

Introducing: Real Life

There is a legend that the Spanish explorer Ponce de Leon searched for the fountain of youth when in America. This was supposed to be a fountain of water which, if drunk, would halt old age and restore youth. He never found the fountain, though many cultures have legends about waters which will bring dead fish back to life, restore dead plants and even restore youth to people who drink them.

There's no truth to those legends, because the curse of death is upon all men, as all have sinned. But the presence of the legends shows that people want life. They desire life, and wish they could have more of it. And yet, so few people know what life is actually for. So few know what it is supposed to be about.

The Bible reveals what life is really for – in fact, it's the closest you'll get to a real fountain of youth, because it's all about life. The book of 1 John is about finding real life, and knowing what it looks like when you have it. You could subtitle this book: Signs of Life.

That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, concerning the Word of life – the life was manifested, and we have seen, and bear witness, and declare to you that eternal life which was with the Father and was manifested to us – that which we have seen and heard we declare to you, that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ. And these things we write to you that your joy may be full.

1 John 1:1-4

These four verses serve as an introduction to the whole book. John is telling us what he's *going* to tell us. He is summarising the whole book, in which John declares something to his readers – something he has witnessed and experienced – so that we might fellowship with him and have fullness of joy.

And what is the thing John is declaring? Verse 2 tells us. He is declaring the eternal life that was with the Father. In verse 1, he is declaring the Word of Life. This book will be a description of what it looks like if you know and possess such life. You can use this book the way you use medical books which describe symptoms of a sickness. This book describes the signs of eternal life:

These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life, and that you may continue to believe in the name of the Son of God.

1 John 5:13

So here in these introductory verses, John is going to tell us three things about this eternal life: that this life is a revealed person, that this life is a person who can be known and experienced, and that this life is a person who can be shared.

I. Real Life is a Person

This life that John speaks about is not some animating force, not some cosmic energy, not some impersonal thing which binds us all. It is none other than Jesus Christ Himself. How do we know that this life is a Person? Well, there are three things in this passage that tell us that John means that eternal life is the Person of Jesus Christ.

The first is that He calls this life the “Word of Life” in verse 1. The only other place where we read of someone called the Word is in the Gospel of John, written by the same man.

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made. In Him was life, and the life was the light of men.

John 1:1-4

Who is this Word? Verse 14 tells us: *"And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth"* (**John 1:14**). The only begotten of the Father is the Son, Jesus Christ. In fact, in the book of Revelation, also written by John, Jesus Christ is pictured coming back to earth, and it says of Him: *"He was clothed with a robe dipped in blood, and His name is called The Word of God"* (**Revelation 19:13**).

Notice too the second reason we know John is talking about Jesus: He says that the Word was from the beginning: *"In the beginning was the Word"* (**John 1:1**) and *"That which was from the beginning"* (**1 John 1:1**). Only one person who has ever walked the earth, who was physically heard, physically seen and physically touched, was claimed to be from the beginning: Jesus Christ.

When Jesus spoke with the Jews, He told them something which caused them to try to stone Him: *"Jesus said to them, 'Most assuredly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I AM'"* (**John 8:58**). When Jesus prayed His high priestly prayer that the disciples heard, one of the things He prayed was: *"And now, O Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with You before the world was..."* (**John 17:5**).

The third reason is this: John says that this eternal life **'was with the Father.'** Remember that **John 1:1** says, *"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God."* So there are three reasons for believing John is speaking about Jesus in our key passage: The Word refers to Jesus, only Jesus existed from the beginning, and only Jesus was with the Father.

It's clear that John is telling us this life is not an impersonal force, not simply something mysterious. John is telling us that the source and the sustainer of true, real life is a Person.

Nowt his might sound strange to you. You might be thinking, obviously a person must **have** life to be a person. But how could any person **be the life**? Well, the answer is, if the source of all life is actually a Person, then that Person is the Life. He is the source of our life, he is the goal of our life. He is the spring from which our life comes, He is the ocean into which our life flows.

You can see this from a list of Scriptures:

- *In Him was life, and the life was the light of men.* (**John 1:4**)
- *For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.* (**John 3:16**)
- *For as the Father raises the dead and gives life to them, even so the Son gives life to whom He wills.* (**John 5:21**)
- *And Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life. He who comes to Me shall never hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst."* (**John 6:35**)
- *The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly.* (**John 10:10**)
- *Jesus said to him, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me."* (**John 14:6**)
- *And we know that the Son of God has come and has given us an understanding, that we may know Him who is true; and we are in Him who is true, in His Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God and*

eternal life. (1 John 5:20)

Now this is critically important for us to understand. Life is not found in things. Real life is not found in sensual activities. Real life is not found in being spiritual. Real life is not found in religion. Real life is centred and concentrated and focused on a Person – the Person of our Lord Jesus Christ. This is completely opposite to what we would think.

