

Are You the Antichrist?

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Date: 29 November 2020

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[0:00] We're going to be looking at 1 John 2, verses 18 through 25 this morning. 1 John 2, verses 18 through 25.

And this is what God says to us through the letter of John. Children, it is the last hour. And as you have heard that Antichrist is coming, so now many Antichrists have come. Therefore, we know that it is the last hour. 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 all are not of us. 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 but he who denies that Jesus is the Christ?

[1:02] This is the Antichrist, he who denies the Father and the Son. No one who denies the Son has the Father. Whoever confesses the Son has the Father also. Let what you heard from the beginning abide in you.

If what you heard from the beginning abides in you, then you too will abide in the Son and in the Father. And this is the promise that he made to us. Eternal life.

The Antichrist, that title has immediate effect in our culture to conjure up images of the ultimate evil. Even people who care nothing about Jesus Christ can find themselves intrigued and spooked by the idea of the Antichrist.

Pop culture, especially horror movies or TV shows, love the scary potential of the Antichrist. He's often portrayed as some kind of human-demon hybrid or maybe even the child of Satan himself. Here are a few examples. The TV show Supernatural features a version of the Antichrist. In the horror movie series The Omen, little Damien is the son of Satan, destined to rise up as the Antichrist when he's older.

[2:23] Antichrist mythology is used in The Chilling Adventures of Sabrina, in Hellboy comics and movies, in Stephen King novels. And if you've been around American Christian subculture long enough, you probably remember Nikolai Karpathia, the charming and evil Antichrist of the Left Behind novels.

Now what all of these Antichrists have in common is that every time they're portrayed, it's as a singular apocalyptic figure who is spawned from or somehow empowered by Satan himself and who threatens ultimate destruction to goodness in the world.

And it's probably no surprise that these images don't capture the biblical vision of the Antichrist very well. When we turn to what God says in the Bible about the Antichrist, most of us probably think immediately of the book of Revelation.

And thanks to Pastor Mike's sermon series through Revelation, last year we know that as God carries out His plan for the fullness of time, He's going to be unsuccessfully opposed by the unholy trinity of the dragon, the beast, and the false prophet.

And I think it's fair and accurate biblically to say that's the ultimate expression of the Antichrist. But you might be surprised to know that the term Antichrist is found only in John's letter.

[3:50] And what we learn about Antichrist here is quite different than what we expect. Now the main point of our text this morning could simply be summarized as don't be an Antichrist.

And that would be an accurate portrayal of what John is saying. Don't be an Antichrist. But I think it would also be accurate and maybe more edifying to say that John is urging us to stick with Jesus for life.

That's what he ultimately wants for anyone who reads this letter is that we stick with Jesus for life. And in this text, he shows us three essential elements to sticking with Jesus.

Three things that have to be realities in our life if we're going to stick with Jesus for the long haul. We have to be somewhere. We have to confess something.

And we have to know why it matters. So first of all, we have to be somewhere. We see this in verses 18 through 19. In verses 18 through 19, there are two major surprises about the Antichrist. [5:01] The first one is in verse 18. Children, it is the last hour. And as you've heard that Antichrist is coming, so now many Antichrists have come.

Therefore, we know that it is the last hour. The first major surprise about the Antichrist is that there's many of them. In fact, we can't even really say the Antichrist anymore because there's more than one.

And they're not just coming at some point in the future to bring about the end of the world. By the time John wrote this letter, they'd already started rolling out. So right away, if we're going to think rightly according to God's Word about the reality of Antichrist, we need to recalibrate from thinking about one person to thinking about a stream of people or a category of people throughout time.

You notice that John also says that we are in the last hour and that these Antichrists are an indication that we are in the last hour. What does he mean by the last hour?

He means that we are in the final stage of God's redemptive mission. Jesus, the Son of God, has come and no greater revelation will be given. There's not some newer covenant coming than the one that Jesus brought.

[6:16] There's not some greater salvation coming than the one that Jesus has accomplished. All that remains at the end of this last hour is for God to finalize what Jesus has already begun. So the last hour is this time in history begun in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus and completed at the end of his work when he finishes all that he's begun.

And everyone who lives in the last hour, the most fundamental thing about them is their relationship to Jesus. Jesus is the defining reality of the last hour.

And we're going to see more about this idea shortly because it's central to what John is trying to say here to this church. So the first major surprise, there are many Antichrists. The second major surprise is in verse 19.

He says, The second major surprise about these Antichrists is where they come from.

