

Whom/what do we love most?

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: 16 October 2016

Preacher: Tom Lawson

[0 : 00] back, and I'm so glad that you're into shoeboxes. I still have a responsibility for a little orphanage in Romania, and if you can only see the joy on the faces of children who have nothing opening their shoeboxes, it's a great experience. So continue the good work.

We're going to read a couple of sections from chapter 2 of 1 John and chapter 5 of 1 John. And a little challenge for you, see which word occurs most frequently. 1 John chapter 2, verses 15 to 17, and then chapter 5, a verse or two from there.

1 John chapter 5, verse 15. 1 John chapter 5, verse 15. Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For everything in the world, the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes, and the boasting of what he has or does, comes not from the Father, but from the world. The world and its desires pass away, but the man who does the will of God lives forever. Chapter 5, verse 1.

Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and everyone who loves the Father loves his child as well. This is how we know that we love the children of God, by loving God and carrying out his commands. This is love for God, to obey his commands. And his commands are not burdensome. For everyone born of God, for everyone born of God overcomes the world. This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith. Who is it that overcomes the world?

[2 : 15] Only he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God. Then verse 18. We know that anyone born of God does not continue to sin. The one who was born of God keeps him safe, and the evil one cannot harm him. We know that we are the children of God, and the whole world is under the control of the evil one. We know that the Son of God has come, and has given us understanding, so that we may know him who is true. And we are in him who is true, even in his Son, Jesus Christ.

He is the true God, and eternal life. Dear children, keep yourselves from idols. Amen. Amen. What was the word? I can't hear? Well, we're going to talk about the world this morning.

After we've sung our next hymn, the Apostle John has a lot to say about the world. He says this, Do not love the world, or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love for God the Father is not in them.

Do not be surprised, brothers and sisters, if the world hates you. We know that we've passed from death to life because we love each other. Everyone born of God overcomes the world.

This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith. Who is he that overcomes the world? Only he who has faith, believing that Jesus is the Son of God.

[4 : 16] And Peter, in his letter, talks about escaping the corruption in the world by evil desires.

He says it eight times. So we consider two loves together this morning. Love for the world, and love for God and his people, on the other hand.

Do I find it difficult to love my brothers and sisters as God commands me to? Yet I find it easy, relatively easy, to love the world which God specifically commands me not to do.

Well, I suppose I've got to say yes. And this is a scintillating world which God has created.

Louis Armstrong says, sings, I see trees of green, red roses too. I see them bloom for me and for you.

[5 : 21] And I say to myself, what a wonderful world. Genesis 1, verse 31, we read, God saw everything that he made, and it was very good.

And elsewhere in the Bible, we are told that at creation, the angels applauded God as they saw his amazing creation. They too, the angels thought it was a wonderful world.

1 Timothy 4, verse 3, speaks of God's gifts in the world, the variety of lovely fruit and fruits to be thankfully received by those who believe and know the truth, that they come from God, that every good thing God has created is to be received with thanksgiving.

It's consecrated by the word of God and by prayer. James chapter 1, in verse 17 of his letter, every good and perfect gift is from God above, coming down from the Father of heavenly lights. And then Paul adds to this, in 1 Timothy 6, God richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. So that's good, that's positive.

[6 : 46] But because of sin, this is a fallen world, and creation is cursed. So the Bible's evaluation of the present world is mixed.

The world can snare human affection so that the good gifts in the world by which we are surrounded become more important than the good giver.

He surrounds us too. In him we live and move and have our being in this world, yet he is forgotten, ignored, or often totally denied.

1 John then lists a number of tests to apply to confirm to ourselves that we possess eternal life. Are we the possessors of eternal life?

That's what a Christian can say. And to confirm that we are in the faith, John says, for example, one test, if anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.

[8 : 07] Categorical. And the New Testament warns of adverse influences which affect the spiritual lives of Christians.

They are the world, the flesh, and the devil. And we must be on our guard. James, again, chapter 4, verse 4, tells us, friendship with the world means enmity with God.

Therefore, anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God. So, what we've got to decide now, folks, is to find out what the world is, because it's a bit confusing, the picture we get.

It's three things in the Bible. First of all, the world, it's the planet, planet Earth, Psalm 8, verse 1, O Lord, our Lord, how excellent is your name in all the earth.

Now, the planet is not to be hated. That's not the world to be hated. Psalm 115, The highest heavens belong to the Lord, but the earth he has given to man.

[9 : 22] Secondly, firstly, the planet. Secondly, the world refers to the people of the world. The people who live on the planet, they are also referred to as the world.

And the Lord nowhere tells us not to love people. Even those who are radically opposed to God, we are commanded to love and try and win them.

