

“Final Notes on 1st John”

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Opening Prayer

Good morning and welcome to Kasson/Pleasant Corners UMC. I am Pastor Jacob Hanson, and God willing hopefully you had a wonderful Valentine’s Day and a wonderful week in general. If you are new or visiting, a special welcome to you, we are thankful that you have joined us today and we pray that you would find our church loving and Godly. This morning we are wrapping up our walk through of 1st John. The week before last we talked about the very heart of this short (five chapters long) book when we focused on God’s unending love. That love, the core of our faith, is shown to us in a million different ways, but most spectacularly through Jesus’s life, death, and resurrection that paid for us if we call upon Him. The long and the short of this whole book is that if we call upon Jesus as our Savior, then the Lord extends His salvation to us out of love. If you have been here for any of the previous sermons on 1st John then you also likely remember that in addition to salvation, encouragement of believers in the face of persecution and the command to be wary of false teachers are also major points in this book. With all this in mind the last chapter of 1st John wraps up the final thoughts that John wishes to communicate. (Just a bunch of little tidbits, much of which has already been addressed in this letter.) These final thoughts are our focus for today, but first for one last time we should go over the background surrounding this book.

1st John is one of five books written by the Disciple/Apostle John. He writes these books (empowered by the Holy Spirit) near the end of his life in roughly 90AD. This is about sixty years after the death/resurrection of Christ, in a time where all the other disciples have passed away due to persecution. The Apostle Paul too has already been put to death for his faith in Christ by the time these books are written,

and the Jews who were under Roman rule had been spread across the Roman Empire after a failed revolt. Out of all of the great early church fathers it seems that John lives the longest. The Romans, not entirely knowing what to do with this old man who wouldn't stop talking about Jesus, isolated him on a rocky island known as Patmos. It is from that island isolation in his last years that John writes his Gospel, the book of Revelation, and the three pastoral letters that all bear his name. The book of 1st John itself is the longest of these pastoral letters, but it is still very short at only five chapters in length. Its focus, as we have already mentioned, is on salvation through Christ alone. The encouragements that John gives all throughout to love others, preach the good news, and act as Christians in the midst of persecution all serve to uphold salvation through Jesus. The same thing is true with John's continuous warnings against false teachers and idols; he simply doesn't want anyone to fall away from the truth and miss out on God's saving grace. The final thoughts that John shares in chapter five also predictably are focused on these same points.

Verses two and three state "By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and observe His commandments. For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments; and His commandments are not burdensome." If you want to sum up how we as Christians are supposed to act, then there you go. It is probably interesting to hear/see/read that "His commandments are not burdensome." You may be asking how are God's commandments not burdensome? It is hard to love my neighbor, it is hard to not bow to any other idols, it is tough to be a man after God's own heart. It is difficult to overcome this world. But this is where verse four comes into play "for whatever is born of God overcomes the world; and this is the victory that has overcome the world... our faith." Have you ever heard the question "why does the caged bird sing?" It isn't some great theological or difficult answer... a caged bird sings because it is a bird. The bird acts as a bird should, even

when times are difficult. The same is true for us as Christians. Because we have our base, or faith, in Christ, we have the Holy Spirit at work within us. For a Christian who loves the Lord the commands of the Lord are easier to follow. There is no great burden in following them, no great regret, but rather relief. Real regret, pain, and anguish internally result when we follow our old earthly nature... not when we act as we know we are called to. If this is getting to theologically deep for you a simple way of saying this would be “It feels good to a Christian to act like a Christian should.” That mindset is the result a foundation set in Christ that is nurtured by the Holy Spirit.

Our foundation as Christians, as one would correctly judge by our name, is found in Jesus the Christ. Jesus’s teachings, His truths, His saving grace, His unyielding mercy, His crucifixion and His resurrection, this is where we find our base. Why would we as Christians forego the things of this world, putting off the lusts and pleasures of this planet? Because we know that they are not eternally satisfying, and that they are ultimately harmful if used outside of God’s desired plan. (Think sex outside of marriage versus inside of it.) Why would we as Christians continue to have hope, and peace, and joy, even though our lives may seem to be falling apart? Because we know that this life is not all that there is, that we have eternity to look forward to. (Think Betty Duff for those of you who knew here.) Going back to our scripture reading for today, the Apostle John continues beyond talking about how we overcome the world by showcasing how we know these truths. He talks about the testimonies that proves our faith.

1st John 5:7-10 states “For there are three that testify: the Spirit and the water and the blood; and the three are in agreement. If we receive the testimony of men, the testimony of God is greater; for the testimony of God is this, that He has testified concerning His Son. The one who believes in the Son of God has the testimony in himself; the one who

does not believe God has made Him a liar, because he has not believed in the testimony that God has given concerning His Son.” This portion of the reading may have puzzled you a bit as we read it this morning. I have to admit that out of all the stuff that John covers on the back end of his book, this is the piece that stumped me the most, but with a little research it makes sense. The first thing we should know is that testimony is important. If this were a court case in those days you would need at least two people to testify in order for a testimony to be considered valid, having three makes it an assurance. To cite “The Interpreter’s Bible” (a helpful resource that Pastor Clint passed my way) the three things that’s testify about Jesus that John mentions, “the Spirit and the water and the blood,” actually reference in our lives the testimonies of the Lord, the church, and each of us individually within our own hearts.

The testimony of the Lord is pretty straightforward, but is vast in nature in regards to Jesus. As we covered over Christmas and will cover again this year during Lent, Jesus fulfills many prophecies that are written long before His birth. Jesus’s actions clearly have a divine nature, and His speech gives us a clear indication that He was God in human flesh. (Jesus didn’t leave anything to the imagination!) The testimony of the church is also pretty straightforward, and is also pretty vast. The whole of Christianity, amongst many thousands of years, amongst many denominations, amongst many different cultures and backgrounds, all of Christianity attests to the same Lord. If a denomination or sect does not testify that Jesus is God in human flesh, that He came and lived a perfect life, that He died for our sins, etc., then that group is cast out and not considered Christian anymore. The church testifies that Jesus is Lord in all that it does with all of its members. The finally testimony comes from within ourselves. It is a personal testimony that the Lord has placed within only you. If you have ever heard someone reference “I know that the Lord exists because He changed me” or “I have seen the

Lord at work in my life” then they are speaking from their own personal testimony. All three of these testimonies on their own have power, but when all three are at work then you have a Christian man or woman with unbreakable faith who loves their Lord with all their heart and their neighbor as themselves. Why is all this testifying so important? In true 1st John fashion verse eleven then says this “And the testimony is this, that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son.” It always comes back to salvation Beloved.

The last nine verses out of 1st John serve to wrap up just a couple of thoughts from John. He wants us to remember that everything in Christianity leads back to salvation for us and for others. (vs. 13) He wants us to remember that the Lord listens to us, and that we should have confidence in approaching our loving Lord because He does in fact care for us. (vs. 14-15) He wants us to steer clear of sins, to take seriously our calling to be righteous. (vs. 16-18) He wants us to remember that this world seeks for us to fall away, and that we should be wary of Satan and the false idols the devil places in our way. (vs. 19, 21) But above all things, John wants us to remember that we are called to stick to Christ, the truth, and the eternal salvation that Jesus brings.

As we close out our series on 1st John I want to leave you with a closing thought on why we spent this time in 1st John in the first place. 1st John isn't the easiest book to read and it certainly is not the same as picking up a novel from your favorite author, but that doesn't change the fact that it is extremely important. Beloved Congregation books like 1st John exist in scripture for a reason. In our case over the last month we learned that salvation comes from Jesus alone, that we should steer clear of false teachers, and that our conduct should be showing the love that the Lord has placed within our hearts. All that is fine and dandy, but lessons like this go unlearned if we never open our Bibles in the first place to learn them. I am as guilty as any in that often I forget to read

my Bible occasionally, or it is inconvenient to read it, or I end up reading something that is difficult and doesn't seem to have much merit at the moment, but rest assured reading the Lord's word is something that I never regret, and neither will you. Have you ever heard someone complain after eating their vegetables that they wished they would have had McDonald's instead? Of course not. Have you ever heard someone regretting that they worked out or went for a run or did their homework early or spent less on Black Friday than they planned? Of course not! It is my hope and prayer this morning that as we approach the Lenten season very soon, where we will remember the life of Christ, that we all would take a renewed focus in reading the Lord's word. During Lent the majority of our scripture readings and teachings will come out of the Gospel of John, written by the same disciple who wrote the book we just finished. I would challenge you to read that Gospel along with me during Lent, not to check off another to-do list box, but rather to take a step in getting to know our Lord better. Having said all that would you pray with me as we conclude the message for today?

Closing Prayer