

A Love Letter

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[0 : 01] Well, if we could, this evening, with the Lord's help and the Lord's enabling, if we could turn back to that portion of Scripture that we read, 1 John, or 1 John, as others like to call it, but I like to call it 1 John, 1 John chapter 1, and we're reading again from the beginning.

1 John chapter 1, where John writes in these introductory words, that which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we looked upon and have touched with our hands concerning the word of life, the life was made manifest and we have seen it and testify to it and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was made manifest to us.

That which we have seen and heard, we proclaim also to you, so that you too may have fellowship with us, and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son, Jesus Christ.

And we are writing these things so that our joy may be complete, and so on. How do I know that I'm a Christian?

How do I know that I'm saved? How do I know that my sins are forgiven? How do I know that God loves me?

[1 : 32] There's some of the questions that people often ask who are either seeking the Lord for the first time, or they've been following the Lord for many years, for a long time.

And yet we know what the Bible says. We know that the Bible says about salvation, believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you shall be saved. For if you believe in your heart and confess with your mouth that Jesus Christ is Lord, you shall be saved.

But sometimes we struggle to accept the simplicity of salvation, because as you know, salvation is all of grace, all of grace. But because salvation is all of grace, and it's a gift from God, the fact that we can't work for our salvation sometimes causes us to worry, sometimes even causes us to have wobbles, where we begin to think and even feel in ourselves, is my faith sincere?

Am I the genuine article? Am I the real thing? Is my Christianity, the Christianity I either want or the Christianity I profess, is it legitimate?

Or am I just a hypocrite? Am I a hypocrite? But you know, when our faith is founded on feelings, we can often think that we can't possibly be a Christian.

[2 : 54] Sometimes we even convince ourselves that we can't possibly be a Christian. And we begin to doubt our salvation, and we think that we've somehow deceived ourselves into thinking that we're a Christian.

And because we're deceiving ourselves, we're also deceiving others that we're a Christian. But you know, that's why it's dangerous to have our faith founded upon feelings.

It's very dangerous, very deceptive to have our faith founded upon feelings. And this is what the German reformer Martin Luther, that's what he tried to stand up against and to speak out against when he wrote those well-known words.

He said, And the conclusion Luther came to was, So how do I know that I'm a Christian?

How do I know that I'm saved? How do I know that my sins are forgiven? How do I know that God actually loves me? Well, we come to God's Word. And remarkably, 1 John was written in order to answer these very questions.

[4 : 25] It was written, says John himself, that you may know. How do I know? And John says, This is how you know. This is how you know.

He says, That you may know that you're a Christian. And that's the whole emphasis of the first letter of John. That you may know. But as we introduce our study of 1 John this evening, I want us to see that it's boys and girls, it's a love letter.

It's a love letter. And I want us to consider this evening, very simply, the messenger of this love letter, and the message of this love letter.

So the messenger and the message. So, boys and girls, they're your two headings this evening. The messenger and the message. So first of all, the messenger. The messenger. John writes in verse 1, That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we looked upon, and have touched with our hands, concerning the word of life.

The messenger of this message, or this love letter, is, of course, the apostle John. And John, as you know, he is the more well-known of the two Boanerges brothers.

[5 : 41] We were looking at them when we were considering all the apostles. They were two brothers, the sons of thunder, the sons of Zebedee. They were James and John. And John is the more well-known of the two brothers, because John has written five out of the 27 books of the New Testament.

And John is, as you know, he's the author of the Gospel of John. He's the author of 1st, 2nd, and 3rd John. And he's also the author of the Book of Revelation. But as you know, the thing about the apostle John is that he's described to us, not nicknamed boys and girls, he's described to us in the Gospel as the beloved disciple.

Or the disciple whom Jesus loved. But John, he didn't designate those titles to himself because he thought that he was more loved or more loyal than any of the other disciples.

And it certainly wasn't because John was a proud or a pious man. In fact, it was actually the complete opposite. John described and designated himself as the beloved disciple or the disciple whom Jesus loved.

