

Life in the Last Hour

Jonathan K. Dodson | 1 John 2:19-29 | April 9, 2022

There's a lot going on in the world today, and when we witness dramatic world events our thoughts can wander to the apocalypse: wars, disease, persecution, a world ruler, people marked by 666. Are we in the end times? What time is it? How should we navigate the times? Why should we keep the faith?

What Time is It?

John writes, *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.* What time is it? *The last hour.* A phrase borrowed from a prophecy in Daniel (11:35;12:1), which describes the emergence of a figure who will deceive vast numbers of people. But, unlike popular depictions the antichrist is a collective force: “*Forces from him shall appear and profane the temple and fortress, and shall take away the regular burnt offering. And they shall set up the abomination that makes desolate. He shall seduce with flattery those who violate the covenant, but the people who know their God shall stand firm and take action* (11:31–32). When should we expect these seductive forces? Antichrist is often associated with the book of Revelation, but the term only appears here. John insists *now many antichrists* have come. Who are they? Verse 20: *They went out from us, but they were not of us.* John describes the antichrist as a contingent who departed from this first century church. *The Antichrist is antichrists*: ordinary people who left the church. Sounds like convenient way to throw your opponents under the bus, but John describes *why* they are antichrists: “*This is the antichrist, he who denies the Father and the Son*” and *denies that Jesus is the Christ* (22). They refuse to “*confess Jesus Christ coming in the flesh*” (2 Jn 7). Far from a personal dispute, John's concern is *their teaching about Jesus*. Some are appalled at the idea of God become man; others preferred belief in the Father while renouncing the Son. Today belief in “the Father”, theism, is quite popular, but when you ask people about Jesus they often say, *I feel like Jesus was a good moral example but not the messiah*. The difficulty with this view is that the word Christ *means messiah*. Jesus didn't claim to just to show us the good but died to redeem our bad. That is humanity's greatest need before a holy God. It's not a matter of how we feel about Jesus but what Jesus claims. Antichrists are

those who reject Jesus as the Messiah and seduce others to leave the Church for their views. Just this week a couple teachers told our CG about how difficult it is to teach with their school's policy of tolerance; it tolerates virtually anything *except Christianity*. The system seduces adolescents by affirming what they *feel* about sexuality and gender. One teacher was expected to affirm a child's love for the same sex *and their hate for the church*. But isn't the goal of education to train minds to *think*? Hanna Holborn Gray, former president of the University of Chicago, said: "[Education should not be intended to make people comfortable; it is meant to make them think.](#)" We've switched it around. Comfort not reason, feeling not truth has become the arbiter of the good. If we're not careful, we'll be swept away by the spirit of the age. What time is it? *The last hour. These are the end days.* How should we **respond**? John says: [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.](#) What's he saying? If people leave the church propagating their own views of Christ, they are anti-Christ. How to apply this? *First*, John is not saying if people leave a local church to go to another local church that they are antichrists. He's saying the people who left their church with anti-Christ doctrine are anti-Christ. However, serial church leavers often can't be pleased. Many operate on a feeling, church as they imagine it to be, but Bonhoeffer reminds us, [He who loves his dream of a community more than the actual Christian community become a destroyer of that community.](#) We have to shatter the dream to embrace the reality. *Second*, when people leave because they have deconstructed their faith, rejected the Church, and reconstructed community around their own views of Jesus, *they embody the antichrist spirit*. Christians flock to podcasts by people like this! In the New Testament there is no idea of a churchless Christian accountable only to themselves. We are saved into a vital relationship with other Christians under local, *qualified church leadership to be a display of the glory and grace of Christ*. So how we should navigate these last days? *Together, following the true Christ.*

How Do We Navigate?

