

‘Living in the Light’

A teaching series in 1 John by Rev. Robert Griffith

Part 1: Encountering the Eternal

“That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched—this we proclaim concerning the Word of life. The life appeared; we have seen it and testify to it, and we proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and has appeared to us. We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ.” (1 John 1:1-3)

Sometimes life seems unreal. All of us have had days where we felt like we were in a fog. We may have felt like we were in a dream world. At those times nothing seems real. How do we know what’s real anyway? How do we know that this is not all a dream? People have been asking these kinds of questions for years. Perhaps you have played these kind of mind games yourself. Everyone wants to believe that they know what is real, but often we doubt our own perception of reality.

This is compounded by the fact that we live in an age of doubt. Scepticism, speculation, and differing opinions all characterize our age. We live in a time where it’s hard to know what to believe. It’s hard to know what is true, what is real.

Now, this is actually nothing new. In every age throughout time there have been the sceptics, doubters, speculators, philosophers, and debaters of opinions. Perhaps in our age we have refined it a bit with the appearance of the television talk show and social media where totally ignorant people can share their preposterous opinions and where gullible viewers or readers believe them! We should not be surprised that people have no idea what is real.

But even in the day in which John wrote this letter, opinions concerning reality abounded. First John was written in a climate of uncertainty. Sceptics, then as now, had their theories about God. John wanted to share what he had experienced personally. He wanted to share what was real. John, and others like him, had experienced the ultimate reality of God. This was not just a theory to him. This was a certainty. He had encountered the eternal.

Many people live their entire lives without thinking very much about unseen realities. A lot of people are more concerned with the material world than the spiritual world. And when they do begin to think about the spiritual realm they are often easily duped by the so-called psychics, who are in fact charlatans pretending to be psychics in order to take your money. Because most people have no knowledge and experience of the true eternal God, they are easy prey for many of the new age gurus who are ready and waiting to help them part with their money in exchange for the meaning of life!

We need to know what is actually real. We need a personal encounter with the eternal and a personal experience of the life of God. What about you? Have you encountered the eternal? Have you experienced the life of God?

Consider with me the realities that John puts forth in the opening three verses of this letter.

Reality #1 – God is there!

It is interesting that there is no introduction to this letter. John does not start with a greeting, or even an explanation of who is writing the letter. It seems as if he is more interested in getting right to the point. He does not want to waste any time with introductions. He has something to say and he wants to say it. He has a message about the God who is there. In the very first verse he speaks of that which was from the beginning. He invites us to look back to a beginning. But what beginning?

We are all familiar with beginnings. All of us have experienced many beginnings. We may remember when we began school. We remember beginning high school, beginning university, beginning our first job, beginning our career, beginning our family, beginning our retirement (or counting the days until we do). These are all significant beginnings.

But I have not yet mentioned two of the most important beginnings. There was the moment when we began to live in the world outside our mother. We call this birth. That is the second most important beginning. The most important beginning was the time when we began our relationship with Jesus. We call that the new birth.

You might be wondering why I consider our first birth to be the second most important beginning in our lives. You may argue that unless the first birth happened the second birth could not have happened. And you would be right. But I contend that without the second birth the first birth is a tragedy. You see, the Bible teaches that there are two possible births and two possible deaths. Everyone experiences the first birth – the natural birth. Some experience the second birth – the spiritual rebirth. When the Scriptures speak of the first death they are referring to physical death. Unless Jesus comes, everyone will experience this death. But when the Scriptures speak of the second death they are speaking of the eternal death. And some will experience this death as well.

But we have only talked about beginnings that we experience. Think back past all other beginnings to the ultimate beginning. This is the time when no other beginning had ever taken place. This is the moment of the beginning of all things. Some scientists are calling this the Big Bang. But whatever view you hold, this is the time when the beginning of what we know as reality happened. If we could somehow go back to that point of time, we would find that something was already there!

Something preceded the ultimate beginning! Indeed, Someone was there before the beginning! This is the person to whom John points. This is the Eternal One. He is the one spoken of in Genesis 1:1 where it says "*In the beginning God . . .*" John picks up on this theme in his Gospel, where the first words are "*In the beginning was the Word.*" And now he speaks of that which was from the very beginning.

In other words, before anything else was, God was. God is the Eternal One. God is the Prime Mover. God is the Cause of all beginnings. God is the ultimate reality behind all reality. This is really the message of all Scripture. God is there. God is real. Before anything else existed, God is!

Reality #2 – His life has been experienced!

It is not enough to know, however, that God is there. The questions immediately jumps to mind – Can we make contact with this God? Can we experience this God, or is this God merely an impersonal force in the universe? Is He simply the Prime Mover or First Cause? Did He simply begin everything and leave? Or is He involved with His creation in a personal way? John answers these questions immediately. His answer tells us that His life has been experienced. God has revealed Himself to us and people have actually experienced God.

