

## **THE REAL CHRIST OF CHRISTMAS (1 John 1:1-4)**

His name is Del Tackett. He is a retired Air Force officer. He served in the George Bush administration, the first George Bush. He has been a lecturer and professor for many years. A dozen years ago, I heard him in Edmond in a training seminar after his course, *The Truth Project* came out on DVD. He said something I have not forgotten. He asked a question which I want to pose to you: “Do you really believe that what you believe is really real?”

I am afraid many church members view the Bible as being full of good stories, that it teaches good lessons, that it puts forth fine ideals, but were you to press them, they might hold that much of what the Bible says happened didn't really happen. And they might:

- Doubt the miracles.
- Disbelieve the existence of hell.
- Disagree with the idea of moral absolutes.
- Even deny the deity and physical resurrection of Jesus.

I don't expect that to be the case of those who are here this morning. I am quite certain you would affirm the truth of those biblical teachings. While that is likely the case, I think it is also true that many of us do not live our lives as if those things are really true.

If we really believed our unbelieving friends and family members are going to hell because they have not trusted Jesus as Lord and Savior, don't you think we would have a greater sense of urgency about praying for them and sharing the gospel with them?

If we really believed that what the Bible calls sin is in fact sin and that Jesus died for those sins, don't you think our attitude toward those sins would change?

If we really believed that Jesus bought us with His blood, that He is the Lord of glory, and that we owe Him everything, don't you think we would bow before Him, pledge to Him our full devotion, and seek to live for Him daily?

Listen to this C.S. Lewis quote: “Christianity, if false, is of no importance, and if true, of infinite importance. The one thing it cannot be is moderately important.”

The question you and I need to ask and answer is this: “Is the story told of Jesus in the Bible true?” If it is true, then He deserves our total allegiance.

With that in mind, I ask you to turn to 1 John 1:1-4. We will be looking not at the gospel of John but the first letter of John. In this passage, John impresses upon his reader the fact that Jesus is really real. From this passage, I want to focus on three truths as to who this Jesus really is and corresponding implications related to those three truths.

### **Jesus Is Eternal as Is the Life He Gives**

This first thing John says in this letter is, “That which was from the beginning.” At the end of v. 1, he connects “that” with the phrase “the word of life.” It was the word of life

that was from the beginning. If you were unfamiliar with the writings of John, you might think he is writing about a thing rather than a person, but if you have read how John begins his gospel, you know exactly what he is doing. John's nickname, so to speak, for Jesus is "the Word."

Consider what he wrote in the first verse of his gospel: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." John waits until v. 14 of John 1 to identify what he means by the Word. "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen His glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth."

There you have it. The Son of God is the Word. The Son of God is Jesus. That means Jesus is the Word. The Word of John's gospel is the word of life in John's letter. Jesus is the word of life.

John's gospel tells us that Jesus was *in the beginning*, and his letter maintains that Jesus was *from the beginning*. This does not mean that Jesus came into being in the beginning. It means that He was already in existence at the beginning.

We have to ask the question, "The beginning of what?" To answer that question, we have to go back to Genesis 1:1— "In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth." Jesus was in the beginning at creation.

Jesus is uncreated. As God, Jesus had no beginning. He has always been. At some point, God chose to create the universe, and Jesus was right there. Jesus wasn't just watching it happen as an innocent bystander. He was actively involved in the work of creation. We read in John 1:3, "All things were made through Him, and without Him was not anything made that was made."

Paul echoed that same thought in Colossians 1:16, "For by Him all things were created, in heaven and on earth." Paul went on to say in v. 17, "And He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together."

What makes Christmas so special is that this always existing God chose to become one of us. The birth of Jesus was not the beginning of His existence; it was the beginning of His human existence.

There are three terms that come from Geometry which I want to review with you— line, line segment, and ray. If you took Geometry, which I did in 10<sup>th</sup> grade, you will remember that a line is represented with an arrow on either end. Those arrows indicate that the line keeps on going forever in the directions to which those arrows point.

A line fittingly illustrates who Jesus is. He had no beginning. He will have no end. He is the eternal life mentioned in v. 2.

A line segment, however, has a period, a dot, on both ends. Those dots represent a beginning point and an ending point. Your earthly existence is like a line segment. You were born at a point in time, and you will die at a certain point in time. Walk around a cemetery. Look at the headstones. Most of them will give you the person's birth date and death date, a beginning and an ending. Our life is like a line segment.

