

Jesus the Righteous

1 John 2:1-2

This morning, we will continue our look at 1 John together as we come to Chapter 2 of the Apostles first Epistle to the churches. This section, however, really is a wrapping up or a “crescendo” of the section we looked at last time I preached so to give us some much-needed context and to get a running start at our passage this morning, we are going to start reading back in Chapter 1 verse 5, then read through Chapter 2 verse 2.

So, if you have your Bibles ready, turn to 1 John chapter 1, verse 5, and we’ll read it together:

“This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. But 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 cleanses us from all sin. If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.

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.” (1 John 1:5–2:2, ESV)

Let’s pray

Have you ever considered the Astronaut? A man or woman who spends years of their lives training and preparing for a very specific moment when they will be loaded into the capsule atop the towering hulk of a liquid fueled bomb which has been designed to explode in a powerful, controlled and directed manor so as to carry itself and the astronauts into space.

Now, the astronaut, in order to prepare for the stresses and strains which they will endure, undergoes rigorous mental and physical training in the years before that event takes place. They subject themselves to numerous tests of knowledge and skill, constantly learning, honing and repeating so that when the moment comes, they will be totally and completely ready for the launch.

But there is one glaring truth that hangs over all the preparation, all the training all the testing and personal reflection. There is one thing they can never escape from, no matter how well they are prepared, no matter how hard they work, no matter how much they depend on their skills and abilities... When it all comes down to the launch time, the astronaut is fully, totally and completely dependent on that rocket to perform exactly as it was intended in order for them to reach their destination safely. Once that rocket is lit, once it leaves the pad, there is nothing more to do, there is nothing more they can rely on, there is nothing more they have the power to control until the ride has complete and they have reached their destination... For that moment, their very lives and futures are dependent completely on the work of other people to ensure that rocket performs perfectly to bring them safely to their destination.

Similarly, the predicament of the Astronaut at launch is not much unlike the condition of the Christian in the context of justification, is it? The Christian is like the astronaut in that we work to condition ourselves for the task at hand. In order for us to truthfully be equipped for our role in the building of the kingdom there are certain indicatives we must participate in. We are called to truthfulness, sober-mindedness, faithfulness, righteousness, love and obedience. We, like an athlete are told to condition ourselves for endurance for the race ahead; Like the soldier we are to be strong and to stand firm against the spiritual forces which are arrayed against us. We are to put on the full armor of God in Ephesians 5, we are to walk in a manor worthy of God in 1 Thessalonians 2:12 and walk in a manor worthy of our calling in Ephesians 4:1.

We must be conditioned, we must be trained, we must be prepared... Just like the astronaut must be prepared for launch... but in the end, just like the astronaut, our success, indeed our very eternal lives, are ultimately dependent on absolutely none of the things we have done to prepare which will make success sure. In the end, we are totally and fully dependent on another to be carried to our ultimate destination. In our analogy, the astronauts would be fully dependent on the perfect function of the rocket to carry them into the heavens, but in our Christian lives, we are completely and totally dependent on the perfect function of Jesus Christ to carry us to heaven.

Where our analogy breaks down is actually right where our passage picks up this morning... You see, in the end, the astronaut, is still dependent on the technology of fallible men to carry them safely to their destination... technology which will fail them sometime. Whereas, for the Christian, our hope is placed in the perfect Son of God, our savior Jesus Christ to bring us into glory and He has never failed to bring anyone who trusts in Him to their glorious destination because in his deity, he perfectly fulfilled all the requirements to get us there and he will not lose, not even one, “but raise it up on the last day” John 6:39.

My Little Children

Now, our passage this morning comes at a crucial time in John’s epistle. It is almost a divine pressure release valve on the pressure cooker John has just put us through in the second half of Chapter 1. He starts out in verse 1 with:

“My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin”

John, starting off here in Chapter 2, senses the need to soften his language here and lower the temperature a bit after administering what scholars call the “Sin Test” from the previous chapter, so he pivots a bit and addresses true believers by using the term “little children”, which is a term of endearment he used six times in his first epistle and that always describes true believers in the New Testament.

