

Don't Settle for a Substitute

1 John 5:18-21

I. INTRO

- A. The Israelites were rescued from Egypt, where they had been enslaved for hundreds of years. (You can read all about it in Exodus.)
 - 1. Essentially, they were being used by Egypt for forced labor
- B. God steps in. He has heard their cries, he is true to his promises, and with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, he fights on their behalf.
 - 1. There's a series of plagues: darkness, frogs, the Nile turned to blood, etc.
 - 2. Each one is obviously miraculous, but the Bible also sees what God's doing as bringing judgment on the gods of Egypt.
 - 3. He's proving to the Egyptians AND to the Israelites that he alone is God.
 - a) He is bigger and better than every supposed Egyptian deity.
- C. God rescues Israel from Egypt, parts the Red Sea, and they walk on dry ground
 - 1. The Egyptians try to follow. It doesn't go well for them.
- D. And when God brings the Israelites through to the other side, he makes something very clear: They are his people, and he is their God.
 - 1. And because he is their God, their Savior, their Rescuer, their King, his voice has ultimate authority in their lives.
 - 2. His rules. His way. His provision. His everything.
- E. This is actually the foundation for the Ten Commandments.
 - 1. God doesn't show up and say, "Obey these ten things and maybe I'll rescue you from Egypt." → He ALREADY rescued them.
 - 2. He says, "I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery." → Therefore, live like this
- F. So the OT Law could be summarized not as, "Here is how you BECOME one of God's people," but, "Here is God's rescued people should live."
 - 1. They WERE his people. They HAD been rescued
 - 2. Therefore, they should live like people who belong to God
- G. Even the Ten Commandments work this way
 - 1. Why is covetousness a sin? Because at some level it says, "God, what you have provided for me isn't enough."
 - 2. Why is stealing a sin? Before it's even unloving toward your neighbor, you're shaking your finger at God and rejecting what he HAS given you.
- H. Which is why one of the biggest threats facing Israel as they enter the Promised Land isn't ruffians, thugs, poison ivy, or quicksand → it's IDOLATRY.
 - 1. God warns them over and over: Don't go after the gods of the nations around you. Why? B/C another god means another ultimate authority
 - 2. If you give another god the allegiance that belongs to Yahweh, eventually that god will reshape how you understand yourself and how you live

- a) Those idols come with a different set of rules, a different way of life, a different identity.
 - b) And we see where that leads Israel: sexual immorality, injustice, violence, even sacrificing their own children.
- I. So God is constantly crying out to Israel throughout the OT: Remember who rescued you. Remember whose you are. Remember who your God is.
 - 1. Don't listen to the voice of the serpent. Don't bow to Baal.
- J. WHY DOES THIS MATTER? As we finish 1John, there are some interesting parallels between God's warnings to his people back THEN and what John says to God's people HERE.
- K. If you're just joining us, the flow of chapter 5 basically goes like this:
 - 1. If you believe Jesus Christ is the Son of God, the promised Messiah, the sacrifice who pays for the sin of the world, crucified, dead, buried, and resurrected, then you ARE born again.
 - 2. If you are born again, John wants to give you 5 confidences, 5 certainties.
 - a) You see it in this repeated phrase: "We know..."
 - (1) Steve covered these first two last week.
 - b) You can KNOW you have eternal life.
 - (1) E.g. you're forgiven and going to heaven on account of your FAITH not b/c of anything else.
 - c) You can KNOW God hears and answers your prayers.
 - (1) E.g. you have access to God in prayer b/c you can draw near to him, forgiven, purified, reconciled, and adopted.
 - d) You can KNOW that the evil one cannot ultimately steal you away.
 - e) You can KNOW that you belong to God.
 - f) You can KNOW that the Son of God has come and has given you understanding so that you can know the true God.
- L. But then John ends with: "Little children, keep yourselves from idols."
 - 1. Random? I don't think so
- M. Because immediately before it he says that Jesus has come so that we may know Him who is TRUE
 - 1. This is the contrast... the true God vs. idols
- N. Israel had been rescued from slavery, brought into a relationship with God, and told: You are mine. I am your God. Don't give your allegiance to another.
 - 1. And John says to Christians: You have been born again. You have eternal life. You belong to God. You know the true God through his Son Jesus Christ. So don't give yourself to a substitute.
- O. And that's where these last few verses of 1 John are going.
 - 1. You have been rescued from the evil one.
 - 2. You belong to God.
 - 3. You know the TRUE God.

4. Don't settle for a substitute.

II. [18] We know that everyone who has been born of God does not keep on sinning, but he who was born of God (Jesus) protects him, and the evil one does not touch him.

- A. In the previous verses, John talked about a sin that leads to death.
- B. I am of the opinion that the sin that leads to death is, essentially, rejecting Jesus.
 - 1. E.g. You're not going to accidentally do the sin that leads to death.
 - 2. It's a trajectory paved with 10,000 stones of pushing Jesus away.
- C. At the same time, just b/c you don't need to live terrified that you're going to accidentally stumble your way out of salvation doesn't mean you should just do whatever you want.
 - 1. John says the person born of God does not KEEP ON sinning.
 - 2. We all WILL sin → John unpacked that in 1 John 1 & 2.
 - 3. But if you are standing in the light of Christ, the darkness clinging to you will bother you → you're not going to want to entertain it forever.
- D. John ends here saying, "the evil one won't touch you."
 - 1. This isn't some magical promise about how if you know Jesus you can't experience hardship or suffering or temptation or something like that.
 - a) John himself certainly suffered.
 - 2. What he is saying is that there is a KEEPING power in the Good Shepherd Jesus that is greater than the destroying power of Satan.
- E. The Devil does not get the final word over the people who belong to Christ.
 - 1. If your faith is genuine, you can't lose salvation
 - 2. The enemy can't kidnap you from the Father's house
- F. You might go through seasons where your battle with sin feels exhausting, where you look at your life and think, "How am I STILL fighting this?"
- G. You might feel weak. You might feel like you're barely hanging on.
- H. But the beautiful thing about Christianity is that **your hope is not ultimately that you are really good at hanging onto Jesus, but about how good he is at hanging onto YOU**
- I. The Shepherd does not lose his sheep

