

John 4:4

Week #8 in the Series "Whose Verse is it Anyway?"

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Good morning, everybody. Grace and peace to you, in the name of God, our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. It's such a joy to be with you in person and we welcome you online. This is a wonderful day for us to delve into the Word of God. We are bringing a conclusion to our summer series *Whose verse is it anyway?* As you heard Pastor Matt describe it earlier, we are going out with a very important message. When Matt opened up that verse and read it to me, I thought, yes, I got a good one. And yet the more I was praying about this, the more the reality of the presence of that verse of Scripture for our time today became really daunting on my spirit. And I think what the Lord has in mind, both for you, as well as for me, to discern together what God is trying to say to us, people of faith, for such a time as this. So I want to read the verse again that was shared with me. And then we're going to pray, and then we're going to dive into what this word is all about. So, here's the word for today. John 4:4. You, dear children, are from God and have overcome them, because the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world. Would you pray with me? Lord God, open us up to your word. And open your word up to us. Teach us, Lord, what you would have us learn as you can form our lives into the disciples that you have called us to be. All of this, Lord, we pray in Jesus mighty name. And all God's people said, Amen.

I want to read a statement, and you tell me if it is true or false. Here's the statement. Eating spinach will make you big and strong. False or true? Some of you are saying true. Some of you are saying false. Let me just tell you, I ate a lot of spinach. Why are you laughing? The fact is that eating spinach does make you big and strong if you combine it with a bunch of other things that you need to eat that help you become big and strong. Here's statement number two. We only use 10% of our brain. True or false? My answer is it depends on the person, right? Statement number three. Caffeine stunts your growth. Here's another one. You'll catch a cold if you go outside in the cold with wet hair. all technically, technically false. Another one - The COVID vaccine contains a microchip allowing the government to track your activity. True or false? It is false, it is false. I have a doctor friend who said you'd be surprised how many people actually believe that; that the government has put some kind of microchip in you through this vaccine. And so, he playfully has joked with people, he said, you know, give us 15 minutes. And when the patient goes, why do I have to give you 15 minutes? He goes, I need to go into the back room to activate the microchip that we just gave you. So - it is false. Here's one more. The COVID vaccine is the mark of the beast talked about in the Bible. The answer is it is false. How do I know that? This has no understanding of what a vaccine is. Next one, drinking red wine is good for your health. True or false? What they have recently discovered is that is not true, that alcohol completely just is not going to benefit your heart one way or another. But alcohol will help you forget that you have bodily limitations and health concerns. Here's another one - The 5 second rule is true. When food falls on the floor, you have 5 seconds before bacteria jumps on it. True or False? So, my answer is it depends on what the food item is? And the floor. You know, if it drops on the floor in the hospital - I want nothing to do with that. Or public restrooms. So, it is false. The 5 second rule is not true. Bacteria can jump on food in a split second. All right. We're going to get progressively challenging just for a couple more. Video games cause violence. True and false? Here's the harsh reality. The video games themselves are just media. They are not culprits. The difficulty is for those of us, within our human

condition, that have a propensity in our mental health that leans towards violent behavior or the violent expression of our emotions - videogames actually create a reality for us that allows us to then in real time, real life situations, live out those fantasies rather than within the appropriate boundaries. Here's another one, two more. The time of Jesus's return can be predicted. If you read the Bible and understand it's mystery code. True or false? That is false. Yet there's a large chunk of people out there that actually believe that you can. Even Jesus himself in the Gospels says nobody knows except God alone. Last one. If you accept Jesus as your Lord and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you may get into heaven if you lead a good life and don't swear, lie, cheat or kill anyone for. How many you think that is true? This is false. Why? Because of that last part - the part about you may get into heaven if you lead a good life and don't swear, lie, cheat or kill anyone. You could put any kind of secondary phrase on that opening phrase and get it wrong. In truth, if you confess Jesus as your Lord and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, the Bible tells us you will be saved. There is no footnote to that. There's no caveat. There's no small print.

Embedded in first John, is a very passionate plea to the Christian Church. And that plea is to remember who we are, to remember what we were taught. To remember why we believe what we believe. Why? Because we live in a world where you're now getting bombarded with a bunch of messages and there's a little bit of truth in what they're being told, and yet there's a little caveat that's added to it that makes the whole thing wrong. There are just sufficient amounts of truth that are embedded in these statements that are being proclaimed that are convincing even Christians, even churching Christians to believe in what is a lie. Making the season that we are in right now really, really critical for those of us who are people of faith to engage in discernment. So what John is communicating throughout his letter is that there are there are forces of evil that looked very tempting, very alluring, but they are half-truths. And we have to engage our discernment to weed out those things that are not of God so that we can always stand firm on the truth of the good news of Jesus Christ.

