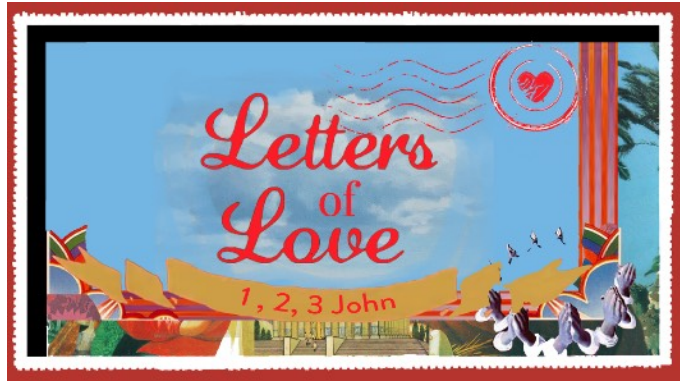


Letters of Love
#5 The World is Passing Away
May 6, 2018
Courage Church, Detroit, MI
scriptures: 1 John 2:15-17,
Matthew 4:1-11, Hebrews 4:15,
2 Chronicles 7:14



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1 John 2:15-17 -

“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.”

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This is what I want to do. We are actually going to start with the Greek today, so please hang with me for five minutes or so and then we will make sense of it.

This middle chunk is important, and because it will explain to us what are, sort of, the main draws of the things of this world... and I want to go through those three in a moment but I want to focus at first on the beginning and the end... and show you some things that I believe to be keys to this passage...

so if we take out the middle, this is what we get... you get the warning, and you get the reason for the warning:

“Do not love the world or the things in the world. the world is **passing away** along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever.”

Passing away (Greek, *paragō*)... the Greek word means “to pass by...” or you could say it like this: its only passing through...

it is at some point going to leave. It will not be here forever.

Now, on the contrary to the things that aren't going to stay, this last line says: whoever does the will of God **abides forever**.

abides is the Greek word "*menō*" which means: "to be held, to remain, or to continue."

and Forever is actually two Greek words:

eis meaning "into"

and:

aiōn meaning "an unbroken age"

"continue into an unbroken age"

The person who does the will of God may live in this broken world full of stuff that is only passing through... but you can live in such a way where you are actually being held in the grip of an unbroken age, even though you are living in one, that is so broken. Through the broken things, we are continuing into something that cannot be broken.

Living in a world that is fleeting, Living a life that is forever.

Now, this is one of the most important things about this passage... and it is why it is worth it to look at these words...

all of these words are all written in the *present* tense... they are talking about right now... not yesterday, not tomorrow. Its not talking about "someday" - it is talking about today. Right now.

It is first and foremost important that we recognize that there is a world which is passing away, and another, which is not. And IN this world that IS passing away, ARE many things that will pass away with it, yet, it is almost

as if we can not help but cling too THOSE THINGS even though we know that they ultimately will add no value to our eternities.

What this verse is telling us is this: You can live in an unbroken age, even now, or you can give that all up for the things in life that are 100% guaranteed to one day go away. And for some reason so many of us choose THAT.

I was in a car accident this week.

Until this week, I had never been in one, at least one involving other cars... and I left this particular scene extremely shook up and really sad, honestly I am still processing some things about it, about what I did wrong, about what I could have done differently, about the other people who were involved who were injured...

All four of my daughters were in the van with me, and I was crossing Vernor from the street we live on going straight... and the traffic going one way was totally stopped, and going the other way was flowing and so the traffic that was stopped had created a space for cars to go through because traffic was so backed up... and I looked both ways and I saw a car coming but I guess I thought it was farther away than it was, and did not realize how fast they were going so I pulled out to go straight through and they just smashed right into the side of the van right where Milly and Fiona were sitting.

I mean, RIGHT where they were sitting. That car hit the side of our van head on at pretty high speeds.

