

Don't be Deceived

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[0 : 00] Good morning. It's good to see you all here. If any of you are feeling like the heat and of humidity is oppressive in here, if you go out this door, the ushers will point you downstairs.

There's a room downstairs that is air-conditioned, and I will not be miffed or in any way put out if you decide to relocate in order to be able to hear God's Word this morning. Please take advantage of that if that would be helpful to you. I myself am recovering from illness, so I have a stool behind me. If I feel like I need to, I'm just going to sit here. Zach, we're going to have some fun with the live stream if I do that, but that's what we're going to do this morning. So, I am glad to be with you again. In 1995, Tim LaHaye and Jerry Jenkins released the book *Left Behind*.

He later was made into a movie series with starring the inimitable Kurt Cameron, and it is a story about the end times and what happens. And one of the major figures in the story of *The Left Behind* is Nicolai Carpathia, the Antichrist figure of the last times. Now, it was a long time ago when I read the first book. I did not read the other 14. I confess. I don't remember it well, but I do remember that there was a captivating portrayal at that time of this figure, Nicholas Carpathia, strong, powerful, smooth, and evil to the core, seeking to leverage power in order to lead power to be amassed in himself and away of particularly from the church and God's people, and who would bring a world domination that would ultimately destroy it. These books aroused concern, fear, and vigilance among Christians because it raised a specter of a threat to the church. In that time, I remember conversations. We have to identify properly who might the Antichrist be so that we can resist him. It was a part of the story in the 1990s. If you grew up in certain circles, you know this, and you remember this, right? And you'll think, yes, that's right, he is coming. Now, for some of you, what I've been talking about for the last minute and a half is the most ridiculous thing you've heard in the last year and a half. And you're going, what in the world are you talking about? And some of you may be thinking, why is he talking about this? That was sort of a hysterical season, but we know better.

This isn't really true. Some of you may think this is spiritual fear-mongering at worst, and just misguided and misleading imagination at its best. But in fact, the Bible talks about the Antichrist.

[3 : 30] And we need to think about how do we move beyond the boogeyman of left behind, which is a creative and imaginative portrayal to see what the Bible actually tells us about this threat to the church that the Bible identifies. And this brings us to our passage today, because in 1 John chapter 2, we see this figure addressed most clearly. So if you are reading along with us in the Pew Bibles, it's page 959. We're in 1 John chapter 2, starting in verse 18. If you're new with us, we are preaching through the letter, first letter of John this summer. And John was writing to a church near the end of the first century that was facing new threats, new ideas, and he's writing to give the church confidence in their faith in the face of these threats. And in fact, in this passage is the clearest use of the word Antichrist in all of the Bible. And so that's what we're going to look at this morning.

1 John chapter 2, starting in verse 18. Let's read this together, and then we'll pray for God's help. 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 a liar but him who denies that Jesus is the Christ?

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 he made to us, eternal life. I write these things to you about those who are trying to deceive you. But the anointing that you have received from him abides in you, and 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 it has taught you, abide in him.

This is God's Word. Let's pray together. Oh God, we ask this morning for your help as we look at this passage. Lord, we pray that, Lord, you would be our help this morning, that we would understand this passage rightly. Lord, that we would receive it gladly. Oh Lord, be with us as we sit under your Word this morning. Help me to speak as I ought, that we might all be edified by your Word. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

[7 : 17] How are Christians to respond to spiritual threats? I think 1 John has three things for us in this passage this morning. We're not going to work through it sequentially as much thematically.

We've talked about this before. John doesn't always write logically sequentially. He writes sometimes circularly. And so, I'm going to pull out three ideas about how it is that we should understand and think about how Christians are to respond to spiritual threats. First, we're going to have to think clearly about the nature of the Antichrists. The second is we are to know rightly the nature of the gospel resources we have to face this threat. And third, we must remain steadfast in the only path of life. So, we're think clearly, know rightly, and remain steadfast. This is the exhortation that we have this morning. That's your outline if you're a note-taker. So, first, let's look at, we must think clearly about the nature of these Antichrists. Now, when you look through this passage, it's very clear. John is writing a word of warning. He is concerned about these people and what they are teaching because they are seeking to deceive the church that he is writing to. So, there is a real threat here. And he mentions this is the last hour. And I'm not going to spend a lot of time on this, but basically, the idea here is that John is saying we are now in the end game of God's redemptive history. Jesus has come and lived and died and rose again. And now, God is working out that work in the world. And he's saying this is the last hour where the kingdom will advance and where the opposition to

