

Christ Community Covenant Church
The Letters of John: Overview dedicated to a new building
Pastor Dave Scherrer - February 2, 2014

Discussion

- What amazes you about this expression of God's faithfulness?
- What do you want to say to God?
- If God has been trying to increase our faith, what do you think His purposes are for our church?

Let's look briefly at the notes I included in the bulletin regarding the Letters of John: The author is generally believed to be **John son of Zebedee** (Mark 1:19-20) -- the apostle and the author of the Gospel of John and Revelation (see Introductions to both books: Author). He was a fisherman, one of Jesus' inner circle (together with James and Peter), and "the disciple whom Jesus loved" (John 13:23; see note there). He may have been a first cousin of Jesus (his mother may have been Salome, possibly a sister of Mary).

This is an educated guess on the part of scholars as the author does not identify himself. There are many good reasons that we have good confidence that John wrote this little homily in his relative old age. We will get into that a bit next week when we dive into our series in earnest.

The letter is **difficult to date** with precision, but factors such as (1) evidence from early Christian writers (Irenaeus and Clement of Alexandria), (2) the early form of Gnosticism reflected in the denunciations of the letter and (3) indications of the advanced age of John suggest the end of the first century.

John's readers were confronted with an early form of Gnostic teaching of the Cerinthian variety. This heresy was also libertine, throwing off all moral restraints. Consequently, John wrote this letter with two basic purposes in mind: (1) to expose false teachers (2:26 and note) and (2) to give believers assurance of salvation (5:13).

*From the NIV Study Bible, Introductions to the Books of the Bible, 1 John Copyright 2002 © Zondervan. All rights reserved.

These are some general notes from a popular study Bible, and I think these two purposes are mostly accurate. When you read a commentary or a study Bible you get the editor's idea of what is going on. Often times it is possible to go directly to the passage – to simply read God's word. If we practice this discipline in this little book we see that John was clear about what his intentions were:

"...We write this that our joy may be complete." (1:4)

"...I write this to you so that you may not sin." (2:1)

"...I am writing you a new commandment." (2:8)

"...I am writing not because you do not know the truth but because you do." (2:21)

"...I am writing these things about those who would deceive you." (2:26)

"...I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God that you may know that you have eternal life." (5:13)

It is a book of contrasts;

Light vs. Darkness, Truth vs. Falsehood, Love vs. Hatred, Love of the world vs. Love of the Father, Christ vs. Antichrists, Children of God vs. Children of the devil, Righteousness vs. Sin, The Spirit of God vs. The spirit of the Antichrist, and Life vs. Death.

Let's just dive in and see what it feels like to read through this letter:

Chapter one – The Message

1¹⁻² From the very first day, we were there, taking it all in—we heard it with our own ears, saw it with our own eyes, verified it with our own hands. The Word of Life appeared right before our eyes; we saw it happen! And now we're telling you in most sober prose that what we witnessed was, incredibly, this: The

infinite Life of God himself took shape before us.³⁻⁴ We saw it, we heard it, and now we're telling you so you can experience it along with us, this experience of communion with the Father and his Son, Jesus Christ. Our motive for writing is simply this: We want you to enjoy this, too. Your joy will double our joy!⁵ This, in essence, is the message we heard from Christ and are passing on to you: God is light, pure light; there's not a trace of darkness in him.⁶⁻⁷ If we claim that we experience a shared life with him and continue to stumble around in the dark, we're obviously lying through our teeth—we're not *living* what we claim. But if we walk in the light, God himself being the light, we also experience a shared life with one another, as the sacrificed blood of Jesus, God's Son, purges all our sin.⁸⁻¹⁰ If we claim that we're free of sin, we're only fooling ourselves. A claim like that is errant nonsense. On the other hand, if we admit our sins—make a clean breast of them—he won't let us down; he'll be true to himself. He'll forgive our sins and purge us of all wrongdoing. If we claim that we've never sinned, we out-and-out contradict God—make a liar out of him. A claim like that only shows off our ignorance of God.

It is a difficult book to outline in a western fashion in that the organization isn't linear like we do in modern western literary style, more circular or spiral in form and it doesn't lend itself to a form like 1. A. 1. But there is still a brilliant form to the homily.

Famous verses (ESV) give us the recurring themes: *Life, Light, Love*

Let's look at this first theme of 'Life'

1 John 1:1-2

1 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.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.

John's specific purpose in this little letter was to warn and instruct its readers against a false teaching denying that Jesus Christ had come in the flesh (1 John 4:2-3). Several forms of this teaching, commonly known as "Gnosticism" existed in early Christian history and continues into today. Gnosticism was a particularly evil heresy because they denied that Jesus was physically alive. Sounds strange to us but they believed that matter, whether it be the physical universe or the humanly body, is evil. Gnostics considered themselves Christians and saw Jesus as a heavenly messenger. However, they rejected the idea of God becoming incarnate (God becoming a man), dying and rising bodily. "These beliefs were considered unspiritual and against true wisdom because they entangled spirit with matter." Gnostics held that Jesus himself was only a spirit who appeared to be human and to undergo human experiences (suffering and death). Most Gnostics believe that whoever entered Jesus at his baptism left him before he died on the cross. The Gnostics held that fellowship with God comes through an esoteric special knowledge. They often expressed their assumed enlightenment in scandalous disregard of the ethical demands of Christianity, embracing darkness because it didn't matter since it was only matter. So the gnostic could live a life of sexual and moral excess and not find it to be a contradiction with a spiritual walk.

