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Welcome to the New Life Podcast, a ministry of New Life Presbyterian Church in Ithaca, New York. Today we have this week's sermon, preached by Tim LaCroix, our senior pastor. Join us for worship each week at 10 o'clock at 950 Danby Road, Ithaca, New York. You can also visit us on our website, [www](http://www). Now here's this week's sermon.

00:43

A reading from the first book of the Apostle John, chapter 2, verses 18 through 29. 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. 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.

01:11

that they are all not of us. 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. 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.

01:41

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. And this is the promise that he made to us, eternal life. I write these things to you about those who are trying to deceive you, but the anointing that you receive from him abides in you, and you have no need that anyone should teach you.

02:06

But as his anointing teaches you about everything, and is true, and is no lie, just as it has taught you, abide in him. And now, little children, abide in him, so that when he appears we may have confidence and not shrink from him in shame at his coming. If you know that he is righteous, you may be sure that everyone who practices righteousness has been born of him. This is the word of the Lord.

02:38

I've talked to you before about how the share of people in our country who say they don't believe in God at all is actually quite small. There was a Pew study done in 2018 and there were recent studies

that confirmed that the numbers are pretty much still the same. In 2023, the last time this study was done. And what that found is that we're basically 10 percent.

03:06

of only 10% of Americans would say they don't believe in God at all or any higher power or spiritual being. But if you look at the numbers a little deeper, you see that actually there's something quite interesting. The number of people who would identify as atheists are about 3 or 4%, depending on the year. One interesting thing is that 1% of atheists say they believe in the God of the Bible.

03:37

I'm not joking, that's one percent. I don't know how they think they're atheists, but at any rate, and a lot of times people would say that they don't believe in God, but they're not atheists for basically because they see atheism as a...

03:54

you know, activism. So Neil deGrasse Tyson is one of these people. Neil deGrasse Tyson says he doesn't believe God exists or he doesn't know if he exists. He could, he said he could believe if he'd shown proof, but he says he's not an atheist because I'm not an activist, he says. I don't care. I don't want to make people atheists. So at any rate, I think that's why the numbers lower. But if you look at the rest of the 90% of people who say they believe in God, you'll find that beliefs are scattered.

04:24

much all over the place. Of the 90% of people that say they believe in God, only 56%, which is still the majority of the country, say they believe in God as described in the Bible. And if you break that down even further though, those that say they believe in God as described in the Bible, we see that of, and this is of all Americans, so 56% of people say they believe in the God of the Bible.

04:49

But only 27% of them would say that they believe that...

04:56

God determines what happens to them all the time, right? Only 27% of Americans would say they believe that God determines what happens to them. An even lower number would say that God knows everything. So that's about maybe 25%, 26% of Americans would say God knows everything,

that he has power to change everything, a lower percentage, that God determines what happens in their lives all or most of the time, even lower percentage.

05:26

And so what we see is when we really parse out what people mean when they say they believe in God, we find that the standard Orthodox teaching of Christianity that God is all-knowing, that he's all-powerful, that he's ever-present, very kind of basic stuff about God, very few people believe, maybe about a quarter of Americans believe. But it's also very clear from surveys and studies that the folks in our country who

05:56

say they believe in God or a higher power, they may not believe Orthodox Christian beliefs, but they do want something or derive something from God. They derive meaning, they derive purpose. A lot of people, 61 percent of people would say that they believe that God judges evil, so that's something that's very important to a lot of people. But along the religious scope, especially among those who say they believe in God in the Bible,

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There's a lot of different beliefs. I'm not sure if this music group is one that is still known by people today. I get the impression that a lot of groups, the one I'm about to mention, I get the impression that a lot of music from my college years is popular again. I saw a student on Cornell's campus wearing a Tupac t-shirt. Tupac is one of the.