I say he pivots here, because in the previous section, during the “Sin Test” it is obvious there are two separate people in view; those who agree with what God says about their sin and those who, by the way they live, deny the truth and call God a liar. Those who would be considered true believers; the “confessors of sin” in verse 9 and the ones who “Walk in the light” in verses 5 and 6; These are put

up as a contrast against those who say they have fellowship with God while they walk in darkness. John says those “lie and do not practice the truth” in verse 6, “the truth is not in them” in verse 8, and “the word is not in them” in verse 10.

In our passage now, though, John is talking directly to true believers only, pivoting to them, calling them “little children”, tenderly, fatherly and says “Little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin”. His desire is that the true believer, having come through the sin test and coming to the conclusion that they agree with God about their sin and how it dishonors God, would not desire to live in that sin. But notice then, following that, he doesn’t say “so just do better Christian! You must try harder not to sin or you are out of the Christian club!!! NO! what’s his answer?

“But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.”

The answer is “look to Christ!” Don’t look to yourself... rely on Christ... He is the righteous one, not you!

Beloved, we have to be careful as we navigate the tests in this letter which will constantly cause us to examine ourselves and look at ourselves, which is right, but, we have to be careful, however, not to begin to think “wow, my assurance is based on how well I deal with my sin, how perfectly I obey or how well I love and I fail at that constantly! I’m doomed!!!”. If we aren’t careful, all this self-examination could cause us to fall into self-pity and self-deprecation as we see how often we fall short. This is not how we should receive John’s letter.

Then there is the other extreme which comes from pride; the error of self-reliance and self-sufficiency where we look at these tests and are tempted to say “I will do everything in my power to overcome my sin, obey perfectly and love people so much they will get tired of me always calling them and trying to get them to come to my latest fellowship time!”

To fall into either of these extremes would be wrong, and that is why John, being fully aware of how we might react to the truths discovered in the Sin Test, is careful to now point us back to the source of our Justification. That’s Jesus!

In other words, John is saying to us this morning “we must look **at** ourselves, yes, but then we look **to** Jesus”

We examine ourselves, yes, but then we trust in Christ for our justification.

We work to practice righteousness, yes, but then we must hide in Jesus' perfect righteousness before God.

We agonize over our sin, yes, but then we trust that our sin has been paid for and the wrath of God has been satisfied in Jesus Christ.

So John, here, in the first two verses of Chapter 2 is doing something very important for the true believer, coming off of that convicting and grinding open heart surgery we called the "Sin Test". He is reminding us at this very moment that our Justification is not in any way tied to our own ability to find and kill sin in our lives. Instead, at this crucial moment when we are tempted to respond by looking to self for the solution, **he pivots from self-examination to Christ Exaltation** by bringing up three key attributes or roles of the one who justifies, that is Jesus Christ himself.

And these three roles are...

First: Jesus Christ the Advocate

Second: Jesus Christ the Righteous

Thirdly: Jesus Christ the Propitiation

Beloved, when we understand the way Jesus fulfills all these roles to make us justified before the Father, it becomes a glorious foundation which frees us from our sin, sets us free from guilt, removes the weight of uncertainty and provides lasting, rich, God glorifying assurance for the believer who trusts in Christ Jesus which means John's number one objective in this letter; that the believer would have assurance they have eternal life.

Jesus Christ the Advocate

First, lets look at Jesus Christ the Advocate

From verse 1 of our passage.

“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,”

Here John calls Jesus our “advocate”. In the Greek, the root word is Paraclete which can mean either “Helper” or “one who speaks in favor of another”. This same word is used to describe the Holy spirit where it is translated as “helper” in John 15:26 when Jesus says “But when the Helper comes, who I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth”.

But here, the word is Paracletos, translated as the other meaning “one who speaks in favor of another”. In other areas of the New Testament the word is translated as “intercessor”, which could also be applied here.

The picture which John paints here by casting Jesus Christ as our “Advocate with the Father”, is that of a heavenly court room where there is a judge and there are attorneys present. One for the prosecution and the other for the defense. In this court room, God the Father is the judge, and Satan is the prosecuting attorney. This is not a jury trial, mind you; the judge has final and total ability to pass judgement on the accused and set a sentence at will.

There at the defendants table sits you, looking up at the judge and hearing the prosecuting attorney charge you with all the things you know that you yourself have done to offend God.

