1 John

SPEAKER	Matt Ryniker
DATE	Sunday, July 21, 2024
PASSAGES	1 John 1; 1 John 2; 1 John 3; 1 John 4; 1 John 5
MESSAGE	Begins at 1:14:24 in the service

THE BIG IDEA

John draws the line between light and darkness about as starkly as anyone in scripture draws it, and that intensity frightens a lot of readers. But the letter opens with hands and eyes and a person who was touched, and it keeps insisting that the initiative was always God's. He is all light. He loved first. Conviction, rightly heard, sends you toward him rather than away.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- We do not know what God is like because clever people worked it out. God knows what God is like, and he chose to make himself manifest. That is the whole order of events.
- "In him is no darkness at all" — none. Not mostly light, the way the best of us are mostly good.
- Walking in the light does not purchase cleansing. The blood of Jesus does, and it does it alone.
- The advocate we have when we sin is the same person who will judge the living and the dead. Matt called that arrangement convenient, and he meant it.
- Trashing fellow Christians to make Jesus look good is itself evidence of walking in darkness. He does not need the contrast; he is already glorious.
- The antichrist, in John's own definition, is whatever denies the Father and the Son — not a science-fiction villain.

- God is love; that is not the same sentence as “whatever we call love is God.” He defines the word, and the information runs from him to us.
- If you finished this letter feeling crushed, that came from the lens you brought, not from John.

▶ 1:14:24

Hope Chapel spent this summer on what Matt has been calling a tour of tiny texts — the very short letters, mostly in the New Testament. First John sits at the large end of tiny, maybe twelve minutes if you read quickly, and Matt took the whole of it in one sitting rather than a chapter at a time.

An eyewitness, not an idea

▶ 1:15:43

Matt loves John’s writing for its angle: the same gospel Paul preaches, told by someone working in metaphor and impressionistic brushstrokes, with word choices that look simple and are not.

> “That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we looked upon and have touched with our hands, concerning the word of life — the life was made manifest, and we have seen it, and testify to it and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was made manifest to us.”
>
> 1 JOHN 1:1–2 ↗

That opening runs deliberately parallel to the gospel John wrote, which itself runs parallel to Genesis 1:1. And the verbs are physical. Heard, seen, looked upon, touched. The word of life is not a message about life but a person they ate with.

▶ 1:17:17

Which settles the question people outside the faith like to press: who could possibly know what God is like? “God knows exactly what God is like,” Matt said. “I think we could all agree on that.” Big brains have worked the problem through philosophy and metaphysics for centuries. But here the life chose to be made manifest. The one who knows is the one who decided to be known.

No darkness at all

▶ 1:18:25

> "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."
>
> 1 JOHN 1:5–7 ↗

Matt stopped on the word *none*. We think of the best people we know as mostly good, and we think of ourselves as mostly on his side. That is not the claim being made about God. The darkness in view is not nighttime either — it is a corrupt manner of life, and the light is his own character.

And the end of verse 7 is the same gospel Paul, James and Peter preach. It is not the blood of Christ plus a satisfying amount of light-walking. Cleansing starts where knowing started: with him.

An advocate who is also the judge

▶ 1:20:07

> "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 2:1–2 ↗

Propitiation is simply the means of forgiveness — the answer to why forgiveness is available at all. And Matt drew out the arrangement: the advocate who speaks for us is the very one who comes to judge the living and the dead. John is not encouraging sin, only acknowledging it will happen. Readers who come away from this letter feeling inadequate and lost have missed the sentence that was put there for exactly that moment.

Hatred of a brother, and the habit of trashing the church

▶ 1:22:44

Whoever says he is in the light and hates his brother is still in darkness. Matt called it one of those lines that will get you — and added, "it's a good thing we have an advocate." The brother in view is the family of God, so no only children get off on a technicality.

