; and through the incarnation we have ALL the blessings He offers – every spiritual blessing in the heavenly realms! All year long we rejoice in countless different blessings from God – experiences of His faithfulness, grace, guidance, encouragement, forgiveness, holiness, food-likeness, power, renewal, life-giving love, mercy, patience, illumination, refuge; and all of it – every bit of joy from every one of those and countless others – all of it comes only because the Son of God stripped off His heavenly robes of splendor and took on human flesh, being made in the form of a servant. And now He is the ideal High Priest who can sympathize with you in all your weaknesses because He learned obedience through suffering and was tempted in every way, just as you are, yet was without sin.

Introduction to 1 John: lofty goals

1 John is an amazing book. He starts out by saying that the purpose of his declaration is so that we can have fellowship with him, and his fellowship is with God; (1:3) Then he says he writes to make his joy complete; (1:4) Then he says he writes so that we will not sin; (2:1) And at the end of the book he says that he writes so that we may know that we have eternal life. (5:13) Does that motivate you to want to study this book? Anybody here want to sin less? Anybody interested in having greater assurance of your salvation? Does the idea of fullness of joy appeal to anyone here? How about fellowship with God? John has some incredibly lofty goals. Some people write with the goal of just getting published. An established author might have a goal of getting on the best seller list. I had a professor who had a goal of writing a book that would still be in print 100 years from now. Some goals are loftier than others. John's is about as lofty as they come. Just to get someone like me to sin less would be a feat all by itself. But add to that assurance, fullness of joy, and fellowship with God and you are talking about a book that, if it achieves its goal, will make a massive difference in a person's life. So what do you think? How likely do you think it is that John's goals will be reached in your case? If you are skeptical, remember that it was the Holy Spirit who inspired those goals. They are not just John's goals; they are God's goals. And if you think you are too sinful, just ask yourself – what do you think is more powerful: the sinfulness of your flesh or the power of God? So let's jump in to this book with eager, excited, hopeful hearts.

From the Beginning

That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have observed, and have touched with our hands...

The normal pattern of a sentence, both in English and in Greek, is to put the subject first, then the verbal part, then the object. For example, "We proclaim that which I have seen..."

Subject	Verb	Object
"I	proclaim	that which I have seen"

That's the normal way to do it. But John really, really wants to emphasize the object of his first sentence. So he does not even say the "We proclaim" part until verse three.¹ He just wants to fix your attention on what it is that is being proclaimed. And in verse one he is going to point out three things about the object of his proclamation.

The Ground of all Being

First, it was from the beginning.

That which was from the beginning²

The phrase "from the beginning," when it applies to God, refers to the ultimate beginning – the Genesis 1:1 beginning. The first thing we need to know about what John is talking about is that He was there in eternity past. He existed before anything else existed. That which is there at the very beginning before creation must be the ground of all being. Nothing came before Him to bring Him into existence, which means He must be the One and only being who has the power of self-existence. The power of self-existence is the ability to keep yourself in existence without any help from anyone or anything. Nothing else in the creation has that power. Nothing made itself – nothing. No house built itself. There is no tree that did not come from

¹ The NIV makes the sentence more readable by inserting the verb in at the end of v.1, but in the Greek it does not appear until v.3.

² John likes this phrase **from the beginning**. He uses it ten times in 1 & 2 John. Twice it refers to God (1 Jn.2:13, 3:8). And in those cases it means the absolute beginning – the Genesis 1:1 "In the beginning God" beginning. Seven times it refers to the "old command" to love one another. (1 Jn.2:7,24, 3:11, 2 Jn.1:5,6). In those cases it refers to the time when the gospel was first proclaimed – the beginning of the Gospel. Here the reference is both to Jesus and the message (which are one in the same in this context). The greater emphasis, however, is on Jesus (who could be touched and seen), and therefore "**from the beginning**" probably refers to Jesus' preexistence with the Father here.

a seed, no man who did not come from parents, no picture that painted itself - everything and everyone is dependent on something that came before it for it to exist, and not just to come into existence, but to continue to exist. Right now the Self-Existent One is holding and sustaining the existence of all other things. If He stopped doing that for one second everything would instantly go out of existence.

