

Therefore Choose Life...

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 05 February 2023

Preacher: Josh Johnston

[0 : 00] Thank you, Libby. Well, let's turn to God's Word this evening, and Josh is leading us through 1 John. So, turn your Bible to 1 John. If you don't have a Bible with you, we have plenty available.

At the side, at the back, in the transepts, do grab a Bible and turn to 1 John, and we're in chapter 2. So, 1 John 2, and reading from verse 15.

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 are all not of us. But you have been anointed by the Holy One, and you all have knowledge.

[1 : 47] 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?

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 have 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. I write these things to you about those who are trying to deceive you.

But the anointing that you receive 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.

[2 : 57] Amen. And may God bless his words to us. Good evening. Do open your Bibles once again to 1 John.

There is a dissonance of sorts that Christians faith throughout life. And very often the dissonance is caused by the contrast of faith and sight.

We've been seeing in 1 John so far the very great encouragements that there are for those who continue with the apostolic gospel. Particularly the recipients of this letter who faced some of their number departing from them.

As we've seen in chapter 2 verse 19. And so John has been making clear that for those who continue, they are the ones who share in fellowship with not just the apostles, but with the Father and the Son.

They are recipients of eternal life. They have sins forgiven and have overcome the evil one. All this because Jesus, the light, had come into the world and had caused darkness to begin passing away.

[4 : 22] But the reality that does sometimes jar for us is that the darkness is passing away. Chapter 2 verse 8. And the world is passing away.

Chapter 2 verse 17. They haven't yet passed away. The direction is set. The trajectory is lined up. The destination is final.

But the darkness, the world, have not yet passed away. They are passing and will pass. But it hasn't happened yet.

And so that does mean that the Christian life, which is founded on great promises of glory, great promises of fellowship with God, it means that the Christian life is also marked indelibly for now by this dark world.

And so this is the age of faith. Where we really and truly have received very great promises, but they are ours now only by faith. A day is coming, a day is set, when we will really and truly enjoy the very great gospel promises by sight.

[5 : 32] But until then, we have to reckon with living in a world still stained by darkness. And it is to this theme that John turns now in the main body of his letter.

We have spent a couple of weeks looking at the introduction up to chapter 2, verse 11. We looked at the hinge, chapter 2, verses 12 to 14. And now the main part of the letter, starting at chapter 2, verse 15.

And what does life in this passing world look like? What shape does it take? What trials does it contain? And as John sheds light on this for us, he continues to expose, as he's been doing throughout, he exposes the departed for who they are, those who have abandoned the apostolic gospel, yes, with great claims of progress and advance, but hollow claims that try to hide the grim reality of life outside of Orthodox Christianity.

And as he exposes the departed, he continues to encourage those who have remained, those who continue in and with the apostolic gospel and the fellowship that comes through that.

And so his message to the remainers is to continue, to continue. Don't be tempted to depart. And of course, he's echoing what has always been the message of faithful preachers throughout the time of Revelation.

[7 : 06] He is echoing Moses and all the other faithful gospel prophets and apostles. He says with Moses, therefore choose life and continue to choose life.

As a conclusion to the people of God, at the end of the great exposition of the law, Moses said to the people, choose life. For all that is yet unclear and unseen by us will one day be made plain and visible to all.

And on that day, the departed will be fully exposed, finally and forever. And so John puts before us, firstly, verses 15 to 17, lasting love or a withering world.

Lasting love or a withering world. The Lord's people are always faced with a decision, choosing life or choosing death, choosing good or evil, blessing or curse.

And that choice reveals either a love for God and his glorious kingdom, or a love for this passing world and all the things in it that are not from God. John is clear. The departed have gone out and given themselves wholly to this world, which is passing away.

[8 : 19] And he says, do not choose this withering world. And these verses are really setting up what is to come in the rest of the letter, a kind of introductory word on what is to follow.

And look at verse 15. We have the first explicit and sort of forceful command in the letter. Do not love the world or the things in the world.

If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. Notice the repeated word in verses 15 to 17. It is the world.

Six times in three verses. And the contrast that John uses with the world is the Father. And they interact in these verses around the word love.

Now, two things we need to get clear on as we look at these. At first, what is John talking about when he speaks about the world? And second, we need to see how John contrasts love for the world with a different kind of love.