The blind-spot version is the one he pressed: the witnessing move where you say you know Christians are terrible, you hate them too, but you should love Jesus. “He already looks great. He’s fine, he’s super glorious — more glorious than you could ever paint a picture with your words.” Criticize behavior, criticize deeds; the sweeping contempt for people you have never met is dark even when it is deployed to make Jesus shine. Matt’s practical footnote: he has never met more than a tenth of one percent of Christians worldwide, and neither have you.

Which world we are told not to love

▶ 1:25:30

> “Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world — the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life — is not from the Father but is from the world.”
>
> 1 JOHN 2:15–16 ↗

Verse 16 is the clarification that keeps verse 15 from becoming nonsense. Not the Grand Canyon, not trees, not penguins, not people — Matt had just spent a section on why hating people is out. You do not have to hate city parks to impress the Lord. What is named is desires of the flesh: comfort chosen over obedience, gluttony; desires of the eyes: envy, wanting what someone else has and taking it; pride of life: an abiding sense of one’s own importance.

The antichrist, defined by John rather than by the movies

▶ 1:27:30

Everyone has a candidate — a horned figure who runs banks, the pope, a president, a chip. John’s own definition is the denial of the Father and the Son. What we should watch for is an animus against the gospel, not a science-fiction villain.

And the two do not come apart. Claiming the Father while rejecting the Son is not a position that is available; because of their unity, it is not even a thing one could sincerely hold. Matt did not say that coolly — for those of us with devout friends in other faiths, he said, our hearts should still be broken. Then verse 28: abide in him so that we have confidence, not shame, when he appears. On the end times Christians disagree about nearly everything, but Matt put his hat on the Nicene line — he will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead. “I don’t know if it’s going to be live on Twitter. But I do know this.”

Children, and why the world's hatred is not about you

▶ 1:30:33

> "See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are. The reason why the world does not know us is that it did not know him."
>
> 1 JOHN 3:1 ↗

We clean ourselves up and try to look appealing, and the enmity was never really about us. Being children carries everything you would hope it carries — steadfast loyalty, nurture we have not earned, even discipline that comes from a desire to strengthen rather than from someone who is merely angry.

That cuts two ways, and Matt named both. If your life and the world's systems are entirely cozy — mutual respect, everything loved in common — that is a red flag. So is kicking the door open and spraying hatred at everyone in sight to prove how spiritual you are.

▶ 1:33:06

Then verse 9, where everyone starts sweating: no one born of God makes a practice of sinning. Matt read *practice* as a committed, devoted lifestyle, not the person who wants to walk with Christ and fails in weakness — and he grounded that in John's own consistency. The man who wrote "if anyone does sin, we have an advocate" is not two chapters later telling you that a failure proves you belong to the devil. The confirmations run in both directions and stack up: hatred and rejection of Jesus on one side; believing in the name of his Son, loving one another, and the Spirit he has given us on the other.

Spirits, and a love that ran first

▶ 1:37:02

Every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God. The instruction assumes something about the room you live in: it is not only people who come up and say things to you. There are voices that whisper against the gospel and are content to leave everything else alone. And the verdict is already in — he who is in you is greater than he who is in the world. You have overcome the propaganda.

Matt was careful not to let that become tribal. "We were them, and we are them." The apostles did not reason their way to God while sitting in their boats having great ideas; Jesus walked up and wrecked their lives. That is why John can say he knows — not because he is especially prophetic.

> "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."
>
> 1 JOHN 4:10 ↗

"God is love" is the verse most likely to end up on a hand towel, and it is routinely read backwards — as though whatever we happen to call love is thereby God. It says the reverse. He defines the word, as he defined himself in chapter one, and the information flows in that direction. At our core we will have to accept that he is better than we are and will always outdo us in love.

▶ 1:41:13

Perfect love casts out fear — and a great many Christians are still living in the fear that has to do with punishment. As for the standard objection, that a particular brother is simply insufferable: one of the things God intends to teach you in a short life is unconditional love, which is very hard to learn while surrounded by people who always meet your conditions. Matt admitted he stole the line and could not remember from whom. He also noted the obvious: God himself will bother you.
He resists the proud and gives grace to the humble. Being bothered is not grounds for hatred; it is the ground where love grows.

