

1 John 2:12–17

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 12 March 2017

Preacher: David Helm

[0 : 00] A couple of years ago, my dad did something that surprised all of us who know him.

My dad wrote a poem. No, really, he actually did. Or at least some highly structured lines of verse that our family now calls a poem.

There is something in the world attributed to the hand of my father which now falls onto a genre all of its own. Now, if you don't know my dad, this may not surprise you.

He's a basketball coach for over half a century. He spent his entire lifetime on hardwood floors listening to the squeaks of Chuck Taylor rubber-soled Converse shoes.

He's plain spoken. And as far as language goes, he's straightforward. But to write verse? No.

[1 : 13] Never. In fact, my brother and I kidded that his poem must have been a sign of the existence of God. All seven children now have a copy of it.

Proof, I suppose, for any of his growing up buddies who would dispute the fact. My dad wrote a poem. According to our text, if you take a look at it, it looks like my dad's not the only unlikely one to take a stab at written verse.

Assuming, John, as the author of the letter in verses 12 to 14, you've got hold of something this week that you won't find anywhere else in all of the Johannine material.

Did you catch the shift in the text type when the reading was done today at 2.12? For a few seconds, just for a few seconds, the writer leaves discourse, plain spoken speech, and walks into rhyme.

I think we'd do well to note the change. Why? To what end? What is it about these stylized verses that accomplish something that the writer does not feel could be conveyed in another way?

[2 : 48] In a word. Affirmation. Assurance. Poetry is the language best suited to convey affection and love.

The writer intends, for a moment, to be most intimate with his reader in ways that make himself vulnerable.

For indeed, any writer of poetry might take issue with the strength of his verse. Up until now, the reader can be forgiven for thinking that this letter is a mirror of James' epistle.

Let me put it this way. To now, we could merely be reading 1 John along the lines of a manual for self-examination to consider whether or not you really know God.

And James never lets go of that. But here, immediately, with this evocative language, he instills affirmation within them.

[4 : 24] He now indicates what he believes about them. Did you catch it? I'm writing to you, little children, because your sins are forgiven.

Or, fathers, because you know him. Or, young men, because you've already overcome. And then, that triad rolls over on itself again.

Children, you know him. Fathers, you know him. Young men, you are one who abides in the love of God. It is a striking, narrow moment where the heart of the author is most vulnerable and on display concerning what he truly believes.

And it was time for him to show it, wasn't it? The preceding context, which we saw last week, was ever so strong. the commandment.

If you say you're in the light and you hate your brother, you're really in the darkness. You've got to keep the commandments to actually be in the love of the Father. I mean, he had laid it out like any good coach in a locker room would.

[5 : 43] But here, all the tenderness of the letter is encapsulated in those three brief verses.

Simply, by shifting the text type, the writer is intent on not being understood. He does not believe he is writing to a group of people who have lost the faith.

He does not believe he's writing to a group of people who are on the verge of leaving the faith. Rather, he's writing to a group of people who feel left behind concerning the faith. For many have gone out from them and begun to trumpet a competing view on what life with God really looks like. His readers then need reassurance.

They need to know they're okay. What a moment in the letter. It reminds me here of a parent.

[6 : 47] I've parented along with Lisa five children now. And we've been at it long enough to see them all grow up and even the last one ready now to go out.

There comes a time in a parent's life where you say some strong things. You lay it out. You need to do this and not that. Do you hear me?

The commands of the household are like this. And then there's that moment where the child's conscience is pricked and their face falls and their eyes drop and you as the parent wonder, have I come on too strong?

So then you say, hey, let's sit down for a moment. Look up. Look at me for a minute. Please, just look at me. I know that you desire to live well in the household which we find ourselves.

I know that you're wanting to be assured that you're okay. In other words, there comes a time when we no longer just square somebody up by the shoulders and stare them down.

[8 : 14] No, we come alongside, put our arm around them and say, hey, let me tell you how much I love you. In fact, that's why the repetition I think is there. That repetition of children which then returns and fathers and then returns and young men and then returns.

