

Anglican Church Noosa
1 John 1:1 – 2:2 LIGHT
BELIEVE IT LIVE IT
Rev Chris Johnson – April 11, 2021

I want to start with a very basic question this morning. **Is it possible to know God?** Yes I know most of you have already settled that question many years ago. But I want to speak especially today to anyone who is still seeking. And for the rest of us it is a good refresher in the basics on how do we know we know God.

There are many people from many different faiths and backgrounds who claim to know God. So how can we be confident in our own belief about Jesus being the way to God.

There are some Christians who would even claim it's presumptuous to say that you know God. They only look at it from a human perspective. We are all grasping after truth so sit with it lightly and don't presume to talk about first hand knowledge of God.

What I hear expressed sometimes is - it's a good idea to hedge your bets. Alongside Christianity add a bit of Buddhism and Islam and the latest in personal development. If you cover all your bases you can't go wrong.

This morning we start a **new series in the First Epistle of John**. What the Apostle John wrote back in the first century can directly address these questions that people ask today.

John was very privileged to be alive when a person by the name of Jesus of Nazareth walked on this earth. Not only that but this itinerant preacher called John to be one of his apostles. John has recorded his experience in a Gospel and three Epistles. This morning we look at the first Epistle.

This Epistle is **not** a structured, well developed theological argument. It is a **patchwork of themes** that overlap and repeat throughout the epistle. It is a **pastoral letter** written to churches who counted the Apostle John as their spiritual leader, and exhorting them to faithfully follow Jesus.

It is fair to say John shoots from the hip. He is very direct! in both a stern and loving way. There are **stern words** to those who have strayed from the truth, but very **loving words** of encouragement for his congregations to know they have an assured relationship with God. John reveals in his writing a huge pastoral heart.

Throughout the letter John holds out the idea that it is **possible to know God**. In fact he states this in 5:13, *"I write these things to you who believe in the name of the son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life."*

However, there is plenty in the letter to make one think twice about claiming to know God. Eg Ch 3:6, *"No one who continues to sin has either seen him or known him."*

We all continue to sin don't we?

Can we claim therefore to know him?

Whatever this assured faith is it must be based in right belief and right behaviour. Throughout the epistle John exhorts his congregation to believe the gospel and live the gospel. **To believe it and live it**. He wants his congregation to examine themselves carefully to make sure they have a robust consistent faith.

In this first chapter John certainly holds out **the possibility of truly knowing God**. And it is based around the word **fellowship**. In verse 3 he says his aim in writing is, *"...so that you may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ."* Fellowship implies close relationship so John is saying here he wants to have a close relationship with them and that together they might have a close relationship with the Father and the Son.

Little further down in verses 6 and 7 John gives more definition to this fellowship.

In v6 there is a warning that, *"If we claim to have fellowship with him yet walk in darkness we lie and do not live out the truth."*

And **in v7** this is turned into a positive. *"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."* So here again the possibility of close fellowship

with one another is held out. And the possibility of fellowship with God is also entertained because the stain of sin has been purified through the blood of Jesus. So relationship with God, knowing God is very real for the Apostle John. And I would suggest if you especially read through John's Gospel intimacy with the Father and the Son through the Holy Spirit is an overriding theme.

So what other evidence does John present in this first chapter that would lead us into this confident faith that allows us to say we know God?

Narrow it down to two things.

1. vv1-4 The Son, the Word of Life has come in the flesh.
2. vv5-2:2 The reason he came was to deal with sin.

Another way we might think of this theme is in terms of Christmas and Easter. Christmas is about the word become flesh. Easter is about Jesus Christ being the atoning sacrifice for our sins. In the theologian's language we could say the two themes are incarnation and atonement.

Let's look at the Word of life who has come in the flesh - the incarnation in this passage.

John gives first hand testimony of having been with Jesus the Word of life.

In v1 he says *"That which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched - this we proclaim ..."*

In v2 he says *"The life appeared; We have seen it and testify to it"* and

And in v3 *"We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard."*

The Apostle John is giving first hand eyewitness testimony to the fact that he was with Jesus and therefore his testimony is reliable and his readers should take careful note of what he says. Later on in the Epistle we discover that there has been division in the church. Some people in the church claim Jesus was a spirit, not a real flesh and blood person. These people in the early church were called Gnostics. It seems they had left the church and they were trying to draw others away from the church as well. More on them in future weeks .

Here at the beginning John wants his readers to be very clear that Jesus was a real human being who could be interacted with like any other human being - he could be seen touched and heard. The Apostle John wants people to be confident that they have fellowship with the Father and the Son, because of the testimony he gives.

