

1 John 1:5-2:2

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Preacher: Canon David Short

[0 : 00] Our Heavenly Father, as you said, let light shine out of darkness at creation. We pray now that you would shine in our hearts.! Help us to see you, the Lord Jesus Christ, and ourselves.

And by that light set our hearts on fire for him. And we ask this in his name. Amen. Please be seated. Thank you.

Thank you.

Thousands Affected. And my wife and I live very close to where it happened. And Bron and I have walked around the memorials a couple of times this week.

And it's very moving, actually, to see the spontaneous gifts and the expressions of love and well-wishing. and there are boards that you can write on, large boards that many are writing on and they're very heartfelt messages.

[1 : 53] And in the midst of the flowers on 41st Street, there are a number of picture frames with photographs of some of the victims looking full of life and vitality and hope and those people are gone.

And I wanted to begin there because as we come to this letter of 1 John, it just seems almost too good to be true.

I mean, would it not be astonishing if the God who existed before he created the world, the God of eternity, should enter our space and our time and our world as a genuine human being?

Bringing that eternal life of God with him, which would be so real that people could actually see him and hear him and even touch him and that he could tear down all that stands between us and God, showing us that God is love, smashing a hole in death for all to follow him into life, the life of God beyond death.

So that no matter how we die, we continue the friendship and fellowship with God, with eternal God, the eternal God, and with each other forever.

[3 : 21] And wouldn't it be great if the way we receive that eternal life and that gift of friendship with God that goes through eternity now, not by trying harder or jumping higher or being more moral or being smarter or turning over a new leaf, but simply by hearing the words of promise that this God man said and having the life of God flow into us right now, which might change us and transform us in this life and forever, so that death, as awful as it may be and as tragic as it may be, really actually brings us to a greater enjoyment of that friendship and eternal life with God.

I think it's almost too good to be true. And that's exactly what verses 1 to 4 are all about as we looked at last week. They're beautiful words and they're vital Christian truths and they show us that Christianity is not a philosophy or even a noble moral teaching, but it concerns this one man, Jesus Christ, who came into the world with flesh.

He had a certain weight and a height and eye colours and teeth and that our living connection with him, that's what Christianity is all about. And I have a longer introduction this morning because this takes us right to the heart of the letter, this first letter from John.

It is all about fellowship with God. And fellowship with God is the most exalted possibility for any human being.

It's the highest blessing we can have. Fellowship is a living bond that unites believers together with God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

[5 : 19] It's a connection we share with God and with each other through the gospel. And the thing about it is it's real participation in the life of God. As the Apostle Peter says somewhere else, we share the divine nature.

I think that's almost too much to take in. And it's such a wonderful and precious truth like a diamond that in 1 John the Apostle uses 10 to 15 words, other words that point in exactly the same direction,

almost synonyms that would fire our hearts.

So every time in this epistle we come across what it is to abide in Christ and Christ in us, or having God, or being of God, or being in Christ, or knowing God, or being born of God, these are different ways of seeing and savouring this essential reality of friendship and fellowship with God.

And the whole letter is written to further and foster the reader's fellowship with God and with each other, and to protect their fellowship from the poison of false teaching.

Because this most wonderful reality of eternal life and fellowship with God is under threat for this group of believers.

[6 : 40] There was a former group that belonged to them who'd come under the influence of false teaching, and they had broken away this group under false teaching.

And the false teachers had brought a different gospel than the one Jesus had told the apostles. And they began to deny that Jesus had come in the flesh.

And they began to deny that his death had any atoning power to take away our sins. And that quickly showed itself in behaviour. And you never know which came first, the behaviour or the unbelief.

But it's exactly what you would expect, because our belief always shows in how we behave. And gradually the leavers, and I'm pointing on the right here, but I could be pointing over here, but gradually the leavers, their love for the believers who remained, transformed into hatred.

And they were saying, oh, we love God, but we just hate them. John says, you are deluded. And they take a very weird attitude to sin, as we'll see this morning.

[7 : 51] Since Jesus' death is not really about dealing with sin, they had to find other ways of dealing with sin. And the best way is to deny it, or to excuse it, or to redefine it. And something we're very familiar with in the former diocese we belong to.

This is not a small issue. What is at stake is whether our faith is real, or fake. Whether we really have fellowship with God or not.

Whether eternal life breathes in us, and whether we are saved. And that's why the Apostle John is so spicy. He's unafraid to say things very strongly, even in the negative, but always full of love.

And it's completely understandable that the believers John is writing to have begun to wonder, are we the real thing? Perhaps these people who've left us behind might have something.

And he writes to give them confidence and assurance to direct them to the rock of Jesus Christ.

And so the question that's close to our minds as we read through this, is how can you tell if you're a real believer?

[9 : 00] I mean, what are the marks of authentic, genuine Christianity? And so in today's passage, you see where he begins. He begins with the character of God.

