

The Rock: 11-01-2020

Series: Abiding love

First reading: Revelation 19:11-16

Title: Test the spirits

Scripture: 1 John 4:1-6

Theme:

"Testing the spirits", we will learn today, is a divisive thing -One that marks out the believer over and against the non-believer-All based on what we do with Jesus. Most especially in relation to the incarnation (virgin birth).

Introduction:

We are now eight weeks into our study of 1 John, and more than half-way through this powerful little letter.

We began, as you remember, with John really helping folks to know that this Jesus is exactly who He claimed to be: God in human form.

John was an eye-witness - "We have seen", was his emphasis in chapter one. This is no fairy tale -I walked with Him, I saw what He did, and I was in the empty tomb that first Easter morning.

We've learned that John desired all of Jesus's followers to walk in the light of that truth -and that to confess our sins to Him, we are guaranteed forgiveness.

But, at the same time we have to remember that we are saved by grace, and that's cheapened if we abuse God's forgiveness by just continuing to do wrong.

No -walk in the light, as He is in the light. Honor the grace given to you freely by doing the right things.

Rote memorization, remember, it's the best way for us to learn, and John repeats himself often, as he is reminding every generation that we have work to do because of what Jesus has done for us.

That grounds us in a way that brings protection against the false teachers who crop up among the church body.

Giving us concern about the ultimate Anti-Christ, while we sort out the many anti-christ's who show themselves down through the ages in Church history.

Remember: The biggest indicator there (and we will learn more today) is their teaching on the person of Jesus. Just who is He, why He came, and how He came.

Which is the eternal question we must all ask: "What do you do with this Jesus of Nazareth?"

Because John reinforces the truth of who Jesus is when he talked about the last days and Jesus' return. Once again emphasizing how we are to live -our sanctification in that dynamic tension of the in-between. When Jesus ascended all the way until His promised return -the Last days.

We are saved from sins penalty; we will be saved from sins presence -But remember to fight the fight! We are battling every day to be saved from sins power.

Loving one another in a way that proves we belong to Him leads us once again to a re-visiting / repeating of "watch out for false prophets and teachers.

The Story:

"Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, for many false prophets have gone out into the world. By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God"

-1 John 4:1-2 ESV

John here, gives us a very clear blueprint to start with, and again it's that simple question: "What do you do with this Jesus?"

We need to always be careful, most especially when we see passages like this -not to overcomplicate the simple.

Asking so many qualifying questions that the clear teaching gets lost in the fog of theological egg-headedness. It's simple, test the spirits. Why?

Well, Swindoll simply says:

"Test the spirits. Don't go by how large of a crowd the teacher is able to attract. Don't be impressed by titles, degrees and letters after names. Don't be enamored by the beauty of the robe, the sheen of the suit, or the eloquence of the voice. Our standard is the word of God, the gospel of the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ, the essential truths of the historic Christian faith."

-Living insights: Pg.100

You see, there are false prophets out there, and the frightening thing about false prophets is that it is very hard to tell at times who they are.

They are those who are and who will continue to lie to you. How do we know

they are lying? By how they treat, how they teach, and how they talk about Jesus Christ.

Do they confess Him as Lord? As God having come in the flesh? Virgin born. Remember chapter two -The Bible always interprets the Bible:

"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."

-1 John 2:22-23 ESV

We talked about this in mid-week small group, our men's Bible study that meets here very early Wednesday morning. (Invite men-as it's important to grow together.)

You cannot deny that Jesus is the Christ, God in the flesh, and think you have the Father who sent Him. The triune God - Father, Son, and Holy Spirit -while unique in themselves, ARE A PACKAGE DEAL.

You cannot profess one, while denying the others. That's what John is saying in this short set of verses.

So, we can't say Jesus was a great moralist -He never gave anyone that

option. As though He was going about life just giving us a bunch of good moral teachings in the hope that we will somehow be better behaved.

Neither can we say that Jesus wasn't "virgin born", denying the incarnation - which is John's focus here. Because that carries forward into an unintended consequence -that He didn't really rise from the dead either.

Two pillars of Christian doctrine: The incarnation and resurrection. In denying one, you falsify the other. In the denying of these things, John is saying is to deny that Jesus is the Christ.

John, once again is focused on the central message of the Bible -The Gospel -God sent His Son Jesus to save us from our sin.

If you don't believe that, do not profess to know the Father. This is in direct contrast, and a challenge to the gnostic teaching which says:

"No God would lower themselves to enter our world by becoming flesh and blood, dirtying themselves with this world."

But you see, God did in the person of Jesus -and that is John's message. Again, to deny one of these core beliefs is to

deny the other. John is drawing that clear line in the sand here:

"...and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you heard was coming and now is in the world already."

-1 John 4:3 ESV

There is that anti-christ once again. John has dug down even deeper here to counter the false teaching that has cropped up among the believers. More so than he did in chapter two.

"Listen, any of you who does not, who will not confess belief in this Jesus, has the spirit of anti-christ in you."

Well that's nice, John. I love you too! Getting cranky in your old age there, are ya?

Well no. Time is short and your life is valuable, in the here and now as well as in eternity. We need to recognize today that we have to balance LOVE, compassion, and truth.

We worry so much about being offensive to those who do not believe, that we apologize for just about everything we say. All the while, we offend God in our vagueness about who Jesus is and what you must do with Him.

Now I'm not talking about starting your own personal ministry of "Jerks for Jesus." Just remember that. But we must speak truth.