The whole of this epistle is **written with great authority**. this is not surprising because John is an Apostle who has this first hand experience of Jesus. He wants those who have not had this first hand experience to have the same confidence and joy that he has.

The second reason for confidently knowing God is **the reason he came**.

It was to **put away sin**. This is very clear in v7 where the Apostle says at the end of the verse, *"The blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin."*

In Ch 2 he talks about Jesus being our **advocate with the Father**. This means he pleads our case before the Father.

Next, he is the **atoning sacrifice for our sins**. John knows that Jesus' death on the cross was to pay the price of sin so that we might be purified from all unrighteousness.

John makes it very clear in many places throughout the epistle that sin cuts us off from God and people who habitually and deliberately sin cannot know God. He knows sin has to be dealt with for a person to have a relationship with God.

John has a very clear understanding of why Jesus came. He came to die on the cross to put away sin. We can be very confident of a relationship with God.

Another image the Apostle uses in this opening chapter which conveys this same theme is that of **light and darkness**.

Jesus is the light entering the darkness and dispelling it. I can't help but think of the way John starts his **Gospel** with this same theme. John1:9 *"The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world."*

and in v5 *"The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it."*

The way John expresses it in his **epistle** is

V5 *"God is light; In him there is no darkness at all."* Yes, God is light but what about us? We have a choice – to live in darkness or choose the light.

If we **choose darkness** v6 says we cannot claim to have fellowship with him. We cannot claim to know him. John says we are liars and do not live out the truth.

If we **choose the light** v7 says, *"We walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another."*

So there is a clear choice to be made,

And of course John wants his congregation too choose the light and therefore enjoy fellowship with one another and with the Father and the Son.

Imagine a **large mansion** that hasn't been lived in for many years. The curtains are drawn and the house is very dark and eerie inside. You walk into one of the rooms and you can barely see your way around. You note there is some exquisite antique furniture but you can only make out the silhouette of these masterpieces with the meagre light that is in the room. Then you go over to large windows which stretch up to the high ceiling and you open the curtains. Sunlight comes flooding in. The first thing you notice is that all the furniture is covered in a thick layer of dust. Without the light you didn't notice the dust, but when the light comes it exposes the dust and the way it is ruining the furniture.

In a similar way our lives are masterpieces but they have been ruined by sin. **Without the light** people don't see the sin and **they think everything is okay**. It is only when you open your life up to the light that you see the problem. Jesus is the light that allows you see the stain of sin and want to do something about it. It is especially his death and resurrection which shows up our sin, that should lead us to repentance and walking in the light.

But let's **examine this walking in the light a little further**. It is not about us trying to be a good person and thinking we are a good person. As soon as we think that, we have missed the mark on so much in this epistle, for example v8 *"If we claim to be without sin we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us."* V10 *"If we claim we have not sinned we make him out to be a liar and his word is not in us."* Walking in the light is not about being sinless.

The truth about walking in the light is found in v9 *"If we **confess our sins** he is faithful and just and will forgive our sins."* And v7 *"The blood of Jesus his son purifies us from all sin."* So it is not about us having to reach a certain standard and then we can say we're walking in the light. It is about confessing that we are sinners and trusting in the blood of Jesus. That is what it means to walk in the light.

-If that is the foundation of your faith then you can have a confident relationship with God.

-If the foundation of your faith is I have to reach a certain standard of goodness then you're never going to be sure.

And how would you know when you've done enough repentance that God will accept you? Trying harder to be a good person is not the primary idea of repentance in the Bible. The **heart of repentance** in the Bible is about giving up on the idea that you can save yourself and laying it all at the foot of the cross, and believing that only God can save. The foot of the cross is the only place where there is peace with God.

Have you experienced **how liberating this is**? Once you have grasped the Easter message that Jesus died on the cross for your sins and rose on the third day to put you right with God, then you will know the power of sins forgiven and you will be able to sing with all your heart I know my Redeemer lives.

The **Apostle John's answer** to the question is it possible to know God ? Is a **resounding yes!** John has personally met Jesus, he has testified having seen Jesus with his eyes, touched with his hands and heard him with his ears. He's a reliable witness. His testimony is that Jesus is the light who is come into this dark world to save us. He does this primarily through **the blood he shed on the cross** and this is what purifies us from sin.

When we give up our own feeble efforts to save ourselves and trust only in Jesus death and resurrection for our salvation **we can be sure of a relationship with God.**