

## That you may know the joy of God

### 1 John 1:1 - 4

**Main Point:** *The fullness of joy is found in the gospel of Jesus Christ*

#### Introduction

**JOY.** What brings *you* joy? Where do *you* look for joy? What even is *true joy*?

Well Hollywood will tell you that joy is to be found in ***fame, fortune and relationships***.

If you have millions of followers on Facebook, a big mansion overlooking the ocean, a new Lamborghini and of course a supermodel wife *then you will have true joy*.

Or the health and wellness industry will tell you that joy is found in your ***physical appearance***.

If you have a toned body, beautifully bronzed tan skin, a nice hairdo and of course you do 20 minutes of mindful yoga every morning *then you will have true joy*.

Now while *some of these things* might provide a ***certain worldly pleasure for a season***, the **reality of life** is that our *fortune, relationships and health* can be **stripped away** from us in an **instant**.

Just last week news echoed around the world of the death of basketball superstar **Kobe Bryant**.

Here is a man who was on top of the world!

An **international sporting legend**, a man who was **worth hundreds of millions of dollars**, a man who was in **peak physical shape** and a man who was **dearly loved** by those around him.

He steps on a helicopter with his daughter and then *moments* later his wife receives the heartbreaking phone call finding out that both of them crashed into a mountain and were **dead**.

Where do you find **everlasting joy** in that?

What then is **true joy**?

Fortunately for us here this evening, John seeks to answers these very questions about joy in the opening four verses of his epistle.

## Context of Epistle

### WHEN

By way of background, the epistle of 1 John was written around the year 90 – 95AD.

This places it about 60 years after the death, resurrection and ascension of Christ.

### WHO

Even though the epistle does not explicitly mention the author's name, the church has traditionally credited the authorship to the disciple John.

Now John is no spring chicken anymore.

He was likely old in age and could well have been in his *mid-80s or even early-90s* at this stage. By this time, John would have witnessed the murder of his own brother,<sup>1</sup> lived through the persecution of the early church and would have been the only living apostle left.

John writes this epistle from the church at Ephesus to the believers<sup>2</sup> in the churches across the Asia Minor region (which is more or less where Turkey is located today), and he addresses them very much *like a loving father would to his own beloved children*.

### WHAT

The churches to whom John writes find themselves in the middle of a *real crisis*.

You see shortly after these churches began to sprout and flourish, *false teachers arose* from within the church.

These false teachers were individuals who had been *nurtured with the things of Christ*, they even *professed the name of Christ* **but had never come to a true saving faith in the true Jesus Christ**.

Now note that they were not necessarily seeking to *destroy* Christianity but wanted to *improve* Christianity with their novel ideas.

This collection of heretical beliefs came to be known as **Gnosticism**.

Gnosticism, which comes from the Greek word '*Gnosis*' meaning knowledge, was one of the earliest heresies **to invade and infect** the early church.

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<sup>1</sup> Herod killed James with a sword, Acts 12:2.

<sup>2</sup> 1 John 5:13.

In essence, the Gnostics believed that the ***spirit is good and that physical matter is bad***. Spirit good, physical matter bad. They also believed that you need some kind of secret knowledge to obtain true salvation and liberation.

These primary beliefs led them into all kinds of heretical positions about Jesus Christ and marked themselves as ***enemies of the truth***.

#### WHY

This Gnostic assault on these churches in the Asian minor region ultimately led to a ***faction inside the church***, and these Gnostic teachers and their followers ended up ***departing*** from the church.

The remaining believers were left *questioning* the content of the Christian faith and its connection with the apostles. It left them in a ***state of confusion as to whom to believe and what to believe***.

Now John's style of writing is different than that of Paul. John ***does not directly attack*** the Gnostic false teachers like Paul does with the Judaizers in Galatians,<sup>3</sup> rather, he ***emphasises the truth to expose the lie***.

John writes this epistle to reassure the believers of the marks of genuine Christianity.

