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A JOURNEY THROUGH THE BIBLE

Reading: 1 John 1:1-9

63. THE BOOK OF 1 JOHN

John was a very old man now, feeling the weight of his years and aware that his days on earth were about done. A godly life lay behind him, and a very long memory thrilled him. His native land was far away in the land of Israel, although he now lived in Ephesus, a pagan Asiatic city, on the edge of the European world. This John was,

1. THE AUTHOR OF THIS BOOK:

For although the letter, does not identify the author, the earliest testimony of the church ascribes it to John the disciple and apostle. (Lk 6:13-14) John was not only one of the Twelve but he was one of the three most intimate associates of Christ, along with Peter and James (Matt 17:1 26:37) He was an eyewitness to and a participant in Christ's earthly ministry. (1:1-4) Dr. Graham Scroggie remarks “ *John was the first to appear on the stage of apostolic story and he was the last to leave it. In matter of years he spans the first century.*” *This John, the beloved disciple is the author of 5 books of the New Testament.* Apart from Paul no other author would write as much sacred Scripture in the New Testament as he did. John gave us the gospel of John, 1 John, 2 John, and 3 John, and he gave us the book of Revelation. These

5 books are in three main groups. First, is the gospel, which has to do with *our past*, and deals with the theme of *salvation*. The three epistles have to do with *our present* and deal with the theme of *sanctification*. The last book, in the Bible deals with *our future* and the theme is *glorification*. Now its characteristic of John in his writings to put a key either at the front door or back door of the book. For example in the book of Revelation the key is hanging at the front door. In (Rev 1:19) John was told by the Lord “ *Write the things which thou hast seen and the things which are and the things which shall be hereafter.*” Now that simple outline is the key to understanding the book of Revelation. In his gospel John puts the key at the back door. He says, “ *These are written that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ the Son of God and that believing ye might have life through his name.*”

(Jn 20:31) So the gospel of John was written so that people might come to know the Lord who is God manifest in flesh. Each time that John wrote a book he always had a definite purpose in mind. So what is,

2. THE AIM OF THIS BOOK:

We don't have to guess why John wrote this first epistle, for in this letter there are four keys all identified by the phrase “ *these things I write,*” and these provide the four reasons why John wrote this letter. You see, John wrote

(a) To Provide Assurance:

Look at (5:13) This word “ *know,*” should be circled in your Bible, it's the key word in 1 John, for its used over 30 times. Some say, “ *well, you can't really know you are*

going to heaven when you die.” Yet John says, “ you can.” You see, he is writing to provide assurance for the child of God. Are you sure of your salvation ? Dr. M.L. Jones said, “ assurance is not essential to salvation, but it is essential to the joy of salvation.” 1.

(b) To Protect Believers:

Look at (2:26) So John’s purpose is to protect the saints from those who would lead them astray. Do you recall what Paul said when he was saying farewell to the elders at Ephesus ? “ *For I know that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise speaking perverse things to draw away disciples after them.*”

(Acts 20:29-30) You as the first century drew to a close outward hostility was giving way to inward corruption. False teachers from within the church’s own ranks began infecting the church with false doctrine. This teaching eventually became known as Gnosticism , which comes from the Greek word meaning “ *to know.*” (gnosis) The word “ *agnostic,*” means “ *someone who does not know,*” therefore a “ *gnostic,*” was a “ *religious know it all.*” The Gnostic’s believed that all matter was evil. This means the body was evil, the flesh was evil, anything material or physical was evil. Therefore they denied the humanity of Christ. They were going around saying that Jesus Christ was not human at all, He just appeared to be human. He was a phantom. Others like a man called Cerinthus said that Jesus was a human being and that the divine Christ came upon Him at His baptism and departed before His crucifixion. You see, they did not believe in the

incarnation, the literal coming into human existence of the Lord Jesus. My doctrine matters ? For deny the humanity of Christ, and you’ll have to deny the work of Christ, and if you deny the work of Christ, there’s no salvation.

