

Jesus: Our Advocate

1 JOHN 2:1-2

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Over the past two weeks, we have been looking at the book of 1 John. As you know, most of what we study in sermon form comes from requests and questions turned in by all of you throughout the year. But as I mentioned several weeks ago, I also have a list of my own, and for several months now I have had two reminders near the top of my own list: Preach on JESUS, and preach on LOVE. And these two subjects come together perfectly in the book of 1 John. So, we started two weeks ago by looking at the first four verses of 1 John and the reminder from John that he had personally heard, seen, and touched the Lord, that Jesus really did come to this earth in human form. And the purpose of this short book is to allow us to have fellowship with God, because without a proper understanding of who Jesus really is, fellowship with God and even joy itself, is not possible.

We continued last week with the reminder that God is light. That obviously presents a problem, because we sin, and sin cannot exist in the presence of light. We may try to get around this in different ways (pretending that we don't sin, convincing ourselves that we don't sin, or maybe even straight up rejecting the word of God), but ultimately, the only way for us to conquer the sin problem is to make every effort to walk in the light, and when we do sin, to confess it, to call sin what it is, and to do everything in our power to make things right with God.

Well, all of this is really our part of this problem. So this morning, I want us to move forward into the first two verses of 1 John 2 as John goes on to explain the importance of all of this, the seriousness of it. He does not want us to come away from this with the idea that sin is no big deal. In light of the fact that we just need to try hard and confess, John does not want us to miss the gravity of the situation we are in when we sin. And to make this point in a way we can understand it, John describes the role of Jesus as being that of an ADVOCATE.

Some of you might have a heading in your Bibles above this paragraph. Mine says, "Christ is Our Advocate." So, as we look at 1 John 2:1-2 (and as we keep our Bibles open to these verses this morning), I want us to try to really appreciate what it means to have Jesus serving as an advocate – the fact that we NEED an advocate, the fact that Jesus is PERFECTLY QUALIFIED TO SERVE AS OUR ADVOCATE, and the fact that Jesus has gone far above and beyond even this by PAYING THE PENALTY FOR OUR SIN.

Notice, please, 1 John 2:1-2,

¹ My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; ² and He Himself is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for those of the whole world.

- I. **But again, the main idea in these two verses is that Jesus is our Advocate, and John gets us to that point by making sure we know that WE NEED AN ADVOCATE.**

There is so much just in this opening sentence. Notice how he starts by addressing his first readers as ***“my little children.”*** Remember: John is an old man at this time, at least in his 80’s, but maybe even in his early 90’s. And I would point out here at the beginning that he definitely does not come across as a “grumpy old man.” This doesn’t come across as some kind of harsh lecture to these young “whippersnappers” out there. Sometimes there is tension between one generation and the next, but we find none of that here. But we do find love. We find concern, ***“My little children.”*** We see some genuine concern in this passage. And that is the motivation behind this book. He wants these people to know God. He wants them to have fellowship with God. He wants his joy to be made complete. He wants them to hang on. He wants them to stand firm against this strange new teaching that was starting to make its way into the Lord’s church. And so he starts out, ***“My little children.”***

And he continues, ***“I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin.”*** And so, after that last paragraph where we learned how we take care of sin (from our point of view) by making a genuine effort and by confessing our sins when we fail, John continues here with this reminder – and the reminder is: You really should not be sinning! ***“I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin.”*** In other words: When you read what I am writing, I want you to come away (in a sense) somewhat inoculated against sin! The purpose of this book (and really the purpose of the entire Bible) is to encourage us to avoid sin, to encourage us to make right decisions.

And don’t we see this elsewhere in the Bible? We think of Psalm 119:11, where the author says, ***“Your word I have treasured in my heart, that I may not sin against You.”*** Do we see it there? We study God’s word, we treasure it in our hearts, so that we will not sin against God. And that is John’s message here, ***“I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin.”*** As Christians, our goal is to not sin. Our goal is to sin less today than we did yesterday. Our goal is to maintain the struggle, to keep fighting, to never just give in and go with the flow. And keeping the word of God in our hearts is a powerful tool in that struggle.

