

January 31, 2010

1 John 5:1-5

Alright good morning. I'm glad you are here today - it is an exciting time to be here because we are going to wrap up our study of the book of 1 John together. So grab your Bibles and turn to 1 John chapter 5 with me.

We have studied our way through the 1st 4 chapters sporadically over the past 7 weeks of this letter from the apostle John to the church in Ephesus. And you'll remember that it has a very clear-cut purpose to it. **John is building the ASSURANCE of salvation back into the believers at the church of Ephesus** who have had that sense of truth and security damaged through some bad teaching and open betrayal by people in the church who claimed to be Christians. So John is giving them tests so to speak by which someone can know that they are a Christian. In fact, **chapter 5 verse 13 is really the key verse to the INTENT of the whole letter.** That's where we started – let's start our conclusion there, too.

"I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life."

And as we talked about and have seen, as John writes to accomplish that basic and simple reality, he cycles through the same themes over and over again and each time he broadens or deepens their and our understanding of those themes – the themes of truth and love and righteousness. And we've seen those themes transformed into three tests of the reality of and therefore the assurance of a person's salvation. The doctrinal test, the social test, the moral test. Faith in the truth. Love for God and love for our brothers. Obedience to the Word of God. And today we find ourselves back in the same zone – in fact as he wraps up today, John weaves all three of those together for us. Let's take a look at the text – verses 1-5.

TEXT

Let's take the first theme and test – the doctrinal test – faith in the truth. **Verse 1** says *"everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God."*

That sounds pretty simple right? Straight forward? The only people who are born of God – the only people who are saved – who are really Christians – are those who believe that Jesus is the Christ – that Jesus is the Messiah, God in the flesh of humanity. And of course that is an abbreviated statement. **ALL that is true about Jesus is implied there** – all that Jesus claimed to be is in that statement that He is the Christ. **The point is that those who are saved believe in Jesus Christ as GOD, as Messiah, as SAVIOR, as Lord.**

But the combination or the grammar of the statement is really important. The verb tenses literally give us this truth that whoever is believing (present continuous) is born (past perfect). Whoever is now believing is by that very believing giving evidence of having been born of God – having been saved. That is to say – and this is so important – that continual believing in the truth is the result not the cause of salvation.

There are those who will tell you that if you keep believing then God keeps saving you, but as soon as you stop believing then God stops saving you. That's not what this says. **What John says is that what you received at salvation was a PERMANENT faith, not a temporary one. Ephesians 2:8-9** – it is by grace you have been saved through faith – it is the gift of God. God gave you a permanent faith.

Well what about those who stop believing? Well, John already dealt with those didn't he? Back in **chapter 2 verse 19**. In describing what happened at Ephesus when those people left the church and abandoned the faith, he says:

"They went out from us, but they did not really belong to us. For if they had belonged to us, they would have remained with us; but their going showed that none of them belonged to us."

If you STOP believing, it was never saving faith. Those who have been born of God are believing. Our present continuous faith is a result and therefore evidence of our having been saved in the past. **If you have been born again – given new life by God – it will manifest itself in ONGOING faith in Jesus as the Christ.**

See this is not just a mere intellectual knowledge of the fact of the incarnation, but a full-heart acceptance of all that Jesus Christ is. It is to believe that the man Jesus is God – the Anointed One, the Messiah, the Savior, the Redeemer, the final sacrifice for sin and to commit your life to Him as sovereign Lord and Savior and Treasure because you recognize there is no other. Anybody who believes this way belongs to God.

We'll come back to it in a bit, but look at **verse 5**.

“Who is it that overcomes the world? Only he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God.”

Our victory starts at the moment of our salvation and we are given a permanent faith that never ever runs out. Moments of questioning – sure – faith that must grow and be taught – of course – but doubt is just a temptation and if the faith is real that doubt will not last because you are God's and your salvation is forever and so is the faith that He gave you.

But John here moves into the other areas, the other tests we talked about as well. In fact they are all connected here. The faith of God and in God that saves us is always alone in that it alone saves us but it is never alone in that it has fruit with it. And one of those fruits is love; in fact faith that doesn't lead to love is meaningless. Look back at **verse 1**.

Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and everyone who loves the father loves his child as well. This is how we know that we love the children of God: by loving God... We'll stop there for now.

John reminds us here that you can tell those who are saved because he or she loves God and loves those whom God loves – namely the children born of Him. See **salvation not only brings us into a faith relationship with God, it brings us into a LOVE relationship with God and God's own people.** We love the Father and His children. In other words, you can know your salvation in that you love God and your love for God becomes a visible expression as you live your life in that you also love those whom God loves.

And in case you weren't here last week when we looked at chapter 4, we aren't talking about physical love or best friend love or even sentimentality or emotion here but of the only kind of love the New Testament really exalts and that is agape love – **the love of the WILL. It is a love of choice – a love that is given because it is needed not because it is attracted in some way.** Love that is sacrificial – that is eager for the good of others – of its object.