Listen to what John says:

"That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched – this we proclaim concerning the word of life."

John is talking about something they had personally heard, seen, looked at, and touched. Of course, he is referring to the Lord Jesus Christ. The message that John was proclaiming was the message of Jesus Christ. The *Word of life* is the message of the living Word of God, Jesus Christ. And they had personally experienced Jesus Christ.

When John says in verse two that the life appeared, we are reminded of what he wrote in his Gospel where he said that *"The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us."* (John 1:14) He goes on to say that *"We have seen it and testified to it, and we proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and has appeared to us."* In other words, God has manifested Himself in the person of Jesus Christ.

Jesus made this abundantly clear when He was talking with His disciples one day about the Father. We read about it in John 14:9-10. Jesus said, *"Don't you know me, Phillip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father'? Don't you believe that I am in the Father, and that the Father is in me?"*

Jesus appeared; they saw Him, they experienced His life, day and night for three years. God, in Christ was revealed and they experienced Him personally.

Reality #3 – You can experience His life too!

This brings us to the essence of his message. If God is there and He has been experienced by others, then you can experience His life too. John goes on to say, *"We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son, Jesus Christ."* In other words, God has not merely given this experience to a few. He intends that many experience the reality of new life.

Notice that this new life is found in a relationship. Christianity is not a religion. In our context, the true definition of religion is: *'A unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, that is to say things set apart and forbidden - beliefs and practices which unite into one single moral community called a church, all those who adhere to them.'* In a religion you try to relate to God through a set of pre-determined rules, beliefs and doctrine.

That is exactly what the Pharisees had been doing and enforcing when Jesus showed up and He turned all that on its head, because God hates religion and refuses to relate to us through any code of practice.

Christianity is a relationship with the living God through Jesus Christ. John describes it by using the word *fellowship*. Experiencing God brings us into fellowship on two levels. We enter into a vertical fellowship with God Himself and into a horizontal fellowship with other believers.

John indicates that those who receive this gospel message would have fellowship with us, that is, have fellowship with God's people. And he indicates that their fellowship is with the Father and with His Son, Jesus Christ. Christianity is about entering into a relationship with God and with God's people. Christianity is about experiencing relationships in the eternal Kingdom of God.

Have you encountered the eternal? Are you really experiencing the life of God? You see, the eternal is real and has been experienced by others and you can experience it too! But how do you do that?

Well, the first thing you need to do is look away from yourself and this material world. Look towards the spiritual realm, the Kingdom of God. Recognize that God is there. God is real. Even we Christians sometimes diminish the reality of God's presence. We need to have our sense of the real presence of God restored.

Someone has said that when you say to an older Christian that "Jesus is coming" he wants to debate your theory of the end times, but when you say to a new believer "Jesus is coming" he immediately looks around to see where. A new believer has an expectation of God's presence. Why do we lose that over time? Jesus didn't say, "When two or three are gathering in my name as young disciples only, then I will be in their midst." There was no time-frame on that promise. Jesus promised to manifest the real presence of God in our midst as we gather in His name! We need to cultivate that expectation of God's presence. It should be what gets us out of bed on Sundays as we can't wait to get to Worship and meet God in the fellowship of His people.

We should have the same motivation every day, in fact. As soon as we open our eyes to greet a new day, there should be an expectation of how we might encounter God's presence in the activities of the day ahead. We need to expect to experience the presence of the living God. We need to be seeking Him. God promised us way back in Jeremiah 29:13, *"You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart."*

The next thing we need to do is commit our lives to knowing God. We must focus on the eternal if we are going to experience God. As Paul encouraged the Colossians, we need to set out minds of things above, not on earthly things. (Col. 3:2). God must become our pursuit in life. It is not enough simply to be born again. We must live our lives in Christ, through Christ and for Christ. We must commit ourselves to do the things that bring us into a closer and more intimate fellowship with Him.

And finally, we must burn the bridges behind us. True commitment to Christ means that we never turn back. We must let go of all things which pull us down and keep us from moving forward with our whole hearts. We must lay our life at His feet if we are going to experience the eternal life which He has to offer. Let go all the doubts, fear and shame from past failings and sin - ours and others. Let go of those experiences of disappointment, betrayal and abandonment.

Let go of those times when you feel God let you down, when it was really your expectations of God which let you down. Look forward to embrace God's mercies which are new every morning. Look forward and listen for God's word to you today. Yesterday has gone, it was whatever it was, but it has gone. Today is the day when you can make choices to step towards God and His love .. or you can step away.

I want to leave you with the two most important questions you should face honestly at the end of any teaching.

1. What has God revealed to you today through this sermon?
2. How then shall you live, this day forward, in light of that revelation?

Let those who have ears to hear, listen to what the Spirit is saying to us today. Amen.