

It feels good to be back home. My wife and I have been in Denver this last week visiting family and while it was fun, it was also cold. I started missing my deck shoes after a couple days. Needless to say, I think my blood is a little thin after living here for a few months. Our family time came about because we, like many other people across the world, were celebrating Christmas—the first coming of Christ.

For thousands of years people anxiously waited for Christ to come. As time trudged on, people's hearts burned in anticipation. Last week, Shawn sang the powerful words,

“O Come, O Come, Immanuel and rescue captive Israel. That mourns in lonely exile here until the Son of God appear. Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel shall come to thee Israel.”

When I consider the oppression endured by the Israelites, not just at the hand of earthly powers, but the oppression that all humanity is under--the anguish is palpable for me whenever I hear that song. But we rejoice because we live after His coming. We rejoice because of His sacrifice. We rejoice in salvation. But now what?

As Christmas vacation ends our minds go back to work, to school, to a normal family schedule, to home. But as Christmas, in the context of it being the celebration of the first coming of Christ, ends, where should our mind go? What do we look to down the road? We live in a time when the powers of darkness still oppress us. We live in a time where, as Paul says, we see through a glass darkly.

Matthew 28:16-20 tells the last few moments of when Christ was on earth. And as they were standing there watching, straining to see Jesus as He went higher and higher, Acts 1:10 tells us that two men appeared and asked them why they were looking into the sky. As if a rhetorical question, they continued and said that Jesus will come back. And so we wait.

Through the years God has given guidance as we try our best to live out that commission. The Gospel of John opens with the clear picture that Jesus is the light and that we should live in the light. This morning, we are going to look at some guidance that was given through John, one of the ones standing there the day that Jesus ascended into the heavens. Before we study the word, let's pray.

Let's open our Bibles to 1 John 1:5-7.

READ TEXT

As we study this passage this morning I want us to look at it with the idea that in order to live in the light we must love others.

I want to back up and give a little context to our passage. As I said earlier, the disciple, John, wrote this book. So immediately we know that John will have a different perspective than many others because he worked closely with Jesus for over three years.

It was most likely written towards the end of his life in the late 80's or early 90's A.D. Several times in the book John references the readers as “children,” but in a fatherly way and not a condescending way. This tells us that the readers of this letter had a healthy respect for John.

The letter wasn't addressed to anyone which seems somewhat strange for our culture today. Mail merge, email, text message make communication easy but all their correspondence was done by hand. It was common practice for letters to be shared with multiple churches. We have examples of that with letters that Paul wrote. The readers were most likely intended to be many house churches that were spread across Asia.

What's really interesting about our passage is that it gives us insight into some of the difficulties that were facing the early church. John is combatting two distinct heretical, or false, teachings that were being spread at that time. John tackles the first in verse 5.

READ V 5b

Gnosticism is a set of beliefs that started in the first century. In their beliefs there is a god that exists, but it's like a super god. What's interesting is that this super god didn't create the world because the world is messed up; instead, it was what they called a demiurge, or a lesser god, who created a world that was good and bad. Now there were many sides or beings of this super god, some of them being Sophia, which is the Greek word for wisdom, Jesus and Christ. But these different beings were only a sliver of the actual super god.

It was from these slivers that the demiurge came into existence, and because of that, they reasoned that good and evil came from the same source. So in verse 5 we have John's emphatic rebuttal that God is light. He furthers this emphasis by using a double negative to say that no darkness exists, at all. None. Zilch. Nada.

While all of this is quite interesting, and having some background is nice, does any of this matter to us today? Does any of this have practical relevance to our lives? The answer to those questions is yes. We have many teachings that are similar to Gnosticism in our world today. As Christians, we believe that God created everything, and it was all good, but that Satan made a choice to walk away from the goodness and to destroy goodness. The destruction of goodness, that we call sin, has separated us from God and now God is working to end that separation.

But there are other teachings that believe something different, that God is perhaps not who He says is, that the world is not quite as it appears. As emphatically as John rebutted those claims in the first century, I want to rebut those claims today. God is love and God is light. Anything that speaks to Him being something else is not true.

As we move to verse 6 John starts dealing with a second heretical teaching.

READ VERSE 6

As we learned earlier, Gnosticism taught that the world, which included humanity, was created by a lesser god and that good and evil existed in the creation from the beginning. The physical body is bad and it is our spirit that is good. The goal of Gnosticism is to be freed from the body. So behavior was dealt with in two ways: one was to adhere to a strict code of discipline, the other was basically anything goes, since after all, the body was evil and we would be freed from it eventually. Now let me ask you, which would you choose?