It is how you approach God and how you approach His people that demonstrates whether you really love them. If you love God, you long more than anything else to be in His presence, to hear Him speak, to praise Him, to worship Him. And if you love His people, you long to be with them and to be a source of their needs being met as much as God would enable you to be. You pray for them, you nurture them, you counsel them, you speak kindly, you exhort, you encourage, you confront, whatever is needed in all those “one another” commands of scripture.

So this social test really boils down to this - **this test comes down to the practicality of living your life for FELLOW BELIEVERS.** That's one way you can tell you are a Christian. If someone only seeks friendship outside the family of God – if they have no compassion and longing for those in the family of God – if they don't desire community and fellowship with those who are God's, there's no life of God in them.

Real practically here – if it is a chore for you to show up here and if it's just your goal when you get here to try and to escape this place without having to encounter anybody and you're only here because your wife drags you here, that's a pretty good indication that whatever you may think, you don't love God or you'd be coming to this place every chance you could to join with the people who are His and who you also love because of Him in you.

But this test – the social test – the love for the family – is closely connected to what comes next; the third test or area that John has shown us. Go back to **verse 2**.

“This is how we know that we love the children of God: by loving God and carrying out his commands. This is love for God: to obey his commands. And his commands are not burdensome...”

Now let's put this together here where we are at. We believe in God. We believe in Christ who is God and that faith produces love and that love produces obedience. If I believe that Christ is who He is – I believe Christ is exactly who the New Testament says He is – if I believe God is who the Word reveals Him to be then He is going to draw out of my heart all my love and all my praise and all my adoration and all my interest and all my attention. And I'm going to be consumed with Him as the priority of my life. And as a second but related priority I'm going to be consumed with the people He loves because whoever He loves I love. That's just how it works. And if I truly love Him that way, the expression of that love is going to come in my keeping His commandments.

Another genuine proof of faith is sustained loving OBEDIENCE. And the only way you can really DEMONSTRATE that you love God is to obey Him – that's the only way and it includes obeying His command to love others.

See the verses here remind us of what we saw the first two times John showed us this moral test of obedience in the assurance of our salvation. The end of verse 2 says **“carrying out His commands”** and then in verse three it says **“to obey His commands.”** And the two words sound the same in English to us but are different in Greek. **The first one means to continue to DO them, it's action. But the next word means we don't just do them, it means to REGARD them, to protect them.** It goes from action to attitude.

Again this **obedience** – this keeping His commands – **is not just a matter of the outward obedience, though that is obviously necessary, it is also the DELIGHT in what God says.** And that's what John communicates here when he says God's commands are not burdensome to us.

Now wait a minute, if these commands are not burdensome, what are they? They are a joy, desirable. You and I both know it is never a burden to do what you really want to do. In fact some people say that is all we do – we always do what we want to do. And John says here that part of the test of the assurance of our salvation in the arena of obedience is not just that we keep God's commands, but that doing so is not burdensome for us. Well how does that happen? I mean we just described the social test – the love test – as a sacrificial love of the will where we put the needs and wants of others above our own – how does that not feel burdensome? Look back at the text – verse 4.

Notice the word that follows that statement. The word “for.” God's commands are not burdensome...*“for everyone born of God overcomes the world. This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith. Who is it that overcomes the world? Only he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God.”*

John says I'm going to explain now why loving God by doing His commands – including the command to love other people – is not burdensome. **God's commands are not BURDENSOME because “everyone who has been born of God has overcome the WORLD.”**

So there are forces in the world that would make our obeying God's commands – our loving Him and loving each other – burdensome but those forces have been overcome by our being born of God – being truly saved. Well what would that mean? We could talk a lot about the world system and all of that, but I think it is best to stay within the context of 1 John and he gives us a clear picture of it in chapter 2. Look back to **chapter 2:15-17**

“Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For everything in the world-- the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does-- comes not from the Father but from the world. The world and its desires pass away, but the man who does the will of God lives forever.”

So here are the desires of the world that must be overcome – the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes, and the boasting of what he has and does. In a nutshell – desires for what we don't have and pride in what we do have. When we don't have what we want, the world corrupts us with covetousness and jealousy and envy. When we do have what we want, the world corrupts us with pride. And that keeps us from loving God and loving each other – from keeping God's commands.

The main reason we don't love God and find it burdensome to love people and obey God is that our CRAVINGS are for the things of the world. When it is a burden for you to love God, to love others, to keep God's commands, it is because your cravings are for the things of the world. They may be good things – they may be bad things. They may be material things – they may be relational things. Whatever their form, they are not God and when we crave them above God, they are idols. They replace love for God and love for people and therefore obedience in our lives.

