

April 30, 2006
Easter 3

"Jesus Is the Pure Source of Our Salvation"

1 JOHN 1:1-2:2

That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched-- this we proclaim concerning the Word of life. ² The life appeared; we have seen it and testify to it, and we proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and has appeared to us. ³ We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ. ⁴ We write this to make our joy complete. ⁵ This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: God is light; in him there is no darkness at all. ⁶ If we claim to have fellowship with him yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live by the truth. ⁷ 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, purifies us from all sin. ⁸ If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. ⁹ If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. ¹⁰ If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word has no place in our lives. ^{2:1} My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defense-- Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. ² He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world.

Once upon a time, a certain town grew up at the foot of a mountain range. The town was famous for its clear mountain stream that provided the people with pure water. The source of the stream was a spring carefully tended by a strange and quiet forest dweller. Regularly he cleaned out the debris and foreign matter so the spring flowed pure and cold. Mill wheels sparkled in the sunlight. Flower gardens flourished. Swans swam in the millpond.

Then things changed. The business minded town council wanted to save money by eliminating the job of the forest ranger that tended the mountain spring. They proposed building a reservoir to hold the water like the other towns. The water that came from the reservoir was never the same. It became warm and sluggish. Trout no longer jumped in the stream. The wheel of the millpond became green with unwanted algae. Some of the people became sick from drinking the water.

In desperation the good people of the town decided to go back to the way things were. They voted to tear down the reservoir that held the stale water and rehire the mountain ranger to keep the spring. Amazing. It did not take long for the water to come back to its pristine condition. Once again it danced and sparkled as it flowed over the rocks. Trout were seen feeding at dusk. Swans returned to raise their young.

The Apostle John saw something similar happen to the message of the gospel during his later years of life on this earth. False teachers polluted the pure teaching about Jesus.

Some were saying that Jesus was not God from all eternity, and that he did not die for our sin on the cross and bodily rise from the dead. Oh, to be sure, they spoke in glowing terms about Jesus as a great light who could help you be all that you can be and open yourself up to power source of the universe. The whole idea of a blood stained body that won our salvation for us coupled with a bodily resurrection from the dead was totally repugnant to these people who claimed a higher knowledge and a better way. They created their own reservoir of higher knowledge that blended teachings from the Bible with teachings from Eastern religions. The result was a devil's concoction that poisoned the people and took them away from Jesus as the pure source of their salvation. I don't have to remind you this morning that history is repeating itself before our very eyes. Let's look at these words of John and see how **"Jesus Is the Pure Source of Our Salvation."**

Look at the pure source

John pleads with us to look again at Jesus as the pure source of our salvation. "That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched- this we proclaim concerning the Word of life." Jesus was from the beginning. He is God from all eternity. "In the beginning was the Word, the Word was with God, and the Word was God." That's how the gospel of John begins. This Lord and God from all eternity became fully human. The human body of Jesus is not something to be despised. It is to be loved and cherished as the source of salvation. You can almost see the tears of joy in John as he says, "which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at, and our hands have touched." John was there beneath the cross when Jesus died. John was there in the tomb and saw the grave clothes left behind. John was there when Jesus appeared suddenly and said, "Peace be two you. Look at my hands. Look at my side." John ate food with the risen Lord Jesus Christ. He says in our text, "This life appeared, we have seen it, and we proclaim it to you."

There is a reason John pleads with people to look at the physical body of Jesus as the source of their salvation. He wanted his dear children to have fellowship with the Father and the Son that their joy might be complete. "And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. We write this to you to make your joy complete." The night before he died Jesus prayed that he might see the glory that he had with his Father from all eternity. "And now Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with you before the world began." Then Jesus prayed that his disciples and everyone who believes in him might share in that glory. "My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you." If we are going to have fellowship with Jesus and the Father or be one with Jesus and the Father, we need a pure source of salvation, not one that tries to combine things I do with what Christ has done for me.

