

Date of sermon: 1/9/2021
Speaker: Pastor Jeff Poush
Bible passage or verse: 1 John 1:1-4
Title of sermon: **Complete Joy**

1 John 1:1-4 NIV:

1 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. **2** 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. **3** 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. **4** We write this to make our joy complete.

Well, it's good to be with you -- our first time together in 2021. I appreciated Pastor Jim's exhortation to expect good things from God this year, to have anticipation that God will continue to be at work and He will rule and He will reign in our lives. I appreciate that, because -- it was 81 years ago that a man named Abraham Maslow set out with a rather ambitious and lofty goal to answer a question. His question essentially was, "What is the meaning of life?" And Maslow wasn't the first person to ask this question. These lofty, massive, fundamental, philosophical questions have vexed mankind from the dawn of time. We have always been asking questions, like, "Why am I here?" "How did I get here?" "Does my life have meaning and purpose?" "Does anybody love me?" And "How can I live in such a way that I might experience peace, joy, and happiness? What is all of this about?"

As Maslow wrestled with these fundamental questions, he came up with a simple pyramid that absolutely revolutionized psychology. Because he put words and structure to these abstract philosophical questions. Maybe you've heard of Maslow's hierarchy of needs. He put together this pyramid, and the most basic level, the most basic need that all people have in order to feel peace, joy, and contentment and happiness is simply for their physical needs to be met. You need food and you need water to sustain life. If you've got that, you, at the most basic level, can be happy for that day. After that, his second level in his hierarchy was simply to know that you're safe. No one's gonna get me, no one's gonna wound me. I have shelter and I have my physical safety taken care of. The third level in his hierarchy was the need to be loved and have a sense of belonging, to be part of a community, to experience love and to be able to express love for another human being. The fourth level was to have a certain level of self-esteem, to be respected and have people look up to you and maybe even aspire to be like you. And in the top of the pyramid, the apex, the place that we are all ascending and trying to go is what he calls "self-actualization." This is the point at which a person is most fulfilled. They are most happy and where a person is said to have reached their full potential -- their basic needs met. They are safe. They have a sense of belonging. They are esteemed and now they are actualized. What a great phrase -- self-actualization. For Maslow, this was the pinnacle of human experience. Because when you become self-actualized, you are most complete. You have found fulfillment in life and you are now satisfied. Being at peace with yourself and with the world.

I think Maslow was onto something. I like his pyramid. And tonight I would like to take a shot at also answering life's greatest question. How can we find meaning and purpose in life? I want to take a shot at that same question Maslow wrestled with, because I don't think the answer is found in psychology. I don't think it's found in philosophy. I don't think it's found in sociology or anthropology -- rather, I think the answer is found in theology. We're going to look at the writing of the Apostle John. And he is going to show us where we can find our deepest sense of joy, peace, and contentment. In the simplest of terms, I would like to suggest that complete joy is found in the incarnation of Jesus Christ.

Our text today is in 1 John -- the first four verses. So, way at the back of your Bible, 1 John, chapter one, I'm going to read the first four verses. John writes this -- he 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. The life appeared; we have seen it and testify to it, and we proclaim to you that 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. We write this to make our joy complete."

John is a unique biblical author, because he wrote three different genres of Scripture. The Apostle John wrote the gospel of John, which was primarily focused on what had happened in the past. He was documenting and chronicling the life and the ministry of Jesus Christ that had happened in the past. He writes these three epistles -- First, Second, and Third John. The epistles were primarily focused on what was currently happening in the life of the early church. And then he wrote a third genre of scriptural literature, and that was Revelation -- focused on what was going to happen in the future as God gave him a vision of what was going to happen in the end times. In all three cases, John's primary figure was Jesus Christ. In the past, Jesus died for us. In the present, He lives in us, and in the future, He will come back for us. The reason why John focused on Jesus Christ is because the answers to life's most consequential questions are found in the person of Jesus Christ. In fact, the very first words he uses in this epistle were calculated and extremely intentional. He writes, "That which was from the beginning." How did he do this? Any good Jew who heard those words would have instantly rewound back to the very first words of Genesis -- "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." John did the exact same thing in his gospel, didn't he? "In the beginning was the Word, the Word was with God, and the Word was God." Why is John so concerned about getting his audience all the way back to the beginning? He's concerned about that because he's developing a theology of Jesus Christ -- which is that Jesus is divinely eternal. John takes us back to eternity past so that we might meet the One who was from the very beginning.