Paul, in his letter to the Corinthian church talks about the foolishness of the cross and the offence of preaching such "exclusive truths".

Please don't ever think, in our 21st century enlightened arrogance, that we somehow invented this kind of offence in our 'cancel culture' of today.

While we have dressed it up a bit differently, it is still the same spirit of anti-christ which rejects Jesus. Same pig, just a different tuxedo and a bit brighter lip-stick.

Here is Paul dealing 2,000 years ago with this:

"For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. For it is written, "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart." Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through

wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe."

-1 Corinthians 1:18-21 ESV

I think Peterson, in his paraphrase makes it even more clear, as if it needs to be:

"The message that points to Christ on the cross seems like sheer silliness to those hell bent on destruction, but for those on the way to salvation it makes perfect sense. This is the way God works, and most powerfully as it turns out. It is written, I'll turn conventional wisdom on its head, I'll expose so-called experts as crack-pots.

So where can you find someone truly wise, truly educated, truly intelligent in this day and age? Hasn't God exposed it all as pretentious nonsense? Since the world in all its fancy wisdom never had a clue when it came to knowing God, God in His wisdom took delight in what the world considered dumb - 'preaching', of all things -to bring those who trust Him into the way of salvation."

God has a message, and it is Jesus and the cross. John is saying: "To deny this is to deny God". Bruce Springsteen, one of my favorite writers in talking about his faith said this.

"I have a personal relationship with Jesus. I believe in his power to save, love...but not to damn."

Sad really, because you're almost there Bruce. We don't have the option to pick and choose what we like, what we are comfortable with.

No matter how stupid one may think this is, and many do, it does not change the truth that God, from eternity, decided that He would act that way on our behalf -He would give His own son, both to save, and ultimately to judge those who refuse His free offer.

His own son would freely accept the assignment and be obedient to death, even death on the cross -for you, for me.

To deny that is anti-christ. But you, my children are not them. No, you are overcomers:

"Little children, you are from God and have overcome them, for he who is in you is greater than he who is in the world."

-1 John 4:4 ESV

This echoes another promise of Jesus, one which we read last week as John remembered the words of Jesus in the garden:

"I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world."

-John 16:33 ESV

Colin Kruse in his book on 1 John says this:

"John recognizes that his readers have overcome them (these anti-christs) not by their own unaided efforts, but 'because the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world...believers are not only 'from God' as this verse indicates, but also indwelt by God (4:12, 13, 15)"

-The letters of John Pg. 160

You are overcomers, because He overcame. He is in you now by His Holy Spirit. Your victory is assured, no matter what you face. Why? Because Jesus overcame. And because of that, we overcome.

What are you struggling with today? What have you faced this year, with all of its craziness and unsettledness? Write it down, pray over it and ask God, in Christ to strengthen you.

This victory is assured, even though the world rejects it. Listen, Jesus meek and mild, Jesus the sage and moral teacher, Jesus the nice guy who just challenges us

to love everyone -is just fine with this world.

That Jesus is an invention of this world and He isn't meek in any Biblical sense, he is WEAK, non-offensive, accepting of everyone. The main problem with that Jesus, is that he is not the Jesus of the Bible.

The Jesus of the Bible, John says here in verse 5 doesn't fit with what the world says because:

"They are from the world; therefore they speak from the world, and the world listens to them."

-1 John 4:5 ESV

This is a very clear-cut statement. Because they want Jesus, the moral teaching man. They don't want the Jesus who flips tables, who challenges us in our sin, who challenges the status quo, and all the kings, kingdoms and petty little potentates who abuse His image-bearers and His world.

Those who use humanity as pawns in a giant chess game of power and manipulation, all in their twisted effort to maintain control and keep their power.

No, that Jesus, the one the Bible tells us about, challenges us to die to

ourselves and to live differently than this world, to challenge those in power who would say they are kings and Jesus is not.

Be very careful of those leaders who use Jesus and the Bible as a prop and a means to their own ends! They are as accountable before God as we are in the end!

Let's remember John's words that "when He appears..." You see, Jesus will return, and He will finish the work of making His creation whole and he ain't coming on a little donkey, all meek and mild.

No, John in his revelation tells us this:

"Then I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse! The one sitting on it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he judges and makes war. His eyes are like a flame of fire, and on his head are many diadems, and he has a name written that no one knows but himself. He is clothed in a robe dipped in blood, and the name by which he is called is The Word of God. And the armies of heaven, arrayed in fine linen, white and pure, were following him on white horses. From his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations, and he will rule them with a rod of iron. He will tread the winepress of

the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty. On his robe and on his thigh he has a name written, King of kings and Lord of lords.”

-Revelation 19:11-16 ESV

King of Kings, Lord of Lords. John tells us in verse 6 of 1 John:

“We are from God. Whoever knows God listens to us; whoever is not from God does not listen to us. By this we know the Spirit of truth and the spirit of error.”

-1 John 4:6 ESV

Arrogant? Only if it is untrue. Otherwise it is the settled confidence in the truth of what the Bible says about Jesus of Nazareth.

Whoever knows God, listens to these words and we in turn do what He commands - Whoever doesn't know God, thinks we are nuts, radical, and offensive.

I close with this. The more negative the culture and the world views the Church and the exclusive claims of Jesus - the more they will fight against and push back against that truth.

But the settled truth is that if we are in Christ, we are kept, we are empowered

by His Holy Spirit, and He will sustain us in all of our adversity.

Listen to Him, read your Bible, pray every day, and get to work in this world.