We are poised at the beginning of a new year, a time when many people are making resolutions for next year. I'd be willing to be that if I told you that cholesterol, diabetes and heart disease were no big deal that a lot of New Years

Resolutions would be changing. In this verse John is combatting the idea that we can do whatever we want and claim to be in fellowship with God.

There are many who claim that “I’m saved” and that “I’m under a new covenant,” which is *sometimes* used as a license to do whatever they want. John is making it quite clear that in order to claim fellowship with God we must be walking in the light. So what does it mean to walk in the light?

As Christians we often look to the 10 commandments as what it means to be walking in the light. We look to Jesus’ summation of the law and the prophets to love God and love others. This church’s mission is loving people into a lifelong friendship with God. But as we continue on with our text I think that John points out an area where many of us are quite lacking.

READ VERSE 7

If we are walking in the light we have fellowship with one another. I think our world, including the world of Christianity is lacking fellowship with one another, especially if that other person is different from us. I want to share a couple ideas that living in the light changes our vision and our relationships.

About a month ago I went to the eye doctor. It was the first time I had been in years. To any children listening I am not saying that is a good thing, I should have gone much sooner. I went because I was having headaches quite often and after talking with a few people they suggested I should go. I was having no problems reading, things weren’t too small, things weren’t blurry so I figured they wouldn’t find anything. Well, as you can see, they did find something. Apparently I’m farsighted which means that I can see things that are far away just fine, but I have difficulty with things that are close. I can read them, but my eyes work harder to read, which then makes the other muscles around my eyes try to help and is what was causing the headaches.

I think that Jesus works kinda like a pair of glasses. Sure we can see things, but with His glasses on with we can see things sharper than we could without the glasses. The problem is that sometimes we use this enhanced vision to cast our gaze on others.

I misunderstood the doctor to tell me that I should wear my glasses all the time, like when I’m driving, walking around, etc. But really what she said is that I should NOT wear them I’m driving, walking around, etc. To be honest, I was somewhat in a state of shock so it’s not surprising that I misunderstood. I had just turned 30 a few weeks prior and now I needed to get glasses. “I’m getting old” was all I could think as I sat there wondering what was next, a pacemaker, a hip replacement, a knee replacement? So I left the office with the understanding that I should be wearing them all the time...and I did. The next day I was helping Jeff and Shawna with a few things at their house. I’m walking around and noticing that I’m tripping on stuff like crazy. I couldn’t keep my balance for anything. It all culminated with a less than graceful fall from a ladder.

I wasn’t using my glasses properly. I think as humans we are all a little farsighted because we have no problem seeing what other people our doing, but for things that are close, well, we need some help. The glasses that we put on are to help us see our deficiencies, and not those of others.

Neglecting our own shortcomings is not unique to our time. Lets turn to Matthew 7:3. Jesus is preaching what we call the Sermon on the Mount. And comments on the very thing we're discussing.

READ MATTHEW 7:3-5

So what does that have to do with living in the light? Let me show you. With all of these lights on, I can see clearly. But I can't see you. The focus is on the log in my own eye.

But what happens when others are living in the light? With all the lights on I can see you clearly. And the closer I get, the more I can see. That's why I feel that living in the light changes our relationships.

Last time I preached I used this plant as an illustration. After one of the services I spent some time taking with our green thumb, Brad Jones about the illustration I used. He made a very good point in that I never addressed that these yellow flowers are actually fake. I had been talking about the cool, ivy, green thing that was growing and not about the fake flowers.

These fake flowers don't need anything. They could just sit and be fine. They don't need water, sunlight or any attention whatsoever. Sometimes we like to think that we're those fake flowers; that we'll be fine on our own. Or that other people are those fake flowers. We bear down on them like a gust of frigid wind, not realizing that our cold front will kill what is actually a live plant.

Our relationships change when we realize that we're not dealing with fake flowers but living plants—people who are as broken as I am. Just like Brad quickly spotted the fake flowers, it's easy to spot someone not living in the light, even if they claim to be living in it. Those living in the light will have fellowship with those around them. If they don't, there's a problem.

Sadly I have met some real nasty Christians. And to just get it out there, I've been included in that grouping quite a few times. If we find ourselves at war with someone, we need to reevaluate. If we have anger and hostility towards someone, if we are at odds with someone, the fact of the matter is that we are not really living in the light. We should be asking, What am I doing to restore relationships? What am I doing to draw people closer to the light?

It is the mission of Florida Hospital Church to love people into a lifelong friendship with God. In order to fulfill that mission we must love people. As we stand just hours from a new year, I ask you to consider your resolutions. What are you going to do to live in the light by loving others?