

April 12, 2015 – 1 John 1:1-2:2 (First Reading: Acts 4:32-35 Gospel: John 20:19-31)

The certainty of our sin, the certainty of the solution.

- *From an eyewitness to what Jesus said*
- *From an eyewitness to what Jesus did*

For many years around Christmas and Easter popular magazines, such as Time and Newsweek, have published articles that talk about Jesus. These articles often question what we know about His birth, life, death and resurrection¹. These days atheism seems to be on the rise, at least it is becoming more out-spoken. These attempts to cast doubt on who Jesus was and what He did, and even to cast doubt on the existence of God Himself, all come from the same desire to deny the reality of sin, to deny mankind's responsibility to God, and deny one's need for a Savior.

Even without reading these articles, the devil, the world around us, and our own sinful flesh can lead us to question what is really wrong or right. We can be lead even to question what we really know about God. Our friends, neighbors, and even family members can challenge us with the question: "How do you know what you believe is true?" That is a good question. And it is one that our epistle reading this second Sunday of Easter answers.

The magazines are right to focus on Jesus. If Jesus did not exist, or if He was not who He claimed to be, we are just wasting our time. We might as well go home and do something else on Sunday morning. If Jesus was not raised from the dead then our faith is futile and we are still in our sins (1 Corinthians 15:17). That is why John focuses on Jesus from the very beginning of this his first letter. Notice how many times John emphasizes that he, and the other apostles, were eye-witnesses of Jesus: "*That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, concerning the Word of life— the life was manifested, and we have seen, and bear witness, and declare to you that eternal life which was with the Father and was manifested to us— that which we have seen and heard we declare to you...*" (1 John 1:1-3). Over and over again he says that he, and the others, heard Jesus, saw Him with their very own eyes, looked upon Him, and even "handled" Him with their own hands. What more could you want from an eye-witness? You can trust what John and the other Gospel writers say about Jesus because they are eye-witness accounts.

Why is this important? It is important, first of all, because it establishes the truth of what Jesus said. John tells us in verse 5: "*This is the message which we have heard from Him and declare to you, that God is light and in Him is no darkness at all.*"

This message isn't as popular as what John wrote later in chapter 4 where he said: "*...God is love*" (1 John 4:8b). It is true that God is love, but people often quote this out of context. They use it to deny their sin. They claim that if God is love, He would never punish anyone, especially not eternally in hell. An example of this over-focus on love is Pastor Rob Bell and his book *Love Wins*. In this book he questions hell as a place of eternal conscious torment and suggests that in the end everyone will be reconciled to God because "love wins."

But we cannot skip this message from Jesus that John first brings us here: "*God is light and in Him is no darkness at all*". Perhaps another way to say this is that with God things really are black and white. God is light and He cannot tolerate any darkness. There is no middle ground. His love doesn't cause Him to "look the other way." "*If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth*" (v. 6).

1. See for example <http://money.cnn.com/2014/12/29/media/newsweek-christian-jesus-covers/>

And that is the problem. By nature we do not want to admit that we walk in darkness. We want to make black things white, or at least somewhat gray. And we tell our selves that things are OK because “God is love” and He accepts us anyway.

In today’s schools one of the things that is taught is the difference between fact and opinion. A fact is defined as “a statement that can be proven true (or false) with some objective standard.” An opinion is “a statement that a person believes to be true but it cannot be measure against an objective standard.”² While this distinction can be useful, it is often over-simplified and everything is forced into one of these two categories. Anything related to morals or religion is labeled an opinion. This results in complete relativism. If anyone has ever told you, “well, that is just your opinion” when you have tried to share with them what the Bible says, you have seen the results of this often-false dichotomy.

But God didn’t give us the “ten opinions”. The definitions I just cited both mention an “objective standard.” God’s word is an objective standard by which we can measure our lives – although many would consider this fact to be just our opinion. But John doesn’t mince words here. He says that if we claim to walk with God but live in sin, “*we lie and do not practice the truth*” (v. 6). “*If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us*” (v. 8). When we justify what we do and say that it really isn’t a sin – that it is only a sin in the opinion of some people – we are just deceiving ourselves. “*If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us*” (v. 10).

Over and over John here mentions “the truth.” He tells us where we find the truth; we find it in God’s word – we find it in Jesus who is the Word. We have God’s Word here confirmed by John and his fellow eye-witnesses.

God’s Word tells us that we have sinned, but as certain as our sin is, the solution to our sin is just as certain. This solution is the Word of life to which John here bears witness – Jesus Christ the righteous. John tells us that “*He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world*” (2:2).