And beyond self-existence, the One who was there at the beginning also is the ground not only of all being, but also of everything else. He is the ground of all truth. Any truth claim that doesn't agree with Him is wrong – period. He is the standard for everything. Beauty is not a matter of opinion or taste, something is beautiful or not beautiful inasmuch as it resembles His beauty. He is the standard for morality, for truth, for goodness, for life – for everything. He is the ground of all being. And that makes Him the ultimate authority, the greatest power, and the most wonderful and most marvelous thing in existence or that could possibly exist.

John is not one to start with small talk and slowly ramp up to bigger issues. Right out of the hatch he just starts out with about as big a concept as there is - that which was from the beginning. And if you understand the meaning of that first phrase, the rest of the verse should just make your jaw drop to the floor.

That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have observed, and have touched with our hands (!)

Do you realize how outlandish this claim is that John is making? He is saying, “Hey, you know the ultimate Ground of all Being, who was there before time began and who created all things and upholds the existence of all things, and who is the supreme Authority over all things? Well, I’ve touch Him, listened to Him, saw him with my own two eyes, talked to Him, hung out with Him. Do you realize what a spectacularly massive claim that is? And it would be totally unbelievable, and we would dismiss it out of hand if it were like I just said it, because just now I did not say it quite the same as John said it. John did not say “which I have touched with my hands.” He said, “Which we have touched with our hands.” If one person starts making wild claims we tend to just write him off if it cannot be verified or corroborated. But once someone says “we” – then you can do a little investigation. You can find out if these others really exist, and how many there were, and how reliable they are, and if their stories match, etc. So John starts out with some huge claims, but then immediately points to evidence to support the claims.

Seen, Touched, Heard

Scripture Twisting

It is pretty obvious right from the start that John is arguing against somebody in this book. In the Gospel John just said **the Word became flesh** and left it at that. That is really all you need to say if you want to communicate the idea that the Son of God took on physical, human flesh – right? It used to be – back when John wrote his Gospel. But now some false teaching has arisen, and false teachers can be some pretty ingenious people. They can take a phrase like, “The Word became flesh,” and give you a 45 minute talk on it, and by the time they are done the phrase ends up meaning something like, “The Word did not become flesh.”

Cerinthus

Cerinthus did that sort of thing. He was a contemporary of John, and early writers said that John wrote in order to refute Cerinthus’ teaching. According to Irenaeus, John once left a building where he saw Cerinthus saying, "Let us flee, lest the building fall down; for Cerinthus, the enemy of the truth, is inside!"³ Cerinthus rejected all of Paul’s letters and used a twisted version of the Gospel of Matthew and parts of Mark for his scriptures. He taught that Jesus was the physical son of Joseph, and that the “eon Christ’ came upon Jesus at His baptism but then took off before the cross. So Jesus was the Christ only between His baptism and the cross. (So you have a mere human being dying on the cross. What in the world good does that do anybody?)

This is the kind of thing false teachers do.

³ Irenaeus mentions the anecdote about Polycarp in *Adv. Haer.*, III.3.4.

2 Peter 3:16 The ignorant and unstable twist [Paul’s writings] to their own destruction, as they also do with the rest of the Scriptures.

The picture is of putting the Scriptures on the rack and torturing them until they “break” and say what you want them to say. So John is not going to just say, “The Word became flesh.” He is going to make sure there can be absolutely no mistake. He says “We literally heard Him speaking.” “We saw Him...with our *eyes*.” Not some kind of spiritual perception or enlightenment – actual, physical seeing with physical eyeballs. We observed Him. We touched Him – not in some metaphorical way – with our *hands*. It is very obvious that John is arguing against an error here and he wants to leave zero possibility of misinterpretation on this point.

Eyewitness testimony

Christianity is a religion that rests on the foundation of eyewitness testimony.

2 that life was revealed, and we have seen it and we testify and declare to you the eternal life

John is testifying like an eyewitness in a court of law. He was there. The whole discussion today about the quest for the historical Jesus is so incredibly absurd. What these Jesus Seminar people, and the Divinci Code types are doing is saying, “We are going to disregard everything that the actual eyewitnesses say happened, and we are going to speculate about what we think must have happened.” It is as if you were in a courtroom, and the case is about a robbery that took place, and there are ten experts and one eyewitness. And the experts are all coming up with all kinds of theories about what probably happened based on their expertise. “My profile of this type of robber shows that what he would have done is come in the back door and threaten the owner with a knife...” And the next guy says, “My instincts tell me he came in through the roof...” And the next guy says, “No, I think it was a con job. He just tricked the owner into giving him money in some sort of scam.” And they are all going on and on, and meanwhile the eyewitness is sitting there shaking his head. Finally he speaks up and says, “Hey – I was there in the store. I saw the whole thing. He walked in the front door, pointed a gun at the clerk, took money out of the drawer, and ran off.”

