



Letters of Love

#3 Jesus is our advocate

April 22, 2018

scriptures: 1 John 2:1-6,
Zechariah 3:1-10, John 14:6, John
13:34, Matthew 22:36-40.

We are in a series on the 3
Epistles of John, this is our third

week in the series and we are now today entering into the second chapter
of 1 John... lets get right into the word.

1 John 2:1-6

“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. He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world. And by this we know that we have come to know him, if we keep his commandments. Whoever says “I know him” but does not keep his commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him, but whoever keeps his word, in him truly the love of God is perfected. By this we may know that we are in him: whoever says he abides in him ought to walk in the same way in which he walked.”

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One of the most significant things to note in this passage is the first three words, it says “my little children,”

The writer of this letter is writing to people who he clearly feels a deep, family like, Father like responsibility too... which is very important because it is very clear that HE ACTUALLY CARES WHAT HAPPENS TO THEM. This is not some guy writing in the distance trying to write a good book that hopefully will get picked up by a publishing company and make him some money.

This guy is writing to people who he feels a deep Fatherly, pastoral connection to.

Another thing that the greeting shows us, that I believe is very important to remember about the letters that we are studying, is that they are written near the end of the life of the Apostle John. Those whom he is writing to are mostly all going to be YOUNGER THAN HE IS. They are his “little children”

And the Apostle John has seen a lot. He walked with Jesus Christ. He was “the disciple that Jesus loved” - BUT he was the ONLY of the Apostles who was not KILLED for his faith...

Peter was killed by the Roman Government, and they crucified him upside down because he didn't feel worthy to die the same death as Jesus did. James was stoned and clubbed to death... Others were murdered for their faith on missionary journeys to Ethiopia and Turkey other countries because that was the cost of following Jesus in that day.

John was the only one who know didn't die a martyr. But what that means is that John is a guy who lost every single person that he was in close community with, BECAUSE of the message of Jesus Christ.

Could you imagine losing every person you love to something you believe in... at some point, don't you think that it would waver? Don't you think it would be like “man, was any of this worth it?” “is it really worth it to keep going on with this?”

But in the midst of all of that happening, John still clung to the gospel. He still believed, that though it was the thing that took the life of his friends, it is the ONLY thing that can save anyone... and he still wrote with such HOPE and grace and LOVE for Jesus, and for the Gospel and for the church.

and as, sort of, the last man standing among those who walked with a physical Jesus, John is writing to a church that HE obviously loves very very much, and yet he obviously has a concern for them which is very broad and we will get into more details of in later messages....

and the first thing that he tells them... don't sin. But if you do sin... and at some point you *will*... here is what you need to know... YOU HAVE AN ADVOCATE.

And I believe that this is the most crucial line in the entire passage. Before you ever get into the things that show us that we DON'T really know God... like not keeping His commandments, the one thing that John says is this:

when you don't keep His commandments, its very important that you remember: YOU HAVE AN ADVOCATE.

Advocate is the Greek word: *paraklētos* - and it means "called to one's side" - so in its most basic sense, it is coming alongside someone and doing everything that you possibly can to make sure they know that they are not alone.

Its where the word "paramedic" comes from... someone who comes running to help when you are at your most desperate hour... when you have to call the ambulance... the person who comes in and does EVERYTHING HE CAN POSSIBLY DO FOR YOU on the spot, then takes care of you AS he takes you to the hospital.

The church needs to keep growing in this... I think sometimes we do a really great job, but we need to live the lifestyle of advocates... people who don't let others face things alone. People who, the moment someone has a baby, we have a list of people lined up ready to bring them meals, and offer them relief. When someone is going through something that we have no way of possibly understanding, we still stand next to them... by their side. We scramble to figure out how to help them.

This is a cultural issue that I need you guys help with here... because it takes everyone, and we need to determine "I don't care who you are, I don't care where you live, I don't care how long it takes me to get there, I am called to your side."

An advocate is not JUST someone who will pick up a cause or stand on a platform and be a voice for someone... they are actually willing to come to that persons side... its an arm-in-arm type of thing... what happens to one, happens to us both.

they are willing to get dirty.

In a world that is obviously very divided, we need more advocates.