God's kingdom will also arise in particular ways. And so, he's simply saying this is the hour. Now, he's not saying I thought that it was going to end at the end of the first century because here we are another 2,000 years later and we're still in the last hour. We're still in the last days. And we don't know when that will end. But here's where we are. And he's saying in this, the Antichrist is coming, a threat. And you might have noticed right at the very beginning in the first passage or in verse 18 that he actually talks about the Antichrist and then the Antichrists. The first one is singular, the second one is plural. And that's a helpful observation to make because this is where lots of people get confused because they're thinking, well, we've got to know who the one is. Who's the one? But John clarifies that right from the start. No, the Antichrists are going to be multiple, right? And what is the Antichrist? Well, the Antichrist is someone who is Antichrist. And that could mean two different things. It could be someone who stands against Christ. So, someone who rises up in power to rival Christ and to say, I am going to be a greater one than Christ.

Or it could be someone who's seeking to replace Christ. So, what is it that John says about the nature of the Antichrist? What is at the heart of this? Because there have been lots of ideas throughout history, right? In the past, there have been wonderful people to the extent of Arius, the fourth century theologian, to Peter the Great, the leader of Russia, to Napoleon, to in recent times, both presidents, Obama and Trump, have been called the Antichrist by various people in our world. [11 : 08] And so, some people think that this is going to be a political figure who's going to lead the church, who's going to destroy the church. Some people see it as theological leaders. So, again, I mentioned Arius earlier. The Pope was a famous target of this during the Reformation.

And many of our Reformation heroes, Calvin, Luther, would say, well, of course the Pope is the Antichrist. In modern days, we might point to someone like Senyung Moon, who was the leader of the Moonies.

If you're familiar with that cult, he also claimed to be Christ and has been identified by others as an Antichrist. Other people. Charles Manson, the mass murderer, identified himself as the Antichrist when he was alive. So, this...so there are lots of...there's lots of confusion about what is this person.

But at its core, what John is saying...look with me in verses 22 and 23. This is what John says. John says, first and foremost, they are people. In the first century, they were false teachers who

were a part of the community of the church.

And the reason that they were identified as false teachers and Antichrist was because they denied that Jesus is the Christ. They denied Jesus in his identity and in his work. In his identity, that he was both fully human and fully divine.

[12:42] The incarnate Son of God who came and lived and died and rose again. And in his work then, that his life and death and resurrection were effective to overcome sin and to offer forgiveness to all who had faith in Christ.

That his suffering was real. That his death was real. That his resurrection were real. And remember, these people were a part of the community, right?

In verses 19 and 20, it says, they went out from us, but they were not of us. And so, this is the bewildering reality that John is trying to help the church navigate.

People who used to worship next to one another, now some of them are teaching that Jesus is not who the church has claimed he was from the beginning. They have changed. They have changed. They have shifted. They have re-characterized Jesus as something else.

They claim to be Christians still, but they deny the Christ of Christianity. And friends, John says, this is not merely a mistake, something that we can overlook easily.

[14:06] This is a grievous error because these were teachers who were intentionally seeking to lead the church astray to believe something else about Jesus.

And John is saying, the church is not like that. The church is not something that we have created that we get to choose which and is malleable according to the spirit of the age or the ideas that are prevalent of the time.

The church is a bounded community by an objective reality. And therefore, these who teach these things, who used to be a part of us, are no longer part of us.

In fact, they show that they were never a part of us because of their denial of who Jesus is.

Pastorally, here's a note.

The church has often been accused of shooting their wounded. We often can be the harshest on one another. And we need to think carefully about how we do this.

[15:14] Because some of us are going to be far too willing to judge, condemn, and exclude others. We're going to jump to the end and think someone who's slightly off kilter, well, they're out completely because they've mischaracterized something.

Or maybe someone who's going through a time of suffering and is questioning. We heap upon them the standards of doctrinal purity while they're wrestling through their existential crisis.