***What think ye of Christ, is the test
To try both your state and your scheme
You cannot be right in the rest
Unless you think rightly of Him***

You see, there are always going to be people who will attack the Lord Jesus, and they will attack Him from all sides. They will either attack His deity, or they will attack His humanity. So John is writing to protect the saints.

(c) To Prevent Sin:

Look at (2:1) The Bible nowhere teaches that a Christian is sinless, but it does teach that a child of God ought to sin less. Day by day we ought to grow in grace and sin less today, than we did yesterday. (1) (2) (3)

(d) To Promote Joy:

Look at (1:4) So John is writing to promote joy in the heart of the child of God. Do you have joy today ? I mean are you happy in the Lord ? Can you see (1) (2)

(3) THE ANALYSIS OF THIS BOOK:

Many Bible scholars have said that this letter is impossible to analyse because John seems to go round in circles. His letter has been compared to a spiral staircase

because John keeps returning to the same three topics of obedience (1:5-2:29 3:1-24) love (2:7-17 4:1-21) and truth (2:18-29 5:1-21) John picks up a word or a thought, then puts it down only to pick it up again. The three prominent words of the gospel of John are emphasised here again, Light, Love, and Life. Now John knows no shades of grey. Things are either right or wrong, true or false, good or bad, black or white. John speaks of life and death, truth and falsehood, love and hate, light and darkness, righteousness and sin, the Father and the World children of God and children of the Devil. As we shall see in a moment we have divided John's book into three parts which may not be that satisfactory for as John Phillips says "*we get the feeling that John would recognised no such analysis at all.*" (1) (2) (3) What about the,

(4) THE AUDIENCE OF THIS BOOK:

I mean to whom is John writing ? It is believed by some that John directed his epistles to the same readers who would later receive the book of Revelation, that is the seven churches in Asia Minor. No doubt there is a measure of truth in this for this letter was probably written from Ephesus about A.D. 90 perhaps designed first of all for the church of Ephesus, then for the churches of Asia what is modern day Turkey and finally for the whole church of God, for all Christian believers everywhere.

(5:13) My John's letter is vitally important, for it gives us guidance on what a real Christian is. John says, in a world of make believe, in a world where absolutes are out of fashion, in a world of fantasy, in a world of shallow relationships, in a world of forty shades of grey, be real,

be authentic. Now as I have said John's great words are Light, Love and Life.

(1) GOD IS LIGHT: 1:1-2:29

Do you see that simple statement in (1:5) ? Now this is the basis of our *fellowship*. Later on John makes another statement about God for he says that "*God is love.*" (4:8) That is the basis of our *sonship*. *So it's possible for us to be sons of God because God is love and its possible for us to have fellowship with God because God is light.* Now John does not say God has a light, or God is a light. No. God in His nature is light. God's essence, His being is light. Do you recall the words of the Psalmist ? "*The Lord is my light and salvation.*" (Ps 27:1) Paul talks when he writes to young Timothy about God "*who only hath immortality dwelling in the light which no man can approach unto.*" (1 Tim 6:16) Now when John says that "*God is light,*" he is speaking Physically of the Glory of God. (Gen 1:2 Ex 13:21) Intellectually of the Knowledge of the God (Job 36:4 Ps 73:11) and Morally of the Holiness of God. John is making a statement about the character of God. He is saying that God is absolutely holy, God is totally moral, nothing whatsoever in God is wrong. (James 1:13) Thomas Binney put it like this,

**Eternal Light ! Eternal Light
How pure that soul must be
When, placed within Thy searching sight
It shrinks not but, with calm delight
Can live and look on Thee**

Now how can we live in that light ? How can we have fellowship with God ? The word “ *fellowship*,” is the Greek word “ *koinonia*,” and means “ *to have in common*,” “ *to share something together*.” A teacher in her Sunday School class said “ *can anyone tell me what fellowship is ?*” One little fellow raised his hand and said, “ *Its two fellows in the same ship*.” Well, it isn’t quite that it means “ *to share in common*.” Do you see what John says “ *And truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ*.” (1:3) Does that not stagger your imagination ? You can have fellowship with God. You can be as close to God as two friends walking down a country lane. Now John talks here about,

