

True Deciever

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[0 : 00] Please be seated. I feel like I've been here before, and I'm much wiser than I was last time, in that I know that I would prefer to be where you are than where I am at this moment.

Just the business of sitting with the congregation and hearing the Word of God and praying together is, it seems to me, to be a priceless possession and opportunity.

And standing up here, you get into trouble. And the kind of trouble you get into is described in the passage that we're reading this morning.

And I really want you to look closely at it and to follow it closely, because I'm going to follow it closely, and it will make very little sense to you if you don't.

So, if you turn to 1 John 2, verse 18 following, and let me pray.

[1 : 32] Well, our Father, we must first confess that these words, which are in some ways very, very familiar, that we are in our almost unsearched territory in our lives and in our experience.

We have no wit or intelligence by ourselves to penetrate into the meaning of this word that you have spoken for us.

And so we ask that your Holy Spirit will guide and direct us as we look at these scriptures. And as we wrestle with understanding them, we pray for each of us in the very different circumstances of all our lives, might be guided to the meaning of them for our lives.

We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen. It begins, chapter 2, verse 18 of 1 John.

Chapter 2. Dear children, I think the thing that characterizes children, and John's epistles seem to want to call the likes of you children, and the particular virtue of you being a child, is that most of it's still in front of you, not behind you.

[3 : 17] That's the way children are. It's in front of them. And that's the way they relate to life. And as those whom John addresses as dear children, he's telling you that most of it is still in front of you.

And if you, by process of aging and all those various things, think it's all behind you, then sharpen up. You are children.

And it's still all in front of you. The next thing he says to our... This is the last hour.

Now, 50 generations of Christians have had to read this and say, well, how can we say it's the last hour when the 49 generations that preceded us, it didn't turn out to be the last hour for them, so how can it be the last hour for us?

And how do we know that the last hour isn't indefinitely postponed? But, taken in the sort of context of New Testament teaching, what the last hour means is that the crucifixion has taken place, the resurrection has happened, the Holy Spirit has come, so that we are in the last hour.

[4 : 52] There is nothing remains except the return of our Lord Jesus Christ. So that's the timeframe in which we are to see ourselves.

It's not... And that's the timeframe in which we are put when he says, this is the last hour.

And this is perhaps simply an evening, which may seem like a thousand years to you, but then a thousand years is meant to seem to you as an evening past.

And so when time is gone, it's gone. And so there is, I think, a reason, apart from any belief that John didn't understand history when he said this, apart from that, I think there's a way in which we, in this 50th generation since John wrote this, the last hour, can say it's the last hour.

Now, the reason you know it's the last hour is because the Antichrist is coming.

[6 : 17] And in the ancient world, they had a concept that the Messiah would come. And when the Messiah came, the Antichrist too would come.

So that you would have a double focus, one on the person of the Messiah, the Christ of God, and the other, the opposition to the other side of it, which would be the Antichrist.

And so you would have this great division between the Christ and the Antichrist. And he says, you have heard that the Antichrist is coming. And then he adapts that understanding a little bit.

When he continues that verse, you notice, and says, even now, many, many Antichrists have come. But it's not a single person.

It is, it's many people, or many ideas, or whatever, you know, is enshrined in, or idolized by, the coming of the Antichrist.

[7 : 34] That it is a multiple personality problem. So then, he goes on from there to say, this is how we know that it's the last hour, because of this opposition between these two.

The Christ of God on the one hand, and the Antichrist on the other hand. Then he refers to the immediacy of how, within the church, within the community of Christ's people.

And remember, this is almost the church of the first generation of Christians. Perhaps there would be few that were actually alive when the events of the, of the crucifixion and resurrection and Pentecost took place.

But they would be a, a very early congregation. And they would have found or discovered that amongst them, as it says in this passage, there are those, there are those whom he describes as they.

Do you see they at the beginning of verse, verse 19? You see what it says about they? It was understood who they were.