Even those who despise Christians, Jesus commands us to love our enemies, to bless them that curse us, do good to them that hate us, and pray for them who spitefully use us and persecute us.

And God does not hate that same world of sinners and rebels. This is what we read in the verse everybody knows.

God so loved the world, soul of the world, of people, that he gave his dearest and best for their redemption. God sent not his son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through him might be saved.

[10 : 33] So, the planet, the people, God loves, his own work, he loves people to the extent that he gave his best.

And thirdly, what we might call the principalities and powers, wicked spirits in high places. We are told in the Bible that Satan, the devil, dominates this world system, which is against God and his people.

The system. The world in which we live is ruled by its prince. First John 5, 19.

We know the whole world is under the control of the evil one. He holds its government, its finance, its politics, its moral standards, its business, its philosophy, its pleasures in his grasp.

Of that, there is no doubt. John speaks of all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life.

[11 : 45] So, a question, which of the three worlds are we commanded not to love? It's not the planet, it's not the people, but the principalities and powers.

Definitely the third one there. Romans 12 and verse 2 says, do not conform to the pattern of this world. In 1953, I was introduced to, made aware of, real Christians for the first time in my life.

I come from a godless background. I knew some religious people. I didn't know any true Christians.

Prior to this, I'd been unaware of their existence and made some interesting discoveries.

when I found myself worshiping at an evangelical church. The young people I mixed with, let me tell you, they didn't drink.

They didn't gamble. They didn't buy lottery or raffle tickets. They didn't swear. They rigidly observed Sunday as a special day. They did not frequent the cinema.

[12:58] They didn't go to the theater. They didn't go to the pub. They avoided football matches, billiard halls, dance halls, and nightclubs and fairgrounds. No pop songs.

No listening to Radio Luxembourg. Now, what's that, you see? Now, appreciate my coming into this. And my world was one of Teddy Boys, sporting crew cuts, bolero ties, blue suede shoes, drainpipe trousers, and they sang along with Lonnie Donegan in the skiffle group, and Elvis Presley. And I was suddenly become a Christian and introduced. And now that I was a Christian, I was taught a song, a new song, and it was Dare to be a Daniel.

Do you know that one? Anybody know? Dare to be a Daniel by Philip Bliss. It's an old hymn. Dare to be a Daniel, dare to stand alone, dare to have a purpose firm, dare to make it known.

Daniel, of course, folks, the godly youth living in Babylon, he was living in Babylon, but he was not of Babylon. That's what we're told. He was of Jerusalem, and he was now in exile in a foreign land.

[14:20] And his god was the Lord, and his standards were different to the Babylonian standards. And Jesus described his own disciples in the same way as Daniel was described.

In John 17, he said, they were in the world, but they were not of the world. Same principle. So as a young believer, I was encouraged to follow Daniel's example and say no to certain things that the world had to offer.

They would be detrimental to my growth in grace and spiritual understanding. And that song was, Dare to be a Daniel, was twisted a bit, and this young Yorkshireman teacher said, these are one for you boys.

Dare to be a Daniel. Dare to stand alone. Dare to pass the tobacco shop and breathe the pure ozone. That's for you boys.

The girls were not left out. Girls, here's one for you. Dare to be a Daniel. Dare to stand alone. Dare to pass the chemist shop and call your face your own. There was a thing called worldliness.

[15:39] And the Sunday school children sang they were not to be left out. Be careful little eyes what you see. Be careful little ears what you hear. Be careful little hands what you do.

Be careful little feet where you go. For Jesus up above is looking down in love. Have you heard that one before? Yeah? Yeah, some of you have. And that message was not just for children.

Then I often heard and this was new to me too the reminder that Jesus is coming again a second time and that he could return at any time.

Question. When he returns will he find you in a place of the devil? This was all new to me folks but I accepted it without question and with determination and I embraced the Christian lifestyle whatever the cost.

Whatever was involved I was up for the full day. My parents who were not Christians at that time thought our Tom has flipped his lid. They noticed the things Tom doesn't do anymore.

[16:53] was he heading to be a monk? He'd become a religious maniac. He's become a total killjoy.

The strange thing was I didn't feel deprived in any way when I adopted this lifestyle. I came across an old membership form application from the church of which I am now a member.

Let me tell you one question amongst the many. As a Christian applying for membership do you see the necessity of dissociating yourself from all such practices and pleasures as might be considered questionable or of a worldly nature?

Important question. Be careful if you want to become a member how you answer that question. The point I'm making is worldliness at the time was taken seriously.

Today the world worldliness has almost dropped entirely out of our Christian vocabulary because times have changed you see. but I don't judge our forefathers or my forefathers yes there was some legalism about it but I ask myself have we swung too much the other way we could discuss that.

