

Don't Love the World

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[0:00] Good morning, church. As Tom mentioned, there is overflow downstairs, so if you get a little hot during the midst of the sermon, feel free, if you go down these stairs, right down the hallway, there's an overflow with a screen and we're streaming, so I won't be offended if you get up in the middle of my sermon and head for the exit, as long as you're heading downstairs to cool off.

Good. Well, our sermon text today is 1 John chapter 2, verses 12 through 17. 1 John chapter 2, verses 12 through 17. That's page 959 in the Pew Bible, and let me encourage you to turn there so that you can follow along as we work through this passage together today.

And as we turn there, let me pray for us as we come to God's Word. Father, we are grateful for your great hold upon us, that we find that as we cling to Christ, it is actually you holding fast to us. We are grateful for your faithfulness, God, and for your love for us. And we ask that as we come to your Word today, we would continue to see your faithfulness and your love as you show us through your Word more and more what it means to be known and loved by you and what it means to be your people in the midst of the world, to be the people of Christ, following Him.

We ask that you would do this through your Spirit. Amen. All right, let me read for us 1 John chapter 2, verses 12 through 17.

The Apostle John writes this. He says, I write to you, young men, because you have overcome the evil one.

[1:58] I write to you, children, because you know the Father. I write to you, fathers, because you know Him who is from the beginning. I write to you, young men, because you are strong, and the Word of God abides in you, and you have overcome the evil one.

Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world. And the world is passing away along with its desires. But whoever does the will of God abides forever.

In John Bunyan's allegory, *The Pilgrim's Progress*, there's a memorable scene where Christian and his companion, Faithful, in the midst of their pilgrimage to the heavenly city, come upon a town, a town called Vanity. And every day of the year, this city, this town, holds a festival, a fair called Vanity Fair, where the booths and the stalls are filled with every manner of earthly wealth and pleasure and power and applause. And for Christian and Faithful, and for every pilgrim to the heavenly city, their road runs straight through it. There's no way around Vanity Fair. Vanity Fair, of course, is Bunyan's allegory for what the Apostle John calls here the world. That is, human society arranged without any reference to God. And the Apostle John here is giving us his counsel on how we should approach our pilgrimage as the church in the midst of the world.

And we need this counsel because the world is attractive, isn't it? It promises satisfaction and joy, significance and power. The world promises that it can fulfill the deep longings of our hearts.

And oftentimes, we look at those who are living according to the world or living for the things of the world, and it seems like they are happy and content. It seems like the world's promises might just be true. And so, we are tempted to peruse the stalls and maybe buy the wares or even set up our own shop in Vanity Fair. But how do we break the spell? How can we live as Christians in the world but not of the world? After all, as Bunyan's allegory points out, and more importantly, as the New Testament teaches again and again, we cannot escape the world. The path of the Christian is not in retreat or removal from the world. No, the path always leads straight through it. After all, how else could we be salt and light in the world unless we remain in it? But at the same time, how do we not simply conform and compromise to the world? How can we traverse our pilgrimage being in the world but not of the world so that we might actually do good for those in the world? Well, John has two main things to say to us this morning along these lines. The first is this. In the midst of the

world, he says, remember who you are. Christian, remember who you are. We see this in verses 12 through 14 of our passage. John's point in these verses, these first three verses, is to affirm and encourage his readers by reminding them of all the gospel realities that they enjoy in Christ. The false teachers in John's day wanted the church to believe or to forget all that they truly had in Christ, who they truly were in Him. The world, too, causes us to forget who we are, to experience spiritual amnesia, to undergo an identity crisis of the heart.

[6 : 00] Just think about nearly every advertisement you've ever seen, right? What's the point? The point is to convince you that your life will somehow be poorer, sadder, and less fulfilling unless you have this thing, right? I mean, really, who are you if you don't have an iPhone or a great new pair of Nikes or a bigger house or a nicer car? Surely your life will be sadder, poorer, and less fulfilling without these things.