#### Main Point

With that context fresh in our minds, let's look at tonight's main point:

***The fullness of joy is found in the gospel of Jesus Christ.***

***The fullness of joy is found in the gospel of Jesus Christ.***

#### Headings

We will unravel this main point under two key headings:

- 1. Christ is the source of true joy (verses 1-2)***
- 2. The gospel is the reason for our joy (verses 3-4)***

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<sup>3</sup> See e.g. Galatians 5:7-12.

□ Christ is the source of true joy (verse 1 -2)

**Certainty of the message**

First, **Christ is the source of true joy.**

Please look with me again at verse 1 and first take note of the ***absolute and unshakeable certainty*** with which John pens these opening verses.

*‘What was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have observed and have touched with our hands, concerning the word of life’.*

John did not start off his letter by writing ‘what we think we heard’ or ‘what we imagined in our mind’ or ‘what we reasonably thought we touched’.

He did not dip his quill and write ‘One upon a time in a galaxy far, far away.’

No. John writes with ***unashamed boldness and clarity*** ‘what we have heard, what we have seen, what we have observed and what we have touched!’

**Car Analogy**

Now this word ‘*observed*’ is more than just a mere glance. This is an ***intense scrutinization, a deep and careful examination.***

It’s a bit like when you go and buy a second-hand car.

You don’t just have a quick glance and hand over the cheque to the seller.

No, you look intently at it because you want to make sure it’s in a *good condition* and that you’re *not buying a lemon*.

You ***carefully examine*** the engine for leaks, you examine the body of the car to see if there are any dents or scratches, you examine the interior, the tread on the tyres...

I think you get the point.

**Jesus**

*What is it or who* is it that John heard, saw, observed and touched?

The obvious answer is of course ***Jesus Christ***.

This is John writing; the disciple Jesus loved.

John *carefully studied Jesus Christ* and personally knew Whom he spoke about.

John is the disciple who laid his head on Jesus' chest, who ate with Him, who wept with Him, who saw Him cleanse the lepers, who saw Him give sight to the blind, who saw Him die and rise again from the dead.

The weight of John's words here are **monumental** as he did not speak of **myth or of clever storytelling**.<sup>4</sup> John records his **true** eyewitness account.

### **Gnostic counterpunch**

Think again of our context. These churches were under assault from the Gnostic false teachers.

Now remember, the Gnostics believed that ***all physical matter is bad***.

They therefore had a ***real problem with the real physical body of Jesus***.

Some Gnostics taught that the ***incarnation was not a real thing at all***, and that Jesus ***did not*** have a real physical body.

Some would even go so far as to teach that when Jesus Christ walked along the shores of the sea of Galilee, ***he did not even leave any footprints at all***.

**But** John is like a town crier, walking through the streets of the city and proclaiming '**Listen everybody. I heard him, saw him, observed him, touched him and proclaim this message to you!**'

### **The Apostolic Witness**

Also note that John does not just write what *I* heard, what *I* saw and what *I* observed.

He writes what we have heard, we have seen, we have observed and have touched with our hands.

John was one of the 500 plus eyewitnesses to the resurrected Christ.<sup>5</sup>

But more than that, he was also one of the 12 **Apostles**.

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<sup>4</sup> See also 2 Peter 1:16

<sup>5</sup> 1 Corinthians 15:6.

Now to qualify as an **Apostle**, you had to be especially chosen and appointed by Jesus, you had to have received the message of the gospel from Jesus Himself and you had to have been a personal eyewitness to His life, miracles, death and resurrection.<sup>6</sup>

Given the context of these first few verses, the word 'we' here can be best understood as referring to **all the Apostles**.

### **Apostles' Changes Lives**

These are the same Apostles whose lives were **radically and completely changed** after encountering Jesus Christ, and who all went on to die horrible deaths testifying about what they *saw, heard, observed and touched*.<sup>7</sup>

Church tradition tells us that Peter was crucified upside down in Rome, Matthew was killed by a sword in Ethiopia and James was thrown off the pinnacle of a tower in Jerusalem.

