

Sermon 16, Why John Bothered, 1 John 2:12-14

Proposition: Christian, you have full-orbed salvation in Jesus Christ!

- I. What John Did: “I am writing/have written” (6x)
- II. Who John Did it to: “Little Children, Fathers, Young Men” (2x)
- III. Why John Did It: Because You Are Saved!
 - A. Your Sins Are Forgiven
 - B. You Know Christ (2x)
 - C. You Have Overcome the Evil One (2x)
 - D. You Know the Father
 - E. You Are Strong
 - F. God’s Word Abides in You

Introduction

Dearly beloved congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ, the poem we have before us is a glorious reminder of our status as Christians. What John is telling us is sandwiched between the dark vision of a man who hates his brother and has been blinded by the darkness on one side, and the progress of antichrists in the world on the other. Yet John, into this blackness, shines the full brightness of gospel truth. Why did he bother writing this letter in a world where antichrists are rampant and people are walking through the darkness blind? Because that’s not the whole story. John bothered to write because you and I are saved, and half-a-dozen glorious things are true of us. Christian, you have full-orbed salvation in Jesus Christ!

I. What John Did: “I am writing/have written” (6x)

The structure of this passage is amazing, a triad of triads. Notice how John specifies six times that he is writing, each time specifying who he’s writing to and why it is that he’s writing to them. We have already seen some of his purposes for this letter, including his desire to proclaim Christ’s message about God (that God is light) and his further purpose of writing so that we might not sin. It seems clear to me that John recognized the power of the letter he was writing, that he was fully aware that this was not just his private opinion but the word of God that liveth and abideth forever. Why else would he put such an emphasis on the fact that he is writing?

John wrote. We are reading what he wrote. I’m preaching about what he wrote, because this stuff is important. It’s enduring. It is the word of God to you.

II. Who John Did it to: “Little Children, Fathers, Young Men” (2x)

Or is it? It’s a little tricky to figure this out. John tells us not only that he’s writing, but adds to whom he’s writing. Indeed, lest we miss it he repeats it. He’s writing to children, fathers, and young men.

Now, the obvious way to take this is that his message is for those three groups. John has rhetorically divided up the church into three groups, and he has something to say to all of them. He wants children to know that their sins are forgiven and that they know the Father. He wants fathers to know that they know Christ. He wants young men to know their own strength and victory.

But what about women? What about old men without children? What about the rest of the church? And above all, what about the fact that John refers to all of his readers as “little children” at various other points in the letter, including immediately before this passage (2:1) and after it (2:18)? Is it really the case that John sometimes call everyone “children” but at other times talks only to literal children? Most commentators think not, and I agree with them. After all, what does he ascribe to children? Forgiveness and knowledge of the Father. But of course, those things are not merely true of believers who are under 12; those are true of all believers! And thus, I think that when John says he’s writing to children, he means that he’s writing to the entire church, identified by him as his beloved little children. That’s you! You’re a child of God. The apostle John is, in one sense, your spiritual father. Don’t say to yourself “I’m not mentioned here.” If you’re a child of God whose identity is defined by the word of God, you are here!

But within the overarching category of children of God in the church we find two smaller subsets, the old and the young, here called “fathers” and “young men.” Is John trying to exclude women? No, he’s trying to include them, just as he includes them in his statement in the gospel that those who believed on Jesus’ name gained the right to become sons of God. This is not demoting women, but giving them status. You are a son, what that culture (and many others) thought of as the most valuable kind of child. You are a father. You are a young man. This is not John saying “Women are without value” but John saying “Women are just as valuable!” And, to be honest, if his approach offends you then you need to repent. You don’t judge God’s word; it judges you. Your feelings, and your culture’s feelings, are not the final arbiters of what’s correct. If you want to take offense at a compliment, at a title of honor, be my guest. But don’t expect me to thank you for it.

So anyway, the two titles — young men and fathers. Who are these groups? Some see a reference to baby Christians and to spiritual fathers, perhaps even people who have led at least one other person to the Lord. But the dominant impression among the commentators is that John is literally talking about older and younger people in the church. Older people know Jesus. They may know that they know little else; they may have had every other former certainty beaten out of them by a rough life; but they know that they know Him. Younger Christians, on the other hand, have a vibrant, victorious, conquering spirit. The young are strong, but the old are tenacious.

Ultimately, of course, both young Christians and older Christians are the beneficiaries of every gospel promise. John mentions six characteristics. All of these are true of every Christian. Yes, in certain ways some of them are more true of the young, and others more true of the old. But all of them are true of every Christian, rightly understood.

So John is writing, in a world full of antichrists and blind people walking in darkness. If that's not how the world seems to you, I will just tell you that you are living a sheltered life. John, though, had seen evil and grappled with its weight, most of all at the cross of Jesus Christ. In that darkness, he bothered writing because his audience wasn't like that. Do you hear that, Christian? You are not in the darkness. You are in the light, as He is in the light. You are not in darkness, for that day to surprise you. You are children of the light and of the day. You are blessed because the Light of the World has dawned in your hearts.

III. Why John Did It: Because You Are Saved!

Another way to put that is this: John is writing because you are saved. You're not lost, and so you're worth writing to.

