

The Real Life: How Do You Know If You Are Real - 1 John 3:4-10 – 16 No 2014

Today we come to 1 John, so if you have your Bibles, please turn with me to 1 John and we'll look at chapter 3, today in particular. We began this series some months ago and we recognise that 1 John really talks about the Christian life - the real life; the spiritual life. I began this series by saying that according to the Greek words used in the Bible, there are 3 dimensions to life. There is the physical life, there is the psychological life and there is the spiritual life. In the Greek, they are the words:

- 'Bios' for physical life.
- 'Psyche' for psychological life and then
- 'Zoe' for spiritual life.

How do you know today if you have 'bios'? Well I'm breathing; I'm moving, that tells me I have physical life. How do you know that you have 'psyche'? Well I'm thinking and I'm speaking, that's how I know I have 'psyche' or psychological life. But the question is: how do you know if you have 'zoe', spiritual life? Sometimes we think we have, sometimes we're not so sure. How do you tell if you have the real life or not? It's not always easy.

This week I read in the news that the Madame Tussauds Museum, wax Museum was opened in Sentosa. And one of the wax figurines is that of 'Phua Chu Kang', one of our favourite T.V. characters in Singapore. If he was not here (referring to picture shown on screen), this is a really good wax figure, don't you think? It almost looks real. Gurmit Singh and 'Phua Chu Kang' wax figurine, they look so good together. They look almost identical. In fact, it was so good that I'm told that er... he deliberately removed the wax figurine. He sat there himself, stayed motionless, people sat beside him to take photos and he will 'waahhh' (laughter in the congregation) and... and jump on them and shock them. It's not easy to tell the real from the false sometimes and it is so too, for our Christian lives. It's not always easy to tell a real Christian from a fake one. Don't be surprised! There are.

In this passage, we are reminded that not everyone who says he is a Christian, is really a Christian. There's a story told of a man, a young man who was standing in line to pay at a supermarket. And standing right in front of him in the queue was an elderly lady. This lady was a little bit strange because she kept looking back at him. He turned around many times and... and the man was beginning to feel a little bit awkward. What are you doing? Why do you keep looking at me? Finally, she said, "Young man, I hope you're not disturbed that I keep looking at you, but it's just that

you look so much like my son. My son just passed away and you remind so much... you remind me so much of him. I hope you don't mind." He said, "Sure. I understand that and that's perfectly okay." She went on to say, "Well you know something? Can I ask you a favour? When my son left, when my son passed away, he never really got to say goodbye to me. So when I'm leaving, would you be so kind as to say 'Goodbye Mom' and I'll be so happy if you could." He said, "Sure. I would be happy to do that." And so as she was about to leave the supermarket, the young man said, "Goodbye Mom." And she turned around, gave a smile and waved goodbye. Well it was time for the man to pay and the cashier then told him, "Sir, your bill is \$235.15." He said: "That can't be! I...I...I just bought these five items, it can't be \$235." "Yah, but your Mom said you'll pick up her tab." (Laughter in the congregation)

Just because we call someone "Mom" doesn't mean we are her children. Just because we call God, "Our God", doesn't mean that we are necessarily His children. That's not what John said. He says, "Little children, let no one deceive you. Whoever practices righteousness is righteous, as he is righteous. Whoever makes a practice of sinning is of the devil, for the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil. No one born of God makes a practice of sinning, for God's seed abides in him, and he cannot keep on sinning because he has been born of God. By this it is evident who are the children of God, and who are the children of the devil." (1 John 3:7-10, ESV) John objectively says, this is how I know the real from the false. It is not what you say, it is by this that it is evident. You say by what? That a true child of God will not and cannot keep on sinning. Why? Because he has been born of God. So John's logic is that a true Christian is not just because he says he's a Christian, but he can see he is a Christian. It is not just his talk but his walk that he will not keep on practicing sin.