John speaks up here in the hubbub of all these crazy after-the-fact theories flying around and says, “Hey, we were there. We knew Him personally. We hung out with Him for years. We heard the words come out of His mouth. Here’s what happened...”

What is wonderful about the proof

We can know for sure

So let’s talk about what is so wonderful about all this empirical, eyewitness testimony. God could have taken another approach. He could have taken the “appear in a vision to one single man in a cave” approach. No corroborating evidence, no eyewitnesses, no other evidence at all – just believe that this one man’s account of his vision is the truth of God and base your eternal destiny on it.

Of all the major world religions there are really only three that base their credibility on historical events: Christianity, Islam, and Judaism. Those three religions claim to be valid if and only if certain events actually took place in history. And all three religions would admit that if those events did not take place, then the religion is invalid. All the other religions are basically philosophies, and they claim to be true apart from whether or not their version of history is correct. Confucianism, for example, is a set of philosophical maxims. Whether or not those maxims are true or untrue has absolutely nothing to do with whether or not Confucius ever even lived. If you could prove that Confucius never existed it would have zero effect on that religion. The same is true for Shintoism, Hinduism, Buddhism, Taoism, Zoroastrianism, Sikhism, Baha’i, and Jainism. All those religions basically just tell you, “Trust me – this is true.” And if you question, “How do I know for sure that it is true?” the only response is, “Trust me – it is.” And if you say, “How do I know your

opinion about truth is trustworthy?” the response is, “Trust me – it is.” Praise God that He does not ask us to base our eternal destiny on that!

The three history-based world religions (Christianity, Islam, and Judaism) are all valid or invalid based on whether their version of the record of Jesus’ life is accurate. For Christianity to be true the gospel accounts of Jesus performing miracles, dying on the cross, and rising from the dead according to prophecy all have to be true. If those events did not happen then we are to be pitied more than all men because we are a bunch of blind fools. For modern Judaism to be valid they have to be right about their theory that Jesus did *not* fulfill the prophecies about the Messiah. And for Islam to be valid they would have to be right about their theory that Jesus never claimed to be God, never claimed to be pre-existent before His birth, never claimed to come from heaven, did not have the power to perform miracles, never died on the cross, and never rose from the dead.

So, what evidence has Islam adduced to prove their version of history, (which was written 600 years after the fact), is correct and all the ancient eyewitness accounts are incorrect? All they offer is one testimony of one man (a man of *very* questionable integrity), who claims that something appeared to him when he was by himself in a cave. That’s it. No miracle claims, no resurrection, nothing that can be tested or investigated, no witnesses – just a guy claiming to have an experience in a cave.

What about Christianity? What proof do we have that our version of history is correct?⁴ What would happen if we took everything in the Bible that could not be validated or corroborated according to the standards of modern historical scholarship, and threw it out? If we looked only at the things that are accepted by the majority of secular, unbelieving, non-Christian scholars, what would we have? There is a consensus among secular scholars that the following are all true and historically provable: There was a man named Jesus who did live during the time the Bible claims He did and He was from Nazareth. He claimed that He was the Son of God and that He would rise from the dead. He was crucified in Palestine under Pontius Pilate during the reign of Tiberius Caesar at Passover time. He was buried in the tomb of a rich man, and the tomb was guarded by Rome. On the third day that tomb was unexpectedly empty. Initially not even His followers believed – even when they saw the empty tomb. Then something happened that convinced His disciples and thousands of other Jews and Gentiles that He rose from the dead and was alive. They were so convinced that they were willing to die in great numbers for their belief.

All of that we know from history. It requires no faith in the Bible as God’s Word at all. Those are the facts. And the only scenario that fits all those facts is that the resurrection actually happened. Every other theory that has been set forth is easily defeated, so we can prove the resurrection without assuming the Bible to be God’s Word. And the main thing that convinces all those secular scholars of those facts that I listed is the nature of the eyewitness testimony.

So all that is to say that these things John is talking about – the seeing and hearing and touching of the resurrected Jesus by multiple, reliable eyewitnesses, are very important. That is how we know for sure that Christianity is true. God did not reveal the truth to one man in a cave somewhere. He did it out in the open, where everyone could see, and with such absolute undeniable show of divine power than no one could argue.