What the letter was actually for

▶ 1:43:26

Everyone who has been born of God overcomes the world, and this is the victory that has overcome the world — ou
Against a constant supply of twisted versions of the truth designed to confuse and overwhelm,
steadfast faith is, as Matt put it, a fairly satisfying act of rebellion. The letter closes plainly:
we are from God, the Son has come and given us understanding, and little children, keep yourselves from idols.

▶ 1:45:54

Then the pastoral turn, which was the point of the morning. Some people hear all of this — light, dark, two camps, the call to loyal action — as one more entry in a long stream of condemnation. *I knew it. I knew I wasn't living up to it. I'm an idiot.* Matt was blunt: "I didn't say any of those things. John didn't say any of those things. We put that there." Because of upbringing or trauma or lies long believed, we bring a lens that makes conviction sound like a verdict. John did not sit down to write so that you would feel awful and give up.

> *"The revelations that we find in the Bible are more about God than they are about you."*

There is no dark in him, no desire in him to tempt you, no secret wish to crush you. There is darkness in us, and we already knew that. He is love, he is our source of light and life, and he is faithful — which is precisely the thing to cling to. Seeing him in his glory does convict. Conviction should end in clinging, not in panicking and walking away.

Rally, or come sit down

▶ 1:49:05

Matt closed with a homely picture. A guest you did not want is coming, and the good china feels like a burden; the same evening with someone you love is nothing but delight — take the china, stay the night, let's take a few pictures. The job, then, is the one the room had already been doing in worship: to behold him. He is light. He knows you are screwy.

And if you are not up for rallying — if you are empty and cannot give one more thing — Matt's counsel was to sit at his feet and let other people carry the praying. He said plainly that he needs help there himself; he uses timers, he writes things down, his mind travels. The Heart Ministry teams were coming forward, and he recommended them for anyone who feels dark or discouraged or slow: people who do have the faith right now and will pray over you. "We only love him because he loved us. So we should be gluttons with his love. Third, fourth helpings."

FOR FURTHER STUDY

SCRIPTURE IN THIS MESSAGE

- 1 John 1:1–2
- John 1:1
- Genesis 1:1
- 1 John 1:5–7
- 1 John 2:1–2
- 1 John 2:9–10
- 1 John 2:15–16
- 1 John 2:22–23
- 1 John 2:28
- 1 John 3:1
- 1 John 3:9–10
- 1 John 3:23–24
- 1 John 4:3
- 1 John 4:4–6
- 1 John 4:8
- 1 John 4:10
- 1 John 4:18–20
- James 4:6
- 1 John 5:4–5
- 1 John 5:19–21

FOR YOUR HOPE GROUP

1. Matt said we know what God is like only because God chose to make himself known. Where do you still try to reason your way to him instead of receiving what he has shown?
2. Where have you caught yourself trashing the church — even in an attempt to make Jesus look good? What was underneath it?
3. Of the three things John names as "the world" — desires of the flesh, desires of the eyes, pride of life — which one has the most traction in you right now?
4. What lens do you bring to a passage like 1 John, and where did it come from? What does it turn conviction into?
5. Matt's instruction was either to rally or to come sit at his feet and let others pray. Which of those is your honest next step this week, and who will you tell?

ABOUT THE SPEAKER

Matt Ryniker is Hope Chapel's senior pastor — his own description of the job — and reports to the church's governing board, who he cheerfully calls his boss. He and his wife Mandy have been held up from Hope's own pulpit as an example to the congregation. He spent a stretch of his working life as a public school teacher, and he still teaches the parent dedication classes where families commit to raising their children to follow Jesus — a theme that runs straight into this message.

Watch the full message:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S0IcwNo7XOo&t=4464s

These notes summarise a message preached at Hope Chapel in Austin, Texas. They are a reader's aid, not a transcript — scripture references link to the full passage so you can read it in context.