

It Is the Last Hour - J Glyn Owen

by From the Pulpit & Classic Sermons

The sermon emphasizes the urgency of the last hour, as described by John in 1 John 2:18, and warns against the dangers of worldliness and the presence of Antichrist.

Duration: 39:24

Scripture: Matthew 6:33, John 1:14, John 3:16, John 14:6, 1 John 2:18-20

Topics: "Radio"

Description

In this sermon, J. Glenn Owen discusses the concept of the 'last hour' as mentioned in 1 John chapter 2. He explains that the apostle John was concerned about discerning true Christians from those who had broken away from the Christian church and started their own groups. John proclaims that it is the last hour, a climactic time when God will reveal his glory and fulfill his purposes in human history. The sermon explores John's understanding of the times, his unmasking of heretics, and his encouragement to believers to stay strong in the face of false beliefs.

Transcript

Welcome to From the Pulpit in Classic Sermons. Each week we bring you a different message from some of history's greatest speakers in the Christian faith, and powerful sermons for modern preachers too. This week we have J. Glenn Owen.

With his message, it is The Last Hour. Will you turn prayerfully with me, if you please, to 1 John, chapter 2, and to the passage that begins with verse 18, which we have already read this morning as our lesson. You might find it helpful to keep the Bible open before you as we proceed.

We have already seen how the Apostle John would apply certain tests to those in Asia of old, who, whilst professing to be Christian, have broken with the Christian church, have withdrawn from Christian fellowship, and have gone on one side and started a little group of their own, with their own emphases and their own alleged insights into truth. The Apostle is concerned that the Christian community should be able to discern whether or not they are Christian. And the inference running right through here, of course, is that they are not.

We shall see that very especially as we proceed with the passage before us. One test which John has been applying has been the test of obedience. Obedience to God's commandments.

It is the insistence of the Apostle that love for God can only come to full bloom within the orbit of obedience to the commandments that God has given. So that if we really love Him, we will keep His commandments, as Jesus said. And that's the first test.

If a man says that he is in fellowship with God, that he is right with God, that he knows God, this is one test always to apply. Does he so love God that he keeps His commandments? Or are they very grievous to him, irksome, against the grain of things? If the law of the Lord is against the grain of my total nature, then that means that I need to be born again. Not just to have a reformation, that will not do.

If the commandments of the Lord are irksome to me and against the grain of my total nature, then I need a new and a radical birth from above. You cannot patch up human nature at that point. It must be changed radically and effectively.

And God alone can do that. The other test that John has been applying has been this. It's the test of love for Christian men and women.

Loving one another, as he puts it. Again, this is vital. If we find that we have no kinship with the people of God, who love Him and obey His commandments, then we're out of step with the family of God and with God Himself.

If we found ourselves in heaven, we would be very lonely there. If we found ourselves in the courts of the New Jerusalem, we'd want to leave. The most miserable man would be the man who, unregenerate, without love for the saints in his heart, or love for God, found himself in heaven.

Now John comes to the third test. And he will be applying these three times in the course of his epistle. And the third test is as vital, if not more so, than the other two.

It's the test of truth. Or, if you like, it's the test of right belief. It is this.

What do I think of Jesus Christ? Or, to put it in its context here, what do these people that have broken away from the Christian community establish their own little group? What do they think of Jesus Christ? Do they accept His deity, His sonship, His Messiahship, in the terms that are specified here? Or, have they wandered away from the Son of God and the revelation of the Father in the Son? What think ye of Christ is the crucial and all-revealing question. Now, there are three main divisions in this section. We're not going to take them all today.

But I think I will enumerate the way we're going to go over the next two or three Sundays, God willing. John deals with many things at once here. First of all, we have the apostles' understanding of the times.

That's our subject this morning. Then, when we've gone through that, we shall look at John's unmasking of the heretics. And thirdly, John's undergirding of the believers.

Passing through the last hour, as John tells us. Facing heretical people all around us and not quite sure what they are. He undergirds the faith of the people of God, telling them and assuring them that they need not flounder.

There is a way right through the morass of unbelief and of false beliefs. We come then to our subject today. It is the last hour.

John's understanding of the times. Now, it has been cryptically said that all history is his story. That is God's story.

And so it is. History is not a hodgepodge of meaningless events all mixed up together into a stew. History is God's story.

