

1 John 2:18–27

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[0 : 00] I walked in this morning a little late, having just arrived from the baptismal service of my grandson in the western suburbs. Their service out there started at 930, and I'm glad to arrive on the back end of seeing our own children dedicated to the Lord here in our midst this morning.

And I've always said there's a little bit of everything in this room, and as our gospel ensemble is growing, you're beginning to see that as well. I praise God for the way God is enriching our congregation.

Let me pray. Our Heavenly Father, as we now turn to the explication of Your Word, we pray that Your Spirit would confirm the truths in it so powerfully to our hearts and minds that our lives would be forever given to living under it.

For the welfare of this church, in Jesus' name, Amen. In the world of film, a movie often begins by putting us right in the middle of everyday life, the everyday life of the main character.

And early on, a good screenwriter slowly hints, through subtlety and often through dialogue, that there is something hidden from view.

[1 : 38] Something in the past, perhaps, that has shaped the lives of those we are watching in ways that we are not yet aware.

And so, we take it in, silently, led along by the screenwriter, and what we're seeing there, until the writer himself will determine to make the back story known to us.

In other words, the significant past events that account for things that we've been seeing. Casey Affleck was recently awarded the Best Actor for a film, *Manchester by the Sea*, and from what I know of it, the screenwriter does this very thing.

You are watching the painful realities of a present man, without a full awareness until much later on, on why things were the way they were.

By way of analogy, something like that has occurred this morning in 1 John. After all, we are now two chapters and 18 verses into the letter.

[3 : 08] In other words, we are a quarter of the way in. And yet it is here, for the first time, that the historical context that actually caused the writer to let us begin reading with him, finally picks up there before you.

Here is the back story that fills in the gaps, the big pieces of the puzzle that explain why things were the way they were. Take a look.

The back story is laid bare, especially in verse 19. They went out from us, and I love the lyrical nature of the verse. They went out from us, but they were not of us, for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us.

But they went out, that it might become plain that they are all not of us. Again, verse 26 later in the text.

I write these things to you about those who are trying to deceive you. Evidently, the congregations to whom this letter was written, And I mention plural because there is no prescript that identifies it with one group.

[4 : 29] In all likelihood, there were a collection, a loose network of churches that all wanted by the writer to be under the hearing of this word.

Those congregations to whom this letter was written were working their way through what we would only call a difficult split. Some significant leader teachers had left.

The congregation had been set loose. Just like today, when that happens, things get painful.

People get hurt. And ordinary men and women in the pew are wondering, should I stay or should I go? Now we have been very fortunate here at Holy Trinity to now be 19 years in without a single incident that would push the envelope on our congregation in regard to our unity in the faith.

Praise God. But that's not always the case. The two further important observations I want to make on the back story then, having just arrived there today, are this.

[6 : 00] First, the text we are reading indicates that the split was over matters of real importance. In other words, these were matters of substance, not style.

They didn't leave because they weren't in line with the preferential musical traditions of the congregation or the trivialities of dress.

Rather, they blew up over Jesus. And whether or not He was the promised Christ. There it is right there in verse 22.

He's telling these things to you. Who is the liar but he who denies that Jesus is the Christ? In other words, there were questions about whether or not Jesus was actually one who would come in the flesh from God.

Take a look at chapter 4 and verse 3. Every spirit that does not confess Christ is not from God. In fact, there were questions concerning whether Jesus really was the Son of God.

[7 : 09] You can see that in chapter 5 and verse 5. Who is it that overcomes the world except the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God? The churches to whom this was written were separating in leadership and in teaching over who is Jesus.

Second, the lives of the readers were further complicated by the fact that when these leader teachers departed from the church, imagine it, imagine it even today, one or two of our own pastors walking out the door.

When they departed, they didn't leave. In all likelihood, they set up shop right across the street. What a nightmare for the man or woman coming to church on Sunday, wondering which door now to enter.

They were wielding their influence on those who remained in hopes of gaining yet more who would leave the mother load and join them.

What else could John mean by a verse like 2 and 28? And now little children abide in Him so that when He appears, we may have confidence and not shrink back.

[8 : 30] They wanted them to abide in Him, in their word, and in what they were doing. If you look at the literary context of all of the Johannine epistles, turn over to 2 John.

And verse 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 a deceiver and the Antichrist.

But notice, they didn't go out into the world very far. Verse 10, If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not receive him into your house or give him a greeting, for whoever greets him takes part in this wicked world.

In 3 John, you'll see the complete literary context of the day in which they were living. Verse 9 is clear. I have written something to the church, but Diotrephus, who likes to put himself first, does not acknowledge our authority.

So if I come, I will bring up what he was doing, talking wicked nonsense against us, and not content with that. He refuses to welcome the brothers, and also stops those who want to, and puts them out of the church.

