

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 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.

This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: God is light; in him there is no darkness at all. If we claim to have fellowship with him yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live by the truth. But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin.

If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word has no place in our lives.

My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defense—Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world.

In the name of our Risen Lord and with continued Easter joy, dear friends,

Have you noticed that people are confused about the purpose of the Christian Church these days? Church bodies and congregations are overburdened with social programs instead of being focused on sharing the gospel of forgiveness and eternal life in Jesus. From their pulpits they tell people what they want to hear rather than what they need to hear. Preachers are afraid to speak about sin. Sunday messages are often more concerned with political problems rather than the problem of sin in people's lives and the solution to that problem in Christ. And individuals are no better because they prefer these things and rally around those do and say them. And so the purpose of the individual Christian's life is also confused. Be nice, help people out, volunteer in the community, be tolerant of everything, disregard differences of belief and find common ground in spiritual things so that you can join together. Many say that's the way it should be. I say, "What a mess!" What a mess many churches and people are!

If the current state of Christianity in our country is a mess, then what should Christians be doing? What should Christian churches be doing? The Apostle John sets the example for us and shows us the way in the words of our second Scripture lesson today. Because John was an apostle of Jesus, an eyewitness of our Savior's life and death and resurrection, he speaks with some clout, some authority. But you might be surprised to hear that even though we were not eyewitnesses of Jesus' earthly life along with John, our job as individual Christians and as a church is the same as his was. Very simply it is that **WE PROCLAIM THE WORD OF LIFE.**

Things were a mess in some ways back in 90 AD or so when John wrote. There were people proclaiming that Christ had never come in the flesh. There were people saying that there really was no such thing as sin and therefore no guidelines for morality. These ideas threatened the faith of the Christians John wrote to. They needed the Holy Spirit-inspired encouragement the last living apostle could give them.

As you look at what John wrote, you notice that he refers to Jesus as “**the Word of life.**” That might seem like an odd title or name for Jesus, but do you remember what this same John wrote in chapter one of his gospel? **In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God (John 1:1).** Why would John call Jesus “the Word?” Because God’s Word is everything to us since it focuses on Jesus. Everything in the Bible points to Jesus and tells us about him. And every word of Jesus is the Word of God. The better we know the Bible, the better we will know Jesus. The Word and Jesus are synonymous.

John was a disciple and an apostle, a follower of Christ and one who was sent out by Jesus to proclaim the gospel. How amazing it must have been to hang out with Jesus, to listen to him speak, to watch him behave perfectly in every situation, to witness his miracles, to see him die with your own eyes and then see him alive again. That would make John the perfect witness, right? He and the other disciples were the perfect people to PROCLAIM THE WORD OF LIFE to the world because they were there! It mattered when John told those believers **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 the eternal life, which was with the Father and has appeared to us.**

It was impressive for others to hear about Jesus from someone who knew him personally and watched his atoning work, but don’t sell yourself short! You are a perfect person to PROCLAIM THE WORD OF LIFE too. The Father sent Jesus to live and die for you and his Easter resurrection comes with the promise that you will rise from death also and be with him in heaven. And you are a product of God’s miraculous work! God chose you to be his child. He washed you clean of sin when you didn’t deserve it. He has worked in your life, doing incredible things. He’s been with you in good times and bad and brought you through them all. He has given you wisdom and insight by his Holy Spirit as you read and studied his Word. Oh, you make a great witness too! You and I and all of us here for whom the Lord has done these things are even called to be the Savior’s witnesses in the world! And as such, WE PROCLAIM THE WORD OF LIFE. It matters when you tell people about Jesus because of what he has done for you. You speak from experience too!

What is the message that we are to proclaim? John spoke of several things here—things that you also know to be true and can share with others. He said the Word of life “appeared.” Jesus came into the world. God’s one and only Son came from heaven and took on human flesh so that he could live and then offer his perfect life to be **the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the**

whole world. What a simple and yet vital truth for us to share with others! It is the very gospel, the very message that works in people's hearts and through which the Holy Spirit creates saving faith.