06:47

people that was popular. When I was in high school, and we're listening to the radio on the way, I think, I forget who I was with, one of my kids in the car and some West Coast rap was on. I was explaining what West Coast rap was as opposed to East Coast rap. So whenever I listen to the stations, you know, I hear music from college. So anyways, I'm not sure if you guys know who Depeche Mode is, but they had a song in 1990 called My Own Personal Jesus.

07:16

my own personal Jesus. Reach out and touch faith. Some of you know it, OK. What I think we have in this is the spirit of our age in this postmodern world we live in is everyone kind of has their own personal God. They pick and choose what they want, and they find meaning, and they find purpose in it. And I'm all for people finding meaning, finding purpose, finding peace. The

07:44

But what John is writing to us today, it doesn't regard, he's not talking to the world, he's not talking to people who don't profess faith in Christ. He is talking to people who profess to believe in Jesus, who profess to follow God, who profess to be a part of the church. And so this message that John is giving is kind of an inside message. It's a message for those who have aligned themselves with God. And what he's saying is, look, there are people that have pulled themselves out of the church, pulled themselves away from the church, because they believe things about God the Father

08:14

Jesus and the Spirit that are not what you were taught from the beginning. And this is called what is, this is caused what is called a schism. A schism is a ripping of the church apart. We actually sang about this earlier in the song, The Church is One Foundation, how the church is by schism rent asunder. It is true today that the church, although it is spiritually one, is not in any observable way one. We are

08:43

split into at some estimates 10,000 different Christian denominations. That aside, John is addressing those who would pull themselves out of the teaching of the Orthodox faith and of the church. And John's message is, in light of all these different kinds of beliefs, these different kinds of Christianities, and his message is very simple. That is, we need to abide.

09:12

The word abide is repeated.

09:13

Over and over in 1 John, we read from the Gospel of John, Jesus' discourse on the vine and the branches where he says, abide, abide, over and over and over. Here we have John speaking about abiding in chapter 3, which we'll start to cover next week and the week after. We see more about abiding, of remaining. So the message today is fairly simple, but it's broken down into four points in this passage that we have today.

09:43

there's people that have teaching false things and dividing the church, John has four simple things to say. First is that we abide in the truth. Second is that we abide in the church. Third is that we abide in the Spirit. And fourth is that we abide in Christ. So first, abide in the truth.

10:05

How is it and we I was talking to the kids earlier that and during the kids message and talk to them about what does a branch do to stay connected to the tree and You know the answer is a branch doesn't do much of anything. It just stays on the tree

10:19

When Jesus gives his discourse in John 15 though, it's apparent that you could take yourself out of the tree. That's a part of, you know, his message. But essentially, abiding, abiding in Christ, abiding in the church, it really has two outward aspects. First is abiding in the truth, and the second is abiding in the church.

10:42

And if we do that, we'll abide in Christ. And so we're going to say much more about what that means. But here we have in the context of John's letters, people are denying the truth. We've been sort of trying to define what it is that the false teachers were teaching. So far, we've done that by sort of trying to deduce it from the positive things that John says we ought to believe. Here, for the first time, we find

11:08

description of at least part of the beliefs of the false teachers what they were teaching and we find a polemical section here where John begins to describe what they are teaching the specific things they are teaching. John begins in verse 18 with a warning and in this warning he wants to give us a sense of urgency based on the last times and so he says it's the last hour he says you've heard of the Antichrist

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You've heard of the end times. And a lot of Christians are interested in the end times. They're interested in when Christ will come and all the things that will happen when he comes. There may have been quite a bit of interest in these things in John's day. And so he is rhetorically attaching himself to that concern. You know, their concerns when Christ will come back and what will happen and when will the Antichrist come? So John attaches to that concern.

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He says, it is the last hour, and you have heard that Antichrist is coming. But he says, listen, there's something, that's in the future, John is saying. That's in the future, but there's something happening now that is just as important. There's something happening now that you need to pay attention to. There's something happening now that has the danger of...