And yet miraculously all four of my kids and myself walked away from there almost without a scratch.... well, Eloise can't walk yet but she wasn't hurt at all... Milly literally had ONE scratch on her, and everyone else was totally fine. Not even phased by it.

I am still waiting to hear about the van. We hope that it is not totaled... but even if it is, do you know what everyone keeps telling me? The exact SAME THING... everyone says: as long as no-one was hurt.

And if you are ever in an accident, especially if there are other people in your car, you know the instant thought... the first thing in your mind the moment it happens:

is everyone alright?

I looked back... kids, is everyone ok? is anyone hurt? can everyone move... is anyone stuck. Is anyone bleeding... did anyone hit your head?

whatever it is... then you get out...

and when I got out, a crowd had already gathered and the people in the car were all crying... and so of course you feel like crying too because of the pain that someone else feels, and its especially difficult knowing you were involved in that.

so after you make sure that your own family is okay, you go and see if anyone from the other car is injured. And the ambulance comes just to be safe and they check all of the people... the police listen to what happened...

AND THEN THE VERY LAST THING THAT HAPPENS after the ambulance leaves and you have made sure that everyone is okay... (and if anyone is not okay then they leave on that ambulance...) and then, finally, you call a tow truck and evaluate the damage to your vehicle... and you call the insurance company.

But its the very last priority.

Because cars are cool and helpful and convenient for our lives... but they don't matter.

In the scheme of life and all that is significant, the things that DO matter ALWAYS are our priority in the darkest, scariest moments.

The police do not run to the car and make sure you aren't going to have to go buy a new one. They run to people. Our instincts always begin with

people because something innately tells us that only in people is a value found that you can not put a number on...

We know this, in tragedies.

But in the day when we are NOT facing something urgent or catastrophic or dangerous or scary... its not always like that.

one of the most common traps that people fall into in this life is the trap of stuff... the trap of a life that says "I have to work more so that I can have more - " and what we don't realize is that often in our ambitions and aspirations to take care of our families and leave our legacies, we are building at the expense of the things that we ultimately are convinced that we are doing it for.

We are missing the life that we are working for.

THIS IS the worlds system. THIS IS the way of the world.

and John has to warn us "Do not love the world or the things in the world."
BECAUSE THE THINGS OF THE WORLD ARE ENTICING.

they are desirable. But they are also distracting.

and he shows us three things, and these are very significant things that really sum up quite a bit. This is verse 16:

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.

So all that is in the world is the desires of the flesh, the desires of eyes, and the pride of life...

The word "desires" is the Greek word: "*epithumia*" (*epi-thume-ay-o*) and it is a combination of two words, *epi*, which means "in" and "*thumos*" which means "the mind."

So if you separate the words, you get “in the mind” and if you combine them you get the word “*epithumia*” (*epi-thume-ay-o*) which means (similarly) “to set your heart upon.”

In other places of the New Testament, like in the sermon on the mount, the word is translated as “lust” - it is translated as lust here in several other translations.

And John uses this word twice... he says the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life.

and when we say “the lust of the flesh” we aren’t only talking about sexual lust... that is where we usually go, and it certainly can be that... but there are a variety of things in this life that we set our hearts upon trying to find fulfillment in. A lot of people set their eyes upon food... they set their eyes upon things that their neighbor has and instead of being happy for their neighbor, they lust for what that person has and they don’t have.

and this is why this word matters so much, and the significance of it being used twice. Because the things described are not always bad things... but the lust for them... the overindulgence in them... for you to set your heart upon those things, which makes it an “end all thing” - that is what this is talking about. Food is not bad. Living to eat... bad.

Being blessed with something, that is good. Living your life to get more things, bad.

Another translation makes it a bit more clear as to what exactly this is saying when it translates this sentence:

“the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does.”

we could say it like this:

Lust, Greed, and Pride are not from the Father, but are from the world.

Now, of those three things, everyone usually has at least one that if they were honest with themselves they would say “this is the area that I need to guard from the most”

I know that there are others, but these really do seem to be the big three.