John also declared, and so can we, that God is light—he is perfection and holiness. In him there is no darkness, no sin, nothing bad at all. He is good and loving and holy. What God looks for from every person is that they know and trust the Word of life, Jesus his Son.

Why do we proclaim this message? Well, why did John? You know why he did. Those disciples could not help but tell what they had seen and heard. They could not help but carry out the great commission, to go into all the world baptizing and teaching so that people would know the Word of life and be filled with light and look forward to being with God in heaven. John couldn't help himself; he had to PROCLAIM THE WORD OF LIFE. He also gives the purpose for sharing this gospel message with others. He said: **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.** John's intention was for those people who heard his message to believe everything he said about Jesus, the Word of life. And when they believed and trusted in Jesus as he did, true fellowship would exist, a fellowship not only with John, but also with God. There would be a true spiritual relationship with those believers and John and the Lord. And true joy would result. What a blessed fellowship would exist—but only if it was based on Christ.

The same thing happens today, doesn't it? You are sitting next to people who share faith in Christ. Members of this congregation have publicly declared their agreement with the teachings of the Word just as 6 young people will do next week on Confirmation Sunday. When there is that shared love for Jesus Christ and following his Word, true fellowship exists among us and with our God.

But it can happen that it doesn't always work that way, can't it? What if someone who calls himself or herself a Christian doesn't live as a Christian? What if they lead a life that does not attempt to follow God's Word? What if the way they speak and the things they do go totally against the Word of life? John gives us the answer: **If we claim to have fellowship with him yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live by the truth.** When John wrote "**walk in darkness**" the words he used meant to conduct your life in darkness, in other words, living according to the sinful nature. You realize what that means—if a person claims that they are a Christian or that they love Jesus and yet their life is not lived according to his Word and his will for God's people, they are liars. They are lying to themselves and they are lying to others. They can kick and scream and tell you that you're wrong if you point it out, but there is no getting around John's words here. You can't blatantly oppose God's will for your life and at the same time claim him as your Lord.

The opposite is also true: **But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin.** As you and I, children of God and believers in Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior, walk around in—or conduct our lives in—the light of God’s Word and his grace, then we truly have something in common. When our faith is in Jesus, Christ’s sacrifice on the cross makes us holy. And just in case we start to think that we must be perfect in order to get Christ’s love, John gives us a dose of reality:

If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word has no place in our lives. My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defense—Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world.

We will never be perfectly sinless as we live our lives, no matter how hard we try. We don’t want it to be that way, but it is true. There is no escaping the sinful nature that lives and breathes inside each one of us and fights against the part of us that loves God. But this is the important thing—we don’t try to hide our sin or excuse it or pretend it isn’t there. No, we confess our sins to God. In all humility and with sorrow over offending our Savior who loves us, we apologize to him, trusting that Jesus paid for those sins on the cross and having every intention of changing our sinful ways. When we do that, Jesus is faithful and just and will forgive our sins, making us clean again.

As John wrote, we have God’s Word of life to guide us in ways that do not lead to offending our God. But knowing that we are imperfect, we take great comfort in the fact that Jesus Christ, the Word of life, the Righteous One, atoned for every sin of ours and of every person in every corner of the world. Go back to the cross and you see where your comfort comes from. Go back to the empty tomb and you see where your hope of heaven comes from. That cross and that tomb may look like death to many, but they are really pictures of life for you and me, aren’t they? Those images continue to give us Easter joy—the joy of forgiveness and eternal life in Jesus Christ.

You and I have the same joy that the apostle John had and we have the same privilege—**WE PROCLAIM THE WORD OF LIFE.** We live in a world that is very confused about spiritual things. Even Christians and Christian churches are confused about what they ought to be proclaiming. But thanks to God, you know. You know what Christ has done for you. You know the truth of his Word. Let the world around you know so that they might have fellowship with us and with God and so that your joy might be complete—just as it was with John as he **PROCLAIMED THE WORD OF LIFE.** Amen.