Series: 1 John…Living the Christian Life

Message: 01 An Introduction

Text: Various

Theme:

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If you would please turn in your Bible to 1 John, 1 John chapter one.

That’s page 1021 of the Pew Bible or if you go to the last book of the Bible, Revelation, and turn left past Jude, 2nd, and 3rd John and you will come to 1 John.

We are starting a new series this morning. The series title is 1 John…Living the Christian Life.

We spent the summer looking at heaven; what will the new heaven and the new earth be like, what will we be like, and what will we be doing there?

The same John who wrote the book of Revelation, which speaks about the new heaven and new earth, is the same John who wrote this little letter—1 John.

Here in 1st John we will not be looking at what life will be like in heaven, **but** at what the Christian life should be like **now** and how can we have assurance that we will have eternal life in the new heaven.

The title for this morning’s message is simply ‘An Introduction’.

I just want to give you somewhat of an overview and an introduction to this little book.

Church tradition suggest that the apostle John, as an old man, was sent in exile to the island of Patmos. It was there he received the vision of heaven and wrote the book of Revelation.

After he was release from Patmos, presumably because of his age, he went back Ephesus where he had served and lived out his remaining days.

It was there in Ephesus John wrote the letters 1st, 2nd, and 3rd John. He was by this time somewhere around 80 years old.

I have always loved to sit and listen to what older men and women of God have to say - especially at the end of their lives.

We can learn much by listening to the advice of those who have long walked with God!

Let’s read the first four verses of chapter 1. 1 John 1:1-4 “**That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we looked upon and have touched with our hands, concerning the word of life— 2 the life was made manifest, and we have seen it, and testify to it and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was made manifest to us— 3 that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ.**

**4 And we are writing these things so that our joy may be complete**.

As I have said the apostle John wrote the book of Revelation. He also wrote the gospel of John. And he wrote the three letters, epistles, 1st, 2nd, and 3rd John. Both 2nd and 3rd John are short, each only one chapter long.

John was one of the sons of Zebedee, along with his brother James that we read of in the Gospels.

They were dubbed ‘The Sons of Thunder’ by our Lord because of their zealous personalities.

John, along with James and Peter, was one of the inner circle of the disciples who had special fellowship with the Lord Jesus Christ when He was upon the earth.

As one of the inner three, he had a unique eyewitness experience of the ministry, the earthly life of Jesus Christ.

Some would go as far as to say that, even beyond the inner circle of the three, John was special, and indeed the Bible speak of him as ‘the disciple whom Jesus loved’.

There’s something special about John and his relationship with the Lord Jesus, and indeed at the Last Supper he is found to be reclining on Jesus’ breast.

From the cross, Jesus entrust John with caring for His mother.

1 John is called an epistle, a letter, it is not really like a letter in that it has no proper introduction, or address, nor even a closing.

John doesn’t mention anyone by name. So it seems this was written a circular letter, a letter that was intended to be read and passed along from church to church.

Yet, as we read it, though it’s not addressed to specific people, we find that it is intensely personal - so personal, in fact, that John doesn’t even feel the need to mention his own name to those to whom he is writing.

He knows that they will know who it is who is writing to them.

He is so attached to them, so intimate with them, that he bares his pastoral heart of compassion and love for them, and in it he calls this flock ‘My beloved’, or ‘My little children’.

Because of this many scholars think that, thou this is meant to be a circular letter, John had the church in Ephesus in mind as he wrote this because he had served there for many years.

Imagine, if you will, John, as he sits with a quill and a piece of parchment, and he looks back and reminisces over the life that he has lived with Christ – a life he has lived for Christ as an apostle, as an evangelist, as a missionary.

He remembers all the experiences he had with the Lord, he contemplates the rise and spread of Christianity across Europe.

What must his thoughts have been?

In 1 John we get a sense of what this aging apostle thought and the wisdom he had gained in a life time of serving Christ.

This letter contains what John thought most important to pass on to his beloved children.

John, the apostle, at the end of his life - and he is speaking with great authority and with great influence, because at this point he is the only apostle now still living.

So he speaks to these believers with a fatherly counsel.

As we see in chapter 2 and verse 1, he says to them: “**My little children…”**

In essence he is saying in this letter: ‘This is the message that I give to you, as I look over the whole of my life and I assess where the church of Christ is at this particular juncture in its history, this is the message that I feel that God would have me bring to you’.

So what does he say?

John’s writing style is a little hard to follow and harder yet to outline.

He doesn’t develop an argument in any order, the way that, say Paul does in the book of Romans or the book of Ephesians.

As you read through these five chapters, you quickly see that John tends to repeat himself over and over again.

But these are not the ramblings or an old man who keeps telling the same old stories over and over again.

No. John seems to repeat himself around three main themes: righteousness, love, and truth. And every time he repeats himself, he tends to add a little bit more—to take the thought a little deeper.