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bringing, you know, of ripping people out of the church and out of fellowship with Christ. So he says, you've heard of the Antichrist, and maybe you've heard of the Antichrist before. By the way, this is the only passage in the entire Bible that uses the word Antichrist. Maybe you weren't aware of that. This is the only place.

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The notion is referred to in other places. Paul talks about the man of lawlessness. Jesus says there'll be many false Christs that rise up. Of course, in Revelation, John describes a false prophet and a beast. So there's obviously the idea that there's going to be a big bad guy at the end. And people sort of latch on to that big baddie. And what John is saying is, you have

13:20

for that big evil person, but you need to watch yourself. You need to watch yourself because there are anti-Christ's all around you. And he says, anyone who denies that Jesus is the Christ is an anti-Christ. So the truth that John wants them to abide in is to profess that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. We find in 2 John that this also includes the fact of the incarnation.

13:49

In 2 John, verse 7, 2 John, verse 7, he says, those who do not confess the coming of Jesus is in the flesh. So there were teachings about Jesus that were pulling people away from the truth, either saying that Jesus isn't God, he isn't God's son, that there were various versions of false teaching at the time, which de-emphasized either the divinity or the humanity of Jesus. We don't know exactly.

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what was in line here and it would be kind of foolish to land on one of them because we just don't know. But we do know it was questioning Jesus. It was questioning Jesus' divinity. It was questioning whether Jesus was fully human. And I think that's very relevant to where we are today. Because we

think about the truth. The truth that John wants us to really latch onto is that Jesus is who he says he is.

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Jesus is described in the Bible as who he says he is. John, from the very beginning of his letter, he says, chapter one, verse one, that which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have handled, which we have seen, which we have looked upon. He's describing the fact that he knew Jesus, and this Jesus is who he says he was, that is the Son of God, the divine Messiah, the King of Kings.

15:16

made flesh. If we read John chapter 1, it is inescapable that Jesus is God and he became human being. God became flesh and dwelt among us. This is the truth that John says we have to abide in. This is the truth that John wants to make sure that we do not lose. Of course there were other truths that John is emphasizing. One of the things he keeps coming back to is the fact that the false teachers were saying, there's no such thing as a false teacher.

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is sin and there's no such thing as sinning and so John keeps coming back to that. We saw it at the end of chapter 1, we saw it in the middle of chapter 2, we're going to see it again. John keeps coming back around to the fact that there is such a thing as transgressing God's law because as we saw in Jesus, the words of Jesus recorded in John 15, he talked about if you love me, you keep my commandments. And so keeping his commandments is a part of

16:15

loving God and abiding in God. And so we are taught are to abide in the truth, the truth that scripture teaches. There's a quotation on page three of your bulletin. And it's by scripture scholar, Karen Jobes. She wrote one of the commentaries that I'm using. She had this insightful.

16:40

thing to say about this section that we read for today. She said, love does not mean getting along with everyone regardless of what they believe in and an exercise of tolerance that ignores truth. Love does not trump truth.

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but insists there is a truth apart from which people will perish. Now, this lady is not like a fire and brimstone kind of person. But she is articulating that there is such a thing as truth, and love is not opposite of truth. John says the implications of abiding in the truth or not abiding in the truth is eternal life.

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He says, let what you heard from the beginning abide in you. That is, the gospel that you received when you first heard it, and this is Ephesus, so it came from Paul. 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. And this is the promise that he made to us, eternal life. So the stakes are high. Eternity is a very long time.

17:53

And so, abiding in the truth is very important, because if you don't abide in the truth, you don't abide in the Son, you don't abide in the Father, and you don't receive eternal life. And love is committed, love is perfectly compatible with the idea that there is such a thing as truth. Now, having said all that, let me say this. That doesn't mean that we get to be jerks.

18:22

At youth group on Friday night, I was talking about this, and I said to the teenagers, I said, you guys know what the word winsome is? They didn't know the word winsome. I said, well, it basically means don't be a jerk, right? We're called to abide in the truth, but that does not give us permission to be hateful.