The judge calls down from the bench to say “The accuser has rightly charged you with sin and I agree, you are a sinner. The punishment for sin is death... How do you plea?”

Sitting there, hearing what the punishment would be if you admit to your sin, you begin to try to rationalize and minimize it in order to form a defense of the things you have done. You think, it really wasn’t that bad, the things I’ve done. I was generally a good person. I didn’t do drugs, I didn’t commit murder. I didn’t steal anything... well, anything really big or expensive anyway. I don’t deserve to die.

Right at that very moment, just as you are about to open your mouth; before you have a chance to speak a word in your defense, a man stands up who had been sitting off to the right side of the judge. He walks over to you and stands between you and the Judge. He announces himself as the court appointed defense attorney, there to intercede on your behalf, but first he has but one requirement of you before he will defend you and that is you must confess to every one of the sins you have been accused of because you know them to be true and He will only defend those who would trust Him to speak on their behalf as an admitted, guilty, sinner.

Well, it turns out that the defense attorney also happens to be the son of the judge and they have a deal between them that if anyone who was guilty would confess to the court of their guilt and place themselves at the mercy of the judge that that person would be found not guilty and they would be set free without condition or parole and the ruling could never be revoked or remanded.

Upon hearing this, you open your mouth to speak and you say “I am guilty, I am so sorry that I have offended you and I place my trust in my attorney to advocate on my behalf”.

The judge, upon hearing your plea announces “You are innocent, for my Son has secured your freedom and if the Son sets you free, you are free indeed, now go and sin no more”. You leap up and make your way out of the room.

But as you go to leave the court room, you see someone in the lobby who you have had a strained relationship with and you think for a moment, I wish he were dead. Then you hear from inside the courtroom the prosecutor call out “you see, he’s guilty” and you then your defense attorney say’s “no, he is innocent, for he is covered by my innocence”. You would continue to hear this same debate with every misstep and every sin you commit... Each time making your status more and more sure as you hear “he is innocent” being proclaimed over and over again as you continue to confess “I am guilty”.

Now, listen, you Christian to what God’s word says about how we ought to live in light of Jesus Christ, our advocate. “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 cleanses us from all sin!”(1John 1:7) “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness”!(1John 1:9) “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".(1John 2:1) "Christ Jesus is the one who died-more than that, who was raised- who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us."(Rom 8:34-36)"How can we who died to sin still live in it? Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life".(Rom 6:2-4) "Even now, behold, my witness is in heaven, and he who testifies for me is on high"(Job 16:19) "He who testifies to these things says, 'Surely I am coming soon'. Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!" (Rev 22:20)

When the Sin Test convicts you of your sin, remember, it has been forgiven... separated as far as the East is from the West, if you are in Christ Jesus. Confess your sin and he is faithful and just to forgive your sin and purify you from all unrighteousness because you have an advocate who is with the father and is interceding on your behalf... Look to him for your assurance, not to yourself and your own works.

Jesus Christ the Righteous

Next, John calls him Jesus Christ the Righteous.

Only one who is perfectly righteous can cleanse us from all unrighteousness, right? In John's parlance, the word righteousness is generally used as a statement pertaining to holiness. This is the word he uses in Chapter 3 to describe true believers when he said in verse 7 "Little children, let no one deceive you, Whoever practices righteousness is righteous, as he is righteous". This he states in contrast to verse 8 where he says "Whoever makes a practice of sinning is of the devil".

So, again, we have two people in view here. The righteous and the sinner. The righteous in John's writing always refers to the true believer or refers to the one in whom the true believers believe, Jesus Christ. But remember, in chapter 1, John just got done telling us we are still a bunch of sinners. How is it that, even a believer, can be called righteous if he is still a sinner? That's a good question!

The answer is very much like what we heard from our analogy of that astronaut earlier, though, isn't it? We are righteous because Jesus is righteous. John says in chapter 3 verse 29 "If you know that he (Jesus) is righteous, you may be sure that everyone who practices righteousness has been born of him." In verse 5, he continues "You know that he appeared in order to take away sins, and in him there is no sin. No one who abides in him keeps on sinning;" so the justification of the believer is facilitated by the righteousness of the savior. There is nothing the believer can do but believe, just like there is nothing the astronaut can do but go along for the ride.

