

1 John 1:1-2:2

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[0 : 00] In order to understand 1 John, particularly the passage that we have, I think we need to understand! But in order to understand the context, what I think we need to do is imagine a dangerous! You need to close your eyes if you have to, but imagine a dangerous city, a place where you never choose to walk down. It's a place where houses are boarded up, windows are broken.

It's a really scary place. And in the middle of all this chaos, in the middle of this really scary city, there's a child. You can imagine the child, but this child is lost and scared as they wander down the street. It can be scary for adults being in those kind of places, but imagine how scary it would be being a child. This child just wants to go home. I just want to be home. And people come out of the shadows and they start offering assistance. They say, come with me and I'll get you home. Listen to me, I can tell you the way to get there. Now should we listen to them? And should we listen to those people? But how do we know who we can trust to make sure that we'll definitely make it home safe? Who's trustworthy? That's a really important question in that situation. This little child asking, who can I trust? Where should I go? Will I ever make it home? You know, imagine how frightened you'd be if you were the parent of that child. Well, that is exactly how John feels about the church that he's writing to. He has a fatherly affection for them, concerning them. I mean, just look at verse 1 of chapter 2. My little children, he says. He looks at this church and he sees that they're in a dangerous place. They're being tempted by false teachers, people who have left the church and are questioning the faithfulness of the gospel they once heard. And John, his heart is moved for them. He just yearns and desires so desperately that they'd be safe.

Not wanting them to continue down that dark and dangerous street, listening to dangerous messengers. So he writes them a letter. He writes them a letter. You see, what that small child needed was a faithful guide. A faithful guide, someone he could really trust to take them home. He needed a familiar face that could go out and come to him and give him faithful, safe instruction to take him away from evil, to take him away from the darkness, off that dangerous street and on the right path. And what we have here, what we have in our hands this morning, is the message of that faithful guide. How to stay safe as a Christian.

How to stay safe. To make sure that you're not led astray by the world, by false teachers. And instead, that you're able to confidently walk home. Confidently to make it there with full assurance. John, that is a great theme for a letter, isn't it? How to stay safe and make sure you'll definitely get home. So what we're going to do in our time together, is we're going to start briefly looking at the faithful guide. What makes John such a faithful messenger? Now, what means that we can trust him?

[3 : 43] And then secondly, this is something we really need to be clear about, is we don't just need a faithful messenger, but we need to know what his message is. So we need to be clear about the faithful message that this faithful messenger brings. So firstly, a faithful guide. Okay, looking at verses 1 to 4, we're looking at a faithful guide. John emphasises straight away, straight from the beginning of his letter, that he and a group of others were there with Jesus from the beginning of his ministry. Just look at verse 1. That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, which we have touched with our hands concerning the word of life. He was there with this group of others from the beginning. In each of the four gospels, Jesus calls his 12 disciples, his 12 followers, immediately after he's baptised, and they follow him. If you're familiar, you'll know they're with him at every turn. It's incredible.

They see him praying. They see him eating. They walk down dirt roads in the hot sunshine with him. They watch him do the miraculous, and they see him do the very, very ordinary things. You know, if they had toothbrushes, they'd have probably even seen him brush his teeth. They were

there every step of the way, seeing with their eyes, hearing with their ears, and touching with their hands. They were there. This isn't second-hand information. They were there. But more than that, they didn't just hear, see, and touch, though. But this group that were there from the beginning, later called the apostles, were also called to preach. Jesus appointed them to take what they had seen, heard, and touched, to take it to the nations, to people all over the world. Speaking to the apostles, Jesus says in John's Gospels, but when the helper comes, when the spirit comes, well, he's going to bear witness about me. And you, my disciples, my apostles, well, you're going to bear witness to the ends of the earth. They're to take to the nations what they've witnessed, the life, the death, the resurrection of Jesus, and proclaim it to the world, all by the spirit's power. They were there, and are empowered by the spirit. And that's what John's trying to get across in 1 to 4. But not only does he repeat the idea of the disciples being eyewitnesses, but three times he says we were proclaimers. We were people who spoke. You know, like lost children in a dangerous city, where there are false teachers trying to lead us astray, John wants to make it really, really clear that he, along with the other apostles, that they are the eyewitnesses that you can trust, that they have the authoritative testimony of Jesus Christ, that they alone are the ones that can give the instruction that we so badly need. But the thing is, they're dead. They died. What are we to do?