[9 : 25] So first, what is John talking about when he speaks of the world? Well, verse 16 tells us. He says, for all that is in the world, that is the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride in possessions.

John tends to work in threes in this letter. And this is another three to unpack what he means by the world. Desires of the flesh, desires of the eyes, and pride in possessions, as in the footnote.

The word used here can mean life or livelihood or property, material possessions. So I think that the footnotes are more helpful translation for us. And we aren't given any indication of how narrowly we can define and understand each of these phrases.

The commentaries are only helpful in making that much plain. And so I think we understand this triplet best if we understand it in a broad and plain way. So first, the desires of the flesh.

That would seem to be best taken as that which our fallen nature wrongly longs for. Desires that have been corrupted and drive us to search for something in this world that might satisfy them.

[10 : 39] But of course, they won't be satisfied. Desires of the flesh that relates to wealth, to sex, to power, and these kinds of things.

And then the desires of the eyes. Well, that would seem to be external things that tempt us and woo us. Things that we can see, that we look at and long for. We see it and covet it.

And so we are captivated by its immediate and aesthetic appeal, but without comprehending the true value of it. It's easy for us, isn't it, to be quickly taken with a new trend, a new fad, a new gadget, a new relationship, or anything shiny looking that's new really.

And it's all about being tantalized. And so not about being considered. And finally then, pride in possessions. Well, isn't that as plain as day?

And yet, in understanding this, that's not really the difficulty, is it? Comprehending what's meant by pride in possessions, that's not hard. The hard thing is that material possessions can always be a pull to even the mightiest.

[11 : 47] Wealth, a property empire spread over the world to enjoy, the need for less toil and stress, all of life's luxuries. Well, when we think about John's description here of loving the world, these three things, and we think about how it links with the great claims of the departed, it's quite telling, isn't it?

We've noted in previous weeks that the departed make great claims and promises of greater spirituality, of greater purity, come with us for greater knowledge and victory.

But these promises are hollow, aren't they? They offer only worldliness because there is nothing more than the apostolic gospel.

There is only something other, which is death instead of life, evil instead of good. Yes, with great marketing to make it sound like it isn't the case, to make it sound glorious and wonderful, but that's the reality when stripped back.

And so the cold, hard reality is that any claims to greater spirituality and greater all the rest that means abandoning the apostles, well, that offers only worldliness.

[13 : 03] The only benefit that will be to us is here and now. Do you see? When those who have been in the church depart with claims of grand ascent up the spiritual ladder, watch out for the ways they are becoming more like the world, becoming more acceptable to or popular in the world, more prosperous in the world, because it's out into the world that they go.

For there is nowhere to progress to from the gospel. And so any so-called progress is just dressing up selfish desires. And that's where love comes in.

We've seen what John means by the world, but notice, secondly, how John contrasts love for the world with love for the brethren. We saw last week that the departed hate the brothers, but now we see that they love the world.

And I think that's John's implication in all of this. Remember the big conclusion from last time, chapter 2, verse 9, whoever says he is in the light and hates his brother is still in darkness.

That was John talking about the departed, exposing them. The reality is they hate you. That's why they left. But 2, 10, whoever loves his brother abides in the light.

[14 : 36] An encouragement to those who continue. True Christian love, loving the brothers, is other person focused. True Christian love is shaped entirely by the law of God, which pictures life in God's kingdom, which is an extension of God's own character.

And what of the love of the departed? Well, we've seen the love for the world, which is really a love for oneself. All about me and my desires and my wants and my prospering.

So love for the brothers is a love shaped by God's law. That's what John was talking about in chapter 2, verse 7, about the new and old commandments. It's one commandment, love one another, but it's really encompassing the whole law.

Or you could say that love for the brothers is a love shaped by 2, 17, doing the will of God. So what do we love?

James Philip helpfully says, love is something that can be both commanded and forbidden. Not all are sure about this, but this is because love is thought of more as an emotion or an uncontrollable feeling than an attitude of will, which it certainly is in the thinking of the apostles.

[16 : 00] Of course, that doesn't exclude emotion or feeling, but real love takes in mind and heart and it drives thought and action.

And John seems to be saying that the departed do not have the love of the Father in them because not all that is in the world is from the Father. twisted desires, twisted wants, twisted views of possessing things that are all about oneself are so far from the Father that they cannot be identified with Him.

