

Immanuel Lutheran Mail Ministry



1 John 1:1-2:2 *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. ⁵ 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. ⁶ If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. ⁷ But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin. ⁸ If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. ⁹ If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. ¹⁰ If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us. ¹ My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. ² He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world.*

I remember vividly the first magic show I ever attended. I believe I must have been four or five years old, but I'm not really sure how old I was. I'm also not sure where the show was, I don't have any idea why we were there or any of the accompanying details, really. But I do remember how amazed I was as rabbit after rabbit after rabbit came out of that magician's hat. I remember being entranced as the dove disappeared in a puff of smoke. And I remember being confused about it all. I remember asking my dad how the magician did any of it, it just didn't make any sense. Of course, I learned later what we all have learned about magic: it's all deception, slight of hand, a lie. A fun lie during a magic show, but really just a lie, in essence. The crowd marvels at the events that *appear* to be happening, staring wide-eyed at the acts that the magician *presents* as being true, but behind the scenes the magician knows it's all just a lie.

Now a magician never reveals his secrets; uncovering the lie would quickly put him out of business. But when it comes to other lies, it is vital that the lies cease and the truth is revealed. After all, Jesus identified *Satan* as the source of all lies, saying, ***"When he lies, he speaks out of his own character, for he is a liar and the father of lies."*** (John 8:44) The liar, the deceiver—the Devil—his goal is to tell a lie so that we might believe *it* in place of the truth. Buying into the lies, we sell our souls to be separate from God forever. So instead, let's focus on the truth, as Jesus says, ***"I have come into the world-- to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth listens to my voice."*** (John 18:37)

Today, we'll be digging up the lies, uncovering them, and replacing them with the truth of God. The lies lead only to separation and death. The truth leads only to fellowship with God and eternal life. We'll be finding that truth as we consider the theme:

Exchanging a Lie for the Truth

- I. "Jesus is not risen."
- II. "I have no sin."
- III. "You cannot be forgiven."

Now, perhaps you recognized it, but I'm borrowing my theme from another location in Scripture. I took a passage from Paul's letter to the Romans and reversed it. In that section, Paul is defending the Gospel message and refuting many of the lies that had been spread among the Roman congregation. He warns them, **"they exchanged the truth about God for a lie."** (Romans 1:25) His goal, along with all the Apostles and ours today, was to exchange those lies for the truth about God. That was really why Jesus appointed the Twelve Apostles in the first place. It wasn't just because He wanted to have a group of close friends, but so that when He departed they could continue defending the truth in His name in that time when the devil would be working most feverishly to destroy the young church.

Defending the truth is what the Apostle Paul does throughout all of his epistles: Romans down through Philemon. It's also what the Apostle John was working at as he penned the letter before us this morning. You see, he was combatting the Satanic teaching of a man named Cerinthus, who claimed that God did not create the world, rather a low-ranking god called the Demiurge created the world and later inhabited the body of an ordinary man named Jesus of Nazareth. In this ordinary man, the Demiurge healed and walked on water and performed all the miracles, and then he departed from Jesus, meaning Jesus was just an ordinary man who died on the cross and so **Jesus is not risen**. Some bold lies which obviously would lead to disastrous consequences if they were embraced.

Namely, as Paul writes, **"If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins."** (1 Corinthians 15:17) If Christ was just a man possessed by the Demiurge, then there was no sacrificial death, no atonement, no resurrection, and YOU have no hope. You are without God, separated for all eternity with only your own sins as your companions, to be bundled up together and thrown into the fire. If Cerinthus was correct, then we are damned; we have no fellowship with God.

But John writes, "It's just not so!" **"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-- the life was made manifest, and we have seen it, and testify to it and proclaim to you the eternal life."** Remember who this John is. He was one of those who had locked the doors and hidden himself away on Easter evening. He was one of those who was slow to believe what Christ had foretold about Himself and hesitant to trust the testimony of others. And here John is basically saying, "I should have believed. For I, myself, have touched Him, seen Him, spoken with Him, heard Him speak—I say to you, Christ is risen! Hope is restored! You may have fellowship with God! For, as John says, **"We proclaim this [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."** And yours is too.

