

Sermon Series: Where the Lover Meets the Road
“Special Aspects of Christianity Which Make It Work”
Sunday, July 17, 2022
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What makes an experience work for you? E.g., a vacation? Elena and I have been for several years to San Antonio, Texas for our anniversary, and we recently returned from there. A friend of mine said, y’all have been there before, haven’t y’all? And that made me think, why is it we like to return there? Several reasons—the hotel right on the Riverwalk, we have a credit card that usually allows us to have one of our two nights free, the Riverwalk itself with some good Mexican restaurants right on the river, the history of the Alamo, and San Antonio’s close proximity to Houston, where, especially when the kids were younger, we could drop them off at relatives’ houses and Elena and I could have a couple nights away. What makes a vacation work for you? What makes an experience work for you? In our passage today, we are reminded of what makes Christianity work for people. We are reminded about why Christianity is so very good—it is good news! E.g., I was reminded recently why we need to be reminded of this. I got a call recently from a friend whom I had played a role in his becoming a Christian and growing in the Lord, and he moved away and I have not seen him for years. Well, I got a call from him and he had a crisis in his life, and I asked what church he was attending, and the answer was none. I was heartbroken. You too may have had a similar experience. If Christianity works so well, why would he abandon it? I think he forgot, in the ups and downs of life, what makes Christianity work, what makes it such wonderful news. Today we are reminded of it.

READ 1 John 3:19-24 (p. 240)

CONTEXT: John has given them basically two tests for whether they are loving as children of God. First, are they murderers, in a literal and non-literal way. Second, are they into me-me-me, in a concrete and non-concrete way. We are not perfect, just as John's first readers were not perfect, so today's passage addresses how we handle the fact that at times we can be very unloving.

READ vv 19-20. "For the Christian who follows the Truth, he or she should know that there is a solution to a heart that feels condemned: our God Who is greater! Cf. 1:7-9." V 19 begins in the original language with "And in this" (καί ἐν τούτῳ), which refers back to v 18. We recall v 18 states, "Little children, let us know love in word or speech, but in deeds and truth." We notice that v 19 also mentions again "truth". But have you ever felt guilty, even condemned, when you have not lived out v 18? I know I have. E.g., I recall at a previous church I drove by a church member in need because I was so terribly busy, or so I thought, but I carried that guilt with me for a long time, and needed God's forgiveness for my selfishness. E.g, I recall a friend of mine from this area who years ago had cheated on his wife with prostitutes, and around that time he became a Christian, and the guilt on him was great, and he confessed it to his wife. She was a Christian, and she took this very hard, and they had to go through counseling and addressing this ugly part of their marriage. Guilt and self-condemnation could have damaged him severely, but he confessed his sin and repented of it, and received God's forgiveness and mercy. He came to know in his life that God is greater than his feelings of condemnation. God knows all things, and that means He knows our hearts, and He desires desperately to have us reconciled to Him. In 1 John 1:7-9 we read, ". . . 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. If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is

not in us. If we confess our sins, he who is faithful and just will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”

READ vv 21-22. “The Christian who lives in obedience to God has the privilege of boldness in His presence as seen in his or her requests of Him. Cf. Matthew 7:7-11; John 14:12-14; 16:23-24; 1 John 2:28; 4:17.” Isn’t it amazing, that Scripture talks about us not only going to heaven to be with the Creator of the Universe, but also having boldness before Him! E.g., I recall how this was put by a Christian speaker Becky Pippert when she told about a little girl who burst into her parents’ bedroom one night and just said something like, “Here I am!” And her expression was one of knowing it brought joy to her parents. E.g., it is like football players running out of the tunnel before a home game begins when their names are called and they rush out into the open field and enjoy the adulation of the fans. Similarly we can rush into the presence of God with joy knowing that it brings joy to Him, and we can have boldness because our sins are forgiven and we are seen as perfectly righteous in His sight! And He is a heavenly Father that greatly desires to bless us and to grant us our requests. READ Matthew 7:7-11. This idea of God granting our requests may make us feel a bit uncomfortable, because we all know what it is like not to have our requests granted. E.g., when C.S. Lewis was about 10 years old his Mother had terminal cancer, and he prayed to God to heal her, and when she died this tragic event in his young life led him on the path to being an atheist. But we need to remember John 16:23-24 in this respect: “. . . Very truly I tell you, if you ask anything of the Father in my name, he will give it to you. Until now you have not asked for anything in my name. Ask and you will receive so that your joy may be complete.” We pray in His name and thus according to His will, and entrust the answer to Him. In the course of my life I have seen wonderful answerers to prayer, especially during this disaffiliation and my withdrawal from The UMC, and answered prayer in that for both sides there

was mutual respect and appreciated in what was a rather awkward process. And because we are walking with Him, we will ask things according to His will. E.g., I recall when my parents took me out to eat when I was in college and as an adult and they were treating, we never asked for alcoholic beverages, because we knew how they felt about such things, and we didn't drink because we did not want to displease them, because we loved them, so we would ask and want to do things that pleased them. We need to know God like that through spending time in His Word and prayer, and then we will find ourselves thinking His thoughts, and seeing the events of the world through His eyes.

READ vv 23-24. “The Christian thus enjoys a relationship with God, where He remains with the believer through the Holy Spirit! ‘Obedience to the Lord’s commandments is not the cause but the proof of His people’s dwelling in Him’ (F.F. Bruce, *The Epistles of John*, p. 100).” Just in case we have forgotten what God’s commandments are, John provides them: believing in the name of Jesus the Son of God and loving one another. The two are closely linked. F.F. Bruce in his commentary on 1 John explains that to believe in Jesus’ name is to believe in His character— His love, His forgiveness mercy, His righteousness, His holiness— and in His person, in Him in particular as the crucified and risen Son of God. And because we follow and believe in Him, we will be like Him and love one another. But, how do we do this? Through the Holy Spirit living in us. He remains in us, John says. Have you ever had someone remain with you for a time and it was precious? E.g., I recall after about our first year in Aberdeen, Scotland, we had Elena’s family come and visit us and spend about 10 days or so with us, and it was wonderful, and we had so much fun, and they remained with us in our flat, and then it came time for them to leave, and it left me and Elena in tears, literally, because their remaining with us meant so much. That is what it is like to have the Holy Spirit remain in us— He is precious, and will never leave us, and will

strengthen us to live in His ways. I know what it is like to have fallen away from the Lord and to have come back when I was in high school, and I missed that peace of walking with the Lord.

“Have you and I relished these special aspects of the faith, or do we take them for granted?” If we take them for granted, we will very easily wind up like my friend, who no longer goes to church, and is so troubled by life. But if we embrace God’s being greater than our self-condemnation, that we can boldly come into His presence and make requests as we walk with Him, that He remains with us and within us through a relationship in the Holy Spirit, then we will be secure. And He can use us to move this world toward Him.