

“Real Jesus for Real Perseverance”

February 4, 2018

1 John 2:18-27

Dr Clay Smith

Having returned mid-week from ministry in Cuba I am thrilled to be home with you all. I am grateful to be a part of a church so invested in God’s mission around the world. We had a great team on the trip from Central (John McGowan, Ted Winters, Romondo Davis, and our fearless leader Randy Mayfield), including a friend and mentor of mine, Pastor Mike Jones of Friendly Temple Baptist Church. Many of you know Pastor Jones. He has preached here in this pulpit through the years. One of the great benefits of this mission in Cuba was to talk with Pastor Jones about how our churches and our people can begin to learn and trust and serve together for the sake of Jesus in St Louis. I would ask that you pray for God’s mission around the world and down the block to happen in and through Central and in partnership with brothers and sisters that are culturally different.

And as we think about growing in friendship and appreciation for the witness of our African-American brothers and sisters, we will be blessed today and later this month to have a member of our church family, Naima Warts, lead us in worship with songs from African-American church traditions. As you may know, February is national Black History month, and so this is an appropriate time to be reminded not only of the diversity of people and gifts in God’s kingdom but also the unity we share in Christ that binds us together as brothers and sisters in God’s family.

As we turn to our passage, John calls us to perseverance, to endure with Christ. How do we keep going when things get so hard?

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.

It was hard in Cuba. Each of us got physically sick: migraines, churning stomachs, a couple cases of food poisoning, rattled bones and backs and one kidney stone. Rough, physically. Spiritually, there was a sense of oppression, difficulty, struggle. We wondered aloud as a team: What is God doing here that the devil is working so hard to stop. Why is perseverance so hard?

Of course the real struggles are not merely with Americans visiting, but with Cubans! How do these people persevere with joy when so much is broken and difficult? Disease, disaster, disintegration?

You and I face similar challenges, as did this church to which John wrote. We have disappointment, disease, disaster. We face, as with this church to which John writes, dissension and disintegration of relationships. How do we persevere when it can be so hard?

He begins in v. 18 calling it “the last hour,” the bible’s terminology for in between the appearances of Christ. This little phrase is more about a theological truth than hard chronology. Jesus had broken the back of evil in his crucifixion and Resurrection; the ultimate destructive power of sin and death were silenced when Jesus walked out of the grave. It is in that act that what the bible calls the “last days” or “last hours” have begun. Yet, we wait for the full and final tumbling of the domain of darkness, which will come when he returns again, in the triumphant procession of his Resurrection life.

Victory is assured, yet the battle rages. **Yet, how do we press on and persevere? We remain, or abide in three brief things in this passage. Dwelling in, remaining in, strongly remembering strengthens us to persevere. Abide in what?**

1. Abide or Remain in the message, v. 24.

What message? V. 22, the message that Jesus is the Christ. V. 23, no one who denies the Son has the Father. Whoever confesses the Son has the Father also. V. 24, what heard in the beginning. V. 25. And this is the promise that he made to us—eternal life.

If you recall our first in the series on 1 John from 1:1-4, there were some who came into the church to teach that Jesus was not really God in the flesh. He was merely a man, a good one, but was **not** God in the flesh.

But John reminded them of the message that saves. Jesus is the Christ, the anointed one, the long promised one, God who took real flesh, as real as ours, lived as we do, being tempted as we are and yet without sin, and was crucified for us. He really stepped into our world. Confessing that message, believing it, indicates that a person has the Father, also, . 23. To “have” the Father, means essentially to gain all the benefits of inheriting what the Father has: in 1 John eternal life, fellowship with God because Jesus has cleansed us, confidence, hope, love, answer to prayer...all these things belong to the Father. They come to us through Jesus, the Son. That’s the only way they come.

To have the Father means to inherit all of what Jesus died on the cross and was raised again to provide: living as children of God NOW. John calls us to abide in that message if we are to persevere in these last days, last hours. When struggle in the brokenness of this world and of our lives, abide in this Jesus who came to draw us near.

How does that help, you might ask. Think about it from the perspective of the Jesus who took on flesh. You may feel all alone or weak or struggling, but Jesus has come for you, to enter your life and go through this with you! You are not alone and will never be again. Jesus lived in the flesh and knows what you think and feel, how you struggle and are tempted. He knows exhaustion. He has seen with eyes like yours what a disease ravaged loved one looks like. He knows loneliness of being all alone, betrayal and alienation from the closest of friends. He knows what the pain of anxiety and anticipation of something hard feel like in the pit of your stomach. Even anxiety that makes you break out into a sweat...but in his he sweat blood.

He knows how you feel, and came to this world to live with you, and give you the gift of his own eternal life. He came to where we are, in our struggles, pain and sin, so that we may be with him where he is eternally, in blessing and joy.

Lay hold of that message, and put one foot in front of the other...remembering he is with you.

2. We persevere when we Abide or Remain in the truth.

In this church, there had grown this group of people who look like Christians, but are false. They are counterfeit Christians. And in v. 21-22, he connects these people with lies, fomented by antichrist.