Friends, let us be gracious in these ways. But some of us have the opposite instinct. Some of us have developed too much of a reaction to that and reaction to the battles that have happened throughout church history about doctrine so that we don't want to draw any lines at all.

And we just sort of, well, if you say you love God, that's good enough for me. I don't need to know anything else. And John is saying, no, to know Jesus rightly is essential for your Christian faith.

And so we must draw some lines. As we think about the 20th century, some of you may think, who in the world is a Christian and doesn't believe that Jesus is God?

[16:32] Well, there are lots of people. It's not that hard, right? There are lots of churches that have turned to a view that Jesus was flawed, that He was merely human, that He was a good teacher, but not God, not died on the cross for our sins and rose from the dead.

And they deny these things. Certainly even within the evangelical fold in the last 30 years, 50 years, I thought of here a couple who have done exactly what John describes here.

Clark Pinnock was a teacher at the seminary that I went to in the 1970s. But as his theology developed, he came to the conclusion that Jesus' death no longer was necessary, that actually what Jesus did was to save absolutely everybody, and so that all people could be brought in.

That's a gross oversimplification. I'm sure someone would nitpick at that. But fundamentally, he came to a point of universalism, where he believed all people will be saved by the death of Jesus. denying the actual work that Jesus did of saving some from sin by His death and resurrection.

Some of you are too old to remember Clark Pinnock, but some of you may remember a guy named Rob Bell.

[17:51] Rob Bell was a popular writer 20 years ago who wrote about God being love, and how if God is of love, how is it possible that He could ever condemn people?

And suddenly, in this logic, the death of Jesus becomes a terrible injustice. Nobody, God would never judge someone so severely as to cause them to have to die.

So Jesus' death is robbed of its meaning by Rob Bell's overemphasis on the love of God, to the exclusion of the justice and righteousness of God, that when we look at it rightly, we think we want God to be just because we want Him to judge evil in the world.

Thirdly, on a maybe more scholarly level, there's a chap named Bart Ehrman who is running around today teaching on a fairly highly sophisticated level in New Testament critical thinking that Jesus didn't really claim to be God.

And the church has always been misguided by that misunderstanding of who He really is. And if you really looked at the Gospels, that's not really what it says. And in the end, he denies that Jesus is God.

[19 : 13] He just says Jesus is a human being, a significant one for sure who started a movement, but not who God is. Friends, we need to recognize that all of these men had arguments, they had reasons, and there are always parts of these that are attractive.

Usually, heresy doesn't come with a broadside attack on truth, but usually it takes one part of truth and then overemphasizes it to the exclusion of other and molds and reshapes truth in a way that denies it all.

But John is warning us of these. John is warning because these arguments, when we see them clearly, when they deny the person and the work of Christ, they're deceivers and they're liars.

And they lead to destruction. Because if you don't have the Son, you don't have the Father. And if you don't have the Father, you don't have eternal life, according to John.

So John says, we must think clearly. We must think rightly about the nature of false teachers, the nature of those who would come in the spirit of Antichrist and in various ways deny the centrality and the person and the work of Jesus.

[20 : 45] But we're not only to think clearly about this threat, but John says, I want you to think, to know rightly the nature of the gospel resources that you have.

Because you might think, Bart Ehrman is a scholar. He knows more than I do. How can I, how can I disagree with him? What resources has God given me to talk against these guys?

John says, brothers, sisters, you are equipped by God to know the truth for two reasons. And this is my second point.

We must know rightly the nature of the gospel resources to face this threat. And friends, you may not be surprised. These are not rocket science. First, I want you to look at verse 24.

Let what you have heard from the beginning abide in you. The first resource that we have is the very message of the gospel itself.

[21 : 54] Think about how John opened this letter. I'm going to reread the first couple of verses in John 1 so you can remember. That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our own eyes, which we have looked upon and touched with our hands concerning the word of life, the life that was, that was, the life was made manifest, and we have seen it and testified to it and proclaimed to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was made manifest to us.

That which we have seen and heard, we proclaim also to you, so that you too may have fellowship with us. And indeed, our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ.

John is saying that the message of the gospel is what we have heard from the beginning. And the church has always held this, that what Christianity is, it is not a conjecture or religious imagination, nor is it a philosophy that we have carefully constructed and refined over time.

