

Swallows and Amazons!

- Another blast from my childhood, I'm afraid!!
 - [Swallows and Amazons](#), Arthur Ransome
 - kids messing about in boats in the Lake District
 - given permission by their (absent, navy? wartime?) father: "Better drowned than duffers - if not duffers, won't drown"
 - in the course of their adventures they discover a little island, which has a tiny harbour at one end;
 - to get into that harbour in a little boat - had to come in [dead straight](#), line up the markers
 - rocks on either side
- Too far one way or the other spelled danger!!
- John writing to help readers [navigate between different distortions of the truth](#):
 - distortions that are close enough to the real thing to appear safe enough;
 - [but deadly under the surface](#)

Balance on sin! (vs.1-2)

- It is possible to be either too lenient or too severe towards sin:
 - we finished chapter one confessing frankly our sin and fully aware of our forgiveness
 - immediately, then, John corrects the course, and steers us away from sinning
- For there is danger here:
 - "well then, I am a sinner, but since Christ has forgiven me, dealt with the consequences of my sin, it doesn't really matter any more... I can do what I like!"
 - there is a danger in treating sin too leniently, denying its invidious power, its death bringing properties
 - [just because you don't have any snake poison in your veins doesn't mean you treat a vial of that poison carelessly!](#)
- John's purpose is not to condone sin, but rather to prevent it:
 - we daren't treat sin too lightly, and tolerate its presence in our lives; Jesus died to wash us and free us from that sin;
 - but neither should we be too harsh, for we need to remember that we too are sinners, we are those to whom grace and mercy have been extended.
 - ["if anybody does sin, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defense"](#) (v.1)
 - if we come across somebody who has sinned (especially in some particular way), or if we ourselves stumble, we are to bring them or come to Jesus, the one who ["speaks to the Father in our defense..."](#)
- In this we are simply acting like Jesus:
 - with rich young man, cutting right to the heart of his obedience, will he give his money?
 - yet with the woman caught in adultery able to say, "neither do I condemn you..."
 - there he says, "go and sin no more..." - forgiveness leads to a freedom!
 - [\[we\]... must walk as Jesus' did](#) (v.6)

Tests of faith (vs.3-11)

- In the next few verses John lays down a couple of tests, or self-checks for their faith:
 - Moral test: obedience to God's commands - [vs.3-6](#)
 - Social test: love for neighbour - [vs.7-11](#)
 - old command - from OT - new command, Jesus invests with new richness & depth of meaning; he exemplified it;
- Are we on track? Are we heading safely towards the heavenly harbour?
 - are we obeying God's (moral) commands?
 - are we loving our neighbour?

Digression about the church (vs.12-14)

- Reassurance that he doesn't think they are off the rails; writing because he loves them and wants them to remain true!

Do not love the world (vs.15-17)

- do not love... the football
- do not love... the cinema
- do not love... the dancing
- *that's perhaps how an earlier generation of Christians would have marked this one out!*
- But can we "mark out" territory that is of the world, and territory that is OK?
 - where would we stop? everything has the taint of sin!
 - **and that is not what John does!**
- For John gives us a technical definition of what "the world" is:
 - *the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does (v. 16)*
 - that is a definition that isn't about external behaviour so much as internal priorities
 - what do you want, what do you desire, what do you want to boast of?
- And John says: **hate those desires, wants, priorities that are not from God!**
- More akin to a marriage relationship:
 - if I were to "love" another woman in the same way I love Helen I would in fact be hating Helen and not loving her!
 - I can't have it both ways - that kind of love is **exclusive!**
- *(James 4:4) You adulterous people, don't you know that friendship with the world is hatred toward God? Anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God.*
- Or Jesus' own words to the disciples shortly before the crucifixion:
 - *(John 17:14-18) I (Jesus) have given them your word and the world has hated them, for they are not of the world any more than I am of the world. My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one. They are not of the world, even as I am not of it. Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth. As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world.*
- Our call is to be in the world but not of it:
 - engaged, not separate, relating to people in it, not stand-offish
 - but still somehow different, with different priorities, priorities that will include introducing people to the Saviour, obeying his moral commands, treating people with the same love and compassion as he did
- Possibly best example of that I've come across recently was Cameron from **Big Brother!**

Conclusion

- Its all about where we are heading, who we are following, the markers we are looking to to guide us to port
 - are we on track?
 - balanced on sin: serious, not treating lightly, yet compassionate, knowing our own sin
 - in-step with the Lord on his moral and relational commands
 - in the world, yet not loving it, rather stepping to the Lord's command, marching to the beat of a different drum
- **Lord, guide us to your light, correct our course where we are off kilter or in danger of hitting the rocks**