What's the solution? Back in verse 4: *"Everyone born of God overcomes the world."*

Now we see what that means. It means in salvation, the root of those cravings is severed. The desires of the flesh, the desires of the eyes, the pride of life does not rule us anymore.

How does that work? The last half of verse 4 and 5 tell us.

"This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith. Who is it that overcomes the world? Only he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God."

And we are back where we began. **The most immediate and decisive and lasting work of God in our salvation is our FAITH; faith that sees the superior value of JESUS CHRIST over anything else.**

Believing that Jesus is the Christ – that He is all that He claimed to be is what enables us to OVERCOME the world and then to love Him, love people, and keep His commands – to pass all three tests.

So here's the deal - you say you are a Christian - great. The verification of that – the assurance John is trying to rebuild in his readers and that God is giving to us – is in your own heart as well as to those around you. It is your sustained faith in the truth – but there is more to it than that, more than just saying you believe. It is also a sustained love for God and others. And it is a sustained love that shows up in a sustained obedience and a sustained obedience that is not burdensome. That's what God through John is giving us in this letter so that we might know that we have eternal life. That's what it means to live as a Christian.

But before we wrap up, there are **two key clarifications** we need to make – maybe again, but just for certainty here. John is very aware of that his words could be taken in two wrong ways. So he is as explicit as any writer in the New Testament that this is not the case: **that Christians are not SINLESS, and Christians cannot lose their SALVATION and be lost.**

We didn't look at it specifically in chapter 1 though we have referred to it multiple times in our study so look at **1 John 1:8-10**,

"If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word has no place in our lives."

So John is working hard here to say that walking as a Christian – or in the light in the context of this first chapter - does not mean walking flawlessly. It means that, **WHEN you stumble, the presence of God causes you to see it and hate it and confess it and move forward with Christ.**

And John is just as careful to make sure we don't infer from these "tests of assurance" we've been talking about that we can be saved or be a Christian and then later lose that salvation and be lost or cease to be a Christian.

First John 2:19 which we've looked at multiple times is one of the clearest statements in the Bible that there is another way to understand what happens when a person abandons the church or abandons the faith. It says again,

“They went out from us, but they did not really belong to us. For if they had belonged to us, they would have remained with us; but their going showed that none of them belonged to us.”

Notice two things John says to protect us from misunderstanding. 1) Those who seemed to be saved and yet left or abandoned the faith never were saved in the first place—they never were “of us” he says. *“They went out from us, but they were not of us.”* In other words, the explanation is not that they lost their salvation. They never had it. 2) Those who are truly saved (“of us”) will persevere to the end in faith. Verse 19b: *“For if they had belonged to us, they would have remained with us.”* Endurance is not the cause of our salvation. **Salvation is the cause of ENDURANCE, and endurance then is the EVIDENCE of our being saved.**

You know when John first started this letter he said in chapter 1 verse 4 *“We write this to make our joy complete.”*

And I can honestly say I understand that heart. As we have studied through this letter I as your pastor have greatly prayed for and wanted each of you to really come to grips with the wonderful truths God has given us. Because some of my greatest fears are addressed in 1 John.

Because of the tradition and church culture that we have been in so long I am greatly fearful of any of you being comfortable in a salvation that is not real. I tremble at the thought of any one being at Fairway for any length of time and being able to think you are saved when in truth you are not – for any reason. And God deals with that in 1 John.

But I am just as fearful – just as longing for none of you who are God’s – who have been miraculously saved by grace through faith – to wallow in self doubt and miss the glorious freedom and joy of knowing that you know that you belong to Jesus. And God deals with that in 1 John.

And I am just as fearful of the possibility that those who do not yet know our Savior to come here and not to be able to see in those of us who truly do the very proof that John is talking about – a life of sustained though imperfect obedience and a life of continual though growing sacrificial love – both of which are obviously coming from a sustained grip on the truth of Jesus Christ. And that too is dealt with in 1 John. In fact,...

That’s why our vision is what it is – they we would be doing life in Christ one step at a time together – worshipping Jesus – learning truth – building community – and as a result reaching our world for the glory of our Jesus. That’s what 1 John is all about – that that if your salvation is real, that will be your life – that’s what it means to do life as a Christian. So that’s what we pursue together.

So let me close up 1 John with his own nutshell version of his letter. Chapter 5 verse 13 may be the key verse as to why John wrote the letter. But **chapter 3 verse 23 is the key verse in SUMMARY** we should take from it. Because having understood all he said and all the tests and all the reasons and all the background – we can take this verse and live it now because it sums up all three marks of assurance.

“And this is his command: to believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, and to love one another as he commanded us.”

Faith in Jesus, love for people, keeping His Word are inseparable. They aren’t indistinguishable, but they cannot be separated. So what God is saying today to you and me is **go and live in the assurance of your salvation if indeed you have the right to – go and BELIEVE in Jesus and LOVE each other as God commands one step at a time.**