How do we navigate the last hour? 20: [But you have been anointed by the Holy One, and you all have knowledge. 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.](#) We navigate our times not out of fear, not

with eyes glued to the headlines, not fretting over elections or moral decay. We navigate the last days with the anointing of the Spirit and a knowledge of the truth. What does anointing mean? It's the application of oil onto a person or object. Oil used for lampstands in the Jewish temple. When Israel was opposed as they returned from exile, Zechariah the prophet had a vision of two lampstands, each with 49 flames, fueled by oil. Behind the blazing lamps stood two olive trees. Zechariah asks what the trees are for and an angel replies: "Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, says the Lord of hosts" (4:6). Unsure what he means, he asks again: What are these two branches of the olive trees, which are beside the two golden pipes from which the golden oil is poured out?" ...Then he said, "These are the two anointed ones who stand by the Lord of the whole earth"(11-14). What are the olive trees? *The anointed ones who stand by the Lord of all the earth*, who Daniel described as *knowing God, standing firm*. **They are the men and women who witness to the blazing light of Christ.** I think of Loma Miller who consistently points people in her workplace to the light of Christ. Praying with them in her office. How do they witness in the face of adversity? **By the golden oil that flows through them: Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, says the Lord of hosts.** We navigate the last hour *dependent* upon the Spirit! The Church doesn't stand firm by depending on great numbers, mission strategies, or cultural power *but by my Spirit, says the Lord of hosts.* We have more than we need—the golden anointing to bear witness to the glory of Christ. We can walk into that gospel conversation confident in the Spirit's power to witness and to save. We witness; he saves. So speak with confidence in the only effective evangelist, the Spirit of God. But the Spirit, alone, is inadequate. We can get off track relying on "the Spirit," claiming revelation of this and that, but John says confidence comes not only because we have the Spirit but also because we *have all knowledge*. All knowledge? He explains: I write to you, not because you do not know the truth, but because you know it. He's not referring to encyclopedic knowledge but gospel knowledge. The knowledge or truth he's been writing about: *the one heard, seen, and handled, the Word of life* (1:1). The Christ and his gospel of grace. So, we navigate the last hour with Spirit *and* truth. Not Spirit or truth. Now some people try to go at it with just truth. Arguing people into faith; badgering people with Bible verses; making haughty doctrinal claims. Gospel without power. They too get off track. So how do we navigate the times? Not by getting some Spirit people and some truth people. The Holy

Spirit is *the Spirit of truth*: [When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth](#) (Jn 16:14). [What we need is Spirit *in truth* people: dependent upon the Spirit as they testify to the truth.](#) Story of Witness. The golden oil flows *through you* as you witness to the truth. And if you don't have it, if you're exploring Christianity, you can have the Spirit and the truth today! Recognize Jesus didn't just come to show you what's good; he died and rose to redeem your bad. Ask him for salvation. He'll do it, in a moment, if you ask.

Why Keep at It?

What time is it?—the last hour. How do we navigate?—Spirit in truth community. Why keep at it? [And this is the promise that he made to us—eternal life.](#) If you keep at it, living a Spirit in truth life following Jesus, then one day you will enjoy *eternal* life. Life free from the struggle, persecution, loneliness, and fear; free of the desires of the world, the eyes, and the pride of life. Life unending with the Christ who became flesh not just to show us what's good but to deliver us from evil. Life with the one you were made for. We keep at it because of Jesus, because eternal life with him is coming. Soren Kierkegaard is known for his erudite philosophy, but what many people don't know is that he had his heart broken early in life and never recovered from it. He struggled with depression and loneliness his entire life, *but he struggled*; he fought to cherish eternity with Jesus. And before he died he chose this for his gravestone:

In a little while
I will have won.
The entire battle
Will at once be over.
Then I can rest
In paradise
And talk unceasingly
With my Jesus.

That's how he got through. Not a Jesus, a distorted Christ but the true Jesus. *My* Jesus. The promise of life forever with Jesus Christ kept him going, moving to that new creation where one day we will *all* worship in Spirit and in truth *forever*.