

## Sermon 2, The Joy of Knowing that You Know, 1 John 5:13, 2:1, 1:4

**Proposition:** John's purpose in writing is to let you know that you have eternal life, to keep you from sin, and make the eyewitnesses of Christ joyful.

- I. John's Audience: Believers, 5:13a
- II. John's Purpose
  - A. To give you a true, justified belief in your own possession of eternal life, 5:13b
  - B. To keep you from sinning, 2:1a
  - C. To make the eyewitnesses glad, 1:4
- III. John's Message
  - A. You can (and should) know you're saved
  - B. You and (and should) not sin
  - C. You can (and should) make us glad

### **Introduction**

Dearly beloved congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ, we are embarking on a study of the glorious riches of 1 John. What we saw last week is that this letter focuses hard on trusting John's eyewitness testimony. It doesn't appeal to Scripture, but rather to the author's own experience with Jesus. What John saw and heard is definitive for your Christian life and mine. But though the focus on eyewitness testimony is a major part of John's method, what is his broader purpose? We know that few books in the Bible explicitly state their purpose. This one, the gospel of John, Proverbs, and Revelation are the only ones with an explicit purpose statement, as far as I can remember. What is that purpose statement? Well, it's found near the end, in ch. 5 v. 13. There is a textual variant here, such that the Majority text (and KJV/NKJV) posit two purposes, while the critical text and thus the other English versions posit only one purpose. We'll just look at that one purpose today, and discuss the matter more fully when we get to chapter 5. The purpose of this book, John tells us, is so that we can know. He wants us to know, he wants to keep us from sinning, and he wants to make his joy and the joy of all the eyewitnesses of Jesus full. We'll look at those purposes one by one, and then we'll apply them our own lives this evening.

#### **I. John's Audience: Believers, 5:13a**

We start, though, with John's audience. Who is the beloved disciple writing to? He tells us that he's writing to those who believe in the name of the Son of God. To believe in Christ's name, of course, is to trust Him, His character, and His purposes. It is to trust all that He stands for, and to be against all that He is against. To believe in Christ is the same thing as believing on His name.

His name is just a longer way of referring to all that He is and all that He thinks. John's audience, then, is believers. He is writing to those already convinced.

Why is this important? Well, it helps us understand the letter. It tells us something very important about the purpose of writing. This letter exists primarily to strengthen the faith of those already converted. Hence the appropriateness of preaching it in the evening service, to those who are by definition the most dedicated people in the church. Brothers and sisters, you already believe in the name of the Son of God. That's fantastic. That's glorious! And this letter is for you.

Negatively, of course, that means that this letter is not primarily evangelistic in its aims. (Hence the omission from the critical text of the second purpose. How can a letter that is written to those who already believe primarily be designed to get them to believe?) Rather, it is primarily about strengthening your faith, deepening the value you place on the truths you already have, and in general helping you continue to hold dear the Son of God you've already embraced as Lord and Savior. In that sense, then, it is just like 2 Peter. It's an epistle to build up. It's an encouraging word. It's a demonstration of what you need to know to grow in your faith in our glorious and beautiful Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. This is a letter for true believers by a true believer. If that doesn't describe you, then you may not get much out of it.

## **II. John's Purpose**

Well, John is writing to believers. What does he want to do for them?

### **A. To give you a true, justified belief in your own possession of eternal life, 5:13b**

He wants believers to know that they have eternal life. What is knowledge? Remember, the philosophers define it as "true, justified belief." In other words, in the first place knowledge is a belief. Knowledge is something that you think with your mind. It's something that you mentally hold to be true. If you don't believe something, it may be true and justified, but it's not your knowledge. Thus, we would not say that a Red Sox fan knows that the Yankees are the best team in baseball. It may be a true belief; it may be a belief justified by many years of bitter and brutal experience; but it is not a belief resident within the mind of that Boston fanatic.