Verse 5. This is the message we heard from him, from Jesus. And proclaim to you that God is light and in him is no darkness at all.

This is what they heard from the lips of Jesus, that the Christian message is not the result of human ingenuity, but divine revelation. God is light.

This is one of the three magisterial statements about God in the New Testament. All of them John reports. God is spirit. God is love. God is light.

And in him there is no darkness at all. So helpful that he says that, in him no darkness at all.

Because I think it's probably easier for us to understand what darkness is all about than light.

[10 : 00] Darkness is the symbol of all its evil, of lies, of what's shady. And in the Bible, light signifies primarily two things.

Light is life and light shines, revealing, showing, driving away darkness, half-truths, deception and evil.

And the reason John starts with this is because true fellowship with the true God arises out of the nature of who God is. He shines with a holy love, not to drive us away, but to draw us near.

And so for the rest of the passage, from verse 6 to 2-2, what John does is he applies this magnificent reality to what the false teachers and the leavers are claiming to show what's fake and what's real.

And they make three boastful, proud claims, but it's all talk, he says. It's empty talk. And that's what counterfeit Christians really say.

[11 : 09] And then he brings three contrasting realities that remedy these lies, woven in between the three false claims. So three behaviours that mark false faith and three that show that God is

light.

So I've got two points after that very long introduction. Sometimes at St John's we have long introductions. Aaron never gives long introductions.

I thought that was very important for us to set our way through this. So I've got two points. The first is counterfeit Christianity. So I want to lump together all the false teachers are saying in this passage to get a clear picture.

Because the first thing the apostle targets is their attitude to sin. Now, you don't use the word sin in polite conversations these days, do you?

I mean, the only place I ever see it is on dessert menus. You know, the sinful triple chocolate cake. And I looked it up last night. There are recipes online for sinful triple chocolate cake.

[12:17] I think most people think that we Christians are a bit neurotic to even believe in sin. It's something of the past. But the Bible teaches we cannot understand ourselves.

We cannot understand our world. We certainly can't understand the Christian faith apart from the reality of sin. And any version of Christianity you come across that doesn't have any room for sin is a scam.

Run away from it. I mean, everyone out there believes there's something wrong with the world. It's an easy conversation piece to start. And they're also most happy to share with you not only what is wrong, but their theory on how to fix it.

And it's usually a combination of the government needs to do more and we need to be nicer to each other. I used to think that the doctrine of sin was the only doctrine scientifically provable.

It is not. Because our knowledge of sin comes from an encounter with the God who is light in whom there is no darkness at all. Do you remember back in Luke's gospel when Peter and the other disciples, apostles, were out on the lake fishing all night, catching nothing.

[13:30] As they came to the beach, Jesus told them to throw the net on the other side of the boat. And Peter rolls his eyes and says, all right. He throws the net on the other side, pulls it up and it's bursting with fish.

And do you remember you expect Peter to say, I'm so happy. That's a great miracle, Jesus. This is what we wanted. No, no. What does he say? He says, depart from me because I am a sinful man. Because he realises in that instant that he is in the presence of God. And the power of God that is in Jesus isn't just massive supernatural cosmic energy.

It's the power of goodness and of holiness. It's a spotless and cleansing power of the God who made us. So when we first encounter the true Jesus Christ, the reflexive thing that we do is we suddenly discover this chasm between him and me and we become very aware of our own sinfulness.

This is the mark of someone who has truly met Jesus Christ. Sin is a big deal. And if we have no conviction of sin, if we don't have any sense of our own spiritual need, we haven't met Jesus yet and we're so glad you're here because we pray and hope that you'll meet him through his word as we do.

[14:48] But if you do have this conviction in your heart that you are a sinful person before God, that's not something you can give yourself.

That comes from God alone. It's the beginning of true repentance and true forgiveness, the conviction of sin that comes from the Holy Spirit because sin is essentially directed toward God. Later in this letter, John actually tells us what sin is. In chapter 3, verse 4, he says, sin is lawlessness. Not the law of Canada but the law of God.

It's a fundamental attitude to God saying, I really don't care what you say, I'm going to make my own decisions, thank you very much. So sin isn't really about selfishness, it's not an impersonal breaking of the rules or doing bad things, nor is it just hurting each other or messing up my life. Sin is a deeply personal violation and betrayal of God. It's replacing God with my own desires. So how does this new false teaching work?

[16:00] John exposes the false teachers with three claims that are very similar. Just look down at the text. Verse 6, if we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, he then says we lie and do not practice the truth.

Verse 8, if we say we have no sin we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. Verse 10, if we say we have not sinned we make him a liar and his word is not in us.

Now there's not a great deal of difference between these fake claims. I mean the first is that sin is trivial, it's unimportant. It's the idea that we can pretend to have fellowship with God without any change at the level of our behaviour.