[8 : 48] But the they means, those who went out from us. Further, they did not really belong to us. And if you suppose that they did belong to us, then the result would have been, as it says, with certain devastating logic, if they had belonged to us, they would have remained with us.

But their going showed that none of them belonged to us. And of course, that the church in that day was full of such people.

And the church today is full of such people. Inevitably, that's true. I mean, people who have been loyal to the church, people who have been traditionally involved in the church, people who have been sentimental, belongs to the church for sentimental reasons.

Many people are like that. And they go out from us. But this, this is, this is more than just the casual backslider. This is more than the guy who, having watched the World Series last night, couldn't get up this morning.

And so is not with us. And we pay tribute to them. Theirs was a great cause. But, this isn't them.

[10 : 24] This is, these are those who, who having come to an understanding of who the Christ is, have now gone on to know better than that. They now understand more. And so they have left us behind, as those who haven't properly understood, and are not prepared to carry through with the implications of the gospel in the various departments of our life.

So they have gone from us. They are, they are those who, are still searching for pearls, because they have never found the pearl of great price.

They are, they are, they are, they are like the prodigal sons who came home for the weekend.

You know, it's, that's all they came home for. They, their, their interest was, was ultimately somewhere else. they are like the people who are brilliantly described in John chapter 6, who shared in the feeding of the 5,000, and, and from there, came back the next day to be fed again, and Jesus said, hard and harsh words to them.

And in those hard and harsh words that he said, he drove them away. And they went away, because what they were looking for, proved not to be there.

[12 : 02] And of course, there are countless, numbers of people who come to the church looking for something, who come under the sound of the gospel, looking for something.

And then, they go on from there to find something else. Theirs is a perpetual search, which never finds the, finds the heart of the gospel.

And so, when John, when John, when Jesus in John chapter 6 said to Peter, will you also go away? Because that's a very serious temptation to anybody who's got involved in the churches.

It's now time to move on. This no longer is relevant to me. This no longer has meaning for me. I must go on to greater things. I must become a philosopher or something like that.

And John, when Jesus said to Peter, will you also go away? Peter said, there's no place to go. You alone have the words of eternal life.

[13 : 12] And so, you see that, that taking place. And I guess you see it still in the church today. And that's why I say, I think it's awkward to be in the pulpit. Because, you always are subject to having really brilliant ideas and want to lead people beyond the narrow limits of the gospel.

To something far richer and far fuller. Believing there might be such a thing. Lead them on to something which will better serve their interests.

You know, the people are easily led on if you appeal to the, to the question, what's in it for me? If you come and tell them, well there's something more in this for you than you've got so far, so come with us.

That's why I think the gospel is one of the great generators of religion in the world. Because so many people have come under the hearing of the gospel, but perhaps not under the lordship of Christ, and have gone from there on to what they supposed to be greater things.

And the significance of this passage is that that was happening 50 generations ago, as it is still happening today. as you know, you and I both meet lots of people who, having once been identified with the church and with the faith of Christ, have now gone on to a greater enlightenment of some kind or other.

[14 : 52] And that's, that was a problem then. And John is trying to deal with that problem because it's hard on the people of the congregation.

So he moves from talking about they, who moved on to greater things as they imagined, and you, you see, in verse 20 it says, you have an anointing from the Holy One, and all of you know the truth.

There's nothing that makes Christianity more generally despised in the community in which we live, than a statement like this. You have the anointing of the Holy One, and you know the truth.

It's very important if you want to have credentials in our society, not to make any, any reference to the truth and to the possibility that you know it.

It's, it's forbidden to be. as, as, as, Jeremy Begby said, and I thought this was quite helpful. He said that, in our society, it's not only important, I mean that, that our, our job is not to be right, but it's, to come to the place where we know we are not right.

[16 : 22] That's the ultimate goal, where we don't know anything. And, because nothing can be known, ultimately. And that it's all totally subjective anyway. So, John seems to be of another point of view, when he writes verse, verse 20 and says, you have an anointing from the Holy One, and all of you know the truth.