(a) The Beginning of this Fellowship: 1:1-4

Or if you prefer, the source of this fellowship. You see, the beginning of “ *living in the light*,” is historical, it begins with Christ, the One who had dwelled in that light from all eternity and who was born at Bethlehem. You see, in this opening statement John plunges right into the Gnostic controversy. In this letter he warns us several times not to listen to false teachers who tell lies about Christ. (2:22 4:2-3) My if a man is wrong about Jesus Christ, he is wrong about God because the Lord Jesus is the final and complete revelation of God to man. John describes Him as “ *the Word of life*.” (1:1) The Lord Jesus is God’s communication to us He reveals to us the mind and heart of God. In fact do you see how John describes Christ ? **He speaks of Christ Eternally:** “ *That which was from the beginning*.” In his gospel John goes a little further. For he begins his gospel by saying “ *In the beginning*,” not

“ *from the beginning*.” But “ *In the beginning was the Word*.” (Jn 1:1) Do you see the difference ? The Lord Jesus was in the beginning. The Lord Jesus was from the beginning, therefore Christ is eternal. There was never a time when He was not nor is there a time when He will not be. The Lord Jesus is coequal, coeternal and coexistent with God. **Then John speaks of Christ Historically:** the word for “ *manifested*,” means “ *to be made visible*.” The eternal Christ was born, became visible and lived and moved on this earth. (1 Tim 3:16) Do you see that John appeals to three of the senses that identify a person as a real person ? He says “ *we heard*,” then he uses the word “ *seen*,” then he uses the word “ *handled*,” what it means is “ *we touched him*.” (Lk 24:39)

Now why was John at pains to establish the perfect humanity of Christ ? To counteract this heresy as Gnosticism. You see, the cultists were going around saying that Jesus Christ was not human at all, He just appeared to be human. He was a phantom. But John says “ *Nonsense of course He was real. I was there. I heard Him, saw Him and touched Him. I know*.” **Did you notice that John speaks of Christ Relationally ?** John uses a lovely phrase when he talks about “ *that eternal life which was with the Father*.” (1:2) Here is someone unique, someone who shared eternity with God in a most extraordinary way. Yet John says “ *He appeared*.” It’s interesting that John wrote his gospel to prove the Deity of the Lord Jesus, then he to turn around and write his epistle to prove the Humanity of Christ. Aren’t you glad that Christ “ *was made in the likeness of men ?*”

(Phil 2:7) That Jesus Christ was a real man. For its because of that He can be touched with the feeling of your infirmity. (a)

(b) The Basis of this Fellowship: 1:5-7

God is light sin is darkness and that is the basis of our fellowship. We have to walk in the light. We cannot live in light and darkness at the same time. Now it's possible that there were some in Ephesus who started to believe that you could walk in spiritual and moral darkness and still have fellowship with God. People were living in sin and claiming that they were in fellowship with God. John says "*Impossible.*" Someone has said "*you might just as well live in a coal pit and claim that you're developing a sun tan.*" Its crazy, its impossible. Do you claim to live in fellowship with God ? Than are you walking in the light ? Are you walking in holiness of life ? (a) (b) Can you see,

(c) The Breaking of this Fellowship: 1:8-2:2

What is that breaks fellowship with God in the life of a believer ? Sin. You some of the false teachers were claiming that they attained a life of sinless perfection but John says they are liars. (1:8) Now though it is true that a Christian does not have to sin, it simply is not true that a Christian will never again sin. (Phil 3:12) *You see, when the Lord saves you He does not make you perfect, He just makes you forgiven.* Can a Christian sin ? Yes. If a Christian sins can he lose his salvation ? No. You see, if we do sin then we have the victorious death of Christ to maintain our forgiveness by God (1:7) but we have also

