

Christmas and Resurrection: The Word of Life – 1 John 1:1-4

Introduction – “What, then, was God to do? What else could He possibly do, being God, but renew His image in mankind, so that through it men might once more come to know Him? And how could this be done save by the coming of the very Image Himself, our Savior Jesus Christ? Men could not have done it, for they are only made after the Image; nor could angels have done it, for they are not the images of God. The Word of God came in His own Person, because it was He alone, the Image of the Father, Who could re-create man made after the Image. In order to effect this re-creation, however, He had to first do away with death and corruption. Therefore He assumed a human body, in order that in it death might once for all be destroyed, and that men might be renewed according to the Image.” – Athanasius, “On the Incarnation,” 4th Century AD.

Outline of the Passage – Alluding to the Creation story (Gen 1:1) and from his earlier Gospel (John 1:1-3, 14), John attests to his witness and to the witness of the apostles. The Incarnation is made as clear as can be. We heard, saw, looked upon, and touched the “Word of life” which was “that eternal life” which was “with the Father” (vv1-2). This he declares so that we may have fellowship with the apostles whose fellowship is with the Father and with His Son, Jesus Christ (v3). He also writes these things for our fullness of joy (v4), which was what the angel proclaimed as well (Luke 2:10-11). Note well: there is a fullness of joy in comprehending the doctrine of the Incarnation.

Joy in the Material World – God created the heavens and the earth, the sea and the dry land, the trees, the birds and fish, the land animals, and last of all, in His own image, He created man, male and female. And what did God think of His created stuff? “Then God saw everything He had made, and indeed it was very good” (Gen 1:31). God likes stuff. He invented it. Not only that, He created man in such a way that His image-bearer would like to make stuff too (Gen 2:15).

Against the Material World - One of the first doctrinal challenges for the church was the doctrine of Christ being both fully God and fully man, two natures in one Person. John was battling an error some taught that Jesus Christ had not actually come in the flesh (1 John 4:2-3). In addition, according to Polycarp (2nd Century bishop), John stood against one false-teacher, Cerinthus, whose many false teachings centered on denying the full divinity of Christ. That God could take on flesh bothered both Jewish and pagan sensibilities (1 Cor 1:23). Wanting to acknowledge the Father, some were denying the Son (1 John 2:22-23). John said this was the spirit of Antichrist.

But these were not the only false-teachings; there were many antichrists, John wrote. And some of these false-teachings had similarities to what would develop into a full blown system of teaching later called Gnosticism. Hard to encapsulate in its entirety, two foundational presuppositions of this heresy were (1) the essential impurity of matter and (2) the supremacy of knowledge, especially a spiritual, mysterious knowledge. Freedom/salvation came from being released from the material world and into an esoteric knowledge. These teachings split into two basic errors regarding the material world. One was that we were essentially spirits encapsulated in temporary bodies so it did not matter what we did with our bodies (licentiousness). The other was that we were essentially spirits and therefore everything material and all material pleasures were to be denied so that we could ascend into our true, ethereal essence (asceticism).

The Real Problem – Adam and Eve, before the Fall, were material beings and they were good. The difficulty that has always plagued mankind since the Fall has been ethical and moral and not any essential problem with the material world. There was not something sinful in the fruit in the tree of the knowledge of good and evil that went into Adam and spread to us. There was something sinful in his disobedience to God that went into Adam and spread to us (Rom 5:12, 18). One of our fundamental sins is that we point the finger away from our hearts to the “stuff” out there that made me do it. Jesus addressed this error (Matt 15:17-18). The problem is our pride, our self-indulgence, our twisting the words and laws of God and calling good evil and evil good. And we can do all that without ever touching stuff.

The Real Solution – God did not become a material being in order to rescue us from the material world. He came, rather to rescue us from sin and from the effects of the Curse. Jesus came as a man-child and remains in His resurrection fully man, glorified man (Luke 24:39). Jesus had to be fully human to serve as our perfectly obedient representative (Rom 5:19). His humanity made His human death in our place an efficacious substitute (Heb 2:17). His resurrection in the middle of history declares our hope unto a full humanity one day at the Final Resurrection. Christians look forward to the resurrection of the body and not only to the immortality of the soul. We will one day be fully human.

But this Baby in the manger was also fully God. This was “Christ, the Lord.” In Him the whole fullness of deity dwells (Col 2:9). This Jesus declared, “Before Abraham was, I AM” (John 8:57-58), a claim that was blasphemous to the unbelieving Jews. His resurrection declared Him to be “the Son of God with power” (Rom 1:4), and this is why He could bear your sin and the sins of the world in His death.

The Word of life was born; Eternal life was laid in a manger. This Word that took on flesh did so to do all that the Father willed: “For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me... And this is the will of Him who sent Me, that everyone who sees the Son and believes in Him may have everlasting life; and I will raise him up at the last day” (John 6:38, 40). Christmas and Resurrection together proclaim that Christ came to save you from yourself, “that your joy may be full.”

Dave Hatcher – December 24, 2017