

Preacher: Pastor Twyla

Scripture: 1 John 1:1-2:2

We declare to you what was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the word of life—this life was revealed, and we have seen it and testify to it, and declare to you the eternal life that was with the Father and was revealed to us—we declare to you what we have seen and heard so that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. We are writing these things so that our joy may be complete.

This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light and in him there is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship with him while we are walking in darkness, we lie and do not do what is true; but if we walk in the light as he himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin. If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he who is faithful and just will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.

My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; and he is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world.

An atheist was walking through the woods, admiring all the “accidents” that evolution had created. “What majestic trees! What powerful rivers! What beautiful animals!” he said to himself. As he was walking alongside the river, he heard a rustling in the bushes behind him. Turning to look, he saw a 7-foot grizzly bear charging towards him. He ran away as fast as he could up the path. He looked over his shoulder and saw the grizzly was closing. Somehow, he ran even faster, so scared that tears came to his eyes. He looked again, and the bear was even closer. His heart was pounding, and he tried to run faster. He tripped and fell to the ground. He rolled over to pick himself up, but the bear was right over him, reaching for him with its left paw and raising its right paw to strike him.

At that instant the atheist cried, “Oh God help!” Time stopped. The bear froze. The forest was silent. Even the river stopped moving. As a bright light shone upon the man, a voice came out of the sky, “You deny My existence for all these years, teach others that I don't exist, and even credit creation to a cosmic accident. Do you expect Me to help you out of this predicament? Am I to count you as a believer?”

The atheist looked directly into the light and said, “I would feel like a hypocrite to become a Christian after all these years, but perhaps you could make the bear a Christian?”

“Very well,” said the voice.

The light went out. The river ran. The sounds of the forest resumed. Then the bear dropped his right paw, brought both paws together, bowed its head, and spoke: “Lord, for this food which I am about to receive, I am truly thankful.”

Today, with the events of Good Friday and Easter still fresh on our hearts, it seems fitting that we turn to the text from 1 John, reminding us that Jesus is the light of the world, and ask ourselves, where do we go from here? The fulfillment of God's Easter plan has not erased for us the reality that we still do battle with questions and doubts, at least occasionally in our lives; it has not removed all pain from our lives, and it hasn't eliminated the struggles we face with

temptation and sin. We undeniably continue dealing with inward spiritual battles as we are attacked daily by evil lies, which can be disguised in a manner that looks pretty appealing. John's message has something to say about all of this.

But, before digging into the actual text, I feel it is necessary to explore the question of who exactly was this John who wrote this text? You will understand why, in a few moments. John was one of the disciples who walked and talked with Jesus. He was probably "the disciple whom Jesus loved", according to the gospel of John 21:20, and along with Peter and James, he had a special relationship with Jesus. At the time of this writing, sometime between A.D. 85 and 90, it is believed he was an older man and perhaps the only surviving apostle. It was written before he was exiled to the island of Patmos, where he wrote the book of Revelation.

This letter was not written to any particular church, but to the young Gentile church overall. They were second and third-generation Christians, who were being hassled by false teachers who found their way into the inner circle of the church. These false teachers denied the incarnation of Jesus Christ, meaning they did not believe that Jesus was the embodiment of God who died and arose from the grave.

John wrote this letter to verify, from his personal experience, that Jesus was the Messiah, the Son of God, the Word of Life, as he calls Jesus in this text. John wanted to assure the Christians that Jesus was the incarnation of God; because, unfortunately, some of the young Christians were losing their commitment to the faith and were conforming to the false teachers standards which denied Christ.

John lived with Jesus and was a first-hand witness as he listened to Jesus teach, saw him perform amazing miracles, and watched him die. John saw Jesus in living form after he arose from the dead, so, John knew without a shadow of a doubt that Jesus was exactly who he claimed to be. John wrote this, then, to put the believers back on track, to show the difference between light and darkness, the light meaning truth and the darkness meaning inaccuracy. He encouraged the church to embrace the light, knowing then, that they would grow in sincere love for God and for one another.

Of course, like these early Gentile believers, we do not have first-hand experience and exposure to Jesus, **but** we do have the New Testament, which these believers did not have yet, that records everything that we know about Jesus, from people who were eyewitnesses to Jesus. Yet, there are many "false teachers", a variety of ungodly accepted values, competing for our attention, and in some cases, winning the battle. Christians today find themselves fighting the same kind of war with misleading false teachers and temptations.

In verse five John begins the discussion about light vs. darkness. God is light, meaning God is good, holy, true, pure and reliable; and all of those living in the light radiate that same light. The darkness is sin and evil, and those who submit to the darkness breed sin and evil through their lives. God, who is light, John goes on to say, exposes evil and sin, and by exposing sin and evil, the light wipes out darkness from the lives and the fellowship of those who do choose to walk in the Light.

This contradicted what the false teachers were professing lies in the church during John's ministry. The false teachers said the believers could have fellowship with God and go on living in darkness. In their way of thinking, the phrase, "we're only human" gave them an excuse for living in sin. They taught that the physical body was evil or worthless and this meant one of two things then about a person's behavior.

