

INTRODUCTION

I wonder if you have met any celebrity in-person before. My wife used to be a nurse in Taiwan. In one Chinese New Year when she was doing her night shift in the emergency room a young lady came in asking for help. The name on the registration form was Teresa Teng. My wife thought it must be someone whose parents were big fans of the singer, and so they gave their daughter the same name. Lo and behold, when my wife went to the waiting room it was indeed the singing artist! Teng was having some discomfort in one of her eyes. The doctor on duty was then paged. After the patient was treated my wife asked the physician: “It was indeed her, right?” The doctor replied: “No doubt, and she is truly a beauty!” I am sure he would brag about his experience. Seeing a famous person can be a thrilling experience. But what if you met God? You will tell everyone about your encounter. The apostle John spent three years with Jesus. He wrote the book of 1 John when he was at his senior age. He was also the author of the gospel of John and Revelation. If you compare 1 John and the gospel of John you can find some common themes like Word, light, life and love. The letter was written to strengthen the faith of believers. At that time, they were bombarded by a rising philosophy that was contrary to the Christian belief. That school of thought later evolved to what is called Gnosticism. The term came from the Greek word *gnosis*, which means knowledge. Followers of Gnosticism believed that human consisted of the body and the soul. The body was evil and only the soul was pure. Through mystical knowledge which only certain people could attain, they thought that one could transcend to a higher level of existence. Since they thought the body was inferior, it would be unthinkable for God to take on a human body and come into our world. In the letter, John stressed that Jesus did become a man, and He died to redeem us from sin. Also, salvation is available to all who put their trust in Jesus. A person can have assurance that he/she is indeed saved. **1 John 5:13** is a good theme verse for the book: I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life. We need the same assurance today. Sometimes we may have doubt about our own salvation too. How will you answer when people ask you: “What makes you so sure that you are saved?” In the letter, John told us at least 13 ways to verify our salvation. We will go through the list in our subsequent studies. My goal is for us to strengthen our faith. If you fail in some of the categories then you should ask the Lord to help you improve in those areas. But if you score a zero in the test then I would encourage you to open your heart and accept Jesus as your Savior and Lord. Today we will study the first four verses of chapter one as an introduction to the book. The message from the apostle is this: God became a man so that we can experience Him in person.

EXPLANATION

1. The Word Revealed 道的顯現

First of all, John told us that the Word was revealed to us. Look at **verse 1** again: 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. Just like what John wrote in the first chapter of his gospel, he used “Word” to describe Jesus Christ here.

Still remember brother Ron Chan's message a month ago when he spoke from John 1? The Greek word *logos* that is translated as Word here has a broad meaning. It can be referred to a speech or doctrine. In that regard, the Chinese Union Bible did an excellent job by picking the word *Dao*. It can mean a way of thinking or a pathway to arrive at a final destination. Our Lord is all that. He came into our world to bring us the Kingdom of Heaven, and He is the only means for us to get there. Notice how John encountered Jesus: he heard about Jesus, saw with his own eyes, looked at him and also touched him. Can you see a progression from faraway to a close distance and from objective knowledge to a personal experience? It is like when a young man dates his future wife. Perhaps he heard about such a person in the church, campus or office. One day he finally saw the lady in a public setting. He then did some research to try to get to know her. After some carefully planned "coincidences" he showed up in front of her and introduced himself. With more causal chats the guy finally mustered up courage to invite the girl for a date. They had some good time to look at each other across the dinner table. Everything worked well. He respectfully asked if he could hold her hand. So much for the romantic story. Let us come back to the Scripture. John did not only have some indirect knowledge about Jesus. The Lord called him to become one of the disciples. John followed Jesus day after day for the next three years. The Word revealed Himself in a personal way to the people at that time too. Some believed in Jesus but others did not. God the Father could have dropped a million printed copies of "The Way to Eternal Life" from the sky. Instead, He sent Jesus into our world so that He could interact with people. Jesus said in [John 14:6](#) that ... "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." We do not need to go to the mountain and meditate about how to obtain eternal life. Jesus said: "I am the only means. Put your trust in me!" People at that time did not only hear about the truth. They saw the truth revealed to them. They did not only study about the God of love, but they also saw how Jesus loved even the people despised by the society. They did not only know in their mind that perhaps God was powerful, but they also saw Jesus exercised authority to heal the sick, calm the storm and cast out demons. Why does all that matter? The Bible we hold in our hand is a collection of true events. Some eye-witnesses faithfully recorded how they met Jesus, what they saw from Him and what He taught. The same is true for other parts of the Bible. The authenticity of the Scripture is a huge topic. Many serious scholars did a lot of detail research into the truthfulness of the Bible. They examined whether the people, locations and incidents in the Bible are fact. Some of those experts became Christians in their studies. Two of them are Josh McDowell who wrote "Evidence that Demands a Verdict" and Lee Strobel who composed "The Case for Christ." To Christians, we have confidence that what we believe can withstand objective scrutiny. To our seeker friends, I encourage you to keep an open mind and check for yourself if what the Bible says is true.

