

2nd John

opening up the letters of John

¹ The elder to the elect lady and her children, whom I love in truth, and not only I, but also all who know the truth, ² because of the truth that abides in us and will be with us forever:

³ Grace, mercy, and peace will be with us, from God the Father and from Jesus Christ the Father's Son, in truth and love.

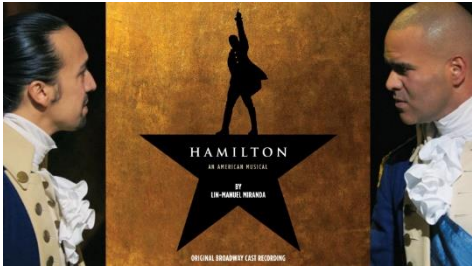
⁴ I rejoiced greatly to find some of your children walking in the truth, just as we were commanded by the Father. ⁵ And now I ask you, dear lady—not as though I were writing you a new commandment, but the one we have had from the beginning—that we love one another. ⁶ And this is love, that we walk according to his commandments; this is the commandment, just as you have heard from the beginning, so that you should walk in it. ⁷ For many deceivers have gone out into the world, those who do not confess the coming of Jesus Christ in the flesh. Such a one is the deceiver and the antichrist. ⁸ Watch yourselves, so that you may not lose what we^[a] have worked for, but may win a full reward. ⁹ Everyone who goes on ahead and does not abide in the teaching of Christ, does not have God. Whoever abides in the teaching has both the Father and the Son. ¹⁰ If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not receive him into your house or give him any greeting, ¹¹ for whoever greets him takes part in his wicked works.

¹² Though I have much to write to you, I would rather not use paper and ink. Instead I hope to come to you and talk face to face, so that our joy may be complete.

There. If you don't do anything else this week, you can say read an entire book in the Bible.

We're going to spend two weeks on this short little letter of 2nd John. And the first week, today, we're going to look at 2nd John – this short little letter – as our introduction to all the letters of John.

Let us begin. And I'm going to begin by introducing a thought; by giving an example. I'm going to begin by talking about musicals. Two of them.

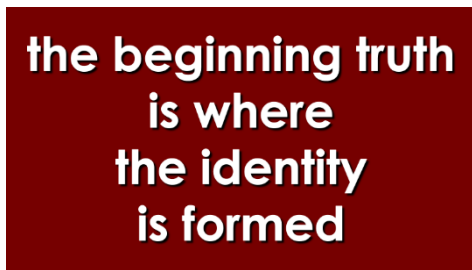


First example, **HAMILTON**.

What I liked about "Hamilton" the musical, when I saw it on Disney+ this summer was the general depiction in the musical of the messiness of life. Our nation's "Founding Fathers" were not saints and they were capable of wrong choices and wrong behaviors.

What I didn't like about "Hamilton" was the extreme liberty that was taken with some of the characters; actually, taken with a lot of the characters. But I get it. Those are precisely the kind of liberties that it takes to make an entertaining show. "Hamilton" was not a re-enactment of history and that's okay.

Expecting ... or receiving ... "Hamilton" as pure history is ... just kinda' foolish. But the reason I even bring up "Hamilton" is because I am introducing a thought. The only real problem that could come from "Hamilton" the musical would be if IT was all you knew or cared to know about the founding of our nation. And the thought I am introducing is that "beginnings" matter; "origins" matters; the earliest truth matters.



People's lives are shaped; Entire nations are shaped by what happened in their beginning, in their origins, when their fundamental truths were hammered out.



So now I move on to the second example. **Jesus Christ Superstar**. It was a musical. And it certainly presented a different view of Jesus. But unlike "Hamilton" where the historical liberties can be swatted away, over the last 50 years in popular culture **Jesus Christ Superstar** has influenced WAY more people about Jesus and about the first disciples; WAY more people in popular culture over the last 50 years than the letters of John or the gospel of John.