Thus, first of all, John wants you believe that you have been saved. He wants you to hold it as true that you have passed from death to life, that you have gone from lost to saved, that you have moved from life (or more accurately a living death) under sin's dominion to life under Christ's dominion. This must first of all be a belief in your mind.

But it can't stay there. He's not writing so that you'll merely believe that you have eternal life; he wants you to know. And to move from belief to knowledge means that you need to add the other two conditions. You need to not only believe that you have eternal life; you need to have good reason to believe it. That is, it has to be a justified belief.

My great-aunt once told me how she was recently married one day when she went to her ladies' Bible study. While there, the thought "I'm pregnant" came to her head. She hadn't missed

her period; she hadn't felt any different; but nonetheless, she decided that the thought was correct and told the ladies there, "I'm pregnant with twins."

Well, that was her belief. As it happened, it turned out that the belief was true; she was in fact pregnant with twins. But because her belief in that pregnancy was unjustified by any evidence, it is not correct to say that she knew she was pregnant. We could say that she believed she was pregnant, that she guessed she was pregnant, that she thought she was pregnant. We can even say that she really was pregnant. But it is not true to say that she *knew* she was pregnant. Only later, after the missed period and the pregnancy test, did her guess get confirmation. Only then did her true-but-unjustified belief turn into a true, justified belief.

Belief is the first element of knowledge. Justification for that belief is the second element of knowledge. But the third and final element of knowledge is truthfulness.

Let's say that Aristotle believed that the sun revolved around the earth. Let's say further that he had really good evidence for that belief, both from his own personal sight of the sun rotating across the sky every day and also from the complex calculations of the mathematicians of his era. Did Aristotle know that the sun revolved around the earth? In common usage, we would say "No." No, you can't know something that's false! I can't know that Gillette has 50,000 people in it, even if some prankster edits the Wikipedia article and the proofreader misses that entry on the official Census Bureau site such that I believe Gillette has a population of 50,000 and have evidence from the Census Bureau and Wikipedia to prove it. You can't know something that's false. Even if you have good reason to believe it and do in fact believe it, it has not attained the level of "knowledge."

Well, the Evangelist says that he wants believers to *know* that they have eternal life. He wants us to believe that. He wants that belief to be justified. And he is assuring us that if we believe and have reason to believe it, then it's true.

Thus, throughout the letter, he gives us reason to believe that we have eternal life. These reasons revolve around our own personal holiness and the presence of the Holy Spirit in our hearts. In other words, this letter offers no comfort to a carnal "Christian" who says "I struggle with assurance. I want to know I'm saved." John wants you to know you're saved too — but he insists that knowledge is not only a true belief, but a justified one as well.

In other words, even if you're saved, if you don't pass the tests that he lays out for us in this book, *you can't know you're saved*. You can be saved without meeting them. You can even have a true belief that you're saved without meeting them. But you can't know, you can't have a true, justified belief, without seriously considering and passing the tests. If you aren't walking in the light, if you aren't loving your brothers, if you don't have the Holy Spirit making you holy, if you aren't walking in the way Jesus walked, then you can't know you're saved. You can be saved, but you can't know it.

John is writing so that you can know. He's giving you a set of justifications for your belief that you've been saved by Jesus Christ from the wrath of God. They are not blanket justifications; they are conditional justifications. *If* you're doing what he describes, then you can

be sure that Jesus has saved you. These are not tests of salvation *per se*, but they are tests of whether you can know, and know that you know, that you have eternal life.

### **B. To keep you from sinning, 2:1a**

Well, the second purpose John identifies for this letter is to keep you from sinning. His second goal in writing, besides giving them knowledge of their situation as saved people, is to keep them from sinning. Let me rephrase that: John is writing to keep you, child of God, from doing anything evil or wrong. He doesn't want you to sin, and his letter serves that goal.