The story of God's doings. Now, it is true that we can't at any given moment in the course of history look at any part of the whole affair and ourselves understand everything about it. You can't do that when you read a book, can you? Whilst you are half way through the book, you may not be quite sure unless you have read the last chapter before you read the first.

You are not quite sure how it is all going to end up. The meaning of the whole thing is not clear. The plan is not clear.

How much more difficult it is for us feeble men and women to be able to understand the divine pattern at any given point in the outworking of God's purposes. But what we are assured is this. Running through all the events of history there is a white thread.

A thread of divine purpose. God is working his purposes out as year succeeds year. And when at last the whole thing is over we shall be able to see that out of this apparent jumble of events God has worked a perfect tapestry of his own perfect will.

And that is the confidence of Christian people. That is the faith that undergirds the saints. That is the belief of the Bible.

Addressing the harassed Christians of Ephesus and its environs here. Nearly two thousand years ago then. The apostle John says that the world is now leading up to their vital climactic hour.

When we shall see the meaning of it all. When God will consummate his purposes. And when the order will appear even to us human beings.

Because God will reveal his glory running through the whole course of human history. Now that brings us to our theme. I want to say three things about this.

We start off with the solemn proclamation that we have here. Children says John it is the last hour. Then we look at the accompanying explanation that John gives and tells us how he knows it is the last hour.

And then lastly we are going to look at John's pastoral exhortation to the saints as they face this last hour. Now first of all then this solemn proclamation. Children says John, little children, it is the last hour.

We do well to give some serious consideration to this statement and indeed to the entire biblical language. That refers to the consummation of the age in which we live. Now the first thing to grasp is that in speaking of the last hour or elsewhere of the last days.

Or of kindred notions as we encounter them in scripture. Bible writers are speaking theologically rather than chronologically. Now let me explain what I mean by that.

They are not measuring time according to our calendars or our clocks. When the Bible speaks of the last hour it doesn't mean the hour which comprises 60 minutes and so many seconds. Bible language is entirely different.

It is theological rather than chronological. Now this is always difficult for us to appreciate. You see God is not subject to our clocks and calendars.

God is eternal. He is outside of the realm which is bounded by day and night. He neither slumbers nor sleeps.

He is eternally the same. He is outside of this. And he therefore in his experience if we may so say has no morning or evening, no day or night.

Now we can't take this in. I find it very difficult to preach about it, to talk about it. Because you see you can't compare it with anything else.

Let me attempt to illustrate it this morning. And in so doing I know full well that there is no illustration. But I'm going to ask you to imagine something quite hypothetically.

And then don't criticize the illustration because I can do the criticism better than you can this morning. I'm very aware of the way it falls before it starts, before I start. But in order to illustrate it think for a moment, hypothetically.

Imagine yourself somewhere able to live outside of this world of ours. No longer subject to the laws of time and space. And there you are somewhere perched outside of the universe, outside of it.

Looking down upon the world. Now assume, what an assumption. If you're no longer subject to the laws of day and night.

You don't need breakfast, lunch and supper, whatever you have. You're above it all, you're outside of it all. And you're looking down upon the whole business.

You see over there it's dawn of day. Over there it's night. Day's beginning here, day's ending there.

But now take another step. Assuming that you can go still higher as it were and become more elevated. And have an eye that spans the whole of time at one moment.

You can see the beginnings of history and the end of history at a glance. Now you don't talk up there, may I say so very frequently. From that vantage point you don't talk about the 25th or the 26th of February or the 3rd of January or anything like that.

You don't talk about morning, noon and night. Everything is eternally present. You see the whole thing from your vantage point which is beyond this scene of time with its limitations.

Now whether that's a good illustration in parts or not, I know it's very fallible. But perhaps it gives us some faint idea, albeit faint, of the fact that God is right outside the historical process. And he doesn't talk of morning, noon and night.

And he's not subject to the need for sleep and the need for food and so forth. Calendars and clocks were made because we are feeble and frail. We need to sleep and we need food.

We have to be replenished. God is all so different. Self-sufficient and eternal.

Without beginning, without ending as the Catechism puts it. Now viewed then from outside of things, now God addresses himself to men. Through his Apostle and he says, Children, it is the last hour.

Not as you measure time in ticks and ticks of minutes and seconds. But as I measure time from my vantage point outside the universe as the Lord of the universe. I want to tell you, he says, it is the very last hour.

Now this is important for us to see. You see, many scoffers have come to a passage like this in Scripture and have said, Well, the last hour, that hour has run out a long, long time ago. And it's all out of ignorance that God's measurement of time is so different from ours.