It is because of the incarnation that we can know for sure what the truth is. It is because He became seeable and feelable and hearable. And why is all this proof important? It helps us feel more confident in what we believe, and that is wonderful – but the significance of the proof goes way beyond just that. The reason it is so wonderful is because of what it shows us about the nature of God.

Self-revealing God

The Message is the Messenger

Jesus is called the Word of God. Words are for communicating. When Scripture calls Jesus the Word it means He is God’s communication to us. The commentators debate about why it says “That which was from the beginning” instead of “He who was from the beginning.” Using the neuter in place of the masculine is a technique John tends to use when he is referring to more than the mere personhood of someone. John is

⁴ I recommend Lee Strobel’s “Case for Christ” or Frank Morrison’s “Who Moved the Stone?” For a more scholarly discussion you can get William Lane Craig’s book, *The Son Rises: The Historical Evidence for the Resurrection of Jesus*.

speaking of Jesus both as a person – the messenger from God, and the message itself. Jesus did not come to us with a message from God. Jesus came to us *as* the Message from God.

Jesus is all of God's message to us

Jesus is all God has to say to us. There is nothing else. He is not part of God's message – He is all of God's message.

Hebrews 1:1-2 Long ago God spoke to the fathers by the prophets at different times and in different ways. 2 In these last days, He has spoken to us by His Son

No more speaking through prophets at various times and in various ways. Now it is just His Son.⁵

God's self-revealing nature

So now let's consider this amazing truth, - that *God has spoken to us*. Why? Why would God bother to communicate something to us? Who made Him do that? No one. So then what compelled Him to do it? God has a good reason for everything He does, so what was it that made Him decided to reveal Himself to sinful man? The same thing that compels Him to do absolutely everything He does – His own nature. He did it because He is, by nature, a self-revealing God. If that were not part of His nature we could know nothing at all about Him – zero. No matter how hard we thought, no matter how deeply we studied, no matter how much we investigated, there is no way we could have discovered even one single fact about God. We would never be able to build a rocket that could blast us into heaven so we could find Him. No amount of thinking or reasoning or philosophy could cause us to realize anything true about Him. Apart from divine self-revelation there could be no knowledge of God at all – not even through the creation.

But God is a communicator. John 1 does not say, "In the beginning was the Thought, and the Thought was with God and the Thought was God." He is described as Word and not thought because thoughts just sit there in your head; words go out of your mouth into someone else's head. It is in God's nature to show Himself to us. At least two parts of His nature compel Him to do that.

God's glory compels Him to show Himself

What is the greatest thing that could possibly take place in the Universe? The absolute best thing and most important thing would be for God to be glorified. Nothing is better than that. If you think anything is better than that, then you are an idolater. That is, if you think something or someone else is more worthy of being honored than God, then you are holding that thing up as greater than God, and that is idolatry. Now, is God an idolater? Does God hold anything in this universe up as being more worthy of glory and honor and praise than His own name? No – God is not an idolater.

Isaiah 42:8 I am Yahweh, that is My name; I will not give My glory to another, or my praise to idols.

Uppermost in God's own affections is His own glory. So if nothing is more important than the glorification and honoring of God, and God only does what is best, then you would expect that God would do whatever would bring Him the most glory and honor, right? And that is exactly what He does. He does that which will bring Him the greatest honor in this world. And what brings Him the greatest honor is when He shows Himself to created beings and those created beings respond to what they see with great delight. The thing that honors my wife the most is not just when she looks really good. What honors her even more is when she looks really good and I see her and say, "Wow!" What honors God the most is when His creatures see Him and say "Wow!", and prefer that experience to any other joy. And so God's delight in His own glory compels Him to expose that glory to His people.

⁵ And even in Old Testament times when God was speaking through prophets at various times and in various ways - even that was all about Jesus. **Luke 24:27 And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, [Jesus] explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself.**

God's love compels Him to show Himself

But that is not the only part of His character that compels Him to show His glory. Sometimes people recoil at the idea of God glorifying Himself, or desiring that He be made much of, because if a human being does that it is selfish and unloving. If I try to get everyone to focus on me and praise me and make much of me I am being selfish, and for me to be selfish is unloving. It is unloving because, frankly, delighting in me and making much of me, and beholding all my greatness is not really much of an experience. It is definitely not the best thing that could happen to you. So for me to pursue that is unloving – it is a failure on my part to care about your best interests.

