**‘HIS STORY’ - 1,2,3 JOHN – ARE YOU AUTHENTIC OR A LOOKALIKE?**

“Love, love, Love…. all you need is Love” – so sang the Beatles!

“Jesus loves me this I know” is the song that mothers have sung for generations to children. It stirs something deep within us. That the God of the universe might love me! And this is the essential message of 1,2,3 John. God is Love. This is the essential message of not only the John letters but the message of the whole Bible.

Remember John is writing these three letters as an old man. He is reflecting over his life on what matters most, reminiscing about what matters most. We have seen that the books from Hebrews onwards in the Bible all move very strongly with the theme of glory. But it is the glory that comes through suffering, trial, opposition, and persecution. The only exception to this is the short books of John just before the end, and he speaks of love being the litmus test of faith.

The World’s way of education starts in the home, then kindergarten, then school, university and then people write books on their speciality then go on a lecture tour. But in the Kingdom, it’s the opposite. We are educated by the Word and the Spirit that interplays with our life experience and we grow to maturity not by attending a Bible school or theological college but through the school of the Spirit. And it’s not the amount of theology you can digest that matters, it’s how you come to strong convictions about what you believe. Then as you get older you get wiser and lesser things fall away. The issues that once captivated you and divided you from others somehow don’t seem to matter quite as much. *Did he choose me or did I choose him? Exactly how did creation take place? How can I exercise freedom of choice when God knows what I will choose? Can a believer fall away from his faith? Is hell eternal punishment in literal lakes of fire or is that a picture of separation from a holy God?* On and on the questions go….and when you are truly old and wise in the kingdom you come to see – there is only one thing that really matters – it’s a kindergarten type faith of a child – God is love – love one another!

But what strikes me as strange about being human is that just a few minutes after thinking this I can be so self-obsessed with my life, problems, or so filled with rage about what someone has done to me, or how I can make my life more comfort filled, buy this, experience that, travel to there. Have you wondered how we can be so stirred one moment and then so out of tune with God so quickly after? We so quickly turn to make it all about us. God seems to go out of sight in our lives and his love far from us, and we are left groping for what we think will satisfy - money, health, pleasures, and possessions. This two-timing heart of ours. We have the language and theology and can talk the talk – but the walk does not match the talk. It’s to this end that John the beloved disciple writes his three letters.

And we learn to love in Church, home, and work.

**John’s three Litmus Tests**

The commonly used expression ‘litmus test’ comes from the World of science and tests the alkalinity or Ph level in something. But it’s also an expression meaning ‘the acid or definitive test’. And John uses *three well-known litmus tests* to hold a mirror to our lives, to ask of us – is our faith the real thing or a lookalike fake? And this morning I’m going to ask you to try and tell yourself the truth…hold a mirror to your life and let John’s three litmus tests tell you whether you are the real deal – or a lookalike.

**Litmus Test 1 – Light. God is Light….and in him is no darkness at all (1 John 1:5-9).**

He is not like us. In him is light and there is no darkness at all. We on the other hand hide stuff…. darkness lives within and lies close by. The first thing we try to do is hide our stuff.

And here is the truth about light – It exposes the truth about you and me.

We see ourselves for what we are and it is not pretty at times. And telling ourselves the truth about ourselves is not easy either. But it’s the first step to spiritual recovery. We find it hard to let the light of God shine into our hearts because when that happens, we see the dark side… because we are sinners. We have this propensity to go it alone from God – pursue our lives independently from Him and we constantly ‘miss the mark’ of God’s best.

And what God asks us of us is painful….to bring our lives towards his light and let him shine it upon us so we see our sin and seek his forgiveness. If we say we have no sin – then the truth is not in us*…. “but if we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to cleanse us from all unrighteousness”* 1 John 1:9.

John teaches us that God the Father has made a way for us – but without Jesus as our advocate, this is not possible. An advocate pleads for the cause of another. And the blood of Jesus Christ pleads our cause before the Father. But the way requires of us to let his light shine inside.

1 John says - When we tell ourselves the truth then two things happen – firstly we are **forgiven,** and secondly, we have **fellowship** with God and each other. This fellowship is a word called *Koinonia*, it’s a deep close intimate knowing of one another, it’s a ‘we are in this together’ and we are all saved by grace the same way.

So, there is no room for spiritual elitism, pride or arrogance in God’s family. The light you see exposes sin in every one of us. Mine is just like yours…. So, that’s what it looks like from our human perspective…. what does God see when he thinks of us?

And here is the amazing awesome truth. God doesn’t see our sin when we bring ourselves to Him. He sees Jesus. The ADVOCATE. He loves us with an unconditional love that says -

You are mine; you are alive in me and with me and alive to me! And John says this about light…. when we understand this need to walk in the light and allow its penetrating truth to expose what is hidden, we can say the same back to God…. You are mine, you are alive in me and with me and alive to me!

**Litmus Test 2 – Love. God is love and love is of God (1 John 4:16- 21).**

Don’t say you love God if you don’t love one another. For God is love.

No one-word describes God better than love.