For He is the one marked by love which serves others by cross-sheet love. And so John may explain that this is a command that is to be heeded.

There is a choice to go on making. Do not love the world. Don't fall for it. Don't be lured in by those who have left and promise you the world. Because if you go with them it's the world that you'll get.

Well, John has been exposing the departed here and all of their dangers and the final exposure to make if you go after the world and if it's the world that you get well, verse 17 the world is passing away along with all its desires.

[17 : 26] Our dissonance will one day be righted because this world will pass away. And so John's big encouragement to those who continue those who choose to do the will of God those who evidence love for the brothers those who cling on to the gospel at all costs those who confess their sin and desperate need of a savior those who continue with the apostles those who live the life of faith well they will abide forever.

That's what we see in verse 17 and also verse 15 then the love of the father is in them. John says keep on choosing lasting love in a withering world.

Now the reality is that we will always face the prospect of people dangling in front of us alternatives to the costly Christian life and we need to weigh if what is on offer plays into worldly desires.

Here are some questions for us to ask and to have in mind when we hear of new teachings or people trying to introduce us to some greater spirituality something seemingly attractive better than the apostolic gospel here are some questions to have in mind.

Does what I'm being offered remove or sideline a necessary struggle with sin? Will it allow me to do things that I was sure that I wouldn't be allowed to do?

[18 : 59] Is what I'm being offered attractive because it promises some instant reward? Does it make me better off here and now?

Does it help me avoid suffering and cost? What will it do for your material possessions and for your place in this world? Does it offer you some sort of esteemed position in your spiritual life like the scribes in Jesus' day loved?

Those who like to walk around in long robes and who liked greetings in the marketplaces and have the best seats in the synagogues and the places of honour at feasts and for a pretense to be in long prayers?

Does it play into that longing to be standout and special in whatever spiritual field you're in? If the answer is yes to any of those then beware.

Investing much of our substance and ourselves and things that are passing is like sipping salt water. When thirsty and longing for refreshment it looks so tantalising but when we drink it it only makes the yearning stronger and more unfulfilled.

[20 : 15] We only get thirstier. This world is passing away therefore choose life. Well John goes on to unpack one of the realities of life in this passing away world and he puts before us another choice to keep making.

So secondly verses 18 to 27 deficient deceivers or an unwavering word? Here what are we going to listen to? Deficient deceivers or an unwavering word?

Verses 18 to 27 the Lord's people will always have antichrists in their midst. Do not be unprepared and do not be perturbed and do not be persuaded.

Look at verse 18. Children it is the last are and I think we should take last are in the way the New Testament talks about the last days.

The last days is the era of the church the era of history that began with Christ's first coming and that will be consummated at his return. But until then we live in the middle of that in the last days.

[21 : 35] And one of the realities of the last days is that they'll be marked by hostility for the people of God. John in his gospel speaks of the hour which will come when Jesus' disciples will be put out of synagogues and they'll be killed and all of it will be done by people thinking that they're offering service to God.

Look again at verse 18. John goes on to talk about opposition by antichrists and at some point the antichrist himself.

Do you notice that in verse 18? Antichrist has been warned of and antichrists have come. John here is not going off in some wild direction into realms of speculation.

Verses 18 and 24 make plain that this church have been taught these things already. They've been taught it from the very beginning. So John isn't speaking to them about something new and unfamiliar and indeed Jesus himself teaches on this very thing in Mark chapter 13 and Matthew chapter 24.

Paul teaches about the same thing too in some of his earliest letters to the Thessalonians. There we find a young church who had Paul with them for just three Sabbaths yet they were prepared for the man of lawlessness a similar figure to this antichrist and these New Testament passages are drawing from Daniel's prophecy about the abomination of desolation and what they're teaching is that there's going to be a great evil figure whether literal or figurative for some pervasive ideology that will do great evil they teach that a great figure would come and stand in opposition to God and the era of hostility would build up until there was a high point of hostility that would signal be a signal of this great evil one and so from the beginning it was clear through Jesus own teaching and also the teaching of the apostles that the last days would be marked by hostility hostility in the form of persecution and hostility in the form of false

