

## This Passing World

*1 John: Fellowship with God*

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**Bible Text:** 1 John 2:15-27

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*Heavenly Father, you have promised to bless all your children with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Jesus Christ. We thank you that often as we gather in this room we sense that the windows of heaven have been opened and that you are pouring down upon us grace upon grace. We pray as we turn now to your word and look for the help of your Holy Spirit that all of us may be conscious of the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ that we may sense he knows us through-and-through and that known by him, we pray that we may come to know him better and love him all the more truly. We thank you for your word and for its power and we thank you that you have given up the power to shape and mold our lives and so we feel ourselves to be clay in the hand of the Potter today and we pray that you would mold us and shape us and transform us more and more into the likeness of your dear Son, our great Savior Jesus Christ. So, hear us and minister to us through your word we pray, dear Father. In Jesus' name. Amen.*

Please be seated.

In our readings in the first letter of John, we've come to 1 John 2:15-27. You'll find this passage in the Pew Bible. There will be a copy of that Bible in the pew rack in front of you and the passage is on page 1,021 and for our children who have their Children's Bible, the passage is on page 1,522.

There are themes in 1 John that recur from time-to-time as he encourages us to understand what it means to be a Christian and today we come to the third of three themes that are repeated throughout the course of the letter: the Christian is somebody who walks in the light; the Christian is somebody who walks in love towards the Lord and towards the Lord's people; and the Christian is also somebody who understands the truth of the gospel and is committed to it. Throughout this letter, these three themes seem to be woven again and again into what John is teaching these young Christians in the first century and through his letter, continues to teach us.

1 John 2:15, let us hear God's word.

“15 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. 16 For all that is in the world -

the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride in possessions - is not from the Father but is from the world. 17 And the world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever.

“18 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. 19 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. 20 But you have been anointed by the Holy One, and you all have knowledge. 21 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. 22 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. 23 No one who denies the Son has the Father. Whoever confesses the Son has the Father also. 24 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. 25 And this is the promise that he made to us - eternal life. 26 I write these things to you about those who are trying to deceive you. 27 But the anointing that you 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.”

The famous early Christian saint, Augustine, once said that he thought he knew what time was until somebody asked him and somebody, indeed, apparently did ask him, “Augustine, what is time?” And his response was as your response might be and mine certainly would be, “I think I knew what time was until just before you asked me the question.” It's a concept that we use daily in our ordinary lives. We all speak about time in different ways but it's one of those words, a concept, that we all know what it means until somebody actually asks us to define it and then we become hard-pressed as the philosophers and the scientists continue to be hard-pressed to define exactly what we mean when we use the word “time.”

But we measure it and those of us who are of my generation, we measure it by the things we have on our wrists and those of the younger generation who absolutely despise us for needing wristwatches, they share in the same slavery because they keep the time and measure it in the cellphone in their pocket. Actually, as people from past generations would say if they looked at the present generation, we not only watch time and measure time but most of us in one sense or another in the Western world are actually slaves to time. There are all kinds of little indications of that. You forget to put your wristwatch on in the morning and you're driving the car to work and you realize you've forgotten your wristwatch and rather than being casual about it, you debate with yourself for a minute, “Should I turn back because I scarcely know how to live without my wristwatch,” or it may be in your case, a cellphone.

Yet, what is time? Then we realize long before theories of relativity and special relativity became part of our conversation as modern people, that people have always known that there is a sense in which time is relative. You knew that when you were a child going on a long journey and your parents driving in the more comfortable front seats were thinking there's only 15 more minutes to go and you in the back seat, as you experienced this with your ten brothers and sisters back there in the back seat almost asphyxiated, those 15 minutes were the longest part of the five hour journey. Or, spending five minutes, surely this isn't just true for me, it's true for you as well, spending five minutes with some people is way too long whereas spending two hours with other people, is way too short. Or, if you're a college student, ten hours from one professor is way too long but another professor, the bell rings and you say to yourself, "Where on earth did the time go?" Unfortunately, the same rule works with sermons: five minutes from one preacher is too long, 45 minutes from another preacher may not be long enough. Indeed, 45 minutes from the same preacher may not be long enough and these two people could be sitting in the same room listening to the same preacher preach the same sermon at exactly the same time. In fact, they may actually be here at this very moment. The person who wants me to preach this morning for 45 minutes may actually be sitting right beside you or the person who has already had enough.