The faithful guides disappeared. Well, they didn't merely preach, as it says in 2 and 3, but verse 4, they also wrote their message down. 1 John, what you have today, what you are hearing this morning, is the message that will get you home. When we receive John's letter, when we receive the teaching of Jesus Christ himself, the apostles' teaching is what we must cling to. So we must walk through that dangerous city with people trying to lead us astray. What must you cling to? You must cling to this.

Because they alone have the message that what can it do? It's one of the things I think we skip over all the time. But there in verse 3, it's this message alone that can give you fellowship with God. Fellowship with the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. And it also gives you fellowship with the church. They alone have the words that gives you fellowship. Life himself will come to know you.

[8 : 18] They alone have the ability to give you this message. Because they were there in spirit-empowered teaching. We have now the message in our hands that can mean that you can be welcomed into the divine family. That you will make it home on that final day. So have confidence. I don't know if you're ever like me, but when you sit and it's mid-week and you think, probably should open my Bible, is it really worth it? The answer is emphatically yes. Because anything else, whether it's the news at 10, or your favourite TV show, what you read in the newspaper, the conversations you have at work, none of those things can get you home safe. But the Word of God.

Do you know what? There's loads of people trying to vie for your attention, trying to lead you astray, telling you this is the way. Every day you're bombarded by messages, saying, come and listen to me. Come and follow me. You know what? People write holy books, don't they? Like the Quran or the Book of Mormon. Jehovah's Witnesses even have their own version of the Bible. Do not listen to it, because it is dangerous and will not take you home. It even comes in more subtle forms, with just the whimsical good advice of a friend about what it means to be really spiritual. Do not listen to them. They are dangerous truths that aren't real truths at all. Only this message can get you home safe. So think and be aware of what the world's telling you.

So the content then. What is this message that John's given? What is the content of your message? Well here we have 1 John 1 verse 5 to 2-2. It's John's faithful message. This is the beginning. Straight from the get go. What do you want us to know then? What do you want the church to hold on to, John? What is it that John thinks is essential that we hear to stay on the right track? Well if I was to ask you to summarise the gospel, because that's secretly what we're all waiting for, how would you summarise it? Maybe if I gave you 11 words. 11 words to summarise the gospel. What would you say? The message to keep you safe. I don't know, maybe we'd have something about the cross. Maybe we'd have something about resurrection and forgiveness.

But instead, John very peculiarly says this in verse 5. This is the message that we have heard from him and proclaim to you. That. And I've checked it in the Greek and in the NIV and in the ESV, it's always the same amount of words. God is light and in him is no darkness at all. Good news. Brilliant. We can all go home because we're all really clear. God is light and in him there is no darkness at all. That's the message that will keep you safe. I'm not that convinced yet. John, I need you to explain it.

[11 : 42] I need you to unpack. Why is it good news that God is light and in him there's no darkness at all? Well, what we're going to do then is we're going to split it into two in this faithful message. We're going to have the message about our sinfulness and the message about our salvation. The message about our sinfulness and the message about our salvation. Let's just think about light for a moment. What happens when you turn a light on in a room? Well, the darkness disappears, doesn't it? The darkness disappears. Light and darkness, they just don't go together. As the sun rises, the night time disappears. On that cold, wintry morning when we all long for the sun and then it comes and then we all go, ah, I kind of miss winter now, it's too hot. But the light comes and the darkness disappears. They're opposites. Let's think a little bit more. What is John trying to get across with this idea of light? Well, I think the first idea is this idea of revelation. The idea of making things clear, making things known.