Because as a disciple, as a disciple of Jesus, that's what he was. As a disciple of Jesus, he was a beloved disciple. He was a disciple whom Jesus loved.

[6 : 58] And for John, John was amazed and even astonished and astounded at the love of Jesus, that Jesus would love him at all. That's why John not only describes and designates himself as the beloved disciple and the disciple whom Jesus loved, John, in all his writings, he declares the love of God that has been demonstrated and displayed to us through the death of Jesus Christ.

In fact, John wrote so much about the love of God being demonstrated and displayed through the cross of Jesus Christ that the early church, boys and girls, the early church nicknamed him the Apostle of Love.

He was nicknamed the Apostle of Love. Because it was John who penned that well-known verse that I'm sure we've all memorized from a young age, John 3, 16.

A verse that probably so many people know. It's a verse that is the gospel in miniature. For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son that whosoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.

And throughout John's gospel, John writes about the love of Jesus. He displays the love of Jesus. He demonstrates to us the love of Jesus. But then he brings us right towards the cross.

[8 : 26] And he writes there in John 13 that Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart out of this world to the Father, having loved his own who were in the world. He loved them to the end.

John is obsessed with the love of Jesus. He's amazed by the love of Jesus. And he records again in that upper room discourse in his gospel, he records what Jesus says about his love.

You remember Jesus said, a new commandment I give to you, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you are also to love one another. By this all people will know.

This is how they will know that you're my disciples, if you love one another. And John goes on to highlight what Jesus said there in that upper room, that as the Father has loved me, so have I loved you.

Abide in my love. For greater loveth no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends. If you do whatsoever, I command you. Do you know my friend, the apostle of love, John, he had this desire, this determination, to declare to us that the love of God, it has been displayed to us.

[9 : 36] It has been demonstrated to us through the death of Jesus Christ. But as you know, when you read the writings of John, you see that he not only wrote about the love of God in his gospel, he also wrote about the love of God in his letters.

Because when John wrote this letter to the early church, you see that it's a letter full of love. It's a letter of love. It's full and overflowing with the love of God. And John is always bringing it back to the place where God displayed and demonstrated his love towards us through the death of Jesus Christ.

Everything goes back to the gospel and to Jesus. And even as we shall see in our study of this letter, John, the beloved disciple, the apostle of love, he sought to remind and reassure Christians that God is love.

Don't forget it. And that in Christ, the love of God is perfected. So don't forget that either. There's nothing lacking, he says, in the love of God.

And as John keeps pointing us to the cross of Calvary time and time again, to this place where the love of God is demonstrated and displays, he says, behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us that we should be called the children of God.

[11 : 03] And you go into chapter 4 and he says, look, here in his love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us. And he sent his son to be the propitiation for our sins.

Everything goes back to the cross, the place where God demonstrated and displayed his love towards us. But you know what I think is so beautiful? Is that as this beloved disciple, as John addresses the early church, he addresses them all as beloved disciples.

John is known to everyone as the beloved disciple. That's how he described and designated himself. But he also calls the church. He reminds the church that they are beloved disciples too.

Six times in these five chapters, John describes the disciples as beloved disciples. He writes, beloved, we are God's children.

Don't forget it. Beloved, we can have confidence before God. Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another. Beloved, let us love one another.

[12 : 11] Why? Because love is from God. And whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. And John explains, anyone who does not love does not know God because God is love.

In this, the love of God was made manifest among us. That God sent his son into the world so that we might live through him. John brings everything back back to the person and work of Jesus Christ.

And you know, as you read through this love letter, and I'd encourage you to read through it as we begin this study, read through 1 John. Read through 1, 2, and 3 John. Because you know, one of the things that stands out is that John is passionate for the Lord, but he's also passionate for the lost.

John was an evangelist at heart. That's why besides being known as the apostle of love, he was also known as John the evangelist. John not only wanted people to believe in Jesus, he wanted people to know that they belonged to Jesus.