[9 : 49] They never left. They left, and they were still there. That's your worst nightmare. Someone who abandons the teaching of Jesus from the pulpit, and begins to do his own thing, under the shadow of your banner.

That's the fullness of the context. What a mess! And yet, what could possibly make more sense of everything we've read to this point.

No wonder the letter opened with a Jesus that the author claims to have heard with his own ears, seen with his own eyes, touched with his own hands, in the flesh.

No wonder he moved on to distance his congregants from those who had left behind by reminding them, as TJ reminded us a few weeks ago, that real recognizes real.

That the authentic one will know the authenticity of the other, and therefore the disingenuous confession of those who have left. No wonder he began to move immediately, by telling them, you're going to know people who walk the walk, who talk the talk, and whose love is the full manifestation that they live out the commands.

[11 : 18] All these things were there. It also accounts for why he writes a poem that we looked at last week. Why he wants to affirm them. Why he wants to put his arms around them.

And yet, why he wants to say, look, don't love everything. And so here they are. The historical context, as messy as it was, had convinced the writer to pick up his pen to write. And if you look at the opening verse, back to 218, it had convinced him of a couple of other things too. Children, it is the last hour.

And as you have heard that the Antichrist is coming, so now. Many Antichrists have come. Therefore, we know that it is the last hour.

The logic is simply this. The time in which he claimed to be living was the time of the end.

[12:26] And how did he know it was the time of the end? Because these dudes were on the scene. And his Lord had told him that at the end, many will come in my name and be pulling people away from my message.

The time was here. The enemy was on the scene. And it wasn't merely this singular Antichrist that you could kind of look off into the distance and wonder who it might be.

No, he says, you want to know the spirit of the age at the end? Well, it's a many-headed beast and I'm watching him walk around in the churches that I once planted. Let me put it to you this way.

His logic. The emergence of the false teachers on the scene were proof to him that the hour was now at the end.

I don't know if you've listened to the soundtrack of Hamilton. Probably more likely to be able to afford the soundtrack than the ability to see the play itself. But if you've listened to the soundtrack of Hamilton or been able to see the play itself, there's a moment very early on when the emergence of certain characters on the set indicate the hour that we have arrived.

[13:52] Let me give you the text. This is from Burr speaking with Hamilton. While we're talking, let me offer you some free advice.

Talk less. Hamilton. What? Burr. Smile. More. Hamilton. Ha! Burr. Don't let them know what you're against or what you're for.

Hamilton. You can't be serious. You want to get ahead? Yes. Fools who run their mouths wind up dead.

And then from the stage left, yo, yo, yo, yo, yo. What time is it? Showtime!

Back to Burr. Like I said. In other words, the boys are on the set and it's an indication of the hour.

[14:57] And it foreshadowed all of their own deaths. In the same way, John, the author, is writing the church saying, it's the end of the age.

How do you know, John? Because they're on the scene. Leading everyone astray. Today's churches are still dividing over matters of substance.

Over the apostolic gospel. This is an aside to you here. It doesn't surprise me that in all of the big luminaries of the New Testament, Peter, Paul, and the Johannine literature and John here, they all foresee or foreshadow or deal with what will happen when that early generation passes along.

In other words, the end of the apostolic era and the time when you had teaching that was directly related to those who had been there for themselves, the eyewitnesses which had the advantages, when that season was closing down, competing views and teachings began to swirl.

So Peter says, the time of my departure and the laying down of my body is at hand and how will you know how to go forward when I'm gone? And then he recounts the Mount Transfiguration and then says, but as great as my own experience was, you have a light that is more sure, a path that is more ready, a word inscripturated that you are to follow.

[16:46] In other words, he's trying to tie the future to the inscripturated word. Paul, through his Corinthian correspondence, says, you are leaving the apostolic gospel for this foolishness of super apostles.

You need to return to me if you want to return to God. John says, in our own text, what am I to do when the end of my life comes and the competition arises?

How will you know that you have the authentic thing? He's dealing with that issue in the very moment because the stage is overrun with people who are doing anything they please with Jesus. and the poor congregant. Talk about confusion. How do I know that the church I attend should instill any confidence in me that I'm connected to the authentic gospel?

The argument of the author here is fascinating. it comes in verses 20 to 23. He appeals to the presence of the Holy Spirit having been applied to the life of the believer as the basis of confidence that they have the real thing.

[18 : 23] There it is, verse 20. but you. But you have been anointed by the Holy One and you all have knowledge.

I write to you not because you do not know the truth but because you know it and because no lie is of the truth. Who is the liar?

Notice the contrasting movement. But he who denies that Jesus is the Christ this is the antichrist. He who denies the Father and the Son no one denies the Son no one who denies the Son has the Father and whoever confesses the Son has the Father also.