They don't come from some bizarre union of a human and a demon. They aren't unleashed from some pit in hell. They aren't sitting in some Satanist cult meeting right now.

[7:41] They come from the church. Who wants to own that? A church members meeting, someone's giving an update. They say, You know, it's been a tough year.

We've been working our way through the pandemic. And unfortunately, three Antichrists went out from us into the world this last year. Sounds kind of absurd, right?

But that's what John is saying. John is saying that there were participants in the life of the church, people who we would assume professed to be Christians, who at some point left the church and left the faith.

And it's their departure from the church that identifies them as Antichrist and proves that they never truly belonged to the faith. When these people left the church, it indicated that there was something wrong all along.

And now by going out from the church, they are identified as Antichrist. And we're going to see in the next section what it is that made them Antichrists. What is it that constitutes an Antichrist?

[8:45] But it's their going out that identifies them. So the first essential element to sticking with Jesus for life is that you've got to be somewhere. And that somewhere is the church.

No one should expect that they or anyone else can stick with Jesus for life outside of the church. And particularly, I mean regularly gathering with a local church.

When you read the New Testament, it is clear that the church is ordained by God as the gathering of His redeemed people where His gospel is proclaimed and where we learn to follow Jesus faithfully.

The church is the community where the identity of God's people is revealed and sustained. And so to abandon the church, to leave the church, is to call into question your status as a follower of Jesus.

According to John here, your location is indicative of your identity. To leave the church is to indicate that you never belong to Jesus. So we need a few clarifying questions because it's really easy to get this turned around, what John is saying and what he's not saying.

[9:59] So here's the first question. Does going to church then make you a Christian? No. It's possible, of course, to be part of a church and not a true Christian.

In fact, that's what was going on with these people here that Jesus, or sorry, that John was talking about. They were part of a church. It wasn't being part of a church that made them a Christian. They were part of this church for a time, but eventually they went out.

They left the church. They left the gospel that it proclaimed. And so the issue is, over the long term, one major indicator, not the only indicator, but one major indicator of whether you are sticking with Jesus is whether you are located in a church or not.

Here's another question. Am I saying that you have to stay at Christ the King Church forever, or else you're not really sticking with Jesus? Am I saying that if you leave Christ the King Church, are you an antichrist?

No, not necessarily. We have some wonderful examples of people who have left recently. Matt and Elise Sear and their family left, not because they were leaving the church, not because they were abandoning the gathering of God's people, not because they were rejecting Jesus, because they felt called by God to join another local church for a time in anticipation of eventually planning a church themselves.

[11:22] So they did not go out from the church like John is talking about. They went out from our church for the purpose of following God's leading elsewhere. There were some people from our church who lived in Racine.

They left our church, not because they were abandoning the gathering of God's people, but because they said, hey, we live in Racine. We need to find a church that's closer to home so that we can be more engaged.

So I'm not saying that you have to stay at Christ the King church forever in order to be a faithful follower of Jesus. But I am saying that you do have to be part of a church.

You do have to be part of a church that preaches Jesus if you want to stick with Jesus for life. And right now, and over this past year, we faced a lot of pressures to abandon the church.

We've been dealing with COVID-19. Initially, it meant that we had to move to Zoom meetings. And then we were meeting outside for a while, and now we're meeting back in the building, but we have increased distance.

[12:34] We have mask wearing. And any one of these things could lead someone to say, you know what? Maybe it's not worth it. You know, I've been watching church on Zoom for a while or on live stream, and I don't really think there's much difference between being there and watching.

Now, I think about it. What's the difference between watching the church on live stream and just watching any random sermon once in a while? And what's the difference between just watching a sermon on my computer and just not getting out of bed at all?

What difference does it make? So some of the ways that we've been separated may lead some people to think it's not worth it anymore. Some people may be frustrated, frustrated by distance, frustrated by having to watch on Zoom if they have to stay at home right now, frustrated by having to wear masks, and they say, you know what?

I'm tired of all this COVID stuff. I don't like the decisions the elders are making about how we're going to deal with this. I'm just going to give up.

We've had political pressures, a significant election year. You've probably seen some things in your fellow church members that you don't like online or in person.

[13:55] You don't like what they've said about the election. You don't like who you think they voted for. And you know that you're closer to Jesus than they are because of who they voted for and who you voted for.

And in fact, you're so close to Jesus that you just need to give up on this group of people. They're so much farther away from Jesus than you are. The best bet for your relationship with Jesus is to get out of here.

there's a lot of pressures and temptations to abandon the gathering of God's people to leave the local church right now.