Therefore, love will mark those who know God. Our love of Him is demonstrated by our love of each other. But conversely, if you don’t love then you don’t know God. And this love John tells us is not just a woolly warm feeling, it is a gutsy, sacrificial kind of love that gives and will even die for us. This love, John also says produces in us an awareness of how what we do impacts and affects others.

In case we have not yet felt the heat of God’s conviction John spells it out once more even more blatantly. You cannot love God and the World. They are mutually exclusive. So, what does loving the world look like?

John says; Pleasure, Pride and Possessions (the 3 P’s).

Now there is nothing wrong with the 3 P’s. We can take pleasure in music or art. We can take pride in our achievements, or our grandchildren. We can enjoy what we own and worked hard to buy. But the things we own don’t own us! Achievements are a status that ranks you above others, pleasure is not something to line your life with comfort to insulate yourself from needing God in your life. Here is the thing about the three P’s - each of them has the capacity to steer your life away from trusting God. When you make pleasure your goal then you start making decisions based on how you feel, when you make pride in your goal you make choices on how others view you and rank you and the status this gives you, when you make wealth and possessions your goal you insulate yourself from any sense of living in community where others have less than you and you focus on playing with the toys you have bought and worked hard for.

So light and love are the two litmus tests of authentic faith for John.

So, you say you love God then says John – well how intensely does the light of God shine into your life exposing your pleasure, pride and possessions? – how loving are your relationships especially among the people of God? – how are you at obeying the commandments of God?

**Litmus Test 3 – Confession. Water Blood and Spirit (1 John 5:6-8).**

We think of confession mostly in a negative way, which is to bring our sins to God and admit them and then receive his forgiveness. The confessional is still practised today in the Catholic Church. But confession is much more than admitting sin. It has a positive application also which is called ‘declaration’. It is also a declaration of *where* you place your hope and your faith.

Now suddenly John’s letter shoots off on an issue he needs to address. The teachers that were travelling around the churches were teaching a mixture of truth and heresy. John says that really, it’s quite simple to discern truth from false teaching. False teaching will not confess Jesus coming in flesh. These people were teaching that the *divine Jesus* *came on* *the human Jesus at baptism and then left him when on the cross.* At the critical moments when the atonement for our sin was a sacrifice by Christ – the divine abdicated.

Jesus was in other words less than fully divine. They taught that Jesus is a more friendly meek and mild, or a kind of Superman than he is holy and divine. And in doing so they pulled the essence of atoning sacrifice by God himself for his lost world. You see it’s a more believable story…. because we reduce Jesus to a “more human - less Godlike person”. But friends it’s the spirit of anti-Christ. John teaches that the anti-Christ is not personified, it is a spirit that is alive in the world and even in the Church when we reduce the redemptive power of Jesus’ death on the cross - because we find it abhorrent that God would stand back and let his Son die on Calvary’s cross or when we minimise or reduce who Jesus is because we cannot comprehend or agree with its truth. You see here is our problem when it comes to the Bible, we judge the parts we don’t understand or like rather than come as a pupil, learner, or a disciple.

Is the spirit of Anti-Christ alive today? Yes, it is. The Devil prowls around minimising the power of the cross. He provokes our thinking to humanise the gospel message and make it more palatable for people to believe. He challenges our compromise of truth and our fallen thinking that we can somehow learn enough to save ourselves! Friends to get truly saved it is not your brain that needs saving it’s your soul that needs spiritual rebirth and that can only happen with a revelation of *who Jesus is.* And confession and declaration of Jesus contests the Anti-Christ spirit.Who can provide us with this revelation? – Only God by his Holy Spirit can.

This revelation of who Jesus is John says was most seen in two things – baptism in water and his death on the cross. Do you remember what came out of Jesus’ side when a spear pierced him? Blood and water! Add to this the witness of the Spirit and three things declare Jesus as the Christ. May I pause here for a moment to say to you…. If you have not declared Jesus in public water baptism – I, think your faith is seriously questionable! If you don’t have an awareness of sin within and the need for the blood of Christ to cleanse you through and through – I, think your faith might be religious and not genuine! If you never hear nor sense the move or prompting of the Holy Spirit in your life then you might never have experienced genuine conversion. You have without realising bought into the spirit of anti-Christ which looks close to the real thing but is not.

2 John - Did I tell you that loving one another is a litmus test of authentic faith? …. And by the way. *Don’t lose what you have gained.* You won’t if you keep on loving God and loving people.

3 John - Did I tell you that loving one another is a litmus test of authentic faith? …. There was once a leader who was arrogant, insensitive and demanding. And his influence and impact was turning people away from following Jesus. *3 John 11 Don’t let someone else’s bad example destroy your faith in God.* Keep loving God and loving his people.

*Rather let the three litmus tests of authentic faith be yours.*

**Light of God** – let it shine and expose in you what God wants to heal. **Love of God** – let it show. **Confessions of Blood, water and the Spirit**. – let it secure for you a deep settled knowledge – I am his and he is mine, This is why John wrote this book – he tells why 1 John 5:18 *“That you may know you have eternal life”* That you may have certainty that you are his…and you are not a lookalike fake.