

The Real Jesus — Study Guide

A Study of 1 John 1:1–4

Big Idea

Salvation depends on believing in the *real* Jesus, not a counterfeit one. Since ancient times, false ideas about Christ have circulated — and John’s prologue exists to correct the errors of his day and anchor the church in the truth about who Jesus really is.

Key verse: “*There is salvation in no other name.*” (Acts 4:12)

Opening Discussion

1. Why does *which* Jesus we believe in matter for salvation, not just *that* we believe in “Jesus”?
 2. Name some modern examples of a distorted or repackaged “Jesus” (prosperity gospel, cults, cultural versions). What makes each one attractive, and what makes it false?
 3. Jesus warned that false christs would arise “to deceive, if possible, even the elect” (Matt. 24:23–24). What does that warning suggest about how convincing counterfeit versions of Jesus can be?
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Background: The Problem John Was Addressing

- First-century false teachers denied Jesus’ full humanity, treating physical matter as inherently corrupt — so Jesus, they argued, could not have been truly flesh and blood (an early form of Gnosticism).
- This wasn’t a minor disagreement — it struck at the heart of the gospel, since Jesus’ real suffering and death are what accomplish salvation.
- John writes to refute this error and reestablish clarity about “the Word of Life.”

Discussion: Why would denying Jesus' physical humanity undercut the entire message of salvation?

Four Affirmations About the Real Jesus

John's opening verses make four claims about Christ. Each is explored below with the relevant text, explanation, and questions for reflection or group discussion.

1. He Is Eternal

"What was from the beginning..." (1 John 1:1) "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." (John 1:1)

- Jesus' humanity has a starting point (the incarnation); His deity does not.
- The Greek term for "with" (*pros*) suggests a face-to-face relationship — Jesus existed eternally alongside the Father before anything was created.
- This is affirmed elsewhere: Jesus' prayer in John 17:5 ("the glory which I had with You before the world was") and Proverbs 8:22–23, understood as pointing to Christ's eternal existence.
- Because Jesus is fully God, He has the authority to forgive sins — something only God can do.

Questions:

- Why does Jesus' eternal, divine nature matter for His ability to save us?
 - How does John 1:1, 14:9, and Colossians 2:9 work together to establish that Jesus is *fully* God, not a lesser or created being?
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2. He Is Historical

"...and the life was manifested, and we have seen and bear witness..." (1 John 1:2–3)

- The Gospel is rooted in real time and space — not myth, symbol, or spiritual metaphor.
- The Greek word for "manifested" (*phaneroo*) means to make visible, clear, and seen. Jesus' physical presence was public and undeniable.
- John writes decades after the events, as the last living apostolic eyewitness,

precisely because a rival, unhistorical version of Jesus was gaining ground.

Questions:

- Why does it matter that Christianity is grounded in verifiable history rather than private spiritual insight?
 - How would you respond to someone who claims Jesus was a “spiritual idea” rather than a historical person?
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3. He Is Relational (Witnessed and Verified)

“...what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have beheld and touched with our hands...” (1:1–3)

- John stacks up sensory testimony — hearing, seeing, touching — as courtroom-style evidence for Jesus’ physical reality.
- Examples woven through the sermon: the disciples hearing Jesus’ voice on the water (Mark 6:49–50), the woman with the issue of blood touching Him, Jesus touching the blind and deaf to heal them, His body being physically nailed to the cross, and the risen Christ inviting Thomas and the disciples to touch Him (Luke 24:39).
- First-hand testimony from multiple witnesses carries evidentiary weight — this is not secondhand theory but eyewitness account.

Questions:

- Why does John emphasize multiple senses (hearing, seeing, touching) rather than just one?
 - How does eyewitness testimony function differently than “spiritual” or mystical claims to knowledge?
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4. He Is Experiential (Leads to Fellowship and Joy)

“What we have seen and heard we proclaim to you also, so that you may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ.” (1 John 1:3) “And these things we are writing, so that our joy may be made complete.” (1 John 1:4)

- The purpose of proclaiming Jesus isn’t abstract theology — it’s **fellowship** (*koinonia*): participation and partnership with God through Christ.

- This contrasts with the Gnostic goal of secret “enlightenment.” The gospel’s goal is relational union with God, not private knowledge.
- That fellowship produces real, overflowing **joy** — not merely relief from judgment, but a living relationship with God through Christ.

Questions:

- How is biblical “fellowship” (koinonia) different from just having correct information about Jesus?
- Where do you see joy (or the lack of it) connected to how vividly you grasp the truth about who Jesus is?

Summary Table

Affirmation	Core Truth	Key Text
Eternal	Jesus existed with the Father before time	John 1:1; 17:5; Prov. 8:22–23
Historical	Jesus lived in real time and space	1 John 1:2–3
Relational	Jesus was seen, heard, and touched by witnesses	1 John 1:1–3; Luke 24:39
Experiential	Knowing Jesus produces fellowship and joy	1 John 1:3–4; John 15:11

Closing Reflection

“The real Jesus is necessary to salvation. He is fully God and fully man... And our fellowship is the ground for Christian joy.”

- Which of the four affirmations is most challenged by ideas you commonly encounter today?
- What would change in your daily walk with Christ if you meditated more on His eternal, historical, and relational reality?
- Spend a few minutes in prayer thanking God for the *real* Jesus — fully God, fully man, who suffered, died, rose, and now offers real fellowship with Him.

Based on a study of 1 John 1:1–4, “The Real Jesus.”