But we need to remember that our preferred political party or faction has not been ordained by God as the vehicle of His redeeming the work in the world.

Only the church has. And no precautions we may take, even if you agree with them or not, no precautions we may take are going to stop God's work in the world and in His church in particular.

[15:06] So continue gathering with a local church. If it's not this one, that's okay. But find a local church that preaches the gospel of Jesus and continue gathering with them.

If we're going to stick with Jesus for life, we have to be somewhere. That somewhere is in the church. Secondly, if we're going to stick with Jesus for life, we have to confess something. We may ask, in light of these things, in light of the fact that antichrists aren't coming from this evil world, they're coming from within our gatherings, how can we have any confidence?

if even some who seem to be part of the church are antichrists, how can we have the ability to sort these things out rightly? How can we know if we're a faithful follower of Jesus or if we're an antichrist?

Well, John helps us out in verses 20 and 21. How can we figure these things out? He says, but you have been anointed by the Holy One and you all have knowledge.

I'll write to you not because you do not know the truth but because you know it and because no lie is of the truth. The way we can sort these things out is through the testimony of the Holy Spirit.

[16:19] The anointing of the Holy Spirit given to us by God gives us knowledge, which is exactly what Jesus promised that the Holy Spirit would do for us when He was telling His disciples about the coming of the Holy Spirit.

The anointing of the Holy Spirit on our lives given to us by Jesus as a guarantee of our salvation gives us the knowledge necessary to distinguish between faithful follower and antichrist both in our own hearts and in those around us.

But here's the thing John says, sometimes that Holy Spirit deposit of knowledge needs reactivation by teaching and by reminder. And John says, that's why I'm writing to you.

I want these things that I'm writing to you to align with the testimony of the Holy Spirit in your hearts and reactivate what He's already given to you. It's kind of like an SOS pad.

You've got a piece of steel wool infused with soap. It's really good for cleaning things. Let's not activate it until you get it wet. You've got to suds it up. And so John is writing to suds up the Holy Spirit anointing so that these believers can effectively apply that truth in their own situation.

[17:32] And what happens is as we hear the truth, the Holy Spirit given to us by God testifies to it and says, this is true. We see it for what it is because of the Holy Spirit.

And John knows that because of the testimony of the Holy Spirit, he can write to these believers about the realities of Antichrist and they will acknowledge it as true and they'll be able to apply it. So with the Holy Spirit anointing and with the truth of God's Word, we can competently and rightly judge between faithful follower and Antichrist. Again, beginning with ourselves.

So the Holy Spirit helps us distinguish the truth to recognize it. But what is that truth? What is the content of the truth? What does the truth entail that John is talking about?

If we have to confess something in order to stick with Jesus for life, how do we know what to confess? Look at verses 22-23. Who is a liar but he who denies that Jesus is the Christ?

[18:42] This is the Antichrist, he who denies the Father and the Son. No one who denies the Son has the Father. Whoever confesses the Son has the Father also. If I were to ask you, what is the opposite of the Antichrist?

If you were like me, you would be inclined to say, well, the opposite of an Antichrist is obviously Christ because he's Antichrist. But according to John, the opposite of an Antichrist is not Jesus.

it's a confessor of Christ. A confessor of Christ is the opposite of an Antichrist. And what does it mean to confess Jesus? Well, first, we probably have to understand what it means to deny Jesus. Because he says, who is a liar but he who denies that Jesus is the Christ? What does it mean to deny Jesus? It doesn't mean to deny that Jesus existed. That wasn't really an issue when John was writing this letter.

Jesus was with many of these people not that long ago. Some of them had seen him. Some of them had heard from others who'd seen them. It was not a question of does Jesus exist? So denying Jesus does not mean denying that he existed.

[19:54] It doesn't even mean denying that he had some divine power. People that John was writing to would have been willing to accept, you know, people can come with divine power, empowered by God or the gods.

to deny Jesus is to deny that he is the Christ. Christ means Messiah or anointed one.

To deny that Jesus is the Christ means to deny that he is the one sent by God the Father to accomplish his plan for the redemption of creation. To deny that Jesus is the one who died for the sins of the world, rose in eternal life, ascended to the throne of God, and will one day return to fully establish his kingdom.

In other words, to deny Jesus as the Christ is to deny that he is exactly who God has revealed him to be. A generic Jesus is not an option.

That's why John is so anxious at the very beginning of his letter, chapter 1, verse 1, he says, that which was from the beginning which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon and have touched with our hands.

[21:05] The life was made manifest and we have seen it and testified to it. It was made manifest to us, that which we have seen and heard we proclaim to you. John is saying something specific has happened.

