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Title: The Things We Have Seen and Heard We Proclaim to You

Key verses:

1st John 1:1-3 (NIV) – “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. ²The 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. ³We 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 20:30-31 (NIV) – “Jesus performed many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. ³¹But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.”

Good morning, brothers and sisters. Once again we are broadcasting our worship service and sermon on You Tube rather than meeting together as a church. A few months ago, I told you that I would some day give you my personal testimony of coming to faith in Christ, and that day is today. Actually, I really wish I could be telling you this story in person and looking at you face to face in our church building, but here I am presenting today’s message from a place far away from you all – from my home here in Nara.

Within some of the sermons I have presented for you the past two and a half years, I have already given you bits and pieces of my life story, especially the Lutheran Sunday school I attended in my childhood and how I came to Japan for the first time at the age of 30 to participate in a summer missions program. But I haven’t yet told you the story in between: the steps I took on my journey to salvation. It was at the age of 20 on Palm Sunday, 1979, when I “walked forward” in an invitation and gave my life to Christ. In the next few days after that, during the week we call “Holy Week,” that church had several evangelistic meetings which I attended, and that series of meetings culminated in celebrations on Good Friday and Easter Sunday. I have always thought that that was a wonderful first week of my born-again Christian life.

In more ways than one, the resurrection of Christ plays a part in how I came to faith in Christ. The crucifixion and resurrection of Christ are the pivotal moments in human history, when Christ paid the penalty for our sin and then He arose from the grave to show us His victory over death and the promise He gives us of eternal life. Many skeptics have cast doubt on the reality of this story, and indeed I had to struggle with questions of whether this was a real occurrence or not. In the end, it was the testimony of the eyewitnesses of the resurrection that won me over. And that is why I have chosen two passages of scripture from the Apostle John as my key verses for today’s message. So, let us take a look at them.

1st John 1:1-3 (NIV) – 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. ²The 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. ³We 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.

It is from these verses that I have taken the title of my sermon today: “The Things We Have Seen and Heard We Proclaim to You.”

In the fourth gospel, the Gospel According to John, he tells us the story of the things he had seen and heard, from the beginning when John the Baptist proclaimed that Jesus was “the Lamb of God,” and continuing on to a description of the various miracles and teachings of Jesus, and culminating with his own witness of the resurrection on that first Easter Sunday. He then wrote these words:

John 20:30-31 (NIV) – Jesus performed many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. ³¹But these [the signs that John did record] are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

From these two passages of scripture, I would like to highlight a few points. John and his fellow disciples were there “from the beginning” of Jesus’ public ministry, and they saw . . . they touched . . . and they heard the many things that Jesus did and taught. It is these things that John and the other New Testament writers proclaimed to the people of their generation . . . and to every generation as we read their testimony in the pages of scripture. In verse 2, it says “the life appeared” – commentators say that “the life” in this verse refers to the Lord Jesus, who was God incarnated in human flesh and who ministered among us and brought us the message of eternal life.

John 3:16 (NASB) – For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life.

Let me also quote the opening lines of the Apostles’ Creed, a statement of faith crafted in the early centuries of the Christian Era to summarize the key, essential tenets of the Christian faith: “I believe in God, the Father Almighty, Creator of heaven and earth. I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary . . .”

The first of the essential tenets of our faith are that God created heaven and earth, that Jesus Christ is His only Son, and that Jesus was conceived of the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary. This last part describes what is known as the Incarnation: that God the Son took on human flesh. In the words of St. Athanasius, a fourth century theologian and a hero of the Council of Nicaea, in order to redeem fallen humanity, God himself had to become human, to take on human flesh. It was in that way that He could redeem our flesh and give us eternal life.

So, looking again at 1st John chapter 1, verse 2: “the life appeared,” Jesus appeared . . . and John and the other apostles were witnesses of His life . . . and through Him we have the promise of eternal life.