But God is different. For God, “selfishness,” in that sense, is the most loving thing He could do. Here’s why: If you owned the Grand Canyon and you had a giant curtain pulled in front of it for privacy, the most loving thing you could do for me would be to open up the curtain and let me see it, because it is such a delightful and awesome thing to behold. And if you were the Grand Canyon, and you somehow had a mind and control over the curtain, the most loving thing you could do would be to open up the curtain and allow yourself to be seen. If God is indeed glorious and marvelous, which He is, then if He is going to be a loving being He has to show Himself and expose His glory.

The best thing that could ever happen to you would be to catch a glimpse of His glory – like David did in Ps.63 when he says...

Psalm 63:2 So I gaze on You in the sanctuary to see Your power and Your glory.

David wrote that when he was in the desert. He could see a little bit of God’s power and glory in the sky and in the creation out in the desert, but he wanted a much greater experience of God’s power and glory – the kind that is only experienced in the presence of God in His sanctuary. It is not talking about a vision. It is talking about an experience of God’s presence in which the eyes of your heart are opened up to be able to see what is so glorious about some truth you have always known about God but that never got you very excited. It never got you very excited because your eyes have not been opened to what is glorious about it. Every truth about God, if your eyes were opened to it, would fill you with ecstatic, unbounded joy. The reason we do not find ourselves moved to tears and literally jumping up and down and shouting and dancing for joy when we read about God in the Scriptures, is only because our eyes are veiled from the marvelousness of what God is like. And the best thing that could ever happen to you would be for that veil to be lifted a little more. The best thing that could ever happen to your kids would be for their eyes to be opened up a little more to the glory of God. The biggest favor you could ever do your best friend, or your husband or wife, is to help open their eyes to see a greater glimpse of the spectacular vistas of God’s glory.

Seeing God’s glory transforms the heart (2 Cor.3:18); seeing God’s glory fills up your heart with joy so extreme that it can drown out even the most severe suffering (Job 33:26); seeing God’s glory satisfies all longings and desires of the soul so that it is content and sated and full and satisfied (Ps.17:15). Having your eyes opened a little wider to His glory is the best thing that could possibly happen to you. So not only does God’s glory compel Him to reveal Himself to us, but His love also compels Him to do it.

This Christmas season, every time you are reminded of Christmas let it be a memory cue of the fact that the thing we are celebrating – the incarnation, not only gives us certainty and confidence that what we believe is true, but it also shows us that God is a self-revealing God. And that revelation is the best thing that could ever happen to us, if our eyes were just opened wider to it. Let’s turn every ring of every jingle bell, every Christmas light, every gift and tree and decoration, let it all set off the same prayer in our hearts: “Dear Lord Jesus – open the eyes of my heart to see Your glory!”

Benediction: Ephesians 1:16 - 19 I never stop giving thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers. 17 I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better. 18 I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he

has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, 19 and his incomparably great power for us who believe.

DEVOTIONALS

We Touched the Word of Life: Joy of the Incarnation

1 John 1:1 Day 1

Luke 2:8-14 In the same region, shepherds were staying out in the fields and keeping watch at night over their flock. 9 Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. 10 But the angel said to them, "Don't be afraid, for look, I proclaim to you good news of great joy that will be for all the people: 11 today a Savior, who is Messiah the Lord, was born for you in the city of David. 12 This will be the sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped snugly in cloth and lying in a manger." 13 Suddenly there was a multitude of the heavenly host with the angel, praising God and saying: 14 Glory to God in the highest heaven, and peace on earth to people He favors!

Some say we shouldn't celebrate Christmas. They say there is no command to commemorate the birth of Jesus – only His death. It is true that there is no command to commemorate His birth. Nor is there a command to commemorate His resurrection, and yet from the very beginning the Church did so by making the first day of the week their day of corporate worship. God has given us great freedom in the forms of our worship. God has not forbidden the celebration of the arrival of the Son of God into the world, and so the question is, "Is the incarnation worth celebrating?"

That question is not difficult to answer – God answered it for us. When it happened it was celebrated in a manner never before seen in human history. A multitude of the heavenly host appeared in the sky praising God and saying "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and peace on earth to people He favors!" This is not a common occurrence in Scripture. God is referred to in the Old Testament as the LORD of hosts many, many times (the word "host" means "army"). But has there ever been a time when anyone has actually seen the heavenly host worshipping God like this? No.