John didn't want his friends to be deceived so he wrote a note to them reminding them of what he told them about Christ. This attack or heresy on true Christianity continued for several hundred years and it was these kind of concerns that precipitated the various Council and Creeds to clarify the truth and to confront the lies of these gnostic thoughts.

Augustine said, [God] gave Himself for a time to be handled, [by the hands of men]. John is saying "I was there, I touched him, I walked with him and I know him. He is life itself, the very life that was with God and is with God from the beginning. At once fully human and fully man." John was saying "If you want to know life and experience life abundantly, you have to know Jesus. Without Jesus every other expression of life is a mockery and a robbery of the true life."

So Jesus is life but then he goes on to say that he is also *Light . . .*

1 John 1:5-7

This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: God is light; in him there is no darkness at all. ⁶ If we claim to have fellowship with him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live out the truth. ⁷ 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.

This really speaks to the moral theme of this letter. John is saying there is a right way to live and a wrong way to live and they can be known and measured. One has the evidence of the Spirit of God and is light. The other is motivated by the Spirit of Anti-Christ and is darkness. I love this analogy because light dispels darkness doesn't it, just as when Jesus comes into a room, evil must flee. Evil does not even want to be around Jesus.

In Mark 1 we read ***And when he came to the other side, to the country of the Gadarenes, two demoniacs met him, coming out of the tombs, so fierce that no one could pass that way. And behold, they cried out, "What have you to do with us, O Son of God? Have you come here to torment us before the time?"***

When we read the first few verses of the Gospel written by this same John we read a similar set of themes about life and light:

1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ² He was with God in the beginning. ³ Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. ⁴ In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. ⁵ The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome^[a] it. Life has come into the world and this life is the light of mankind.

So there is the theme of Life and Light and there is also the theme of ***Love***

1 John 2:3-6

³ We know that we have come to know him if we keep his commands. ⁴ Whoever says, "I know him," but does not do what he commands is a liar, and the truth is not in that person. ⁵ ***But if anyone obeys his word, love for God is truly made complete in them.*** This is how we know we are in him: ⁶ Whoever claims to live in him must live as Jesus did.

Love is God's basic theme isn't it? God is love and we must find a way to live in that love and to share that love. This letter brings us back to the basics. Some scholars see this book best thought of as a series or collection of so called "Tests" . . . tests of knowledge like we experience in our western schools but also tests of moral behavior and spiritual faithfulness, so important to eastern religious thought.

An example of such a test is in this passage we just read:

⁴ Whoever says, "I know him," but does not do what he commands is a liar, and the truth is not in that person. ⁵ But if anyone obeys his word, love for God is truly made complete in them. This is how we know we are in him: ⁶ Whoever claims to live in him must live as Jesus did.

Life and Light and Love. If we say we believe in Christ and follow him then that means the test is on. Did you bring your number 2 pencil?

We are under such a test right now aren't we? Do you feel the spirit of expectation that comes with a gift like this building? We have experienced new life and a sense of rebirth in this opportunity of physical space. That means now we must give that life away. We must live abundantly and sacrificially and generously so that life may abound even more.

You will see numerous expressions of Kingdom in this building. ACoC is one of those expressions, but there are others. And there will be others as we continue to seek and to share the 100 fold blessings of God.

This building is about Light isn't it? For over a year we have been singing *Pete's song "We Believe"* as our theme song of sorts, and the chorus prophetically proclaims, "We want to be a light on a hill, we want to be a light on a hill, shining bright for all to see." We are quite literally a light on a hill. If we live here and do not dispel darkness and the kinds of evil that God hates then we will be failing the test. God hates injustice and poverty and death. You will see that our little light on a hill will shine bright with obedience and intention.

And finally this building will be a place of *love and truth*. A place where the knowledge of God does not reveal itself as judgment and condemnation and isolation, but as companionship and mercy and grace.

This building is either a blessing or it will be a hindrance. We will either pass the test of life and light and love or we will fail. We can step out in *life and light and love* and be the light on a hill we sing of or we can become complacent and comfortable, throw parties for ourselves and pat ourselves on the back for our good fortune. We will either be that battle ship we have talked about, purposeful and engaged in the fray or we will be a cruise ship, comfortable and lazy and self-satisfying.

I promise it is my intention to strike out in obedience together, believing the promises of God and following the living word of our exalted Head and thereby discovering and sharing love, or we will fail the tests and become saltless and dark.

- Christianity is fact, not fiction. (1 John 1:1)
- Christianity is proclaimed, not private. (1 John 1:2)
- Christianity is shared, not selfish. (1 John 1:3)
- Christianity is rejoicing, not repressive. (1 John 1:4)

6757 Simms will be a place of prayer and power and preparation and from here we will proclaim and serve and rescue.

Let's go out into the world to proclaim and serve and rescue together. Let's pass the test of our obedience and belief and love together. We will with the power and grace of God.

Prayer