

Matt Henry
1 John 1:1-2:2
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“Light and Life”

Grace and peace...

On the front of your bulletin, you’ll find the lyrics of a popular Christmas hymn. Which one is it? *Light and life to all He brings, risen with healing in His wings.* That’s right, it’s “Hark the Herald Angels Sing.” I thought about using this cover last week, but I thought it might really confuse the Christmas and Easter Only crowd. But the lyrics cut both ways don’t they? Risen with healing in his wings...a good description of the resurrection. The lyric is actually from Malachi 4:2, “But for you who fear my name, the sun of righteousness shall rise with healing in its wings.”

It felt that way at the sunrise service on Easter morning. When you’re outside and cold and you feel the sun’s rays hit your face, it’s a very hopeful and reassuring sensation. It feels good. The time of darkness is broken in that moment. Every day God has dialed in this little reminder, this experience of the light breaking in, of life being made possible. The Scriptures are full of examples of how being in the light is synonymous to having life.

If we look at anything that John wrote we see this theme come through. 1 John has been called “the gateway to the New Testament, presenting the deepest

truths in the simplest terms” (Complete Biblical Library Commentary). Luther said about 1 John, “I have never read a book written in simpler words than this one, and yet the words are inexpressible.”

As the Sons of Thunder, James and John are brothers. James was the first apostle to die, but John is the last. John goes on to old age—everybody else is martyred. This means the material in the New Testament that John wrote (John’s gospel, 1,2,3 John, Revelation) is going to have a perspective that no one else has—that of being an eyewitness and having the close-up account of Jesus, but also the capability to zoom out in time and see the bigger picture of the world after Jesus’ ministry. John is like the smart camera that can zoom in and out. He lives for 60 years more after Jesus ascends into heaven. Sixty years is a long time—it’s as long as Bill and Dottie have been married! In that time, John took care of the church in Ephesus.

That’s why when John sits down to write this letter, he is making a big deal of that which he has seen. “That which we’ve heard, that what which we’ve seen, which we looked upon, which we’ve touched.” No one else is living that can say this kind of thing. One church Father (Papias) who had direct contact with John described him as a “living and abiding voice.” As the last remaining apostle, John’s

testimony was highly authoritative among the churches. Many eagerly sought to hear the one who had first-hand experience with the Lord Jesus.

John starts his letter, "That which was from the beginning..." Well, which beginning? There are three beginnings in Scripture, not one (Robert Lightner).

In the beginning in Genesis is the moment of creation.

In the beginning in John's Gospel speaks to eternity before creation existed.

In the beginning in John's epistle refers to...the beginning of Jesus' ministry.

So in this beginning was John. "But why does John say "we"? The odd thing about this letter is that there's no greeting, no identification of the author, just this collective "we" statement. And I think it's John's way of speaking on behalf of all the eyewitnesses. He has authority to do it because he outlived them.

As we heard/will hear today, Lily, Chloe and Sally all went to Houston with the team. Lily came back with a shirt that said, "Jesus is kind of a big deal." John could wear that shirt because by proclaiming Jesus to us, we too have fellowship with the Father and with the Son. That's a big deal. Fellowship with God brings John joy because he wants people in on this kind of personal relationship with God. And I want that for people.

Now I'm going to ask you to define light and dark which seems kind of silly because the concept is so simple, but profound too. Verse 5, "God is light and in

him there is no darkness at all.” God is perfect, He doesn’t deal in shades or degrees of darkness. There’s nothing unholy about Him. So the darkness that exists is foreign to Him, the darkness is anything that is opposed to the light.

Now finally, here’s some application to real life. Verse 6: “If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth.” Fellowship with God doesn’t occur in the darkness. It’s not possible. God’s not in the cheating on your taxes, God’s not in the gossip you like so much, God’s not in the images and content that are not good for you. God is in the light and He calls us to be in the light. Verse 7: “But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another and the blood of Jesus cleanses us from all sin.” Being in the light doesn’t mean being sinless, it means being forgiven. People in the light still need and receive cleansing of sin by the blood of Jesus. Otherwise, we could never be in the light. Sin still happens in the light, it’s just that we know what to do with it. Confess it and be forgiven by Christ who is the propitiation—atonement sacrifice—for our sins (1 John 2:2). He is faithful and just and will cleanse us from all unrighteousness...it’s just the liturgy many of us have memorized over the years, isn’t it? God has provided a way for us to be in fellowship with Him, even after we have sinned. As we confess our sins, Jesus

advocates for us through His blood and we experience His forgiveness all over again. Light and life—who wouldn't want this?

But then we have to recognize something about the human condition...

Why would people ever remain in the dark? Darkness doesn't force anyone to change. Darkness satisfies and promotes the love of the self over another. Darkness doesn't go for community; it goes for isolation. Dietrich Bonhoeffer says, "Sin demands to have a man by himself. It withdraws him from the community. The more isolated a person is, the more destructive will be the power of sin over him, and the more deeply he becomes involved in it, the more disastrous is his isolation." It's not good for man to be alone, and he never feels so alone as when he's dealing with shame. The philosopher Plato (427-347 BC) said, "We can easily forgive a child who is afraid of the dark; the real tragedy of life is when men are afraid of the light." Darkness peddles the lie that there's shame in the light. So people hide in the shadows. But the truth of the matter is that shame is in the darkness. That is what would have kept us there had it not been for the loving kindness and mercy of Christ. He is the light that dispels the darkness.

It's a dark world we live in, but we are in this side of Easter. We have something to live out here. The resurrection of Christ is *our* victory over sin,

death and the devil. He won it for us. Death and darkness are officially put on notice that the time of their reign is over. The dawn of the resurrection of Christ has ushered in a new era. And what is this era about? It didn't delay death, it destroyed death. It didn't mingle with the darkness, it obliterated the darkness. If you think about it, the tomb of Christ was the place where death and darkness once reigned. It was completely dark for the Light of the World was completely dead, but that is the sight of their upheaval. We look to the risen Lord and let His light fall on us. As we stand in the light, He draws us together. "Light and life to all He brings, risen with healing in His wings." That's a song we get to sing in any season!

In Jesus' name, Amen.