If, however, you have placed your faith in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord, your life is best illustrated by the ray. The ray begins with a dot, but the line going out from that point is capped with an arrow indicating that it will keep going and going. I believe that

your soul came into being at conception, and when you trusted Jesus, you were given eternal life. Your soul will keep on going, and when Jesus returns, you will be given an eternal body which will keep on going. It won't wear out. It won't get sick. It will not die. As a believer you are a ray. You had a beginning. You will have no end. We are not eternal in the sense God is, because unlike God we had a beginning. Through faith in Jesus, we receive eternal life; so, we are eternal like God in the sense that we will have no end.

I want you to notice a second thing about Jesus.

### **Jesus Is Physical as Is the Hope We Have**

Jesus was not a ghost. He was not a disembodied Spirit. Jesus was flesh and blood. John said, "We heard Him with our own ears. We saw Him with our own eyes. We touched Him with our own hands."

God created time and space, and then when Jesus came, He entered into time and space bodily. Earlier, we referenced John 1:14, "And the Word became flesh." I like the way Eugene Peterson paraphrased that verse: "The Word became flesh and blood and moved into the neighborhood."

When I was young, I remember singing the Christmas hymn, "Away in the Manger." The second verse starts out: "The cattle are lowing, the Baby awakes, but little Lord Jesus no crying He makes." Though not intended, that hymn led me to believe that Jesus didn't cry as a baby. That's not the way it was. I imagine that as a baby, Jesus exercised His lungs quite vigorously when He was cold, wet, or hungry.

Jesus was physical. When He was a child, he skinned His knees when He ran and fell. As He worked in His father's carpentry shop, I imagine He got splinters in His hands. He missed the nail with the hammer and hit His fingers every now and then, and cried "ouch!" in Aramaic. I imagine He experienced the common cold, or the flu, or strep throat. Such things must be left to speculation.

Here is what we know from revelation: The gospels tell us about Jesus sleeping in the bottom of the boat because He was tired. John 4 tells us that after the journey to Samaria, Jesus sent His disciples into town, but He rested by the well because He was weary. When a woman showed up to get water at that well, Jesus asked her to draw Him a drink. He didn't ask her that just to engage her in conversation. He also did that because He was thirsty. Jesus experienced intense, excruciating pain on the cross. And Jesus died because He was a physical being.

There are bad things about having physical bodies, but there are even better things. Last Thursday you smelled the Thanksgiving Dinner as the food was cooking. Then, you had the pleasure of eating that food in the company of family and friends that you saw, and heard, and hugged when either you or they arrived.

In life, there are so many:

- beautiful sights to see with our eyes,
- wonderful sounds to hear with our ears,

- scrumptious foods to taste with our tongues,
- enticing aromas to smell with our noses,
- and exhilarating touches to feel on our skin.

Christians need to know that heaven is not the way it is often depicted. Heaven is not an ethereally place, where we float on clouds, and strum harps. Heaven is not a never-ending, worship service.

Christians often believe that when Jesus comes back, He is going to take us off to be with Him in heaven forever. That is not what the Bible teaches.

We read in Revelation 21:1, “Then I saw a new heaven and new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more.” In the next verse, we see that heaven comes down to the new earth. Heaven on earth will not be a metaphor; it will be a reality

According to the Bible, Christians are going to spend eternity on a new, recreated earth. I believe we will live forever on the earth with the curse reversed. There are some verses that seem to suggest that God is going to destroy this earth with fire, and that God is going to completely replace this earth with something else.

I don’t think that is the best way to interpret those verses. I think God is going to cleanse this earth with fire and redeem it. Consider what we read in Romans 8:21-22.

The creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now.

Creation is not groaning to be destroyed and replaced. It is groaning to be renewed, and redeemed, and set free to become what it was intended to be all along. It will be a paradise as Eden was. It will be a world that does not kill people with tsunamis, hurricanes, tornadoes, lightning strikes, volcanic eruptions, and earthquakes.

Back in 2004, Randy Alcorn published a book simply entitled, *Heaven*. It comes in at over 500 pages and tells you everything there is to know about heaven and does speculate about some things we can’t know until we are there. Listen to this statement:

God’s kingdom and dominion are not about what happens in some remote, unearthly place; instead, they are about what happens on earth and everything connected with it: mankind, animals, trees, rivers, *everything* . . . The earth is not disposable. It is essential to God’s plan. God promises that ultimately the whole Earth will be filled with His glory.