He is the light. God is light in the sense that he reveals truth. Actually, even more than that, he is truth revealed. God has revealed things as they really are. And he has revealed himself. Not in an obscure way. Not in an abstract philosophy. But in a person that was touched, that was seen and was heard. The God who is light, who reveals, has been seen. He has been made himself known. Dispelling all mystery about what God is like. Because in history he revealed himself. God is light. And that light has been made known to us in the person of Jesus.

But more than that, and I think probably more the connotation that you're thinking, is the idea of God's moral perfection. He is light. And in him there is no darkness at all.

Delving into the eternal depths of God, you will never find any moral imperfection. He is perfectly good, perfectly holy, perfectly righteous. He never does anything wrong, nor can he tolerate anything that's wrong. So when we put those two things together, what we have is a God who is light that reveals and exposes in contrast with his moral perfection.

Genevieve and I, I told you, we have a son called Judah. And ten months ago, we were frantically decorating his new room. All the mums are thinking about nesting and what it was like when they had a baby and all the redecorating they did. Well, I expertly thought, right, I'll do it in a day. The day kind of ended up and I started about one o'clock in the afternoon. I was determined to get it done. And as I started, sun's up looking wonderful. Starting decorating. And it gets further and further. We've done, stripped all the old wallpaper. We've done all the priming. And it gets ready and we start wallpapering. But the sun starts to go down and we're now relying on energy-saving bulbs, which never really seem to get that bright. But I finished it. It was two o'clock in the morning and I'd finished it.

[15 : 16] I felt so good. I went to bed. I woke up in the morning, woke Genevieve up and said, let's go look at the new baby's room. Sun had come up. We flung open the curtains. And boy, did it look miserable.

Boy, did it look miserable. We're talking crooked wallpaper, smudges and smears. We're talking wrong alignment. We're even talking that I put wallpaper on the wrong wall. I was tired.

But the thing is, God's light is far more exposing than sun on wallpaper. Instead, when it comes to me, if there is any smudges, if there is anything crooked, if there is anything wrong, it will be exposed in his light. It's a sobering truth, isn't it? It's sobering to think that God is light and in him there is no darkness at all. And the reason that that is sobering is that because standing in that light, my darkness is exposed. But John calls us straight from the start. And he says, in this letter, in his instruction to the church, that is wandering like a child down a dangerous street, he says, please stick with this. I know it's uncomfortable, but stick with it. Because if you compromise this, everything's gone. If you compromise this, you'll end up in a very dangerous place. Don't water down who God is. That is not the way that you can have true fellowship with him, that he's described and put on offer. That's not the way to make it home. And we know that there are false teachers who are saying that.

We're trying to deny what John says. Because he goes on to say, three times he repeats this phrase. Look down, he says, if we claim, if we say. So verse 6, verse 8 and verse 10.

These are the words of the false teachers. He says, if we say that we have fellowship with him and walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. Verse 8, if we say we have no sinned, we have no sinned, we have no sinned. We make him a liar and his word is not in us.

[17 : 56] So I think all three statements are basically the same. Just saying the same thing. Just slightly nuanced. He's basically saying, sin doesn't matter. Sin doesn't matter. That's what the false teachers are saying. Sin doesn't matter. And John is just rejecting that denial of the false teachers

that God is light by saying very simply, do not trivialise your sin.

If God is light and he is, then don't listen to the false teachers who, and certainly don't say yourself, that your sin doesn't matter. If God is light and we walk in darkness, we can't say we have fellowship with God. Don't kid yourself. One of the other things, maybe it is because my wife's American. She has a great affinity for the sun. She loves walking the sunshine, sunbathing, beaches, all that kind of stuff. And I think it's a disposition of British people, or maybe I'm a bit unique, but I love the shade. I love it to be cooler and not too sunny. But the thing is, when summer comes, this happens on many occasions, we'll be walking down the street and General will go, I'm going to cross over and I'm going to walk in the sun. Can't think of anything worse. So she walks down one side of the street and I walk down the other in the shade. Yeah. The thing is, we can't kid ourselves. We can't hold hands anymore. Like, we can't have fellowship. If she's in the light and I'm in darkness, we just can't kid ourselves, can we? If she's on the sunny side of the street and I'm in the darkness, we don't have fellowship. We can't be united. And if God cannot bear darkness and sin, there is no way, no way in which those who are walking in darkness and disobedience can ever have fellowship with God. It is a lie, according to John, to claim otherwise.