And we get swept up into an alternate story. We get swept up into a story where my identity is finally completed by being a consumer of a particular product.

And getting swept up in that story, we suddenly forget what's already true of ourselves, what's really true of us in Christ. And so we need to be reminded. We need to be re-storied in what the gospel says is really real about who we are and where real life is actually found.

John does this by repeating himself twice to the same three groups of Christians in verses 12, 13, 14. Of course, it's not hard to figure out why John repeats himself. You know, remember, ancient letters like this one would have been read aloud to the recipients, so John was probably repeating himself for emphasis. He wanted them to hear it and then hear it again.

He was repeating himself for emphasis, like I just did, right? It's not that hard to figure out. But what's a little less clear is the significance of these three groups, little children, fathers, young men. Did John have in mind maybe three stages of spiritual maturity? Brand new believers, little children, mature believers, fathers and mothers, and those somewhere in the middle, young men and women? Or perhaps little children is a reference to everyone in the church. After all, throughout this letter, John calls his readers, all of them, my little children again and again.

[8 : 08] If so, then maybe John only had two distinct groups in mind, older Christians, fathers and mothers, younger Christians, young men and women. And all of them, for John, were his little children, his beloved. Either way, I think the effect of the whole passage is the same. John wants to include everyone in the church in what he's saying. Whether you're young or old, whether you're new in the faith, or whether you've been following Jesus for many years, this affirmation, this reminder is for you.

So don't think that you're too young to qualify, and don't think that you're too old to need it. So what does the Apostle John want us to remember? What are the great gospel realities that are true of us in Christ? Well, there are three. Peace, wisdom, and power. Peace. Look at what John says to the little children in verses 12 and 13. In 12, he says, I'm writing to you, little children, because your sins are forgiven for his namesake. And then at the end of 13, I write to you, children, because you know the Father.

Here are two sides of the peace that we have in Christ. On one side, our sins are forgiven. Every thought, word, or deed that we've committed that is against God's perfect law, every moral failure that keeps us awake at night in guilt or shame, every misstep that makes us not want to look at our own reflection in the mirror, it's all been forgiven. All of it. The reign of God's mercy has come down upon you. Through the cross, it has all been washed away. You're clean. You're forgiven.

That's one side of the peace we have in Christ. The other side is this, that we are perfectly accepted. We know the Father. He embraces us as his own beloved sons and daughters. In other words, the same favor, the same delight that God the Father has for Jesus, his eternal son, he now bestows on you, his adopted son, his adopted daughter. You see, this is the wonder of the gospel. God forgives our sins. There's no more record against us. But he doesn't just leave us there as if we were in some sort of now spiritual neutral state, right? No, God actually then imputes Christ's own righteousness to us, Christ's own positive record to us. Now we have a positive standing with God. God doesn't just cancel our debts.

He fills our account with the supreme wealth of Jesus' own righteousness. And now, in light of all that, God regards us not with the neutrality of a judge, but with the active, pursuing love of a Father.

[11 : 04] And that means we have something the world cannot actually offer. Peace. Lasting peace. Peace with God that nothing can take away. Like the sea on a calm day, ebbing and flowing beneath the bright summer sky.

That is our soul in the peace of Christ. Our sins are forgiven, and we know the Father's love. God bless you. But there's not just peace. There's wisdom, John says. Look at what John says to the fathers and mothers, those who have been following Christ for some time. I'm writing to you, fathers, because you know him who is from the beginning. I wonder, do you think becoming a Christian is a shallow thing? Do you think that it makes you or makes a person simplistic or two-dimensional?

Well, friend, think again. Who is it that we've come to know in the gospel of Jesus Christ? None other than him who is from the beginning. The world is full of passing fads and trends. And the passing fads and trends of the world are not just the ephemeral ones of pop music or fashion. Yes, those come and go quicker than a summer rainstorm, right? But even intellectual movements, philosophical trends, cultural tides, these come and go. One day, very few people will be excited or animated about critical theory or whatever the philosophical fad happens to be. Not that Christians shouldn't learn and engage with these trends. We should. But the wisdom that we have goes so much deeper, and it will never pass away because the one that we know is from the beginning.

[13:04] He ordered the planets and stars. He designed the human mind and heart. He created and sustains the human will and desires. Here is the most profound philosophy. Here is the clearest and most illuminating science. Knowledge of God, the Holy One, our triune Creator and Redeemer who is from the beginning and who will have no end. If you walk with this God, you walk with very wisdom itself.

But there's not just peace and not just wisdom. There's also power. Consider what John says to the young Christians. I'm writing to you, young men, young women, because you have overcome the evil one. I write to you because you are strong and the Word of God abides in you, and you have overcome the evil one. John is saying a great spiritual battle has been won. When Christ died on the cross, everything looked like defeat, did it not? But in that moment, in what looks to the world's eyes like utter defeat, utter failure, that moment was actually the moment of God's greatest triumph. The spiritual forces of evil that held the world captive, the accuser who brought all of our sins before God, asking for our condemnation, in that moment at the cross, all was overcome. The evil one had lost.

He thought that the death of Christ would mean a failure of God's plan. But in dying, Christ put death to death. He swallowed up death in victory, and the sting of death. Our sin was once and for all taken into the grave, never more to rise, paid in full. And three days later, to prove that victory had been won, that the sacrifice was complete, that death could not hold Him, Christ rose from the grave. The new creation began on Easter Sunday, and on Pentecost, just a few weeks later, having ascended to the Father, Jesus poured out the Holy Spirit on all who believe. So now, united to the risen Christ through the Holy Spirit by faith, we too are risen with Him. The evil one, His lies, His accusations, His shame, no longer has a claim on those in Christ. In Christ we have indeed overcome. You see, friends, there is very real spiritual power in the gospel. Not worldly power. Not worldly power that seeks to dominate others or subjugate others or goes to war on behalf of greed and fear. Not that kind of power.

No, this is a different sort of power, a power that actually brings change from the inside out, the power of God for salvation to all who believe, as Paul says in Romans.

Doesn't the world promise that if you buy this or that product or get on the inside with this or that social circle or achieve this or that professional goal, that you'll then finally sort of be different, that you'll achieve that change you're looking for, that you'll finally feel like you've arrived?

[16:18] Isn't that what the world promises? But friends, listen to nearly every celebrity who's ever made it big or every athlete who's ever won the big game, and what do they tell you?

I achieved success. I made it big. I had the world at my fingertips. But I was still the same old me, still struggling with the same old fears and insecurities, still hampered by the same old anxieties and addictions.

Many of us have a desire to change the world, and yet we can barely change ourselves. But for those in Christ, there is real spiritual power.

You have overcome the evil one. God is at work in you, completing the good work He started to make you more like Christ. And nothing limits the tools that God can use in your life.

God can use even hardships, even trials, even losses. Those things are like instruments in His hands. And like a perfect surgeon, God can take the sharpest knife and bring healing.

[17 : 35] And you know, when a community embraces not the way of the world's power, but the way of the cross, then yes, even cultures can change.

In the Greco-Roman world of John's day, a world where honor and protecting one's own was the key virtue, Christianity spread the radical ethic of humility and loving your enemies. When the Roman Empire collapsed, it was Christians who started schools and hospitals, who cared for the sick and who educated the poor.

Christian history, of course, is checkered with sins and failures. When the church did not live up to its own message, when the church proved that it too needed and will always need the radical grace of God's forgiveness and mercy, like everyone.

But the words of Jesus are still true. As we stay close to the Word of God, as we stay close to the message of the Gospel of Christ incarnate, crucified, risen, and coming again, as we walk in utter dependence on Him and His grace, yes, as we walk in what looks like to the world the weakness of faith, then we will be strong.

