



Sermon, Sunday April 14, 2024 “Jesus, the Word of Life!”

SCRIPTURE: 1 John 1:1-10 ¹ We declare to you what was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the word of life— ² this life was revealed, and we have seen it and testify to it and declare to you the eternal life that was with the Father and was revealed to us— ³ what we have seen and heard we also declare to you so that you also may have fellowship with us, and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. ⁴ We are writing these things so that our joy may be complete. ⁵ This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light and in him there is no darkness at all. ⁶ If we say that we have fellowship with him while we are walking in darkness, we lie and do not do what is true; ⁷ but if we walk in the light as he himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin. ⁸ If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. ⁹ If we confess our sins, he who is faithful and just will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. ¹⁰ If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.

Introduction: The Early Church and the Gnostics

Today is the third Sunday of Easter. Today’s text is 1 John which begins with the words, **“We declare to you what was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the word of life”**. The expression **‘the word of life’** in this verse is a translation of the Greek word **‘logos.’** Logos is a philosophical term that refers to reason, and rationality. In other words, logos is the most fundamental force that understands and explains the world.

The word logos appears intensively in John 1:1 and refers to Jesus Christ. Apostle John believed that all creatures can properly understand the world and experience life only through Jesus.

Today’s text contains similar expressions from John 1:1. However, at the end of 1 John 1:1, it says, **‘what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the word of life’**.

Apostle John said these words in relation to the situation of the early church. 1 John 2:19 says: **“They went out from us, but they did not really belong to us. For if they had belonged to us, they would have remained with us; but their going showed that none of them belonged to us.”**. The people who have gone out from us in this verse are the Gnostics.

The early church fathers strongly warned against the activities of Gnostics within the church. Additionally, the early church fathers thought that the Gnostics denied the historicity of Jesus Christ. This means that Gnostics deny that Jesus lived as a human being.

Gnostics believed that if Jesus was the Son of God and the Messiah, there could be no human limitations. So, they clearly distinguished between the appearance and essence of Jesus, who lived a real human life. In other words, the Gnostics argued that the essence of Jesus was a completely spiritual being and that his body appeared to the world as a fake. If we accept their words, Jesus' pain and suffering on the cross also becomes fake because God is a being who cannot suffer. Scholars say that these Gnostic claims are Docetism.



The reason why John says in today's text, **'This is what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands'** is to reject the claims of these Gnostics.

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ! Can you agree that Jesus was a man who lived a human life like us? During the period of Jesus' life, he ate, drank, laughed, and mourned with his disciples. If we have confidence and faith in these facts, the claims of the Gnostics will not distort our faith.

Please do not forget that like the early church in today's text, the claims of the Gnostics can distort and lead us astray in our religious life. So, what is the problem with the claims of the Gnostics, and in what ways do they lead us astray in our religious life?

Body: Jesus Christ, the word of life!

Gnostics argued that the human flesh was evil and only the human spirit was pure. Therefore, they argued that human physical life should be denied, and spiritual life should be encouraged. So Gnostic teachers usually lived ascetically. We cannot deny or criticize this ascetic life itself. However, humans cannot become clean or pure by living an ascetic life. So, verse 10 of today's text says, **"If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us."**

This is a passage in which Apostle John points out that the Gnostics' understanding of humans and sin is wrong. Extreme Gnostics thought that no matter how sinful their bodies were, it was okay if their spirits were clean. Conversely, among the Gnostics, there were some who lived completely ascetic lives, but there were also many who lived decadent lives.

In other words, the Gnostics who lived ascetically claimed that they had no sin because they did not actually commit sin, and those who lived according to physical desires claimed that they had no sin because such a life had no effect on their souls. Both are hypocrisy. Human beings cannot achieve salvation with such a hypocritical life.

However, a hypocritical attitude toward life is not a religious phenomenon that only appeared in the early Christian era, but a universal problem that appears in our lives as well. Additionally, many people have little awareness of the sin that is evident in their lives.

However, the early church overcame the temptation of the dualism that distinguished spirit and body that appeared in Gnosticism. Additionally, we have constantly acknowledged and confessed the fact that our entire personality has fallen into sin.

This is acknowledging that not only our bodies are sick, but our souls are sick as well. That is why we pray to the Lord to have mercy on us and to forgive our sins. This is a Christian attitude of faith that is never seen among Gnostics.

These Christian acts of faith contain accurate insight into humanity and salvation. Verse 9 of the text says: **"If we confess our sins, he who is faithful and just will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness."**

As can be seen from this passage, early Christian leaders thought very thoroughly about the problem of sin in understanding humans. The leaders of the early church clearly knew that no matter how ascetic a person is, (he or she) is not free from sin, and no matter how much (he or she) separates their soul from their body, is not free from sin.

They learned this spiritual insight during the spiritual battle between Jesus and the Jewish legalists. Jesus called the scribes and Pharisees who specialized in studying and practicing the law hypocrites. Apostle Paul also said that the law causes wrath (Romans 4:15). This is a paradox that arises not because the law is bad, but because it is good. In other words, if we admit that we have sin, we can find a clue to the solution, but if we



claim that we do not have sin, we are denying God and cannot solve the problem of sin. Verse 8 of the text calls this human behavior **‘deceiving ourselves,’** and in verse 10 it is called **‘making God a liar.’**

So, you may ask, what difference does it make if we acknowledge sin and live like Christian teachings? Verse 9 of today’s text says: **‘God, who is faithful and just, will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.’**

Christians are people who focus on this fact. In other words, we leave everything to God to cleanse us, not to anything else in the world. The key to solving the problem of sin is Jesus Christ, the word of life. So, Apostle John said in verse 7, **“the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin.”** and in verse 9, **“If we confess our sins, he who is faithful and just will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”**

The reason why Apostle John mentions the ‘blood of Jesus’ in verse 7 of the text is because Jesus’ death on the cross is related to the sacrifices of the Old Testament era.

In the Old Testament, Jews thought that their sins would be forgiven by slaughtering a clean animal and sprinkling its blood on the altar. Early Christians who were aware of this tradition believed that the Jewish ritual was completed through the death of Jesus Christ on the cross.

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ!

The cause of sin is separation from God, the Lord of life. And the result of sin is death. So, being forgiven of our sins means gaining life by resolving our separation from God.

However, we often live without seriously considering this ‘problem of sin’ in our lives. This does not mean that we should live in a state of guilt. Rather, believers are people who have received a solution to the problem of sin through the gospel of Jesus. Nevertheless, living while overlooking the problem of sin is as hypocritical as the life of the Gnostics.

We may overlook it, but the problem of sin dominates and affects every area of our lives. So we must seriously think about this problem and focus on the fact that this problem was solved only through Jesus' death on the cross. It is hypocrisy and arrogance for us to think that the problem of sin has been solved by anything other than Jesus' death on the cross.

Conclusion: The Word of Life from the Beginning

Now let’s summarize today’s message. Jesus' death on the cross represents the death of the innocent. Jesus’ disciples experienced the death and resurrection of Jesus. Also, we experienced this through God’s word and grace.

People who have experienced Jesus, the word of life, are free from sin and free from the fear of death. These people can shout, as in today’s text, **“The blood of Jesus will cleanse us from all sin.”**

Those who have experienced Jesus, the word of life, do not fall into a hypocritical life or claim that only their souls are pure and godly. This is because our Christian faith began with Jesus Christ, **“the word of life from the beginning of time.”** I hope that we all experience the fullness of grace every day through our fellowship with Jesus. Amen!