The fears that John and the other apostles had after Jesus had died—fears that they were separated from their teacher, fears that they were separated from God, fears that they were soon to be killed and separated from this life—these fears were totally unfounded, for Christ fulfilled His Word. It's a wonderful testimony for John to begin with and to build His entire letter upon, for every other lie that he will combat is built to tear down that foundation, to put fellowship with God in question. It's good for us to begin with this foundation too, for it is in our very nature to run from this fellowship.

And I'll tell you how. Have you ever thought what the most difficult words to say might be? I can think of many situations in which finding the right words can be extremely difficult. Placing a phone call and telling someone of a loved one's sudden, totally unexpected death. Those are difficult words, what can you even say? Words of discipline spoken to your already sobbing child. Some of the most difficult words to deliver. But speaking from experience, in spite of many years of practice, I still find the most difficult words to be: "I was wrong. I've sinned. I'm sorry."

These are hard words to speak. They're hard words for a husband to speak to his wife. Hard words for a dad to speak to his children, or a child to admit to his parents. Hard words for a pastor to say to a congregational member. "I was wrong. I've sinned. I'm sorry." I think those words are so hard to say because they lay me bare, totally exposed as weak and broken and frail and all the things I strive not to be, and all the things I *pretend* not to be. Like a magician, it's preferable to keep on pretending, to keep up the ruse, to never reveal the secret. We meticulously formulate and touch-up the picture-perfect self-portrait of ourselves and of our lives, and admitting those words spoils the whole picture.

But maybe even more difficult than saying those words, "I've sinned, I'm sorry," is to actually name the sin. "I'm sorry, I was wrong. I lost my temper." "I'm sorry, I was wrong. I gossiped behind your back." "I'm sorry. I lied to you." We don't like to get that detailed about our sin. It's not that we don't understand what the Scriptures say regarding sin, it's just that it's so tempting to generalize it all, to deny it, to excuse it, to trivialize it, to blame it on someone else. Frankly, when hounded by our sin, rather than actually naming it before one another or before God, we'd rather just be left alone. Alone with our sin. This is why I said, it's fellowship with God that we try to run away from.

It's so, so very common, the prevailing philosophy around sin goes like this: "Don't tell the pastor." What does that do? What does that accomplish? The #1 methodology for the treatment of sin is to pretend it didn't happen. To think, "So long as no one finds out, I should be ok." What does that do? What does that accomplish? I'll tell you what this accomplishes, it's spelled out for us in verse 6: "***If we say we have fellowship with [God] while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth.***" And in verse 8: "***If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.***" And in verse 10: "***If we say we have not sinned, we make [God] a liar, and his word is not in us.***"

It is a lie, a damnable lie to hold onto: "***I have no sin.***" It is the lie of Satan which tells us that it would be better to hold some sin back only for ourselves to preserve our idol of self which we've so religiously crafted. But in so doing, we may preserve our self-image, we may maintain some surface-level friendships, and we will destroy the fellowship with God which Christ died to establish. Make no mistake, sin separates. It separated our first parents from God and from each other. Even two brothers, their sons, couldn't get along. Sin separated. Pride overwhelmed the one, one lay dead in a pool of blood, and the other just wants to be left alone. "***Am I my brother's keeper?***" (Genesis 4:9) Sin draws each sinner into their own dark corner where they can be left alone, alone with their sin.

And that's just so opposite of God's desire for you. What God wants, what the Christian life is all about, is fellowship. Fellowship with one another established upon our fellowship with God. God does not want us to be left alone with our sin and its consequences. So, He comes to find us in our dark corners, exposing our sin for what it is, so that we might deal with our sin the way that God does. With a word! "I'm sorry." A word that exposes, a word that confesses. And God's response is a word that forgives, a word that restores. This is the way to handle sin. Those difficult words may be spoken with utter certainty, that Christ has already answered for all of our sins, He has destroyed every possible barrier that might separate us.