Ok, so John says "in him there is no sin" and those who abide in him don't continue in sin. But how can John be so sure that there was no sin in Jesus? To say that Jesus Christ is the Righteous is to say Jesus Christ the Holy. But wait, only God is Holy, right?

Well, if you are legitimately asking that question, you must have forgotten what we covered earlier in John's epistle and from his gospel. Remember back in chapter 1, John laid a foundation that:

1. Jesus was "from the beginning" in chapter 1 verse 1, and he was "with God in the beginning" in John chapter 1.
2. Jesus is the "Word of life" who "was made manifest" in 1 John chapter 1
3. The Word made everything that was made in John 1.
4. In John Chapter 1 "The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us"

John makes it clear that Jesus is God, he can be sure of that because only God existed from the beginning and only God created and if the Word was there and the Word was Jesus, then Jesus is God.

In 1 John chapter 1 verse 5 John says "God is light, and in him is no darkness at all". God's total lightness is a statement of God's complete holiness, his complete righteousness. If Jesus is God, then Jesus is completely holy, he is completely righteous, he is without sin.

The writer of Hebrews says it this way:

“Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.” (Hebrews 4:14–16, ESV)

Jesus Christ the Righteous makes us sure in our justification and eternal life because we know that he has lived as a man like us, yet without sin. He was God who came from heaven to meet the standard of holiness and righteousness that no other man, born of flesh could meet. When we trust in the life he lived and in the death he died, Romans 6 says we are raised with him in a resurrection like his and we can say with Paul in Philippians Chapter 3 verses 8 through 10:

“Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith— that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death,” (Philippians 3:8–10, ESV)

Jesus Christ the Righteous gives us assurance because when we come to him through faith, we receive the righteousness that is from God which depends on faith, not on our own works. We aren't like the astronauts who must depend on a rocket made by faulty men to get us to our destination. Our destination is sure because it is held secure by the faithful, holy, perfect one, Jesus Christ the Righteous!

Jesus Christ the Propitiation

Finally, John says:

“He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world.” (1 John 2:2, ESV)

We can be sure of our justification before a Holy God because Jesus paid the price that Sin demanded and he satisfied the wrath of the offended party.

Remember back in our court room? Well, it turns out that all those sins you were guilty of were directed against none other than the judge himself. And this isn't a flawed human judge either who might see fit to overlook some of the offences. This Judge is perfectly just and he is committed to seeing perfect justice exacted in every case and see the law applied to its fullest extent every time.

He is not only the Judge, but he is also the legislature, the one who wrote the law to begin with and he knows every jot and tittle of it. He also is omnipresent, and he was with you every time you broke it, so he is also the perfect witness who can testify against you.

This sounds like an impossible situation if you are to get off scott free, right? Seems nearly impossible because the deck is stacked against you, and indeed it is. In God's holy courtroom, there will be justice and all sin will be punished by death, just as the judge had told you.

The idea of God's Justice is what is in view when we consider Jesus as our Propitiation, and when we think about God as a judge who is perfectly just, this makes sense. The word Propitiation is biblical word and not one we use very often in modern language because it is associated mostly with the action of appeasing a god, which is something we mostly read about only in the biblical context of atonement and usually in the Old Testament.

Now the language of atonement would have been very familiar with the Jewish believers who would have been reading John's letter and in that area of Asia Minor, post-dispersion, there would have been many Jews who would have been reading this letter. Remember what Paul recounted in Galatians 2:9 when he went to visit the apostles and he met with James, Cephas (Peter) and John. Paul wrote “they gave the right hand of fellowship to Barnabas and me, that we should go to the Gentiles and they to the circumcised (who are the Jews)”. So John's

primary ministry, along with James and Peter was to the Jews and therefore, we have to assume that many of the believers in the churches who John was overseer of would have been largely Jewish, although, by this time, there would have been many from all different backgrounds in the churches. This dynamic is further shown in our passage where John says “and not for us only but for the whole world”. Not just for Israel only, like the old testament atonement, but for every nation, tongue and tribe.