It's as if a parent says, you know, I just want you to know that I know you really know. And let me just say that again to you. I want you to know that I know you really know that repetition is a sign of intimacy and desire to give oneself to those to whom you are speaking.

That's what John's doing. That's what he wants. And so as we come to this point in the letter, I think the reader for the first moment is more fully aware of what he is trying to accomplish.

The writer is more rightly understood. This is not an epistle like James, which is merely setting forward a manual on how you can know you are good with God, but it is one that is there to shore up the faith of those who are wondering I'm giving it a good run, but am I good with God?

And so he lays it out. Those who are struggling in life are somehow reminded that your sins are forgiven for his namesake.

[9 : 57] Even the familial language here is beautiful, isn't it? children, which is, of course, gender neutral. And we know from the letter in chapter 2-1 that when he speaks of little children, he's actually including all of his readers.

He's calling the entire readership of his letter into play with that opening verse. It's not as though he has compartmentalized out a word for different aspects.

He's bundled up the whole church. And he says, listen, I want you to know that you have your sins forgiven in Christ's name. That you can know Him who is from the beginning.

That you do know Him. And of course, that's an echo all the way back to 1-1. That which was from the beginning. In other words, it's Jesus here, not God. In that technical sense.

He says, I know that you know Jesus. The one who is from the beginning. And I know that you who are young are overcoming and have overcome the evil one. And notice how it ends with that great strength on young men because you are strong and the Word of God abides in you and you've overcome the evil one.

[11 : 12] It's fascinating to me because young people always talk about the power of God. I want to see God's power. Old people always talk about what?

The faithfulness of God. But in your middle years, what are you wondering? Where is the presence of God? And indeed, you have home an entire congregation or readership of 1 John that is almost in its middle years.

They came to faith in Christ back then, but they've been around long enough to see a bunch of competing views come and they've seen a number of people leave their church for another idea. And as the chairs empty out for something more profitable about Jesus, they're wondering, do I stay with what I heard from the apostles in their tradition?

And so here it is. Do you want to know about the presence of God? Stick with the very word I presented to you by the apostolic tradition, he writes.

[12 : 26] Believe everything I've told you about Jesus. In other words, in a word, 12 through 14 fall under affirmation.

And only then does then the coach return in verse 15. Only when everyone now knows we okay? Yeah, we're okay. Then he turns to them and says, okay, since we're okay, do not love the world. He moves from affirmation to application.

application. He moves from assuring his readers to exhorting the same. He moves from a language that best conveys love to a word literally on what not to love.

Take a look. 15 through 17. The command is put forward in 15. The reasons for the command follow in verse 16 in the first half of 17.

[13:42] And then the encouragement to stay in line with the command closes out. It's a wonderful thing to think that you've only listened to half the sermon and the rest is application.

This is what I call applicationary preaching. And the application given that they know God is simply this. Do not love the world.

That's a surprising application for us. I mean, after all, isn't love the supreme virtue? I mean, the Beatles were right, were they not? All we need is love. Think of it in line of what we have in the gospel for God so loved the world.

but here, do not love the world. What's with the imperative?

[15:04] What are we not to love? And why? Think of it in regard to our own day. self-authenticated loves in our day receive equal legitimacy and are to be universally accepted.

In other words, what you claim to love, you have a right to love and what you have a right to love, no one can speak against.

Self-authenticated loves are universally legitimized as the mark of love.

But here he says, do not love the world. We say, hey, live your own truth.

And in saying that, we are loving you. We say, do whatever you love doing. And in saying so, we legitimize whatever you love doing.

[16:30] We say, it doesn't matter who or what or when or why you love, as long as who or what or when you love, you really love. And he says, do not love.

Is it possible that the Christian faith under the apostolic teaching would challenge our contemporary notions?

It's striking to think that perhaps, perhaps, according to the scriptures, your loves, my loves can be misguided. We don't offer any room in that for discussion today.