We just celebrated Christmas, and that's a birth story, isn't it? And we think, Well, Christmas is a story about when Mary and Joseph -- you know, they traveled to Bethlehem, and Mary was pregnant on the donkey, and there was no room in the inn -- right? That's the time that Jesus was born. But Jesus always existed as the second person of the trinity. Jesus's birth story doesn't begin in Bethlehem, because Jesus has always been from the beginning. And John wants us to understand. He wants us to meet this Jesus who is divinely eternal. Why? Because Jesus is the source of everything that exists. He is the basis. He is the foundation upon which everything else is built. And John points us to Jesus, because it is in Him that we find our deepest meaning and purpose in life. Jesus has always existed as the second person of the triune godhead. Now, when we talk about trinity -- I know this has become a very complex and complicated theological discussion, and it's really not that complicated. It's actually quite simple. There are three persons -- the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, who exist together in perfect harmony as one God. Three who's and one -- what? Father, Son, Holy Spirit existing as one God. And there's a unique relationship that exists between the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit. When God created Adam and Eve, what did God say? "Let us create man in our image." Plural language. *Elohim*. There were three persons there -- not three gods. Jesus was involved in creation. Jesus was part of the creation of mankind. And it is such an important theological concept that you and I were created in the image of this God who existed in perfect harmony with himself. You and I bare the same image as the triune God who existed in perfect harmony -- Father, Son, Holy Spirit as one. You know what that means? That means you and I have the capacity to know our creator relationally, because we were built that way. We were built with an instinct to have fellowship with each other and with our creator because we have that instinct bred into us to be relational beings. Adam and Eve experienced what it was like to live in harmony with each other and with their creator. They would walk and talk with God in the cool of the evening. There were no barriers. There were no divisions. There was no unreconciliation. In the Garden of Eden there was just perfect unity between God and mankind and between Adam and Eve.

There's a Jewish term that describes this unity and this harmony and this fellowship -- the Jewish term "shalom." Shalom is a broad term that describes complete well-being. Physical, psychological, social, and spiritual well-being. Our friend Abraham Maslow would have called this self-actualization. The Jewish culture calls it shalom. Shalom comes when all of a person's relationships are right. The relationship with God, the relationship with themselves, and the relationship with others. It's perfect peace with God and with each other. In the Garden of Eden there was shalom -- until there wasn't. There was perfect peace and harmony until sin entered the world, and then we begin to see the effects of shame and guilt and blame-shifting. Because shalom was lost. Where there was once peace with God, now mankind was separated from God. The closeness that existed between God and His children was now replaced with separation. The fellowship that existed between Adam and Eve was now tarnished because of their inability to honor God's law. And Jesus was there. From the beginning, the second person of the trinity was there watching these events unfold and possibly knowing that He would be the solution to this new problem. Shalom had been broken. The peace that once existed in the garden would be reestablished through the incarnation of Jesus Christ. So, John brings us back to the beginning because all good stories need a point of origin. You see, not only is Jesus divinely eternal, He's also profoundly historical. John continues by saying, "That which was from the beginning." Let me get all of you oriented to eternity past, where Jesus has always been as the second member of the trinity. And now that we've got you there, understanding that Jesus is the foundation, He is the source of all life, let me help you understand that that second person of the trinity came to earth. He 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 refers to his senses to help people understand that Jesus Christ is not some mythical character. He's not some fanciful fairy tale or fable that was made up. He was a tangible, real, corporal human being who walked the face of this earth. Why is John doing this? Well, he's establishing his credibility. Just like in a modern-day court of law -- we all understand that an eyewitness testimony bears more weight than a second- or third-hand account based on hearsay.

John wanted his audience to listen to him. He wanted to convince them that he was telling the truth based on his first-hand relationship with Jesus Christ who was a real human being. Not a mythical character from the past, but someone who literally walked among us. And the reason why John needed to do this -- because there were false teachers that had begun to infiltrate the church, and they were teaching things about Jesus that simply weren't true. The Gnostics and the Docetists were teaching that Jesus Christ was really just a phantom. He was a ghost who really didn't have a physical body. And the reason they taught this is because they had a fundamental belief that everything that was spiritual that was good and anything that was material was bad. So they had no idea what to do with Jesus Christ. Fully God and fully man, they didn't know what to do with it. So they came up with this crazy notion that He was just spirit, and when He walked He didn't even leave footprints. How cool is that? They also taught that Jesus wasn't the gateway. He wasn't the pathway to eternal life, but rather, wisdom was the pathway to eternal life. So, we need to pursue this ethereal esoteric wisdom, and when we attain wisdom, we will transcend this physical world and we can reach and attain the other world. You see, people were perverting the true gospel based on their own intellect, their own wisdom, hearsay, and conjecture, and they were beginning to pervert the true gospel. And John says, "Stop it! They are not talking about the right Jesus. They don't even know Him! I knew Him. For three years, I lived with Him. I heard Him teach. I saw him interact with people, and I touched him. I actually leaned up against him at the last supper. He washed my feet! You guys listen to me! I've got truth to share with you! Don't listen to the lies! These people are deceivers -- don't take the bait! These liars are doing the exact same thing as the ultimate liar did in the Garden of Eden. They are trying to deceive you. And all they're offering you is death." John was offering his first-hand, eyewitness account of what he had heard and seen, because this was life-altering information. What did John hear? One day he heard Jesus say, "I am the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the father except through me." Another time John heard Jesus say, "My son, your sins are forgiven." He also heard Jesus say that, "If you have seen me,

