

Simple Things 1 John 5:11-12

So think about three things: one is chaos, one is loneliness, and the other is fear. These are three things that you and I, in our culture and in our life, face all the time. Chaos, loneliness, and fear. Me, as somebody who, I have a beautiful wife, I have two lovely kids, I have a home, I get three meals a day (I'm pretty sure), I have two cars that work most of the time, I have wonderful friends and a beautiful community to be part of and a job that I really love even though sometimes it's hard and you guys are frustrating. But in all of that, I still taste the chaos of life. I still am impacted by loneliness. And I still face fear. And you can't run away from it. Last week I talked about this tide of evil – that we all kind of are holding our breath under – that came out of the Garden. And some of those waves that we experience are chaos, loneliness, and fear. Now, if you say, "No, I don't experience those", then you're in a fourth wave, and that's denial. But tonight we're starting a series, up to Lent, called Simplicity, or Simple Things, and what we are going to talk about are just some simple verses that we think are really core to following Jesus, and really core to maybe being part of the Village. And so tonight we're going to talk about 1 John 5:11-12.

Now, John was a disciple of Jesus, and John was ostentatious enough to say in his gospel, his story about Jesus, that he was the disciple that Jesus loved; that's how he identified himself. John writes in the New Testament and he writes three letters. He named them creatively: 1 John, 2 John, and 3 John, and he wrote a gospel called the gospel of John. I don't think he had any part in giving titles to them, because that wasn't part of the thing. But we titled them very creatively. He wrote these. And in his first letter, in 1 John 5, he basically summarizes everything he says in the gospels and everything he says in his letters. And it's: "*This is the testimony that God has given us eternal life and this life is in his son. Whoever has the son has life and whoever does not have the son does not have life.*" This echoes one of the major themes of Scripture, and that is that life can only come through Jesus. But John starts with this word: "testimony". That this is "the testimony". Some translations say, "record". But this is a testimony. To have a testimony, or a record of something, you're proclaiming something. And the proclamation that he's making is that eternal life is in Jesus. That God has given us eternal life. But to have that kind of testimony, you have to come from somewhere. You have to have an experience of something. And so, let me read to you a little bit out of 1 John 1, as to what John's testimony actually is out of which he's making this proclamation that God has given us eternal life. So chapter one of John says this: "*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.*" Now I just want you to catch that theme there. John is saying, "the thing that we have seen and the thing that we have heard." Well if you remember back two sermons to Advent, in Advent we talked about how this angel shows up to the shepherds, and then the thing that they're proclaiming to everybody, and the thing that they're talking about to each other is the things that they have seen and the things that they have heard. And then we jumped forward last week and we looked at Acts 3, and we looked at John and Peter, after Jesus had risen from the dead and ascended into heaven, and they are in front of the Jewish rulers, who are saying,

“You’ve got to stop teaching about Jesus’s healing and Jesus’s name.” And they’re like, “Well, if you’re telling us that we have to stop talking about what we’ve seen and what we’ve heard, then good luck. Because we’re not going to stop talking about what we’ve seen and what we’ve heard.” And John, in 1 John, adds something: “Something we’ve touched.” “We actually wrestled with the Word. We saw the Word. We heard the Word.”

There’s this relationship. So when John is saying, “*And this is the testimony: that God has given us eternal life*”, he’s saying, “I saw eternal life, I heard eternal life, I touched eternal life.” And then he continues and says, “*This we proclaim concerning the Word of life: the life appeared, we have seen it and testified to it, and we proclaim to you the eternal life which was with the Father and has appeared to us. 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, we write this to make our joy complete.*” So, John says that he wants to tell you that there are two reasons he has this testimony that God has given you eternal life (that it’s yours). One of these is reasons is so that you can have fellowship with him. With John. So you can have fellowship with John. Now, when he’s saying that, he’s not saying that he wants to hang out with you and with his first century contemporaries at McDonald’s. That’s not what he’s talking about when he says fellowship. And for you foodies, he’s not talking about Zinburger or any kind of high-falooting place like Harvest, or any other places that you might go to if you’re a person who loves food. He’s not talking about sitting around, hanging out, and having fun. And if you’re a kid, In-and-Out Burger. When John says fellowship, what he’s talking about is communion. He’s talking about the eating of God’s body and the drinking of his blood. The thing that connects us to life. So he’s saying: “What I want is for you to be able to come, together with me, and be in fellowship with Jesus. I want us to be in community together, with Jesus”. And then he says: “*Because I want my joy to be made complete.*” Now, Gareth is sitting here. Gareth makes amazing sweet rolls. Now I know Gareth well enough to know that when he makes sweet rolls, there’s a reason that he gives them away to his friends. Number one is that he wants us all to be fatter than him so that he can feel good about himself. No that’s not true☺. Number two is that his joy is made complete when he sees you eat, or hears about you eating his sweet roll, and you just melt, as the calories and the sugar and the butter...right? His joy is made complete when you taste the thing that he tastes. The thing that he enjoys. So when John is saying, “*This is the testimony, that God has given us eternal life*”, what he’s saying is, “I want you to be with me in this eternal life, and the way that I have touched it, seen it, and heard it, I want you to touch it, see it, and hear it. I want to see that on your face. I want to hear the stories of your experience of Jesus.”