[23 : 51] Christs as Jesus himself spoke of but what's striking here in 1 John is how this reality is applied differently than elsewhere for here in 1 John where does the hostility come from where does the opposition come from where do the antichrists come from verse 19 they went out from us John is very pointed in saying that this hostility was born from within the church they the antichrists went out from us and verse 26 they are trying to deceive you now that can seem like quite an unsettling reality but it is far better to be prepared than to pretend that things are other than they are we find that often in life don't we how many people are happy to trust institutions and governments and all sorts of people thinking the best of people because it's far too uncomfortable to comprehend that they might be corrupt that they might be fallen and shaped by the world and its desires it can be more comfortable to follow and believe a pretense but we must not be naive

John is clear here and listen to the Westminster Confession of Faith on this it says the purest churches under heaven are subject both to mixture and error and some have so degenerated as to become new churches of Christ but synagogues of Satan naivety is not an option not everything that calls itself a church is a church not everyone who calls himself a Christian is a Christian because not everyone who calls himself a Christ is a Christ now before we do despair here John wants to take away the mystique of these deceivers and so he may explain that they are deficient deceivers because firstly verses 18 and 24 we've been prepared we've been prepared Jesus taught about this

Paul taught about this and John is teaching about this Jesus own teaching on the reality of the Antichrist Antichrist is full of two commands be on guard and keep awake if we put our fingers in our ears and pretend away reality then we will be terribly caught out but God has been gracious to us to tell us what is coming be prepared be ready be warned he says there are those who will come who are trying to deceive you verse 26 that's why I'm writing so we mustn't be soft not everything with a steeple and a bell and pews in it is a church not every building that puts up a cross is a church not everyone who stands with a bible and teaches things is a true preacher not every denomination is orthodox and with the apostles remember the words I quoted from Dick

Lucas last time he says Satan's masterpiece would be to lead Christian churches back into idolatry while they still retain all the outward form and structures of Christianity that would be his masterpiece when a church or a Christian starts to say things that don't fit with the bible then don't be taken in by their dog collar or their pulpit those things don't provide credibility and authority outside of the bible don't be taken in by their title now there's a particular problem particularly today with regards to listening to people on youtube and online all sorts of people who call themselves orthodox Christian teachers and so it's so easy for us to have a question and we get on google to find an answer and we end up listening to someone claiming to be a faithful christian and they begin to teach on the question we've got well we at least have to be prepared that they may be trying to deceive us whether knowingly or unknowingly great wisdom and discernment is required when suddenly sitting listening to a new voice making claims about the christian life promising new insights and greater knowledge and greater spirituality and greater purity victory because we've heard that before haven't we be prepared be warned it shouldn't shock or surprise us that some who claim to be reliable are anything but so the first thing john says is we've been prepared but the second he says their true state has been made plain verse 19 their true state has been made plain we haven't just been told to look out for something but we are told to look out but we are told what to look out for exactly verse 19 these particular deceivers have gone out from the apostles and also from the church john is writing to and that departure is a helpful thing john says if they had been of us they would have continued with us but they went out that it might be plain that they are all not of us some physical departures are very helpful if someone leaves a church and ends up at another which believes wholly different things then that physical departure is only making clear what's already true if you can smoothly jump from a reformed church to a flagrantly liberal one or an overtly charismatic one then it possibly reveals that you were never at home in the church you moved on from but what is plain here isn't only that they have physically moved helpful as that was but it was a departure on absolutely fundamental things verse 22 they were denying in some way that

Jesus was the Christ they were undermining genuine fellowship with the father and the son they were ripping the heart out of the gospel what do you believe about Jesus that's such a key question today isn't it because the predominant thinking today in the world doesn't really take issue with spiritual things the new atheism is no longer the big battle ground the battle now is not the supernatural as such but the moral we hear all kinds of vague spirituality people talk about the universe as a spiritual force others are happy to talk about God in general terms and even MPs want to give credibility in our world to the national church as long as they toe the line on moral issues we saw that recently didn't we there was a conservative MP using her position to write to a bishop to plead with the church to buy into the progressive times she wasn't saying the church has no place but was pleading on the grounds that the church can have its place as long as it buys the knee to the