[18:23] Certain things that once troubled the Christian conscience don't trouble them anymore. You see when the motive is changing one's total lifestyle and behavior in order to honor the Lord and to pursue holiness who are we to judge?

We could ask ought we to question some current practices that we've accepted more than we do well that's for another time but we were given a rule of thumb for guidance in those days.

If in doubt don't do it. Keep a clear conscience and an oft quoted verse was 2 Corinthians 6 and verse 17 come out from among them and be separate says the Lord touch no unclean thing and I

will receive you for what fellowship has light with darkness do not be yoked together with unbelievers and a favorite verse of one of my elders who was my spiritual guide Psalm 1 verse 1 blessed is the one who does not walk in step with the wicked he does not stand in the way of sinners he does not sit in the company of mockers John the apostle teaches separation from the values of the world are a necessary prerequisite for showing Christ likeness the principle I've described is also found in the Old

Testament in Exodus 11 Moses know that the Lord makes a distinction between Egypt and Israel Israel was to be known for their difference things are different now something happened to me when I gave my heart to Jesus we used to sing and in the New Testament 2000 years ago Christians were having problems with the world do you remember Demas one steeply involved in the Lord's work Paul's companion in spreading the gospel and with Paul the apostle in his first imprisonment but then a sad change Paul says in 2 Timothy 4 verse 10 Demas has deserted me Demas has forsaken me and why did Demas do that well we're given the reason because he loved this present world in the garden of Eden

Satan lured the first two innocent human beings away from God and he used the world to do it not the grubby sleazy unpleasant elements of the world there were none then but something superbly beautiful and pleasing Satan used what was intrinsically good to undermine Eve's trust in God surrounded by aspects of paradise abundant fruit trees one tree only did God bar Adam and Eve from partaking only one and there was an abundance of others which tree was she interested in the one that God had forbade Genesis 3 6 when the woman saw the fruit of that tree that it was good for food to eat pleasing to the eye and also desirable for making one wise she took the fruit and ate it and thereby alienated herself from

[22 : 20] God her husband too the lust of the flesh the lust of the eyes the pride of life in the human heart but it's in the world now we've all inherited Eve and Adam's inclination and made the same mistake question would their love for God the father that first pair their creator would their love for their creator be stronger than the devil's temptation Jesus would later say to his followers if you love me you'll keep my commandment God gave a commandment which was not kept Israel remember what you owe the Lord for his faithfulness and provision when you have eaten and are satisfied with what God has given praise the Lord your

God for the good he has given you be careful that you do not forget the Lord or forget what he said when all that you have from the Lord is multiplied then your heart will become proud and you will forget the Lord and so they did now I'm going off at a tangent how much longer have I got in the last few minutes that we have I want to go off to change to rehearse something that John said in his gospel soon after the resurrection John chapter 21 Peter Thomas Nathaniel James John and two other disciples seven of them were together as friends and Peter said to them I'm going fishing and they replied we're coming with you they went fishing they caught nothing all night at daybreak Jesus stood on the shore but the disciples didn't know it was Jesus the stranger prophesied suggestion to them with regard to their fishing Jesus is not against fishing and they took up his suggestion and they the result was they landed a huge catch John himself John soon recognized the man on the beach was the Lord and when all seven disciples came ashore Jesus had prepared a barbecue fish and bread laid out Jesus is not against barbecues Jesus wasn't against fishing but after they'd had their breakfast Jesus took Peter aside the fact was the disciples had returned to their former way of life before

Jesus called them the time when they were engaged in a legitimate fishing business and they were together as friends but was that what they were meant to do now and for the duration Jesus questioned to Peter as he took him aside after breakfast Simon son of John do you love me more than these Jesus wanted to know what did people what did Peter love most in life Jesus originally called Peter from fishing at the beginning of his ministry follow me and he left the nets to follow him he now repeats that command to follow him and he says

Peter I want you to love my lambs and I want you to love me I want you now to feed my sheep to care for my flock to serve my church fishing is good but I now want you to become a fisher of man now we can all be tempted towards things that are clearly and obviously sordid and evil we're all prone to be tempted by the lust of the flesh the lust of the eyes and the pride of life but often temptation comes to us when we take the good things for our pleasure devoting ourselves to them to such an extent that we make idols of them Bunyan John Bunyan reminded us to be wary of enchanted ground many become preoccupied with academic success degree

[27 : 57] PhD etc scholarships professorships nothing wrong with that wisdom is more precious than rubies others Paul says hinting to Timothy others become preoccupied with physical fitness and this has a certain value Olympic gold medals are nice to have other pursuits make a successful business and pursue wealth lots of money Deuteronomy 8 and verse 18 we read the ability to produce wealth comes from the Lord not intrinsically wrong Jeremiah has a corrective though let not the wise boast of their wisdom let not the strong boast of their strength the fitness let not the rich boast of their riches but let the one who boasts about let the one who boasts boast about this that they have the understanding to know me that I am the