One time there was a prophet (Micaiah) who saw the heavenly host as part of a vision, but even in that vision they weren't worshipping God or celebrating anything. So all through redemptive history we have heard about these hosts – the heavenly armies. Almost 300 times God is called the God of hosts. But even with all the marvelous things that happened throughout the Old Testament there is never a time when Scripture records them appearing in the sky or anywhere else to celebrate anything. The birth of the Lord Jesus Christ into the world was a uniquely wonderful event. Is it worth celebrating? A great multitude of the heavenly host certainly thought so. These creatures had existed for thousands of years – ever since the creation. And that night in the fields outside Bethlehem they found themselves doing something they had never done before that we know of – appearing to men and shouting praises to God in the highest because of what was taking place on earth. If we are going to take our cues from heaven I would say the incarnation is something worth celebrating.

And celebrating with joy! Each holiday in our culture has taken on a particular mood. And the mood of Christmas, more than anything else, has been joy. People want to be spooked on Halloween, and they want to relax on Labor Day, and they want to get serious and make resolutions on New Years Day; but more than anything Christmas is about joy. People say "merry Christmas." That is right on. It's exactly as it should be, because it's a day when we celebrate the good news of great joy!

The rejoicing of the world is a rejoicing of ignorance. They are blind to the real reason for joy, and so all their joy this time of year is hollow to say the least. But it is fitting nonetheless that the whole culture should be joyful at the celebration of the incarnation even if they don't understand what they are doing.

Dear Lord, let me be one who does know what I'm doing. May I be full of joy when I think about the marvelous truth of eternal God coming to earth and taking on human flesh. Oh, let that fill my heart with joy! Protect me, dear God, from thinking of it as a mere doctrine or historical event. Open Your servant's eyes to all the marvelous wonders that are realities because of the incarnation. Only because of that can I know You.

Only because of Jesus' coming into this world can my sins be forgiven. Only through the incarnation can I have any of the blessings You offer; and through the incarnation I have ALL the blessings You offer – every spiritual blessing in the heavenly realms! All year long I rejoice in countless different blessings from You – experiences of Your faithfulness, grace, guidance, encouragement, forgiveness, holiness, food-likeness, power, renewing, life-giving love, mercy, patience, illumination, refuge... and all of it – every bit of joy from every one of those and countless others – all of it comes only because the Son of God stripped off His heavenly robes of splendor and took on human flesh, being made in the form of a servant. And so now He is the ideal High Priest who can sympathize with me in all my weaknesses because He learned obedience through suffering and was tempted in every way, just as I am, yet was without sin. Oh thank You, dear Lord Jesus!

This Christmas season let everything about the holiday remind me to rejoice along with the heavenly host, and to think of each of the millions of blessings in my life – especially those direct, profound experiences of Your presence; as happening only because of the incarnation.

Attribute to behold, desire, experience & enjoy: The incarnate Deity

Promise to trust: He will be an ideal, sympathetic High Priest for me

What will result if I experience this attribute today: Joy, encouragement, hope

We Touched the Word of Life: The Ground of all being

1 John 1:1 Day 2

That which was from the beginning

That which is there at the very beginning before creation must be the ground of all being. Nothing came before Him to bring Him into existence, which means He must be the One and only being who has the power of self-existence. The power of self-existence is the ability to keep yourself in existence without any help from anyone or anything. Nothing else in the creation has that power. Nothing made itself. No house built itself, there is no tree that didn't come from a seed, no man who didn't come from parents, no picture painted itself - everything and everyone is dependent on something that came before it for it to exist, and not just to come into existence, but to continue to exist. Right now the Self-Existent One is holding and sustaining the existence of all other things. If He stopped doing that for one second everything would instantly go out of existence.

And beyond self-existence, the One who was there at the beginning also is the ground not only of all being, but also of everything else. He is the ground of all truth. Any truth claim that doesn't agree with Him is wrong – period. He is the standard for everything. Beauty is not a matter of opinion or taste, something is beautiful or not beautiful inasmuch as it resembles His beauty. He is the standard for morality, for truth, for goodness, for life – for everything. He is the ground of all being. And that makes Him the ultimate authority, the greatest power, and the most wonderful and most marvelous thing in existence or that could possibly exist.

