

Life Manifest: Counting the Truth of the Gospel

Bible Verses Mentioned: 1 John 1:1–2, Genesis 2:7, Genesis 5, John 1:1, Revelation 1:4–8

Lord, be with you. Father, we thank You for the gift of Your Word. I pray that You would open the eyes of our heart, that we may see You, Jesus, more clearly, and that we may understand what it means to walk in Your truth and in the freedom of Christ. We pray this in Your Holy Name, Jesus. Amen. Good morning. Good morning. Got lots of babies in here today. I love it. I love it.

So we're starting a new sermon series today on the book of 1 John asking what does it mean for us as Christians to walk in truth? What does it mean for us to walk in love and holiness? And 1 John, I love it. It's a great book of the Bible. It's also one of those books I like to call one of those crackle books. Like if you were to open first John, your Bible would probably go because you've probably read it so rarely. It's kind of tucked back in there.

But I promise you it's great. Let me give you a little context. First John, it was written by no surprise the apostle John. John was one of the 12 son of Zebedee brother of James and he was 50%. He was a he has 50% of the sons of thunder. When you first meet him in Scripture, he is referred to as one of the sons of thunder, which means we don't think about John this way because he's the God so loved the world guy.

But he had a short fuse. It's the same guy that when the apostles were rejected at the Samaritan village, he turned to Jesus and said, "Hey, is it cool if we call down fire on them to consume them?" And Jesus is like, "Okay, no, we're not doing that today." No surprise, John was the one who wrote the gospel of John, 1 John, 2 John, 3rd John. He also wrote the book of Revelation. If John was a musician, 1 John would be his second album.

And like every great second album, it draws on elements of the first album, but then takes them in a new direction to kind of develop and mature the listener. And what what John is doing here is just that he's taking us in a new direction. So what's happening? He lives in Ephesus at this point and he's riding into a church that has gone through this big church split. Apparently, we don't know all the details, but apparently there's a group of people in this church that said we can do whatever we want.

We can walk in the darkness, as John said, they can walk in whatever sin that was. And we can still claim that we have fellowship with God and that we're okay. And John said, no, that's not the way this works. It's apparently it created a lot of rifts and they had left the church and what John is doing is he's writing this book to unpack for the church to get to correct the ship and get it back on track and he's getting people refocused on the truth of the gospel.

So what's the core truth that John is trying to dial in for these people and for us today and we're going to unpack that looking at first John it says in the first verse he tells us he says that which was from the beginning that which we have heard that which we saw with our eyes that we looked upon and we touched with our hands concerning the word of life. The life was made manifest and we have seen it to testify and to proclaim to you the eternal life.

Now here's a pro tip.

If you read the Bible and you want to understand what any piece of scripture is about Count the number of times a word is used because they didn't have a lot of paper back in those days so they really used an economy of words and if you saw a word that was repeated or a phrase that was repeated That's the author trying to drive something home he's trying to tell you what he's trying to the point he's trying to make and in the first two verses that we just read the word life

life is mentioned three times says the word of life life made manifest eternal life this is a huge theme for John now we sat in church a lot and we hear phrases like eternal life and life manifest a lot so we kind of read over that but I really want us to slow our roll a little bit because it's really important we understand that so how do we know what John is trying to talk about here we look for more clues and what he says in verse one how does he begin the whole thing he says that which was from the beginning does that sound familiar?

It's how he starts the gospel of John but it's also how God started the entirety of Scripture He's stealing language from Genesis 1:1 and he's doing that he's sending up a flare and what he's saying is hey if you're going to think about if you want to understand how we're talking about this this life here you need to look at it through the lens of Genesis through the creation story So what's it say I love this story

in the beginning or literally translated before the beginning began the living word Jesus who was with God who was God and what Colossians says is it was by him and it was through Jesus that all things were made and what that means is at creation the voice we hear at the beginning the voice we hear speaking into the void that shatters the

emptiness it's the voice of the pre-incarnate Jesus realized that and on each consecutive day Jesus speaks and he calls something new into being he's in every day each consecutive day everything that he creates becomes more glorious it becomes more intricate it becomes more grandiose he goes from light to stars to earth to sea to fish to animals until day six What's he make on day six us and God takes a knee and he scoops up the ground and he fashions man in his hand and Genesis 2:7 says what God breathed into the nostrils the breath of what?

Life, the ruach, the Spirit and He made man in His image. See, this divine life, it's what John calls in his gospel. He says it's the light of men. That we, humanity, it's what tethers us to God. It's so important that it illuminated our hearts. It's that life in us. It gives us our sense of purpose.

It gives me my sense, our sense of identity. It gives us our sense of meaning, our sense of belonging, our sense of mission, our sense of completion, our sense of value, everything that matters to us is a product of this life of God that we got in the beginning is a product of our relationship with God. You see how important this is? And this God breathed life.