But there was also a legal sense to the word *paraklētos* - it was: one who pleads *another's cause* before a judge

So it is really the same concept, but in a courtroom.

This was a very commonly used word in that day.

There was a famous saying among Rabbi's about *paraklētos*:

“The man who keeps one commandment of the law has got to himself one *paraklētos*; the man who breaks one commandment of the law has got to himself one *accuser*.” (still Barclay)

They would often use the word *paraklētos*, or advocate, as a word that would often be used opposite of the word “accuser” - which we know is the definition of Satan. The accuser.

So, just like we talked about last week, John here is continuing this thought process about the tension that exists between good and evil... the light and the darkness. But as we will see in the examples today, just like we said last week... the power distinction between light and darkness is not even a comparable. We said this last week, and I'll say it again for those of you who missed it: Darkness has an infinite power over everything except for light... but it is INFINITELY POWERLESS AGAINST LIGHT. There is nothing darkness can do in the presence of light, it instantly becomes non-existent.

and so we are given this sort of “court room setting” in which we know that we are guilty because we have sinned, but we go confidently knowing that we have an advocate who we can have confidence in.

and the reason it is important to cover this before we cover the part that seems a little more hardcore... by that I am referring to that says “if you say you love God but you don't keep his commandments, then you are actually a liar...” the reason we have to cover this part first, and the reason that I

believe that John covered this part first, is because its far more important to understand that you are guilty, and that no matter how hard you try to live free of sin, you will still sin... BUT there IS still hope for you, because you are not the person who has to plead his own case.

People love to say things like “when I stand before God and plead my case... That is kind of what everyone expects on that final day... a chance when we can show God why we are good to go...

but if you are standing before God guilty, you have no case.

A case will do no good. The only thing that will do any good is an advocate.

You see, it is on our WORST DAY that Christ died for us...

but the Bible says that in Isaiah that even on our best day... EVEN OUR VERSION OF RIGHTEOUSNESS is as filthy rags to God.

So we can go in with this amazing case for all the good we did, and all God is going to be able to say is: well, do you have an advocate?

WATCH THIS. When I read this this week it absolutely blew me away.

There is this vision that we get in Zechariah 3, and its of Joshua who was the high priest... and because he is the high priest, he was the one who was representing Judah in what is depicted as something of a heavenly courtroom where Satan is the prosecutor.

And in the Bible, there are not many descriptions that are more graphic as to paint the picture of guilt than the one that we are about to read.

Joshua is the high priest, so he should be clothed in fine clothing... it is one of those moments where you would go into it thinking... if anyone has a case for themselves and their life, its this guy... He is the priest. He leads the people... He loves God! He helps people, he helps people find God.

Well, the high priest wore a linen coat, a linen undergarment, he had a linen sash for his waste...

He himself was himself a mediator between God and the people of Israel, on Yom Kippur it would be him who would slaughter the goat and he wore these very specific clothes that were light, that he wouldn't sweat in...

and yet in Zechariah this man is standing trial clothed in what the version we will read in a moment says "filthy garments" - its very similar language to Isaiah when it says that even our RIGHTEOUSNESS is as filthy rags"

what it literally says is more graphic... it said "Joshua was clothed in garments soiled with excrement" - which automatically meant Joshua was unclean. He was defiled.

And I want to read these ten verses to you...

Zechariah 3:1-10 (this is the entire chapter 3)

"Then he showed me Joshua the high priest standing before the angel of the Lord, and Satan standing at his right hand to accuse him. And the Lord said to Satan, "The Lord rebuke you, O Satan! The Lord who has chosen Jerusalem rebuke you! Is not this a brand plucked from the fire?"

This is such a basic example of light just instantly conquering darkness... Satan thought he had the best case... he brought in the guy who was supposed to be the high priest of all of Judah and the guy was guilty all the way down to his soiled clothes... and the Lord just looks Joshua, and at Satan, and He turns on a light.

He says... no... I won't accept your charges against Joshua.

picking back up in verse 3:

Now Joshua was standing before the angel, clothed with filthy garments. And the angel said to those who were standing before him, "Remove the filthy garments from him." And to him he said, "Behold, I have taken your iniquity away from you, and I will clothe you with pure vestments."