Then we will be salt and light. And perhaps, perhaps at the end of the day, cultures won't change. Perhaps outwardly we will waste away.

[19 : 04] After all, there are no promises of earthly triumph or health or wealth or influence to the Christian or to the church in this age. But as the Apostle Paul writes in 2 Corinthians, even so, we do not lose heart.

Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, as we look not to the things that are seen, but to the things that are unseen.

For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal. So as we walk this pilgrimage through the world, John 1 wants us to remember who we are, to remember what's ours in Christ, to remember all the realities that are ours in the gospel, peace and wisdom and true power, the forgiveness of our sins, the knowledge of Him who's from the beginning, the overcoming of the evil one.

Now, before we move on, let me mention just two brief applications. First, I think we should all strive to follow John's example here. That is, we should seek to remind each other, to encourage one another with these same realities.

As we consider our homes, our spouses, our children, our Christian roommates, as we consider our small group and our Christian friends, as we even consider our Christian co-workers, as we get the chance, we should pray that God would allow us and empower us to remind each other of all that we enjoy in Christ.

[20 : 36] We have to confess that it is easier sometimes to talk about the weather or the latest sports game or the latest series streaming on Netflix than it is to talk about the things of the gospel.

And while there's nothing necessarily wrong with those things or with casual conversation, let's pray that God would also deepen our conversation and give us grace to speak life-giving words rich with this kind of encouragement.

A simple way to begin might be by just asking a simple question when you're in conversation. How has God been encouraging you lately? Where have you seen God at work in your life these days? What's new or fresh in your walk with God? And then you can begin to talk about the things of God and encourage each other. Second application, if these things are true, if in Christ we have peace and wisdom and power, then we should also be a people of joy.

Of course, there will be seasons of grief for every Christian in this fallen world. Sin and death are still at work and they still break our hearts. But though we may at times be brokenhearted, we will not and we cannot lose the deeper well of joy that we have in Christ.

[21 : 53] And what is it that feeds those deeper wells of joy? Is it not what John is reminding us of here? The peace of knowing God as Father. The depth of knowing Him who is from the beginning.

The strength of knowing Him who overcame the evil one. And who one day will put an end to all sickness and death and sorrow. And with this joy that springs forth from these truths, as a church we can stand in the midst of Vanity Fair.

We can walk through this world and with that joy springing up from underneath, we can walk through Vanity Fair and not be tempted to turn aside and to buy that which cannot satisfy.

Because we have a joy that nothing in this world can give and that nothing in this world can take away. So Christians, remember who you are.

That's John's first counsel to us. His second is this in verses 15 through 17. As you travel through this world, John says, guard your heart.

[22 : 58] Or more bluntly, don't love the world. If John begins with encouragement in verses 12 through 14, he continues with a warning in verses 15 through 17.

Anyone who loves the world, he says, doesn't truly love the Father. Or as James will say in his letter, friendship with the world is enmity with God. Love of the world and love of the Father are incompatible.

But as John continues with his warning here, he gives us what's really an analysis of the world. He gives us an analysis that's meant to unmask the world for what it really is.

And why does he do this unmasking? He does this unmasking so that we can see it for what it really is and so our hearts won't be tempted to go after it like we know they so often are. In these verses, John un.masks three things.

He un.masks what the world is and where it's from and where it's going. He un.masks the world's nature, its origin, and its end. John first un.masks the nature of all that's in the world in verse 16, where he describes it as the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and the pride of life.

[24 : 15] This is how John describes all that's in the world, what makes it up. Now, this verse is important to help us realize what John is referring to here when he talks about the world and not loving the world.

John's not talking about the created order, right? The material creation. John isn't talking about that. He's not talking about forests and mountains and skies and stars and bodies and minds and music and poetry.

The created order is good. Very good, God says in Genesis 1. Neither is John necessarily talking about the people in the world when he says don't love the world.

After all, in this sense, the people in the world, in that sense, God loves the world and gave his only son that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.

Jesus came to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins and not for ours only, but for the whole world. So in what sense does John warn us not to love the world?

[25 : 14] Well, as we said earlier, for John, the world means something like human society arranged without any reference to God, like a power of its own.

And what is it that makes up the world in this sense? Well, first, John says, what makes it up are the desires of the flesh. Now, flesh here doesn't mean our material bodies.

It means our inward sinful nature. From Adam, we have all inherited a sinful nature. And this sinful nature desires to gratify and serve not God, not others, but the self.

We're all just turned in, bent in on ourselves. That's the flesh in the New Testament. And how do the desires of the flesh express themselves, these inwardly bent desires?

Well, John then pinpoints two things. He says, first, the desires of the eyes. In other words, what we see is what we want. If it looks pleasing, pleasurable, useful, we covet it.

[26 : 19] And this coveting what we see, in turn, leads to all sorts of conflicts. Again, listen to how the Apostle James describes it. He says, what causes quarrels and fights among you?

Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you? You desire and don't have, so you murder.

You covet and can't obtain, so you fight and quarrel. You don't have because you don't ask.

You ask and don't receive because you ask wrongly to spend it on your passions. The desires of the eyes, James says, it leads to all sorts of conflict and quarreling.

Then John, back in our passage, also pinpoints not just the desires of the eyes, but also the pride of life. Now, that word life here is a particular word in the New Testament that means something like your livelihood or what sustained your life.

In other words, it's often translated in the New Testament as your possessions, your property, what you own. So John is saying, it's not just sort of pride in being alive, but boasting in what you have.

[27 : 26] So John's saying, this is what makes up the world and all that's in it. Self-centered desire, wanting what you don't have, and boasting in what you do.

Now, that may seem like a stark description, but if human society is arranged without any reference to God, what's left? Of course, thanks to God's common grace, this isn't how we see things absolutely all the time, is it?

We still see glimmers of kindness and truth and integrity, and we should thank God for His common grace. But take away God's common grace, and what would be left?

You know, I don't need to look outside to answer that question. I can simply look in my own heart. Take away God's grace, take away the knowledge of God, leave me on my own, and what do I have left?

Where will I find satisfaction? Where will I find significance? With the God-shaped hole left in my heart, what's left for me?

[28 : 39] What's left but wanting what I don't have, and boasting, building my identity on what I do? And even if I do a good job covering those things up, because I know I'm supposed to be content, and I know I'm supposed to not be proud or brag, even if I try to cover those things up, it's still all that's left.

So see the world for what it really is, John says. Don't love the world. It's empty. It's nothing but a craving for something that's not there.

After unmasking the nature of the world, John then unmask the origin of it. Notice the end of verse 16. All this, he says, is not from the Father, but is from the world. All that's in the world, as he just defined it, doesn't come from the Father.

It doesn't spring from his will and desire. So don't love it. If you love the Father, don't love something that doesn't come from him. Don't give it your allegiance. Don't structure your life around it.

Because all those things, they don't come from God. They come where? They come from the world, John says. Now that kind of seems a bit circular and redundant, doesn't it? All that's in the world comes from the world.

[29 : 55] Okay, thanks, John. That was a very deep analysis, right? But I think John isn't actually being circular or simplistic. Again, remember, he's unmasking the world for what it is.

And you see, the world can't help, the world can't help but make transcendent claims. The world all the time is making transcendent claims.

Buy this and you'll know real satisfaction. Achieve this great feat and you'll be immortal, remembered forever. Find the right partner to sleep with and you'll be enraptured.

What is the world promising? Satisfaction, immortality, bliss. That's what the world promises.

But can it actually give those transcendent things? Immortality, bliss. Of course not.

[31 : 02] If I put \$3 into a jar, screw the lid on tight and shake it around, maybe I just shake it for days and for weeks, you know what I'm going to pull out of that jar? \$3.

It's never going to become anything more. And it's the same with the things in the world. The glitz, the glamour, the achievements, no matter how noble or good they seem, they won't amount to anything more.