The Holy Spirit *moved within these men* to write about the **truth of Jesus Christ** and to **testify** about His incarnation, life, death and resurrection.<sup>8</sup>

The apostles testified about the fulfilment of the *long-foretold promise of the Messiah*.<sup>9</sup>

**We know what we know** about the **good news of Jesus Christ** because of the **true accounts** of these apostolic eyewitnesses.

### **Good News/Bad News**

However, **good news** is only really good news if we first understand the **bad news**.

**The bad news** that *none of us* have loved God with all our heart, mind, soul and strength and *none of us* have loved our neighbour perfectly as ourselves.<sup>10</sup>

The bad news that the penalty for sinning against a Holy God is **eternal damnation in Hell**.

But we also know **the good news** that Christ has come.

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<sup>6</sup> Acts 1:15-26.

<sup>7</sup> With the possible exception of John who died of old age in Ephesus (after his exile on Patmos).

<sup>8</sup> 2 Peter 1:21; 2 Timothy 3:16-17; see also Ephesians 2:20.

<sup>9</sup> See e.g. Genesis 3:15; Isaiah 7:14; Isaiah 9:6; Isaiah 53:1-12.

<sup>10</sup> Mark 12:28-31; Romans 3:9-20.

We know the **good news** that Christ lived the perfect life, died in our place on the cross, bore the penalty for our sins and rose again from the dead!

*That's why* the hymn writer writes, '**Joy to the world, the Lord has come!**'

### **Right Jesus**

**But having said that**, hearing this good news and believing in Jesus is not enough for salvation.

Because you have to believe in the **right** Jesus in order **to have your sins forgiven and have true and everlasting joy**.

Look with me again at the first two verses of 1 John: 'What was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have observed and have touched with our hands, concerning the word of life – 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 – what we have seen and heard we also declare to you'

### **Worldly opinions**

We live in an age where **everybody has an opinion** on who **Jesus Christ** is, don't we?

For example, say it's a beautiful Saturday morning and you're still in bed. You hear a knock at the door. You open the door to find two Jehovah's Witnesses standing there. They proceed to tell you that they too believe in Jesus Christ, but... **that he is in fact Michael the Archangel**.

Or you are on your way to the local shopping mall and see two young guys in black pants, white shirts and black ties locking up their bicycles. They say a friendly hello and proceed to tell you that they are indeed Mormons and that they too believe in Jesus Christ, but... **that he is in fact the spirit brother of Satan**.

Or in our context in the book of 1 John here, these Gnostic teachers were also claiming a faith in Jesus Christ, but... **they were saying that he did not in fact have a real physical body**.

You see, almost all cults pervert the true Jesus Christ and profess faith in a false Jesus Christ.

### **What was from the beginning**

But John addresses this very idea in these opening verses, and he **meticulously lays out** who Jesus Christ truly is.

Look with me again at verse 1 where John writes '*what was from the beginning*'.

Now, ***there is some debate*** about whether this phrase is used to describe the event of the incarnation, or Jesus' ministry after his baptism, or the absolute beginning of the universe or the time before creation when Jesus was the eternal and preincarnate Word.

My personal view here is that John is making an ***obvious parallel statement*** with his prologue in the gospel of John where he writes '*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God.*'<sup>11</sup> Therefore, my view is that he is referring to ***eternity past where Jesus was the preincarnate Word***.

Think about that.

There was never a time when Jesus was not.

Let that sink in.

In the beginning, He was there.

All of us had a beginning. Not Jesus. He had no beginning. He is the one who never was not.

### **The Word of Life**

Also note at the end of verse 1, John refers to Jesus as the '*Word of Life*'.

John uses this phrase to emphasise that ***Jesus Christ is the eternal, pre-existent, fully divine Son who came into the world as the definitive revelation of God.***<sup>12</sup>

Jesus is the ***voice of God***, the ***image of God*** and the ***embodiment of God***.