So, there is this strange sense that we measure time and yet our experience of time seems to depend on something quite different. One of the things the Apostle John is teaching us in this passage is that Christians have a very distinct sense of time. If you have the same sense of time as somebody who isn't a Christian, then you too aren't a Christian because Christians have a very distinct sense of time. John puts that in two different ways in this passage. He puts it first of all in this way: you and I as Christians are living in a time when we are conscious that the world is passing away. We live in a time when the world is passing away. Look at what he says in verse 15 and then explains it in verse 17, "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. And the world is passing away along with its desires."

Clearly here, he's not just speaking about the fabric of the cosmos. Actually, he understands that when the Christian looks at the fabric of the cosmos, he or she instinctively then looks beyond the fabric of the cosmos to praise God for the wonders of creation. No, rather he's thinking about what he goes on to say in verse 16, "All that is in the world – the desires of the flesh, the desires of the eyes and pride in possession – that is not from the Father but is from the world." He's saying, "All that is passing away." Of course, the point he's making is this: the Christian when he looks at life, he looks at the things he has, she has, in life, the relationships in live, the pleasures in the life, the possessions in life. The Christian is conscious that all of these things are passing away and, therefore, the kind of devotion that I have towards them ought to take account of the fact these are not the permanent treasures of my life. By contrast, the person who isn't a Christian and the person who isn't a Christian is in a sense, simply imprisoned in this, that if all you see is what you see with your eyes, what you desire with your affections, what you amass as your possessions, if that's all there is to life, then that's where your devotion is going to lie. So, you're really going to take account of the fact, indeed, you will be so mesmerized by these things, you'll be incapable of taking account of the fact that all of

this is going to pass away. It's simply here for a season. I brought nothing in and I will take nothing out.

So, instead of looking at parts of creation and having my eyes deflected to the glory of God or enjoying a part of created life and having my affections drawn to the grace of the heavenly Father or having possessions that he has given me in his generosity and stewarding for his glory, instead of these becoming objects through which I am enabled to worship and give myself with great devotion to the Lord, instead I've fixed my eyes on these possessions, on these things or even on these people and they become my god. They become the center of my affections; they become the object of my devotions; they become the realities I seek to protect; they become the things by which I am defined. "Do you see how much I possess? Do you see what this says about me and my family and what we have achieved?"

John is saying to us that the Christian is a person who has come to the realization that this world is passing and I live in a time when this world is passing away. That's the reason, of course, that whenever we put our arms around anything in this world, absolutely anything in this world or any person in this world, we can never find the satisfaction and pleasure for which God has made us because everything in this world is passing away. You remember how the author of Ecclesiastes puts it in Ecclesiastes 3:11, God has placed a kind of burden on our lives, "He has set eternity in our hearts." Therefore, it's part of the way in which he has created us, that the things that are passing can never satisfy the way in which we were created for eternity. Indeed, he hints here that only the love of the Father that is an eternal love, that is a satisfying love, can satisfy those who have been created for eternity. That's a theme that runs through some of our hymns.

"I tried the broken cisterns, Lord,  
But, ah, the waters failed!  
Even as I stooped to drink they fled,  
And mocked me as I wailed."

I spoke to somebody the other day about their graduation. Imagine, the end of all those years of study and there is the prize and as they grasp the prize, it felt like clothes that a moth had been in and there was nothing there except the rest of life to live. Everything in this world, John is saying to us, everything in this world when we take it out of its context in knowing the love of the Father, is like stretching for riches and finding that they've become crumbling sand in our hands. Remember, some of you will remember Robert Burns' words,

"But pleasures are like poppies spread,  
You seize the flower, it's bloom is shed;  
Or, like the snow-fall in the river,  
A moment white, then gone forever."

But says John, there is something different about the Christian. The Christian realizes he's living, she's living, in a time when this world is passing away and everything in it but the

Christian marvelously has the love of the Father abiding in their hearts. Notice how he puts it, he says, "If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him but if the love of the Father is in him, then the love of the world will begin to be dissipated." Oh, my friends, I wish we could learn that lesson. I feel I need to learn that lesson again and again because as Christians, of course, we struggle with the glue that seems to attach the things of this world to our lives but John is teaching us that the struggle alone will not avail. I don't have the resources in myself to be delivered.