2. The Word Relayed 道的傳揚

In the letter, John told us that not only the Word was revealed, it was also relayed. In other words, the gospel message was spread out. Look at [verse 2](#): 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. Jesus appeared as a man to the people of His time. His followers testified and proclaimed that He was the Word. Both verbs "testify" and "proclaim" have to do with sharing what one saw, heard or knew. But "testify" has a passive connotation to it. A person has to testify his/her personal experience when taken to a court proceeding. For example, in the book of Acts believers were interrogated by the Jewish religious leaders and Roman officials about what

they believed. In comparison, when a Christian proclaims his/her faith the person voluntarily shares what he/she believes. If I go to another city where no one knows me, people will not know that I am a Christian until I say so. Back then when my family prepared to move here, we came on one weekend to look at a rental property. The agent put on a cool face as she showed us around. Her reaction changed 180 degrees when she asked about my profession. She responded: “You’re a pastor. That’s great!” Then she went on and told me which church she attends and the speakers she admires. Similarly, some people may not know the Lord until we share about Him. The Bible tells us that those who had a personal experience with Jesus were entrusted an important task to relay the truth to others. After Jesus was raised from the dead He first appeared to His disciples. Jesus showed up when the disciples were meeting in closed doors in a house. He commanded them in **John 20:21** – ...“As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.” Forty days later, Jesus went back to heaven. Before He did so, He passed the baton to the disciples to testify and proclaim the truth wherever He might send them to. The Greek word for “apostle” means someone being dispatched to take a message to elsewhere. Soon after Jesus’ departure, about 120 believers met and Peter proposed that a new apostle had to be elected to replace Judas, who betrayed Jesus and later committed suicide. Peter brought up an essential criterion for the candidate. He said in **Acts 1:22** – ...“For one of these must become a witness with us of his resurrection.” To be an apostle one must have met the risen Lord. The apostles were not only church leaders who coordinated internal ministries. They were also evangelists who testified and proclaimed their personal encounter with Jesus. Paul called himself an apostle to the Gentiles. Even though he did not see the resurrected Christ face to face, he saw Jesus in a vision on the road to Damascus when he was still persecuting Christians. But Jesus changed Paul and called him to preach the gospel. Nowadays, we do not have apostles anymore. However, God commands every believer to testify and proclaim the truth. In our society, people see religious belief as a personal thing just like the colors of clothing you prefer or whether or not you eat spicy food. Also, some people may get mad when we say that the Bible is the absolute truth and Jesus is the only way to eternal life. Do you actively testify what you believe and proclaim the gospel to the people around you? We should be thankful that God sent someone to share the good news to us. Now it is our turn to relay the truth to other people.

3. The Word Received 道的接受

The Word was revealed and relayed. Thirdly, the Word is to be received. John said in **verse 3**: 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. Here John did not use the common terminology of saved, salvation, or eternal life, etc. Instead, he used the word “fellowship” to describe a believer’s relationship with God. Remember that the recipients of John’s letter had already accepted Christ? We mentioned at the beginning that John wanted to reassure their salvation. Therefore, he highlighted fellowship as an essential aspect of their Christian experience. The way the Chinese Union Version rendered the word makes it sound like some kind of tropical fruit in Mandarin. I put the translations of other Chinese Bible versions on the screen for comparison. Then I also include my proposed translation for “fellowship.” When John talked about “fellowship” surely, he did not refer to our regular Friday Bible study meeting. He was talking about our interaction with the Father and our Lord, and the interaction between believers. The Greek word for “fellowship” has the sense of participation and association. Therefore, it is more of an action word rather than a noun. Our salvation in Christ is not a

completed milestone. It is a starting point of a dynamic interaction with God and with other believers. We will talk more about the result of those interactions in subsequent messages. But in [verse 4](#) John mentioned one effect of our fellowship. He said: We write this to make our joy complete. John's heart was full of joy when he saw believers enjoying their fellowship. By describing our salvation as fellowship, no Christian should be a lone-ranger believer. Some people like to attend bigger churches because it makes them feel more relaxed. On any given Sunday you just walk into a sanctuary, enjoy the singing and preaching, then walk out at ease. You do not need to say anything to anyone. When the ushers greet you, you simply respond "good morning" or "hi!" But if that is what Christian life is all about then you are not fellowshiping with anyone. Nowadays, you do not need to come into a church to enjoy a worship experience. There are tons of sermon messages from any renowned speaker and great Christian music on the internet. Some bigger churches also broadcast their Sunday worship live for people who cannot attend the service in-person. You can remain in your pajama and grab your breakfast as you watch the worship program from home. Why still come to the church? We are not offering education programs and Bible study lectures. We are creating an opportunity for you to have fellowship with God and with each other. There is no substitute for a warm handshake, a hug or a pat on the shoulder. We build bonds in small groups as we share our burdens and we pray for one another. Even when we eat together it is also a means to fellowship. Therefore, we need to ask ourselves: "Do you enjoy your fellowship at FCBC?" After you have received Christ, do you make every opportunity to have fellowship with others? Or you just come the last, sit at the back row, then leave the sanctuary as soon as our service is adjourned?

CONCLUSION

In this message we learn that God became a man so that we can experience Him in person. Jesus Christ, the Word of life, had been revealed to us. Our mission is to relay the gospel message to those who do not know Christ. For those who received the Word, they enter into fellowship with God and with brothers and sisters. The world is changing at a faster pace than anyone can imagine. The internet became popular not even 30 years ago. Newer technologies like artificial intelligence and virtual reality that used to be story lines in sci-fi movies will gradually become popular like rice cookers. While our life becomes more convenient, we feel alienated from one another. Fewer people actually write letters to others. Even phone call is replaced by texting. When dinner is ready, some moms simply send a message and ask the kids to come to the dining table. We do not communicate much, instead we connect. You share your pictures on the social media about your vacation experience, a new restaurant you tried or when your pet gets sick. Your "friends" then respond you with "likes" or "thumbs-up." Are they truly your friends? No wonder some people feel that church life is repetitive and tedious. They wait for the next Christian rock concert, revival conference or charismatic speaker to come in town to satisfy their excitement. But after a few hours or when the weekend is over, they feel bored again. If that describes you then you have to re-examine your fellowship with God. He saves you into a genuine relationship with Him. Just like any human relationship, our fellowship with God comes down to the day to day routine. You have to spend time with Him to read His Word and pray to Him. Besides, there is no short cut to build fellowship with your brothers and sisters other than spending time together face to face.