His hour may proceed for two thousand years of our timing. You see, God's timing is not measured by ticks of the clock, but by moral and spiritual conditions. And his hour may be a very long one if moral and spiritual conditions do not proceed apace.

As a matter of fact, the Bible only acknowledges two main divisions of time. As true in the Old Testament, as true of our Lord Jesus Christ. Fundamentally, there are only two main divisions.

Jesus spoke of them when he said to the Pharisees, Whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, either in this age, now that's the right translation, age, or in the age to come. This is how time was divided in New Testament times and by the Jews of old and by the early church. There was the age that now is and the age that is to come.

But now with the coming of our Lord Jesus, with the completion of his work and with the coming of the Holy Spirit, the age to come has already arrived. The kingdom of the heavens has come to earth in the person of the Son and is liberated by the Spirit. So that we read in some places, we read, for example, of the ends of the ages of come.

Paul writing to the Corinthians, 1 Corinthians 10 and verse 11, he says, The ends of the ages have come upon you. Not only that, in the epistle to the Hebrews we read that we have tasted of the powers of the age to come. The last age has broken into this age and we are already in that last age.

But now John takes it further. Not only are we in the last age, but we are in the very last hour. And whether this is the language of God or the language of men upon earth, it speaks of the fact that time is running out.

I wonder, my friends, whether you and I are alert to that fact this morning. That for two thousand years we have been living in the last hour, according to God's reckoning of time. Now, if we take this seriously, it ought to have some very real impact upon our living.

And if you've never got the message before, my friend, look at this word of ours this morning and pray that God will write it upon your heart. It is the last hour. If it was two thousand years ago, it must be the last hour today.

There was a passage of scripture which I never understood until quite recently. It's so simple on the face of it that I guess many of us could miss the message of it. Do you remember these words spoken by our Lord? As it was in the days of Noah, so will it be in the days of the Son of Man.

He's speaking of the days of his second coming. They ate, they drank, they married, they were given in marriage, until the day when Noah entered the ark and the flood came and destroyed them all. Likewise, as it was in the days of Lot.

They ate, they drank, they bought, they sold, they planted, they built. But on the day when Lot went out from Sodom, fire and sulfur rained from heaven and destroyed them all. Now, I'm afraid that I took that simply as a recitation of the facts of history.

And it is that, of course. But don't you see the subtle thrust of it? What Jesus is saying is this. They didn't do anything very terribly wrong.

They didn't do anything that was abominably, abysmally evil. What they did was this. They just went on giving time to the ordinary affairs of life.

They ate, and they drank, and they married, and they built, and they did this. There's nothing evil in any of these things. Not one thing.

But they were oblivious of the fact that they had been warned that the age was coming to its end. And they forgot and forgot about it. It is not without good reason, therefore, that John wrote telling his first readers not to love the world, nor the lust of the world, as we saw last Lord's Day.

Because the world and its lust are all to pass away. The world passes away and the lust thereof. Do not allow yourself, therefore, to be duped and doped by it into a drowsiness which is unaware of what is going on.

We're in the last hour. The times are serious. But how does John know? That brings us to the accompanying explanation.

Well now, let me read the second part of verse 18. As you have heard, he says, that Antichrist is coming. So now, many Antichrists have come.

Therefore, we know, he says, that it is the last hour. How does John know? Well, put it in a nutshell, he knows for this reason. He has been told.

Now here we must assume that John had got his knowledge from the Lord Jesus himself. We have been told, he says, we know that Antichrist is coming. And already, he says, there are many Antichrists abroad.

We know, therefore, because these have come, that the last great Antichrist cannot be very far away. Now just a word about Antichrist and Antichrist. The Antichrist, according to the language itself, is either one who opposes Christ, he is opposite to Christ, anti, the preposition anti can mean that, one who is set over against, deliberately opposed to Christ, and everything that Christ stands for.

Or, it can be used in a slightly different way, as an alternative to Christ. The word means that too. Now probably, here in this context, the reference is to anti in the sense of being absolutely, utterly, irrevocably opposed to Jesus Christ.

The Antichrist is one who is set against everything he stands for, everything he says, everything he has done. He is over against it. It may not be good taste to introduce a joke at this point.

You may have heard the story of the Irishman who landed in South Africa, and asked, is there a government here? He was told, yes, a very good government. Well, I am against it, he said. Now, pardon me, Irishman, but you know, that's the Antichrist.