Through him, God is made ***audible***<sup>13</sup>, ***visible***<sup>14</sup> and ***touchable***.<sup>15</sup>

He is not just the Word, but ***the Word of life***.

Jesus is life. He brings life. He imparts life. He is the source of life.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> John 1:1.

<sup>12</sup> Gary M. Burge, Letters of John, NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 58.

<sup>13</sup> Hebrews 1:2-3.

<sup>14</sup> Colossians 1:15.

<sup>15</sup> Mark 3:10.

<sup>16</sup> Colossians 1:16.



### **The eternal life that was with the Father and revealed to us**

John then writes at the end of verse 2 '*the eternal life that was with the Father and was revealed to us* (or some translations read *was made manifest*<sup>17</sup>).'

This is a **deep and profound statement** by John.

John here is stating that ***Jesus eternally existed in perfect unity with the Father.***

The Bible is clear that prior to the Son taking on human flesh and being born in Bethlehem, ***the Son shared the same glory as the Father and the Holy Spirit as God.***<sup>18</sup>

### **Gnostic Context**

Now remember the context in which John is writing this letter.

The Gnostics could not fathom God becoming a man, as they believed *all physical matter to be bad*, and therefore *completely rejected* the concept of God taking on human flesh.

John **says no**, and he **boldly testifies to the full humanity and deity of the true Jesus Christ.**

### **Importance of Full Humanity and Full Deity**

But why is it so important that Jesus is **fully God and fully man**?

*Listen carefully* to the way the **Heidelberg Catechism** so beautifully answers this.

**Question:** Why must he be a **true and righteous man**?<sup>19</sup>

**Answer:** He must be a **true man** because the justice of God requires that the **same human nature which has sinned** should pay for sin. He must be a **righteous man** because one who himself is a sinner cannot pay for others.

**Question:** Why must he at the same time be **true God**?<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> See e.g. ESV translation.

<sup>18</sup> See John 17:5; Philippians 2:6-11; John 16:1-15. See also Psalm 102:25-27 cf Hebrews 1:8-13; Isaiah 6:1-10 cf John 12:36-41; Isaiah 48:11-13 cf Rev 5:13-14.

<sup>19</sup> Heidelberg Catechism Question 16.

<sup>20</sup> Heidelberg Catechism Question 17.

**Answer:** He must be **true God** so that by the power of his **divine nature** he might bear in his **human nature** the **burden of God's wrath** and might obtain for us and restore to us **righteousness and life**.

Or to put it *even more succinctly*, Jesus had to be **truly human** in order to **suffer** and **sympathise**.

And Jesus had to be **truly divine** in order to **satisfy** and **secure**.<sup>21</sup>

### **True Source of Joy**

You see brothers and sisters, there is **no true and lasting joy** to be found in false understandings of Jesus Christ. Because a wrong understanding of Jesus Christ means that you have a **different gospel**.

A gospel that does not save, a gospel that only leads to eternal death and not eternal life, and a gospel which has **no true joy**.

**Only the true Jesus Christ** as revealed in Scripture can save us from our sins.

- The **Jesus Christ** who is fully God and fully man.
- The **Jesus Christ** who was from the beginning in perfect unity with the Father and the Holy Spirit as God.
- The **Jesus Christ** who was made manifest to us by taking on flesh.
- The **Jesus Christ** who bore the wrath of the Father on the cross.
- And the **Jesus Christ** who rose bodily from the dead and ascended back to heaven.

But it's one thing to **know of** the true Christ who is **the source of true joy**, **but unless we are in fellowship with Him, we** are still dead in our trespasses and sins and have **no reason for any joy**.

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<sup>21</sup> Heidelberg Shorter Catechism.

□ **The gospel is the reason for our joy (verses 3-4)**

That moves us onto our second *and shortest* point, **the gospel is the reason for our joy. The reason for our joy.**

Turn with me again to verses 3-4: *'what we have seen and heard we also declare to you, so that you may also have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. We are writing these things so that our joy may be complete.*'

Now follow the train of thought.

