

SERIES: Authentic Christian Community

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Message Title: Dancing in the Light

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Years ago, when I was a college student in downtown Chicago, for a couple of years I had a job as a maintenance man, for a guy who owned a bunch of apartments, just a little bit north of the downtown area. He had some that were pretty decent, but he also would purchase apartment buildings that had been condemned by the city of Chicago. They were still occupied, but they were condemned; and he would pick them up cheap; and then basically the city of Chicago would send a notice of everything that had to be brought up to code; and I'd get the list, and that was my to-do list for the next several months. And one of the memories that's really vivid in my mind is: when I'd get a call to go to one of these apartments in the evenings—something broke or whatever—and I would be in there and it's dark outside. Some of these were occupied and some of them weren't, but if you went into the apartment in a lot of them, and you turned off the lights and you just waited, pretty soon you'd start to hear something. And if you waited long enough, and flicked on the light, dozens of rats would scurry back into the darkness.

Every single person was created for relationship; your soul longs to experience relationship with God and, until you give your soul what it longs for, your soul will be restless. But here's the deal: **God only dances in the light. If you're going to dance with God, you must dance in the light. But when we come into the light, our rats are exposed. And what you do at that moment, will determine the difference between a soul that thrives and a soul that struggles in despair.**

If you have a Bible, turn with us to 1 John, Chapter 1. All life flows out of the life of God. Therefore, there could not be a life that's deeper, richer or more fulfilling than the life you find in God. For all eternity, God the Father, God the Son, God the Spirit, have celebrated life together in relationship—the Father loving on the Son, the Son on the Spirit, the Spirit on the Father, glorifying one another, celebrating one another, loving one another, giving oneself away, forever.

With that in mind, we pick it up in Verse five.

This is the message we have heard from Him and announce to you, that God is Light, and in Him there is no darkness at all. (*NASB, 1 John 1:5)

God is Light. It isn't just that there is light; God **is** light. Because of that, there is no darkness; there are no shadows; there are no pockets; there's nowhere to hide. The Greek is really emphatic; there is no darkness at all! Now in an ancient culture, the metaphor of light and darkness was very powerful. It loses some of its impact in our culture, because we have electricity and we have flashlights—we have so many sources of light. But in an ancient culture, when it was dark, it was really dark, and so you better be very thoughtful about what you get

done in the light, because you can't get much done in the dark. So it was a dramatic contrast between darkness and light. What John is saying, is that God invites us into the dance but, if you're going to dance with God, you must dance in the light.

Verse 6:

If we say.....now there are three of these *if we say* statements: Verse 6, Verse 8 and Verse 10. These three represent the false teaching that these people were being exposed to. This is what they're hearing and John is challenging it.

If we say that we have fellowship (*we have koinonia; we have this deep, rich community*) **with Him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth;** (Vs. 6)

In other words, if we say we dance with God but we're dancing in the dark, then we're lying, and the truth is not really in us. Now John talked about this idea of light and darkness in his Gospel. In John 3:16, very familiar words, "For God so loved the world," but if you keep reading down to Verse 19, John starts talking about Jesus as *the light*. Jesus declared, "I am the light of the world. He who follows after me will not walk in darkness but will have the light of life." But this life must be lived in the light. Jesus goes on to say in John 3 that *men prefer darkness*. Why?—*because their deeds are evil*. In other words, when I'm in the darkness, I can hide my rats and no one needs to know, but when I step into the light, my rats are exposed. When we step into the light and our rats are exposed, the knee-jerk reaction is to pull back out of the light. And basically, what we do is, we wander down the street and we open our own dance studio, because our soul still longs to dance. But I don't want to dance in the light, because I don't want my rats exposed, so I'm going to open my own dance studio. Only the rules in my dance studio are that we only dance in the dark—no rats exposed. This is really important to understand, because I think this happens a lot in Christian circles. There's something deep within us that longs for this deep, rich community but, when we're exposed in the light, we don't want that, so we pull back. But my soul wants something, so we set up something that's artificial—a counterfeit—a cheap imitation of what my soul really longs for. This can be in the living room of my home; this can be in the coffee shop; this can be anywhere. This can be in a ministry context; this can flow out of me starting my own ministry! It's trying to give my soul what it wants, but will only dance in the dark. Everybody agrees; nobody's going to expose anybody else's rat—and so we settle for something far less than what God intended.