The, the difficulty, I think, I mean in understanding that, and the, the difficulty it raises for us, in our society, is, that, this anointing from the Holy One.

People have trouble because it doesn't say whether it's God the Father, God the Son, or God the Holy Spirit. It just says an anointing from the Holy One. The picture of an anointing is, I think, a little bit like, do you remember when Samuel went to Jesse and had all his sons come before him because he was going to anoint the one who was to be the king?

And so this shepherd boy was anointed and then went back to looking after the sheep. But he never forgot the anointing.

He never forgot. And even when Saul was bitterly opposed to him and wanting to kill him, David said, Saul is the anointed one and I will not fight against him.

[18 : 03] Knowing that he too was anointed and his time would come when he would be vindicated by reason of the anointing which he had received. And that seems to be the thing that happens to us, the thing which sacramentally perhaps is expressed when a tiny child is brought up and signed with the sign of the cross, in token that you will be Christ's forever.

That's a kind of outward sign of this deep inward anointing. That God has chosen you, that he has anointed you, and that God has acted towards you.

And that is his activity. It's not something you've done. It's something he's done. And you find yourself incapable of escaping from that anointing. And with that anointing is coupled the rest of the verse which says, all of you know the truth.

The truth yesterday was that HIV and AIDS were linked. The truth in the province this morning is that they are not linked necessarily.

So the truth about that has changed. And scientific truth is always subject to change. And when it says that you know the truth, it doesn't mean that you know more than anybody else.

[19 : 41] It doesn't know that you know better than anybody else. It doesn't mean that you have a superior understanding than anybody else. It means that the truth is, the unchangeable reality is, that God has created the world and has come into the world in the person of Jesus Christ.

So that when you stand and say the creed, that is the truth that you know. You don't know a lot more, but you do know that. And that's what's involved here.

When he says that you have an anointing from the Holy One. He goes on to write to say to them, I do not write to you because you do not know the truth, but because you do know it.

And because no lie comes from the truth. And of course that's what was happening with the false teachers, is that they had, as it was imagined, they had come to encounter the truth in Jesus Christ, and then they had built on that something new and different, which was a lie.

And John says you can't do that. You can't start from the foundation of the truth and build a lie on it. Without denying the truth in the first place.

[21 : 12] It just won't work. You can't do it that way. He says you have... That they are incompatible. That the truth and the lie don't work. And you know that the lie is much more acceptable to us than the truth. It's much more congenial.

In order to make a lie work, you have to deny the truth.

That's the fix that we're in. That's the moment. And I think that's pretty basic to our own personal lives.

That we come to the place where we want to make a lie work. And we find in order to make it work for us, we have to deny the truth.

[22 : 17] And that's where the damage is done. A lie might be quite a convenient and quite a beautiful lie. But it ultimately involves you in denying the truth.

And therefore taking away the whole foundation of your life. So he says, who is the liar? It is the man who denies that Jesus is the Christ.

The truth is that Jesus is the Christ. The liar is the one who denies that. Such a man is the Antichrist. He denies the Father and the Son.

No one who denies the Son has the Father. Whoever acknowledges the Son has the Father also. The, you see, for Christians the question is not, how do you prove the existence of God?

If somebody comes and asks you that question, you have to say, I can't. But then you raise the other question for them.

[23 : 29] All I can do is to say to you, figure out who Jesus is. That's the way it works.

I mean, if somebody appeals to you to be a philosopher of such a profound insight that you can prove the existence of God, you have to back down from that.

But you can ask people the question, who is Jesus? Now, you may find that offensively simplistic.

Perhaps I hope you do. But it's pretty hard to get around. It's a very difficult thing to get around. And that's why when it says that a man, he denies the Father and the Son.

No one denies the Son. Who denies the Son has the Father. No one who acknowledges the Son as the Father also. So you can't separate them.

[24 : 38] You can't separate the Father from the Son. You can't say, well, Jesus was a wonderful example of human life. And not say that Jesus is the Christ.

You can't separate those two. You can't say that you have a relationship to the Father and deny Jesus Christ.