Room for misguided loves. interestingly though, according to the text, we can love the wrong things and therefore keep entrance for God at bay.

Augustine is famous, Christianity would have to articulate the Christian message in terms of love, but that Christianity would have you love that which is the supreme love, God himself, rather than have your misguided loves hold on to you.

[18:25] So in other words, it becomes in a sense another way to look at sin rather than to say you're in sin. Augustine might be open to saying your loves are misguided.

Listen to what he says on Christian doctrine and I quote, living a just and holy life requires one to be capable of an objective and impartial evaluation of things.

To love things, that is to say in the right order. Now here he goes, so that you do not love what is not to be loved or fail to love what is to be loved or have a greater love for what should be loved less or an equal love for things that should be loved less or more or a lesser or greater love for things that should be loved equally.

Don't you love Augustine? He's got all his bases covered. This is a challenging notion then for all of us who hear this word today.

Christian faith has the audacity to challenge your loves. To call some of our loves out of bounds.

[19:53] In other words, to shift the foundation of our reasoning from our self, from our subjective understanding, from myself as an individual, and in accordance with my experience, to something outside of myself, namely, a divine articulation of loves, with an exacting commitment to what is and is not to be loved.

And so there it is. Things we are not to love. There it is. Do not love the world or the things in the world.

If anyone loves the world, the Father is not in them. For all that is in the world, here are three things, the desires of the flesh, the desires of the eyes, and the pride of life is not from the Father, but is from the world.

desires. It's used 37 times in the New Testament. It's actually a word that can be both positive or negative, like you can have positive desires or negative desires, but you just need to know that in the New Testament only three times is the word used kind of in a neutral sense that could mean something positive, like a positive desire.

34 of the 37 times when you're desiring things, in the New Testament your desires are misguided. That's the sense of it here, certainly. There it is, the desires of the flesh, the desires of the eyes, and then the third notion there, the pride of life.

[21 : 44] This is an evidence then by the world, John means this sphere that's in place where the will and rule and word of God is challenged.

and we have to have discernment on what he says versus what we think he says or versus what I want to do.

Let me see if I can encapsulate these three desires of the flesh, desires of the eyes, boastful pride of life. I'm going to put it this way. In other words, when it says don't love the world, it means you don't always love whatever makes you feel good.

That's the flesh. or what you want. That's the lust of the eyes, covetousness, or necessarily what you got.

That's the pride of life here. It's actually used later in 317 in the sense of material property. It's the one then who says I like what I got.

[22 : 52] That's the boastful pride of life. The one who begins to love what they have. So here it is. He says don't love the world, namely, not necessarily what makes you feel good, what you want, or what you got.

When our loves are what we like, what we want, and ultimately pleased with what we got, our hearts, according to this letter, are earthbound. Imagine. Get what you want, and you could be in a very bad way.

our whole system here is built on the upside of attaining all that is in our mind.

Thomas Hardy wrote a book, *Jude the Obscure*. Powerful moment in the book. young man with his Greek New Testament open.

So here's a man who's reading the living word of God in the original tongue, and he's got this image of a young girl that his own soul wanted to ravish for himself.

[24 : 11] And here he is reading the word and remembering just where she will be at that time of the day, and his entire internal desires are now at war and eventually in the book if you've ever read it.

He casts the New Testament scriptures aside, walks out the door, ravages the woman, ruins his life and hers. Based on what? Based merely on some external act?

No. A heart condition whose loves were misguided and who appropriated the desires of the flesh. the desires of the eyes.

The pride of life. What I got, I almost think here of all the way back to the Garden of Eden. Adam and Eve are there and the language of the text is when she saw that it was good for food, that's this flesh thing, and that it was pleasing to the eyes, that's this covetous thing.

Then she took and ate and her husband was like, I'm in on this too, and we go together and we succumb in a sense to all three.

[25 : 24] Or you think of Jesus in that representative moment when he stands in place of Israel in their own disobedience and he walks into the wilderness for the purpose of being tempted. What is the temptation that the devil throws at him?