Someone specific has come. And we want to tell you about that. We want you to believe that a generic Jesus isn't an option. Any version of Jesus that doesn't include all that he claimed about himself isn't an option.

anyone who confesses a generic Jesus is actually an antichrist. Because John says you have to confess that Jesus is the Christ, that he is the anointed one from the Father.

There has to be specificity to our confession about Jesus. In order for our confession about Jesus to be true, it has to align with the reality of who he really is.

And the more we see clearly what this means, to confess Jesus means to align with who he really is, we begin to realize that we can deny Jesus with our lives as well as with our words.

[22:15] In fact, Paul says in Titus that it's possible to profess God with our mouths but deny him by our works. So here's a working definition of denying Jesus.

to live or to speak against the reality of who Jesus is. To live or to speak contrary to who the Father has revealed Jesus to be.

To contradict what God has revealed about the Son. An antichrist is someone who refuses to confess Jesus for who he really is. Things like Jesus is not God's anointed.

He is not God's only plan for solving the problem of sin and making the world right again. Things like Jesus is optional. I can have a meaningful spiritual life or connection to God apart from Jesus. Or things like I can claim the name of Jesus or the name of the Father but live in a way that lies to the world about who he is. To deny Jesus as the Christ means to live or to speak contrary to who God has revealed him to be.

[23:27] And so if that's the definition of denying the definition of confessing Jesus is the opposite. To confess Jesus is to live and speak in agreement with reality as revealed by God.

To confess Jesus means that when people hear your words and see your life they see more clearly who Jesus really is. They see that he really is God's single solution to sin and evil and suffering. They see that he's not optional at all when they see your life and they hear your words. They see in your life what it means to put your hope in Jesus and they see a reflection of who the Father and the Son are.

To confess Jesus means to live and to speak in alignment with who he has revealed himself to be. Now a true antichrist denies that Jesus is the Christ.

Jesus is not the anointed of God. He is not the one who accomplishes God's plan. But even confessors of Jesus can be influenced by what John later calls in 1 John the spirit of the antichrist. [24:42] An influence that pushes even confessors of Jesus to start drifting into living and speaking in ways that lie about who Jesus is. And there are some antichrist tendencies that can operate in all of our lives.

So I want to give some practical examples of these antichrist tendencies. Again, I'm not saying that if one of these is true about your life, that means that you're an antichrist.

In fact, I'm confident that at least one of these will have been true of all of you at some point in your life as a believer. But if we want to confess Jesus for all that he really is, we need to see the antichrist tendencies that can threaten even confessors of Jesus.

Here's a big one. Watch out for denying Jesus by acting as if what's most important for those around you is that they believe in God generically rather than repenting and putting their faith in Jesus alone for salvation.

American Christians can have a tendency to communicate to the world that what's most important is that you just believe in God, that you're not an atheist or something like that.

[26:03] Do you have Judeo-Christian values? Do you have family values? Do you give some credit to the guy upstairs but for us to communicate to the people around us that belief in God generically is all that's required is to deny who Jesus really is.

To act like what's most important is putting God back in the schools or putting the Ten Commandments back in the courthouses or just for people to acknowledge God in their public speeches is not enough.

Believing the Ten Commandments never saved anybody, believing that God exists never saved anybody, faith in Jesus as the Messiah is what saves people. Here's another one, watch out for denying Jesus by speaking and living as if some political figure or outcome is your greatest hope. to say that any politician or election is the last hope of America or the church is an Antichrist statement.

Because we should instead be confessing that all authority belongs to Jesus, that the hearts of all rulers are like water in his hands, and that we as believers have hope for a greater kingdom than the USA.

[27:27] Watch out for denying Jesus by finding more brotherhood in a political faction than in the church, as if the last hour is defined by American politics rather than by the Son of God. Watch out for denying Jesus by claiming to believe that he's the king of the universe, and yet giving him the least of your time and money.

Watch out for denying Jesus by living as if sexual pleasure is the greatest thing that life has to offer. Watch out for denying Jesus by acting as if wrongs done to you are more unforgivable than those for which he has forgiven you.

So as we think about the reality of Antichrist and what it means to deny who Jesus is and what it means to confess who Jesus is, let's be careful of speaking and living in ways that are kind of hard to see but are contrary to the reality of who Jesus is.

And if you felt that, hey, you know what, some of that stuff was true in my life, I know I did, let's ask God's forgiveness for lying to the world about who Jesus is and let's embrace the incredible privilege of confessing Jesus for who he is by speaking and living in a way that clearly shows that he is the only savior of the world, anointed by God who brings us to the Father.