They can't deliver because it all just comes from the world. It won't deliver. So don't love it.

And that brings us to John's third point. He's unmasked the nature of the world and the origin of it, and now he talks about the end. Where is it all going? Verse 17, he says, And the world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever.

This world won't last, John says. The world is passing away. Now, materially speaking, this is, of course, true on a scientific level, right?

[32 : 15] The universe is expanding, we're told, and eventually it's not going to last forever. If it just keeps going and going and going, we all freeze and end up in darkness and nihilism. And in light of that, no matter how much you gain and gather in this life, no matter how many achievements you amass, no matter how many altruistic ventures you start and fulfill, you know, if there isn't a God, it literally all means nothing.

As Psalm 1 says, it's like chaff that the wind drives away. Chaff, you know, is the sort of outer shell of a wheat kernel.

And in the ancient world, they would take a stick or a rake, and they would put all the wheat on the ground that they had harvested, and they would start to pound the wheat with their tool, and that would start to separate the kernel from the chaff, and then they would toss it up into the air.

And what would happen is, is that the heavier wheat kernel would fall to the ground, but that outer shell, that chaff, would be blown away. The wind would pick it up, and it would be gone.

Friends, the world is like the chaff. It just passes away. It's not going to last. But the fact that the world is passing away is more importantly true theologically.

[33 : 37] There is a God who made all things. The universe isn't just running on its own steam towards oblivion. There is a God who has a plan and purpose for His creation, and that plan is

permanent, lasting, and enduring.

He has a plan to make all things new. And the turning point of that plan was the work of Jesus Christ. When Jesus Christ died on the cross, the world was exposed in all of its weakness. Why? Because at the cross, the world did its worst to Jesus. All of its hatred, all of its jealousy and envy, all of its desire to live in its own terms, in its own way, all of this was unleashed on Jesus at the cross.

But though the world unleashed its worst, it could not win. Christ triumphed at the cross. And as we've said, His death was not a defeat, but a victory, a victory that exhausted the evil world, and the evil won.

And like a boxer that has swung all his punches, the world now reels and rocks without the strength to last.

[34 : 39] But the risen Christ lives never to die again. The world and its desires won't last forever. The risen Christ will one day render a final verdict, and the battle will finally be over.

And so John exhorts us, don't love the world. Those desires won't last. They will pass away and be gone like chaff in the wind.

Instead, seek God's will. Seek God's desires. Because the one who does God's will abides forever. And what is God's will? John will write later in this letter, this is God's commandment, that we believe in the name of His Son, Jesus Christ, and love one another just as He has commanded us. Those who believe in Christ will abide forever. St. Augustine, preaching on this same passage many, many years ago, wrote, Hold fast to Christ.

[35 : 51] For Christ became temporal, so that you might partake of eternity. The Eternal One entered into this passing world, and He faced all of its temptations, and He persisted and prevailed.

The Eternal One became temporal, so that you, friends, and me, we might partake of eternity and abide forever. So remember who you are, Christian.

Remember what Christ has done for you. Remember all that's yours now in Him. And don't love the world. It's passing away. But the one who does the will of God remains forever.

Christ remains forever. And so will you, because you are in Him. Let's pray. Father, we take just a moment on this morning to open our hearts and open our hands before You and ask that You would begin, from the inside out, to change our desires.

Lord, it's so easy to become enamored with the glitz and the glamour and the promises of this world. Lord, it's so easy to become distracted and dissipated and just caught up in something that isn't from You and doesn't lead to You.

[37 : 23] Forgive us, God, as a church, for the ways in which we have been captive to worldliness. And Lord, free us from these things.

Help us to long for and to love that which lasts forever, You and Your Word. Help us to not become like the world so that we might be salt and light in the world.

Lord, we need Your Spirit to do this, so come. Fill us with Your Spirit, we pray, that we might go out this week being in the world but not of the world to the praise of Your name.

We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.