John, an old man at the end of his life, is writing what perhaps will be his final message to the church he loves, and these three themes are the most important things to him.

So, he just repeats them again and again and again, because they’re worthy of repetition.

Jerome, an early Christian historian, says that when the aged apostle was so weak that he could no longer preach, he used to be carried into the congregation at Ephesus, and he used to content himself with just a word of exhortation: ‘Little children’, he would always say, ‘Love one another’.

‘Little children, love one another’, and when the hearers grew tired of the same message over and over again, they asked him why he so frequently repeated it.

He responded: ‘Because it is the Lord’s command, and if that is all that you do it is enough!’ Little children, love one another!

So John repeats himself, not as the onset of dementia in this old man of God, but John, inspired by the Spirit of the Living God, writes what these Christians in Ephesus needed most!

Here is the application for us today. We should never become weary with repeating the same message from God’s word.

Because God’s word is the message that our generation urgently needs to hear, just like in John’s day!

The gospel, though we repeat it over and over again, and to some it might seem not to bear any fruit, this is the message that is needed most today.

Mom…dad, keep repeating those truths to your children. One day, most likely when they have children of their own, they will hear those words again…as they come out of their own mouths with the realization, “I have become my father!”

So what was the message that John brought these Christians?

Well, let’s start by looking at the primary reason John writes this letter, and then we’ll be able to make more sense of what he actually goes on to say to them.

I believe the primary reason for his writing is found in chapter 5 and verse 13, one of the key verses of the letter, if you turn to it with me.

John says: 1 John 5:13 “**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**.”

This is why he is writing, that those who have believed in the Son of God may know that they have eternal life.

In the gospel of John, John chapter 20, we see there the reason for his writing of the Gospel of John.

John 20:30-31 “**Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; 31 but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name**.”

When John writes his gospel, he is writing to a people who are not yet believers. He is trying to lead them to saving faith in Christ.

According to 1 John 5:13, John is talking to people who are already believers, they have saving faith in Jesus Christ.

So in 1 John, John is trying to lead these believers into a deeper understanding and a further maturity in their Christian life.

In fact, as you go through this little letter, you’ll find the word ‘know’ over and over again.

That little word suggest that John knew that there was somethings that these Christians he is writing to didn’t know.

Yes, they had believed in the Son of God, they were saved, but John is writing that they might know that they have eternal life.

In other words, there seems to have been a lack of assurance in their salvation.

Now you might ask: why were they doubting their salvation? Why had they a lack of assurance?

Well, if you turn to 1 John 2:18, we are given a hint as to the reason.

Let me back up to 1 John 2:18 “**Children, it is the last hour, and as you have heard that antichrist is coming, so now many antichrists have come. Therefore we know that it is the last hour.**

These “antichrist” are false teachers who have risen up and are teaching a different gospel, a different message about Christ, who he was, what he accomplished on the cross, and what we must do to be saved.

By the end of the first century there were a number of hearsays, false teachings going around. Scholars debate which of these teachings John writes against.

Though John doesn’t specifically call out which false teaching he is combating, you can find each of them hinted at in this letter.

And it is because of these false teachers why some of these believers lacked assurance.

Assurance is extremely important for the Christian, and if we glean anything from our studies of 1 John, it surely will be that.

Dr. Martyn Lloyd Jones said on one occasion: ‘Assurance is not essential to salvation, but it is essential to the joy of salvation’.

You see, you could be saved and not have assurance, many people are.

You could have assurance and not be saved, and many people are that too.

But the best position to be in, and the biblical position that we all should strive after, is to know that we are saved and have the assurance of it that brings the joy that can only come through that certainty.

John writes to these Christians who had already believed, so that they would know for sure that they possessed eternal life.

John writes to them in a world of doctrinal, social, and moral confusion, and tells them they need assurance to survive.

As we go through this little epistle, we will see the relevance it still has for our own day.

We need to see the truth of 1 John - because we live in a world, even in a Christian church, sadly to say, that is relativistic.

In other words, they believe that everything is relative, even truth - that there are no longer any absolutes, no longer any right and wrong, black and white.

We live in a society that is not necessarily immoral, though it is that, but it is amoral, there are no morals whatsoever!

There is no truth. You have your truth and I have my personal truth, but no one can say that this is ‘the truth’.

What we have in 1 John is a message for today, if ever there was, and it’s this - John says: ‘There are certainties, you can be certain, you can know’.

If this book tells us anything, it tells us the fundamentals of the faith, and it encourages and exhorts us, and calls us back to the basics of biblical Christianity.

May I ask you, are you sure of your personal salvation? Do you know you’re saved? Are you convinced of the Lord Jesus Christ, who He is, what He accomplished in His death, His burial, His resurrection, the truth of the gospel - by grace, through faith, not of works?

Have you received it, embracing the offer of the gospel?

**Benediction “The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make his face shine upon you and be gracious to you; the Lord turn his face toward you and give you peace.” (Num. 6:24-26)**