So God had them remove all of the things that made him unclean... But not only did he remove what was unclean, BUT HE REPLACED IT WITH SOMETHING THAT WAS CLEAN. God was saying “give him something to wear that is FIT for a high priest.”

We talked about this in detail last week... you can't defeat darkness with anything but light, and whenever you want to remove darkness, you can't just take it away... you have to replace it with a light.

then it continues in verse 5:

“And I said, “Let them put a clean turban on his head.” So they put a clean turban on his head and clothed him with garments. And the angel of the Lord was standing by. And the angel of the Lord solemnly assured Joshua, “Thus says the Lord of hosts:

and then it goes on to say something so similar to what the second half of 1 John 2:1-6 says, the part we will get back to in a minute about ACTUALLY FOLLOWING THE COMMANDS OF JESUS.

If you will walk in my ways and keep my charge, then you shall rule my house and have charge of my courts, and I will give you the right of access among those who are standing here. Hear now, O Joshua the high priest, **you and your friends who sit before you, for they are men who are a sign: behold, I will bring my servant the Branch.**

You may notice that the word “Branch” is capitalized. I didn't do that, its like that in your Bibles.

In the Old Testament, when you read about “the Branch” - you know that you are reading about the Messiah, who we know is Jesus. Isaiah 11:1 says that “There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, and a branch from his roots shall bear fruit.”

Jeremiah 23:5 says “I will raise up for David a righteous branch who will reign as King and execute justice and righteousness.”

So God tells Joshua the High Priest that as for you and your friends, I am providing for you Jesus... your advocate.

You see, *paraklētos* is someone who the judge will actually listen to... when a person is so obviously guilty and the verdict is so obviously clear, when they walked into court wearing soiled garments and literally no way to spin their case favorably... the only hope for that person is a *paraklētos* - someone who will say “yes, this person is guilty, JUST LOOK AT THEM! They are a mess!”

“but there is another option other than condemning them... because yes they are guilty, but I already paid. Charge them to my account.”

verse 9-10:

“For behold, on the stone that I have set before Joshua, on a single stone with seven eyes, I will engrave its inscription, declares the Lord of hosts, and I will remove the iniquity of this land in a single day. In that day, declares the Lord of hosts, every one of you will invite his neighbor to come under his vine and under his fig tree.”

In that day... as the branch extends out and you are resting underneath it, you will realize that this branch is so good... This God is so good... that you and everyone you know all went on trial dressed in filthy, soiled rags... but the God of all love had those rags removed from you, and clothed you in his righteousness...

you will realize that, it would be ridiculous to think that grace like that is only available to you... as you sit under the shade that the branch is casting, it would be so selfish to think for even a moment that God has *this* for you, but He doesn't have it for your neighbor. So Zechariah says that when THAT day comes, every single one of you is going to go out and invite your neighbor into the same grace that met you in your filthy rags, replaced them with His righteousness, and then the covered you by his branches.

Remember what John said? He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world.

One of the most destructive things that a Christian can do is to allow themselves to believe that their neighbor is guilty while they themselves are innocent and actually deserve to wear the pure vestments that God had put on us.

What a lot of people do, is they get saved... those soiled garments get replaced by pure vestments, then after not long, they get so used to looking at themselves wearing a priestly robe that they forget they ever lived their lives wearing soiled rags.

And I think to a degree that is good... we shouldn't constantly be looking back on who we used to be. **BUT WE SHOULD ALWAYS BE REMEMBERING WHAT GOD DID FOR US...** but here is what a lot of us do...

when we see someone else still in soiled garments, we kind of, subtly think we are better than them. But John made it so clear... the only reason that you are who you are, is because of what Jesus did for you. And He did **NOT** only do it for you, He did it for the **ENTIRE WORLD!**

The gospel of Jesus Christ is the most **INCLUSIVE MESSAGE** that could possibly exist. It reaches to the ends of the earth. The arms of the gospel know no end, they keep going and going, reaching out to wrap itself around broken people and reminding them that yes you are guilty...