What John was dealing with at his time were false teachers called Gnostics. They believed that all matter was evil and only the spiritual is good. They believed that an evil side of God, you might say the dark side of the force, created all material matter in the universe including our bodies that are subject to decay and bad behavior. The key to salvation was having what they called knowledge or enlightenment that helped discover the spark of good in you that could connect you to the main source of good in the universe. They absolutely could not stand the thought that Jesus was Lord and God from all eternity and became one of us with flesh and bones, or that he paid for sin with his human body that

was nailed to the cross. We have certain elements of this thinking still with us today in the self-help movement that leads people to look into themselves.

One of the largest and fastest growing churches in the country in Houston, Texas has as its motto, "Look for the champion in you." That is certainly not what John is telling us in these words this morning. What is he saying to us? He is telling us to look for our champion in Jesus.

For the false Gnostic teachers at the time of John, Jesus was like this orange I am holding my hand. When I eat this orange, I dispose of the peeling and eat the good part inside. That is how they saw the body of Jesus, as something that the Son of God occupied for a time and then discarded. They loathed the beautiful wounds that mark our salvation that Jesus kept on his body when he rose from the dead. How beautiful are words of Colossians that tell us, "But now he has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation." What a slam these words were against the Gnostic teachers at the time of Paul who were saying all matter is evil and the body of Jesus on the cross is something repugnant and repulsive.

In this bag I have a book that has sold over 40 million copies world-wide the last several years. Can you guess what this book is? It is the *Da Vinci Code*. In a couple of weeks the movie will come out in the theaters starring Tom Hanks. Sony Pictures is spending over 100 million to advertise this movie. The *Da Vinci Code* claims the Bible was a book pieced together to suppress women and to hide the truth that Jesus was actually married to Mary Magdalene. It says that some of their descendants eventually lived in France.

Where did Dan Brown get these weird ideas for this book? They come from ancient Gnostic teachings that tried to discredit Jesus as the Son of God from all eternity with all sorts of false writings. Recently *National Geographic* featured a newly discovered manuscript of *The Gospel of Judas*, an attempt to discredit the facts of Jesus death and resurrection. Christian apologist Josh McDowell has written a book called, *The Da Vinci Code: A Quest for Answers*. The book provides help for Christians to give the answer to the truthfulness of the Bible and the importance of the life of Jesus. I can think of no better answer, than these words of John. "That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which our eyes have seen, which we have looked at and our hands have touched." The night of his resurrection Jesus told his disciples, "Touch me and see; a ghost does not have flesh and bones as you see I have."

2) Treasure the pure source

If Jesus is the only pure source of my salvation and my peace with God, then I want to treasure this source. I don't want to add anything I do to what he has done for me. John reminds us that God is light, not the false teachers who claim to have a better way or higher knowledge. "This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you; God is light; in him there is no darkness at all."

God is light. He has spoken to us in his Word and his word is bright, like the noonday sun. On a bright day you do not need a flashlight. According to John, if we have fellowship with God, we will want to continue to walk in the light where God makes things crystal clear to

us. He says, "If we walk in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin." When it comes to being sure my sins are forgiven, then I don't want to be groping in the darkness and searching for human solutions to my problem of sin. I want to cling to the blood of Jesus. The blood of Jesus purifies from all sin. God is light. People who walk in the light and have fellowship with God believe very strongly that the little word "all" means "all."

The false teachers did not see a need for the blood of Jesus to cleanse them from their sin, because they had minimized sin and its consequences in their lives. John reminds us: "If we claim to be without sin, then we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us." On the other hand, "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us from all unrighteousness." Imagine going to the doctor for a spot on your skin. The doctor checks it out and it is a cancerous growth that needs to be removed immediately. If I say to myself, "No, I don't want to have the growth removed, I will put a Band Aid over it and it will go away," I am in serious trouble. When we come together for worship we don't minimize sin or try to hide it, we confess it. We join in confessing together as we did this morning. We constantly find ourselves praying, "Lord have mercy on me a sinner" or we say with David, "I know my transgressions and my sin is always before me."

Such confession leads me to not look for the champion not in myself, but to look for the champion in Jesus. As John encourages us, "He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not for ours only but for the sins of the whole world." That is the pure source of our salvation and our peace with God. "Not only for ours, but for the sins of the whole world." The whole world? Yes, the whole world! Why, that also includes me and it includes you. This pure source of forgiveness makes our joy complete as John tells us, "We write this to make our joy complete. Amen.