

# *Luminous: 1 John*

Why Should I Stay?  
Sunday, August 2, 2020

Main Text: 1 John 1:1-4

Supporting Texts: 1 John 2:19; 2:22; 3:2; 4:2-3

## **INTRO**

John writes this to address a topic that we like to avoid—there are people who have left the church.

When people leave, we ask, “I wonder why so and so left?” “If they left, should we?” This second question is precisely the one that members of John’s congregation were asking.

1 John 2:19 says they “went out from us.” In order to keep the remaining members of the congregation, he needed to reaffirm the values and beliefs of the church.

Ben Witherington writes, “The emotive language used of the departed (antichrists, false prophets, etc.) is meant to help those remaining to let them go and focus once more on their own spiritual well-being and belief system. It is meant to ensure that the community stops losing members and that none that remain are tempted to embrace the beliefs and behavior of the departed.”<sup>1</sup>

At the end of this message, I’ll be asking you to do the same thing John wanted from his audience: to recommit to your faith in Jesus and your participation in this church.

## **GOD: 1 JOHN 1:1-4**

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. <sup>2</sup>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. <sup>3</sup>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. <sup>4</sup>We write this to make our joy complete.

First, John says that **he is an eyewitness to the incarnation of the Word**. By the end of the first century, when this was written, quite a few of those eyewitnesses had passed away. Peter and Paul were dead.

Verse 1 is incarnation language. By beginning the sermon this way, he is not simply proclaiming to them a message—he is proclaiming to them a person. This same person is the Word of life, and in verse 2, he is simply “the life” and “the eternal life.”

Karl Barth says, “The incarnation is inconceivable, but it is not absurd, and it must not be explained as an absurdity. The inconceivable fact in it is that without ceasing to be God the Word of God is among us in such a way that He takes over human being, which is His creature, into His own being and to that extent makes it His own being.”<sup>2</sup> And why does he do this? Because if the One who is Life takes our humanity and makes it his own being, then he is able to give us the same Life he has.

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<sup>1</sup> Witherington III, Ben. *Letters and Homilies to Hellenized Christians*, Vol. 1. p. 432.

<sup>2</sup> Barth, Karl. *Church Dogmatics 1.2: The Doctrine of the Word of God*, p. 166.

So, John says, “Stay because we are eyewitnesses and have received Life that is found in no other.” We should choose to stay because we are the ones God wants to use to be like John, who pass on not just the message about Christ, but the life he offers also.

Second, **John knows Jesus, who is the incarnation of the Word.** Those who have left the church have some radical ideas about the nature of Jesus. To follow them out the door would mean embracing these far from orthodox beliefs. There are those who deny that Jesus is the Messiah (2:22), deny the Father and the Son (2:22); do not acknowledge Jesus has come in the flesh (4:2-3)<sup>3</sup>. Here’s why that belief was so detrimental to the Christian community and fellowship they had—because this belief was tied to what it meant to live the Christian life.

“It may be that those who left the Johannine community valued the heavenly and spiritual realm and despised physical matter in such a way that it led them to lay all their emphasis on the heavenly Christ rather than the human Jesus and on their own ‘spiritual’ status as the children of God rather than their day-to-day actions.”<sup>4</sup>

If Jesus isn’t fully human, then we can skip how he heals our humanity, our need for confession of sin, because we are already “heavenly” like him. See 1 John 3:2.

As Christians today, we realize that our knowledge of Christ has been passed down in this order.

1. The incarnation, life, death and resurrection of Jesus.
2. Eyewitness accounts of Jesus that make up our New Testament.
3. Testimony believed by others who become members of the first churches.
4. As eyewitnesses die, those churches continue to affirm the apostles’ teaching in the face of heresy throughout the first 450 years of the church.
5. The Church (big C) meets for several councils to affirm beliefs about Jesus. The most important councils take place in:
  1. Nicaea in 325 AD—affirms the oneness of God, that Jesus is of the same substance as the Father
  2. Constantinople in 381 AD—affirms the threeness of God, that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are equal yet distinct members of the Trinity
  3. Ephesus in 431 AD—affirms the oneness of Christ, that Jesus is a complete human person with body, mind, and soul
  4. Chalcedon in 451 AD—affirms the twoness of Christ, that Jesus has two natures, both fully human and fully divine, in one person

Often when we think about leaving a church, we ask, “Is this the right church for me?” John says the more important question is, “Is this the right Jesus? Period.”

Third, John says they should stay **because fellowship with John means fellowship with Jesus.**

Fellowship = common participation, sharing, and eating.

John says, “Oh by the way, our fellowship is with the Father and his Son, Jesus Christ.” Those who left only had options of fellowship either A) with those who have left the church who have their own views of Jesus;

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<sup>3</sup> From Powell, Mark Allan. *Introducing the New Testament*, pp. 497-498.

<sup>4</sup> Achtemeier, Paul J., Green, Joel B., Thompson, Marianne Meye. *Introducing the New Testament*, p. 540.

or B) with pagan gods/goddesses, subtract Jesus. It is not like they have a ton of other options for churches. In the whole Roman empire, by the end of the first century, estimates are that there were a total of 7,500 Christians, equal to .01% of the population.<sup>5</sup>

## YOU

You may be under the impression that leaving a church is always wrong. Ah, if only it were that simple. Let me say that even though 1 John is written to convince people to stay, there are times when people may be released to go. And we can start with the exact opposite of what we're just heard.

1. If the eternal life the church is committed to holding out to others is absent—no life change—it may be time to go.
2. If there are major doctrinal issues, like things you find in the creeds—it may be time to go.
3. If rather than common partnership around the person of Jesus you find it is partnership around the person of the pastor—it may be time to go.
4. If rather than common fellowship, you find there is constant bickering about the little things—it may be time to go. We could add more reasons, but this is a good starting point.

But all too often, it is easier for us to leave than to stay. So today, the challenge for you is to recommit to Brenneman.

1. Watching online? Stay engaged.
2. Considering leaving? Ask yourself, "If I go, what am I going to miss out on? What life that God wants to bring to me and others at Brenneman would I not experience? How would I not be used by God if I leave?"
3. You may not even be thinking about leaving, but your mind goes to those who have left over the years. And you wonder what it would have been like if they had stayed. Maybe this week your call is to reach out to one of them to let them know you care.
4. Ultimately, no matter where you're at, the challenge is to recommit to Jesus—the one who is from the beginning, the eternal life, the Son of God.

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<sup>5</sup> Stark, Rodney. *The Rise of Christianity*, p. 7.