You'll see it again in 27 but the anointing you have received from Him abides in you and you have no need that anyone should teach you. what's going on.

In these verses the author is not merely contrasting two kinds of people that will inhabit the world at the end. Rather he's providing a basis for confidence that his readers would know that they have the authentic seal to the apostolic message and a direct link to Jesus who is eternal life and who will give them life.

[19 : 54] And what does he point to? The Holy Spirit. Now there are good reasons exegetically to associate the anointed and the anointing one receives in this text with the Holy Spirit.

Verse 27 we've already alluded to. It's not merely something that they received but it's something that abides in them. Something that is not just given to them but that someone in a sense that is living in them.

Quite an appeal. Just across the column in chapter 4 and verse 13 he will say I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God that you may know that you have eternal life.

And then he begins to speak of the presence of the one who will hear us given the fact that we have the Spirit given to us. To have the Spirit of God is to possess the truth and the truth is nothing less than possessing Christ and having that sealed to you by the Spirit.

How do you know therefore that you have hold of the apostolic gospel? according to the author you've been anointed by the Holy Spirit you've received him.

[21 : 25] The others are liars deniers. Well you say a lot of people claim to have the Spirit so if the Spirit is the basis for my confidence then what would indicate to me that I have the Spirit?

And the author in this letter has been very clear the one who has the Spirit is the one who receives and continues to receive the full apostolic message.

they won't play fast and loose with what the apostles heard and saw and proclaimed. Here's what's going on in the day in which you and I live.

People are cherry picking whatever they like about Jesus. Oh this tastes good. I'll eat that one. Don't plan on touching that one.

In fact I'll ignore it as if they're not words that he ever mentioned. They begin to cherry pick the sayings of Jesus to accommodate their own desires.

[22 : 43] Think of a child in the middle of the floor with a whole carpet filled with Lego blocks. They begin to construct something out of the making of their own mind.

And that's what people do with Jesus. They begin to build block by block until we fashion a belief that fits the conformity of our own wishes.

This is why today we have so many people saying well I believe in Jesus. I confess Jesus. Yeah but what Jesus do you confess? In this day and age in our letter there were many who had no need for a Jesus that would make much of their sin.

sin. You remember back in chapter 1? If we say we have no sin we're deceiving ourselves? I can't tell you now at the age of 55 how many times I've heard people talk about confessing Jesus but feel that Christianity in general makes way too much of personal sin.

Way too much. That the problems of the world today are sociological. The problems of mankind are met by the environments in which we live. Very few people are willing to embrace in Jesus that says no the deepest problem you have is internal.

[24 : 05] It's a sin problem. People who begin to make light of sin I believe are in danger of moving a few degrees off of what is the apostolic message.

As if that's not our real issue. I'll give you another one in chapter 1. They begin to make light of the atonement. But if anyone does sin, verse 2, we have an advocate with the Father who is Jesus Christ the righteous.

He is the propitiation for our sins. Very many teachers of the scriptures today will tell you that we are here to emulate the model that Jesus has put forward but they do not look to his death as

substitutionary in nature.

In other words, they don't think he needed to die for your sin. When people begin to make light of sin and little of substitutionary atonement, they are constructing a Jesus of their own making to accomplish their own ends.

I'll give you a third mark because the mark of the letter is you begin to have a love for the brethren when you're really confessing Christ properly. But these ones who had left the building and put up a shingle of their own and began to proclaim a gospel of their own liking, what were they known for?

[25 : 38] They had no actual love for those who were confessing Christ. Here's the irony of it all and I've seen it. I've seen people come unglued out of their shoes in anger over anyone that would think our sins are an issue and the atonement of Christ shed blood is the answer.

How do you know? Whether you're holding on to the message.

All I can say is you know because he's provided the Holy Spirit to you. And how do you know if you have the Spirit? You're doing everything you can to hold on to the fullness of that apostolic message.

the good and the bad of it. The nice parts and the difficult parts. The salvation and the judgment. The grace and the need to be conformed into the likeness of Christ. The willingness to come and have it all be done for you on Jesus, by Jesus, and yet once you stand, He expects you to be mature and to walk the way He walks.

[27 : 16] All of it. All of it. That's how you know. Well, if the end is here and the anointing of the Spirit provides confidence that you're on to the real thing, and that anointing is connected to your reception of the fullness of the apostolic message and scripture in it, then what does He want from you?

24 to 28, He simply wants you to abide in that. Let's finish with this part, verse 24.

let what you have heard from the beginning abide in you. In other words, what your ear took in, don't relinquish any of it in all of its fullness.

Let what you have heard from the beginning abide in you. If what you have heard from the beginning abides in you, here's the encouragement that goes with the application, then you too will abide in the Son and in the Father and this is the promise that He made to us, eternal life.