If we live in sin, we have no fellowship with God. Verse 8 and verse 10 say the same thing, but just ramp it up even further by saying, you're not only deceiving yourself, but you're calling God a liar. So I deceive myself and call God a liar because I say, if I say I'm sinless, why is that true? Well, because as we said, light has come into the world. Truth has been revealed in the face of Jesus Christ. When you look at Jesus and you see who he is and what he's done and the light that he brings, if you say that you are without sin, basically you deny everything that Jesus is, everything that he's done. We basically end up saying, well, we don't need it. We pretend we're without sin and we basically say that God isn't bothered about sin, that God isn't pure and that in the face of Jesus Christ, light reveals that there isn't really a God who hates sin and is so committed to it, to ridding the world of it, that he would die to deal with it. We essentially say, God, you're not good. You're not really that holy.

You don't really mind the dark patches in my life. You don't really mind the sin. We call God a liar. But I'm going to give you a bit of credit. I'm going to give myself a little bit of a slack because we know why we do it. We know why we compromise that truth and it's precisely because we know that God is light. If God is really light, I basically have to pretend, don't I? Knowing that I'm dark, I have to pretend that I'm not really what I'm like because if I confront what I'm really like, then God will just crush me. So I have to compromise the truth about who I am and what God is like just to make my life livable.

We do it all the time. We project an image to one another, don't we, of what we're really like, our best face. Because if you knew what I was really like, you wouldn't want to be friends with me. Think about that with us and God. And this is the teaching of the false teachers that's leading people astray. They're pandering to this in people and you can understand why it's working. Imagine you go into the counselling room of one of these false teachers teachers. And you sit down and you say, I don't know if you'd call them false teacher, like, hello teacher, but think false teacher. I'm really struggling today. I feel really burdened with my sin. I've done loads of stuff wrong. And the false teacher just goes, don't worry about it. It's alright. And you say, look, I really don't think you understand. You don't know the things that I've thought, the things that I've said, the things that I've done. And the false teacher goes, look, just don't worry about it. You know, God loves to forgive, like, you know, you'll be fine. Like, just, you know, you're not that bad. Just go on. And I say, well, thanks. That's great. I walk out of the counselling room and I think a little bit better about myself. And the problem is, it's just shallow. It's nonsense.

[23 : 39] It's nonsense. Because it denies that God is light. It's a fake relationship. It's all pretend. It's a pretend fellowship. A pretend fake friendship. When you deny what God is like and what we're really like. But the question is, what's the alternative? What's the alternative?

What am I meant to do as someone who is sinful, who is messed up, who walks into that counselling room and I really do feel burdened by all the things that I've done? Well, that brings us to our second and final bit. And that's the truth about our salvation. The message about the truth of our salvation. John gives us his answer in the kind of verses in between the things we looked at. So we have 6, 8 and 10, the things that the false teachers are saying.

And then we have the message that John is bringing. The gospel message that John is bringing in verses 7 and 9. Listen to what he says. 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, purifies us from all sin. And then verse 9. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. Can I take your gospel hat off and the formulaic gospel you know? Because what he says seems absolutely crazy. Because strangely, verse 7, he says, walk in the light. He basically says, well, Adam, stop walking in the shade and come over to the sunny side of the street. It seems like an odd thing to say because it basically means being exposed. He says, bring it all out into the light. Come and let's see how bad it really is. Come and stand next to my pure, holy, blameless, pure light. And let's see how bad it is. He says, come and walk in my way and be exposed. Which seems crazy, but then he ramps it up even further. And he says something strange to it. He says, don't come and step into the light. And once you've done that, confess. Confess. Verse 9, confess our sins. You're thinking, John, this is a crazy thing to do. This can't be good advice. Not only am I to step into the light and have my darkness revealed and exposed, but then I'm to stand before the God who is light, who cannot tolerate darkness. And say, do you know what? Compared to you, I am dark here and here and here and here. Seems crazy talk. This can't be a good idea, surely. So you can understand the appeal of the false teachers. You go, just sweep it under the carpet. But read on to what John says. He goes on to say that if we do, if we do that, if we come in to the light and be exposed, if we confess our sins, then he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins.