Let me go back to this verse. I want to share with you some very challenging applications for all of us, for the time in which we are living. Throughout the letter of John, what the Apostle John is trying to communicate to us is that there is a challenge for us to live as children of the light rather than children of the dark. So, it's really important for John to communicate that light and darkness. In fact, if you read all of John's gospel as well as first, second and third John, less so in second and third because there are more specific letters, but you're going to see that contrast between light and dark. He is going to use it symbolically. He's going to use it very tangibly. Staying in the light, the light meaning the light of the gospel of Jesus Christ, everything that Jesus taught, everything that He embodied, everything that He modeled, that is the light. And when we live as followers of Jesus, we are to live in the light as opposed to living in the dark, which is the metaphor that John uses about living in the flesh, living in evil, following the things and the desires that pull us away from our relationship with Jesus. So that contrast between light and dark is really important. Light is good, dark is bad in the metaphor that he's describing. So, light for him is truth, dark is lies. And specifically what John communicates in the gospel and this letter is that the embodiment of the lie leads us to the evil one. And as followers of Jesus, He wants us to live within the freedom of what it means to be fully saved, fully embraced. So, throughout John:1, you'll hear him talk very affectionately to these young believers in the church to which he's writing. He'll call them Dear Children. It's a very special word that's used to talk about affectionately, little children. That's not saying that he's looking down on him. It's actually the opposite. He's looking, as a parent, just wanting to embrace each and every one of those believers. That embracing love is the passion behind why John is saying what he's saying. He doesn't want them to lose hope, he doesn't want them to lose their sense of salvation. Mostly he wants them to feel the embrace of God's grace. He wants them to live fully in that incredible arena of love and passion that we

know in our relationship with Christ. He pours his heart out to them in a very affectionate way. And when you look at it from that vantage point, then what he begins to unpack in the majority of his letter is that in order for you to live as people of the light, you have to discern what is of God and what is not. And by the time we get to chapter four, which is where our verse is for today, by the time you get to chapter four, what he's talking about is testing the spirits. It's language that that we use in the church all the time but maybe you don't understand what that means. Basically, what it's talking about is, discernment, being able to discern through all of the wide variety of messages that we are getting out there. It's being able to discern what is true. And in order to do that, we need help. Very specifically, what John is communicating is we need the help of a Holy Spirit that is in us.

I want to start chapter four, verse one. All right, so this is what John is writing. He writes Dear friends, and there's that affectionate term, dear little ones. Do not believe every spirit. Do not believe every teaching that comes your way, but test the spirits, test the teaching to see whether they are from God. Many false prophets, false teachers have gone out into the world. This is how you can recognize the spirit of God. He's telling the reader, if you want to help in your discernment, this is one of the tools that you want to use in order to discern truth. This is how you can recognize the spirit of God. Every spirit, every teaching that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, but every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the Antichrist, which you have heard is coming and even now is already in the world.

So let me pause there for a second. I know many of us have heard the term Antichrist before. Sometimes we have heard it within the context of the Book of Revelation or the Book of Daniel or Thessalonians, and when you look at it from that vantage point, we get the impression that this Antichrist is a person, and that person is coming. And that may be true, that there's still a lot of unknowns that depends on who you are and what you preach and what your framework is. There may be a person that embodies that. But what John is communicating here, which I think is quite accurate, is that the spirit of the Antichrist is prevalent within the brokenness of society and the forces of evil that are at work. That force that is opposite of what is Jesus. You have an anti-Christ movement of evil that seeks to counter the movement of good in Jesus. That is prevalent from the moment of the crucifixion of Christ on through history. Why do I say it that way? Because Jesus came to inaugurate a new kingdom. And the forces of evil, both human and supernatural have been set up to try to thwart that activity from day one. So, in John's parallelism, light versus dark, truth versus lie, you have Christ versus Antichrist. There may come a day when the Antichrist as a person rises up, depending on how we read the Book of Revelation. But until then there is a force that is at play and has been at play that is seeking to undermine the activity of God. One of the best ways that the anti-Christ spirit seeks to work is through deceiving the body of Christ. And through deceiving the Body of Christ, it brings about pitting sister and brother against sister and brother in the faith. Because if you can dismantle the church, you eradicate or make irrelevant the message of the gospel. Why is it that any time that there is a surge of growth or movement of force where God is birthing something new that suddenly leaders in the church start having affairs, start sabotaging ministries, divisions start happening in the body of Christ and the body of Christ starts fighting each other, even to the point of division. Because if you can dismantle the movement of God, the theory is that you can make irrelevant the message of the gospel. And if the culture is established with a mindset that everything is about me, we tend to agree with the forces and messages of the anti-Christ. John says the spirit of the Antichrist, which you have heard is coming and even now is already in the world. Then he says, in verse 4, You, my dear children are from God, and you have overcome them. What is the "them"? All of those Antichrist forces. Notice the word overcome. This is so important for us to hear. He uses a term overcome. And what does the term overcome mean? It means you have fought the battle and won. You emerged as Victor. Why? Because you have put your faith in the cross