One thing that Pastor Brad would always do with his staff and his leadership that I always admired about him... was it was always very important for him to know what areas in our lives we struggled in. He actually says that this is something that he learned from his mentors and the pastors who have been over him... and its something that I want to learn from him.

He put it like this... he said “I don’t feel like I really know you, unless I know which of these three you are most drawn too...”

Because we are all human, and these are the things of this world.

so that was something he made a point, especially with those of us on his staff, to learn about us... Not so he could hold it against us, but so he could help walk us through it and navigate it...

because we won’t be able to help each other if we don’t know each other. One of the first steps in working to cultivate a Christian Community is to cultivate trust between everyone... and the only way that you will cultivate trust is if you first create environments where everyone is welcome... and not only just feels loved and accepted... but actually knows that they are loved and accepted for who you are.

When we TRULY know each other, and we still are committed to each other... that is a good indication that we are moving forward together.

I believe those are keys for our church. I really believe two key components culturally that are going to determine how far we are able to move ahead as a church body are:

1. The Holy Spirit... listening to the Holy Spirit... following Him, letting Him guide us... that is why we spent so many weeks talking about it at the beginning of this year...

and then:

2. we have to cultivate a community where everyone is known and accepted for who they are, as we hold each other accountable and do life together all moving forward in the direction of who God dreams for us to be in our lives.

But before we can be known, we have to know ourselves... what is it for you?

is it **lust**?

is it **greed**?

is it **pride**?

For me I would say it is pride. Which is scary because I also believe that pride is in many ways the worst and most destructive one on this list...

It is "the boasting of what he has and does" - what have I accomplished? and that is not just to say "oh look at how great I am... it is to say that I struggle with putting my worth in the things that I accomplish which, sometimes makes me feel WORTHLESS.

how many people ARE or are NOT in church today... how many people DO or DO NOT listen to the podcast...

how many people do or do not like me? what do people think of me?

What is the applause?

What is the things that build up? The word pride in the Hebrew literally means "to lift up strength" - what makes me feel like I am strong?

but the things that make me feel strong, if it is anything OTHER THAN THE GOSPEL, are actually separating me from the gospel... because the gospel is that "I am weak and HE is my strength"

2 Chronicles 7:14 says that "if my people who are called by my name will HUMBLE themselves... and pray... I WILL FORGIVE AND HEAL THEM..."

the word humble in Hebrew means "to tear down the wall"

it means that I tear down all of the things that I have built up that are actually dividing me from living in the love of God...

Think of the wall that you put up between you and God when you live in pride... because pride, ultimately says "I don't need you."

on the contrary, humility acknowledges that "I am enough because Jesus is enough for me."

if you can let that reality take shape in your life it will be your solution no matter which of these three you are most drawn toward.

Because the same gospel that tells me "you are worth the exact same whether everything you do succeeds or falls on its face" is the same gospel that will fill you whether you have the newest house or TV... whether you are married or you are single...

its the same gospel that will fill you when you think you need to give in to your flesh and your desires... you lust and your covetousness....

When you are greedy, and all you can think about is what you can GET, and then you look to the cross... you will see that all Jesus ever thought about was WHAT HE CAN GIVE.

When you focus on the things of the world, you understand... this world is all about getting. Matthew 6 - MOST PEOPLE LAY UP TREASURE ON EARTH... when you GET stuff, you are laying up treasure on earth... but WHEN YOU GIVE STUFF... you are laying up treasure in Heaven. The Gospel teaches us how to give.

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When Jesus went to the wilderness to be tempted by the Devil, the Devil tempted him with all three of these.

He tempted him with something to set his heart upon, with food... Jesus is fasting... allowing God to fill Him completely, and not relying on food to fill his needs and what is the first thing the Devil tries to give Him? Food. The Devil says "take of this... indulge... give in to the craving..."