And I think that's so important. John not only wanted people to believe in Jesus, he wanted people to know that when they trust in him, they belong to Jesus.

[13 : 33] They belong to Jesus. That's why John wrote at the end of his gospel, at the end of his gospel, his first writing, he writes, these things are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have a life in his name.

But at the end of this love letter, if you go to chapter 5 at verse 13, it's the key verse to the whole letter. Chapter 5, verse 13, John writes, he says, I write these things to you who believe, who already believe.

Not that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, like he wrote earlier in his gospel, but he writes to those who now believe. They now do believe who Jesus is.

I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God that you may know that you have eternal life.

That you may know that you have eternal life. My friend, John not only wants us to believe in Jesus, he wants us to know that we belong to Jesus.

[14 : 47] He wants us to know that we belong to this Jesus. And so we're asking the question, how do I know that I'm a Christian? And John here, he's wanting to answer that question.

He wants to tell us, this is how you know. This letter is all about how you know that you belong to Jesus. And so that's what the message of this love letter is all about.

Which leads us to consider, secondly, the message. So the messenger is John. And then secondly, the message. The message.

He writes there, verses 1 to 4, this is the introduction. That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we looked upon and have touched with our hands concerning the word of life, the life was made manifest and we have seen it and testify to it.

And proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was made manifest to us. That which we have seen and heard, we proclaim also to you. So that you too may have fellowship with us.

[15 : 53] And indeed, our fellowship is with the Father and with the Son, Jesus Christ. And we are writing these things so that our joy may be complete. When you read through this letter, it becomes glaringly obvious that the Apostle John wrote this letter out of love for the Lord first and foremost, but also out of love for the Lord's people.

He loved the Lord's people. That's why we've described it as a love letter. This love letter was written around 85 AD, only a few years before John would be exiled to the Greek island of boys and girls, Patmos, where he received this revelation.

That's the book that we're looking at on Wednesday evening, the book of Revelation. But you know, by this time, by 85 AD, all the other apostles, they had been put to death.

They had died a martyr's death for their fearless faith in following Jesus. As you know, everyone living under the authority and the aggression of the Roman Empire, everyone was ordered to confess Kaiser Curios.

Caesar is Lord. But anyone who refused, if a Christian refused and confessed Jesus, Jesus is Lord, they were executed.

[17 : 17] They were executed for their confession of faith and their commitment to Jesus Christ. And you know, a brilliant book, if you want to read it or dip in and out of it, is Fox's Book of Martyrs by the 16th century historian and theologian John Fox.

It's a brilliant book to find out and read about all these different Christians who were executed for their confession of faith and their commitment to Jesus Christ.

But even though John escaped execution, he didn't escape persecution. Because prior to his exile, prior to being exiled to the island of Patmos, John was severely persecuted by the emperor.

The emperor at the time was called to omission. And in fact, it said that John was ordered by the emperor, first of all, to drink poison. That was to be his first execution.

He was ordered to drink poison, after which he was to be boiled to death in a cauldron of oil. And apparently that was quite a common way to execute, I don't know, Christians or other people.

[18 : 25] Miraculously, as it says in Fox's Book of Martyrs, the apostle John survived both attempts on his life before he was exiled to the isle of Patmos.

But you know, because John was this lone survivor, he was the last apostle of Jesus. He was the last, you could say, the last man standing. All the other apostles had been put to death. All of them had died a martyr's death.

And yet John is left. And because he's the only one who's left, he inevitably becomes this important and influential figure in the early church.

And at the time of writing this letter, John was pastoring in the church of Ephesus. Ephesus was a well-known church. It was a seaport city church. It was the place where Paul had planted.

And Timothy was there. And Apollos was there. And John was there. And as you can see from these opening verses, this love letter wasn't written just to the church in Ephesus.

[19 : 30] It wasn't written to a specific church with specific instructions like many of Paul's letters were. This letter is a general letter. It's a letter that's written generally to all of the New Testament churches.

And it's written generally because John had a heart not only for his own congregation, but for all congregations, all of the Lord's people.