There is a deception going on in the early church and that's why John says, "My little children, let no one deceive you..." There are false teachers, who teach a heresy. It is a Gnostic heresy. A heresy, a lie, a deception that says, it really doesn't matter how you live your life, you can sin all you want. Well, you may not want to sin all you want but even if you do, you are still a child of God if you know him in your heart. So that is the lie that the Christian can continue to sin, as if he was... as if he had never really known God. If his outward behaviour remains the same, you cannot question him about his relationship with God. That is the lie these false teachers are perpetuating. This is a lie because they believe the soul and the spirit of the man can know God and the flesh and the body can sin against God but they are separate. They see it as separate things. So you can sin with your flesh, but it doesn't affect your relationship with God. But John says that is absolutely rubbish. That is absolutely not true. Let

not these people deceive you. A true born-again child of God does not keep on practising sin. So that was the lie they had to deal with then and maybe that is the lie we still have to deal with today. Because there are people who say, it really doesn't matter how he lives his life, as long as he believes; he says he believes. As long as he has prayed that prayer to Jesus, he is saved. It doesn't matter how he lives. 0:07:43.5

Recently I read an article by this pastor - Todd Wilson and I found it interesting because the subject he was dealing with is: "What does it mean to be real?" So immediately it captured my attention and he gave a simple illustration of Barack Obama. He says, "Perhaps you recall when 2012 presidential hopeful, Senator Rick Santorum claimed that President Barack Obama's policies were based on a different theology." Obama openly says he's a Christian. Senator Rick Santorum says, but his policies are not really Christian, they are of a different theology. So he is hinting that Obama may not be a Christian. Now of course, the reporters, the media picked up on that. This is juicy details. He asked... they asked him further. And on pressing, when Senator Santorum was pressed, he then gave a politically savvy response, very clever way out. He says, "If the president says he is a Christian, then he's a Christian. End of story. Next question, please. Don't ask me anymore." His line of reasoning is: if the president says he is a Christian, then he is a Christian. His answer satisfied reporters and thousands of others following the story. It was as if he said, "To profess faith is to possess faith." But one wonders what Jesus thinks of what Santorum said. This is a statement that we have to ask ourselves. Is this true? If the president says he is a Christian, he is a Christian. Is this statement true when it's applied to you? If I say I am a Christian, it doesn't matter how I live my life, I am a Christian. Is this true for your child? If he or she says he or she is a Christian, then he or she is a Christian. Is this necessarily true?

I read about another example. John MacArthur. He was visiting someone in another town. He was with this seminary professor in theology. Wah, 'high class', okay? And they were walking along the streets and they passed by a liquor store that sells alcohol. And er... he remarked how unique this store is. And the professor immediately says, "Yah... it's very unique. In fact, we've many stores like this in this town. They are all owned and opened by my Sunday school class member." So John MacArthur looks at him and says, "Your Sunday School class member opens all these?" "Yah, he did. But let me tell you, that's not the worst thing he did! He is unfaithful to his wife. He commits adultery and you know I really cannot understand how a Christian can live like this and sin like this." John MacArthur immediately picks up on that says, "Have you ever thought that, maybe he's not even a Christian

in the first place?" The seminary professor then said, "No, it can't be. I remember the day he prayed that prayer."

That is the kind of logic we live with. Doesn't matter how he lives his life. He can commit adultery, he can steal, he can cheat, he can continue to live the way he used to live but we would never dare to ask, "Are you really a Christian?" Because we remember the day he raised his hand; he prayed a prayer; he said he's a Christian. This is not U.S. or John MacArthur. This is here in Singapore. I... some of you I've met, I spoke with some of you, and one of you said and shared with me that one of his friends, who claimed to be a Christian, professes Christianity, every time he goes for overseas work trip, he goes to 'enjoy' himself. He comes back and shares with his friends how he 'enjoys' himself. Unfaithfulness to his wife and he at the very same breath, says he is a Christian. He's a child of God. This is bizarre! It is acceptable and people can believe it. We have been deceived to think that because I say I am a Christian, then I must be a Christian.