And let's confess what the Father is really like based on his revelation to us. So John says, hey, children, don't be an antichrist, be a confessor of Christ.

[29:00] If we're going to stick with Jesus for life, we have to be somewhere, we have to remain in the fellowship of the local church, we have to confess something, we have to confess the Son and the Father as they reveal themselves. And number three, we have to know why it matters.

Why does it matter that we stick with Jesus for life? Verses 24 through 25. Let what you heard from the beginning abide in you.

If what you heard from the beginning abides in you, then you too will abide in the Son and in the Father. And this is the promise that he made to us, eternal life.

When John talks about what they have heard from the beginning, he's talking about the truth of verses 21 and 22. The confession confirmed by the Holy Spirit that Jesus is the Christ, the anointed one.

The confession of what God has done through his Son. And John is saying, let that abide in you, let it remain in you, hang on to that truth, don't let it go, don't let something else take its place.

[30:07] Sticking with Jesus requires that we remain in the church, but it also requires that the truth of Jesus remain in us. And if the truth of Jesus remains in us, what is the result?

We remain in the Son and the Father and we experience eternal life. He says, you too will abide in the Son and in the Father. And this is the promise that he made to us, eternal life.

And as you read through 1 John, you realize that for John, everything is connected. He gives us these three big tests to identify if you are in the faith.

Do you believe rightly? Do you obey? Do you love? But these aren't three separate train tracks. They're always crisscrossing over one another and intertwining and bleeding over into one another. For John, everything is connected and when he says, you will abide in the Son and the Father, and then he says, this is a promise that he made to us, eternal life. John's talking about the same thing.

[31:18] Pastor Mike talked about this at the end of his sermon last week. We remain in the Son and the Father and we experience the eternal life that God has promised to us and it's the same thing because life is found in the Son and in the Father.

Salvation and eternal life are often described as a gift. gift. And that's true. That's biblical. Paul says it. It's a free gift. But if we're not careful, if we think of life, eternal life from Jesus only as a gift, it can blind us to some of what's really going on.

Eternal life is not something that Jesus hands to us like a present on Christmas morning. It isn't something that passes from him to us and then we take it and go.

Eternal life is Jesus giving us himself, giving us the life that he has. And apart from him, we don't have that life at all. Eternal life is less like a box to be opened and more like a power source to be plugged into.

The eternal life that's promised by God is found only in union with him. And this life that John is talking about is the life that we were meant for.

[32:38] It's not just life exactly as it is now, extended forever. It's a life that begins now in a relationship with the Father and the Son. And it does continue forever, but it also changes and grows and is transformed.

And there's a promise of greater life coming than what we have yet seen. And so, when we think about this eternal life, there are a few things we need to know.

If you are lonely right now, which I think a lot of people are with COVID, if you are lonely right now, you should know that this life is relational. Jesus said, this is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.

If you are sick or weak, then you or even approaching death, you should know that this imperishable, glorious life that God has promised for us is the resurrection life of Jesus.

Jesus who said, I am the resurrection and the life. And the life that Jesus has now in his resurrection that will continue forever is the life that he promises to share with you. If life right now feels boring or meaningless to you, and the idea of eternal life just sounds terrible, you should know that Jesus right now is building a kingdom.

[33:59] And his promise of eternal life to you means that your life and your actions now are not meaningless, but they can have eternal significance in connection with Jesus. If your life feels hopelessly polluted by the evil of others or the evil you have done, you should know that this eternal life that God promises, it empowers healing and change now in relationship with the Father and it promises an eternal home where nothing twisted or sinful will be allowed to enter, a place of perfect peace and justice.

And that's what's on the line in sticking with Jesus for life. And John is saying, don't miss out on that. It's been promised to you, this eternal life. So stick with Jesus.

Don't be a Jesus denier who walks away from Jesus' church. Be a Jesus confessor who locks arms with other confessors and holds on for the eternal life that begins now and grows into the full glory of all that God has promised.

So Christ the King Church, let's stick with Jesus for life. We're going to need three things if we're going to make it. We need to be somewhere prayer within the regular gathering of Jesus' followers called the church.

We need to confess something by our lives and our words showing that Jesus really is who he said he is. And we need to know why it matters because eternal life is on the line.

[35:40] So let's pray together. Father, may none of us here who have heard your word this morning be antichrists.

But instead, may all of us today who have heard your word remain confessors of Jesus for life. Amen.