A propitiation is a sacrifice that pays for sin. Jesus died on the cross to pay for your sins. And He paid not only yours, but also for the sins of the whole world. This is an objective fact in which you can trust. The forgiveness of sins is yours because of what Jesus has done – not because of anything you do.

But Jesus not only died on the cross but He also rose from the dead. Jesus resurrection, which we celebrated last week on Easter, and which we celebrate every Sunday, showed that God accepted Jesus’ innocent life in the place of your sinful life. It shows that He is the propitiation for your sins. Jesus’ death satisfied the wrath of God that was upon us all because we have all sinned against God. John and the other disciples were eye-witnesses of Jesus’ resurrection. And even more than that, they were able to touch the risen Lord with their hands, as we read in our Gospel reading, and confirm that Jesus really had bodily risen from the dead. It was not a dream or a hallucination. Jesus’ sacrifice for the world’s sins was accepted by God; He has taken away our sins, and has conquered death and brought us eternal life.

John writes what he has seen and heard so that we may “*have fellowship...with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ*” (v. 3). Our sin had separated us from God, but now that Jesus has taken away our sin, we can have fellowship with God and with one another. This fellowship is

2. From <http://www.classroomtech.org/credibility/Fact.Opinion.PDF>

based on the truth – the truth of God’s word, the truth of what Jesus has done by living a perfect life, dying in our place and rising again from the dead.

This fellowship is not compatible with the darkness in which we once lived. By the Word of life, God has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light (1 Peter 2:9). We are to “*walk in the light, as He is in the light*” (v. 7). This is not something that we can do ourselves. It is not something we accomplish by our own efforts. It is God who works in us through the light of His word. It is He “*who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of...Jesus Christ*” (2 Corinthians 4:6). God works in you to enable you to walk in the light.

We are reminded here, however, that it is not us walking in the light that earns us the forgiveness of sins, but it is “*the blood of Jesus Christ His Son*” that “*cleanses us from all sin*” (v. 7). Your forgiveness is based on the blood of Jesus Christ that He shed on the cross in your place.

As I mentioned before, one of the ways people try to deal with their sin is to claim that it really isn’t sin. But the way to deal with sin is not to deny it, but to confess it. To confess one’s sin simply means to agree with God that what one has done is wrong, that it is sinful. And “*if we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness*” (v. 9). You can trust that God does forgive your sins, because He is faithful. And He is just to forgive your sins. God doesn’t simply turn a “blind eye” to our sins, but He can freely and justly forgive them because Jesus paid the penalty of death that our sins deserved. Jesus satisfied the just demands of the law for us.

And God not only forgives you your sins, but also cleanses you from all unrighteousness – cleanses you from all sin. It isn’t up to us to “clean up our act” so that we can come before God, but God came to us. He came to us in Jesus, whom John saw and even touched. Jesus came to us while we were still sinners and shed His blood to cleanse us.

The good news that John tells us here just keeps on going. There is a beautiful little word repeated here that is so important. That word is the word “all”: “*the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin*” (v. 7), “*He is faithful and just...to cleanse us from all unrighteousness*” (v. 9). There is no sin that you have done that has not been paid for by the blood of Jesus, God’s Son. He has taken away all your sin and all your unrighteousness.

John writes these things “*so that you may not sin.*” We have the warnings here that we cannot have fellowship with God and still walk in darkness. We have the great news that Jesus has cleansed us from all sin and all unrighteousness.

But as we live in this world, we can still fall short. The world, our sinful flesh, and devil can still lead us into sin. But that doesn’t mean that all is lost. In the same breath in which John says that he writes these things so that we won’t sin, he says, “*And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous*” (2:1). This shows another reason why Jesus’ resurrection is so important. Because He lives, He can be our Advocate with the Father. An advocate is someone who speaks on your behalf, someone who speaks in your defense. Jesus is your defense attorney with the Father when you sin. And His defense guarantees your acquittal, because “*He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and [for the sins of] the whole world.*” He points to His sacrifice for you and His righteousness that He gives you as the reason for your forgiveness.

So trust in these words of an eye-witness to what Jesus said and did here on earth. John’s message from Jesus is that we have certainly sinned, but he also saw Jesus provide the solution to our sin by living a perfect life and dying on the cross in our place. And John saw and even

touched Jesus after He rose from the dead. This same Jesus now lives to be our Advocate with the father. May these words forever make your joy be full. Amen

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