John teaches that whoever wants to have **true fellowship with God** must first be joined to the apostles and their true eyewitness accounts about Christ.

**Gnostic Context**

Remember the context here.

These Gnostic false teachers were **wooing** believers in these churches with **false testimonies** of a **false Christ**.

They were **contradicting** the apostolic eyewitness testimonies and telling believers in the church to follow their *new and improved* form of Christianity instead.

John, however, declares that **true** fellowship with God is **only** by way of the apostles and their **true** eyewitness accounts.

The false teachers had **no personal connection to Jesus Christ** and were in fact **preaching a different gospel**.

**Fellowship with Apostles**

So how do we have fellowship with God? *How are we saved?*

Picture what John is saying like this.

If we want to hold the hand of God and be reconciled to Him, we must first hold the hands of the apostles' and be joined to them.

Because **if we don't believe the apostles**, then **we don't believe in the right Jesus** and therefore we **don't have true fellowship with God**.

We must believe their **true** eyewitness accounts concerning the **true** Christ in order to be **partakers with them** in possessing eternal life and fellowship with God.

### **Dead in Trespasses and Sins**

We too were once alienated from God, hostile towards Him and **dead** in our trespasses and sins.<sup>22</sup>

**But we were made alive** when we heard the true testimony of the true Jesus Christ. **The gospel message.**

God, because of **His** great love for us saved us by His grace and brought us into fellowship with Him.<sup>23</sup>

We have joy because the God who was once **against us** is now **for us**.<sup>24</sup>

### **Parental Analogy**

So why does John write in verse 4 '*We are writing these things so that our joy may be complete*'?

Why does he not write so that your joy may be complete?

Let me try and illustrate this.

If you're a parent here, I'm sure you will agree that your joy will be '**full**' or '**brought into a state of completeness**' when your children come to faith in Jesus Christ and live in fellowship with Him.

So, ***I am full of joy when I live in fellowship with the Lord***, but my ***joy is in a sense fuller when my children are also in fellowship with Him***.

I think this is what John is getting at here.

### **John's Beloved Children**

When John thinks of the believers in these churches, the believers whom he **endearingly calls his 'children'** throughout his letter, **his joy is completed when they too are walking hand in hand** with the **apostolic testimony about Jesus Christ**.

Listen to what John writes in 3 John 4: '*I have no greater joy than this: to hear that my children are walking in the truth.*'

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<sup>22</sup> Ephesians 2:1-3; Romans 8:7-8.

<sup>23</sup> Ephesians 2:4-10.

<sup>24</sup> Ephesians 2:1-8.

John in his old age writes these things to **encourage and assure** those that are wanting to follow after Jesus.

***Our joy is completed*** when we are in ***true fellowship with Christ and with one another.***

### **Our Fellowship**

What a wonderful yet ***convicting thought*** that is.

Brothers and sisters, *can this be said of you here tonight?*

That you have **joy in your hearts** when you see other brothers and sisters ***walking in step with the gospel?***

May we all experience **true joy** (just like John) when we see one another flourish in the gospel!

### **Non-Christians**

If you are here and ***have not come to know of this joy*** and ***have not believed upon the Lord Jesus Christ***, I am ***truly glad*** that God in His providence has brought you here tonight.

Tonight, John bids you come. ***Come hear, see, and touch Jesus.***

**Come** and escape the wrath that is to come for your sins against a holy God.

**Recognise** your need for a Saviour and **run to Him**.

**Trust** in Christ's death on the cross for your sins and you will find Him to be the **perfect** Saviour.

**Come** and see ***the beauty and the joy*** that is found in the gospel of Jesus Christ.

### **Christians Conclusion**

For the Christians here, let me start to *bring things to a close tonight* by way of **3 points of application**.