Dear Lord Jesus Christ, Messiah and King of kings and Lord of all lords, You were before all things; You are above all things; You uphold all things by Your awesome, infinite power. From You, through You, and to You are all things – You are the Source, Sustainer and Purpose of everything. Dear Lord teach me to live my life with You as the Purpose of everything I do. Recreation, TV, rest, eating, chores, getting dressed, phone calls – absolutely everything. Make Your servant aware, dear Lord God, of why I am doing all that I'm doing. So much of my life is carried out as a mindless robot. I follow my schedule or the impulses of my flesh without consciously offering those actions to You as worship. Awaken my heart today, dear Lord, that I might offer every action to You.

Attribute to behold, desire, experience & enjoy: The Ground of all Being

Promise to trust: He will reign over all

What will result if I experience this attribute today: Courage, worship

We Touched the Word of Life: What is Wonderful about the Proof

1 John 1:1 Day 3

Of all the major world religions there are really only three that base their credibility on historical events: Christianity, Islam, and Judaism. All the other religions are basically philosophies, and they claim to be true apart from whether or not their version of history is correct.

There is a consensus among secular, unbelieving scholars that the following are all true and historically provable:

There was a man named Jesus who did live during the time the Bible claims He did and He was from Nazareth.

He claimed that He was the Son of God and that He would rise from the dead.

He was crucified in Palestine under Pontius Pilate during the reign of Tiberius Caesar at Passover time.

He was buried in the tomb of a rich man, and the tomb was guarded by Rome. On the third day that tomb was unexpectedly empty.

Initially not even His followers believed – even when they saw the empty tomb. Then something happened that convinced His disciples and thousands of other Jews and Gentiles that He rose from the dead and was alive.

They were so convinced that they were willing to die in great numbers for their belief.

These facts are beyond question. Thanks to the eyewitness accounts of the Apostles we can know for sure that what we believe is truth. God did not call us to base our eternal destiny on the testimony of a single man who claims to have had a vision in a cave somewhere. It is because of the incarnation that we can know for sure what the truth is. It is because He became seeable and feelable and hearable. It is a wonderful thing to be able to have unshakable confidence in the truth, so that we do not have to labor under nagging doubt.

Thank You, dear Lord, for making it so plain and for giving such unarguable proof. Thank You that You did not leave us to have to sort through thousands of different religions, all of which have the same basis for claiming to be true. Thank You for making the truth stand out as completely different from all the rest, that we might know it without doubt. And thank You for revealing it to Your servant. Teach me to have proper gratitude, dear Lord, that would be fitting for such a gift!

And make me bold. Teach Your servant to speak and act in a manner that would reflect someone who has unassailable proof of the truth. Forgive me, dear Lord, for my timidity and fear, and for living and speaking as one who does not have good evidence that what he believes is true. Let my courage show Your self-revealing nature to the world.

Attribute to behold, desire, experience & enjoy: The God who gave us clear proof

Promise to trust: His Word will prove true

What will result if I experience this attribute today: Courage, boldness, gratitude

We Touched the Word of Life: Glorified by showing His glory

1 John 1:1 Day 4

Jesus is called the Word of God. Words are for communicating. Consider this amazing truth: God has spoken to us. Why? Why would God bother to communicate something to us? Who made Him do that? No one. So then what compelled Him to do it? God has a good reason for everything He does, so what was it that made Him decided to reveal Himself to sinful man? The same thing that compels Him to do absolutely everything He does – His own nature. He did it because He is, by nature, a self-revealing God. If that were not part of His nature we could know nothing at all about Him – zero. No matter how hard we thought, no matter how deeply we studied, no matter how much we investigated, there is no way we could have

discovered even one single fact about God. We would never be able to build a rocket that could blast us into heaven so we could find Him. No amount of thinking or reasoning or philosophy could cause us to realize anything true about Him. Apart from divine self-revelation there could be no knowledge of God at all – not even through the creation.

But God is a communicator. John 1 does not say, “In the beginning was the Thought, and the Thought was with God and the Thought was God.” He is described as Word and not thought because thoughts just sit there in your head; words go out of your mouth into someone else’s head. It is in God’s nature to show Himself to us. At least two parts of His nature compel Him to do that.