I was wrong. I've sinned. I'm sorry. Those difficult words may be spoken by us. They may be spoken to the brother or sister that we have wronged. They may be spoken to our pastor. They may be spoken, difficult as they are, because we have no less than Christ Himself standing at our side. He is, as John says, "***our advocate.***" He is the one who has answered once for all in his atoning death. He pleads on our behalf not only with His words, but also with His blood which "***cleanses us from all sin.***"

The only sin that can damn us is the sin that we would hold outside of His forgiveness, that we would grab away from Him. And it is very tempting to withhold certain sins away from Christ's forgiveness, keeping them hidden in the dark recesses within our hearts, because the third life of Satan is that **"You cannot be forgiven."** When tempting us to sin, forgiveness is assured by Satan, and after sin has manifested itself, that assurance is snatched away. This is the lie the Devil would want us most to believe, it's also the lie that our human reason agrees with most readily. And I'll show you why.

Did any of you take Geometry when you were in high school? It's technically a math class, but Geometry is more about logic than it is math. It's about proofs and theorems, using logic to work through different premises to arrive at a reasonable conclusion. So, here's an example: premise A might be, "If it were raining outside, the sidewalk would be wet." Sidewalks are outside, if it's raining outside, sidewalks will obviously be wet. Premise B could be, "It's currently raining outside." And therefore, the obvious logical conclusion is that the sidewalk is wet. In Geometry, we call that a proof.

Well, we have a proof in our text which I'd like to walk you through. The first premise is found in verse 5, **"God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all."** So, the first premise is that God is perfect. He is holy, and He doesn't have anything to do with sin. All of Scripture testifies to this truth. The second premise is in verses 8 and 10, **"If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. . . If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us."** The second premise is that we are darkness, entirely sinful. And so, the conclusion is that God would have nothing to do with us. No fellowship, no nearness, no forgiveness—none of it. Satan's goal is for us to arrive at this conclusion. He doesn't just want us to sin, he wants us to sin and then despair because of it. To imagine that *certain* sins are unforgiveable, and therefore should be buried so deep within ourselves with the hope that they'll never come back to haunt us. And thus, fellowship with God is shattered.

But there's a third premise, in verse 9: **"If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."** We may dig up that sin from our guilty consciences, and hand it over to God, for He alone has the answer for it. When that word of confession is spoken, sin is named. And then when forgiveness is proclaimed, when forgiveness is worded out in response—it is valid and certain in heaven also as if Christ our dear Lord were dealing with us Himself. Forgiveness in hand, fellowship is restored, and joy reigns. Joy that my sin cannot haunt me any longer, joy that I have peace with God, joy that God declares fellowship with me, and joy that what God has joined together, my sin cannot ever separate.

"I'm wrong. I've sinned. I'm sorry." Difficult words to speak, for me. For you too. Difficult words, but they're not *the* most difficult words to speak. The *most* difficult words have already been spoken from a cross. For you. For me. For Easter joy today and for eternity. For Christ is risen which means we are forgiven—entirely, wholly, absolutely forgiven. May we not keep back any sin for ourselves but hand it all over to God and be forgiven of all of it. For living life in a lie is no way to live, and it's not life at all. It's death. Living a lie may work for a magician, but it will not work for us. Rather, run from sin, and when you sin, no matter how strong that sin may be, let your trust in Christ be stronger still and rejoice in Him who is the victor over sin, death, and the world. Let's exchange our lies for the truth, that Jesus is your advocate, your friend, your companion, and His blood cleanses you from ALL sin. Thanks be to God. Amen.

"And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus." (Philippians 4:7) Amen.

Pastor Sam Rodebaugh
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