Next, let’s look at verse 3 – what is the purpose of this proclamation of the gospel? The purpose is this: “So that you also may have fellowship with us.” *You also* – this “good news” is not just for people like the original disciples, but it is also for newcomers – anyone and everyone is welcome anytime. The gospel is not limited to only the Jews – in addition, people “of every tribe and nation” are welcome into the Kingdom of God. John says this is for the purpose of: having fellowship with us . . . fellowship with John and with the other early evangelists. And: *fellowship not only with “us” but also fellowship “with the Father and with his Son.”* We, too, can have a relationship with the creator God and with His Son.

John 17:3 (NASB) – This is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent.

Let's look again at John 20:30-31. Jesus performed many signs, but only some of them are recorded by John. John included just enough of the signs that are necessary to lead us to faith in Jesus as the promised Messiah ... “and that by believing you may have life in his name.” We don't need to know all of the miracles that Jesus performed, but we have enough miracles recorded here in the scripture in order to believe in Him ... and to receive eternal life.

Next, I would like to tell you the story of my journey of faith. My mother was a faithful Christian who took her kids to church every Sunday. She brought us to a Lutheran church, not because that was her denomination, but because that church had the best Sunday school in our town. She wanted us to have the best Christian foundation possible. During summer vacation, my mom also enrolled us in something like “Vacation Bible School,” a summer program for kids that was held at a large church in our town. But, during one summer (when I was eight or nine years old), my mom sent us to a different program, one held in a private home and taught by two ladies. The program lasted about one month, meeting Monday through Friday. In the morning session every day, one lady gave us an overview of the entire Old Testament, from the creation and fall in Genesis all the way to the prophets, such as Jonah. In the afternoon session, the other lady taught us the entire New Testament story: Jesus and the disciples, Paul and the early spread of Christianity, on to the book of Revelation and the Tribulation and the Great White Throne Judgement. It was a fantastic summer, and that was the second great foundation of my Christian life after the Lutheran Sunday school. This is why today I am such a believer in getting to our children when they are young and giving them a really solid foundation in the Scriptures and the Christian life.

Well, when I was 13 years old, my family moved from Orange County, California, to the city of San Diego. At first, my mom brought us to our neighbor's Presbyterian church, but after a few months there, we realized that it was not the church for us. My mother got turned off by the pastor's sermon on the same Sunday that my twin brother and I got turned off by our Sunday school teacher. The church actually had departed from sound Christian doctrine. After that, my mom started searching for a church like the type she grew up in: we started attending a Pentecostal church.

At first, that little Pentecostal church was really nice. We liked the pastor, and my brothers and I liked our Sunday school teacher. Unfortunately ... one year later, our Sunday school teacher left the church. And the pastor changed. After the change of pastors, things gradually began to get rather strange there. This is where I first saw people “speaking in tongues” and it looked pretty wild to me. Some of the people were loudly speaking in tongues every week during the praise time, especially two old ladies in the front row and one housewife who was my mother's age who was the loudest of all. And the pastor often switched to speaking in tongues during his sermon. It was all quite wild-looking to me, and I wondered if it was really from God. It looked like it was generated by human excitement and I seemed to hear the same memorized set of syllables from these people week after week.

Those were my teenage years, when you are questioning everything. I questioned if Christianity was true. Also, in the public school system, we are taught that the earth is millions of years old and that humans evolved from lower forms of life. What exactly is the truth about the earth and about human life?

Well, the time came for my twin brother and I to go off to college. We were both accepted by UCLA, the University of California at Los Angeles. I was so happy to get away from that Pentecostal church and I didn't go to church at all my first two months at college. I was in the UCLA marching band, and I performed at the football games most weekends during the fall semester, so I skipped church. I also tried to enjoy the social life of the dormitory, though I didn't get into the wild partying that a lot of the students engaged in.

Meanwhile, my brother chose a different direction than I did. He didn't really struggle with issues of faith like I did. At UCLA, he joined the Christian fraternity there. It was named Alpha Gamma Omega fraternity. Their theme verse is 2nd Timothy 2:15 (NASB) – “Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling the word of truth.” Their slogan is: “Fraternity for eternity.” They took seriously the call to Christian discipleship and encouraged each member to grow as a Christian.

