

First Baptist Church Merritt Island

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So That Your Joy May Be Complete – a study of First John

We Have an Advocate

1 John 2:1-2

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One of the many things my parents instilled in me from an early age is a love for courtroom dramas. Mom and Dad loved them all, especially Matlock. We loved that Andy Griffith was the actor who played Ben Matlock. We loved with Don Knotts would make a guest appearance. If you don't know who Andy Griffith and Don Knotts are, I'm so sorry for how our culture has failed you.

And I can remember sitting with mom and dad, watching those court cases play out. There was always the person who was on trial for a crime they didn't commit. There was always that elusive piece of evidence that Matlock was on the verge of discovering. There was always the obligatory guess by each family member about how it was going to end. There was always that last commercial break before the big reveal. That's when there was a mad rush to get the last snack from the kitchen or a bathroom break. (you couldn't pause television back in the stone age, so if you missed it, you missed it)

And then it happened. Matlock worked his magic. He got the key witness to admit they were lying. He convinced the gas station attendant to take the stand and vindicate the defendant. Or, best of all, he would introduce a little thing called "Exhibit A." "Exhibit A" was the undeniable proof that made it impossible to condemn Matlock's client. Matlock was the best. He never lost a case. He was undefeated.

Can you imagine being in a legal mess and seeing a real-life Matlock roll into the courtroom on your behalf? The one lawyer who has never lost a case? Would you be happy to have Matlock on your case? Well, it's a bit of bad news-good news situation. The bad news is that Matlock is a made-up lawyer who doesn't exist. The bad news gets worse. You are in a legal mess. You've broken the law of God and deserve to be punished. The good news is that you can have someone infinitely better than Matlock to take up your case.

And that's what the next passage in our study of 1 John is all about. So, before we read our text, let me go ahead and give you the big idea so you can be looking for it in the text.

Big Idea: In our battle with sin, we can rejoice because Jesus is our Advocate.

1 John 2:1–2

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. 2 He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world.

We have an advocate, or a defense attorney, with the Father. His name is Jesus. He's taken up our case. (if we are trusting in Him through faith) and He never loses. That's good news and reason to rejoice. That's where we are headed this morning.

But let's just break down the big idea, a little bit at a time. Our text doesn't start with Jesus as our Advocate. It starts with a call to fight sin. This is an extension from last week's text and a reminder that...

WE ARE IN A BATTLE WITH SIN

1 John 2:1

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

John is clearly calling us away from sin. And, if you were here last week, you might remember that he said we are all susceptible to lies about our own sin. Some people claim that their sin is no big deal and God is ok with it. John says that's a lie. God isn't ok with sin and we shouldn't be, either. Others claim that they don't have any sin. John says when you make that claim you are lying to yourself and lying about God because God says that "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." (Romans 3:23)

And, as John continues writing about sin, notice that he is talking about believers. He calls them "little children." That's not just a term of endearment. It's a designation for people who are in the same family – the family of God. These are believers in Jesus.

1 John 2:12

I am writing to you, little children, because your sins are forgiven for his name's sake.

1 John 2:13

I write to you, children, because you know the Father.

1 John 3:1

See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are.

John is talking to believers in Jesus who have been born again by God's Spirit. And John tells them he is writing this letter to keep them from sin. In other words, the Christian life is a life of fighting against sin. And that's not just an emphasis in this section. That's something John is going to address over and over again throughout this letter.

1 John 2:6

whoever says he abides in him ought to walk in the same way in which he walked.

1 John 3:6

No one who abides in him keeps on sinning; no one who keeps on sinning has either seen him or known him.

1 John 5:18

We know that everyone who has been born of God does not keep on sinning, but he who was born of God protects him, and the evil one does not touch him.

So, John is writing this letter to call followers of Jesus to fight against sin through the power of Jesus. And notice the wording of verse one. ***I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin.***

If you were here two weeks ago, you might remember that John said he was writing for a different reason.

1 John 1:4

And we are writing these things so that our joy may be complete.

When John says “our,” he is including the recipients of this letter. John is writing this letter so that our joy may be complete.

Ok. So, now we have two purpose statements. On one hand, John is writing this letter so that our joy may be complete. On the other hand, just 6 verses later, John is writing so that we may not sin – a theme that continues throughout the letter. So, which is it? Is he writing so that we will have complete joy or so that we will resist sin? The answer is “yes.”