Whatever the Christ of God has said, whatever the Christ of God has done, whatever the Christ of God stands for, the Antichrist is against it, set, solid, beyond repentance. There is no way back. There are no possible negotiations.

He is anti. He is set. The Antichrist is usually identified as having been prophesied by Daniel the prophet in chapter 7. If he is a personage of such importance that the prophets of the Old Testament speak about him before his coming, I think we ought to know something about him.

God does not inspire his prophets in vain. If there is some such character as this, some personage of this order that is to come into the realm of history, my good people, you and I ought to know something about it. Daniel speaks of him in 7 and 25, in these words, He shall speak words against the Most High, and shall wear out the saints of the Most High.

Did you get that? Wear out the saints of the Most High. There is a word in the New Testament which says that when he comes, he shall deceive even the very elect, if it were not for the grace of God. Later, Daniel refers to the same being as one who shall exalt himself and magnify himself above the very God.

Now, John is the only one who speaks of him by the title Antichrist. But it is fairly obvious from the description given in comparison of the two that Paul has the same person in mind when in 2 Thessalonians chapter 2 he writes of the man of sin or the man of lawlessness, as some manuscripts have it. The man of sin or the man of lawlessness.

It comes very much to the same thing. And also that we have the same person in Revelation chapter 13 verses 11 to 18, called the false prophet. Now, summarizing what is said of him in Scripture, we may say that whereas the designation Antichrist may apply to many people in the course of history, the Antichrist refers to one personage coming at the end who is the embodiment of all that is against Christ and his gospel and his truth and his revelation.

This person will be Antichrist theologically, in that he will claim to be God himself. He will be Antichrist politically, as he will attempt to rule the world. He will be Antichrist satanically, because his inspiration is satanic indeed.

It seems that in many respects the future Antichrist will be to Satan what Jesus Christ is to God the Father. Some such relationship binds Satan and the Antichrist as binds the Son of God and the Father in heaven. Now, says John, we know that he is coming because many Antichrists are already here.

John sees the last hour as having arrived because many such people are emerging, not the Antichrist, but people who have his spirit. His spirit is already abroad. These Antichrists already on the scene are not supernatural beings as the Antichrist will be.

They are, in some cases, and this is the tragedy of it, oh, that the Lord would write this on our hearts. These Antichrists already on the scene have been members of the Christian church. They've gone through the motions of being received into membership.

They've been baptized. They've been received in. They've been given the right hand of fellowship.

But they went out from us, says John, because they didn't belong to us. If they belonged to us, they would have remained with us, but they were not of us. Can you imagine such a thing? Here are men and women who have sat in the pew on the Lord's day, have heard the word, and have apparently worshipped with the

people of God, and now they are the precursors and the forerunners of the great Antichrist himself.

Men and women, let us examine ourselves this morning. Is there a genuine work of grace that is going on in my heart? Is there something that is deeper than the skin? Is there something that is radical and transforming, making me like God and his Son? Or is my membership of the Christian church something that is purely superficial? I can shake it off like that, and I can join forces with a great Antichrist. Oh, this is challenging.

And I tell you, it's the more challenging because it is the last hour. You and I don't know how much time we've got to put things right. The day is far spent.

The might is at hand. I know there are many things that have to take place. I know what 2 Thessalonians 2 says, and I know what other passages say.

Some things must take place before the very last event of all, and he comes in his glory. But I also know that God can hasten events when it pleases him. It is the last hour, men and women.

Do not trifle with spiritual things. If there's anything wrong in your life, put it right today. Harden not your hearts as in the day of provocation.

Today is the day of salvation. This is no time to trifle. This is no time to toy.

Many Antichrists have come out into the world. For this reason we know, says John, the Spirit is abroad. And it's not a preparation of the way for the embodiment of the Antichristian spirit.

Now one word. And I move right to the end of the passage because I think we need to bring that truth in here. A pastoral exhortation.

If this is so, what does John just say to the Christians here? Now you remember the situation. A Christian group, a genuinely Christian church has come into existence. Then there's been this division.

These people have had some new light and they've gone outside. John says, now you must test them and see whether they are of God or not. Are they merely schismatics, which is serious enough, dividing the true church? Or are they heretics? And you need to apply these certain tests.

But now he says, look, as you're doing that, and as I warned you of the coming of Antichrist, I want now to encourage you. And why doesn't he do so? Look at verse 28. Now, little children, he says, abide in him.