Well, near the end of my first semester at college, I finally went to church. I joined my brother and the fraternity guys and got a ride to Grace Community Church, where John MacArthur was the pastor. I was in awe of that place. I was told that MacArthur was preaching verse-by-verse every Sunday through the epistle of 1st Corinthians. He had been in 1st Corinthians for two years and was still only two-thirds of the way through the book. Wow. I had never heard of such a thing. Incredibly in-depth teaching, with explanation of the original Greek and the cultural context in which the book was written.

My brother learned that the best current English translation of the Bible was the New American Standard Bible. And so for Christmas in 1977, my mother gave each of her three sons a Bible in that translation. I decided to read through the whole Bible as my project for 1978. Actually, I was still having major doubts about Christian faith. How do I know it's true? What about the evidence for evolution? But now that I had a new Bible, I thought that now was the time to read through the whole thing.

Meanwhile, back at college, I was required to take a course in physical anthropology – that means a course in human origins . . . human evolution. My textbook was authored by Isaac Asimov, a famous science fiction writer. I still vividly remember the opening lines of that textbook. Asimov wrote: “Evolution is a fact of which there is little doubt today.” Well, excuse me, but I must take issue with that statement. Evolution is not a fact, it is a theory (I heard that from church and I heard it from my high school biology teacher). Facts are observable. The “scientific method” requires experiments that are repeatable and observable. You can't observe human evolution happening. Evolution is a guess . . . a speculation . . . a theory developed from looking at the fossil record and looking at the plants and animals we see today, and then making certain assumptions and propositions about what might have occurred over a certain span of time leading to our present age when we see humans and apes and other animals all around us. But evolution is really just a guess, a proposition. So, I reacted pretty negatively to that opening line of my physical anthropology textbook.

It was interesting to be reading through the Bible at the same time that I had to read that evolution textbook in university. In a sense, I fought against both books. Are those miracles during the Exodus from Egypt really true events or were they exaggerations crafted years later when Moses wrote his books? And what about apparent contradictions in the Bible, especially differences between the four gospels? These questions bothered me quite a lot. On the other hand, when I fought with the things I read in the evolution textbook, it somehow seemed easier for me to find problems with evolution than with the Bible.

Actually, I was fortunate in having an honest professor in that anthropology course, who admitted that there are some problems with certain claims being made for some of the so-called “pre-human” fossils being discovered. He told us how some of these anthropologists spend so many years digging for fossils that they sometimes need to justify the time they spent by exaggerating the age or the significance of their finds. My professor also complained that some of the articles being published strayed from evolutionary orthodoxy. He was a believer in evolution, but also honest enough to point out bias and careless reporting on some of the fossil discoveries.

During the summer vacation after our first year of college, my father gave my brother and I a job for the summer: to paint the entire family house, the exterior portion. And somebody had given my brother a big box of John MacArthur tapes – more than a hundred tapes of sermons. So, while painting the house, we got a tape recorder and a very long extension cord and we listened to that entire bunch of tapes. That was a very memorable summer for us: we received a fantastic theological education while painting the house. I consider this the third great foundation of my Christian life.

During that summer, I also read a book by MacArthur entitled *The Charismatics*. I think it was his first book on the Charismatic movement and its flaws. The book gave me great relief on the issue of speaking in tongues. MacArthur told us that it is not a requirement for Christians to speak in tongues. This removed a major stumbling block for me, which had been brought about by the imbalances I saw at the Pentecostal church in my teenage years. However, at the same time, I thought he was too stridently anti-charismatic and I did not agree with some of his points. For example, I’m not convinced by the argument that gift of tongues has ceased completely.

We live in an age of science, and we like to see objective, concrete proof before we decide to believe something. As my second year of university began and I continued reading the Bible, I often found myself skeptical – I told you a few minutes ago that I was sometimes fighting both my Bible and my evolution textbook. Actually, I discovered that I had become skeptical of anything that I couldn’t verify with my own eyes. One day I discovered that I was skeptical of the front page of the newspaper. At that time, the president of the U.S. was Jimmy Carter and the headline on that day’s newspaper said President Carter was doing such-and-such a thing (I don’t remember exactly what it was). And I found myself doubting that there was even somebody named Carter who was president. I’ve never seen him, I’ve never been to Washington D.C. – so how do I really know he is for real? Well, at that moment I realized that I had gone too far with my skepticism. There comes a time when you have to give up desiring concrete, physical proof in front of your eyes and just put a certain amount of trust in the published reports you read.