But there is a day where you will stand before someone and say, "I am a Christian." And someone will boldly say to you, "You are not." Because there will come a day, where there'll be people who will come to say to Jesus, "Lord, Lord." But Jesus will say, "Not everyone who says to me 'Lord, Lord,' (if I may say, like that young man who says mother, mother; not everyone) will enter the kingdom of heaven," because Jesus would declare to them, "I never knew you; depart from me." (Matthew 7:21, 23, ESV) What is the characteristic of these people? You are workers of lawlessness. It doesn't matter what you call yourself. It doesn't matter how you call the Lord if you continue to live in lawlessness. This is the deception, not just in John's time, but today. The devil uses the same trick. Lure us into a state of false presumption and complacency.

So you say what is that thing, what is... what is the test I need to have in order to see if I am the real thing? John tells you it's not your words, your talk but your walk. He says, "No one born of God makes a practice of sinning for God's seed abides in him." He says this is how you tell. He does not continue to sin. He does not have a habitual sin. He does not sin the way he used to sin. There is a change in his life. And the rationale is very simple. The reason why he would live differently is because there is a new life in him. God's seed abides in him. Seed of course, it's a picture of the beginnings of life, the potential for life. The spirit of God is in him, his nature is changed to be the nature of God as it were. The Word of God is in him. So the seed of God is in him and he cannot keep on sinning because he's now born of God. He's born again. He has a new life. He's a new creation. Old things are passed away,

behold, all things are become new. So if he is really born again, there should be a new way of life. He cannot live the same way if he is born of God. Simple logic. 0:15:10.4

In fact, he goes on to say, “The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil.” Why did Jesus come? To destroy the works of the devil! What does the devil do? The devil leads us, tempts us to sin. So Jesus came to destroy the works of... the word ‘destroy’ is really not to obliterate but to loosen. That's the meaning of the word. So Jesus came to loosen the grip of sin in our lives. So if you say you believe in Jesus, Jesus lives in me, then surely there must be evidence that the grip of sin is loosening in your life. Otherwise we’re saying, “Oh Jesus did try to come and die on the cross. He got a victory, he sent the Holy Spirit, but unfortunately he failed. He did not manage to deliver me from sin. I'm still sinning the way I used to.” No! He has complete victory! So if your life is not experiencing progression towards holiness; if your life is not seeing that progressive loosening of grip over you, you know what’s the reality? The reality is, you may... it may be that you have never been born again in the first place. Because, by this, by this, it is evident who are the children of God.

Does it mean that we have sinlessness perfection? No! 1 John 1:8 reminds us, John is not saying that if you believe in Jesus, you will never ever ever sin again. No, no, that's not his point. He wouldn't contradict himself in the same letter isn't it? 1 John 1:8, he says, “If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves...” So he admits that as a Christian, we will still sin. The difference is we're not going to sin in the same degree, in the same manner and there will be a progression of our lives. That's how we started our 1 John series. Walking in the light is not sinless perfection but a sincere progression. So we're not saying Christians are perfect, flawless people, but we're saying Christians are a growing people. They are a changing people. They are being sanctified. They are being made pure and holy because Jesus came to loosen the grip of the devil over us. Jesus came to be born in us to give us this new life. So, this is how you know if you're a Christian today. You will not keep on sinning; you will not make a practice of sin. If I may put it this way, a Christian is not sinless, but a Christian will sin less. A world of difference there. A Christian will not be sinless in this life, but we will sin less because God is born in a sense, in him. 0:18:20.7

Robert Law says, “To believe in Christ and to believe in sin, to love Christ, and to love sin, to live in Christ and to live in sin as one's element is as unthinkable as that one should face north and south at the same moment.” He's saying this is absolutely impossible. You can't face two directions at the same time and you therefore cannot

love God and love sin at the same time. You have been changed. You loved sin but now no more, if God is truly at work in you.