Lord who exercises kindness now the question addressed to Peter is one for all of us to answer Peter do you love me more than more than these I see in echo of the first commandment you shall have no other gods before me God has given good things faithfully provided but that those things are not to be our main focus the right place for the Lord Jesus to occupy in every Christian's affections is number one did Jesus enjoy Peter's unswerving devotion do you love me Peter three times asks him and this demand he makes of all who follow him do you love me do you love me supremely do I come first in your life do you love me above all others maybe Peter was singled out because his obvious leadership role he was obviously the leader of the apostles he was the senior figure Peter decided I'm going fishing and they said oh we're coming with you if Peter now said my friends the other six I'm going to follow the Lord Jesus wholeheartedly all my days putting him first in my life their response could well be we're coming with you Peter in fact that's what happened don't underestimate the power of example be examples to the flock Peter once before left all to follow him Jesus now calls him to do it again to leave the familiar the legitimate and the satisfying satisfying in order to exclusively devote his life to making disciples that was a challenge you may recall

Peter once confidently claimed that his personal devotion his personal devotion to the Lord exceeded that of the others touch of spiritual pride you see Luke chapter 18 verse 28 Peter said to Jesus we've left all we had to follow you and the Lord didn't deny it but Matthew 26 31 to 35 Jesus told his disciples you will all fall away because of me you will all fall away then Peter replied even if all fall away because of you I never will John 13 Jesus said to them where I'm going you cannot come you cannot follow now but you will follow later Peter asked why can't I follow you now I will lay down my life for you will you lay down your life for me

Peter you are going to deny that you ever knew me how many times Peter overrated himself spiritually now Jesus asks Peter do you love me more than these do you love me more than these things the fishing the money the success do you love me more than these men love me God's gifts are to be received and enjoyed but there is someone we are called to love more than things called to be our utmost priority do you love me Peter what am I to you Lord you know I do but do you love me more than these more than fish and fishing and the latest fishing gear indeed did he love the [33 : 26] Lord enough to leave his source of income his standard of living in order to become fishers of men a fisher of men leave it all again if the Lord so desired well yes why not Jesus asks to be loved supremely by his leading disciple as for worldliness which we started talking about the old fashioned worldliness at least worldliness is this basically loving something or someone more than you love the Lord if you can if you say you love me or loving something that the Lord doesn't love and the Lord doesn't want you to love and there's something wrong if you go on loving it your pursuit in life is not to be primarily your pleasures but asking the

Lord Lord what do you want me to do with this earthly life this brief time that I spend here before slipping into eternity are you ready for any inconvenience of sacrifice that might entail sacrificing your substance your time your energy such as the perversity of the human heart that even God's good gifts can be the means of distracting us from him worshipping and serving the creation rather than the creator when I became a Christian I'm almost finished I was handed newly published screw tape letters by C.S.

Lewis about the devil and instructing his understudy demon to encourage Christians to take good things at the wrong time and in the wrong quantities worldliness is forgetting the creator and becoming preoccupied with the creation with the gifts rather than the giver said someone thinking about Peter and the interview give God your whole life he can do more with it than ever you can my Christian brother and sister we know that this conversation with the Lord Peter had with the Lord was not in vain on that morning when they had breakfast on the beach he was a changed man by that interview how do

I know that well the Lord's purpose was achieved in his life proved by the two letters Peter wrote in the New Testament first and second Peter he responded to the challenge and literally gave his life back to the Lord and more than that he went on literally to give his life in crucifixion he was crucified like his Lord that's what happened following that interview and the final exhortation when you come right to the end of John's first letter his first epistle to guard and secure your devotional life the very last word says have no other gods before me if I could paraphrase little children keep yourselves from idols keep yourselves from anything that displaces your affection for the Lord love and Peter's interview was a great success I hope you'll forgive me for giving all those silly examples of worldliness but that's how it was but I can tell you dare I say it there was a quality about personal devotion in those days that I feel that we've lost love so amazing so divine demands my soul my life my all let's pray together Lord you have done so much to deserve our love and our allegiance we can only love you because you first loved us and we've not always responded as we should so forgive us for our ingratitude and our coldness you gave your life for me your blood oh Lord was shed that I might ransom be and risen from the dead oh who can tell how much we owe you and love like yours

[38 : 38] Lord Jesus so amazing so divine demands my soul my life my all help me not to hold anything back for your namesake amen amen let's sing together our closing hymn