

## Final Prayer

We love You, Jesus Christ. We love You with a passion beyond all earthly meaning, because in You we find life, freedom from death, victory over evil, healing from pain and suffering, and the liberty to be true to ourselves and to You. Because of this, the only word that can possibly sum up what we feel is 'love'. We love You, O Lord our God, with all our heart and soul and mind and strength! ALLELUIA!

1 John 2:18-25

No: 7

Week: 197

Saturday

27/06/09

## Prayer

Dear Lord Jesus Christ, we read about the most dreadful things in the papers and on the news. Evil raises its head with vicious power, it seems, and makes innocent people suffer; some lose their faith because they say; 'how can there be a God?' Give us the courage to sustain our faith and pray for those in dire need who go through the darkest of times; and give us victory over the enemy wherever and whenever we come across him: to Your praise and glory we pray: AMEN

## Other Prayer Suggestions

### Weekly Theme: 'Anointing'

*Ask the Lord to prepare His people for their work in the world, and to anoint them with the Holy Spirit to be an effective witness to all that is good and true in a world of evil and hate.*

### On-going prayers

- *Pray about waste disposal, and your own attitude to this issue*
- *Give thanks for the gift of music and its use for worship within churches*
- *Pray for the nation of Iran and against evil and repression*

## Meditation

Jesus, what do You see when You look at Your disciples?

Do you see people who live as if they know  
That the world is a place where sin rules  
Unless it is defeated by the power of the Cross?

Do You see people energised by the Gospel  
Those who have been completely changed,  
And filled to overflowing with Your Holy Spirit?

Do You see people motivated to do Your work,  
Totally confident in the power of the Gospel  
To transform the whole world and be at peace?

Do you see people who are utterly obedient,  
Willing to do for You whatever You ask of them,  
Whenever it is needed, and whatever the cost?

Jesus, we don't know exactly what you see,  
So make us obedient to Your eternal Word;  
Yours, because we love others and do Your will!

## Bible Study - 1 John 2:18-25

<sup>18</sup> *Children, it is the last hour, and as you have heard that antichrist is coming, so now many antichrists have come; so we know that it is the last hour.* <sup>19</sup> *They went out from us, but they did not belong to our number; for if they had been one of us they would have remained with us. Instead, they went out so that it might become plain that none of them belongs to our number.* <sup>20</sup> *But you have been anointed by the Holy One, and you all know what is true.*

<sup>21</sup> I write to you, not because you do not know the truth, but because you know it, and because no lie comes from the truth. <sup>22</sup> Who is the liar? It is the one who denies that Jesus is the Christ! This is the antichrist, the one who denies the Father and the Son. <sup>23</sup> No one who denies the Son has the Father, and whoever confesses the Son has the Father as well. <sup>24</sup> 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; <sup>25</sup> and this is the promise He made to us: eternal life!

## Review

John's writing is certainly more obscure than that of the other writers of the New Testament, but it does not take too long to piece together what he has to say in this passage. In the preceding verse, John warned that the time was short before the return of Christ, and in his own mind this would have connected with Jesus' prophecy of the coming of false teachers and false 'Messiah' (Matt 24:4-7). The passage we have read today reflects on this, calling such false teachers 'antichrists'. Firstly, John wrote about how the 'antichrists' (2:18-20) arose in the church fellowship, and then offered some advice about one particular 'antichrist' (2:21-25).

The word 'antichrist' is important, because many people have used it together with this text, to denounce other Christians. Some people avoid the term altogether because of the offensive way in which it has been used, but it is better to prevent its scurrilous use by understanding what it means than giving in to its misuse. Firstly, John is the only writer in the New Testament to write about 'antichrist'; the term is found here, and in 1 John 4:3, and 2 John 1:7; moreover, the word means exactly what it says. In each of these texts it means one who denies that Jesus is the Christ (2:22, 4:3).

In the first three verses here (2:18-20), John speaks about antichrists as those who have left the community of the church; 'they went out from us, but they did not belong to our number; for if they had been one of us they would have remained with us' (2:19). It sounds as if some had left the church, because John spoke about a group rather than one individual; and it appears that they did not accept the statement of faith required by the church that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of God (see also John 20:31). Whether these people then preached against the church we do not know, but John certainly felt they were a threat, and he insisted that no one could take such a stance and remain in the churches under his leadership (2:19).

In addressing this situation, however, John took a step not taken by Paul or any other New Testament writer (but please remember that the word 'Messiah' is the Hebrew word for 'Christ' - the Greek for 'anointed one'). John recalled Jesus' words about the coming of 'false Messiahs' before the end times (Matt 24:4f. Mark 13:3), and said that this prophesy had come true in those who had left the church. Indeed, he said that their existence proved that the end times had come. Now what Jesus said was that 'false Messiahs' were people who claimed to be the Messiah themselves, but John said that 'antichrists' were different; they denied Jesus rather than claiming to be 'Christ' themselves.

John made this step because he wanted to assist the faith of those in his churches, because this was what bound them together. In the Roman world, the church was surrounded by people who believed almost anything, but the threat against them came not from people who claimed their own revelations, but from those who opposed them by saying that Jesus was not the Christ. They were likely to be either traditional Jews who could not accept that Jesus was God's Son, or Gentiles who were so convinced of their own religions that they could not accept that Jesus was God. Paul identified both these

groups of people as a threat to the church, but John was concerned simply that they opposed Christ.

For this reason, John personalised the issue and spoke in the last part of this passage not about various antichrists, but about one 'antichrist', and he identified him as a liar (2:22) and one who denies the Father as well as the Son (2:22). It is later generations who have linked the antichrist with Satan, or the devil, and made connections with other texts in Revelations. Satan is always at work in the world attempting to prevent the work of God, and denying both the Father and the Son; but he does much more, and we need to fight Satan's work now rather than be concerned about any connection here with the end times.

What John says is this; there is no alternative to confessing the truth that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God (2:22,23). God's people accepted this truth from the earliest of days in the life of the church, but there are some today who wish to be called Christians and retain various beliefs about Jesus including denying that He is God's Son, for example. Whatever we believe about the proximity of the end of the world, it seems to me that if this is regarded as acceptable within the church, then there is indeed something catastrophically wrong, and I would not be surprised if Jesus returned in glory to sort out the mess! It is no small matter!

## Questions *(for use in groups)*

1. Is it possible to identify 'antichrists' today? Is it wise to identify antichrists' today and to seek to counter their influence?
2. This passage assumes that people believe that the 'Son' and the 'Father' are one. Is this what most Christians believe?
3. What should be done if it is found that people are in the church who do not believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God?

## Discipleship

### Personal comment:

*What John writes here is very important, and it goes to the heart of Christian faith. I am not sure it is possible to be a Christian and not say that He is the Christ, though I have come across people who prefer to sit lightly to this and remain within the church. There must surely be a point in time when people should face the question fairly about whether they wish to be identified with God's people, and make a choice; accept Him or reject Him. The choice cannot be put off until we die, or it will be made for us by default and we will have no claim to faith to present before God before the throne of grace.*

### Ideas for exploring discipleship

- *Read through this passage a few times and you will find that it says more than one thing to you. Let it make a guide for your prayers for the life of the church in the days to come.*
- *Pray about the divisions within the church concerning the 'antichrist', including those who believe that the antichrist is a leader of another church, for example, or some other religion. There are many who deny that Jesus is the Christ today, but pray that God's people would recognise the truth about this passage of Scripture, and the importance of what people believe rather than what they do not.*