Would you please stand for the reading of God’s Word?

*1 That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we looked upon and have touched with our hands, concerning the word of life— 2 the life was made manifest, and we have seen it, and testify to it and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was made manifest to us— 3 that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. 4 And we are writing these things so that our joy may be complete.*

Please be seated. May God always bless the reading of His Word among His people.

**John** writes differently, doesn’t he?

This is a letter, but it sure doesn’t begin like most letters you and I know. ***Dear Mary. Dear Bob. Even: To whom it may concern.*** That’s how *we* begin *our* letters today. And *this* letter certainly doesn’t begin like that.

And *this* letter doesn’t *even* begin like a *lot* of the letters in the New Testament:

A letter to a **church**: ***Paul … to all those in Rome.*** Or a letter to a **person**: ***Paul … To Timothy.***

Or **different authors** in the New Testament, with **their letters**. **James** begins his letter: ***James … To the twelve tribes of the dispersion.* Peter** begins his letters ***Peter … To those who are elect exiles of the Dispersion.***

Even **John’s other letters** begin *differently* than this letter: ***2nd John: The Elder to the elect lady and her children. 3rd John: The Elder to the beloved Gaius.*** Even the book of **Revelation**, which **John** wrote: ***“John to the seven churches that are in Asia.”***

So this ***first letter of John begins*** differently than other letters that you and I would recognize ***even*** in the New Testament. No *opening* ***introduction*** of ***who*** is ***sending*** the letter. No *opening* ***greeting*** to ***whom*** is ***receiving*** this letter.

This is *odd* in the New Testament, but it is *not* ***unique***. The ***letter to the Hebrews*** also ***begins*** with a kind of cannonball splash into the subject matter at hand: ***Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last daysHe has spoken to us by His Son …*** And … we’re off and running in ***Hebrews***.

Why do I belabor the opening in this way? Why draw attention to it?

**Context**.

Because the **beginning** of a letter will ***often provide*** the **first** step in ***understanding*** the letter. By ***knowing*** *who writes* the letter and by ***knowing*** who the *letter is written* ***to*** we get our *first* glimpse into the ***meaning*** of the letter.

**Context**.

So what does it *tell* you **about** *this* letter that it *begins* *without* any real introduction, or even *without* any nod to the social convention of “Hello, this is *me*, writing to *you*.” What does that ***tell you*** about the letter?

Well … right away it tells you: it means you’ve got to *look somewhere else* in the letter for the **context**.

Let me give you an example. When we’re traveling in the car Polly will rightly stop me in my tracks when I speak. Why?

Because … we will be riding together on a long trip and we may not have spoken to each other for 30 miles or so, listening to music, listening to a book

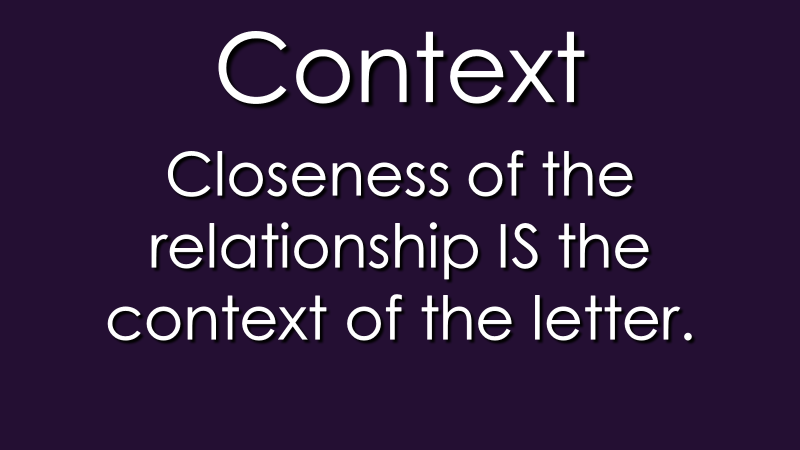
and then … I’ll just blurt out something like: “I think it was already expired.” Or, “We should invite them over for a meal.” Something like that.

And Polly will look at me like I’m crazy because I just blurted out something totally unconnected to whatever it was we were talking about … 30 miles ago. And she’s right to stop me: I just started talking to her without ***any sense of context***.

I had been thinking about … whatever it was … for ten, twenty, or thirty miles and I did not take into consideration before I spoke that Polly was not thinking my thoughts with me. *[Am I the only husband, the only spouse, who does that?]*

**John’s** letter *begins* … kind’a like that: … *he just jumps right in*. But unlike me and my **lack** of *conversational* context before I spoke to Polly;

With **John** and his letter, there ***is*** a **context**, and it is *quite a delightful* **context** when you look at it.

And it will be the place of our **first application** in a minute.

The **closeness of the relationship** between **John** and ***those who receive*** the letter **IS** the context. The **closeness of the relationship** frames the entirety of the letter from beginning to end.

* **“My little children”,** chapter 2, verse 1.
* “**Beloved**,” chapter 2, verse 7
* “**Children**,” chapter 2, verse 18
* “**And now, little children**,” chapter 2, verse 28
* ***We are all children of God,*** the opening verses of chapter 3
* **“Little children,”** again in chapter 3, verse 7; and again, chapter 3, verse 18

And there is a whole section of the letter, covering chapter 3 and chapter 4, about **loving one another because God is love**.

Again, “**beloved**”, in chapter 4, verse 1; in chapter 4, verse 7

The letter closes, the very last sentence of the letter: ***“Little children, keep yourself from idols.”***

The **closeness of the relationship IS** the **context** of the letter. Not in a *condescending* way; not in a *controlling* way. **John** writes with *genuine* ***warmth*** *and* ***love***.

**Peter** may be the *defining leader and shepherd* of the early church in the New Testament. **Paul** may be the *defining missionary & theologian* of the early church in the New Testament. There is a ***reason why* John** is called the ***Apostle of Love***.

There is an *old story* about **John** handed down by **Jerome** from the **300’s**. **John** lived to extreme old age. He would be *carried* into the congregation at Ephesus when they met; sometimes in a chair, sometimes on a cot; the *last living apostle* of **Jesus**.

And all he could say in old age was, ***“Little children, love one another.”*** His ***disciples*** became *weary* of the constant *repetition* of that phrase.

Finally, his ***disciples*** asked him: “Why do you always repeat these same words?” ***“Because it is the Lord’s commandment, and if only this is done it is enough.” And they loved him all the more for it.***

For **John**, the *people* he writes to are *special* to him; they are his *spiritual children*; they are very dear to him. For these *people* who *receive* the letter: they ***revere John***. He is their *spiritual* ***father***. **No** one

* + holds a **place** in their **heart** like **John**.

And here we have our **first application**.



This kind of **close relationship** between ***aged John*** and the ***younger Christians*** is **hard** for us to **grasp** in our day, in America. ***Why*** is it ***hard*** for us to ***grasp*** the ***closeness*** of this ***relationship; the reality of it? the purity of it?***

***One*** reason for our ***caution*** & ***cynicism about the closeness of the relationship***, ***between an aged church authority and younger people*** is because we live in an era where ***wicked church leaders*** and ***their wicked abuse*** of people who ***trusted*** them has been ***exposed:*** hopefully justice here on earth was done.

But *unfortunately*, ***so unfortunately***, so many, many, many, many **good** and **righteous** and **faithful** and **serving** and **pure** church leaders have been ***painted*** with the **same broad brush** of ***cultural*** ***suspicion*** because of the wickedness of the few.

So ***that*** is at least ***one*** reason why it’s hard for ***us*** to ***grasp*** *in our day, in our culture,* the ***righteous close*** relationship between ***aged*** **John** and the ***younger*** **Christians**.

But I believe there is ***another reason***, a ***larger***, and an ***even more pervasive*** reason that we **balk** at ***learning*** **from** the ***relationship*** between ***aged* John** and the ***younger* Christians**. I believe **this *reason*** is ***woven*** into the **fabric** of our ***culture*** at ***large***.

We place such an emphasis ***on* youth**; our ***youth culture***.

**In the United States today we** regularly ***dismiss*** and ***detach*** from the ***idea***, and the ***practice***, of ***respecting*** older people. We ***mock*** them. We ***assume*** the ***value*** of ***whatever*** it is they ***may*** have had to ***offer***, once, long ago, has ***long*** passed it’s ***expiration*** date.

We give ***great lip service*** in the broad culture to the ***idea*** of ‘**inter-generational community’**, but we really don’t ***practice*** it too much. And in, immediately ***visible*** ways.

When we are in ***larger groups*** at larger gatherings where food is served we let our ***children eat*** **before** our ***aged*** at our community meals **because collectively** we don’t have ***the will*** or the ***courtesy*** to **control** our children or to ***teach*** them to **wait patiently** to eat as a way to ***teach them*** to **respect** the ***aged***.

*But closer to home in the church,* in our ***culture*** we build **entire churches** on the ***skeletal structure*** of **segregation by ages**. ***This is a church for young people.***

If you’re **35 to 45** (God help you … 50!) and then you start ***having children*** who have their **own** lives and their ***school schedules***, then **you** start to ***age out*** of those churches that are **built** for young people. You’re only 45 and **you** begin to **feel** like the **old person** in your church.

But, on the ***flip*** side *in our culture* we ***older*** people **won’t** let go; **won’t** listen. It seems like all we can do is ***complain***, and ***wax nostalgic***, about how much **better** it was … years ago. And we almost ***take* pride** in **refusing** to **adapt** to improvements; ***take* pride** in being ***reflexively suspicious*** to any change.

**“Okay, Boomer!”**

We grow **smug**. We grow **condescending**. We grow **cynical**. We lose **faith**. We become **hardened to hope**. We **fail to own** the **impact** of our ***discouraging language*** of our ***judgmental coldness***.

The ***youth*** we **criticize** will **never** grow up under the **constant** barrage of being ***put down***.

***Slackers.***

***Snowflakes.***

The ***youth*** we **criticize** will **not** ***gain*** a long-term **vision** of the future **nor** will they ***cultivate*** a broad, nuanced view of the present, when they are **not** ***entrusted*** with the ***responsibilities*** of making **big** decisions AND when they’re **not** ***allowed to fail*** and ***build*** the ***essential*** resilience to ***keep*** pressing on “***even when you fail***.”

I’m talking about the ***enduring cold war*** **between** the generations in our **modern culture**. And, basically, how **ungodly** it is, and how **Darwinian** it is. And, importantly, **how** that ***culture*** of ***cold war*** between the generations, **impacts** the church.

And how ***building*** a church **on** the skeleton of **segregation by age: none** of that is the Biblical ***model***; **none** of that is the Biblical ***world view***; and certainly **none** of that is the ***New Testament*** example and practice of how churches were **formed** and **led**.

The **context** of 1st John **IS** the ***relationship between*** **John** the Apostle, **John** the Elder AND the **church**: the ***children*** of God, the **beloved**.

Would that ***we***, in ***our*** day, could ***resist*** the cultural **pull** of **cold war** between the generations and could actually, ***intentionally*** develop a church **culture** where **age is respected** and treated with affection & courtesy; where **youth is respected** and treated with hope & trust.

That’s the **first application** and it comes from the ***relationship*** between **John the aged** and **the younger people** to whom he writes this letter.

We’ve looked at the **larger context** of the letter. Let’s look more closely at **these first four** verses. We’re not going to unpack **everything** *right away*, this morning, because **John** will keep on **returning** to these themes.

I want to take us through **Three movements**, ***all*** having to do with **Jesus**

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Although **John** doesn’t ***name*** **Jesus** until the ***very end*** of this one, long, sentence; written as it is, with many moving parts; in the original language the *first* word, translated as “**that which**”, is a *pronoun* directly tied to these nouns: ***“the word of life”, “the life”, “the eternal life”- all*** pointing to **one** person: **Jesus Christ**.

**John remembers Jesus**

We tend to remember the traumas, until we don’t. Just a few weeks ago the nation remembered 9/11.

And yet 20 years has passed and most people under the age of 25 simply do not remember the trauma of that day. In much the same way, very few people living today remember Pearl Harbor or even the trauma of WW 2. And no one alive today remembers the Civil War; not in its carnage; not in its rending of our nation. All academic now.

I’m ***not*** saying **Jesus** was ***tragically*** *traumatic* like **those** violent events. But **I am** saying the world ***changed forever*** with **Jesus Christ**. **I’m** saying **reality**, as we know it; our **present existence *in*** this world ***in*** time and space changed forever ***with*** **Jesus Christ.** Forever.

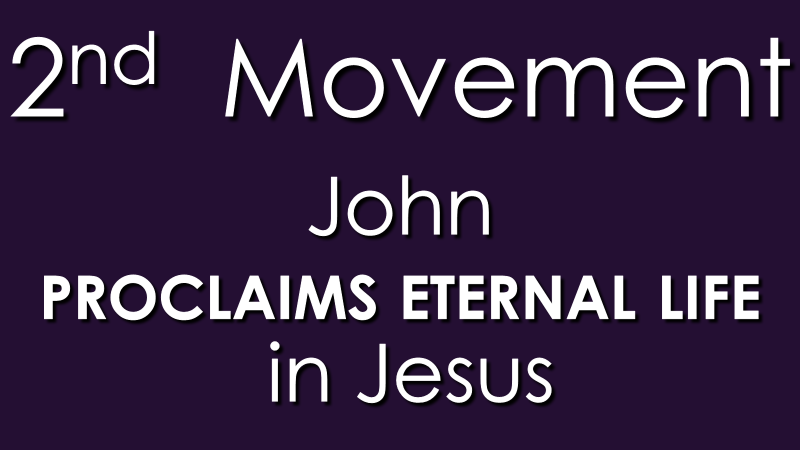
And **John** was there. It was ***not*** a ***childhood*** memory. It was ***not academic***. With **John** it was visceral.