I think it was in Josh McDowell’s book *Evidence That Demands a Verdict* (a book outlining a defense of the Christian faith) that I learned an important distinction in types of evidence, types of proof. There is *scientific evidence*, which is about observable facts and repeatable scientific experiments. But that’s not going to help you determine the truth about a lot of things, such as what events happened yesterday or last week or last year. This is where you need what’s called *historical evidence* – that’s the type of evidence used in the courtroom, for example. In order to determine the facts in a court case, you have to call in some witnesses who testify as to what they saw ... you have to listen to the various witnesses ... and then you can come to a conclusion of what actually happened. This is the type of evidence we have to rely on in determining the reliability of reports about past events ... for example, the life of Christ, and His death and resurrection.

Again, John 20:30-31 (NIV) – Jesus performed many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. ³¹But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

There is enough historical evidence recorded here in the New Testament for us to have confidence that Jesus really said and did the things told about Him. And that He died and then rose from the dead.

Here is John’s testimony of the resurrection, in John 20:1-8 (NIV) – Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene went to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the entrance. ²So she came running to Simon Peter and the other disciple [John], the one Jesus loved, and said, “They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we don’t know where they have put him!” ³So Peter and the other disciple started for the tomb. ⁴Both were running, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. ⁵He bent over and looked in at the strips of linen lying there but did not go in. ⁶Then Simon Peter came along behind him and went straight into the tomb. He saw the strips of linen lying there, ⁷as well as the cloth that had been wrapped around Jesus’ head. The cloth was still lying in its place, separate from the linen. ⁸Finally the other disciple, who had reached the tomb first, also went inside. He saw and believed.

John “saw and believed.” Soon after that, Jesus appeared to Mary Magdalene. Then He appeared to the disciples, though Thomas was not there at the time. Thomas doubted the report he heard from the other disciples, but a week later he had his opportunity to see Jesus.

John 20:28-29 (NIV) – Thomas said to [Jesus], “My Lord and my God!” ²⁹Then Jesus told him, “Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.”

“...*Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.*” This is where you and I are. We did not see the risen Christ ourselves, but we can be blessed when we simply believe in Him.

One of the main arguments Josh McDowell uses in his book *Evidence That Demands a Verdict* is that Jesus Christ must be one of three things: either Lord or Liar or Lunatic. Either He is Lord – He is who He said He was, the Son of God come to earth to save mankind. Or He was a Liar, a fraud. But would He have gone to His death for a lie? Why would you go to your death knowing that you were lying about the whole thing? Maybe He was a Lunatic, misguided, mentally unbalanced. Well, it would be hard to imagine that He would have taught such wonderful things and performed miracles if He was in such a state of delusion. But, what if He was indeed a liar or lunatic and then He was executed? What do we make, then, of what the apostles did afterwards if He was not genuine and therefore did not rise from the dead? According to tradition, most of these apostles later were put to death for their preaching of the resurrection. I hardly think they would have died for a lie. They had to be believing their message. And that’s why I felt I could have confidence in their testimony.

Near the end of his gospel, John writes this: John 21:24 (NIV) – This is the disciple who testifies to these things and who wrote them down. We know that his testimony is true.

John’s testimony is true.

On the day that I looked at that newspaper headline and doubted that there really was a person named Carter who was president of the U.S., I realized that we all have to put a certain amount of trust in things that we do not see with our own eyes, to put a certain amount of trust in the eyewitness testimony of other people. And since the apostles of Christ had suffered for their proclamation of the gospel message and some had even died for it, then I had to put a certain amount of trust in their eyewitness accounts. The Apostle John testified to the things that he had seen and heard. I became satisfied that I had enough confidence in the eyewitnesses of the resurrection that I, too, could put my faith in Christ and in His resurrection from the dead.