For you and I to enjoy this new Earth, we will need new bodies—ones that are eternal. That is what we are promised we will get when Jesus comes back. Alcorn wrote, “A non-physical resurrection is like a sunless sunrise. There’s no such thing. Resurrection means that we will have bodies. If we didn’t have bodies, we wouldn’t be resurrected.”

He went on to write:

You may not be satisfied with your current body or mind—but you’ll be

thrilled with your resurrection upgrades. With them you will be better able to serve and glorify God and enjoy an eternity of wonders He has prepared for you.

Jesus was physical in His birth, life, death, resurrection, and He will come back physically. We, too, will be given physical, resurrection bodies when He returns. That is what makes the good news doubly good. Jesus doesn't just redeem our souls. He redeems our bodies, and He will redeem this planet on which you and I live.

I am all for treating the planet well. We are supposed to be good stewards of all God has given us; this planet included. But in the end, we will not save the planet. That is Jesus' job, and He will do it far better than we ever could.

In addition to being eternal and physical, John tells us one more thing about Jesus.

### **Jesus Is Relational as Is the Church Our Family**

John was not content to privately enjoy this relationship he had with Jesus. He chose to proclaim this eternal, physical Jesus, and he gave the reason he proclaimed Jesus. Look at v. 3. By proclaiming Jesus, others would be able to believe in Him and join the family.

Earlier we used three geometric terms. Let me add two more. The Christian life is lived on two planes—the vertical plane and the horizontal plane. When we establish a vertical relationship with God through Jesus, we are able to enter into a horizontal relationship with other Jesus followers. Both are important.

A monk who has taken a vow of silence may have a strong relationship with God, but he has cut himself off from a relationship with God's people. A gregarious believer who doesn't read the Bible and doesn't pray, may know a lot of people and be on a first-name basis with many of them, but his relationship with God is not what it could be or should be.

The fact is, we would enhance our relationship with our brothers and sisters with in Christ if we would choose to deepen our relationship Jesus. As we grow closer to Jesus, we will grow closer to one another.

The Christian faith is not based on a philosophy of life. It is based on a living person. You can't have a relationship with a philosophy, but you can have a relationship with a person. This relationship is meant to grow and deepen over time. The more time we spend with Christ, the more we become like Him, and the better our relationships with one another become.

The Church is a family, and John uses family terms to describe those in the Church. Look at 1 John 2:12-14. Children are young in the faith, but they are in the faith. They are in the family because they have been forgiven, and they know the Father (singular). The fathers (plural) are wized by experience. They have grown deep in their relationship with the One who is from the beginning. The young men are strong in the word and have experienced victory over Satan. Eventually, the children will become young men, and in time, the young men will become fathers. There is perpetual growth in the family of faith.

You may be wondering, "How can I became a member of this family? How do I get in? What do I have to do?"

John answers those questions in the first chapter of his gospel. Look at John 1:12-13. John calls upon us to receive and to believe. Receive Jesus. Believe Jesus. Trust Him.

I close with a story about a girl name Livia who received a new family. Livia was 12 years-old and living in a Romanian orphanage, her life was changed when she received an Operation Christmas Child shoebox.

I know some of you have participated in Operation Christmas Child. You have packed a shoebox with personal hygiene products, school supplies, and little toys.

Livia had been an orphan for ten years. She said that in her orphanage there was a lack of food and hygiene items. She said that they often would wear the same clothes for a week and share one toothbrush with 100 other girls. The things they most lacked were love and hope.

Then, that Christmas when she was 12, life for her changed. An American missionary group delivered a shoe box to every girl in her orphanage.

Livia said:

Before we opened our boxes, they shared with us about people who packed them because you loved us. I was so mesmerized by the word “love.” And then, they shared “the greatest news of all.” That there’s a God, and He gave His one and only son who died on the cross for me because He loves me. God made this possible through a simple gift. It sparked so much love, joy, and hope in my life.

That same day, Livia met an American woman named Connie. Somehow, Connie arranged for Livia to live with a Christian family in Romania, and Livia received Jesus as her Savior and Lord.

Livia claimed, “I wish I [would’ve] had a mega-sized microphone to tell the whole world I had Jesus in my heart.” She added, “Two years later when I was 14, Connie came back to Romania, adopted me, and took me home to my brand-new family.”

The eternal, physical, and relational Jesus stands ready to adopt you into His family. The question is not, “Will He take me?” The question is, “Will you receive Him?”