[32 : 05] LGBT activism and ideology that reigns supreme vagueness lots of talk about a spirit the spirit spirits and spiritual things that happens all around people's reality is when we get Jesus out on the table what do you think about him what do people think about his claim that he is the way the truth and the life and that no one comes to the father except through him what happens when people's superficial claims that Jesus is some sort of airy fairy hippie who only talked about love what happens when that's exposed as being blatantly not the Jesus of scripture what happens when sin enters the conversation and the reality of Jesus highlights the reality of judgment what happens when Jesus is declared to be both savior and lord we're gaining him as savior means bidding farewell to self focused autonomy well that isn't popular today is it but it is absolutely revealing about reality it makes plain whether someone really does verse 23 have the father because they deny the son what do you think about

Jesus John exposes he exposes that there are deceivers but they are deficient be prepared for them you know they're coming and look out for what they believe and teach about Jesus don't be fooled by them or taken in by them don't choose death or evil and so John also encourages because the deficiency of the deceivers is ultimately down to what we do have which is an unwavering word and the word is unwavering because it is the spirit inspired word God's revelation given to his prophets and apostles is passed on to this church and passed on to us so that John can say verse 20 you all have knowledge and verse 24 you have heard this from the beginning what they've heard from the beginning back to chapter 1 verse 1 they've heard the word of life that was from the beginning and which

John and the apostles had heard and seen and touched and which they proclaim in short those who continue those who remain they knew the truth about Jesus the truth about sin the truth about the evil one because the spirit had entrusted it to the apostles and the apostles had taught it to them they knew the gospel they knew Jesus his unbreakable word and so John says verse 24 let what you heard from the beginning abide in you let the gospel word the word entrusted to the apostles abide in you notice John isn't questioning whether they knew it or not this letter is all about reassurance John is constantly telling them what is true of them and he says verse 20 you have been anointed you all have knowledge verse 21 you know the truth verse 24 you heard it but

John says more than just that this is an inspired word an authoritative word of revelation from God he also says that they have an illumined word do you see that verse 20 and then again verse 27 you have been anointed now John makes his point in a slightly unusual way he's talking about the spirit anointing them but he refers to the anointing of the holy one and this seems to be a play on words because what this all centers on is what is believed about Jesus verse 22 is Jesus the Christ is he the holy one of God is he the anointed one and so John is pulling these things together saying of the Christians he writes to that they can be sure that they are anointed because they believe in the anointed one the spirit has illumined them to see that

Jesus is the holy one of God the Christ the anointed one and so he says verse 27 the anointing that you've received from him abides in you and you have no need that anyone should teach you now that isn't John saying that we have no need for preachers and teachers today rather he is saying that you have no need of the you don't need the departed to teach you they have nothing to teach you for in this new covenant era the spirit has been poured out and is at work throughout the world so that unprecedented numbers of people will come to see and know and love the truth about Jesus or as Jeremiah prophesied no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother saying know the Lord for they shall all know me from the least of them to the greatest declares the Lord and

[37 : 56] John is saying that that is true in the midst of this church notice the encouraging tune of that there are antichrists around they were birthed in your church they have gone out from you they are trying to deceive you but the anointing you received abides in you and you have no need that they or anyone like them should teach you or teach you something new because the spirit's done it already because the spirit's opened your eyes to see the truth about the Lord Jesus the truth that they now deny no John says you already have verse 25 the promise you already have eternal life keep on choosing that the Lord's people will always have antichrist in their midst do not be unprepared do not be perturbed do not be persuaded friends how many of us have known great discouragement from people moving on from us how many have known the unsettling feeling of others moving on to something seemingly better than what we have where costly faithfulness to the gospel is not enough and one of the main costs in ministry and in church is relational fallout it is hard

John wants to reassure us that this isn't an unusual experience those who call themselves Christians abandoned even the apostles we live in a world that is passing away a world where fellowship with the father and the son isn't yet seen in full technicolor and so deception will happen it's better that we're prepared that there will be some who will not only depart from us and from the gospel but also will want to take others with them but friends we mustn't undervalue and under appreciate what we already have as the word of the gospel takes root in our lives the spirit is at work within us uniting us to Christ and that means we have lasting fellowship with the father and the son and with all those who continue with them that will never pass away that will abide and that will continue let's pray gracious heavenly father help us to see reality amidst the fog of deception that so often surrounds us that's so often trumpeted by the world around and even by the church oh lord we ask that you would spoil this world for us if it would unpri our hands from clinging too tightly to it and until this world does pass away grant us your grace to be busy with loving one another we ask your help with these things in

Jesus name amen amen thank you amen thank you