However, immediately after making this point, notice what he says – he says ***“...and if anyone sins....”*** In other words, he realizes, I believe, that we will sin. Yes, we try, but even when we try, there will be times when we fail. We think of what Jesus said to Peter, James, and John himself when they kept falling asleep in the garden on the night of the Lord’s betrayal. In Matthew 26:41, Jesus said to these three, ***“Keep watching and praying that you may not enter into temptation; the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.”*** And isn’t that the way it is? We can make a decision in our minds, “I will not do this thing again.” But, there we go, and we do it again! And the picture there is of staying awake. Don’t we know what that’s like? I might get in bed at 9 o’clock determined to watch some episode of something on Netflix, and 8 minutes later I have surrendered the remotes to my wife, and I am gone! I had every intention of watching something, but it doesn’t happen. Several weeks ago, I had had a particularly long day for some reason, the phone rang and woke me up, I was pretty irritated for a second, “Who in the world would call me in the middle of the night like this?”, and then I looked at the clock – 8:13 p.m.! As the Lord said, ***“The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.”*** And that is the

way it is with sin. We have every intention of doing what is right and avoiding what is wrong, but then life happens!

- Maybe somebody does something to us (at home, at work, at school), they have treated us unfairly, and so we go off in a way that is completely against our Christian character.
- Maybe we see something online that leads us down a dark path, and we think to ourselves, “How did that happen? That is not who I am.”
- Maybe we’re with a group of friends and we do something with them that we would never do on our own, and we look back in shock at what we did.

This is what John is warning about here – he is writing these things to us so that we will not sin, but then he allows for the reality that we will stumble from time to time. And when that happens, we need an Advocate to stand by our side. We need somebody to plead our case.

And this is where we start thinking in terms of a courtroom. In this picture, I am the defendant. But if I’m defending myself, who is making the accusation? The accuser is Satan. In fact, the word “satan” means “adversary,” and in Revelation 12:10, Satan is referred to as **“the accuser of the brethren.”** Don’t we remember what happened in the book of Job? Job is minding his own business, when one day Satan appears before God in heaven and accuses Job of fearing God for nothing. There is this back and forth, Job is then put to the test (and passes the test), but the point is: Satan is the accuser in this picture. In a sense, Satan is the prosecuting attorney. Satan is calling up evidence to try to embarrass God, to try to make God look bad. “Here is one of your followers, and look at what they did!” Satan, therefore, is out to destroy us. And sometimes those accusations are true. Sometimes we really do violate God’s law, we sin.

And that is what sin is. In this case, John uses a word for sin that refers to “missing the mark.” And the idea is: We aim for a target, we are trying for perfection, we are trying to follow God’s law, but due to human weakness, we miss, we fail to hit the target. We sin, Satan makes the accusation, the accusation is true, and we end up standing there guilty before God. And when that happens, we need help. We need somebody to take our side. We need somebody to take up our defense.

II. And that is what leads us to the second half of verse 1, as we find that JESUS IS SUPREME AND PERFECTLY QUALIFIED TO SERVE AS OUR ADVOCATE BEFORE THE FATHER.

The word **“advocate”** here is translated into English from a word that literally refers to someone who is “called to our side.” And in the ancient world the word was used in the legal world and basically refers to a “defense attorney.” In the ancient world, the word referred to “one who takes up or champions your cause.” But primarily, the word refers to the kind of attorney who stands beside us in court, pleading our case before the judge.

Thankfully, I have never been a defendant in that kind of situation, where I have needed an attorney to stand by my side, pleading my case. I have, though, been to several trials – sometimes to support a member of the church or the loved one of a member, sometimes to watch a case where I have a personal interest. I think of attending the trial of my wife’s old boss from the restaurant where she worked. Thankfully, that man is now in prison. But one thing I have noticed while observing several courtroom situations is that those who have an attorney are usually more relaxed. Without an attorney, there is often a sense of confusion – Who says what and when? What are my rights here? What are my choices? Do I have any options? What comes next in this

process? A good attorney, though, can guide a defendant through that process, because a good attorney will often know what comes next and will know what needs to be said and when.

But even outside of a courtroom, some of us know the value of a good attorney from personal experience. Back before we got married, we actually purchased a house together down in Janesville. The problem was: We were still in college down in Tennessee. We found a house over the winter break before we got married in May, and once we found a house, we quickly realized that we were going to need some help. I was only 20 years old, my bride-to-be was only 19, and we had no idea what we were doing. We checked with a credit union, a savings and loan, and a bank to see about a loan, and the first two literally laughed at us when we sat down and told them we would like to check on getting a mortgage. The nice lady at the bank, though, was very helpful, and I think it was through her that we found a local attorney – David O’Leary, who later went on to be elected district attorney of Rock County. The house was for sale by owner and had been a rental, so there was no real estate agent involved, and we needed someone on our side. And that is what Mr. O’Leary did. He stood by us and walked us through it. With his help, we took care of nearly all of the paperwork through the fax machine at the Freed-Hardeman library, and the closing was set for our spring break. We drove 600 miles north to Janesville, we went to the bank where we met the seller and the lender, our attorney was there by our side, and when the bank gave us something to sign, Mr. O’Leary would look it over and give us the okay. And we trusted this man. As our attorney, he was paid by us, and so his only concern was to protect us and our best interests. We then went on to make two house payments together before we got married – we just signed our paychecks down there and sent them up to Wisconsin! But the closing was very smooth, and when it was over, we gave a check to Mr. O’Leary, knowing that it was some of the best money we had ever spent. I want to say it was something like \$178, which is nothing compared to the peace of mind we had knowing that this experienced attorney was there by our side.

Whether we are in court or at something as relatively simple as the closing on a house, there is great comfort in knowing that we have somebody standing by us, guiding us through it. And that is the way it is with Jesus. Satan accuses, we stand before God – literally, as guilty as sin – but Jesus stands beside us. And as our Advocate, the Lord Jesus is perfectly and uniquely qualified to stand in that position – fully human, and yet fully God at the same time – human, yet completely sinless, the only one to ever live a perfect and sinless life. The writer of Hebrews makes the argument that since Jesus is perfect, ***“Therefore He is able also to save forever those who draw near to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them”*** (Hebrews 7:25).

And Jesus takes our case, going into it knowing that we are indeed guilty. This, of course, presents a challenge: If you are representing someone who is clearly guilty, how might we handle that? How do attorneys handle that scenario today? Many times they will go looking for a loophole. They will go looking for a technicality. Yes, my client might be guilty, but nobody read him his rights, or he was mistreated, or the cops were biased, or some kind of form was filled out incorrectly, or whatever. With God’s law, though, there are no loopholes. In a human court, some attorneys might make the claim that their client is actually innocent. And that is certainly a possibility here. Sometimes police do get the wrong person. But when it comes to sin, our guilt is not in question. We learned that last week. If we claim to have never sinned, we are lying. Here on this earth, some attorneys might claim that their client didn’t know any better, that they were simply ignorant of the law – maybe they just moved here from another country or whatever. Concerning sin, though, Paul makes the point in Athens, Greece (in Acts 17:30) that a plea to ignorance might have worked in the past (in Old Testament times), but that “God is now declaring to mankind that all people everywhere should repent.” Ignorance of God’s law can no longer be used as a valid excuse.

So we have a problem again – we have sinned, we need someone to plead our case, we have an advocate who is perfectly qualified, but there is no question that we stand guilty and condemned before the court. There are no loopholes. We are indeed guilty of the charges filed. Ignorance is no excuse.

III. **This dilemma leads us to verse 2 where we find that Jesus not only stands by our side pleading our case before the Father, but he has also ALREADY PAID THE PRICE FOR OUR SIN.**

As John says in verse 2, *“...and He Himself is the propitiation for our sins.”* Now *“propitiation”* is not a word that most of us use on a daily basis! We look it up, though, and the word John uses here refers to “satisfaction” or “appeasement.” At least one translation refers to Jesus being the *“atoning sacrifice.”* And the idea is that of a sacrifice that appeases or satisfies the wrath of God. Normally, most of us do not always think of God as being angry, and yet when we look at what sin is, the picture starts to come together.

Sin is a transgression of God’s law. God says, “Don’t cross this line,” and we cross the line. Or (as we pictured it earlier), God shows us perfection, we aim for that perfection in our own lives, but we miss, we fail to accomplish what we set out to do. Now, if this were some kind of personal offense against God, God could say, “Oh, don’t worry about it.” He could brush it aside. But sin is more than that. Sin (in a sense) is rebellion against God, and justice demands that something be done. And so in that sense, the wrath of God must be satisfied. Some kind of penalty needs to be paid.

In the Old Testament, the wrath of God was satisfied with the shedding of blood, with the continual offering of various sacrifices. And in that way, the people could see the seriousness of sin; in some small way they could feel the pain of their sin. But the idea is: They were guilty, but this animal stepped in and died in their place so that justice was satisfied. There was a substitution. We think of Abraham offering Isaac and how the ram appeared at the last moment as a substitute for the life of Isaac. Later, we think of the Passover lamb that was sacrificed to protect the people from the angel of God as he passed over the land of Egypt. That lamb stepped in as a substitute. Later, the people were commanded to bring that lamb into their home (almost as a pet) for four days leading up to the sacrifice so that they get to know that animal, so that they would have a deeper understanding for what was happening there, so that they would feel it. But that is the idea in the Old Testament: Something had to pay the price for sin so that justice could be satisfied.

We might picture it like the courts today might picture something like driving under the influence. If I hurt somebody personally, I might need to make some kind of restitution, I might need to repair some damage, I might need to pay for somebody’s hospital bills. Or maybe the family I’ve harmed might be willing to forgive. But there is a deeper issue there. The law itself has been broken. And so there is a penalty that must be paid – a fine, or jail time, something needs to happen so that justice is carried out, so that the wrath of the system is satisfied.

And again, I know we don’t like to think of God as being angry, and yet think about what Jesus himself said in John’s own gospel account, in John 3:36, *“He who believes in the Son has eternal life; but he who does not obey the Son will not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him.”* And so yes, the wrath of God is definitely still a factor these days. And the problem is: The penalty for sin is too great for us to pay on our own. As Paul says in Romans 6:23, *“the wages of sin is death.”* The price we pay for sin is spiritual death, eternal separation from God.

Thankfully, though, our Advocate not only stands beside us, but he has also paid the penalty for us! He is *“the propitiation for our sins,”* as John says. He is our *“atoning sacrifice.”* His death satisfies the wrath of God. And

the only reason this is true is because Jesus himself is perfect. Jesus never stepped across the line. Jesus never missed the mark. Instead, Jesus lived a perfect life and chose to die in our place on the cross. He became our Passover Lamb (as Paul points out in 1 Corinthians 5). He is our substitute. And so in that sense, our sins are “covered” by his blood. If we go out to eat and the server brings the check, and if I say, “It’s okay, I’ve got you covered,” we know what that means. It means that I am taking care of that bill that has come due. That is a small picture of what Jesus has done for us. As our Advocate, he not only pleads our case as he stands by our side, but he steps out and announces that he has also paid the price for our sin.

Can we imagine an attorney who would dare offer to pay a fine or go to jail on behalf of a client? And yet isn’t that what Jesus has done? He has paid the price. He has satisfied the wrath of God. He has restored a sense of justice. In an earthly courtroom, if a judge levies a fine of \$200 for speeding, and if the attorney steps forward and says, “Your Honor, here is a check for \$200. I would like to pay this fine on behalf of my client,” what more can be said? Justice has been served. That fine has been paid, and the defendant is in the clear.

This is what Jesus has done for us. His blood has covered our sins. By the way, a form of this word translated here “propitiation” is actually translated as **“mercy seat”** over in Hebrews 9:5 where the author refers to the cherubim covering the **“mercy seat”** or literally, the “place of propitiation.” So, just as people went to the mercy seat for forgiveness under the Law of Moses, today we go to Jesus who covers our sins with his blood.

And as we think about Jesus paying the price for our sins, we cannot miss something John points out at the very end, **“...He Himself is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for those of the whole world.”** This does not mean that everybody’s sins are automatically forgiven – we need to be Christians in the first place, our sins must be covered by his blood in baptism, and then when we sin we need to walk in the light and confess (as we learned last week), but the point here is: The sacrifice of Jesus is big enough for all of us! And, this is not a blessing we can keep to ourselves! To me, it seems there is some outward focus here. We think of the four living creatures and those 24 elders in Revelation who praised Jesus by singing, **“Worthy are You to take the book and to break its seals; for You were slain, and purchased for God with Your blood men from every tribe and tongue and people and nation.”** He is the propitiation (the atoning sacrifice) for everybody, for all who are willing to believe and obey.

And really, that sets us up quite well for what comes next. So I hope that you can join us next week as we move forward into the next paragraph.

Conclusion:

For this morning, though, we’ve learned that since we sin we need an Advocate, and thankfully, Jesus is not only fully qualified to stand by our side, but he has also already paid the penalty for our sins. We thank God for his indescribable gift! What really amazes me about all of this is that when Jesus went to trial before Pilate, then Herod, and then back to Pilate, Jesus never really spoke up in his own defense! And even without a defense attorney of his own, Jesus was declared innocent by the Roman governor – not once, not twice, but three times! And now, having offered himself as a perfect sacrifice for our sins, the one who would not even argue his own defense now appears before our Father in heaven – for us, presenting his blood as evidence on our behalf.

Those who have not obeyed the gospel will be facing God with no advocate, with no one to stand by their side. Thankfully, though, the offer of salvation is completely free and open to everybody. We must believe the good news, and we must obey it – turning away from sin, turning from darkness to light, and then we must

allow ourselves to be buried with Jesus in baptism. At that point, the Christian life begins, and the blood of Jesus continually covers our sins as long as we walk in the light and confess our sins to God. If you are ready to accept Jesus as your Advocate, we would invite you to obey the gospel right away. You can talk to us after the service, or you can come to the front right now as we sing this next song. Let's stand and sing...

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