The point is, many of the readers would have been very familiar with the language of atonement John is using here and how on the day of atonement, once a year, the high priest would go into the holy of holies in the temple where the Arc of the Covenant was located, and make a sacrifice for the sins of all of Israel. The blood would be splattered on what was translated from the Hebrew as the “mercy seat” or hilasterion in the Greek which also shares the root Greek word from Hilasmos, which translates in the new testament as Propitiation. John then is using the language of atonement here in the New Testament to describe Jesus and his sacrifice of atonement, not once a year, but once and for all.

John says “Jesus is the Propitiation for sins”. He is painting a picture of a permanent satisfaction for the cost AND wrath of sin because as a propitiation, God’s wrath was satisfied . Jesus has made amends and has appeased the wrath of the one who was offended. This makes Jesus’ atonement a more complete atonement than any atonement from the Old Testament. Listen to how the writer of Hebrews explains this:

“But when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things that have come, then through the greater and more perfect tent (not made with hands, that is, not of this creation) he entered once for all into the holy places, not by means of the blood of goats and calves but by means of his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption. For if the blood of goats and bulls, and the sprinkling of defiled persons with the ashes of a heifer, sanctify for the purification of the flesh, how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works to serve the living God.”
(Hebrews 9:11–14, ESV)

What the writer of Hebrews is saying here is, unlike the temporary, annual sacrifice that was made by the Levite priests under the Mosaic covenant in the Old Testament, Jesus' blood sacrifice secured an effective, eternal redemption, a once for all time, redemption which, as Hebrews puts it, purifies the conscience of the believer from dead works to serve the living God. This sacrifice of the spotless lamb of God, by means of his own blood was able to satisfy the payment for sin because he was perfectly pure and undefiled by Sin. Unlike the priests in the old testament who made atonement not only for the sins of Israel, but also for their very own sins, Jesus, had no sin in himself to atone for, therefore, his atonement was accepted as a full and final propitiation, or satisfaction to God for sin.

Jesus died, thereby satisfying the righteous requirements of the law of God and he was raised and then seated at the right hand of God, thereby proving his sacrifice was accepted by God the Father and he is now in heaven with his father interceding for all who are his... Those who believe and who trust in him for their own justification and for their eternal salvation.

Now, back in the courtroom, we can now see behind the veil that the side deal the defense attorney made with the judge is none other than that he himself would pay the punishment for every single sin of every single defendant whom trusted him to defend them and who admitted to their total and complete guilt! We call that Grace! Grace does not do away with justice, it recognizes that justice has been fulfilled in the atoning blood of Jesus.

...and beloved, this is where our justification is kept, and by extraction, where our assurance as believers is held... it is held firmly in the relationship between God the Father and Jesus the Son. Our assurance then comes, not by our own "dead works" as Hebrews says, it comes from a purified conscience, through the eternal Spirit which indwells every believer. The same spirit that pokes at us when we are sinning and reminds us who we are and who we serve. The same spirit who is the Paraclete within us and continually points us to the Paracletos who is in heaven interceding for us every time we sin. It is the same spirit which cries out in "groanings too deep for words" when we do not know how to pray as we ought.

If we are sometimes pressed down by our sin, or pressed in from all sides due to circumstance, remember, we have Jesus Christ the righteous who is in heaven, interceding for us and the holy judge listens to him because he has already

satisfied the righteous requirement of the law on our behalf so there is now therefore no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

If you are here this morning and you have never trusted in Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, but you want to know with absolute assurance that you would be with Christ for an eternity, you can accept Jesus as your Lord and savior right here right now.

You can bow your head right here and say with me “God, I agree with you that I am a sinner and I believe your word which says you are perfectly holy. I know that I have offended you by not living a life that honors you. I also know that my sin, my rebellion, and my pride has kept me far from you, but I believe that Jesus Christ died and rose again to pay the penalty for my sin and has satisfied your anger. I trust in him for my eternal salvation and I want him to be my advocate before you so I can rest in his righteousness and in that alone. I don’t know how it all works God, but I trust you and I ask that you would now do the work in my life to make me more like Jesus so as I read your word, I can lay hold to your promises and rejoice in knowing that I will spend an eternity with you. That is something that no one can ever take away from me, not even when I fall and fail because I will no longer look to myself, but I will look only to Christ, the sufficient savior of my soul.”

Let’s pray