He loved the Lord and he loved the Lord's people. And he loved them so much that he wanted to warn them. He wanted to warn them about the danger and the deception of being infiltrated and influenced by false teachers and false teaching.

John wanted to warn them. In fact, as an experienced pastor, John could see that a division was forming in the church. There was this division that could, that was being made known to him.

And he knew that if nothing was said and nothing was done about this division that was forming, it would eventually cause a schism and a split in the church that he loved and the people he loved.

[20 : 41] And of course, well, that was nothing new in the early church. Paul had his fair share of false teachers to contend with and all the things that he had to deal with. But what John is dealing with here in writing this letter was the false teaching.

Are you listening? Boys and girls. The false teaching of Gnosticism. Gnosticism. Comes from the Greek word gnosis, which means knowledge or to know.

Gnosticism was a heresy that plagued the early church where many false teachers, they taught, they taught that they had a higher knowledge, a higher gnosis that was from God.

They taught that they had this greater understanding, this greater knowledge than other people. It was a higher gnosis, a higher knowledge that made them proud. It puffed them up to the point that Gnostics taught that the church, taught the church that you can't be a proper Christian unless you have this higher gnosis, this higher knowledge of God.

You can't be a proper Christian unless you have this higher knowledge of God. You know, I don't know if you hear it yourself, but you often hear something similar in the 21st century from some Pentecostal Christians.

[22 : 04] They claim that you can't be a proper Christian. I've had it said to me. You can't be a proper Christian unless you've received the second blessing and you can speak in tongues.

But such claims, they not only influence and infiltrate the church, they also impact Christians. Because a new convert hearing that is immediately going to think I'm not the genuine article.

I'm not a real Christian. Maybe even an older Christian would think it. They'd start questioning their salvation. They'd feel isolated. They'd feel inferior. They'd feel insignificant as a Christian to the point that they question their Christianity and then begin to doubt their salvation.

And that's what was happening here in the early church. Many of the Christians in the early church, they felt isolated. They felt inferior. They felt insignificant to these false teachers who claimed that they had a higher gnosis and that they felt that they weren't proper Christians because they didn't have what they have.

Which led to them all questioning their Christianity and doubting their salvation. And there's a danger in that. Thankfully, Gnosticism became so confused and so confusing as it continued throughout the first century church and into the second century that it was condemned as a heresy.

[23 : 30] And that was because their so-called higher gnosis, their higher knowledge, their great understanding of God. It had led them to believe that the incarnation, God becoming man, and the resurrection, Jesus rising from the dead, it caused them to believe that these things weren't true.

That the incarnation and the resurrection of Jesus Christ wasn't true. Gnostics taught that Jesus Christ wasn't actually physically born of the Virgin Mary.

And neither did Jesus actually physically have a resurrection. He wasn't really raised from the dead. And they said this, and you know, it's very confusing, it was so confusing in the first century, and I don't think it's changed as you try to understand it in the 21st century.

Gnostics believe that the universe is evil. Everything around us is evil. Space is evil, time is evil, matter is evil. So the flesh is evil.

Your whole body is evil. It's corrupt. Everything physical is evil. Therefore, for the mind of a Gnostic, it would be unimaginable, unbelievable, unthinkable for a Gnostic to accept that the holy God of heaven who knows all and sees all and is everywhere present, it's unthinkable for Him to become flesh.

[24 : 59] Our flesh that's sinful and evil and dwell among us. Absolutely unthinkable, unimaginable. And so instead, Gnosticism, they invented this idea, they influenced the church with all these ideas, and it was another idea called Docetism.

So, boys and girls, the other heresy, Docetism. Docetism comes from another Greek word, doceo, which means to seem. who are followers of Gnosticism with all their higher knowledge, their understanding of God, their gnosis, they taught the church that because the flesh is evil and everything is evil around us, Jesus Christ only seemed His docetio.

He only seemed to be human. He only seemed to be made flesh. He only seemed to be born of the Virgin Mary. He only seemed to die on a cross.