It's as if, when we have come to life, we have been asking the wrong questions, and giving the wrong answers. Like someone who has been studying the wrong subject. We're expecting the answers to be numbers, and they turn out to be colours. We're expecting the questions to be about grammar, and the question turns out to be about geography.

We're looking in the wrong place, for the wrong thing. We're hunting around Antarctica looking for a torch, hoping it will warm us up. We're looking around the Sahara desert for a glass bottle, hoping it will quench our thirst. We think we know what life is about, and where to find it. And then God comes to us and says, in fact, you haven't even been alive up to the point of knowing my Son. You have thought you were alive, but you weren't. You thought you knew life, but you were playing in the paddling pool, when my Son is the Pacific Ocean.

Real Life is a Person. Have you realised that yet? Have you been looking for things or activities instead of a Person? Maybe you are still hoping to find life in things, in fame, fortune, success, power, pleasure, morality, respectability. You will find that those things become like candy floss which melts to nothing once it is on your mouth. Like a mirage which promises water and gives none.

What about you, believer in Christ? Have you drifted from the source of your own life. Paul said, I'm crucified with Christ, nevertheless I live, yet not I, but Christ lives in me, and the life I now live, I live by faith in the Son of God.

Well, the fact that life is centred on a Person doesn't help us much unless there is a way to access that Person. So John's message is not merely that real life is a person. He also wants you to know that:

II. Real Life is a Person Who Can Be Known

John wants you to know that not only is this life a Person, but it is a Person who was known to John. John repeats emphatically that this life was revealed, and entered into his personal experience: “...*we have seen, and bear witness, and declare to you that eternal life which was with the Father and was **manifested to us***” (1 John 1:2).

This Person, Jesus Christ, did not remain hidden. He was revealed, manifested, made known to the world. That is the main reason why He is called 'the Word'. Your words communicate your heart to others. They reveal your mind. So Jesus Christ is the revealing of God. When He came and dwelt among us as a man, He was revealing God to us in way never dreamed of by prophets, priests and kings.

And He was revealed in a way that could be known by ordinary fisherman like John. John is at pains to tell you that Jesus was not a phantom spirit. He was not – like one heresy put it – simply adopting the appearance of a man. Jesus Christ was truly the God-man. He was and is the Creator, who added to Himself a true human nature. And because of that, he could be heard, seen and even touched:

- Heard – 1 John 1:1, 3, 5 verses 1, 3, 5
- Seen – 1 John 1:1, 2, 3
- Scrutinised – 1 John 1:1

- Touched – **1 John 1:1, John 20:27, Luke 24:39**

John says, 'we did not hear about the life from second-hand testimony. We, the apostles, were there. We saw Him and heard Him and brushed up against Him, and leaned on Him at dinner, and saw Him physically spit on the ground, and watched him eat and drink just like us.' This Person who is the life appeared at a particular time and place in history, and John verifies this as an eyewitness.

This is not some kind of sentimental 'God is always with us' statement, but one that the religions of John's time would have thought rude, coarse and unthinkable – that the Creator of Life became human, went through the stages of human growth, experienced the limitations of being human and physical, and yet was God Himself. Christianity is a historical religion that leans its weight upon the testimonies of eyewitness accounts (**2 Peter 1:16, 1 Corinthians 15:1-5**). These eyewitnesses say, 'God Himself, the Life, came to earth, we saw Him, we knew Him, and we declare Him to you so that you might know Him.'

Now stop and think about how tremendous this is. Old Testament Israel knew that God was a Person. They believed they could speak to Him. They believed they could know Him to the degree He showed Himself. And He did show Himself in dreams, visions, and appearances here and there, by miracles, providence, and by speaking through the prophets.

But they probably never guessed that Yahweh would become a human man with eyes, nose, teeth, a particular height, a particular accent and tone of voice. Do you realise what's going on here? God is not simply revealing Himself in the abstract. God is translating Himself into the clearest language we know: humanity. He is becoming a man, and then saying: this is what I am like when I am among you as a man.

- *For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily. (Colossians 2:9)*
- *No one has seen God at any time. The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him. (John 1:18)*

Like a photograph takes the image from the negative and reveals it, so Jesus takes all that God is, the invisible, omnipresent God, and develops it for us. Now can God reveal Himself any more than He did by becoming one of us? He is the Life, and entered humanity to show us Himself, so that we could know Him.

And John wants you to know that he knew this Person, and you can know Him too. Not impersonally, but personally. People who can speak words are rational people who can be known. Jesus as the Word of God reveals God. And He can be known by other rational beings. In fact, knowing Him personally is the essence of eternal life: *"And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent"* (**John 17:3**).