18:41

There's so much of our discourse today that believes that if you're right, you can say whatever you want about your opponent. You can call them names, you can say hateful things about them, you can even lie about them. And sadly, this is also happening within people who call themselves Christians. You see it on social media a lot.

18:58

And I've told you about the there's you probably know this because you probably know more about social media than I do But there are people who are called anons and anons They're anonymous and the reason why they're anonymous is because they want to say things and do things that are horrible There are anonymous Christian accounts and some of these accounts just say awful awful things there some of them are racist some of them are Sexist racist and and and hateful



19:25

The thing is, is some of these anonymous accounts have been discovered who they are. There's two recently that have been discovered, and one of them was a PCA pastor. He was saying hateful things. He was discovered. Another person, I guess he was a lay person, but he was discovered who he was, and he took his account down.

19:44

The point being is this is the spirit of our age, that if you're right you can treat people however you want if you're right. And that is not what John is saying. He tells us that we are to love our brothers and sisters, but as I said before, that does not exclude the fact that we are called to love our neighbor. We are to love our neighbor as our own self. The parable of the good Samaritan shows us that our neighbor is someone who's not like us. The Samaritan is called the good neighbor.

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who is of a different religion, a different ethnicity, and he helps the person in need. So we are called to be winsome and humble as we hold to the truth. We are not to be hateful. We are not to be jerks about it. We are to be kind as we hold to the truth. One of the people who emulated this and taught this the best was a pastor from our denomination named Tim Keller. Tim Keller was a pastor in New York City, and he was able to make inroads

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academia, he was able to make inroads in the arts and also in media and politics and he did so without ever compromising the truth. He always held to the truth. In fact one time he was going to speak at

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Princeton University and give a talk, maybe Princeton Seminary is one of the two. And he was going to give a talk and they were going to give him an award. He was going to receive an award. But before he was able to receive the award, some people began to protest because he held to traditional Christian morals and so they rescinded the award. But he went, he was still invited to give the talk and so he did. And I doubt Tim cared about that award at all. He wanted to present the truth, but he was always presenting the truth in a way that was winsome and warm.

21:26

and not hateful. So we abide in the truth, but we abide in it with humility. We abide in it with kindness, and we abide in it in a winsome way. The second thing we see is that we are to abide in the church. This is John's main point in this section as he begins to talk about abiding. He says in verse 19, they went out from us. I mean, this is the point of the letter.

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It's kind of, you know, the lead is hidden and he doesn't really talk much about it. Makes sense because he's riding to a church that's been split apart, so they know what happened, right? He doesn't have to really beat the drum very hard. And in fact, one of the commentators that I read, Karen Job, she points out that he's very subtly bringing in his polemic in order to not push people away in this section.

22:23

So he does allude to the fact that people left the church. So abiding means abiding in the church. And when we think about abiding in Christ, he gives his passage in John 15 and talks about abiding in me so that you may bear much fruit. He says, I have chosen you. You did not choose me. I chose you, and I appointed you to bear much fruit. It is Christ that does the work in us. It is Christ that appoints us to bear fruit. It is Christ that does the pruning. But we are to abide.

22:52

And what that means is we remain in the church, even though the church is a messy place. Even though it is a place where people get hurt. Jesus says, this is my body. And this is why you are to abide in it. John doesn't use the theological phrase, the body of Christ.

23:12

But he is writing to the town of the city of Ephesus who received a letter from Paul about 40 years prior to this and Paul does talk about the body of Christ a lot. He wrote to the Ephesians that that the church is his body and Christ is the head of the church.

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This idea that we are to abide in the church is not because the church is perfect. It's not because we have it all figured out. It's not because I'm some brilliant person who can give you spiritual insights. The reason why abiding in the church is important is because the church is the body of Christ. And outside of the body of Christ, you can't be in Christ. He only has one body. And it is His people, the church. If you're not in the vine, attached to the body of Christ, then you're not in the vine. So abiding in the church is important.

