

**“The Joyful Proclamation”**  
**1 John 1:5-2:2**  
**June 15, 2014**

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**INTRODUCTION:**

We pointed out last week that John is writing this letter we are studying this summer so that we might be full of joy. What would it take for you to be full of joy? I would imagine the answer many of us would give to that question would be to experience a change of some undesirable circumstance. The person who is fighting for her life against cancer longs to hear the news that she is cancer free, and thinks that such news would bring joy. The young family living on the edge financially thinks that another thousand dollars a month in take-home pay would provide just the margin needed to bring relief and even joy into their lives. The spouse suffering through a troubled marriage thinks that if the other person would just change their behavior, the marriage could be healed and joy would return to their lives. While it is not wrong to seek to change undesirable circumstances in our lives, to think that such change will lead to joy is to sentence ourselves to a loss of joy. The reason is that these changes lie largely outside our control.

John’s message is that joy is available now, no matter what one’s circumstances. It is found in a word that is used three times in this first chapter, the word “proclaim.” In his introduction that we looked at last week, John had said that our complete joy comes from fellowship with God and one another, and that this fellowship comes from the message he was proclaiming. In this week’s text, he gives us more detail about the precise content of this proclamation.

Before looking at some of the details of this message he proclaimed, let’s consider for just a minute this word that appears three times in chapter 1, the word “proclaim.” It means to report or announce something. Think about that for a minute. God’s plan for giving complete joy to his children is a humble announcement. It’s not some display of power like Elijah did on Mt. Carmel when he called down fire on the altar. It’s not some secret knowledge or secret words of incantation. It’s the humble announcement. We make announcements every week in our worship service, and I know it’s the part of the service people are most likely to tune out. Yet it is a simple announcement here that has the power to fill our hearts with joy and eventually to change the whole world and make it what God always intended.

A simple announcement can change your life if the news announced is of sufficient importance. If the doctor treating you for your terminal cancer announces the discovery a new medicine that will certainly bring healing to you, your life would be changed. If your wife announces that she is pregnant,

both of your lives will change dramatically. The ability of an announcement to lead to such dramatic change is related to the content of the announcement. Let's look now at the content of the announcement John made.

## I. It Starts with God

It is significant that John begins the way he does. **“This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all”** (v. 5). John's announcement begins with God. When he says that God is light, he means that God is the source of truth and God is morally pure. All that he does is right and truthful. One of the primary ways people get led astray is when they begin with man instead of God. Since God is the source of light and truth, whenever we do so, we move from light into darkness. In the dark, we get confused. In the dark, we can actually start thinking that God is the problem, not the solution to the problems of the world. One of the common ways this happens today is when people begin to blame God for the problems of the world. “If he's God,” people ask, “why doesn't he do something about all the evil and suffering in the world?” Such an objection only arises if we start with man instead of God. When we do so, we expect God to act as we want him to and then get angry at him when he doesn't do so. In his book, *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*, Steven Covey gives the following account.

Two battleships assigned to the training squadron had been at sea on maneuvers in heavy weather for several days. I was serving on the lead battleship and was on watch on the bridge as night fell. The visibility was poor with patchy fog, so the captain remained on the bridge keeping an eye on all activities.

Shortly after dark, the lookout on the wing of the bridge reported, “Light, bearing on the starboard bow.”

“Is it steady or moving astern?” the captain called out.

Lookout replied, “Steady, captain,” which meant we were on a dangerous collision course with that ship.

The captain then called the signalman, “Signal that ship: We are on a collision course, advise you change course 20 degrees.”

Back came a signal, “Advisable for you to change course 20 degrees.”

The captain said, “Send, I'm a captain, change course 20 degrees.”

“I'm a seaman second class,” came the reply. “You had better change course 20 degrees.”

By that time, the captain was furious. He spat out, “Send, I'm a battleship. Change course 20 degrees.”

Back came the flashing light, “I'm a lighthouse.”

We changed course. (p. 33)

We are like that captain, wanting God to move and accommodate himself to our course. But he is God, and we are not. So we must start with God, and we

must start where John starts. God is light. It is his nature to reveal himself, just as it is the nature of light to shine. Where does God reveal himself? He does so through his word, and through Jesus. If you want to know what God is like, don't try to figure him out yourself. Instead, receive what he reveals of himself through Jesus and through the Bible.

It is significant, too, that John begins with God as light, not God as love. The significance of that is the fact that so much teaching about God begins with his love, not his truth or holiness. John wants more than anything for his disciples to know the love of God, but he knows that they will never know that love unless they begin with God's truth and holiness.

## **II. It Tells the Truth about Man**

Since the first sin of Adam and Eve, mankind has been attempting to cover up or deny sin. After starting with the truth about God, John moves next to consider the truth about man. He addresses three common errors here regarding sin, each indicated by the phrase **"If we say..."** As we go through these three errors about sin, let me encourage you to evaluate your own heart in light of these errors and see if you are guilty of one or more of them. The three errors are to say that sin doesn't matter, sin is not my nature, or sin is not my practice.