God’s glory compels Him to show Himself

What is the greatest thing that could possibly take place in the Universe? The absolute best thing and most important thing would be for God to be glorified. Nothing is better than that. If you think anything is better than that, then you are an idolater. That is, if you think something or someone else is more worthy of being honored than God, then you are holding that thing up as greater than God, and that’s idolatry. Now, is God an idolater? Does God hold anything in this universe up as being more worthy of glory and honor and praise than His own name? No – God is not an idolater.

Isaiah 42:8 I am Yahweh, that is My name; I will not give My glory to another, or my praise to idols.

Uppermost in God’s own affections is His own glory. So if nothing is more important than the glorification and honoring of God, and God only does what is best, then you would expect that God would do whatever would bring Him the most glory and honor, right? And that is exactly what He does. He does that which will bring Him the greatest honor in this world. And what brings Him the greatest honor is when He shows Himself to created beings and those created beings respond to what they see with great delight. The thing that honors my wife the most is not just when she looks really good. What honors her even more is when she looks really good and I see her and say, “Wow!” What honors God the most is when His creatures see Him and say “Wow!”, and prefer that experience to any other joy. And so God’s delight in His own glory compels Him to expose that glory to His people.

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious One, for His infinite glory. You are beautiful beyond description. Your glory is more awesome than the most spectacular galaxy or supernova, more majestic than the Swiss Alps, more delightful than the most beautiful woman, brighter than the sun – holy and perfect and powerful, transforming and renewing the human heart that gazes upon You. Nothing I ever do glorifies You more than when I gaze upon Your glory and take delight in it. Incline my heart, dear Lord, to delight in what I see when I look at You. And open my eyes wider, so that the level of my exuberance is fitting given the marvelousness of Your glory. Teach me to glorify You with my eyes – eyes that ever strain to see Your glory.

Attribute to behold, desire, experience & enjoy: The God whose glory surpasses all of the most wonderful things

Promise to trust: He will be glorified (and pleased) by me if I gaze upon His glory and delight in it.

What will result if I experience this attribute today: Desire and zeal to see Him, joy, transformation

We Touched the Word of Life: Loves us by showing His glory

1 John 1:1-4 Day 5

God is compelled to show His glory because that glorifies Him. But that is not the only part of His character that compels Him to show His glory. Sometimes people recoil at the idea of God glorifying Himself, or desiring that He be made much of, because if a human being does that it is selfish and unloving. If I try to get everyone to focus on me and praise me and make much of me I’m being selfish, and for me to be selfish is unloving. It is unloving because, frankly, delighting in me and making much of me, and

beholding all my greatness is not really much of an experience. It is definitely not the best thing that could happen to you. So for me to pursue that is unloving – it is a failure on my part to care about your best interests.

But God is different. For God, “selfishness,” in that sense, is the most loving thing He could do. Here’s why: If you owned the Grand Canyon and you had a giant curtain pulled in front of it for privacy, the most loving thing you could do for me would be to open up the curtain and let me see it, because it is such a delightful and awesome thing to behold. And if you were the Grand Canyon, and you somehow had a mind and control over the curtain, the most loving thing you could do would be to open up the curtain and allow yourself to be seen. If God is indeed glorious and marvelous, which He is, then if He is going to be a loving being He has to show Himself and expose His glory.

The best thing that could ever happen to you would be to catch a glimpse of His glory – like David did in Ps.63 when he says...

Psalm 63:2 So I gaze on You in the sanctuary to see Your power and Your glory.

David wrote that when he was in the desert. He could see a little bit of God’s power and glory in the sky and in the creation out in the desert, but he wanted a much greater experience of God’s power and glory – the kind that is only experienced in the presence of God in His sanctuary. It is not talking about a vision. It is talking about an experience of God’s presence in which the eyes of your heart are opened up to be able to see what is so glorious about some truth you have always know about God but that never got you very excited. It never got you very excited because your eyes have not been opened to what is glorious about it. Every truth about God, if your eyes were opened to it, would fill you with ecstatic, unbounded joy. The reason we don’t find ourselves moved to tears and literally jumping up and down and shouting and dancing for joy when we read about God in the Scriptures, is only because our eyes are veiled from the marvelousness of what God is like. And the best thing that could ever happen to you would be for that veil to be lifted a little more. The best thing that could ever happen to your kids would be for their eyes to be opened up a little more to the glory of God. The biggest favor you could ever do your best friend, or your husband or wife, is to help open their eyes to see a greater glimpse of the spectacular vistas of God’s glory.

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