But you have an advocate. And **THAT IS** the good news of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

But here is where it gets a bit dicey. And even offensive. And these first six verses of John are some of the clearest in all of the Bible about this:

The Gospel of Jesus Christ is the most **INCLUSIVE MESSAGE** in that it is available to literally anybody... no matter who you are, where you come from, who your parents are, what color your skin is, or how you voted in the last election... the gospel is **FOR YOU...** it is inclusive.

But the gospel is also the most **EXCLUSIVE** message in the entire world in that though it is extended to everyone, its path is very narrow. Christianity is

not one of those religions that says “you do what is best for you, and God will find you there.”

No! Christianity says that whatever it is that you do, IT WILL NEVER BE GOOD ENOUGH... but because of what Jesus did, it doesn't matter that you fall short every single day because His love is DOES NOT FALL SHORT, and it is big enough to heal everything.

I watched two of my friends argue about this on Facebook this week. The bulk of my Facebook experiences are made of up watching other peoples interactions with each other.

but my friend was talking about how he believes that Jesus was the BEST example in the history of the world for LOVE... and for how we should live our lives sacrificially... which is absolutely true..

but then he said this: “my problem is with Christians who think that Jesus is the ONLY way to Salvation...” he said “I don't believe he is the only way, and its just a way to put fear in people!”

But the example of Jesus (that my friend had mentioned,) His exemplary life was a flesh and blood verification of the WORDS of Jesus... Jesus himself said “no one gets to the Father, BUT THROUGH ME.” (John 14:6) BUT - because I love the entire world SO MUCH, I will suffer and die for it, so that I can stand as an advocate between the sinful people, and God...

And He didn't just say it, he absolutely did it.

and like we talked about on Easter, with accounts witnessed by over 500 people, the distinction between Jesus and all of the other gods who died is that Jesus didn't stay dead. Jesus did all of the things possible to give validity to his words... and his Word says that salvation does NOT come by anything other than Him.

If you are a Christian, what that means is that at the very least you believe this about salvation:

IT IS JESUS WHO WILL DO IT.

its not any other god, its not any other person, and its definitely NOT YOU.

But there is this concept going around that is widely accepted that says that something may be true for you, and that just because it is true for you, it doesn't mean that it is true for me.

And the idea is built on an intention to empower people in WHO they are and whatever it is that they want to do, and because of that... because it looks very appealing and inviting and welcoming, it makes it very difficult to challenge it in any way without being painted as someone who is intolerant to others or even hateful... but it is not about tolerance, and it is NOT ABOUT HATE... it is about SOULS. It is about people's eternities... and if we continue raising the next generation to believe that whatever is good for them is "their truth" or "their version of good" and that is what they need to stand on, no matter what that is, we are going to have a world of people who, as someone more clever than me once said: stands on nothing and falls for everything. Its like building a house on sand as Jesus describes in Matthew 7.

it is actually destructive and 100% is an anti gospel. John says, there is actually a way to live your life that is RIGHT, and if you don't live your life this way... the Jesus way, then the truth is not actually in you. But John definitely makes it VERY CLEAR... THERE IS TRUTH. You either have it, or you do not have it. But whether you have it or not does not change the fact that it is there... it exists... it is tangible.

One of the things that John mentions several times in this letter is he says that there are many antichrists who are out in the world and among you today... and he is trying to help them navigate what that looks like in *their* world, and we have try our best to navigate what that looks like, in ours.

We have to discern what are the things that have crept into our society that are strategically placed here to try and cripple the Gospel message.

The primary thing that John's church was facing was Gnosticism, one that focused on the heresy that Jesus didn't actually come in the flesh as a human, it was just an illusion of a human. But this is what John says:

IF YOU BELIEVE THAT, THE TRUTH IS NOT IN YOU.

if that is “your truth” - that Jesus wasn’t actually a flesh and blood man, but he was God...

you can believe whatever you want, but John says that what you believe is actually a lie. And if we can logically think about it, the only way to say that you have a truth that is actually WHAT IS BEST FOR YOU but it is different from the gospel, if that were ACTUALLY TRUE it would automatically disqualifies the truth of the gospel from having any validity. The gospel can NOT only be true for some people and not for others, if that were the case, it would not be good news.