In Matthew 4, it's actually the three things. He tempts him with food, and then he tempts him with a sense of all the kingdoms of the world, and then he tempts him with the presumption that God will give him all things.

In other words, Satan is not all that unique across the ages. We're never surprised with the ways of the world.

in fact, all those ways are so deeply embedded in me that while I think when I give themselves to them, I am seeking my own freedom.

Truth be told, you and me, and you can't lie about this one. They enslave you, you don't own them. Isn't that the truth?

[26 : 23] You wake up one morning and you go, I'm owned by this stuff. I'm owned by the possessions of life. They own me, I don't own them.

I thought I just went and bought it, but it actually owns my heart. I actually want it. I actually have it. I feel good about it.

And the despairing cycle sets in. A humanity that's entrapped to a love of the world. to the creation rather than the creator.

We are earthbound in our loves rather than looking for the eternal life beyond. That is what John is setting forth in this text.

And there are two reasons he says to those who he knows are believers. He says, let me tell you, don't do that. And then let me tell you why. There it is.

[27 : 24] first reason. It's not from the Father. For all that's in the world, the desires of the flesh, the desires of the eye, the pride of life, it's not from the Father.

It's not the way God had it. It's coming from somewhere else. In fact, in the previous poem that he put down, he actually for the first time uses this extraordinary phrase, the evil one.

In other words, if we could peel back our eyes on the material world in which we're living, we would see that there are spiritual undercurrents and heart issues that are actually at work.

That we're out of alignment. And jiffy lube ain't going to get it straight. We need God to come in the flesh and bring us to himself and that indeed is what he did in Jesus.

Why do we not love the world? Because it's not from the Father. Second reason, it's not going to last.

[28 : 39] Verse 17, and the world is passing away with its desires. why buy, why purchase with your soul a depreciating asset?

You want to spend as little money as possible in this world on depreciating assets. I know you need a reliable car, and I know you want it to look good too, but at any rate, it is a depreciating asset.

Why leverage your life on that which is temporary? He says, it's fleeting away. It's not only that it entraps you and needs you to keep coming back to it like a dog to its own vomit.

Like you're going to eat it again even though you know the meal was never good. but one day it's going to be gone. It's not walking through the gate into the father's house.

So you might as well start getting lean because everyone gets lean who wants to get through that door. Not going to be some big old door.

[30 : 08] You can swing your backpack and maybe slide through now into the eternal life. You got to get rid of this world. This world ain't coming in.

None of it's coming in. It's not from the father. It's not going to last.

And I'll tell you, you already know. It's not fulfilling. So he closes with that final word of encouragement.

But, but, whoever does the will of God abides forever. Fascinating, that little word will come into it in the coming weeks. He closed his poem down with it.

And the word of God abides in you. And now he closes his application with it. Whoever does the will of God abides forever. To abide is to dwell with. Makes me think of Jesus in the book of Revelation.

[31 : 14] Behold, I'm standing at the door and I'm knocking and whoever opens the door, I'm willing to come in and eat with them and sup with them and hang with them and be with them and fix them and walk with them, but you got to let me in.

And when we love the world, we keep God from entering. What I know now, he doesn't force himself on us.

I'm old enough now to be a father to many of you. I've got no poetry for you, but as your pastor, I wish I could encircle you collectively and say, I know, I know you're holding Christ, I know, I know there's so many competing views out there, I know, I know you're looking to the blood of Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, I know.

people. And then once you feel like, wow, he really knows, my pastor loves me, then I'd look at you again and say, don't love, don't love the world, don't love the world, we're going to a better place, with a better lover.

Our Heavenly Father, we take time this morning to pause on the strange text type shift in 1 John.

[33 : 14] And we look at those brief fleeting verses as a window into the heart of the writer.

And we thank you that this letter is so much more than merely one that is meant to shake us to our core, but one that is meant to gather us to his breast.

help us then, in the strength of that relationship, to not love the world. We've given it enough of our strength, we've given it too much of our days.

Help us to love you, and therefore abide. forever.
Amen.