the victorious life of Christ to maintain our fellowship with God. Do you see the word "*advocate ?*" it's parakletos which means "*one called alongside to plead our case.*" Let me give you a mental picture of what is being described here. You see the book of Revelation describes Satan as "*the accuser of the brethren.*" (Rev 12:10 Job 1:6-12) How he accuses us before God day and night. I can imagine that when we sin Satan rushes into the presence of God and says, "*Look what he or she did. You call them your child. Just look at what they have done.*" Then the Lord Jesus says, "*Yes, Father but look at Me. On the basis of my shed blood I plead for the remission of that sin.*" You see, the Accuser is met by the Advocate and all Christ has to do is raise His pierced hands and Satan is silenced that is how effective Christ's finished work is. You see, what He pleads on our behalf in heaven is the on-going effects of His own death.

***Though the restless foe accuses
Sins recounting like a flood
Every charge our God refuses
Christ has answered with His Blood***

Thank God for the "*finished work of Christ,*" Christ giving His life as a sacrifice for sin, but today He has an "*unfinished work,*" in glory, as He represents us before the throne of God. My is He not a wonderful Saviour ? Surely we should cry this "*Hallelujah what a Saviour ?*" (a) (b) (c) Did you notice,

(d) The Beauty of this Fellowship: 2:3-14

You see, whether we are “ *little children,*” “ *fathers,*” or “ *young men,*” we are in the family and as such should be living a life of obedience (2:4) a life of Christlikeness (2:6) and a life of love. (2:9-10) John introduces us to one of his distinctive threads in this passage when he says on three occasions. “ *He that saith.*” (2:4 2:6 2:9) He is using it to bring before us a series of tests by which we can know beyond any shadow of that we are a child of God. I heard about a pious church member who thought he was a great Christian. One Sunday he visited the junior department of the Sunday School. The Superintendent asked him to say a few words to the boys and girls. He pompously stood before them and asked “ *Why did you think people call me a great Christian ?*” From the back of the room a little boy shouted out “ *Because they don’t know you.*”

I mean when you think of what a believer should be what comes to your mind ? Well, John brings before us here the test of *Loyalty:* (2:3-5) or faithfulness to the Word. The test of *Living:* (2:6-8) or Christlikeness. The test of *Love:* (2:9-11) My if I know Him I will want to obey Him. If I know Him I will want to be like Him. If I know Him I will want to love as He loved. However there are,

(e) The Barriers to this Fellowship: 2:15-29

In (2:15-17) there is the *Barrier of Worldliness:* John is using the word here to refer to the invisible spiritual system of evil. So what is worldliness ? John Wesley says, “ *Anything that cools my love for Christ is the world.*” What is worldliness ? It is anything that keeps me from

loving the Lord as I ought to love Him and from the doing the will of God as I ought to do it. Worldliness is primarily living to experience the world’s passing pleasures. Do you know anything about it ? Has worldliness infiltrated into your life ?

In (2:18-27) there is the *Barrier of Falseness:* especially false teachers. Do you see in (2:19) the sharp contrast between “ *they,*” and “ *us,* ?” John says that false teachers *deny the Christ:* (2:22-23) *desert the church:* (2:19) and *deceive the Christian:* (2:26) My the devil is out to get you. How can we counteract the spirit of antichrist that is so prevalent ? Well, we need to stay in the church of God: (2:19) we need to feed on the Word of God: (2:24) and we need to rely on the Spirit of God. (2:27)

In (2:28-29) there is the *Barrier of Sinfulness:* Now tell me, how do you want to meet the Lord ? Is Christ going to catch you red handed with things in your life you do not want to be there when He appears ? Wouldn’t it be awful for the Lord to come and find you displaying your old nature ? Wouldn’t it be terrible for Christ to come and find you at loggerheads with your brother or sister in Christ ? My when Christ appears what way will you meet Him ? You see, God is light, holy and the Bible reminds us “ *follow peace with all men and holiness without which no man shall see the Lord.*” (Heb 12:14)