The options for the false teachers taught were that one either needed to deny bodily desires through rigid discipline; or one could oblige every physical desire because the body was

going to be destroyed anyway. The second option would be the easier path to travel; so, it became popular and acceptable with one-time believers. To this, John said, no way. One cannot have it both ways, claim to be right with God and still live in darkness.

The message of the false teachers is accepted and gaining momentum today, too. There is social acceptance that we can have everything and do anything we want. Sayings like, if it feels good, it must be right, so, do it, and as long as you are not hurting anyone else, it doesn't matter what you do, and you need to look out for number "one", are accepted lies that are sucking good people into the powers of darkness.

Vulnerable, self-reliant Christians, just like non-Christians can just as easily fall victim to these lies. They dismiss thoughts about the personal consequences of their actions and go on to promote the theory of non-Christians that Christians are a bunch of hypocrites. John doesn't mince words, he says that those who have drifted towards these lies are living in darkness. John shares a fervent warning to those who choose to live in darkness, Christ, the light of the world exposes and judges such deceit.

Having just celebrated Easter, we know that all is not lost. Jesus paid the price for our sins. He took on our sin and was the final sacrifice for all our sin, but we still need to confess and repent from our sin. It's not because God doesn't know what we've done, but we need to be reminded of it, we need to acknowledge, feel and express our regret for the sins we committed, and ask for help to make the changes necessary so as not to fail in that way again. Then, just as Christ rose from the grave, we rise to a new life of fellowship with him, and with the other members of Christ's body, the fellowship of the church.

In verse eight, John was dealing with another of the false teachers' ideas, another lie that opposes the need for confession and repentance, and that lie is that believers did not have a natural tendency to sin, they were "without sin" and therefore, they were incapable of sinning. The false teachers wanted to be considered Christians, but they saw no need to confess and repent. This makes absolutely no sense. Why would anyone feel the desire to be known as a Christian, yet not find the need or any meaning in the death and resurrection of Christ? In verse 10, John clearly said that when we deny that we sin, we call God a liar.

I don't know how anyone could deny that they sin. It is a fact that we do. All people sin. The evidence is in how the consequences of our sin offends others, even our own beloved sisters and brothers in Christ. Sin severely impairs our fellowship with God, and with each other.

Yes, when we give our lives over to God, our sins, all our sins, past and present are forgiven, but that does not mean we will never sin again. We don't receive a once and done stamp of approval, which excuses our sins. Oh, if only it were that easy. The reality is that we will sin, and we will need to continue to confess and repent.

Confession and repentance are necessary for us, not so God will continue to accept us. God always has and always will love us, but it is necessary because our sin, on our part, builds a wall between us and God, communicating to God that we don't need Him. That wall needs to be torn down in order to have true fellowship with God. Tearing down that wall begins with our own recognition of our sins.

David Slagle from Lawrenceville, Georgia shared this illustration to make a meaningful connection with this point. He said, "My twenty-one-month-old, who had just learned to say 'Daddy,' had been struggling with asthma and an ear infection for two weeks. He coughed and sneezed continually, and his nose ran like a faucet. Each night when I came home, he ran to meet me at the door, smiling, coughing, nose running, yelling, 'Daddy! Daddy!'"

I was not repulsed by his runny nose or close-range sneezes in the least (he 'slimed' every shirt I own!). I love him deeply and enjoy his love for me. It does remind me, though, that when I am sick with sin, God loves me deeply and desires that I run to him as a son, crying, 'Abba, Father.'"

John encourages us to walk in the Light, the Light known as Jesus, our Savior. The Light opens our eyes to those negative behaviors that we allow to control us and take us down unknown paths, paths that could mislead not only nonbelievers but also our brothers and sisters in Christ. Walking in the light guides us in our efforts to help one another remain faithful on our personal and corporate journeys.

We should take seriously John's warning about false teachers. All the false teachings, all the lies that are socially acceptable, will only lead us down a dead-end path that drops off into a cesspool of trouble. It's a place, an existence without God, without all that we long for and need.

A pilot named Tim Baker shared this illustration about the guiding light of Jesus. He said, "When I flew airplanes regularly landing at night was very different than daylight. I would use the instruments to guide me to the airport over most of the trip, but since I was a VFR pilot, meaning a Visual Flight Rules pilot, I would use my eyes outside of the cockpit to land the plane. In the daylight using your eyes to land was easy, you can see many areas that provide you a clear landing area because you can see the obstacles and dangers since everything is well lit.

At night the ground below is very dark, and I remember when recognizing the airport's flashing white and green light pointing me to where I was to land that it was a calming feeling. I knew I was being guided to a safe landing zone by the light. As I approached the landing path other lights lit up both sides of the runway, so you knew exactly where to put the plane down. Runway edge lights are white, which sets them apart from the blue/green/red taxiway lights. At night without lights, it would be nearly impossible to land a plane safely, you don't know if the ground has deep ruts, or if it is a freshly plowed field, or are there any low fences in your path, it's just too dark to tell. Runway lights provide the only path you know for certain is a safe place to land your plane, keeping you alive. It is the same with following God's path. Walking in the light of the LORD brings us safety and life. Follow the light. Amen.