

THE LIGHT OF LIFE

The First Letter of John

I first studied the first letter of St John (today's epistle) in 1980, the year before I went up to St John's college.

My bishop, Peter Mann, wanted me to do a unit of my Bachelor of Divinity as a "test of vocation".

The unit included the first principals of Greek, including the translation of this first letter of John.

Looking back on my records, I note that I have never in the ensuing 40 years preached from today's passage - perhaps that 1980 experience left me sub-consciously traumatized!

Today's five short verses contain an enormous amount of content.

I'm going to focus mainly on the fifth verse, but let's just see how St John, whose saints' day it is today, begins his letter.

In the first two verses he dives straight in:

***"We declare to you what was from the beginning -
- what we have heard,
- what we have seen with our eyes,
- what we have looked at and touched with our hands."***

(1 John 1:1f).

John is emphatic; what he is saying is not heresay, some second hand fable.

This is truth from the horse's mouth, from someone who heard it, saw it with his own eyes, and even touched with his own hands.

And it is ***"concerning The Word Of Life***

***- this Life was revealed
- and we have seen it and testify to it
- and declare to you the eternal Life that was with the Father and was revealed to us."*** (1John 1:2).

We hear a lot about the Word; John's gospel, chapter 1 is a frequent Christmas reading - you remember,

And so it is here in the first letter of John.

The word of life is none other than Jesus Christ.

And John's witness to The Word of life has a twofold purpose:

- Firstly, it is so ***"you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with his son Jesus Christ,"*** (1John 1:3).

This word 'fellowship' is interesting.

In its secular Greek context it means something like having a share in.

So if I have fellowship with you it means that you are involved in my life and I am involved in yours.

In human relationship terms perhaps the closest form of fellowship would be a marriage, where the lives of both husband and wife are intimately intertwined. So, what John is saying is that he is telling us about The Word of life precisely so that we may be in fellowship - involved with - God the Father and his Son Jesus Christ.

So, you see, from John's point of view, there could be nothing more important, nothing more life-giving than proclaiming the Jesus who so dramatically transformed John's young life all those years ago.

Now we come to John's second purpose.

It is ***"so our joy may be complete."***, (1 John 1:4).

John's life of witness to Jesus was founded on the conviction that it was in everyone's best interest to come to know Jesus like he did.

Only then would he be truly fulfilled.

Thus John says that he declares to them the truth about The Word Of Life so that there may be fellowship between them, John, Jesus and God the Father which is necessary for his joy to be complete.

And that brings us to verse 5 - my particular focus today.

“This is the message we have heard from, him and proclaim to you, that God is light and in him there is no darkness at all.” (1John 1:5).

Light is an absolutely primary symbol in biblical revelation.

God’s very first reported action was to say, ***“Let there be light”***, (Gen. 1:3).

It’s like God’s very existence is being revealed in this first act of creation.

It’s the act by which we can see everything else and know of God’s creative power.

Much later, in John’s gospel we see this light symbol being used again as Jesus describes himself: ***“I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life.”*** (John *:12).

Now in Jesus is not of course speaking about light-bulb sort of light; nor infra-red or ultra-violet light.

He is speaking about the ***“light of life”*** ; that is, the illumination which allows us to see the world about us as God sees it.

Now, this ***“light of life”*** is like other light in that it shines in all directions, allowing us to see things in all directions from a godly perspective.

So, this light shines up, so we can see God - God’s character, God’s love and God’s will.

This light shines in, so we can see into our own being and see ourselves as God sees us - for both good and evil.

And this light shines out so we can see the world with eyes of God - we can see the world which needs physical healing and the world which cries out for justice.

Jesus Christ, "***the light of life***" truly bathes all of life in a godly light, so those attuned to this light can see beauty and ugliness, righteousness and sin, justice and injustice just as God sees them - and will have the will to do what needs to be done.

This is the time of year for New Year's resolutions.

I invite you to make your New Year's resolutions in the light of Christ - The Light Of Life; to ask yourself what you might resolve to do that will mean your life will be more closely lived in the light of Christ in 2021.

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