Let's just take the Ten Commandments for a moment. They make no difference. So I don't, I give myself a pass when it comes to lying and cheating and coveting. I do what I want to do sexually. I don't take God's attitude to money. I hoard my money. I don't have a great love for my brothers and sisters. And John says that's walking in darkness and you can't claim to walk in the light and do that.

[17:12] You just can't do it. It's impossible. Or to say we have no sin or to say we have not sin is taking the attitude and I'll just update it a bit, I've moved on from sin.

I've left that behind. I'm a good person. Don't talk to me about sin and confession. What I really need is personal growth. I want to become fully actualised.

that's my real problem. Yeah, yeah, none of us are perfect but I'm basically good trying to reach my full potential. I just don't sin anymore. There's a great story from the 19th century preacher Charles Spurgeon, a Baptist preacher and he was at a minister's conference and one of the ministers had claimed that he had reached the state of being sinless.

He was sinlessly perfect and instead of having a big debate with this guy publicly, the next morning at breakfast Spurgeon took a jug of freezing cold milk and poured it over this guy's head and he got up yelling and cursing and screaming and I think Spurgeon said something like sin had only gone to sleep for a little while.

Probably not that helpful. But see, John does not mince words here. He said these ideas are just impossible. In fact, they're delusional and not just delusional, they're a lie.

[18:34] You're deceiving yourself. You're certainly not deceiving anyone close to you because the key way sin works is self-deception and the way we deceive ourselves is we push the truth down, we suppress the truth.

We know when we're doing it and we love darkness rather than evil because at some level we know that what we're doing is evil. But most astonishing at all is the last comment, you make God a liar because again and again and again through the Bible God says things that indicate we are sinful and we need to return to him.

Return to the Lord, says the prophet, that he may have compassion on us and to our God he will abundantly pardon. So to say we don't need repentance and forgiveness or cleansing is not just saying that God tells occasional lies, lies, it's saying he is a liar in his very nature.

So we've gone from God as light to God as a liar you see. But we need to pause don't we? Just like the Apostle John pauses. He's more than aware that there are many of us who are tender-hearted believers who hear this and we start to worry about ourselves.

Well I claim to have fellowship with God, I claim to walk in the light but I sin all the time. Am I a bogus believer? And this is part of the menace of false teaching it comes along and genuine soft-hearted believers begin to worry about the reality of their own faith.

[20:09] So the Apostle turns from fraudulent faith from counterfeit Christianity to the real thing and he gives us three marks of the authentic Christian experience.

This is my second point. Every single one of them is full of kindness and full of hope and it's interesting every single one of them ends up focusing on the Lord Jesus Christ and not just on Jesus but on his cross.

So here are the three marks verse 7 verse 9 and chapter 2 verse 1 if we walk in the light verse 7 if we confess our sins verse 9 2 1 if anyone does sin.

This is the real Christian experience. It's walking in the light. it's saying I am a sinful person and I need a saviour. It's an open growing life of bringing the truth to God truth of God to bear on what I do and how I live each day.

It's a genuine ongoing attempt to align my behaviour with the truth of God and at the same time recognising I fall and fail every day every hour and many times an hour.

[21:24] So the authentic Christian has a growing hatred of sin in themselves but we know that we're not going to be sinlessly perfect in this life and we know that daily and hourly we need his relief and his cleansing ongoingly and it's interesting every time he spells this out and the focus is on Jesus' death for us but the focus of Jesus' death is on its complete and comprehensive work complete cleansing all inclusive forgiveness.

Look at verse 7 he cleanses us from all sin verse 9 he cleanses us from all unrighteousness and at the end of chapter 2 verse 2 his propitiation is not just for us but the sins of the whole world so the violent death of Jesus on the cross means we are completely forgiven all sins are entirely taken away and the verb tense the way it reads in the original the cleansing work is ongoing keeps going keeps going in our lives in our hearts so forgiveness is a once for all but the cleansing goes on every day to make us pure to give us desires to love him and each other and you may feel that your sins are very big you may feel ashamed but the death of Jesus is far bigger and it's it's not just a little bit bigger it's infinitely eternally massively bigger to forgive all our sins to cleanse us from all unrighteousness and to have enough so that every person in the world can come to him and ask for forgiveness and when we do here is the assurance we have eternal fellowship and life and that is what we are doing here today as we gather around the Lord's table we celebrate the violent death of Jesus the forgiveness of our sins we celebrate the cleansing the ongoing cleansing of God the Father in our lives and fellowship with him praying that our bodies might be cleansed by his body and our souls washed through his most precious blood and I think as we pray for our city in these days we ought to pray that more people would hunger after this fellowship with the Lord Jesus Christ and come to the place of knowing this eternal life and the joy of his forgiveness and cleansing and enter into some of the things that we share together Amen