you have seen my father who is in heaven.” These are words that no mortal man could say unless he was a flat-out liar or he was a lunatic. John heard Jesus speak with supernatural authority, and he wasn't about to let a group of false teachers pass off lies and mistruths about his savior.

What did John see? One day he saw Jesus protect the life and the dignity of a woman who had been caught in adultery. As hypocritical men stood with rocks wanting to stone her and kill her -- not because they cared about her, but because they were trying to actually trap Jesus. Jesus stood in the gap. He protected her life and her dignity, and John was there that day. What else did John see? One day he saw a man named Lazarus walk out of the grave after being dead for three days. John saw Jesus transformed by the glory of God on the Mount of Transfiguration. John saw some amazing things. One day he saw his friend brutally beaten, nailed to a cross, tortured, humiliated, and killed so that he might have his sins forgiven. John heard some things. John saw some things. And he wanted to pass on this life-altering truth to people who were being deceived. These weren't fairy tales. They weren't fabricated by Jesus's followers. These were historic events that were witnessed by hundreds, by thousands of people. And they were written down within 30 years of the event. Friends, within 30 years there's not time for legend to be created because there are people still alive who could read the account of Jesus's life and say, “Uh uh -- I was there. Didn't happen that way.” If 300 years had passed, that's enough time for legend, isn't it, because there ain't nobody still around! The fact that these letters were written down in such a short amount of time after the life of Christ lends credibility to the historicity of Jesus Christ. And even more, we have extra-biblical literature that refers to Jesus. There was a Jewish historian named Josephus, not someone who would have been biased. He wasn't a Christian. He wasn't a follower of Jesus. And in his account, he says that there was this sorcerer named Jesus who had a bunch of followers and who was crucified by the Romans, and after three days his body was missing from the grave.

Do you know how many Christians I talk to that think that was a rude thing for Josephus to say? “That was so rude that Josephus called my Jesus a sorcerer! What a rude guy!” Um -- you know what? I love the fact that Josephus called him a sorcerer. What do you call someone who does miraculous things but you can't explain if you don't think he's the messiah? You call him a sorcerer. I think that's awesome! He's totally saying Jesus did miracles! And he's not a biased guy. He's someone who had no reason to try to cook the books and persuade us that his buddy was really God. But we have extra-biblical references to Jesus Christ. Why? Because He was profoundly historical. And it was because of His life that He radically transformed the world. These events had a life-changing impact on John. The things he heard and the things he saw changed his life, and they were supposed to! Jesus forgave sinners, He healed lepers, and He endured the cross in order to restore shalom. From the very beginning, God wanted peace -- but sin destroyed that peace and brought death with it, so Jesus came, historically, to restore, to reconcile, and to redeem mankind. Jesus came to bring peace with God and to God's people. So, John uses his personal experiences with Jesus to compel his readers and to compel his listeners to believe his words. His life was changed because he spent time with Jesus. He watched the way Jesus treated people, he listened to Jesus's parables, and he saw Jesus perform miracles. And even though at the time of his writing Jesus had already ascended to Heaven, I believe John was imploring his audience that they could have the exact same relationship with Jesus that John had. Oh, even though Jesus wasn't there physically anymore, through the power of the Holy Spirit, all people -- John's audience, you and I -- we can have that same intimate relationship with Jesus that John had. Why? Because Jesus is personally relational.