And not just **Jesus Christ Superstar**, not by a long shot. 'Cause I'm not just arbitrarily, reactively picking on **Jesus Christ Superstar**. **Jesus Christ Superstar** doesn't happen in a cultural vacuum. It doesn't thrive for 50 years in a cultural vacuum. **Jesus Christ Superstar** is just one of the many expressions of our culture redefining Jesus, telling a different narrative, about Jesus, unpacking a

different history, about Jesus. **Jesus Christ Superstar** is just one of the more famous examples that I thought you may have heard of. There are many more.

Remember: **The beginning truth is where the identity is formed.** That's what's at stake in the letters of John. That's what's at stake for the people who receive the letters of John.

Defining the identity of Jesus is always up for grabs. Defining the identity of Jesus has *always* been always up for grabs. The earliest known depiction of Jesus comes to us from the year 200 AD from graffiti that was scratched in the plaster of a room in a school for slaves. Here it is. I know you can't make it out in the plaster itself.

But here is a line drawing of the graffiti: a man with a donkey's head crucified on a cross.



And the words scratched in the plaster are:
○ **“Alexamenos worship his god.”**

For the Romans this was double insult. You draw someone on a cross and it's like you were drawing someone with a noose around their neck. And, of course, putting a donkey's head on the man is its own insult.

But you see, this graffiti wasn't only an insulting statement about Jesus. It was an insulting statement about Alexamenos, too. You define Jesus, you define the followers of Jesus.

These letters of John are all about **“Who Jesus is,”** and, importantly who are we in our claim to follow Jesus.

Now, I've asked you, and I'm asking you again to simply read these letters over and over, again and again. Particularly 1st John. Because we will be spending more time in 1st John. But just read them, over and over, again and again.

Throughout all of July and August, with the exception of about a week, I read the letters of John every day. And in the repetitive reading I stumbled across something that helped me and I hope it will help you. Personally, I found 1st John to be ... well ... a paradox. 1st John is the simplest book in the New Testament. By that I mean 1st John is written with the simplest Greek vocabulary in the New Testament. When you take Greek at preacher school 1st John is the first book you begin to translate. It's relatively simple, linguistically.

But I said I found 1st John to be a paradox because while the language is simple the concepts are deep. It's the old saying about how the Apostle John writes: *“shallow enough for a child to wade through; deep enough for an elephant to swim in.”*

Personally, I confess, I had trouble wrapping my mind around how to organize 1st John until I began to notice something. For me, I found 2nd John is like a table of contents for 1st John. At least I found it helps me to read it with that in mind. 2nd John kind of highlights what 1st John will give in more detail. Not in every particular, to be sure, but ... broadly.

Look at **2nd John verse 3:**

Grace, mercy and peace will be with us, from God the Father **and from Jesus Christ, the Father's Son in truth and love.**

And halfway through **verse 9:**

Whoever abides in the teaching has **both the Father and the Son.**

opening up
the letters of John
**Emphasizing the
Identity of Jesus**

The first way this 2nd letter opens up the other letters is by **emphasizing the identity of Jesus.** 1st John will begin much like the gospel of John by linking Jesus and God the Father. And throughout 1st John repeatedly the closeness, the union, between God the Father and Jesus Christ the Son is pressed.

You can see the closeness in **1st John 2:23**

No one who denies the Son has the Father. Whoever confesses the Son has the Father also.

This fundamental teaching of the identity of Jesus permeates all the letters of John. And you know why? Because when the letters of John were written the identity of Jesus was up for grabs; was a subject of real debate.

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the letters of John
**Warning about the
antichrist and denying
the Identity of Jesus**

And that leads me to a second way the second letter of John helps me understand the first letter of John. **Warning about the antichrist & denying the Identity of Jesus**

Look at **2nd John**, verse 7:

For many deceivers have gone out into the world, **those who do not confess the coming of Jesus in the flesh.** Such a one is **the deceiver and the antichrist.**

In **1st John chapter 2.18** John warns:

"so many antichrist have come."

And John says, in **1st John 2.22**:

Who is **the liar** but he who **denies that Jesus is the Christ?** This is **the antichrist**, he who **denies the Father and the Son.**"

And in **1st John 4**, beginning in **verse 2**:

By this you know **the Spirit of God**: every spirit that confesses that **Jesus Christ has come in the flesh** is from God,

and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God.