Verse 7:

but if we walk [*we're going to change it, if we "dance"*] **in the Light as He Himself is in the Light, we have fellowship** [*koinonia, community*] **with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin.**

Now this is the moment of truth. As soon as *I* step into the light, as *He* is in the light, my rats are exposed. But if I give my soul what it longs for, then the blood of Jesus cleanses me from every sin and we experience fellowship—*koinonia*, community—with one another. Now I think the text kind of surprises us there. You're expecting the text to say, "If we dance in the light, as He is in the light, we have fellowship with *Him*." But that's not what it says. We have fellowship with *one another*; we have community—*koinonia*—with one another. What it's saying is: when we come into the light and we allow the blood of Jesus to cleanse us from our sin, and we enter into

the dance, what we find is, we're not alone there. It now sets up the opportunity for deep, rich community together. True, authentic Christian community only happens in the light, and it only happens when we're dancing with Jesus.

When we come into the light and our stuff is exposed, rather than pulling back into the shadows, we experience God's forgiveness. We go back to Genesis 2 and we stand before God naked and unashamed, and we look around, and we realize we're not alone here. But everything is different now; everything that kept us at a distance in the dark is now removed. There's no rich or poor; there's no black or white; there's no successful or loser; there's none of the stuff that divides us in the dark. It's all stripped away and we're merely sinners who have been made right by the blood of Jesus. We all stand naked and unashamed, and the door is open for deep, rich meaningful community.

Verse 8:

If we say [again, the words of the false teachers] that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us.

If we say we have no sin...he's talking about the false teaching of what was believed to be the early stages of Gnosticism. The Gnostics basically were named after the Greek word *gnosis* which means *to know*. They thought they were in *the know*; they thought they were enlightened and they had created this theology, that the immaterial is good; the material is bad. My spirit is good; my body is bad. My body is, in essence, a prison that houses my soul. The outflow of this theology was to say, that I can do anything with my body, and it doesn't have any effect on the life of my spirit. Therefore I can live a very immoral lifestyle, which they did, and it has absolutely no effect on my relationship with God. So they come into the light and the light exposes their rats, but they are self-deceived and they say, "Hey, I don't have any rats; I don't have any sin." We could spend all day talking about the Gnostics but the relevant point is: In what ways are we like them?

Years ago, I heard a preacher say, "Man will construct his theology to fit his morality." There's a lot of truth in that. God has created us in His image; in return, we seek to recreate God in our own image. In other words, we create a theology that doesn't expose our rats. We somehow rationalize; we somehow reason around; we somehow excuse behavior that is offensive to God, and we convince ourselves—in our case—it's just not wrong. We say we have no sin, even within the church. When we talk about things the Bible clearly calls sin, people say, "That's judgmental; that's legalistic; it's really way too rigid; I mean, man, you're cramping my style." And we figure out some way to say—in our case—this is okay. The text says when we do that, we're self-deceived; we're kidding ourselves. What's the alternative?

Well, he tells us in verse 9.

If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

Rather than say, "I don't have any rats; what are you talking about?" we look Jesus in the eye, so to speak, and say, "You're right; I agree with You. This behavior in my life is offensive to You,"

and with that comes an implied repentance. In other words, it must stop; something must change. The word *confession* literally means *to agree with*. Over the years I've found that language to be very helpful in my own personal life. **If we confess our sins He is faithful**—that means *willing*—**and righteous**— that means *able to forgive us our sin and to cleanse us*, to wash away the stain, to make us naked and unashamed before Him. **If we confess**, He is both willing and able to forgive our sin.

Verse 10:

If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us.

When we step into the light, our rats are exposed, and Jesus says, "Those rats must go." But, when we deny that, when we convince ourselves we're okay, Jesus says, "You have a stain on your shirt," and we say, "I don't have a stain on my shirt." We're looking Jesus in the eye and saying, "Jesus, You're a liar." The next time you're tempted to excuse, to reason, to rationalize, to explain away your sin, remember, when you're doing that, you're saying to God, "God, I think you're a liar." And ask yourself, "Are you really wanting to say that to God?"