Now, in the gospel of John, John 4:6, Jesus says something really interesting. He says, “*I am the way, the truth and the life. And nobody gets to the Father except through me.*” By me. I’m it. Now, most of us, if you’ve grown up in the church, maybe you’ve thought, “Wow, that’s a great statement by Jesus”. Most of us think, when someone asks, “What’s true?”, you say, “Well Jesus says he’s the truth.” Well here’s the cool thing about that that I haven’t told you in awhile and it’s that, in the Old Testament, we have the Law and the Prophets. And a Jewish person would call that, in general, their Torah. But the Law and the Prophets, for a Jewish person, was called The Way, The Truth, and

The Life. And so a Jewish person would say, the way to God is through the Law and the Prophets. The way to truth is through the Law and the Prophets. The way to life is through the Law and the Prophets. But Jesus said, “No, no, no, it’s not the Law and the Prophets, it’s me. The Law and the Prophets just point to me. I’m the way, I’m the truth, I’m the life.”

Now, John says, *“This is my testimony, that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son.”* But at the end of the gospel of John, John says that the reason he’s telling this whole story, and if you read the first letter of John you will find this out, is because he wants you to believe that Jesus is the Messiah. But there are some problems with belief, right? You can’t just “believe” something (what does that mean?). If you’re going to take hold of this proclamation and say, “This is my testimony. That God has given you eternal life and this life is in his Son, and he who has the Son has life and he who does not have the Son does not have life” – if that’s going to be my testimony, if that’s what I’m going to proclaim, then what does that actually look like? How does that actually happen? Well John, in 1 John 5:1, kind of lays that out for us. It says this: *“Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God”*. Okay, so everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God. So the first thing that you have to believe, the first thing that you have to assent to is that Jesus is the Christ, and is born of God. So part of following God, part of having the testimony that eternal life comes from God – to be able to proclaim that – you have to be able to say, “Okay, well Jesus is the Christ. Jesus is the King. He’s the Son of God.” You have to be able to just say it.

But to say something doesn’t really mean anything, right? You have to have some kind of action that goes underneath that. Something that shows that it’s true. It says, *“And everyone who loves the Father, loves his child as well. This is how we know that we love the children of God. By loving God, and carrying out his commands. This is love for God: to obey his commands and his commands are not burdensome.”* The other day, somehow my son said something about “How do you know that I love you?”, and I said, “When you obey!” Right? What does God say, what does John say is involved in believing? Involved in eternal life? Loving God and his people, loving Jesus and his people, and obeying. So we have a statement: “I believe that Jesus is God and that he was born of God”, which for an ancient person is just saying that Jesus is God. And now I’m willing to act on that. But, you know what, acting on that without any kind of motivation doesn’t go very well. After awhile, belief and acting on belief, without any motivation, doesn’t do anything. And so, it says, *“For everyone born of God overcomes the world. This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith. Who is it that overcomes the world? Only he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God.”* So, part of believing is making the statement. Part of believing is obeying and loving. But the reason that you would do that is that there is this hope that you would overcome the world.

Now, last week I told some people I was going to go see Rogue One. And everybody said, “Oh, well it’s going to end up in your sermon.” And I was thinking, 1 John 5:11-12 – Star Wars – I don’t think that’s going to work.Oh, it does. And for the people who said it was going to be in my sermon, here you go. There is this scene with this monk, and he’s blind, and the monk has this mantra that is, “The force is one with me

and I am one with the force”, and he repeats it when he’s nervous. Or something along those lines. Now there’s this scene at the end of the movie, where this guy and a few of the rebels are pinned down, and they need to get from one place to the next to flip this switch. So the monk stands up as the laser bolts are flying around and he holds his little staff and he’s blind and he begins to walk into the battle field, saying, “I am one with the force and the force is one with me. I am one with the force and the force is one with me,” and he just walks straight through the battle field. As things are flying at him, and he makes it across, and I’ll leave it there. But it’s a pretty compelling scene. And as I think about 1 John 5:11-12, these two verses are very similar to the mantra of this monk. Because as you and I face chaos, loneliness, and fear, the thing that we’ve been given in belief and obedience and love and hope of overcoming, the way that we actually practice that is to stand up, grab our little staff and say, “This is the testimony, that God has given to us eternal life and this life is in the Son. And he who has the Son has life, and he who does not have the Son of God does not have life. And this is the testimony....”