You know, I've discovered when a man or a woman is having an affair and they say it's all over now, the question I ask is this: has the affection been broken? Because if the affection has not been broken, it isn't over yet. That's in a way, what John is saying. We have affections for the things of this world and they fill our horizon. They are bigger than the Lord himself. We have this sense as Christian believers that it ought not to be this way and so we struggle against it. But you see, what John is saying is not just we need to struggle against being overly attached to the things of this world, he is saying what we actually need is this glorious sense of the love of the Father abiding in us.

One of my great theological heroes, he would be Scottish so in some ways I'm glad Dr. Thomas isn't here this morning although he'll probably hear about this. One of my great theological heroes is Thomas Chalmers, a magnificent 19<sup>th</sup> century figure, a genius of a man, who preached surely one of the greatest sermons ever preached in Scotland with this title "The Expulsive Power of a New Affection." You used to be able to give sermons titles like that, now you'd call them things like "This Passing World." The expulsive power of a new affection and you see what he's saying. He is saying the satisfaction of the gospel begins to deliver us from the tentacles of the octopus of the world, not just because we screw up our courage to fight against those tentacles but because the affection of the love of the Father in us empowers us to be delivered from them.

That's one of the great lessons that we learn from realizing that we Christians have a different sense of time. We're living in a time when this world and all that is in it, is passing away but the abiding love of the Father dwells in his people and that eternity that has been set in our hearts begins to be satisfied by the eternity of his love for us in Jesus Christ. But then he speaks of this in a different way. Not only are we living in a time when the world is passing away but we're living in a time, he says, secondly, when the last hour has already struck. I wonder if you noticed that in verse 18? Says John, "Children, it is the last hour." Now, I enjoy this because this is especially true of the Southern states, isn't it? People are very excited about the last things and so sometimes people will say to us, "Do you think we're living in the last days?" Now, the Bible's answer to that is: of course. Of course we're living in the last day because the Bible is teaching us those last days began when Christ was crucified, resurrected, ascended to the right hand of the Father and poured out the Holy Spirit. Peter said in the day of Pentecost, "This is the sign that the last days have come." Then people will say, "Well, do you think we're living in the last hour? You know, there are all kinds of things. There are wars, earthquakes, criminals running around. Look at our politicians and so on. Isn't this prophesied in the Scriptures? Do you think we're living in the last hour?" The answer,

of course, is: yes, we're living in the last hour. How do I know that? Because John says it here in black and white, "Children it is the last hour."

So, what's he saying about the way in which the Christian thinks about time? Of course, you remember that this is related to the teaching of Jesus in John's gospel, don't you? That Jesus thought about his work and thinks about his work in terms of three hours: the first hour is the hour in which he is crucified for our sins. Remember how he says to Mary, his mother, "My hour," my time, "has not yet come." Right through John's gospel, "My hour has not yet come," and then "The hour has come." Then Jesus speaks about a second hour and that was the hour in which he would pour out his Spirit upon all of his people. What began on the day of Pentecost and the glorious experience of living in the grace of the Holy Spirit into which every Christian is brought. "We are all," says the Apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 12, "we are all baptized with one and the same Spirit into the body of Christ," and John will refer to that in a few verses.

Then, there is this last hour, the time between the outpouring of the Holy Spirit and the coming again in majesty and glory of the Lord Jesus. "This," says John, "is the last hour." It's really the same thing that Peter describes, that Paul describes, as the last days. We're living in the last hour between the glorifying of Jesus on his ascension and the outpouring of the Spirit and the coming again of Jesus to wind up time and history. That's where we're living and because that's where we're living, because it's the last hour, it shouldn't surprise us, he says, that there are antichrists that come. You see, how John understands it is this: if Christ has already won a victory over Satan on the cross and is going to consummate that victory, if Christ has done everything that's needed for the forgiveness of our sins and is going to wrap up history, then in a sense, this is the last hour for the enemy to attack and, therefore, attack the enemy will. If you think of something of the fierceness of the opposition and the fighting that took place between D-Day and V-Day at the end of the second World War, you'll have some sense of what John is speaking about here. The kind of last gasp effort and so John says to his fellow Christians, "You've heard that antichrist is coming but you need to understand that he has many forerunners, there are many antichrists come. That's one of the ways in which we know," he says, "that this is the last hour."