(2) GOD IS LOVE: 3:1-4:21

Do you see what John says in (4:16) ? Love is part of the

very being and nature of God and if we are united to God through faith in Christ we share His nature. ***Now remember that Christian love means that we treat each other the way God treats us.*** Most of us interpret love as a feeling. I think of the young man that said to his father at breakfast one morning. “*Dad, I’m going to get married.*” “*How do you know you’re ready to get married ?*” asked the father. “*Are you in love ?*” “*I sure am,*” said the son. “*How do you know you’re in love asked the father ?*” Well, said the son, “*Last night as I was kissing my girlfriend good-night, her dog bit me and I didn’t feel the pain until I got home.*” You see, we think of love as an emotional thing. My It’s an act of the will. I choose to treat you the way God treats me. Tragically and sadly this kind of love is often missing among believers.

Yet the words “*love,*” and “*loveth,*” occur 43 times in this letter and cover many aspects of the Christian life such as “*Why we love God ?*” (4:19) “*We should love one another.*” (4:7) and “*How may this love be developed ?*” (2:5) John tell us that we need to be marked by,

(a) PURE LOVE: 3:1-10

Or righteous love. How many times have you been told that salvation is in three tenses ? We have been saved from the penalty of sin, we are being saved from the power of sin and someday we will be saved from the presence of sin. *The problem is that too many of us are still too tense about the second tense.* We hear that we are being saved from the power of sin, but for many of us, if that

statement is true, than our salvation hasn’t yet taken full effect. My do want to have “***Victory in Jesus,***” and not just sing about it ? How ? *Through the work of the Saviour.* Why did He die ? To make you holy. (3:5)

How ? *Through the walk of the saint.* Here we have some of John’s uncompromising statements about sin.

“*Whosoever abideth in him sinneth not.*” (3:6) “*He that committeth sin is of the devil.*” (3:8) “*Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin.*” (3:9) Sure, we are not sinless, we never will be this side of heaven, but are we sinning less and less as time marches on ? ***Victory in Jesus.*** How ? *Through the witness of the Spirit.* Is this not another reason why Christians cannot practice sin ? Its incompatible with the ministry of the Holy Spirit who has imparted a new nature to us. For John speaks of the divine “*seed,*” in us. (2 Pet 1:4) That’s why this love is to be pure love.

(b) PRACTICAL LOVE: 3:11-24

If you want to know the true meaning of love you’ll not find it in the dictionary, you will not find it in a romantic novel, you will not find it in a soap opera you will only find it at the cross of Christ. John says “*Hereby perceive we the love of God because he laid down his life for us and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.*”

(3:16) John is saying “*If Christ loved you enough to die for you, you ought to love your brother enough to live for him.*” You see, Christian love is personal, active and practical. We talk about helping that sister in need and we talk and talk but what good does it do, if we never do anything about it ? We talk about soul-winning and

bringing people to hear the gospel and we talk and talk but what good does it do if we never do anything about it. Talk is cheap, but this love is practical.

(c) PERCEIVING LOVE: 4:1-6

For it is a love that perceives, truth and error. Look if you will at (4:3) Or we could translate it like this “ *every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus is Christ come in the flesh is not of God.*” Now “ *Jesus,*” is the name of the Saviour’s humanity and “ *Christ,*” is the title of His deity. Now do you see what John is saying ? He is saying that any teacher who does not confess the full deity and the full humanity of Christ is to be identified among the antichrists. (2:18) My the crucial question is always this, “ *what think ye of Christ, whose son is He ?*” (Matt 22:42) You see, what folk think about Jesus Christ is the touchstone of correctness in matters of the faith. I mean how can you tell a faithful preacher of the Word ? They will be one hundred percent clear on the person and work of Jesus Christ. My check them out. That is why you ought to bring your Bible. Check me out. (c)

(d) PERFECT LOVE: 4:7-21

Do you see what John says in (4:18) The emphasis is on perfect love, love that has reached maturity, love that is complete. My do you want to stand before the Lord and be able to look Him in the eye ? Will let me ask you, do you love your brother or sister in Christ ? John says if you claim to love the Lord and yet at the same time detest your brother you are a liar. Is this what God is calling you

this ? A liar. My how can you claim to love the invisible when you don’t love the visible ? How can you claim to love the Lord and not love His people ? (1) (2)

