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Letters to Dear Children, Part 1

A Sensory Faith

Text: 1 John 1:1-4

John has a great appreciation for history. Several times in this epistle, I will point out how often John refers to “that which was from the beginning”. For John, the key to going forward is to appreciate looking backwards. For John, the rearview mirror is as important as the windshield.

We just finished a look at selected passages in the book of Job. Job said, in the final chapter of that book, that at one time he had *heard* of God but now his eyes *saw* God. John is like Job in that he is processing his faith through his senses. He is seeing, hearing, touching. John always tells us why he’s writing. In the Gospel of John, the “why” is in 20:31.

*But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name.* (John 20:31)

In the Revelation, John placed the “why” at the front end of the book:

 *Write the things which you have seen, and the things which are, and the things which will take place after this.* (Revelation 1:19)

Here in 1 John, the “why” is in the prologue. John is compelled to write this general epistle (not addressed to a particular church in a particular city) because he has experienced something on a deep level. If he had simply mused on a truth or had a fleeting thought, he might not have written. However, John *heard* something, *saw* something, *handled* something.

What, exactly, is it that has motivated John’s writing and John’s declaration? Whatever it is, it will not be kept hidden. The “it” is the new life which Jesus offers. John calls it

* The Word of life (1d)
* The life (2a)
* That eternal life which was with the Father (2b)

Here is where we might observe similarities between this epistle and the gospel which John wrote.

In John 1:4, John speaks of Christ as the One in whom is life and that life was the light of humanity.

Both the gospel and this epistle will speak of pairs of opposites:

light and darkness, life and death, true and false. John will press the point that it is possible to entertain these realities as concepts only. John says, however, that it is our privilege to enter in, to fellowship with the light, the life, the Word. John is advocating two levels of *koinonia* here. That Greek word which means *fellowship* is a picturesque word. *Koinonia* is that sweet interaction which marks a community. It is the binding agent that is visible in a group of people that are committed to each other. On the first level, John invites his readers into fellowship on a human level. On the second level, John pushes for koinonia, fellowship, with the son of God, Jesus. John says that fellowship with Jesus forms the foundation of his fellowship with these fellow Christians (3).

Until we understand this truth, our joy is incomplete. Until we understand the difference between being religious and knowing Jesus, we have a superficial faith. John says to us all, “Get in there. See, hear, touch. Don’t look at this new life from a safe distance. Rather, get all up in there”. In verse 1, John urges us, for instance, to see and then *really* see; to see and then gaze upon, stare at! We ought not to simply see with the physical eye but ought to take the faith in, with the spiritual eye. This is the same Greek word(*theaomai*) John uses in John 1:14- we *beheld* his glory.

**Illus.**

I like to cook. I never cook with plastic gloves on. I never put a clothes pin on my nose when I’m cooking. I want to *smell* the sauce that I’m making.

I want to *feel* the texture of the radishes when I cut them up for a salad. I want to *feel* the garbanzo beans when I make hummus. Sometimes I deliberately toss a salad by hand rather than use tongs. I want to engage with the food on a sensory level.

You who are serious about Jesus, take off those sterilized plastic gloves. Enter in. See Him, hear Him, touch Him. Hear the psalmist: Oh, *taste* and *see* that the Lord is good (Psalm 34:8).

This sensory faith is not to be privatized. There is a great temptation to enjoy one’s faith by internalizing it and making all of life center on you and Jesus. Listen to some of our songs:

1. “And He walks with me and He talks with me and He tells me I am His own...”
2. “Like a rose trampled on the ground, you took the fall and thought of me above all.”

Listen to the phrase we use to motivate ourselves:

3. “If it is to be, it’s up to me.”

For John, there was no getting the good feelings and tasting and seeing that the Lord is good, to the exclusion of sharing that faith and that experience with others. John cites that faith as the basis of his proclamation (v. 2). There is the *sensory* life and there is the *declarative* life. In both verses 2 and 3, John writes about declaring. He will only *declare* what he has *experienced*. When we have begun knowing Christ on a sensory level, we will have a different verbal witness. In life, we are always eager to talk about what we’ve experienced: a trip, a meal, the birth of a child. When we experience Jesus on an intimate level, we will declare it(3a).

Consider with me, as I close, the primacy of proximity. There is a great difference between being in the vicinity of something and being up close to it.

John argues for these first century believers to be *close* to Jesus. I want that for us as well.

Amen