Now here’s what happens when you begin to embrace eternal life. Because, when you’re embracing eternal life, when you’re willing to make the proclamation that Jesus is the Son of God, when you make that proclamation and when you begin to love his people and love him, and embrace the hope that he will overcome, you begin to face chaos. And the thing that you face chaos with is truth. Because there are lots of virtuous people in the world who don’t know Jesus. You do not need Jesus to have virtue. You do not need Jesus to be good. But you need Jesus to have a reason to be good that’s not selfish. That’s not about you. You need a construct that’s moral to ground you. And the thing that’s different about Christianity is that Christianity comes along, and the God of the Universe says, “I am the anchor. I am the Way. The Truth. And the Life. I will give you a boundary. I will put a way.” Now I don’t know how many of you follow history, or like to read about World War II, but when the war ended and the Nazis were on trial, and most of the western world was saying, “How could you do these things?” And the people would say, “Well, but we were just operating according to the rules of our country.” And if you go into the courtroom at Nuremberg, you will see, on one side of that courtroom, there is Adam and Eve and the Serpent, and on the other is the Ten Commandments. And eventually the appeal is, “Well isn’t there a higher law? Isn’t there something beyond your virtually-constructed truth?” Well, in Christianity, eternal life is to say, “You know what’s going to anchor you in the chaos? The thing that’s going to keep you bobbing straight, and not caught off guard and terrified in the chaos of evil? Is Jesus. The way, the truth, and the life”.

Now, the second thing that we face is loneliness. And you would think that maybe this doesn’t connect, but it does. The thing that eternal life offers us, in the face of loneliness, is justice. When you are saying, “This is the testimony that God has given us: eternal life and this life is in his Son and he who has the Son has life,” what you are saying is that there is a justice. Let me explain this. Justice is the highest virtue. Because without justice, you can’t have friendship. Without justice, you are lonely. Think about it: all of our relationships are built on wrongs. You can love me, you can care about me, you can be so nice to me for years, and you do one thing to me, and you will never fix it. Ever. I will hate you for it. Oh, I’ll be nice to you. I’ll be kind. I’ll pretend that

everything's okay. But there is a wound and it will always be there. Because we cry out for justice; it's in our pores, it's the thing that makes life right. Now, 5,000 years ago, the father of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, Abraham, climbed up a mountain with his son. And his son was named Isaac, and according to Abraham, he thought that God had asked him to sacrifice him (which I believe he did). So they went up the hill and Abraham got ready to kill Isaac, and all of the sudden, God says, "No. Wait." And he provides a different sacrifice. And any historian worth his salt (if you took your humanities 101 class you would have found out) that the moment that God stopped Abraham from sacrificing his son was the moment we can trace in history when human sacrifice began to slow down and stop. That is when human sacrifice began to stop being one of the primary ways of worshipping God. That's not that it didn't continue, but it changed in that moment. When God stepped in and said, "Wait. There's another way."

Now, 2,000 years ago, Jesus climbed up a hill, and was killed. And justice was meted out for him so that, when I am super nice to you for a couple years, and then I do something stupid and hurt you, that justice is actually paid, by Jesus. That you and I can actually be friends, because now, in eternal life, we can taste justice. And do you know how we taste justice? Through Jesus. Jesus, who stepped in between our marriages, our friendships, our stupidity, our arrogance, and provides justice for us. So that we can eat the bread, drink the wine, and be in fellowship together. And actually taste goodness. So the way that we stand in the way of loneliness is through justice. That's what eternal life offers.

Last, is love. And really, we could say, grace, love, belonging. But really what eternal life offers, when it speaks out against fear, is it really speaks about belonging. Because when you belong somewhere, and to someone, you are loved in spite of yourself. Not because of who you are. Because you belong. That's what grace is: it's belonging. It's actually why we have a belonging service every year. We have a doctrine of belonging at the Village. You belong here and you should be reminded of that, but it's not that you belong in this particular little community. It's that you belong to the table. You belong to Jesus. There's nothing you can do, or can be done to you, that will separate you from the love of God. Nothing. So as we face chaos, loneliness, and fear, my encouragement is for you to imagine yourself as the monk, as chaos and loneliness and fear come flying at you, to stand up, hold your staff, know that you're blind, and begin to say: "And this is the testimony: that God has given us eternal life". And when you hear "eternal life" I want you to hear, "God has given us truth. God has given us justice. God has given us belonging. And this truth, this justice, this belonging, is in Jesus." And I want you to repeat that mantra. Because no matter how hard you work as good Americans to avoid any kind of adversity and surround your life, as much as you possibly can, without any chaos, without any loneliness and fear, you will face it. It will come knock on your door. And it will meet you every day, and it seeps into your pores. And the only way that you and I can stand against it is to stand with Jesus. To stand in life. So my invitation is simply to take that verse as your mantra this year, and to remember, "That this is the testimony: that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son, and whoever has the Son has life, and whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life."