Only John uses the term “antichrist,” but that idea of opposition to Christ or false Christ appears in many places in the bible. It seems as though John did believe in a personal future antichrist to come, as stated in v. 22. But also, and more prominent is the reality that the spirit of antichrist appears frequently. The lie of antichrist is a denial of what Jesus came to be and to do, and that lie deceives people.

Some, believing the lies left the church. The reason for their departure John gives us in v. 19, if they had been of us, they would have continued with us. Although for a season these people appeared faithful, by their leaving, walking away from the truth, their true character is revealed.

Their departure from the faith reveals something of the character of their faith. One pastor has summarized this teaching in this pithy way: A faith that falters at the finish, was truly faulty from the start. Does this mean that doubt is outside the bounds? NO! Some of the most courageous people I have ever met battle persistent doubt, and yet continue to bring that doubt to the Lord. Asking him to deal with it, be tender with them through the doubt. Just the opposite! To continue and struggle with our faith is a sign of perseverance, the work of God on our behalf.

John says THE lie comes from THE liar V. 22, the lie that underlies all other lies, the foundational level that lies under all lies is to deny that Jesus came God in the flesh—just a man. Why is this so foundational?

There are many reason, but let's focus on one. To have Jesus die as simply a man, essentially says we need a moral example, someone to show us the nature of sacrificial love. We need someone to show us how to be kind, to demonstrate justice, **as if our chief problem is a lack of information**, or a problem education can fix. As if by following his example, we can be saved. To be sure, we do need models of love and kindness and justice and the rest. But if anything has been proven in humanity, it is that models and examples of virtue are not sufficient to change the world. if this world truly is made new like God wants, it requires more than a spit shine and an improvement plan. Jesus as a mere man never saved anyone.

We not only need a human example to show us the way, but we need one who can remake our hearts! Being a little better never saves anyone. To be new, God has to work. We need spiritual heart transplants! Each of us. That is what Jesus, God in the flesh, came to do. To enter this world to cleanse us from our guilt, shame, our mis-ordered loves in our hearts, our selfishness by his death on the cross, and by his Spirit, to remake us into new people! We not only need an example, we need a Savior.

Let me break it down as simple as possible. The lie of the evil one is that we are pretty good folks, who need a little help, someone to show me how to be better. God says, the truth is you need me to reach into your life, deal with your sin and save you, and remake you glorious.

How does this help us persevere? A little perspective. When you need a Savior, or friend, or child needs a savior, don't be shocked. Don't shame another because they need a Savior and can't help themselves. Claim again the truth: People are desperately wicked, and so am I. Praise Jesus that he came to make us new.

3. We persevere when we abide in our preservation.

It is helpful to abide in the message, and to abide in the truth. But in v. 20, John gets to the bedrock of perseverance. They left because they were not of us, v. 19, but you, in the emphatic position, but YOU have been anointed by the Holy One.

You have heard anointing used all through the bible. It was usually done with oil to mark someone as for God's special use, or a designated task, like Aaron as priest, or Samuel anointing kings, or prophets marking them as God's spokesmen. But here, John says something remarkable. You are not anointed, or marked, covered in oil, but by the Holy One, v. 20!

The Spirit of God has been given to give us new hearts, to open our eyes to see the truth, v. 21. That is what v. 27 points us to. Not that you no longer need any teaching; if that were true, then John wouldn't have had to write the letter. But the Holy Spirit enables you to grasp and understand the truth and protect us from the lies of the evil one. He helps us remember we need a SAVIOR, and that One has come.

We persevere, John says, because we are being preserved by the Holy One! We keep going because God keeps working!

You fight not on your own, or own willpower. When you are weak, he is strong. When you want to give in, he won't give up. When you feel like you just can't keep going remember that his power is at work in you.

The battle is hard! This life is hard. We lack understanding. We are attacked. We are weary. We know we can't do it anymore. Where do we go to keep battling on, to persevere? By remembering that there is a one who preserves us, the Holy One has been given to keep us safe, to keep us going, even when we feel like giving up.

That power of the preserving one, the Holy Spirit gives us endurance to keep going when we want to quit. I thought a lot about these verses while in Cuba, because at various times on this trip, every one of us wanted to give up and quit. Elder Ted Winters was to preach a service on Friday night and call men and women to faith in Christ. On Saturday and

Sunday last week, Pastor Jones and I were to teach a seminar for pastors and church leaders in Havana, I was to preach an evangelistic service on Saturday night, and Pastor Jones on Sunday morning.

We all felt terrible. Upset stomach with all the accompanying conditions, nausea, high fever, food poisoning... on Friday, Saturday and Sunday. To say we were not at our best is the understatement of the year. Why would we be foolish enough to try and preach? We were not at our most articulate. Did not bring our A game, or F game for that matter. Why preach? Because there was someone else working: the Spirit of God. We kept going because God keeps working. And he used sick, broken, frail men like us to save about 30 people from eternal hell, to give them eternal life. We preached because the Holy One opens eyes and hearts and he used weak, frail, broken people to do it.

So for you friends, why keep going? Why persevere when life feels like it is falling apart? Because you are anointed with the Holy One and he keeps your life. Abide in him.

Remember the message. Jesus came and his life in us keeps going far beyond our problems in front of us. Remember the truth to combat the lies. And stand firm because He will give you strength when you are weak.