(3) GOD IS LIFE: 5:1-21

Do you see what John says in (5:11) ? We notice here,

(a) THE ACCEPTANCE OF THIS LIFE: 5:1-5

This new life begins with a new birth. “ *Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is born of God,*” (5:1) When John uses the word “ *believe,*” he actually means what we mean by the word “ *receive.*” This statement in (5:1) is explained by (Jn 1:12) “ *But as many as received him.*” Have you received Him ? Are you saved ? Of course one of the marks of this new life is a desire to obey God and have victory over the world. (a)

(b) THE ASSURANCE OF THIS LIFE: 5:6-13

*Tis a point I long to know
Oft it causes anxious thought
Do I love the Lord or no ?
Am I His or am I not ?*

Is this not one of the reasons why John wrote this letter ? Look at (5:13) Some say “ *well you can’t really know you are going to heaven when you die.*” Yet John says “ *You can.*” How ? How can we know for sure ? **Well, His Work for me makes me Sure:** You see, we are saved by Jesus Christ who we are told in (5:6) “ *came by water*

and blood.” Do you recall what these false teachers were saying ? They were saying that the Lord Jesus was a human being and that the divine Christ came upon Him at His baptism and departed before His crucifixion. This would mean we have no Saviour at all. No says John here are two witnesses to prove that Jesus Christ is God. He was declared to be the Son of God at His baptism (Matt 3:17) He was proved to be the Son of God at His death. (Jn 8:28 12:28-33) On both occasions at His baptism and on the cross the Father testified to the deity of His Son. **His Work for me makes me Sure.**

His Witness in me makes me Sure: and the witness of the Holy Spirit is reliable for John says “ *the Spirit is truth.*” (5:6) Now how do I know that Jesus Christ is my Saviour and Lord ? Well, look at (5:10) The moment we believe on the Lord Jesus, the Holy Spirit enters our hearts to abide there forever and “ *the Spirit beareth witness with our spirit that we are the children of God.*” (Rom 8:16) But there is something else here. ***His Word to me makes me Sure:*** “ *these things have I have written unto you,*” refers to the Scripture, the Word of God. My Christian assurance is simply a matter of taking God at His Word. (a) (b) But notice,

(c) THE ACTIVITY OF THIS LIFE: 5:14-21

For this new life we have in Christ will be active in *prayer* (5:13-17) in *holiness*, (5:18) and in *knowledge*. (5:19-21) Do you see again John’s repeated use of the word “ *know* ?” “ *We know that the Son of God is come.*” (5:20) The heretics knew nothing. “ *We know him that is*

true.” John cannot seem to say it enough. “ *The Lord Jesus is the Son of God, the Man of Calvary is God’s Son, Jesus Christ.*” Do you see here that John sets forth the **Humanity of Christ ?** “ *the Son of God is come.*” (5:20) Do you see here that John sets forth the **Deity of Christ ?** “ *This is the true God and eternal life.*” (5:20) Then he gives one last word of warning. “ *Little children keep yourselves from idols.*” (5:21) What has that got to do with what John has talked about ? Do you recall that I said John’s letter is like a spiraling staircase ? Well, we have climbed all the way to the top of the staircase and what do we find ? It’s the throne room of deity. Who is there ?

It is Jesus Christ as God, and John tells us that anything that is short of Jesus Christ revealed as God is idolatry. Are you guilty of theological idolatry ? Have you a substandard view of Christ ? Maybe your idol is not mental, it’s monetary, its material. Of course an idol is any substitute for God. Your house, your car, your children, your home, your job, your clothes, anything that comes between you and your Lord. Whatever it is, have you enthroned it in your heart ? Is it taking the place of God and “ *His Son Jesus Christ* ?” Is it time for you to pray,

***The dearest idol I have known
Whate’er that idol be
Help me to tear it from Thy throne
And worship only Thee***