A. Your Sins Are Forgiven

First of all, your sins are forgiven. We have heard that proclaimed in one of the clearest texts on the subject in the whole Bible. I hope everyone in this room can recite it from memory: "When we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." That's 1 John 1:9, and it is glorious news for everyone who has ever sinned. Brothers and sisters, your sins are forgiven you for His name's sake.

They aren't forgiven because you earned it. They aren't forgiven because you are a wonderful person. They aren't forgiven because God has to forgive, or because you were a good person already and didn't need any forgiveness of sins. No. They are forgiven for the sake of the name of Jesus Christ. That is, they are forgiven because of His character, because of everything that He is and does for His people, especially His life, death, and resurrection.

Your anger is no longer held against you! Your lust is no longer held against you! None of those things from your past define you because Jesus paid the penalty for them, thus propitiating God's wrath and expiating your sin. Your sins are forgiven you.

Calvin commented on this passage that you can't charge the preachers of forgiveness of sins with trying to keep people from obeying God. Actually, this news of forgiveness is the only thing that enables you to obey Him. Why bother if you're already unbelievably behind and will never get out of it? Most of us have a baseline understanding that if we get slapped with a \$5 million medical bill we will simply take out bankruptcy. I'll never pay it, so why bother pretending that I can? If it would cost my entire yearly income for 100 years, then there's no way. And the same goes for those who know they're still mired in sin. Why try to obey God? I might as well be hung for a sheep as hung for a lamb; I can never be in His favor anyway so why would I try? But brothers and sisters, your sins are forgiven for His name's sake. You are pleasing to Him; He loves you. That's why you try to be pleasing to Him!

B. You Know Christ (2x)

But second — and this is directed specifically to older Christians, to the fathers in the church — you know Christ. He's the one who is from the beginning. That, of course, is how John began this letter. He said already that he's writing about that which was from the beginning. We saw already that Christ and His earthly ministry were the thing that was from the beginning that he's writing about.

You know this one — the one whose earthly ministry began at a certain point in time, but whose existence never began. How well do you know Him? Do you know Christ as the eternal one? Do you worship Him as the eternal one? Do you love Him as the eternal one?

What do these questions mean? They mean that you look up to and respect Jesus Christ as the one who had no beginning. They mean that you worship Him because He is co-eternal with the Father. They mean that you delight in Him because He isn't a time-bound person like yourself.

You know Him. That is, you have a personal relationship. You talk to Him, and you obey Him, and you listen to Him.

This is particularly true of the older saints here. John repeats it twice. Don't doubt. Don't wonder whether you do in fact know Jesus. You do.

C. You Have Overcome the Evil One (2x)

And young people, you have conquered Satan. How? By being united to Christ by faith and sharing in His victory. How do you share in that victory? Well, you share in it in a number of ways. You share in it as a piece of spoil: Jesus conquered Satan, and captured you. You are one of the things He gained from His adventure on earth; He went to the cross in order to save you from Satan.

How else do you participate in Christ's victory? You also participate in it by saying no to the Devil's temptations. He is foiled every time you do your work instead of surfing Facebook. He is foiled every time you love your wife instead of lusting after someone else. He is foiled every time you pray a heartfelt prayer to your Heavenly Father. He is foiled every time you show love and patience instead of prejudice and spite.

You have overcome the evil one with the victory of Jesus Christ. You belong to Jesus now, and Satan can't touch Him. He can still attack you, and even kill if you God allows — but he can *never* reclaim you or force you to obey him again.

Young people, Satan can't have you. He can't force you to sin (though he can convince you to do so). You have conquered him in Christ.

D. You Know the Father

Brothers and sisters, not only do you know Christ, the one who was from the beginning; you also know His Father. God is a Father to you, and you are called little children here because you belong to Him! If that isn't the best news you've heard all day, you're not listening.

We can all daydream about what it would be like to be the only child of a billionaire, knowing that essentially unlimited wealth would be yours. Well, so it is: You are the child of the

King of Kings. You know the Father, and He is your Father. You know His strength, His love, His joy, His care for His children. You know the Father!

E. You Are Strong

And since He is your Father, you have His strength. Again, this is most true of the young people in the church. They have the strength of God Himself to fight the Evil One. They are not collapsed in weakness, but raised in power.

Young Christians, if you are having trouble with a particular sin, have you given up the thought that you can overcome it? Don't. You are strong. You have the power that's mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds, casting down imaginations and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of Christ.

You are strong in Christ.

F. God's Word Abides in You

Why does John say that? Because you have the unbeatable word of God living and abiding in you. God's word cannot falter or fail. And if you are possessed and driven by God's word, you cannot fail either. You're strong, and the power of God's dynamic word stored in your heart will overcome the evil one's temptations.

So why did John bother? He bothered because he saw the truth about his readers. He saw that the Christians he was talking to had overwhelmingly glorious privileges in Christ. He wanted them to know that, so he told them.

In the face of antichrists, people who walk in darkness, the prowling Evil One, and the rest of the doomy, gloomy realities of this world — these things are true of Christians. Your sins are forgiven. You know Christ. You know the Father. You have overcome the evil one because you are strong and God's word remains in you. So be of good cheer. Take heart. Christ is real, and His might is strong. You will not be overcome by the world, the flesh, or the devil, because you belong to Christ and nothing can separate you from His love.

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirits. Amen.