I tried to find a picture that makes both a pig and a sheep look similar. This is the best I could find (picture shown). Not bad lah huh? Not bad. Give me some credits for the spots at least. Both are spotted animals and both may look a little bit similar. How do you tell a pig from the sheep apart? Yes, I know you can see it. Herher (laughing).. but another way you can do it is to put it to a test. Bring both animals to a puddle or pool of mud and swish them within. And leave them there and you will see the pig and a sheep apart. The sheep immediately looks at the mud and says, "Eeekyucks, why did you do this to me!" and the sheep cannot wait to get out of the mud. Now, he is plunged into the mud, that's the reality but he wants to get out of the mud. But when you look at the pig, he's absolutely happy. He says, "I'm at home, this is wonderful." This is the 'onsen' for the pig. Waahh... the water, the...the...the...he loves to be... it's his element. He doesn't want to get out of that. By this you know, if it is a pig or a sheep. 0:20:16.7

Adrian Rogers puts it very well, "A Christian lapses into sin and loathes it." Now he's not claiming sinless perfection. We will do... we do and we will lapse into sin. We will stumble into sin, but that... that... this is the difference: I used to love sin but now I loathe sin. I loathe it not just because it brings me bad consequences but I loathe it because God change my heart. And I love Him, and therefore I hate sin. But the non-Christian, regardless of what he says in church, regardless of how many years he has been in church, regardless of how many ministries he may be even involved in, he may even be a pastor, mind you, he may be even be a seminary professor or anything like that. He leaps into sin and he loves it. You say why? Because a pig is a pig and a sheep is a sheep. A child of God is a child of God. And a child of the devil is a child of the devil. The nature is as such. So until you have a total change of nature, you will be reflected as what Adrian Rogers have said.

A true sheep of God, a true lamb, a true follower of Jesus Christ, therefore, will be described herein: "Although the believers sometimes sins, yet not sin but opposition to sin is the ruling principle of his life. For whenever he sins, he confesses it, he wins forgiveness and perseveres with his self-purification; but the habitual sinner does none of these things, sin is his ruling principle." What is your ruling principle? To get out or to get in to the mud of sin? That's how you tell. That's how others would tell. That's how you tell for your kids, that's how you tell for your parents, that's how you tell for your wife, that's how you tell for yourself. So John says, this is so simple, isn't it? So straightforward, but we are so deceived. But when you look at Scriptures, it's so

straightforward. No one born of God sins. No, no, no, that's not what he said. In the Greek, it's ... I...I appreciate the ESV for here: "...keeps or makes a practice of sinning." "No one born of God makes a practice of sinning, for God's seed abides in him and he cannot keep on sinning because he has been born of God." He is not sinless, but he does sin less.

That's a sheep. What's a pig? Well, the children of the devil. Aaah... I know who are the children of the devil - those who kill others, like Saddam Hussein and Hitler and Joseph Stalin, all those who deal with black magic and the occult...ah...those are the children of the devil. Really? The definition of 'children of the devil' is far wider than what I've just described as examples. 'The children of the devil' are people who make a practice of sinning. They are of the devil. And that pretty much includes all of us except for those who have believed in Jesus Christ. It's not a nice title to call one another. Imagine you go to school, you're the child of the devil...that's...wah...you're so harsh! But while it is harsh, it is reality.

My two years old son, er...when he plays and he's absorbed with something he's playing and er...when I smell something, I will ask, "Matthias, did you poo poo?" He looks at me, "No." He has that look that is: Oh no, I think I've been discovered but I better don't tell you because I still want to play. So he looks at you, "No." Why does he lie? Who taught him to lie? Did Winnie or myself or Shawn or anyone teach Matthias to lie? Nobody did. So how did he lie? Because that's his nature. That's who he is. That's who we are. Nobody needs to teach you to sin. Nobody needs to teach you to love sin. Nobody, because we are by nature, according to the Bible, the children of wrath, the children of disobedience. 0:25:02.9