If I look Jesus in the eye and say, "Jesus, I don't think so; I think You're a liar," I'll pull back in the shadows and find a life of despair.

Chapter 2, Verse 1:

My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. (1 John 2:1a)

The whole appeal is the false teachers were figuring out some way to justify a sinful lifestyle. And John is saying, the whole point is: that's not how we should live.

And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; and He Himself is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for *those of the whole world*. (Vs. 1b-2)

We are not to cultivate a lifestyle of sin but, if we do sin, **we have an Advocate**; we have a *Paraclete*; we have One who stands beside us to defend us—maybe a *lawyer* in today's language would be the closest equivalent. So what he's saying is this: when I do sin, I have an advocate; I have a lawyer to represent me but, not only is he my lawyer, my lawyer is also the One who made payment for my sin. So when I stand before the Father, none other than God Himself stands beside me in the person of Jesus and says, "I'm this man's lawyer and I can tell you that payment has been made for his sin, because I made the payment Myself." Can you imagine there will ever be a moment where God the Father would not accept the payment made by His Son? That is as sure as sure can be!

Verse 3:

By this we know that we have come to know Him, if we keep His commandments. The one who says, "I have come to know Him," and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him; [He's calling the false teachers out.] but whoever keeps His word, in him the love of God has truly been perfected. By this we know that we are in Him: (vs. 3-5)

Those who truly experience intimacy with God, experience God's love **perfected**. That word *perfected* is a Greek word that means *to reach its desired goal*. Basically what he is saying is this: God's core motivation is His love and, because He loves us, He wants us to come out of the darkness into the light. So when we step into the light and our sin is exposed, and we confess our sin and we experience intimacy with Him, His love is perfected; it's reached its desired goal. That's what God wants—that we might find life.

Verse 6:

the one who says he abides in Him ought himself to walk in the same manner as He walked.

In other words, it's not a question of whether you sin or you don't sin. We all struggle and, when we step into the light, our rats are exposed. The issue is: what do you do in that critical moment when the light has exposed your sin? Our knee jerk reaction is to pull back into the darkness, to go down the street, open our own dance studio, and settle for something far less, where rats are not exposed or talked about. Or, we try to stay in the light, but we live in self-denial saying, "I don't see any rats; I don't see any stain; I don't know what you're talking about! Jesus, I think you're a liar!" That doesn't sound like a recipe for intimacy to me.

Or we confess our sin; our rats are exposed and we say to Jesus, "I agree! This is wrong and this is offensive and it's behavior that must stop." And we experience His grace and forgiveness; His blood cleanses us from every stain—that we might stand before Him naked and unashamed. And there we find not only intimacy with God, but true community with one another. **Whatever your "rat" is, if you're willing to confess it and experience God's forgiveness, God grants you the opportunity to walk in the presence of God naked and unashamed.**

Years ago, I was invited to be part of a group of mostly business people that were gathering in Kalamazoo, Michigan, to talk about creating a talent based community. And there were a number of influential people in Lincoln that were going to be part of that. And I kind of was invited as the token pastor, mostly because I was friends with some of the guys. But it was a very impressive group of people, and I already felt a little bit awkward being a pastor. We flew on a private jet, which is my one and only time to do that, to Kalamazoo. Everybody gathered; it was a pretty impressive gathering of people. I tried to participate as best I could, and I remember, mid-morning we took a break, and I walked into the restroom, and the first thing I saw in the mirror is, I had a huge coffee stain on the front of my shirt. There was virtually no way to miss it. And the only time I had had coffee was in my truck on the way to the airport that morning. So basically, every step of the way, while I was trying to be impressive and fit in with these people, I had this gigantic coffee stain on the front of my shirt. I just remember that moment in the restroom looking at it, and thinking, "Oh, great."

Well, that's kind of what John is talking about, is when we come to Jesus, we come to the light and light exposes our rats, and nobody likes that. But that's the moment of truth, where either we pull back into the darkness and hide in the shadows, we deny it, or just pretend like, "I don't have a stain on my shirt." Or you face it, and you deal with it. John says, **"If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."** *Community requires, if we're going to be in the light, we have to deal with our "rats".*