He only seemed to rise from the dead. It didn't actually really, truly happen. But of course, John, this pastor who loves the Lord and who loves the Lord's people, he emphasizes, he explains to them, he brings them back to Jesus.

He brings them back to Jesus, and even in the prologue of his gospel, first thing John says, he talks about who this Jesus is. He is the eternal word of God who was in the beginning with God in heaven.

[26 : 35] And in fact, John says, he was God. And that same word, says John, he became flesh. And he dwelt among us. What's more, says John, we beheld his glory.

We saw it ourselves. We beheld his glory. We have seen his glory in human form. And guess what? It was the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.

And then you come to John's first letter, and he introduces this love letter using similar language. He speaks in the same way.

And the first thing he says is, that which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, which we have touched with our hands concerning the word of life.

The life was made manifest. He was revealed. And we have seen it. And we testify to it. And we proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father in heaven and was also made manifest to us.

[27 : 41] That which we have seen and heard, we proclaim to you. That you too may have fellowship with us. And indeed, our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son, Jesus Christ.

And we are writing these things so that our joy may be complete. You know, John emphasizes, he explains right there from the outset of his letter that Jesus wasn't someone who seemed to be real.

He wasn't a figment of their imagination. He wasn't a phantom who appeared for a time. No, he was physical. This Jesus was flesh. He was bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh.

He was God manifest in the flesh. And John says, our senses weren't deceiving us because he says there, we heard Him.

We heard Him preach and proclaim the Word of God. We heard Him on the Sermon on the Mount. We heard Him speak with care and compassion and concern for the lost sheep of the house of Israel.

[28 : 46] We heard Him. More than that, says John, we saw Him. We saw this Jesus in flesh and blood. We saw Him perform miracles. We saw Him walk on water.

We saw Him turn water into wine. We saw Him calm storms. We saw Him make the deaf hear and the blind see. And we saw Him even raise Jairus' daughter to life.

We saw Him. We even saw Him die. We heard Him. We saw Him. We touched Him, says John. We touched Him. We had the privilege in the upper room to touch His resurrected body.

We touched His nail-pierced hands. We touched His spear-pierced side. We heard Him. We saw Him. We touched Him. And John says, this is what we testify to you.

I love the Lord's people, He's saying. I love the Lord and I love the Lord's people. And this is what I testify to you. This is what we preach to you. This is what we proclaim to you.

[29 : 47] Why? So that you too may have fellowship with us. And indeed, our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son.

You know, as Christians, our fellowship is not only with one another. And how fellowship is so important. But our fellowship is, as He says there, with God the Father and His Son, Jesus Christ.

And we'll touch on, we'll talk about, more about the importance of fellowship the next Lord's Day as we go into the rest of the passage. And we see, as it says there in verse 6, if we say that we have fellowship with Him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth.

It emphasizes the importance of fellowship. Because as John says here, the focus of Christian fellowship is complete joy in Christ. The focus of Christian fellowship is complete joy in Christ.

The purpose of gathering together in fellowship is that we all know. we know the joy of being in Christ.

[30 : 59] That's what he's saying. Verse 4, and we are writing these things so that our joy may be complete. That our joy may be complete.

But John knows that his joy will only be complete when Christians in the church are convinced. John knows that his joy will only be complete when Christians in the church are convinced.

Convinced that they not only believe in Jesus Christ, but also convinced that they belong to Jesus Christ. They belong to him. That you may know.

That's why the messenger wrote this message in the first place. That's why John wrote this love letter. He says those words, our key verse, and we'll keep coming back to it all the way through this letter.

John writes the purpose of the letter at the end of his letter. Chapter 5, verse 13, I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God that you may know that you have eternal life.

[32 : 13] So my friend, the first question is, do you believe? The second question is, do you know that you belong? Do you believe and do you know that you belong?

And John is writing here, not only that you believe, but that you know that you belong. That you may know, he says, that you may know, that you may know that you have eternal life.