Listen, John is keying in on something significant here. It’s the connection between our fight against sin and God’s desire to bring us joy. God desires to bring the greatest possible joy to His people. It’s part of His design for our lives.

Psalm 16:11

You make known to me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore.

God wants to give us the deepest joy and the greatest pleasures. He is the Ultimate Source of joy and pleasure. That means every other joy and pleasure is, at its very best, a mere shadow or an echo of the true joy and pleasure God has in store for those who will spend eternity with Him. And one of the reasons God calls us away from sin is because it doesn’t produce true and lasting joy. Sin promises joy and pleasure, but it’s a lie. Sin actually destroys joy and pleasure.

Gluttony promises joy and pleasure in things like food but robs you of your health and destroys your ability to enjoy your one and only life. Greed and materialism promise you joy and pleasure in the stuff of this world but as soon as you get the latest and greatest gadget, you instantly want something else. Sexual immorality promises joy and pleasure but robs you of the true intimacy of giving yourself only to your spouse and leaves you hollowed out and empty. It doesn’t matter what sin you name the result is always the same. Sin promises joy and pleasure but it’s all a lie.

That’s why God calls us away from sin. His commands are designed to protect us, not restrict us. That’s why John says what he says in chapter 5.

1 John 5:3

For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments. And his commandments are not burdensome.

The commands of God aren’t designed to be burdens that make our lives miserable. They are expressions of the love of God who wants to bring us true and lasting joy and pleasure. You won’t find joy in sin. Your sin is actually destroying your joy.

So, if you want joy (and all of us desperately want joy) then draw a line in the sand and declare war on sin. Ask the Holy Spirit to graciously expose the patterns of sin that you are most susceptible to commit – greed, gossip, bitterness, unforgiveness, lying, lust, ungodly anger, impatience, drunkenness, divisiveness...declare war.

And as the Holy Spirit exposes sin, remember that you can’t defeat sin by your own power. That’s why you need Jesus. And you don’t just need Jesus, you have Him as you trust in Him.

1 John 3:8

Whoever makes a practice of sinning is of the devil, for the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil.

Jesus came to destroy the sinful works that the devil tempts us to commit. So, the only way to defeat sin is to depend on Jesus.

1 John 5:4–5

For everyone who has been born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith. Who is it that overcomes the world except the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?

We overcome the sinful patterns of the system of this world through faith in Jesus. If you want true and lasting joy, then say “no” to sin by trusting in Jesus.

But John addresses something exceptionally important in our text. Just a few verses before our text, he says that we can’t ever say that we don’t sin. So long as we are cloaked in these broken bodies, we will falter and fail in some way or another. And that brings up a critical question: If we still sin, does that mean we can’t ever really experience joy?

I mean, how can we have joy if we aren’t sinless people? John has an incredible answer to that. He tells us something that automatically brings us joy if we really believe it.

WE CAN REJOICE BECAUSE WE JESUS IS OUR ADVOCATE

1 John 2:1

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.

This is amazing. The word advocate means one who appears in another’s behalf. It’s a word that describes a defense attorney. It’s Matlock. Only it’s someone infinitely better than Matlock. It’s Jesus. He’s our defense attorney.

John is painting a picture for us here. He takes us to a courtroom, the judgment throne of God. God will judge every sin that has ever been committed. That should make sinners like us tremble. The greatest threat to our joy is that we will one day be condemned by God. How can we possibly experience joy in this life if we know we are destined to be justly condemned by God?

So, here we are, sitting in the courtroom of God as guilty sinners. But, if you are trusting in Jesus, you have a defense attorney – Jesus Christ the righteous. He’s never lost a case.

And He comes to your defense. Now, don’t get the wrong picture here. John isn’t saying that Jesus argues with God the Father as though the Father is wanting to throw the book at you. Jesus isn’t arguing against God. So, who’s He arguing against? He’s arguing against your accuser – that’s Satan.

Revelation 12:10

And I heard a loud voice in heaven, saying, “Now the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Christ have come, for the accuser of our brothers has been thrown down, who accuses them day and night before our God.

Satan isn't just a tempter. He's an accuser. When you sin, he brings your case before God and argues that you should be condemned. He presents his evidence for what you've done and recites the law of God that your sin has broken.

So, how does Jesus argue for you when Satan has an open and shut case against you? You've got a record a mile long so what can Jesus possibly say?

He pulls out a folder marked "Exhibit A." And inside that folder is a piece of paper that has one of the most powerful words in the entire universe: propitiation.