23:59

And remaining in the church and abiding in his truth is essentially how we remain in the bind. And the last two points are God's work. Okay, so these first two points are our work, abiding in the truth, abiding in the church, and then we move to God's work. But before we move on to the third point, I want to mention again that there are a lot of people who've been hurt by the church. A lot of people. In fact, some of us have too. And there are a lot of people who are not a part of the church because they've been hurt.

24:29

Of those studies that I've been telling you about that Pew has done, and other studies by demographers like Ryan Burge and some others, they talk about this group of people in our country called the nones, the N-O-N-E-S, those who would say they have no religion, they check no religion when they're surveyed. But a lot of the nones believe in God, most of them in fact. And when they ask why they're not a part of the church, a lot of them will say because I was hurt.

24:56

in the church. The church caused me damage. So I want to acknowledge that people have been wounded by the church, people have been hurt by the church. You know, I talk to people not every day, but...

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I talk to a lot of people who've been hurt by the church all throughout the week, and I try to help them. I try to help them get justice in the church and navigate our judicial system. And I talk to people who've been, you know, part of the church, they grew up in the church, they've been hurt by the church, abused by a pastor, or their case was not believed by the church leaders. And they're not in the church now. They're not going to church right now. Because they've been wounded. They don't trust the church. And

25:37

Do you think when I'm talking to those folks I make a point to say, but you know what, you gotta get back in the church. No, I don't do that. The reason why I don't do that is because it's not the time. You know, God is going to be working with people throughout their whole life. There are people who've been wounded and have a legitimate reason for staying away. I don't think they should stay away, but I understand why. And there's a time and a place for talking to someone about coming back to the church.

26:04

but there's also a time and a place to let people heal, especially when they've been wounded. So I don't want to say abide in the church without recognizing this fact, without recognizing that there are people that have been hurt and who have wandered away. And when Jesus talks about this, He puts the greater blame and the greater share of blame and judgment on those who caused the little ones to sin. He says, whoa.

26:29

woe to the ones who caused these little ones to sin. It would be better if a millstone was hung around his neck and be thrown into the depths of the sea. So we can have grace for those who've been wounded by patiently working with them, befriending them, loving them, and yes, and yes, calling them back to the church when the time is right. Because we do need to abide in the church.

26:52

Even if we've been hurt by it, we do need to abide in the church. We do need to remain, because this is Christ's body and it's the only body he has. Thirdly, we abide in the Spirit. This is where God's word comes. In this passage, we find John used the word anointing over and over and over. In fact, it's one of the only places in the Bible that uses the word anointing.

27:17

You may have heard of the anointing, the anointing of the spirit, and people talk about that. I grew up in a charismatic church. We talked about that a lot. But what does John say about this anointing? I mean, he expresses it in several different ways. But the main thing he says about the anointing is that we are anointed by the Holy One. And the Holy One, that's in verse 20, is the Holy Spirit. We are anointed by the Holy Spirit. Now what is anointing?

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Anointing is literally having oil poured on you. Okay? And anointing was used in the Old Testament to set priests apart for ordination. It was used to anoint David as the king. And so the idea of the anointed one became what we call Messiah. In fact, Messiah is just a transliteration of the Hebrew word for the anointed one. So Christ is Greek for the anointed one. From the Greek word, *creo*.

28:14

which means to anoint, to pour oil over someone's head. And so when John says that we have been anointed, he's saying we are little Christ. We have been anointed by the Holy Spirit. That makes us not antichrists, but Christianoi. It says in Acts that in Antioch, they were called Christians for the first time, and Christian literally means little Christ.