So that when he appears, we may have confidence and not shrink before him at his coming. It is true that there are Antichrists abroad. It is true that they are multiplying in number.

And it is true that they are the precursors of the great Antichrist. And the time is fast moving. But says John, don't simply concentrate on the opposition.

Take note of the Antichrists and what is happening and what their presence in the plural means. But then he says, remember this. Your Lord is returning.

Jesus is coming back. Our Master is coming back again. There's the great appearing of the Lord himself to which we look forward.

He says, remember that. He's coming. And now he says, you prepare for his emergence in his glory as he appears.

Now, there are two alternatives he puts before the Christians. Look at them. Now, little children, he says, you abide in him so that when he appears, he appears, we may have confidence and not shrink before him at his coming.

The first alternative, the first possibility is this, that when Jesus Christ comes, his people will shrink and shrivel fearfully and timidly before him at his appearance. Now, this is a very graphic statement, but you know what it is. You have seen it happen in some sphere or other.

Someone is guilty of something. And then some key figure in the whole business has emerged into the scene, and you notice how they begin to blush, unless they've completely lost the art of blushing. And if they can't blush, they'll get a little bit agitated.

And they don't want to look this key figure in the face, and they'll gradually move away until they get into a corner away from the look of his eye. Oh, men and women, I tell you, there's a possibility that some of us, on the day of our Lord's appearance, will want to hide. I have no time this morning.

Think of the parable of the talents. Think of the parable of service. Think of the parables of our Lord, all relating to this hour.

And for one reason or another, we may well want to hide and shrink back before him at his coming. What a terrible thing when the bride wants to hide from the bridegroom. We've professed a love toward him, and we're awaiting for the marriage day, and then when he comes, we want to hide from him because we've been unfaithful.

That's one possibility, says John, that we prove our infidelity, and at last, when he comes, we'd rather not see him. But the other alternative is this, that we may have confidence before him at his coming. And when confidence is one of the most graphic ones, it means say everything.

Say everything. Now, the best illustration I can think of is something that happens very often in families where there are little ones. You know, Dad or Mum have been away from home, and lots of things have gone on in the house, and then at certain ages, children just have the knack of saying everything in one sentence.

And Daddy or Mummy comes home and get in the front door, and suddenly everything's out, and there may have been some secrets, you know, something special kept for Daddy coming home. And it shouldn't have come out just then, but everything's out. Everything's out.

You see, this utter openness, this love that opens the heart and's got nothing to hide. Now, says John, you should be like this, and this is what you should pray for and prepare for, that when he comes, your heart will be open, you'll have nothing to grieve about, nothing to hide, but with an open heart, welcome your beloved. And the secret of it all, says John, is this.

And here we see the stamp of the same writer in the epistle as in the gospel. Oh, my little children, he says, abide. Nothing more.

It's all wrapped up there in that little word, abide in him. Can I apply it very briefly to this chapter? What does it mean to abide in him? One, see that you keep his commandments out of love. Two, see that you love his people out of the same love of God in your heart.

Three, see that you continue to believe that he is Jesus the Christ and honor him as the Christ of God. It's the test of obedience, it's the test of love, it's the test of truth. Now, he says, this is the way of abiding, this is the prescription for abiding.

Oh, blessed day, when my Lord returns in glory, and every eye shall see. I trust that none of us will want to draw back at that point. Now's the time to prepare.

Now's the time to get ready. This is the day, this is the hour, these are the means of grace. We have the word, we have the promises, we have the covenant, we have the fellowship of his people.

My good people, this is the Lord's day. And a Sabbath on earth is but the means given by God for the preparation of souls for that eternal Sabbath in the heavens with our beloved. Are you using this day in its fullness to prepare for that? What more are we using our lives? It is the last hour.

Don't fritter the moments. Just one life will soon be past. Only what's done for Christ will last.

Let us pray. Heavenly Father, in heaven thy dwelling place, hear our acknowledgement of ill-desert, unworthiness, guilt, transgressions of thy law, and lack of love for thy people. At times, O our Heavenly Father, in mercy come and cleanse us, purge us, and forgive us, and make us the agents of thy forgiving love for the purifying and the edifying of the fellowship of the church, and ride out into the cold, abysmal world that lies in ignorance of the meaning of history and of the terminus towards which it is appointed to move.

Father in heaven, hear our cry this morning and bring anew earnestness and sobriety into our lives. Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

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