John says, this is what you need to know. This is the real gnosis you need. This is the real higher knowledge that you need. not a higher knowledge that no one else can access or understand.

This is the knowledge you need to know that your salvation is not founded upon your feelings because feelings come and feelings go and feelings are deceiving, but that your salvation is founded upon Jesus Christ.

Faith in Jesus Christ alone. I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God that you may know that you have eternal life.

[33 : 23] My friend, 1 John was written for this purpose, that you may know that you believe in Jesus and that you may know that you belong to Jesus.

And I hope and pray that in our study of this love letter of 1 John, I hope that we will all believe and I hope that we will all know that we belong to this Jesus, that it will be a benefit to our salvation and a blessing to our soul as we simply seek and strive to follow faithfully in the footsteps of Jesus.

That you may know that you have eternal life. Well, may the Lord bless these thoughts to us and let us pray.

O Lord, our gracious God, we give thanks to Thee for Thy Word, the Word that never changes, the Word that is yesterday, the same yesterday, today and forever.

And we give thanks, Lord, for that wonderful reminder that feelings come and feelings do go, but feelings are deceiving, that our warrant is the Word of God and not else is worth believing.

[34 : 39] And help us, we pray, not only to believe in this Jesus who is freely offered to us in the Gospel, but help us to know that by believing in Him that we belong to Him.

We belong to Him for time and for eternity. Lord, bless us in our study of Thy Word that Thou wouldst truly open it up to us, that as we come to delve into the riches of it, that we would see the unsearchable riches and that we would see the fullness of Jesus and that we would be reminded and reassured of what Jesus has done for us, His demonstration and display of love through the cross.

Bless us, Lord, together in the week that lies ahead, a week unknown to any of us, as we are often reminded, but, Lord, a week known to Thee. Bless us then, we pray, as we commit and commend ourselves into Thy care and keeping, that Thou wouldst go before us in everything, keeping our going out and our coming in from this time forth and even forevermore.

Bless us, Lord, we pray. Bless our fellowship this evening as we meet with Roger Crooks. Bless him as he speaks and that we would know, Lord, the encouragement and the blessing that it is to meet together in fellowship that we might have that joy that is complete in Christ.

Do us good, we pray. Go before us, for we ask it in Jesus' name and for his sake. Amen. Well, we're going to bring our service to a conclusion this evening.

[36 : 12] We're going to sing the words of Psalm 31. Psalm 31, it's in the Scottish Psalter, page 243. Psalm 31.

Psalm 31, we're singing from verse 21 down to the end of the psalm.

So page 243 in the Blue Psalm book, Psalm 31 and verse 21. But before we sing, I've got the questions. You're so glad I got the sheet.

Okay, question one. What kind of book in the Bible is 1 John? A love letter, yep. What was John's nickname in the early church?

The apostle of love. What island was John exiled to? Not St. Kilda, so Patmos, yep, good. Which two heresies plagued the early church?

[37 : 15] Gnosticism, well done. And, give it a go. Docetism, yep, good, well done.

So Gnosticism about this higher knowledge and docetism that Jesus seemed to be real, what he seemed to be made flesh. What were the headings?

The? The message. Good job. I know, everybody thinks I'm such a taskmaster. It's terrible. Okay, Psalm 31 and verse 21.

All praise and thanks be to the Lord, for he hath magnified his wondrous love to me within a city fortified. For from thine eyes cut off I am, I in my haste had said, my voice, yet heardst thou when to thee with cries my moan I made.

And we'll sing down to the end of the psalm of Psalm 31 to God's praise. O praise and thanks be to the Lord, for he hath magnified this wondrous love to be within the city fortified.

[38 : 54] O from thine eyes cut off I am, I in my haste haste said.

My voice yet heardst thou to thee with Christ my own I may.

O love the Lord, O God, He now be with you And he benchesly proud to us, our reward.

The of good courage and strength unto your heart shall stand.

For he whose hope and confidence hath on the Lord depend.

[40 : 48] The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God the Father, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all, now and forevermore. Amen.