28:41

We are all little Christ. We are anointed by the Holy Spirit. And because we are anointed by the Holy Spirit, we are in Christ and we are little Christ. And we are to abide in this anointing. We are to abide in the Spirit. The Spirit that gives us spiritual power, that gives us what we need to live the Christian life. That gives us the strength we need to remain in the church, to remain in the truth, to abide in the truth and abide in the church. What does he say the anointing does?

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as he mentioned it several times. He says, the anointing that you receive, this is in verse 27, the anointing you receive from him abides in you. And you have no need that anyone should teach you. But as his anointing teaches you about everything, and is true, and is no lie, just as it has taught you, abide in him. Now, when he says you don't need anyone to teach you,

29:36

He's referring to the fact that his false teachers were saying they had a special knowledge. They had a special thing to bring. John says you don't need a special teaching. You don't need the latest trendy thing to believe in or thing to do because you have the anointing of the Holy One. You don't need that. You have what you need. You know what you need to know. There's no other special knowledge. You know it. And you have what you need from the Spirit.

30:04

The Spirit has anointed you, the Spirit has filled you, and the Spirit will give you the power to live the Christian life. The Spirit will give you what you need to live and to grow. Last week after church, a couple of church members were talking to me about the sermon. And last week, if you don't remember the sermon, and normally I don't remember them either, but it was really... I'm serious. It was maybe a little bit easier to remember the main points. The first point was, you know this.

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You got this and you don't need that. Right. Those are the three points. And the second point was you got this and it was intended to encourage everybody. You got this. And John encourages the young people. He encourages the older people. He encourages the children and he says you got

this. And as he says you got this he says your sins are forgiven. You know God. You know the father. You you are strong and all these things. And.

31:03

Couple of folks were talking about the church and they were really struggling or at least asking the question with, yes, yes, but I can't. I don't have the ability to do this.

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I don't have the, I don't feel like I have what it takes. It's hard. And where do I get the strength to do these things? And I said as I'll keep saying, the way John keeps looping back around, John will eventually get there. And so to those who are having that conversation, he got there and he got there in the very next passage. The answer is this, you got this, you have the strength because the Spirit enables you. Because you have the anointing of the Holy One.

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It is in the strength of the Spirit that we were able to do these things. It is in the power of God that comes in us and fills us that we are able to abide. So we are to abide in the Spirit because the Spirit abides in us. And lastly, we are to abide in Christ. This is where it really begins and ends. Believing in Jesus as the Son of God, believing in

32:09

that Jesus is the Christ and has come in the flesh. And he concludes with this, knowing that he is righteous. Doesn't it all come down to abiding in Christ and abiding in his righteousness? One of the things that you'll hear me talk about over and over and over is that we do not get by on our own righteousness, but we are covered in Christ's righteousness as with a coat, as with a garment. We abide in Christ because Christ is the one.

32:39

who has the power to do anything about anything. Christ is the one who actually gave his life to save the world. Christ is the one whom God says that he loved the world so much that he gave him. He gave Christ Jesus to us. Jesus is the one who did what we couldn't do, to obey the law of God perfectly. Christ is the one who gave his life in exchange for ours. He gave his life in exchange for ours, and he gave us his righteousness when we...

33:09

can offer nothing but sin. And so we abide in Christ and we receive His righteousness because He is the one, He is the one who not only can save us, who can save this world and renew it, He is the one who gives us the standing with God. As our advocate, we talked about a couple of weeks ago, saying continually in God's presence.

33:33

That one is mine and I covered that one. We are clothed in his righteousness and it is because he is righteous that we can do any of this. It is not because of our goodness. It is not because of our

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or holiness, it is only because of Christ and we abide in Christ. There's no other hope that we can lay hold to, no other hope, than the God who became flesh, dwelt among us, paid the penalty that we owed, and defeated death, hell in the grave, forever. And so we trust in that Christ, we trust in Him, we follow Him, and we abide in Him as we abide in the Spirit, as we abide in the church, and as we abide in the truth. Let's pray.

34:15

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