1 John 2:2

He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world.

The word propitiation means, "an appeasing sacrifice." It carries the basic idea of appeasement, or satisfaction, specifically towards God.

In the ancient world, there were cultures that thought that there were lots of different gods. They believed that those gods were really hard to predict, like you could never know if the gods were happy with you or not.

Have you ever known someone who was wildly unpredictable? They like you one day and then hate you the next. Ancient pagans thought the gods were like that. That meant they never knew whether the gods were about to bless them or curse them. So, most cultures came up with various plans to give gifts to the gods in an attempt to please them and get blessings from them. So, that gift to the gods was known as a propitiation. A gift that satisfied or pleased the gods and brought blessings instead of curses.

That's the word propitiation. And although there are no other real gods, that's what the Bible says God did in Jesus.

You see, because of our sin, we aren't able to totally please and satisfy God. All our good works and sacrifices are tainted by sin so they can never be fully pleasing to a holy and righteous God. That means we are eternally stuck in a place of being displeasing to God because of our sin. So, God did something we couldn't do for ourselves.

1 John 4:10

In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.

In His great love for us, God offered His own gift on our behalf. Jesus didn't sneak out of heaven on a rescue mission. Jesus was sent by the Father. The Godhead agreed to accomplish something on our behalf. God offered the most pleasing and satisfying gift in all of existence. God the Father gave God the Son as a gift or sacrifice to appease or satisfy the Law of God that demands a just punishment for sin.

And since Jesus is perfectly righteous in every way, He is perfectly pleasing to God the Father in every way. That's why His sacrifice can put an end to all our sin, because the just demand of the God's Law is completely satisfied by a perfectly holy sacrifice.

So, in the great courtroom of God, the One who sits on the throne is the One who came up with this whole plan. And when the accuser brings up the record of your sin, Jesus comes to your defense.

Exhibit A isn't a record of something we've done; it's a record of something Jesus has done on our behalf. He stood in our place at the cross and endured the punishment for our sins that God's law demands.

The defense Jesus makes for those who are trusting in Him is a presentation of His perfect work as a sacrifice for our sins. And John says that sacrifice isn't just enough to pay for one or two of your sins. It's enough to pay for all the sins that have ever been committed by the entire world. That doesn't mean that everyone will be saved. It means that anyone can be saved if they are willing to place their faith and trust in the finished work of Jesus at the cross. Anyone can be saved no matter how deep or dark their sin. Anyone – your friends and family and neighbors and coworkers. Anyone – including you. Jesus is our propitiation.

That's how you can have joy in the face of your sin and Satan your accuser. In our battle with sin, we can rejoice because Jesus is our Advocate. He's never lost a case and He never will.

PRACTICAL APPLICATION

Declare war on sin and depend fully on Jesus. This is such a big part of John's letter that we will repeat it over and over again. Sin destroys every good thing God desires to give us for our joy. So don't mess around with sin. Don't live in patterns of sin. Don't minimize it or excuse it or deny it. Declare war on it. And acknowledge you are no match for sin. That's why you need Jesus. He came to defeat the works of the devil and to deliver you by His power as you trust in Him.

Claim the Cross against your Accuser. The accusations of the enemy don't just come against us in the courtroom of heaven; they often come to us in the courtroom of our heart. You hear the voice of the enemy bringing up your sin and all its condemnation.

- You don't deserve to be blessed by God. You deserve to be condemned by God.
- Life might be going ok right now, but one day God's going to drop the hammer on all the things you've done, and it will all come crashing down on you.
- You're such a hypocrite. If people knew what you've done, and even worse what you've wanted to do, they'd want nothing to do with you.

On and on the accusations go. It's demoralizing and deflating. So, what do you do? Look to your Advocate, Jesus. And claim the His work at the cross. At the cross, God the Father drove a stake in the ground that says He loves you and have more than enough mercy and grace and patience for you. At the cross, Jesus didn't come up with excuses for your sins, He dealt with them so they can be forgiven forever, and you can be completely cleansed in the sight of God.

Preach the Gospel to yourself and preach it to the devil. he won't get saved but he has no defense against Jesus.

Look for open doors to Let others know. The sacrifice of Jesus is sufficient to provide forgiveness for the whole world. But only those who are willing to place their faith and trust in Him will be saved. Grace comes through faith alone in Christ alone.

So, will you let others know? Can I pray for you? That's why we need Jesus...