It was so important and God knew that he said, hey, we've got to protect this So he tells Adam and Eve and he gives them one one rule He says look enjoy this this this spirit of life in the garden I've given you and all the trees of the garden are yours to eat especially this tree of life but there's one tree there's one tree Don't touch it it's the tree of the knowledge of good and evil

and he says to them if you eat this tree you will surely die So you know the story in comes the serpent and the serpent who hated God he hated his plan and therefore he hated us as God's image bearers and he and he tells Adam and Eve the oldest lie in the world It's a lie that we still hear today and we will still tell ourselves today God doesn't have your best

interest in mind Did God really say not to do that really because I know how you can not just meet your own needs but I know how you can determine what those needs are better than God ever will and that's the lie and they believed it and they aided the tree and sin enters the world It was kind of a weird story because God said if you eat of this tree

you surely die But Adam lived to like 950 or something like that didn't he See when sin severed the connection between God and man the result the death they died it was a spiritual death and that life that light inside of Adam that defined him that defined Eve that gave him their sense of purpose identity it went dark

It went out and now it was up to them to use this newfound knowledge of good and evil to reanimate their hearts It was on them to turn to the things of this world and say to the things of this world and to use them to bring them their sense of purpose their sense of belonging their sense of meaning their sense of completion their sense of value they were dead men walking trying to create life How did that go?

Not well. Why? Because they couldn't produce life they were never meant to. Now why does that matter to us?

Because in Genesis 5 it says just as God had made Adam in his image Adam had a son and his name was Seth and the Scripture says that Seth was born in the image of Adam fallen spiritually dead and this was the spiritual DNA that was passed on for generation to generation to generation to us That's the spiritual DNA that we're born with the darkness Born into the death of sin and we're left to try and bring resolution to our hearts to use our knowledge of good and evil through work or through pleasure or through accomplishment and guess what?

It didn't work for Adam who walked with God in the cool of the day and I promise you it hasn't worked for us look around us look at our world the turmoil the brokenness all a product of these monuments to the life and legacy in our own image But thank God who thank God we live in a very different part of the story that Jesus came this Jesus who spoke all things into being he came and what does the Apostle John write in his gospel in him was life and that life was what it was the light of men and when he appeared We were like moths to a flame people who had eyes to see her ears to hear us oh home the thing for which I was created has finally come life manifest finally a path home.

Do you see why this matters? It's not just about going to heaven though it is it's so much more and the message of the cross we just celebrated this at Easter when Jesus died on the cross he absorbed our sin and all the ways that we used our knowledge of good and evil to generate life this side of heaven and he brought it to the grave with him and it will never rise again but he did and we rise with him and by his resurrection the free gift of God is eternal life in Jesus our Lord.

We are reanimated Jesus was the second Adam who makes us new creations with new meaning, a new identity, a new sense of purpose. Amen. And so what John in first John is saying here, he's saying growing as a Christian for us to mature, to develop in this truth.

It requires two things to continually, continually, not just once, but to continually remind ourselves of this new life we've been given in Christ and to continually let us see the death we create when we try to do it on our own. See, John knew two things. He says, I can't see my need for life in Christ unless I see the death I create on my own.

And the flip side, I can't see the death I create on my own unless I'm holding it up against the backdrop of new life. The problem is this I love the idea of embracing the life of Christ. But I'll be honest, I can't always see where I get it wrong. I'm either not willing to look at myself or I can't see myself when I do. Sure, others can tell me. My kids love to tell me.

Probably tell you too, so don't ask them. Seeing your own sin is like trying to smell your own breath. You just can't do it. Because you're not offensive to you. You're nuanced. Oh, if you only understood me more. And we need to have it reflected back to us. I have a friend of mine who was working at a bank and he was he was became a teller there.

And one of the main jobs they do for the tellers there is they teach them how to identify counterfeit money and you think how do you identify counterfeit money? You study what counterfeit money looks like. No. What they did is they took them and they put them in a room and they gave them a stack of hundred dollar bills of real \$100 bills and they said count it. So he goes into the room and begins to count one, two, three, four, five, six. Great. Comes back. It says great, do it again.

They give him another stack. One, two, three. This goes on and on. He does it five or six times until they took a counterfeit \$100 bill and they stuck it right in the middle of the pile. And he begins to count one, two, three, four, until he comes to the counterfeit. He's so familiar with what's true. He's so familiar with the real thing that when he gets to the counterfeit, guess what? It pops and you can't miss it. That's not real.

That's not consistent with the truth. You see, it's good. It's a good thing to try to understand the ways that we try to counterfeit life. The toxic things in this world that we use to try and bring life or how about the good things in this world like marriage or our jobs or whatever the good things in this world that we ask them to do things for us that they can never do to create life.

The truth of it is most of the time we can't see it. We can't understand what's fake about ourselves by studying what's fake and John is saying our first order is to focus on what's true and God has given us a stack of real currency of truth in his word and we open the scriptures and we sit in church and we reflect on he calls us to count each of these truths one by one. I am saved by God's grace and God's grace alone.

I am all my sins past, present and future are forgiven. I have been made alive in Christ. Nothing can snatch me from the palm of my hand. Great, count it again. I do it over and over again. When someone slips that counterfeit in, it begins to pop. I am saved by God's grace, not my own. All my sins past, present, and future are forgiven. I have been made alive in Christ. God will approve of me as long as I don't continue screwing up my life. What? But that's not true.

God, that's a counterfeit. And see, the only way I would see that, I know that God approves of me because of the goodness of Christ, not my goodness. And I study God's Word and it begins to pop. See, the only way we can be set free from the chains of this life is the truth of the gospel. But we can't be exposed to the truth of the gospel without being exposed to the truth of ourselves. And when that happens by God's grace, I'm driven more deeply to Christ.

We learn the truth of God. He reveals the truth of ourselves. We cling more deeply to the cross. We rinse and repeat. This is the invitation in 1 John, and this is the invitation of Christ. Amen.