But there was one more thing to consider.

The gospel message says that we are all sinners, and that we must repent of our sin.

Romans 3:23 (NIV) – For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.

Matthew 3:2 and 4:17 (NIV). First John the Baptist and then Jesus made the next phrase the linchpin of their message to sinners: “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”

Luke 24:46-47 (ESV) – And [Jesus] said to them, “Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, ⁴⁷and that repentance for the forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem.”

In college, I never got into the wild partying that many students engaged in ... never got into sex and drugs and all of that. But I was still aware that I was a sinner and that I had a corrupt heart. In addition to that, I was learning more and more about the world around me, and the cruel injustices there were in every society. What a miserable place the world could be. Is there a solution to all of this sin and corruption and misery?

And what impressed me about the Bible is that it tells us where we came from (created by God in the beginning), why we are in the mess we are in (because of Adam and Eve’s disobedience), and what the solution is (Christ’s sacrifice on the cross for us, and our trust in Him for salvation). Finally, I was able to put my trust in Christ, turn away from my sin, and dedicate my life to Him.

At that period of time during my second year of college, I was attending an enthusiastically evangelistic church that had contacted me while they were doing campus evangelism. It was in that church that on Palm Sunday, 1979, that I “walked forward” in an invitation, confessed my sins, and asked Jesus into my heart. As I told you at the beginning of this message, in the days after I accepted Christ, the church had various meetings during what is known as Holy Week, the week between Palm Sunday and Easter. It was wonderful going to those meetings as a new-born, born-again Christian. It is during that week in the Christian calendar that we celebrate the most important events in human history. In particular: Good Friday, when we commemorate the death of Christ on the cross on our behalf ... and Easter, when He arose from the dead to announce His triumph over death and give us the promise of eternal life.

For the rest of my college years, I read my Bible with renewed enthusiasm. I returned to MacArthur’s church and soaked in the teaching there, attending morning and evening services

and checking out tapes in their tape library every week. And I joined Alpha Gamma Omega, the Christian fraternity. Back home in San Diego during summer vacation, while working on various projects around the house, I had no more tapes to listen to, so I began listening to Christian radio and discovered many fine teachers, such as J. Vernon McGee, Charles Swindoll, Chuck Smith, and many others. As a result, I have had a lifelong habit of filling my ears with Christian material.

About four years ago, I began reflecting on the tremendous privilege I had of having a faithful Christian mother who brought her kids to the best Sunday School in town, of the summertime Christian programs for kids, of joining the Boy Scouts, and then UCLA and John MacArthur's church and other fine evangelical churches in southern California. While reflecting on the great foundation I had when I was young, my wife Toshie told me about the state of the Sunday school at her Japanese church here in Nara – I told her I thought it needed a makeover, so she and two other members at her church did an entire revamping of the curriculum and teaching methods, which saw an increase in interest and attendance by the kids. Then, here at OIC, Pastor Alistair asked me to start preaching occasionally. In previous years, I would have felt it was too intimidating to stand in the pulpit to deliver a message on God's Word, but at that moment in time, reflecting on the privileges of my youth, I was ready to yes to his request. There is much I can share with my church family of the things that I have seen and heard and learned and experienced.

I am going to close today's sermon with the testimony of the Apostle Paul. He was not among the original disciples during Jesus' earthly ministry. But Jesus met him on the road to Damascus and dramatically called him into Christian service. Here are his words, describing the key points of the gospel message, and mentioning many of the early witnesses to the risen Christ:

1st Corinthians 15:3-8 (ESV) – For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, ⁴that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, ⁵and that he appeared to Cephas [Peter], then to the twelve. ⁶Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep. ⁷Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. ⁸Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me.

Paul received this message ... and he was now delivering it to the Christians in Corinth. We, too, have received the gospel message from those who came before us, and we, in turn, are to deliver this message to the people of our time and place. The message that Christ died for our sins, he was buried (he was really dead), and he was raised ... and that fact was witnessed by many people whose lives were changed by the encounter.