III. [19] We know that we are from God, and the whole world lies in the power of the evil one.

- A. John draws this big divide, like two sides of the Grand Canyon
 - 1. "We are from God." // "The whole world lies in the power of the evil one."
- B. Throughout the letter, John has been talking in extremes.
 - 1. Light vs. Darkness. Truth vs. Lies. Children of God vs. Children of the Devil. Kingdom of God vs. the world under the evil one.
- C. The point? There are only two people in this world
 - 1. Those who have been born again, new creation, born of God
 - 2. And those who haven't been (Lord willing, yet!)
- D. Our world likes to see these things as a spectrum, and we def don't like it when people tell us we under the power of the evil one
 - 1. We like to think of ourselves as independent.
 - a) I make my own choices. I decide what's true for me.
 - 2. But John says there is no spiritually neutral territory.
 - a) The whole world lies in the power of the evil one.

- E. If you aren't born again, you're not actually ultimately in charge, you don't have your sin under management → you are in the power of the evil one.
 - F. But I have good news → Jesus came to destroy the works of the devil.
 - 1. You can be freed, born again, brought out of darkness
 - 2. You can know the power of Christ to destroy Satan's chains.
 - G. THIS is what John wants you to know: that is what has happened to YOU.
 - 1. You are no longer part of the kingdom you used to belong to.
 - 2. You have been rescued. You are FROM GOD.
 - H. You might have bad days, bad weeks, bad months. You might have rough seasons, rough years → you might have a rough life.
 - 1. You might relapse. You might make a terrible mistake. You might do some really dumb, sinful things in your life → hopefully not.
 - 2. But in Christ, black-hearted sinner is no longer your identity.
 - 3. You ARE a child of God. You ARE righteous. You ARE a new creation. You ARE adopted. You ARE an overcomer. The enemy CAN'T have you
 - I. And THAT is a beautiful certainty.
- IV. *[20] And we know that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding, so that we may know him who is true; and we are in him who is true, in his Son Jesus Christ. He is the true God and eternal life.*
- A. What word keeps repeating? TRUE
 - 1. "Him who is TRUE." // "We are in Him who is TRUE." // "He is the TRUE GOD."
 - B. Why does that matter?
 - 1. There are a whole lot of things pretending to be true in life.
 - 2. There are a whole lot of voices... a lot of religions... a lot of youtube vids
- C. Jesus has come so that you can actually KNOW the One who is TRUE.**
- D. God wants to have a relationship with you. Do you realize that?
 - 1. With all your warts, bumps, wrinkles, personality quirks, hang-ups, and pet peeves... The God who made everything wants YOU to know HIM.
 - E. And he has done everything in order to make that a reality.
 - 1. He has sent his Son to REVEAL truth. You don't have to guess.
 - 2. He has given us understanding that we might KNOW truth.
 - 3. Jesus has died on a cross so we can have a relationship WITH truth
 - 4. God is the One, TRUE God, and knowing him is eternal life.
 - F. Christianity is not about knowing a bunch of TRUE THINGS.
 - 1. Jesus came so that "we may KNOW HIM who is TRUE."
 - 2. Eternal life is knowing the TRUE God & having a relationship with HIM
 - G. And every other voice that promises to give you what only God can give is a counterfeit and an idol. Which is why John ends with...
- V. *[21] Little children, keep yourselves from idols.*
- A. Think about everything John has just told us.
 - B. If you have faith in Jesus (not self, religion, etc) → You ARE born again
 - C. If you are born again...
 - 1. Jesus keeps you, and the enemy can't have you #NotTodaySatan

2. You belong to God
3. The Son of God has come to reveal himself to you, to save you to give you understanding
- D. We know the One who is true. We are in the One who is true.
- E. Jesus Christ is the true God and eternal life.
- F. THEREFORE: Keep yourselves from idols.
 1. What's an idol? A substitute for the true God. Not just pagan gods, but anything that wants to sit on the throne of your heart
 - a) Power, money, control, pleasure, people-pleasing, approval, etc
 2. An idol says, "Give me your allegiance. Listen to my voice. Trust what I tell you. Let me tell you what is good. Let me tell you what will satisfy you. Let me tell you who you are. Let me tell you how to live."
- G. And that's EXACTLY what God warned Israel about.
 1. He rescued them from Egypt.
 2. He brought them through the sea.
 3. He said, "You are my people, and I am your God."
 4. And then the gods of the nations came calling.
 - a) Trust us instead. Worship us instead. Live our way instead.
 5. And God says: Don't do it. Remember who rescued you.
- H. And John is saying the same thing to us.
 1. Jesus has rescued you from the kingdom of darkness.
 2. The evil one does not own you anymore.
 3. Remember He who is true
 4. The Son of God has come so that you can know the true God.
 5. Why would you give your allegiance to a substitute?
- I. And I think that's the question we need to leave with today.
 1. **What voice in your life are you tempted to treat as more authoritative than God's?**
- J. Remember who rescued you.
- K. Remember who is called "Him who is true.
- L. Remember, and accept no substitute!
- M. *"Little children, keep yourselves from idols."*