How does the letter accomplish that? What does it take to stop someone from sinning? Such a question gets us into the complex realm of human motivation. In one sense, of course, we all wish that John identified some kind of magic bullet, something that would always and infallibly prevent sin. Wouldn't that be nice? You could just keep one with you and then you would never sin again. But of course, that's not biblical religion. That's magic. And it doesn't work. Why do we sin now? Because we want to sin, in the moment at least, more than we want to honor God. John is writing to us about the glory and beauty and perfection of Jesus Christ, trying in any way that he can to tell us what he personally saw and experienced with the goal of getting us to love Christ enough that we hate sin. In other words, this letter doesn't offer some kind of physical compulsion that will get us to stop sinning. It offers moral persuasion. It aims to influence our desires by presenting the truth and making us love Him. It capitalizes on our built-in desire to live by presenting Jesus Christ to us as the only source of eternal life.

When you really understand this letter, and believe it and remember it all the time, you won't sin. What's even better is that if anyone does sin (which we all have and will), the letter presents the solution to that, too: the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, the propitiation for our sins and for the whole world's. Go to Him, and you will find forgiveness. And that, in turn, is the greatest power of all to keep you from sinning.

### **C. To make the eyewitnesses glad, 1:4**

Finally, though, we see one other place where John states his purpose in writing. That place is 1:4, where he tells us that he's writing so that "our joy may be full." Whose joy? The joy of the "we" who speak in the prologue — that is, the joy of the eyewitnesses of Jesus Christ. They, together with John, desire the joy of as many people as possible gaining eternal life through Christ and knowing that they have gained it. John wants to make the eyewitnesses glad, and that's why he writes this book.

Do you think in those terms? That your faith gives joy to the apostles? That your assurance makes the eyewitnesses who saw Jesus in the flesh ecstatic? Because that's what John is saying here. He's saying that it's worth writing and helping people know that they have eternal life because it brings him joy. There is no greater joy than knowing Christ — but that joy too can be perfected as it spreads to more and more people. It is the most intensive joy, but it is made even better when it is made as extensive as possible too.

This is the motive for evangelism, my friends. In one sense, evangelism can be negatively motivated — “I don’t want these people to go to Hell!” But how much better for it to be positively motivated: “I have joy, and I want to share it!”

### **III. John’s Message**

So this all leads us to the application. Because this letter was written so that you could know that you’re saved, so that you would not sin, and so that you’ll make the eyewitnesses glad, what does that mean for you?

#### **A. You can (and should) know you’re saved**

First of all, you can and should know you’re saved. You can know this. It is quite possible and reasonable to have assurance of your own faith. In fact, it is something you should strive for. Some people struggle with assurance for years, for a variety of reasons that generally revolve around sin or mental illness. Those things are real problems, and they can deeply hurt Christ’s sheep. But they don’t take away the goodness of assurance and the reality that every Christian is called to strive for assurance. It is likely true that you’re saved. I’m guessing that pretty much all of you believe that you’re saved. But that true belief doesn’t become knowledge unless it’s justified by the tests the apostle puts forward.

#### **B. You can (and should) not sin**

And those tests essentially boil down to not sinning. The more righteously you live, the greater assurance of faith you’ll have, generally speaking. (Again, mental illness and especially depression can make this all different.)

So don’t sin. Don’t kill, cheat, steal, yell, covet, lust, or dishonor your authorities. You have the ability not to sin because you’ve been born of God. You have the power to say no to sin because the Holy Spirit, the “divine seed,” remains in you. Above all, Christ came by blood and covered your past sins. You are free from sin’s power; you don’t have to sin because of what Jesus did for you!

#### **C. You can (and should) make us glad**

And so you ought to live a life of full assurance of faith, a life marked by light and love. Such a life will make the eyewitnesses glad; indeed, it will make all Christians glad. We will rejoice to see you walking like that. I will rejoice, and the rest of the church will too.

So what are you waiting for? Seek to know the Christ whom John saw face to face. Seek to know that you know Him. Only then will you not sin; only then will you make us truly glad. These things I preach to you, that your joy may be full as you fellowship with the Father and with His Son, Jesus Christ. Amen.