And again, in **1st John chapter 5.1**:

Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God.

And I could go on, but I won't. We need to understand, loved ones, that the gospel of John, and the letters of John, and the book of Revelation, were all written, before the end of the first century;

Faithfulness to the Identity of Jesus mattered!

The early church wrestled with the identity of Jesus. Who Jesus was. Was He real? Was He spirit? Was He flesh? Was He ... God; equal to God; God in the flesh? It was all up for grabs.

And John writes his gospel, and John writes these letters to affirm the identity of Jesus; the Jesus that he knew ... personally. The Jesus John had seen. Consider what this meant for John.

The Jesus John had walked with and eaten meals with and had been there when the thousands were fed in the desert from a prayer of blessing. When the storm was stilled in an instant, at His mere, spoken word. The Jesus John had seen - *had witnessed* - Elijah and Moses talking with Jesus at the Transfiguration. When John had witnessed the agony on the cross and the spear into Jesus' side and blood and water flowed out. John had been there *at the Empty Tomb*; got there first, before Peter, but Peter goes in first and then John goes in and we read in John's gospel "**and he saw and believed.**"

Now, when John is writing these letters, he's writing them as an old man. **50 years have passed.** And so much has happened in that time. What a journey it has been for John since that day he was in his father Zebedee's boat mending nets with his brother James. and Jesus called him to follow Him: "**From now on, I'll make you fishers of men.**"

We are who we are **BECAUSE** He is who He is.

So much has happened. His brother James is long dead, dying for Jesus by the sword of Herod. Peter, oh, Peter: Peter is long dead. *He misses Peter.* The apostle Paul is dead. John is the last one left of the apostles. He calls himself "**the elder.**" The aged one. He feels compelled to KEEP telling about Jesus and being clear about WHO Jesus was and IS. It always gets back to the identity of Jesus. Always.

And that leads me to a third way this little 2nd letter helps me organize how I understand the first letter. As we have already touched upon, John writes about deceivers and antichrists who have gone into the world. But the third way I'm helped *is to understand* that when John talks about "**the world**" - as in, "**these deceivers who have gone into the world**" - he's not primarily talking so much about: this was the deceiver's message to non-believers. Although, certainly, there were people who were promoting a version of Christianity to non-believers that was patently false; an obvious contradiction from the truth. Yes, that was happening out in the world.

opening up the letters of John Loving and protecting the church

But John is also saying there are people who claim to be from us, from the community of Jesus, from the church. **John is loving and protecting the church.**

There are people who are going to other churches – other communities who follow Jesus – and they are teaching what is not true about Jesus. They are not confessing that Jesus has come in the flesh. They are not abiding in the teaching of Christ. They are bringing this aberrant, false teaching into the homes of people who follow Jesus.

And can you imagine how disruptive, how confusing, this could be in the life of those small little church communities all across the Mediterranean Sea, and Asia Minor, and the inland provinces of the Romans Empire? Struggling little communities, *perhaps*, when John writes, probably less than 20,000 followers of Jesus in a Roman Empire of 50 million people.

John, the Apostle, John, the Elder, is simply not going to let this disruption to let this confusion go unanswered. Out of love for Jesus, John loves the people who Jesus loved - who he saw Jesus die for. Yes, Christianity was a growing movement, but Christianity was still a relatively small movement, still a relatively fragile movement

So, in the time of John, people were coming in, sounding for all the world like they know what they're talking about when it comes to Jesus. That Jesus had only appeared in a vision. Or that Jesus had only seemed to be divine. Or that Jesus really wasn't raised from the dead. Or that Jesus really wasn't the sacrifice for sin.

Remember: ***The beginning truth is where the identity is formed.***

And John is ... lovingly protective of the beginning truth about Jesus. And he is lovingly protective of the identity of the people who are following Jesus.

Well, loved ones, for today o that is enough to get us started. I am excited about moving through these letters. I am praying for God to do great things through the power of His Word. We will return to 2nd John again next week.