#### **Application 1**

First, **be bold in your proclamation of Christ**.

***Be bold in your evangelism.***

Life is short. About **150,000** people die across the world every day. That is almost **two every second**.

***Don't delay*** proclaiming the gospel **with boldness** to your family members, your friends, your colleagues, your neighbours or the stranger on the bus.

***Many, many*** years ago, while I was finishing off my legal studies, believe it or not I actually worked as a **tree lopper** (you know a **lumberjack**).

So, I was affectionately known as the *lumberjacking lawyer*.

We used to drive from job to job and over time I struck up a friendship with our tree climber, **Scotty**.

Scotty was a **wonderful character**. Hard, true blue Aussie tradie in his early 40s and a staunch atheist.

We used to have long chats about all things of life as we travelled from job to job.

Now, I had literally just become a Christian at this point, and I remember wanting to tell Scotty about **Jesus**.

For one reason or another I kept putting it off, but I kept telling myself that I always had tomorrow to do so.

Then one day I got news that Scotty *had suddenly and unexpectedly died*.

*That hit me hard as a young Christian.*

And this **forever** changed the way I viewed evangelism.

This moment in my life convicted me so greatly, that I immediately arranged to individually meet up with all my close friends and family with the **sole purpose** of sharing the good news of Jesus Christ with them **then and there**.

Don't wait for the '*perfect opportunity*' because they might not have tomorrow. ***Be bold***.

Now I am not saying that this is always easy, trust me, there are times when I talk about Christ and I too get nervous.

Nervous of being judged, nervous of being rejected, nervous of looking weird and nervous of not being able to provide an appropriate apologetic.

***But 10 out of 10 gospel conversations are a success.***

***Why? Because God is the one who saves souls not us.***<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Romans 10:14-20.

We are only called to be ***faithful and willing*** to be used as ***broken vessels*** in proclaiming the good news of Jesus Christ.

You ***don't*** have to be the most winsome, persuasive or the smartest person.

So pray, get up, go and be bold, and ***let the Word of Christ take hold of your hearts with great joy*** and leave the results to the Holy Spirit.

### Application 2

Second, beware of the ***subtle seductions of false teachers***.

Jesus described them as '*wolves in sheep's clothing*'.<sup>26</sup>

They may be confident, articulate, winsome, knowledgeable and ***even get a lot of things right about Jesus Christ***.

But *just like a couple of drops of arsenic in a glass of water*, the end result is **death**.

Study the ***true Christ*** through the ***true testimony of Scripture***, so that you will be better equipped to ***identify false teachers*** and ***discern truth from error***.

### Application 3

Finally, make it your ***goal to keep on seeing the glory of Christ when you read your Bible***.

Preach the gospel to yourself every day, because the battle for joy is ***the battle to see***.

Brothers and sisters, ***our joy rests in the fact*** that Jesus Christ has saved us and has reconciled us back to him.

But I'm sure there are days that you don't necessarily feel upbeat, optimistic or cheerful.

Our joy is ***constantly*** under attack by external circumstances, sickness, our emotions and sin.

You see, life goes along and then... *in a second...* your **daughter** dies, you get diagnosed with **cancer** or some other **horribly debilitating illness**, you lose your **job** and the bank repossesses your home, you are **betrayed** by someone close to you...

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<sup>26</sup> Matthew 7:15.

But *unlike happiness and sadness* which are based upon *the circumstances of life*, *true joy* is based on God, on His promises and on His faithfulness.

This is a *daily battle to see* and can sometimes be *bright and cheerful*, and other times, it can be *through tear-filled eyes knowing the deep and sweet satisfaction found in Christ*.

The world cannot offer you this *true and everlasting joy* that no one can ever take from you.

**Christ can and He does.**

John writes these things to us *so that we may know that the fullness of joy is found in the gospel of Jesus Christ*.

*Turn your eyes upon Jesus. Look full in His wonderful face. And the things of earth will grow strangely dim, in the light of His glory and grace.*