[27 : 21] Hang on, John. I hear you all cry. Are you not denying the exact thing that the false teachers were doing? God is light and in him there is no darkness at all. Are you just not denying that by saying, well, this God will just forgive you? No, he says. There is a way. Amazingly, there is a way.

For dark people like you and me to come to the God who is light and without deceiving ourselves or God being compromised. And that is verse 6. Through the blood of Jesus, the Son who cleanses. And verse 9 and chapter 2, verse 1. Here is the way. It's by this bloody sacrifice.

The word propitiation. This atonement. God taking the penalty for sin. His wrath against it. The light being switched on and it consuming the darkness.

Jesus taking that. But Jesus doesn't pretend that there isn't any darkness. No, instead he confronts it head on in his death.

[28 : 41] Jesus takes our sin. Our darkness. And he clothes us in his righteousness. In his light.

Let me just for a moment take you into the counselling room of Jesus. What is the counselling room according to John? John, you walk in.

You sit down and you say, John, I've really messed up. The things that I have thought, I've said and done. And Jesus says, I know.

And you say, Jesus, no, I really don't think you understand. I've done so much. It's so big. It's so dark. And he says, It is far worse than you could ever imagine.

What am I to do then, Jesus? What should I do? How can this be dealt with? What am I to do about the sin in my heart if I want to come to you?

[29 : 52] If I want to walk in your way on the sunny side of the street, how can I come? And Jesus just turns and he says, How about I cleanse you? How about I forgive you?

I'm not going to pretend that you're not dark. And I'm not going to pretend that I'm not light. But how about in history, in a way that you can touch, that you can see, that you can hear, how about I come and I die in your place?

But how about I die for all the sin and darkness so that people like you can be welcomed into the light?

Jesus propitiates, bears the wrath, anger of a holy God against sin so that his favour may rest with me, with you. His blood is spilt at the cross in a way that people touched, saw and heard bearing the penalty that sin deserves.

Jesus the righteous dies a dark death that you might become the light of God. So imagine now, imagine now the confidence that you can have drawing near to God.

[31 : 15] No longer pretending, you don't have to pretend with God. No longer pretending, but knowing that the basis of your relationship with God is that if I confess my sin, I know that God has acted in history in a way that is touched, heard, and seen so that I might have fellowship with God himself and make it heard.

But no wonder John says that passing on this message makes his joy complete. Verse 4. This makes his joy complete because where is his confidence?

Not in pretend, but in reality. And it's worth defending against the false teachers. It's worth defending against the lies of Satan and the people of the world.

It's worth defending. One last thing as I close. There's probably loads of people in here that are thinking, that's great, that's really good news.

But the problem is, this is the pattern of every day. Every day, remembering that we are darkness and we need Christ the light to die in our place that we might have fellowship with God.

[32 : 35] I've never met a brother or sister, no matter how old they are, that have been trusting the Lord for years and years who go, do you know what, good news, good news, over coffee, I've just got something to tell you, I'm done with sin.

It's brilliant. It's taken a while but I'm now done with sin. That never happens, does it? Actually, in fact, younger Christians, children, go and speak to the older believers and say, do you know what, what's it like being a Christian?

And the normative Christian experience is that as we walk more in the light, our sin is exposed more and more and we go, do you know what, I feel more sinful than ever.

But I glory in his light all the more. Yes, by God's grace, by the spirit of work in us, we are transformed more and more into his likeness. But our experiences of one, where we come daily, remembering that in history, he did something for us.

You know, John is telling us that he and the apostles have the true message that we must cling to. the question is this morning, will you walk in the light and confess your sin that you might have a real relationship with the living God, the God who is light, rather than the pretend one?

[33 : 58] Shall we pray? Do you think any of those any of those experiences of those experiences experiences of those experiences of those