



The Hour of the Antichrist

Did You Know There Are Antichrists?

Years ago I was in a tough place emotionally and psychologically, but a small group of Christians wanted me to be their pastor. It took me several months leading the group before I was willing to officially be their pastor. In less than six months, our little church went from sixteen people including my family to over seventy the day we had a big high attendance push. I had gone door-to-door meeting people and sharing Christ and it was bearing fruit. Even a local newspaper ran a large story with pictures of our ministry. The Sunday after our great victory hope filled the air of a vibrant church developing, I was told by the family I had grown closest to in the church that they were leaving to find a congregation with a large children's ministry. Also that week the couple who supported our church financially far more than anyone else, told me they were dropping out of the church because the husband wanted more say in the theological direction our church was heading. In addition to those resignations, our young worship leader, who was fabulously skilled and talented told me a huge Korean church in the area was hiring him as their worship leader. The accumulation of these three significant changes in our church was too much for me and I announced to the church the next week I would be leaving and we would close down the congregation. I left the church and there was no one to take my place and so that church ended.

Our passage for today announces that we are in the age of departures spiritually. It doesn't use that exact language, but it is the clear message for you and me. **Children, it is the last hour. And as you have heard that antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have come. By this we know that it is the last hour. They went out from us, but they did not belong to us; for if they had belonged to us, they would have remained with us. However, they went out so that it might be made clear that none of them belongs to us.** (1 John 2: 18-19 CSB) John presents a stern warning. It is the last hour. A few points need to be made here. First, it literally reads, "it is continually the last hour." Many when they ponder this declaration wonder how it could still be the last hour if that was the case nearly two thousand years ago. The indication is that it was the last hour when John wrote this letter, and it is still the case. That may sound illogical to you and many have wondered how this can be. Consider the precise language used. When John says, "it is..." the tense used does not indicate a particular specific time but rather the existence of what he describes. We live in the "last hour" just as much as John and the early church did in the first century. Here is how this is so. Hour as used by John describes not the span of sixty minutes but much like Winston Churchill used hour to describe the glory of Britain's heroism as its "finest hour". The hour is the sort of time in which we live, and it is the time of the antichrist, or as John notes, the antichrists. Twice he makes this assertion that it is the last hour. The double declaration reminds you not to forget this. You live in the time of not just an antichrist but many. That is why this time in history is so chaotic and irrational. It is the hour as Jesus reminds us, of "wars and rumors of wars", of "famines and earthquakes". (See Matthew 24: 6ff NIV) It is the time when the world walks away from salvation.

John though doesn't mention here any of the more outward signs of the hour of chaos. He speaks of something much more subtle, the time of antichrists. This may catch you off guard if your picture of "antichrist" is of a powerful political leader who directs the forces against God's people. John however gives us a definition of "antichrists" later in the letter. **Who is the liar, if not the one who denies that Jesus is the Christ? This one is the antichrist: the one who denies the Father and the Son.** (1 John 2: 22 CSB) The antichrists are those who deny the Father and the Son. The rejection begins with a simple determination. Each antichrist denies that Jesus is the Christ, the Messiah, the Savior of the World. The revelation is not that antichrists exist or that their determination is that Jesus is not the Christ, but that they come out of the church. The antichrists are those who claimed to be God's people but left Him.

Keep in mind the mentality of the antichrists. They do not believe Jesus is the Christ or to use the Hebrew term, the Messiah. As a result, **“they went out from us...”** The way it is put might be translated, “They completely left us.” Some examples from Scripture might illuminate how this occurs in real life. A leader in the Jewish community who was well known for his goodness came to Jesus wanting to know how he could gain eternal life. Jesus noted that the wealthy ruler was well versed in the commandments. The man confidently assured Jesus that he knew them well and in fact had been keeping them since he was a boy. **When Jesus heard this, he said to him, “You still lack one thing. Sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.”** (Luke 18: 22 NIV) Astounded by this demand, the rich young ruler balked. **At this the man's face fell. He went away sad, because he had great wealth.** (Mark 10: 22 NIV) This unnamed seeker is much like many who come to Christ. They have an interest in Jesus but the Messiah part, the Christ part they are not so sure they accept. The Jews thought Messiah meant One who would bring a military and political victory to Israel and lead the nation into a golden age of power and global prominence. God had another plan altogether. The Messiah came to save the world, to bring eternal life and the forgiveness of sins and by doing so, transform not just the people of Israel but everyone in the world. There are those who leave the Messiah because like the rich young ruler, they don't think He can save them when finances are bad, when what they want isn't what they get, when times are tough and they have a hard time of it. The rich young ruler could not see the Messiah being good enough for life without wealth, without property, without luxuries. Many don't believe the salvation of Jesus is good enough when they lose their job, their health, or their dreams. Like the rich young ruler, they leave Jesus when it seems too tough to follow Him..

Consider the case of Judas Iscariot. In a previous week we described the terrible moment when Judas left the Messiah and went into the night to betray him. **Then Judas Iscariot, one of the Twelve, went to the chief priests to betray Jesus to them. They were delighted to hear this and promised to give him money. So he watched for an opportunity to hand him over.** (Mark 14: 10-11 NIV) We know from the Gospel of John that Satan cemented Judas's determination to leave the Messiah but what led to him even considering that course of action? Did he think salvation would not make him happy? Was he afraid salvation would demand too much of his life? Did he become disillusioned by the lack of military gumption in the Messiah? Something about the salvation the Messiah offered was not good enough for Judas and so he walked away from it. This happens all the time with those who lack faith that Jesus has the power to give them a life the world cannot offer.

Paul wrote rather sadly of his good friend Demas. **Do your best to come to me quickly, for Demas, because he loved this world, has deserted me and has gone to Thessalonica.** (2 Timothy 4: 9-10a NIV) Previously in another letter Paul spoke rather glowingly of Demas. Now though, as it got bad for Paul and it seemed like there was no hope for his life to be spared as he awaited in prison his execution, Demas abandoned him. Have you ever considered that the majority of antichrists would not be viewed as bad people. They are not burning down church buildings, murdering Christians as they worship, throwing them in prison or blaspheming the name of Jesus. Antichrists are generally normal people who often have things together, feel good about themselves and believe they are doing well. They are perfectly happy with their lives and maybe quite successful. But they don't think the salvation of Jesus is good enough for them and so they walk away from it..

We live in the hour of antichrists, those who leave the salvation of Christ, but we also are in an era of great courage and faith. This is not a time for Christian people to fret about those who reject their faith and discredit their hope in eternal life. This is the hour, it has come and is here, when the world will see how great salvation is in God's people! The time is now for courage, faith and commitment by God's people to the salvation of Jesus that is of far greater worth than your mind can ever imagine. **“No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him”**— (1 Corinthians 2: 9b-c NIV) It is the hour of the antichrists but more importantly, it is the age of the Church and the glory of God revealed in His people.