Now perhaps you say, 'Well, it's all very well that John could know Jesus Christ, the life. John got to see Him, and hear Him and touch Him. But I don't have that experience. So what good does this do me?' That's a good point. If Jesus had simply come to earth, lived among us, then only a few hundred, maybe a few thousand could have ever known this life. But if Jesus Christ had not ascended and sent His Spirit, His life could not have been manifested to us all.

Instead, because He ascended, His life is now not only forever in the God-Man in heaven, but also currently resident in millions of humans on the earth: *"Nevertheless I tell you the truth. It is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you; but if I depart, I will send Him to you"* (**John 16:7**).

When Jesus Christ ascended, He sent His Spirit. His Spirit is now able to inhabit any and all who come to God through Jesus Christ. All those who give up on living life for self and embrace Jesus Christ as their life, and accept His death as their own death, and His life as their own life – His Spirit can indwell and impart the

very life of Christ to them: *"By this we know that we abide in Him, and He in us, because He has given us of His Spirit"* (1 John 4:13).

Jesus gives the life, but Jesus is also the life Himself. Jesus gives you Himself when he gives you His Spirit. This kind of knowing is not the knowing of distant head knowledge. This is the knowing of personal experience. The Holy Spirit comes to dwell inside us. He abides in us and us in Him.

Do you know Him personally, not just 'about Him?' Is Jesus just a religious figure to you? Is He a shapeless, faceless, formless idea? Or is Jesus Christ your life, in the truest sense? Have you trusted Jesus Christ as your Lord and Messiah? Have you been willing to let a selfish life die at the cross, and embrace His life as your own life?

Real life is a person who can be known. But once you know Him, you will want to make Him known. That's the third thing which John shows us in this passage about the true and real life.

III. Real Life is a Person Who Must Be Shared

John and his fellow apostles did not keep their experience secret: *"...and [we] bear witness, and declare to you that eternal life which was with the Father and was manifested to us that which we have seen and heard we declare to you..."* (1 John 1:2-3).

John tells us that his eyewitness experience has turned into a present-moment declaration. He shares His knowledge of Jesus Christ with others for a reason. Consider the purpose in the middle of **verse 3**: *"that you also may have fellowship with us..."* Essentially John says, if you believe and receive what I write to you, then you will be in fellowship with me. In other words, you will be partaking of what I partake of. You will have something in common with me. And that's what I want for you!

To be in fellowship with the apostles is to have fellowship with those they are in fellowship with. And who is John in fellowship with? *"...and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ."* If we receive it, we have fellowship with the apostles.

See, once John had tasted of the eternal life that is in Christ, he desired that others would taste for themselves. And the reason is that to be in fellowship with God in Jesus Christ is to find fullness of joy:

- *These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may remain in you, and that your joy may be full.* (John 15:11)
- *...that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height – to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God."* (Ephesians 3:17-19)

You see, satisfied people have no reason to be stingy. People who have drunk their fill, and know the fountain is still flowing, have no reason to hide this secret. 'I have drunk, and there is more than enough to go around!' Jesus Christ is not a drip of life for one or two. In Him is life, and the life is the light of men. He has come that we might have life and have it abundantly. He is the way, the truth and the life.

Jesus said this about the kind of life He gives you: *"...but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst. But the water that I shall give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life"* (John 4:14). You don't just get a bit of life. Now the Holy Spirit lives within you, you live in Christ's life, and it ought to overflow to others. It ought to be a life of joy in fullness and flowing over.

I wonder, if we are so Christ-centred, so filled with His Spirit, that we exhibit fullness of joy?

Notice something interesting here: John says, 'these things have I written to you, that your joy might be full.' It is the written Scripture can bring fullness of joy. You're reading the very thing which can bring you fullness of joy in Christ? Why? Because the written Word reveals the living Word. The Bible is the revelation of Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is the revelation of God. The Holy Spirit of God takes the Word of God and shows us the Son of God.

So, if you have the very life of Christ within you, then this Bible should be to you like oxygen to your physical body. This Bible should be to you like water and food. If Christ is your life, then how can you go on healthily if you do not feed on Him? The Life has been written to you. What is your relationship to Jesus Christ the Word of Life?

This is the starting point, without which the rest of 1 John will not make any sense. The rest of the book is a list of internal and external evidences that Jesus Christ – the true life – dwells within, to differentiate true Christians from false believers and the disciples of false teachers. The rest of the book is concerned with explaining in practical terms what someone who has eternal life believes, and how he or she behaves. But if you do not have the Son of God dwelling within by His Spirit, the rest will be a maze to you.

So come to him today. Believer, renew your love for Him as the centre and core of your life. Feed on Him. Know Him, and then from the overflow, make Him known.