John states the first error like this. **"If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth"** (1:6). This is the error that says that sin doesn't matter. No matter what sin I commit, it has no effect on my relationship with God. There was a teaching that was growing in popularity during the time John wrote this that is known today as Gnosticism. The Gnostics believed that the material part of a person, the body, was completely separate from the more important part, the spirit. Further, they believed that anything done in the body had absolutely no effect on the spirit. The body is like a box we might put something in for shipping. If the box gets a little damaged during transit, it doesn't really matter, as long as the contents remain undamaged. The Gnostics believed that the body was the same as the box. There is a type of Gnosticism still present today, in which some professing Christians are completely untroubled by any sin in their lives. On the contrary, they almost seem at times to celebrate it, all the while being completely confident that God is as untroubled about their sin as they are. It's a view of sin parodied by the poet W. H. Auden: "I like to sin/God likes to forgive/the world is admirably arranged."

The second error says that sin is not in my nature. In other words, it believes in the basic goodness of human nature. **"If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us"** (v. 8). The singular, "sin,"

instead of the plural, “sins,” indicates that he is talking about the sin nature rather than individual sins. So this error is to claim to be free of a sin nature. The only way to believe that is to be free of all truth on the inside. John says of the person who believes in the innate goodness of humanity that the truth is not in him. This person reminds me of one who first shoots the arrow and then draws the target around the arrow. In other words, this person believes that if I do it, it must be right. They have no inner truth that serves as a target to be hit, because if they did they would realize how far short of it they fall.

The third error about sin is the person who claims not to have any actual sin. This person may acknowledge the existence of a sin nature, but is unaware of any actual sin in his or her life. **“If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us”** (1:10). This error grows when something else is missing in our hearts—the word of God. Let me ask you a question. Do you have a knowledge of any sin you have committed within the last two days? What sin have you repented of in the last 48 hours? If you can’t come up with anything, it’s because God’s word is not inside your heart.

### **III. It Ends with Jesus**

The reason John has so much to say about sin is because it is only through honesty about our sin that we can see and believe the truth about Jesus. This announcement ends with Jesus because there is no better news than what John announces here. We have walked in darkness instead of light, and as a result have been cut off from fellowship with God, from joy and from life. But there is glorious news in Jesus. This passage is saturated with glorious, life-giving truth about Jesus. Verse 8 says that **“the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin.”** It provides not only forgiveness, but the cleansing of the stains brought by sin. Verse 9 promises the same, offering both forgiveness and cleansing.

Let me point out two very important words that are used in the first two verses of chapter 2, words that bring joy and freedom to the soul in what they tell us of God’s grace. They are the words “advocate” and “propitiation.” First, Jesus is our advocate with the Father. The idea is one familiar to us. Someone is accused of a crime and enters the complex, mysterious world of the judicial system. It is a world in which the one who doesn’t know the rules and procedures will be certain to run afoul of justice. I remember one of our elders telling me about a time when he found himself facing an appearance before a judge as one accused of violating the law. Then he said that an attorney he knew came up to him with these words, “Don’t say a word; I’ll take care of everything.” That’s what Jesus says to us concerning our sin. He says, “Let me take care of this.

Jesus is also the propitiation for our sins. This word is used only one other time in the New Testament, just two chapters later (4:10). But it was very common in the Old Testament. All the scholars are agreed that outside the Bible the word always “conveys the thought of an offering made by man in order to placate the wrath of a god whom he has offended” (Marshall, p. 117). That is its consistent meaning in the Old Testament, and here as well. It is good news. It means that God has provided a way for his wrath to be satisfied.

Remember that John is writing that Christians might have assurance of their salvation. If you are a Christian, you are the object of Satan’s accusing attacks. He is called in Revelation 12:10 **“the accuser of our brothers... who accuses them day and night before our God.”** Notice that it is Christians he accuses. Satan wants non-Christians never to think about their sin so they will feel like they don’t sin, and he wants Christians to feel condemned and to have their hearts filled with a sense of sin. He wants that because it keeps both groups from seeing Jesus and coming to him. So those of you who think that you are just a uniquely bad sinner, stand against Satan’s accusations by seeing Jesus as your advocate and your propitiation.

## **CONCLUSION:**

Let me mention two applications. The first one comes from the first verse of the second chapter, when John says that he is writing these things that we may not sin. Christians grow in righteousness as we believe the gospel John proclaims. That was the experience of our author, John. Jesus had given John and his brother James a nickname. He called them Boanerges, which means “sons of thunder” (Mark 3:17). I think a better translation for our culture would be “sons of Rambo.” For example, once when Jesus and his disciples were traveling through Samaria, they were refused hospitality in a small Samaritan village. When James and John saw this, they went to Jesus and asked him, **“Lord, do you want us to call fire down from heaven to destroy them?”** These were not the kind of guys you would want to cross and then meet somewhere in a back alley. And yet, by God’s grace, a wonderful transformation was wrought in the life of John. We can see something of that by the way he addresses the believers here, calling them my “dear children.” And we see his strong emphasis on love for others, with a real gentleness in his manner. Jesus had changed him.

Second, we are to join with John in proclaiming this to unbelievers. It is not our job to make people believe in Jesus. It is our job simply to make an announcement of good news. Lost sinners can be rescued so that they have fellowship with the God who loves them. Let’s join John in sharing this good news wherever God gives opportunities to do so.