And so there are only two kinds of people in this life. Two kinds. Not black or white, not Singaporeans and Americans. Two kinds. You are either a child of God or you are the child of the devil. A child of God will keep sanctifying himself. A child of God will not make a practice of sinning. A child of the devil very clear, he keeps on sinning. So there's only category one and category two. But today Christians in order to kind of falsely assure ourselves, we come up with category three. Category three are people who say, "I'm a Christian, but I will still sin because I'm not so 'on the ball'." They say, "Wah, pastor you preach all these very good lah. This is for category one kind of people - the top class one; the very sincere, give their lives to Jesus, die in Africa type. But I'm not that type lah. I...I believe Jesus, I come to church, but I'm not so holy. I... my life after ten years not much change but I'm a Christian lah. I'm the category three type." There's no category three. You can say all you want, but it's not found in the Bible. There is no Christian who says, "I follow Jesus enough to get into

heaven, and that's it. Anything else I don't need to follow him." There's no Christian like that because he's not a Christian in the first place. It's a very clear line. You're either a child of God or a child of the devil. John says, by this it is evident. That's something very objective for us to see today. He cannot keep on sinning because he has been born of God. A Christian is a Christian, not just because he says he's a Christian but because we all can see he's a Christian. It's not his talk but his walk.

There's this news recently about this family. Some of you must have read it; it is quite an interesting story. Now I say it's a story because I cannot verify if it is true. In fact, when I research further, I'm told that this might just be an urban legend, meaning somebody cooked this story up, used some other people's pictures, may not be very fair, may not be very true. But if it's a false story, still the lesson is kind of catchy. What happens is that this very good looking man sued this very good-looking lady, who is his wife. You say why did he sue his own wife? Reason is found in the picture (picture shown). He cannot believe how his children look. He says, I'm so handsome, you are so pretty, how come my...our three children all like that one? (Laughter in the congregation) This is unbelievable. No matter how I mixed our two genes, shouldn't be like that what! So he proceeded to sue her for adultery, that these three kids are not his children but someone else's. Now, DNA testing was done, again this is urban legend, don't know whether it's true, but the DNA testing was done and it is proven that they are his kids. But the... this is the twist to the story, he's right in a sense, if it is the mixture of these two genes, should not be like this but the problem is she does not really have that genes of... the genes for beauty. Apparently, she...she spent lots of money to have... plastic surgery. So no matter what she said, the lesson is this: the man did not just based his thinking on what was said, he based his thinking on what was seen. 0:29:08.3

I say I'm a Christian. You say you are a Christian. You know something? If you are real, you can see it. You can see it. This is what Todd Wilson says, "I think Jesus' point is simple. Real is something you can see. There is a visible difference between real and not-real Christians. It's not enough to say you're real; you should be able to see you're real." In fact, that is exactly what Jesus Christ himself would've said. How do you recognize believers? How do you recognize my people? "You will recognize them by their fruits." (Matthew 7:20, ESV) No good tree bears bad fruit, nor again does a bad tree bear good fruit. So today, your life, your behaviour, your holiness, do you have it? Does the tree of your life bear such fruit? Doesn't matter if you hang that sign: "This is a durian tree" or if people around you say, "This is a durian tree." You must have durian fruit. If you are ... if people call you a durian tree but you have no durian fruit, you are not a durian tree. Doesn't matter what others say about you,

what you say about yourself; doesn't matter where you're planted. If you have no fruit, you are not that tree. Simple as it is.

So the Bible says, "Examine yourselves, to see whether you are in the faith..." (2 Corinthians 13:5, ESV) Examine. The word there is 'to scrutinise'. Test yourself. The message today is absolutely simple. Not here to razzle-dazzle you with 'chim' (Hokkien dialect word meaning deep), complex Greek or Hebrew, but this is absolutely vital. Can you examine yourself today and say, "By these fruits I know I am a child of God." By these fruits, I know my son is a child of God. By these fruits, I know those who are in my care group are children of God. Would you be able to say that today? Let's bow for a word of prayer together.