It's marked, you see, by two things: one of them is in a way horribly negative and the other is gloriously positive. What's horribly negative is this: that these antichrists about whom he's speaking have come from within the very heart of the Christian church. They've come from within the very heart of the Christian church. He's not thinking about pagan unbelievers out there when he speaks about antichrists coming and he makes that quite clear, doesn't he? He says in verse 19, "They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us." They used to be in the church. They still claim to be part of the church.

What's the issue here? Well, you see, he explains to us in verse 22 and verse 23, "Who is the liar," who is the antichrist, "but he who denies that Jesus is the Christ? This is the antichrist, he who denies the Father and the Son." Many of us know, I think, enough about the background to John's teaching to understand what he's saying here. He was

speaking into a context that was as much permeated in its thinking by Greek philosophy as our world is permeated in its thinking in every discipline by the idea of evolution. Something that was just in the fabric of the way people think and that influence could be put very simply: the material is evil, only the spiritual can be good. If that were true, then you see what is being said here: these people with that kind of framework in their minds, only that which is pure spirit can be good and anything that is material is by definition is bound to be evil, fallen or sinful, then the one thing that is utterly impossible for you to believe in is that Jesus is the Christ, is that the Son of God, the Holy One, took human flesh, assumed our nature. Within the mindset it was utterly impossible, really, to believe that Jesus was the Christ, that the Son really took our human nature and, of course, if he didn't take our human nature, he couldn't have stood in our place or died for our sins because he wasn't one of us. So, salvation was at stake here. Not just philosophy but how Christ saves us was at stake.

So, John is saying that the antichrist denies that Jesus is the Christ, that he is the Son of God and it's come from within the church. It's only within the church that these words are actually used: Jesus, Christ, Son of God, Father. My dear friends, I want to say to you although I'm saddened to say it to you: we're living in the same hour. We really are living in the same hour when the creed that we said this morning, the Apostles' Creed will be said in many churches and either publicly or privately, ministers and preachers will say, "Of course, we don't believe it in that sense. We don't really believe that he was conceived in the womb of the virgin Mary. It's all a metaphor. It's an appearance. It's a myth. It's got great spiritual lessons."

Notice that John says they are liars and would to God that were more frequently said in the professing Christian church. The claim that somebody is conceived in the womb of the virgin Mary is not a metaphor for anything. Or that he rose again from the dead. Or he really is the Son of God. Or that he did these miracles. Or that he's coming again. "Yes, of course, we believe all these things, but we're modern people and we believe them in a special kind of sense." That is to say, Jesus is not the Son of God who assumed our human nature in order that he may bear our sins upon the cross. Actually, what you find is that these same people within the world of the Christian church, they don't believe Jesus died for our sins. You will never even by accident hear them preaching the gospel. I'm sorry to say this to you, my dear friends. When I was a young man, I used to think this just very sad but now that I know my Bible better, I realize John says they are liars. They are absolute liars.

And he tells us why they are liars because you'll notice that all of those say, "Now, what we believe in is God as our heavenly Father. He's a wonderful, kind, heavenly Father," and John is calling the bluff and he's saying, "You know you can't even logically say that." Why not? Who taught us that God is a loving heavenly Father? By what means do we come to know that God is our loving heavenly Father? Exclusively through his Son Jesus Christ. So, John says, the person who loses the Son also loses the Father. I mean, it's logic 101. If you won't have him as the Son of God, you've abandoned the notion of knowing his Father as your heavenly Father and so you're making it up as you go along. John says, this is what astonishes me so much as I read through 1 John in these days, the

sheer boldness of this old man to call their bluff and to say this is antichrist. No wonder the world holds the Christian church in such mockery because it knows that many of those who draw their salaries on the basis of having professed the gospel of Jesus Christ, deny the gospel of Jesus Christ.