of Jesus Christ. It is God's faithfulness, God's ability, God's strength that makes it possible for us to overcome the forces of the Antichrist that seek to undermine everything that God is birthing. When you see the body of Christ being divided, when you see Christians fighting other Christians in ways that are beyond the normal human stuff. When you see the incredible forces of evil working to divide sister and brother in the faith. What I do is, I pull back and I go, Ohhhh, God must be trying to birth something really important here, to cause the forces of evil to want to dismantle it. Your children are from God and have overcome them. Because the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world. Let's personalize that. The one who is in me is greater than the one who is in the world. Would you say that with me out loud? The one who is in me is greater than the one that is in the world. And what that means, according to what John is communicating, is that force that is the Antichrist - that is opposite of Jesus, is at work, trying to divide the body, trying to conquer all of us as followers of Jesus. All of that cowers at the name of Jesus. Because in us as followers of Jesus, is the fullness of God's victory on the cross. And so therefore, greater is the one that is in me than any in the world.

And that's why I stand as an overcomer. That's why I stand as a victor. That's why I can pronounce and confess that Jesus Christ is the Lord, no matter what else is going on, that I can't control or can't even face into on my own terms. I know by faith that I am an overcomer. Because of the cross. And that truth is for you. It's for those sitting near you right now. It's for those who are watching online who are your sisters and brothers. And what John is saying to each and every one of us, His dear children, who he's embracing, like a parent whose love is so huge that he wants the best for us, he is saying remember who you are. And remember whose you are.

So let me talk about applying this. We are living, as I said, in a season where we desperately need discernment. We cannot live what we do not learn. So, we need to delve into scripture, we need to walk into scripture because we cannot live what we don't learn about. We cannot discern light from dark or truth from lies on our own whims. We cannot make decisions of discernment of what is of God simply based on what we think we like in any given situation. God wouldn't say this, or that, because in my experience, this is what I think. You'd be surprised how many people in churches all over America and all over our globe approach the faith that way. That's not discipleship - that's idolatry. It's making God after our image rather than living in obedience to the One who has called us by His name. So, living in discernment becomes really key. John Wesley, the founder of the Methodist movement that eventually became the Methodist Church, used to kind of embody certain ways of discernment that later, back in the 1950s, another theologian took and said, hey, you know what? All of what he's teaching us kind of fit into four terms. And what we have affectionately over the years called the Wesley and Quadrilateral Scripture, tradition, reason and experience. Those four words basically mean that you start with Scripture. What does the Word of God say? What does it say about anything that we're struggling with? And in order to get past that one, we actually have to read it and study it, which is why small groups become really important. Bible studies and daily devotions are so critically important for all of us who are followers of Jesus. We cannot follow Jesus in a vacuum. So, studying it really becomes important and then basing our lives on this incredible foundation is the starting point for Wesley. And then looking at tradition, how has the church dealt with these issues in the past? The church is about 2000 years old now. So, what has the church done with these topics in the past? It is sheer arrogance for us to believe that we in the 21st century have so much more knowledge and wisdom than the Christians who have preceded us. We may have a lot of tools. We may have a lot of skills. We may have computers that could look at things in a split second that people back in the first century did not. But I tell you that people in the first century gave their lives for what we read about in this book. And so it meant something to them. Does it mean that much to us? I think it's pure arrogance for us to assume that the church of the past cannot speak into the church of the present or the future. And there's a reason God

has uniquely gifted us with the capacity to think. Can we or will we be those who proverbially only used 10% of our brains? And then there's experience. Our culture is switching the order and putting experience first. Because we start with our own experience then we live in a world where there is no sense of truth. But if we devoid our process of discernment, if we devoid of experience, we will miss the life lessons that God has gifted to us on our journey of faith.

I really think that's what Paul was saying when he said, Work out your faith with fear and trembling. I think way too many of us forget about the humility of fear and trembling when we're making discernment.

So, friends, for what it's worth, I really believe that we as believers are facing a season that demands that we know what we believe. And so rather than feeling overwhelmed by that, I invite you to take up the challenge and engage the Word of God as the starting point; the starting point of discernment so that you can truly hear the voice of the spirit in any given moment that's before us. Then we will be able, as John indicates, to live as children of the light rather than children of the dark.

Let's pray. God, I thank you for your word. It is a challenge and yet so, so urgently important. Father, I pray that you would, by the power and presence of the spirit, fill us uniquely with what we need to engage this world unafraid but fully ready to be your witnesses, to be light in the midst of darkness. To be bearers of truth and hope and love. And to always remember the one who is in us is greater than the forces that are in the world. I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.