You can't say that you are a follower of Christ and deny the Father. Those two are inseparably bound, one with another. And the breeding ground for most of contemporary religion in the world has come from separating them.

And saying that they're different. That I don't believe in Jesus, but I do believe in God the Father. Or I believe in God, but I don't believe in Jesus.

He says you can't do it. Because if you do, you are the anti-Christ. That is, you are opposing the truth, which it's possible for you to know.

[25 : 53] So, it goes on. See that what you have heard from the beginning remains in you. Now, what you heard from the beginning is what John said in the beginning.

Do you remember? That which was from the beginning. This is how the epistle starts. That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched.

This we proclaim concerning the word of life. A life appeared and we have seen it and testify to it. And we proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and has appeared to us.

We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard. So, that Christian faith is not based on theory or a concept.

It's based on an event which you have witnessed. And that you have to relate your life, not to some form of philosophical enlightenment.

[27 : 04] Somebody said to me the other day, which I thought was really wonderful. He said that if intelligence was the way to understand Christianity, then all the PhDs would be saints.

And they're not. There's something which is a bit humbling about this process. And it says that what you have heard from the beginning, that's what you remain in.

You stay in that. And the function of the church is to keep relating you back to it, to keep reminding you of it, to earnestly exhort you that you remember that, that the reality of the apostolic witness to the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, that's the foundation stone.

And you remain in that. You don't graduate from it, get wiser than it. You remain in that.

And that's what you heard from the beginning. It remains in you. And if it does, you remain in the sun.

[28 : 24] In other words, as you remain in that, so as that teaching remains in you, so you remain in Christ.

That teaching is gone, so you're continuing in the faith of Christ is gone too. You can't do both. And so, this is what he promised.

And that's what you have to continue in. Well, then what it says, when you go on from looking at that, you see, this is the battle that runs all the way through the New Testament.

The epistle to the Colossians was written because the false teachers came along and said, ah, now that you have come to faith in Christ, let me show you there are greater things, greater experiences, things that you never dreamed of beyond that.

And Paul comes hammering in and says, the fullness of God abides in Christ and in Christ alone. You don't go beyond that.

[29 : 46] You can't go beyond that. And when he's writing to the Galatians, the false teachers have come in and said, there is another gospel. There is no other gospel. There is no other basis on which you find eternal life except faith in Jesus Christ.

And that's terribly humbling to wise and sophisticated and intelligent people like you and me and our society and our culture. And it's very difficult to come to terms with.

But there it is. And there it is, 50 generations ago, when John hammers it out to these people. Then he says, look in verse 26 when he makes the direct reference to the teachers who are working among them.

And he says, I'm writing to you about those who are trying to lead you astray. You were a wandering planet before you came to the knowledge of God in Christ, before you heard this gospel.

And now these teachers want to lead you astray again. But John assures them, as for you, the anointing you received from him remains in you.

[31 : 22] You do not need anyone to teach you. In other words, to teach you something new and something different. Teaching is a normal function of the Christian community and you need a great deal of teaching.

But the fundamental purpose of preaching is not to tell you something you don't know, but to remind you of what you already know.

And to bring you in touch with what you already know. And it's a form of vanity to be looking for something like that. And John says, you don't need that.

You do not need anyone to teach you about such things. As his anointing teaches you about all things. And as that anointing is real, not counterfeit, just as it has taught you, remain in him.

You see, what he seems to be saying is, remember the anointing is from the Holy One.

[32 : 34] And it's that experience out of which you are to learn. And that anointing is to teach you. The difference between the teacher who comes along and says, you don't have it and I have and I'll show you where it is.

And the teacher that John says, you have it by reason of your faith in Jesus Christ. And that faith in Jesus Christ will, because it involves the person of God the Father who created you, God the Son who redeemed you, and God the Holy Spirit who inspires and teaches and directs you.

That anointing will teach you. You can go on in that. And so what you come to do when you sit under the preacher on Sunday morning is have your anointing by the Holy One, in a sense, excited for you so that that anointing can teach you.