Although it includes both of those aspects of our mind, at the core of it, it is a testimony. It is those who saw and touched and held a man when he was alive, and they saw him die, and they saw him rise from the dead, and they said, this is like nothing we have ever seen.

And it is the report of this man, Jesus Christ, his teaching and his life. And it is not up to us to mold or to shape or to retell, but it is up to us to simply receive as a testimony and to either deny or accept it, as it is, objective body of truth.

[23 : 47] This is what John reminds the church that they already have. You have the eyewitness testimony. And friends, we do too.

That's what this is. This is a recording of that eyewitness testimony written down so that we might know more fully this Jesus.

Now, friends, I recognize this is not easy in our modern age. We live in an age where we distrust authority of all kinds, where we don't... We can't even trust the news media, let alone anyone else, right?

So we figure, only I can determine truth. And if you were at John's... At the pastoral discussion we had a couple weeks ago, the elders' discussion, John did a great five-minute history of Western intellectual history where you realize how deeply rooted our perspectives today are in humanism and individual freedom and self-created meaning.

These are values that our culture is deeply embedded, and it makes us unwilling to simply receive from God truth about who He is.

[25 : 07] But as the great poet and songwriter Richard Mullen says, there's a danger in this spirit. They said, boy, you just follow your heart, but my heart just led me into my chest.

And they said, follow your nose, but the direction changed every time I went and turned my head. And they said, boy, just follow your dreams, but my dreams were only misty notions.

But the Father of hearts and the maker of noses and the giver of dreams, He is the one that I have chosen, and I will follow Him. See, friends, when we take the role of determining all truth, we bear an unbearable weight.

But the testimony of the Christian church from the very beginning is that it is not up to us to make that. It is up to us to discover it, because there is a God who is there, and He has revealed Himself to us, and He has made Himself known so that we can receive from Him this body of truth.

And this gives us an objective and a strong place to stand in the face of threats. The second that John tells us about is that we have an anointing.

[26 : 27] That is, we have been anointed with the Holy Spirit of God dwelling in us to teach us all truth. Now, you might remember that Jesus, before He died, as He was teaching His disciples, according to the Gospel of John, chapter 16, verse 13 says this, When the Spirit of truth comes, He will guide you into all the truth, for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears, He will speak, and He will declare to you the things that are to come.

What John says is, not only do we have the objective testimony, but we have the very person, third person of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit, dwelling within us to confirm the truth of the Gospel.

Now, these false teachers were coming and saying, there's another truth, there's another Gospel out there. And maybe they were claiming some kind of esoteric, Gnostic, special knowledge.

In the modern day, we might say something like, well, we believe that God is like this because that feels right to us, or because it makes more sense in my human reason that God must be like these things.

But the Holy Spirit guides us into a truth. And friends, if you have been around the Gospel long enough, you should know, and if you haven't figured this out yet, the Gospel is never what we think it is.

[27 : 54] It is always surprising. It is always when we think about what our human patterns, how would God deal with sin?

How would God deal with power? How would God deal with conflict? How would God do all these things? Right? And what we see at the center of it is the person of Jesus.

How did Jesus do that? He came and didn't count equality with God, something to be grasped, but humbled himself, made himself a servant, and died on the cross for you and me.

Nobody would have ever thought of this. The only reason why it's such a storyline in Western history is because of the Gospel. And so, the Spirit comes and He teaches us into the truth that God has revealed for us.

And our response is to be receptive and to be obedient, to honor Him above our feelings. And friends, this gives us great confidence and humility as we think about our faith, as we think about interacting with others who might say something else.

[29 : 09] Humility before God and His Word. If you met a nuclear physicist, and I know some of you are nuclear physicists, so this is going to be a stretch for you, but maybe you can think of someone else like a concert pianist, all right?

Someone who's an expert in a field that you're not an expert in, right? And if they tell you these things are true, right? And you just go, nah, I don't think so.

That doesn't seem right to me. Would we really do that? Hopefully, we'd have the humility to say, wow, that's really surprising.

I didn't expect that at all. But you know everything about this subject, and I know nothing. So maybe I can be humble and learn from you rather than rejecting or denying what you're saying.