His ***hands*** had been ***slick*** with the ***blood*** of the ***crucified*** **Jesus**. He had ***felt*** the ***dead body weight*** of **Jesus** as he ***helped*** **Joseph** of Arimathea take the ***lifeless body*** down.

And yet ***his*** eyes had ***seen*** the ***risen* Jesus *seen*** the ***nail*** prints in His ***hands; seen*** the ***spear*** wound in His ***side***. He had ***felt*** the ***exhale*** of **Jesus’** ***breath*** when **Jesus** had ***breathed*** on them and said, “**Receive the Holy Spirit**.”

His ***nose*** and his ***taste buds*** had **savored** the ***fish*** that **Jesus** had ***cooked*** for them that morning by the Sea of Galilee.

And **John** knew, if he knew ***nothing*** else at all that **everything** had changed because of **Jesus**.

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This word, **proclaim** ought to be staple-gunned into the sternum of every preacher who stands up before people.

This is **not** the word ‘***kerusso’,*** often translated as ***to proclaim in the manner of the herald*** giving the ***commands of authority*** in the town square. Loved ones that’s the ***regular*** word for preaching: to ***proclaim*** with ***gravity;*** to ***proclaim*** with ***force***. That’s the ***baseline*** of preaching in the New Testament.

This word is ‘***apangello’.*** This word has to do with the authority, of the content of the message. This word ***does* not** mean to *breath fire from the pulpit*.

***This*** word means to ***inform officially*** with a **binding finality**; to ***command officially*** with a **legal authority**.

In other words to “***proclaim eternal life in Jesus***” is **not** “let’s ***dialogue*** about this”; “let’s ***negotiate*** about this”.

To “proclaim eternal life in Jesus” is to say: “***this*** is the **word**”; “this is the **only** word”; “this is the **unchangeable** word”; “this is the **final** word”; “there will be **no other** word.” **“this is the word”**

I get frustrated with ***any*** preaching that sounds ***apologetic*** or ***uncertain*** about **Jesus; *apologetic*** or ***uncertain*** about the ***reality*** of **Jesus;** the ***authority*** of **Jesus**.

In **Acts 4** when **Peter** and **John** appeared before ***the same High Priest*** and ***High Priestly*** council that had put **Jesus** to death;

**Peter** said to those ***same men***: “***There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.”***

And both **Peter** and **John** spoke in ***such*** a way that ***those*** who ***heard*** them were given ***this impression*** by them: ***“when they saw the boldness of Peter and John.”***

Those ***same men*** who had ***crucified*** **Jesus ordered** **Peter** and **John** to ***“speak no more to anyone”*** in the ***name*** of **Jesus**

**Peter** and **John** – together both answered them: ***“Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you rather than to God, you must judge, for we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard.”***

**John** **proclaimed authoritatively, commandingly, definitely” *“this is the Word of eternal life”***

I know that ***preaching*** these days is ***supposed*** to be more … ***collaborative,*** more … ***of a dialogue,*** more … ***narratively structured*** as a life story, more … ***subtle*** and ***nuanced***.

I’m having none of it. Because I DO believe eternal life is at stake. I DO believe Jesus died for sin and was raised from the dead and eternal life is ONLY to be had is ONLY to be experienced by faith in Jesus.

**I** really believe that. **You** may not believe that. **I DO**. And I see **souls** at stake ***in*** that message. I see **eternity** in the balance ***in*** that message.

***Do you believe Jesus died for your sin?***

***Do you believe Jesus was raised from the dead?***

If you have ever had any doubt any hesitation, close with Jesus today. Right now in your heart as you’re listening to me believe upon the Lord Jesus Christ and you shall be saved.

Go home and go to your inner room and pray and close with Jesus today.

Look at what **John** writes: ***“so that you, too, may have fellowship with us”.*** And **John** follows up: ***“so that our joy may be complete.”***

There is ***potential*** for ***fellowship***. There is ***potential*** for joy.

Remember. The **context** of this entire letter is the ***relationship*** between **John** and these ***younger*** Christians.

Because ***of*** **Jesus, *in*** **Jesus, John** is holding out the ***potential*** of **joyful fellowship**. Joyful fellowship with God the Father. Joyful fellowship with His Son, Jesus Christ. Joyful fellowship with John, and with each other.

ALL OF IT … because of Jesus!