It's not that the preacher teaches you something. It's that God teaches you something by the anointing which he has given you. And the preacher helps you to come to grips with it.

That's the pattern. He doesn't come along and say, lead you off in another path altogether. And so he concludes by saying, his anointing teaches you all things.

[34 : 09] And as that anointing is real, not counterfeit, just as it has taught you, remain in him. Now, you see, I think you have to take this seriously because people don't counterfeit something which doesn't have value.

I'm telling you things you know. There's no use counterfeiting pennies because where have you got to for all your labor? If you can counterfeit \$1,000 bill, then you've got something, you know.

And so when God has spoken to us in Christ, there is the action of God, the magnificent central reality of the whole of human history and personal existence is in Christ.

And so, it's well worth counterfeiting. And so the counterfeiting goes on at a great pace. And John is trying to protect these little children from that counterfeiting activity to which they are so susceptible and to which we are so susceptible.

So then, the conclusion is, now, dear children, continue in him so that when he appears, we may be confident and unashamed before him at his coming.

[35 : 37] If you know that he is righteous, you know that everyone who does what is right has been born of him. Continue in him. That's the word.

That's what you're to continue in, in your life. To continue in Christ.

To go on. And it's, when Paul argues with the Colossians, he says, our concern is to present every man mature in Christ, to grow up in him.

And if you were to look at, at one, at Philippians 3, 12 to 16, he says, the development for the Christian is living up to what we have already attained.

See, so that, this creates, I think, a good deal of chaos in a Christian congregation because we all, we all tend to belong to stratified classes of people.

[36 : 49] And we're better than these people and better than these people and a little worse than those people. And that goes like that. But you see, when a person comes to faith in Christ, they have the essential matter given to them.

In what is called in this passage, the anointing of the Holy One. Now, some people have grown up in that, but they haven't grown beyond it. And so the bond that we have with one another is this anointing of the Holy One.

And we are to grow up in that. And we are to, we are to live up to what we have already attained.

We are to bring everybody to maturity in Christ. We are in what Hebrew says, we are to let him work in us that which is pleasing in his sight.

Most people, I mean, our natural inclination is to say, well, what's in it for me? The Christian life is not a matter of what's in it for you.

[37 : 59] It's really essentially a matter of what God is in it for. And he's in it for you. And you have to, you have to be able to live with what's in it for God.

Because it is his purpose and his glory and the hallowing of his name that is the ultimate reality. And that's, you see, the consistency of that is mentioned when you come to the last verse of the passage, the passage, which says, continue in him so that when he appears, we may be confident and unashamed.

You know, we're not, we don't have to say, well, as a matter of fact, I thought it was rather a fruitful pursuit that I took. And I know that it took me a long way away. But when he comes, we will be continuing in him, growing up into him, becoming mature in him, not wasting the precious moments of our lives, going off in other pursuits and adventures, but growing up in him.

And I think the tragedy of mature years is the recognition that we've wasted so many of them going off in the wrong direction.

And we have so few. And so he says that we may not be ashamed before him at his coming.

[39 : 37] If you know that he is righteous, you know that everyone who does what is right has been born of him. And that is, I think, a bit of a curveball.

Because it takes you back to the fact that you can't build a lie on the truth.

And ultimately, the truth that you come to know in Jesus Christ demands the submission of your whole life to that truth.

Everything must be brought under that truth. You can't build a lie on it. Everything has to be brought under it. Everyone who does what is right does what is right because of the truth.

And that you have no life apart from the life which you derive from your continuing relationship to Jesus Christ.

[40 : 44] Let me just pray. Father, thank you for this time together and thank you for these words. Thank you that we find ourselves with so much still to learn.

So much to try and come to terms with. That we're the alternatives we thought we had, we don't have.

And that you, in your grace and mercy, bring us back to the truth as it is in Jesus Christ.

That we may submit to that. And we may be taught by the anointing which you have given us. We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.