But before we do that, I like us to take this time to really examine ourselves this morning. I like to ask you today, to take out a mirror in your mind, a mirror of your own life. Yes, there are people around us here we are concern about but this morning, let's start with ourselves because God is speaking to you. Would you take out a mirror today and look at yourself? And scrutinise your life. How are you doing? Have you changed over the past ten years you've professed faith? Are you still struggling the same way you used to struggle ten years ago with your temper? With lust? With greed? With insecurities? With worries? With fears? With bitterness and hatred? With the love for this world? You know you don't have to tell anyone your answer today. It's between you and God. But look at yourself in the mirror, is there any change at all? Take out the photo of your past, take out the snapshot of your spiritual life in the past and compare it. Put it side-by-side, have you really changed or are you still keeping on, practicing your sins?

My friends, my purpose this morning is not to condemn you, to make you feel bad and to drag you into despondency. No, that not my goal. But I believe God is extremely merciful to us, that in His Word today, we can have this opportunity, when we're so assume, when we're so assume that we are so fine that we are so stuck in this deception that we failed to really take a stock-check and examine ourselves. And if our lives failed to show up any fruit, maybe today will be the best day of your life. In that you are truly humbled, you are truly brought to your knees in your heart and you come and cry out to God, to ask Him for this new life. Because you know you can't manufacture it. You've tried to live a hypocritical life for the past ten years and you know it cannot be done. So this morning, you'll humble yourself, you'll turn from your sin and you'll come to Jesus Christ. Look to His finished work on the cross. You'll receive Him, you'll obey Him, you will say, "God, you are my Saviour. I need

you to change my life.” Maybe this day will be the best in your life. But my friends, it starts right here.

Maybe today you’re thinking about your child. He or she was baptised sometime ago or now he’s already a grown-up, he’s twenty over years old. But he’s not going to church; he has no interest in spiritual things. He’s living in sin and you say, it doesn't matter, he's a Christian. I remember the day he was baptised. You know something? God gives you His Word today so that you may be able to minister to your son; so that you may be able to minister to your daughter. So that you will not just close one eye and somehow hope that one day he will really be a Christian, but today you’ll start praying for him. You’ll start going through the Gospel with him.

May God help us not to have families, where we assume we are Christians and on the final day of judgment, we hear the Lord says, “Depart from me; I never knew you, you workers of lawlessness.” If you are a Christian today, I trust you will be praying for yourself as well. Praying that with these words, it gives you sobriety, it wakes you up. It warns you, it encourages you. It also thrills you that God’s seed is indeed in you and that you will be encouraged to continue to pursue holiness and purity. I trust that if you are really born again, you will take this Word, and be blessed by it and persevere in pursuing Him, in holiness. 0:36:13.2

My friends, if you're here today and you do not know Jesus Christ, the last thing I want you to walk away with is to think, that it is by doing good that you become a Christian. No, no, no, no, that's not the point of John at all. John is not saying, you do good to be a Christian, but he’s saying if you’re really a Christian, the natural consequence is that you would do good; you will live purely. So if you’re not a Christian today, I say to you, would you come to Jesus Christ? This is why the Son of God appeared - to destroy the works of the devil; to break the power of sin in our lives. And today, you can look to Jesus, the Lord. Whatever the Lord is saying to you this morning, would you pray in response to Him? Would you reflect? Would you repent? Would you rely on Jesus Christ?

I see some of you here and my heart pains. My heart is aching for you and I... I don't know, because I'm trying to look for fruit. I do. As a pastor, I'm so glad when I see fruit. I’m thrilled to see the life of God in you. But when I don't, I'm troubled. I really am. And I beg God and ask God today to humble you that you may be saved - really have a life changing relationship with Jesus Christ. At the end of the day, this is what matters. Our great God, our great God can do that work in your heart. He can send the Spirit into your soul, open the Word to you and give you new life. Are you willing

to come to Him? Will you stop resisting God? Will you start rebelling? Will you stop putting on a mask? And say, “God, I need you. Save me.”

Father we thank you for your Word today. Bless every single one. Such a simple and clear message from your servant John. Make it meaningful, life-changing. I know, dear God, that there is power in Scripture. There is power with the Spirit, so would you change lives today? We'll be so grateful to you. We bow in amazement, in advance and as to what you would do in all our hearts. Bless your people. We ask this now in Jesus' name. Amen.