So, I say, we're living in the same hour, the same challenges. You say, "That's a terrible thing to say on a Communion Sunday. That's a terrible thing to have to talk about on a Communion Sunday. Is there no good news for us today?" My friends, we need to have our eyes opened to this. Not to be deceived. Not to be taken in by those who hover around Christ which is what antichrists always do. But there is glorious good news. What are we to do in the midst of this? Says John the Lord Jesus has given you two blessings that will keep you and transform you and here they are, he says, "The first of them is the message of the gospel. This message that you had," he says, "from the beginning." Verse 24, "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." Do you see what he's saying? He's saying it's only the gospel that will bring you to know Jesus as your Savior and God as your heavenly Father. Nothing else will. Absolutely nothing else will. You can talk about it if you want to as a preacher, you can preach about it but only the gospel will bring you to know God as your heavenly Father and to call him Abba, Father because nobody else does call him Abba, Father. You know that, don't you? No one else has that sweetness of relationship with him but those who have received Christ in the gospel. Otherwise, this is mumbo-jumbo. He's broken bread, poured out wine, what's it all about? It's about nothing. He's saying if the message dwells in you, then it becomes everything. It's Jesus offering you a little bit of bread and saying to you in the gospel, "I loved you so much that I gave my body on the cross for you." And a little sip of wine saying, "Dear one, drink this and as you taste it, taste something of the love I have for you that I shed my own precious blood for you on the cross."

Do you know anybody who shed his blood in crucifixion for you? Who loves you that much? It's almost unbearable, isn't it? To think how much he loves us? He didn't need to do this. You don't think he needed to do it, do you? You don't think he was under obligation to do it? But he did it and John is saying when the message abides in you, then the love of the Father begins to expel the love of this world and you begin to see through the lie of the antichrist.

Yes, there is something else, he says, and this is so interesting though it may look a little complicated. He says, "Jesus has given us another gift. He's given us the gift of the gospel message." In verse 20, he's given us the anointing of the Holy One. What's the anointing of the Holy One? The anointing of the Holy One is the way in which the Holy Spirit comes into our lives and opens our eyes and we see that Jesus is a great Savior and that he is a Lord worthy of our devotion and that he is a King whose reign we can submit to and that he's a friend who will walk with us all the way. Remember how Jesus himself had said, "I'm going to send the Holy Spirit to you and he will glorify me." That's what happens when you become a Christian, isn't it? Jesus was dirt before that, or at best, part of a respectable way of thinking about life because he was such a great moral teacher but you didn't feel anything for him. You didn't love him; you didn't know him.



“But when the Holy Spirit comes,” says John, “the anointing that you have received from him,” verse 27, “abides in you and you don't need anybody to teach you.” Was he saying, “Well, let's quit paying these ministers. We don't need anyone to teach us.” No, he doesn't mean that. He means when somebody says to you, “It's a wonderful thing to know and love and trust the Lord Jesus and to have this expulsive love of the Father dwelling in your heart,” you give a little smile and you say, “You don't need to teach me that. I know that already.” I don't need to teach you that Jesus loves you, do I? You know that already. That's what he's saying. “I don't need to teach you that you've experienced this expulsive power of a new affection however imperfectly. You've experienced that. I don't need to teach you that.”

There are many things we all need to be taught but there are some things, if we are Christians, we don't need to be taught. As they say in Scotland: there are some things that are better felt than telt. That's true of Christ, isn't it? That you know you love him. Yes, you know you've failed him. But you know you love him and not all the antichrists in the world with all their teaching, can ever give you what only the Holy Spirit can give you, a simple, undying, sweet love for the Lord Jesus Christ.

So, as John speaks to us and as we come as we will do in a few minutes, to the table: has the love of the Father begun to expel from your heart those unsatisfying loves that we have in this world? And has the wonder of knowing and trusting and having communion with the Lord Jesus defended you from all false views of who Jesus Christ really is? As his anointing teaches you, says John, you don't need a five minute sermon and you don't need a sermon that's lasted however long this sermon has lasted because the Holy Spirit has worked in your heart and brought you to Jesus. In a few minutes, in this special way, he's going to do it again. The first time he did it to us one-by-one, this time at this table, he'll do it for hundreds of us all together.

*Heavenly Father, we pray as we come to feast on the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you would strengthen us by your indwelling love, that you would guard us by the glorious message of the gospel and that you would fill us with an undying love for our Lord Jesus Christ. This we pray in his name. Amen.*