Listen to verse three: “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.” This right here is the first part of John's purpose statement. “I'm proclaiming this. I'm telling you about all these amazing things I've heard and seen so that you might have fellowship with us.” He talks in the plural sense, because John is talking about not just himself and his relationship with Jesus but all of the apostles. He's speaking on behalf of all the apostles who followed Jesus -- the disciples. Because the disciples had the unique privilege of living life with Jesus. John says, “We got to hang out with this guy! We got to be with Him! And you, too, can hang out with Jesus Christ.” John's a community

guy. I love community. One of my favorite things is watching God's people share life together, live life together, do incredible things together. John is a community guy. I'm sure he remembered all the times that Jesus uses sheep as a metaphor for how the church ought to assemble. Sheep are pack animals. They travel together. They stick together. And they're safer together. John listened when Jesus used familial language to describe how members of the church ought to relate to each other. Families are loyal to one another. They share history. And sometimes they experience conflict, but they love each other through it and they reconcile for the sake of unity. John wants the church to experience this dynamic life-changing fellowship, and he uses a specific word for fellowship here. It's *koinonia*. *Koinonia* is a special kind, a unique kind of fellowship. Because simply sharing space together isn't necessarily fellowship. Getting a group of people together in the same place is really nothing more than a gathering. It's a crowd. It's an assembly of humans. *Koinonia* fellowship, the kind of fellowship that John wants the church to experience, has a much deeper meaning because it describes the dynamic relationship. It describes active participation that is experienced among those gathered people. *Koinonia* fellowship is about sharing a common bond - a unique communion that actually appears as if the group shares a common life. This kind of fellowship isn't simply a social gathering. It's about sharing life together. It's about allowing Christ to press in to our lives spiritually so that we can press into each other's lives relationally. John wants that. Jesus wants that. They want active participation in the assembling, not just a collection of people who happen to be sharing the same space and breathing the same air.

As followers of Christ, we are connected by Christ. We bare the same image. We have experienced a second birth whereby God has made us alive in Him and He has called us to find unity in Him. For to have fellowship means to partake in this calling to be one. It's to strive for and to seek to be at peace with one another as we collectively seek to be at peace with God. And friends, when we live this way, we find shalom. We experience the meaning of life, which is to be at peace with our creator and to be at peace with one another. This was John's passion -- to proclaim this message. And he finishes with the second part of his purpose statement, in verse four. He says, "We write this to make our joy complete." Now, was John this sad, joyless, melancholy guy who was just out trying to build his own self-esteem? No way! He wasn't lacking joy. He was trying to share it. John was trying to pass on the life-transforming joy that he had experienced through his personal relationship with Jesus Christ. Why? Because Jesus is emotionally transformational. The result of fellowship with God is the fullness of joy. The effect of *koinonia* fellowship with the body of Christ is the fullness of joy. That's the way God designed it to be. Because we are most content when we are most aligned with the heart of God. In the Garden of Eden, there was perfect alignment. Mankind was at peace with God and with each other, and once we got out of alignment, we began to have problems.

I remember one singular thing from my biology class at Willamette University. It was a very expensive lesson, but it stuck with me. I remember the day my professor talked about salmon. I like to eat salmon, but I really had never thought studied or thought much about the biology of salmon. When salmon spawn, when salmon are about to die, they have this instinct. They have this inherent instinct in them which is to get back to the place they were born, so right before they die, they start this journey, and they have this radar just built into their DNA that allows them to swim back to their origin -- the place that they were born. That's kind of cool, it's kind of a little bit of novelty, a little bit of biological trivia. But I believe that very same thing is true for every human being that was created in God's image. Just like a salmon, we all have an instinct to get back to the way we were created. We were created to be at peace with God, and we all have a longing to get back to the Garden of Eden, where there was harmony and unity between us and our creator. And we can get there because of the incarnation. Jesus Christ came so that we might have peace with God. Jesus came so that we might have life, and life to the full. So again, I ask -- what is the meaning of life? How can you and I find purpose and contentment in this life? Well, friends -- you can find it by pursuing peace with God and peace with His children. Because Christ came, we have access to joy that transforms lives. Oh, yes, I know that life is filled with many obstacles to joy. There are many things that rob and steal joy from us. And that was promised by Jesus. He said, "In this world there will be trials. But -- but take heart. I have overcome the world!" We don't have any control over our circumstances, but

we always have control over the way we respond to our circumstances. Friends, Christ came that you might have a full, abundant life. He is the access point to true joy. Jesus can transform your life. John personally experienced it. He lived it and he wrote about it so that we might believe it. Because Christ came, we have access to joy that transforms lives. All we have to do is pursue the incarnate, historical, eternal Jesus Christ. And as we pursue that peace, we will experience that transforming joy that fills our lives with meaning and purpose.

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