The truth is true for me, and its true for you.

and THE TRUTH is that you have an advocate. And that advocate is light... and light beats darkness every time, in an instant.

And our advocate is LOVE. and He is on your side and THE FACT THAT HE IS ON YOUR SIDE IS THE ONLY REASON THAT YOU ARE ABLE TO STAND AT ALL.

and if you try to stand on your own, you will fall... and if you try to pick yourself back up, you will fall again. and again. and again. Because we are not capable of standing on our own.

THAT is why so many people hate Christianity. Because its the one religion that legitimately says that it doesn’t matter how good of a life that you think you have lived, it is not good enough. This is why people are getting less and less tolerant of Christianity and more and more tolerant of some other religions... do you notice that?

But it shouldn’t surprise you. Christianity says that there is one way to life, and his name is Jesus. But if you think that our world is hostile toward our religion, please remember John... EVERY ONE OF HIS BEST FRIENDS WERE LITERALLY KILLED FOR THIS! Yet John kept going. He kept writing. He kept preaching. Because there is only one thing that will truly

change the world for eternity... there are many good things, but there is only one God.

But to a world who doesn't want to hear that... they are never going to be won by our words. They need to see something different. They need to see Christians loving other people so deeply and so selflessly that they realize "if we shut this down, the world will actually become a darker place."

There have been times like that in history... when people realized... "I may not agree with the Christians... BUT MAN DO WE NEED THE CHRISTIANS!"

well John says that this is how you know if you have come to know him... IF YOU HAVE KEPT HIS COMMANDMENTS...

and we will get into this a lot more next week... but when the word "commandment" comes out of the mouth of Jesus... or its spoken about in regards to Jesus... it usually means one thing... and that is love.

In John's gospel Jesus says: "a new commandment I give you: LOVE one another just as I have loved you" (John 13:34)

When Jesus is asked "what is the greatest commandment?" he simply says "love." (Matthew 22:36-40)

love the Lord your God, and Love your neighbor as yourself."

John ends this passage saying: "whoever says he abides in him ought to walk in the same way in which Jesus walked" - and how did Jesus walk? in love.

Because truth looks like a lie when it hasn't transformed a person.

when a person holds to something that they won't actually let themselves become...

if all you have is stubborn information and it doesn't lead to a life transformation in which every single person who meets you says "there is

something really great about that person - something real... something different” - then to the outside world... truth looks like a lie.

Which is why my friend posted what he did, so fed up with Christians who care more about politics than Jesus... who care more about “religion” than people...

who take stands only on the issues that directly impact them, and their freedoms, and their paychecks, and their houses... while the rest of the world is hurting and dying and begging for some advocates.

What is the last thing John says? Its so powerful!

“whoever says he abides in him ought to walk in the same way in which he walked.”

Yes, Jesus lived love... in the most incredible way... Jesus is our advocate... can we walk that same line for others?

Can we live our lives as IF WE ARE LITERALLY CALLED TO SOMEONE ELSE’S SIDE... maybe even those who don’t agree with us? I mean called... like: this is our destiny. To stand with someone else. we are called to their side. And I think its a whole lot easier to do that when you remember that the same Jesus who died for your soiled rags, came to do the same for everyone.

The most crucial line in this passage, the centerpiece of the whole thing is the line that says “if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.”

I LOVE that John here calls him “Jesus Christ the righteous.”

Thats what He is... He is just righteous. He is just perfect. He didn’t do a thing that was wrong... so that He could stand before the Father in our place and say “charge them to my account”

He is the Branch. He is the branch who will reign as King and execute justice and righteousness.

I believe that the more our lives reflect Jesus, the more people we will win for Jesus. I believe that if our lives start looking more like Him, people will not only come to Him in far greater numbers, but they also will once again recognize how important Christianity is to our society... to our world...

we know that its bigger than that... we know that the gospel is literally EVERYTHING... but we have to start somewhere.

Actions speak louder than words... but truth looks like a lie when there is no life to it.

Summer is coming. And there are a lot of opportunities to put some flesh and blood and action to the truth that has changed us. There are plenty of opportunities to let our lives show that the love of Christ truly is in us.

So lets let these words transform the way we live our lives today.