Again, verse 27, but the anointing that you received from Him abides in you. You have no need that anyone should teach you. But as His anointing teaches you about everything and is true and is no lie, just as has been taught you, abide in Him.

[28 : 59] What do you do? What are you to do today when you walk out of here? You are to abide in the message that the apostles put forward concerning Jesus in all of its fullness.

In other words, you have been given from this pulpit now over 19 years a message about Jesus and what you have heard from me and Lord willing will hear from me for another 20, 30, 40 years.

Wow, wouldn't that be nice? For me anyway. What you have heard from me that which your heart and mind has received from me as coming from God the Father, God that is what you hold fast to. You don't have need for these other deceivers who are going to cherry pick their understanding of the Christian faith and tell you you're good anyway. the temptation is always to pick up with the spirit of the age, to be on the right side of history, to have a Jesus that doesn't quite conform to the exacting nature of the one given to us through the apostolic proclamation.

I think what John is really saying here is don't give your ear to the outsiders who are making their pitch.

[30 : 42] They don't have anything you need. In other words, the cessationists, if I could call them that, the people that left this Johannine apostolic message, they're like bad spiritual salesmen.

They're trying to get your ear on a message that the author would say you don't want in hopes of convincing your heart to make a spiritual purchase you don't need, which more often than not will lead you to trying to give your whole life to pleasing people that you don't even like.

Imagine the ridiculousness of a branch on a tree this spring. You go out today, look at a big branch, imagine a branch looking back to the trunk.

You know, I think I had enough of you in all your fullness. Imagine the branch dislodging itself from the life of the tree, tree.

And thinking it could walk over into the next yard and throw itself by plunging it into the ground as somehow going to be a life-giving tree.

[32 : 10] That's ludicrous. But that's what was going on. People were leaving Jesus to do a life of their own making.

And they want you to come along with. The word abide here, I can't think of it any more clearly than to say you have to remain grounded in life, in the source of life, who is Jesus, in all of His complexity and fullness.

you are to abide in Him. You are to stay put. You are not to cast your lot with those who leave off with Him. Let me put it this way. You are to be a hoarder of Jesus.

You never eBay, Craigslist, anything of Him out of your house. He stays with you, in you, never relinquish it. He is the heirloom.

He is the maybe antique, maybe the one who's not anymore relevant. But there's no life outside of Him.

[33 : 25] So stay with Him. In many ways, we are living, I believe, in dark days. And I don't strictly mean politically.

I don't merely mean socially. And I'm not even speaking of the difficult life experiences that you're in the midst of that almost seem uncontrollable.

Even with the political, the social, the experiential weight of our world, there is a spiritual weight as well. And the end has come.

And we know this to be the case because a host of bad actors are inhabiting the stage. and we should not be surprised, but we should not so easily be pushed off-center.

I'm not moving. And this lectern will never move. And your glance at the pages of Scripture will always be in sight in all of its fullness.

[34 : 38] because I want you to know beyond a shadow of a doubt that the inscripturated word, which contains the apostolic message, according to the ancient promises, is your very life.

life. It's not. You don't see me do this anymore, do you? Oh, when I was young, I could walk the whole platform.

I was good. When I was a young preacher, you would have liked me. I could scare them from the far left to the far right. I'd go all the way over. I worked in a church, had a balcony.

I'd get all the way over that end. I'd look up in the balcony. Oh, pity the guy that decided to sit up there today. I could memorize my material and go, and I could go all the way back forth to the other side because I have the capacity, if I wanted, to say, oh, I think maybe by the force of my personality, I'm going to grab all these people.

You don't see that anymore. The older I get, it's not because I'm not in shape. I'm in shape. I stand right here. Why? Because this is it for me. It's you to this, it's me to this, it's us to this.

[35 : 58] That's it. In all of it. Those who will go out from among us, well, they're going to do something else with Jesus.

us. Don't be so easily moved off center. We live at the time of the end.

But have some confidence, will you? Have some confidence. And where is that confidence? The presence of the Holy Spirit. And pastor, how do I know if I have the Holy Spirit?

You continue to embrace the fullness of the apostolic message. And what does it look like then, day to day, to embrace the fullness of the apostolic message? It is to be immovable.

It is to stay put. It is to abide. It is to not lop myself off from anything in Christ and think that I could shove it in the ground and bring life.

[37 : 07] thus far. God's word. Our heavenly father, as we look at this letter, now with a screenwriter that has given us the back story, we pray that our empathy for the first readers would be so viscerally engaged that everything we read from this point out this spring would have greater depth of meaning.

And help us, Lord, to be satisfied with Jesus. in his name we pray.

Amen. Amen.