This is what God calls us to do before His Word and His Spirit. To be humble. Not to disengage our brain, but to engage our brain with a spirit of humility and receptivity to God's truth.

[30 : 14] Friends, I don't know. I think I've told you my story before, but I grew up going to a church, but I never understood it. I never understood the gospel.

I'm sure I had heard Jesus died on the cross for my sins, but it didn't make any sense to me. And then in the summer of 1986, the Holy Spirit began to work in my heart in a way.

And the same truths were repeated in a different way. And the Holy Spirit helped me understand that I was a sinner and that Jesus was the only hope for me to be restored to a relationship with God.

That only on the basis of what He had done could I be restored and renewed. Could I be forgiven of my sins and given new life?

Only through His life and death and resurrection, these truths that I had heard before finally made sense to me. Through the power of the Holy Spirit.

[31 : 14] I didn't decide it was true. It was revealed to me that it was true. And all I could do was to deny it or to receive it. So there's great place for us to find confidence and humility as we recognize that God has given us these resources and let us stand firm in these ones.

He's given us His Word. He's given us His Spirit so that we can identify, recognize where there may be false teaching in our midst, reject it, and continue on with confidence in our faith.

So we have to think rightly about the threat. We need to know rightly... Think clearly about the threat. We need to know rightly the gospel resources. And finally, we must remain steadfast in the only path of life.

Because this is John's great desire for the church, is that not just that they would win the war, the theological battle, not just that they would be proven right and others wrong, but because this truth is what leads to life and to God.

You see this in verse 24 and verse 27. It says, remain in these things or abide in these things, depending on your translation. It means to be rooted and planted in these things, right?

[32 : 42] Like those pines that grow up in the desert that have deep roots, that go deep into the... to drink deeply from the water, even in the midst of the winds and the waves of the... of the desert.

In the face of a false teaching, someone who remains in these things will not be moved. And they will not be moved while they're able to be gracious.

John doesn't here attack them necessarily. He simply identifies them. And I might even see a tone of grieving. They were a part of us and they went out.

How tragic is that? Right? There is a right way for us to oppose truth and yet not to demonize the people who are teaching it.

We can grieve for them and long for their repentance and for their return. It is gracious, but it is also stubborn. On this I stand and I will not be moved, not wavering from the truth of Jesus.

[33 : 45] Jesus, like a sumo wrestler who sets his stance for the oncoming attack. So we want to set our stance in God's word, depending on his spirit, so that when these pushes come, and they will, they haven't happened yet in their life, know that they will.

At one point, sometime, something will sound right to you or attractive to you and you will think, maybe that's true. But we're to remain steadfast in these things because that's where we can have confidence in our faith, in the midst of these threats.

And friend, this place to stand is a place of life. This is what verse 25 tells us. This is the promise that he made to us that when we have the Son and when we have the Father, we have eternal life. we have what we most need and most wanted. What we were created for to be in a right relationship with our Creator.

To have the stain of our sin removed by the work of Christ so that we can enjoy fellowship with Him. And this then is the church that gathers around the fellowship that we have with Him so that we have fellowship with one another.

[35 : 07] What joy and freedom this is. And friends, if you've come to Trinity for a while, you might figure out this is kind of the only thing we talk about. We talk about Jesus all the time.

We talk about these gospel truths over and over and over again. Why? Because of this. Because this is the place where we stand firm.

From the Nicene Creed to the Westminster Confession to the London Baptist Confession to the Baptist Faith and Mission, the center of it is the person and the work of Jesus.

This is what the church has always held. And for us to be a gospel-centered church is to hold to these things. We're not going to make up anything new.

We're not trying to figure out what else we need to add. We just need to go back to this place over and over again and see that all of the scriptures, as Jesus told His disciples, in Luke 24, all of the scriptures point to these central truths about the gospel and about Jesus.

[36 : 14] And this is where we stand in our confidence. Let's pray together. Lord Jesus, we thank You for Your Word and we thank You for Your Holy Spirit.

Lord, I pray this morning, Lord, that if there are those among us, Lord, who are feeling beaten down and uncertain, Lord, that You would give them confidence by Your Spirit in Your Word about Jesus. Lord, I pray that You would help us, Lord, not only to know these truths, but to treasure them, to cherish them, to remain in them.

Thank You, Lord. We pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen.