

“Christ Our Guide and Advocate”

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Opening Prayer

Good Morning, and welcome here to Kasson/Pleasant Corners UMC. Happy New Year, it is our prayer for you that 2020 would be one of the best years you have ever experienced, and that the Lord would grow your faith immensely over the next twelve months. If you are looking at the new year and have made some resolutions about what you want 2020 to be for you, hopefully you have considered following the Lord a little more closely as one of those goals. If you are seeking the Lord anew in this year, God willing our church will be a place where you can encounter Him often. Being now past the holiday season, we now venture into a new sermon series that will encompass the months of January and February. We are going to be taking a look at three very short, but very important, books of the Bible that are found in the New Testament. These books are all connected by the same author, by the same timeframe, and are all written in a similar way. We are going to be looking at 1st, 2nd, and 3rd John.

The biggest and most memorable of these three books is the one we are going to study first, appropriately it is 1st John. Likely written on the island of Patmos to a number of different congregations in John's later years, it is an interesting look into the focus of the early church. These books, along with Revelation and the Gospel of John, are all attributed to the Apostle John. That would be the same John who was Jesus's favorite disciple. You might recognize him as one of four fishermen who Jesus calls, and also as the only disciple who is present at Jesus's feet during the crucifixion. Along with Peter and Paul he is one of the most significant and important of the early church fathers. He is

thought to be the youngest of the twelve disciples, and is also the only one who outlives the Roman Emperor Nero, who kills all the rest. According to church history (not scripture mind you) John at one point faces death in the coliseum for being a Christian. The Romans set wild animals after him, but the animals leave John alone. They also apparently tried to boil John in oil, but John floated to the top like a cork alive and fine. With no real idea on what to do with this guy, the story goes that it is then that the Romans banish him to the lonely island of Patmos, a rocky outcropping. From that island we get all of John's writings, which are compiled in his old age. Most think that the writings from John show up when the guys is likely in his 80's-90's, roughly around 90 A.D. or a little later. It is from these writings that we get these three pastoral letters from John that we are going to study this month and next, 1st, 2nd, and 3rd John.

1st, 2nd, and 3rd John are all concerned primarily with one major point, that being salvation. These books seek to keep out false teachings, strengthen believers, and empower churches in the midst of persecution specifically for the reason of salvation. If you have been in church for much of your life then certain scriptures from here will sound familiar. 1st John in particular is an extremely easy and profitable book of the Bible to read and gain insight from. (Although perhaps difficult to master.) Just a couple of notable scriptures from these three books are: 1st John 1:8 "If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us" 1st John 3:13 "Do not be surprised, brethren, if the world hates you." 1st John 4:19 "We love, because He first loved us." 2nd John 1:8 "Watch yourselves, that you do not lose what we have accomplished, but that you may receive a full reward." 3rd John 1:4 "I have no greater joy than this, to hear of my children walking in the truth." We could go on and share many other

scriptures that are either very profound like that, or that you at least have heard before. Suffice it to say, these three short books of the Bible are very important for how we as modern day Christians interpret scripture, live our lives, and seek to bring the message of salvation to others. Over the next month I would invite you to take the time to read this for yourselves, to see how these books can have an impact. We begin today with some very important scripture, verses that will set the tone for this entire sermon series.

1st John 1:1-10 gives us many core Christian principles that we adhere to. 1st John 1:1-4 lets us know that the “Word of God” is manifested in the person of Jesus. Verse 2 reads “And the life was manifested, and we have seen and testify and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was manifested to us...” John is talking about the incarnation of Jesus, how Jesus is fully divine and also fully man. That is what we just celebrated at Christmas, and John 1:1 “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God” should come to mind. The opening of this letter is really clear, John wants everyone to know that we find our salvation in Jesus, and it is to Him that we look for guidance.

Verses 5-10 in 1st John 1 set a tone that we will see throughout all three letters that he writes, as well as what is emulated in his gospel and in the book of Revelations. There is an overwhelming emphasis on the fact that believers should be imitators of Jesus. Jesus is our guide in how we should act. To illustrate this he uses the metaphor of light. “God is light, and in Him there is no darkness at all.” The Lord Himself is not sinful, or mean, or evil. In our world often we will hear that God is cruel, and that He must hate us. That simply is not the case. How could a God who hates us be willing to send His own Son to die in our

stead? How could a God who hates us be so willing to share in mortal human suffering for our sake? No, in the Lord there is no sin, and there is no evil. (In fact evil and sin are akin to the absence of God, twisting what He has made so that it is used in a negative fashion.) So what does this mean for us as believers, as the people of God? It means that we too should be found without darkness.

“If we say that we have fellowship with Him and yet walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth.” That is a damning verse Beloved Congregation, one that should bring us pause. Lets be frank, most people who claim to know Jesus don’t give two cents about Him in their regular lives. We have talked about this before, but it is worth mentioning again. If God is so important in our lives, then why do we seem to so rarely make Him a priority? I am not trying to make anyone feel horrible, nor am I calling anyone out, but I do want us to be realistic. Who really cares about Jesus and about His people? The person who makes the Lord a priority. Our time, our efforts, our finances, our speech, our cares in this world should all reflect that we hold the Lord as a priority. If they don’t, then we lie if we claim that we follow Him well. This is what John means when he states “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.” I am not saying that you have to be perfect, have your Bible memorized, or be a missionary in a foreign country to be a good Christian, but we should be taking seriously our walk with the Lord. That is the emphasis John is putting out there in these books. Furthermore, John states just after our last verse we read “If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us.” That last part might also set you at unease, even if you are someone who is dedicated to Christ.

Thankfully, Jesus is not only our guide for how we should act, but He is also our advocate when we stumble.

1st John 2 begins with the most encouraging scripture we read today. “My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; and He Himself is the propitiation [that means payment] for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for those of the whole world.” Often in our day and age we like to focus upon either the emphasis of not sinning to follow the Lord or we focus upon Christ’s love for us in spite of our sins. The truth is that both apply, and John like a good pastor wants his churches to know that their sins should be fought, but that Jesus is the One who takes them away. John wants us to know that we do have an advocate in heaven, Jesus Himself, who stands in our place even though we are sinners. So while Christ is supposed to be our guiding ideal, the one we follow, He is also our advocate for when we fall short.

Jesus, the same one whom we are supposed to emulate is also the one who we are supposed to seek out when we fail. The reality is that we all sin, all of us. Your parents, your pastor, Martin Luther, the Apostle John, all of us are guilty of sin. We need to seek out Jesus as our guide, we should be striving and fighting against our sins, but we also need to seek Him out when we fail and rest assured knowing that it is by His blood we are forgiven. In other words, the good news is that when we sin we can rest on Jesus, knowing that we are forgiven if we seek Him out. We don’t have to be perfect to be a part of God’s kingdom, nor do we have to be perfect to do the good things that the Lord has called us to do, we simply have to continue to seek out Christ.

So what does this mean for us today? Getting down to brass tacks, what is it that we should take away from these verses out of 1st John, and what should we be looking out for as we go through the three letters of John in the near future? Big picture from today is that we need to remember that Jesus is our guide and our advocate. If you want a real world example, He is like a good boss. If you have ever worked for a really good boss, they want you to succeed and are willing to show you the ropes right? If you emulate their behavior, then you get promoted. Similarly, that same good boss will be willing to stick up for you if you seek them out when you make a mistake. In a similar fashion our Lord wants us to follow Christ's example and He also looks to Jesus as our advocate.

God willing as you leave here this morning and walk into a new year with all of its challenges, joys, hardships, and changes, you will also leave here knowing that we should all be following Christ. We should also remember that even when we do fail though, that we can lean on Him who went to the cross for us. God Bless, and have a wonderful new year, let us pray.

Closing Prayer