It's a message that says "God is not enough for you... you will never be full until you are full by the world's standards!"

then The Devil takes him to the pinnacle of the temple and says "if you are the Son of God, prove it." Show us... Throw yourself down... let us see how powerful you really are.

It's like the old saying... "if you have to tell someone you are in charge, then you probably are not."

Someone does something that defies us, and we get all puffed up, and what is the thought as to the action we should take:

"let me show you just how big of a deal I am!"

It's pride.

That is why I try my absolute hardest to lean as far into the gospel as I possibly can in anything involving my life, especially in leadership. Paul says it this way "I will not boast in ANYTHING OTHER THAN JESUS CHRIST CRUCIFIED." (Galatians 6:14)

Jesus knew who He was... He belonged to the Father and was filled with the Holy Spirit... He didn't need to live on proving ground trying to show what a big deal he was.

and then finally, Satan takes Him on the mountain, and shows Him the whole Kingdom, and says “its all yours, if you bow down and worship me.”

YOU CAN HAVE EVERYTHING. YOU JUST NEED TO COMPROMISE WHO YOU ARE.

He is trying to get Jesus to give in to Greed. You can have the whole world... you don't have to wait for anything.

He did the exact same thing in Genesis 3 when he was trying to get Eve to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

It has always been the same tricks. And understanding the areas that the Devil ALWAYS attacks is our first defense against those attacks.

If he can make you believe that STUFF is worth compromising for, you are giving up life in the unbroken age for the things that are broken and will not last.

and this is what makes the temptation in Matthew 4 so significant... and what makes the entire life of Jesus so significant.

one thing that John constantly says in this letter is that “Jesus came in the FLESH”

Jesus came in the same flesh that in these verses John says is worldly. Now, that is not saying that JESUS is worldly... it just shows us how much of the world Jesus actually had to overcome with his life.

its the Greek word “*sarx*” (which we will talk more about this word later this series, consider this your soft introduction to it.) Its the exact same word when it talks about Jesus and when it says here:

“For all that is in the world—the desires of the **flesh**”

Jesus faced those same desires, yet he overcame them every time.

Hebrews (4:15) tells us:

“For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but **one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin.**”

The temptation of Jesus would carry 0 significance if the things that Satan presented to Him were not actually tempting. But they were tempting... they were enticing... they were desirable and yet as our example, he said no to them.

But what this verse tells us is that from the beginning Jesus has been living out this very verse we are studying in 1 John 2, so that He could be a perfect sacrifice for us. From the beginning, he has been pushing away the things that are passing away, no matter how great they may seem, in exchange for the things that last forever.

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On Friday night I was feeding Eloise her dinner, and as I was feeding her, I heard sirens off in the distance. I may talk about this more in a few weeks, but something that I am noticing is that in the aftermath of being in that accident, I am a lot more edgy right now... a little paranoid about driving... and everything takes me back... in some instances it is probably not healthy, in other instances I would say that it is healthy.

But as I was feeding her and I heard this... I looked into her eyes and I just got a bit choked up... and I was just so thankful that when that ambulance came for us just two days before, my baby did not have to get in it. My daughters, who basically got a direct hit **RIGHT WHERE THEY WERE SITTING**, didn't have to get in it.

My little baby was still smiling at me... laughing at me as I fed her and I smiled at her.

and I said a prayer for whoever that was, that the ambulance was going to pick up... whatever scene they were heading toward...

a scene likely like ours... where material things may be gone, but that SIREN doesn't go off so we can save material things... it goes off so that we can save lives.

There are things in life that you can throw away...

and there are things in life that are worth dying for.

And Jesus died for people.

there are things in life that can carry us to wherever it is we want to go...

But there is only one thing that we can carry with us, to where it is we are going.

and thats people.

The currency of the Kingdom of Heaven is our lives lived for others, so that they may see that the things of this world are worthless compared to abiding with Jesus forever, in the unbroken age where there is no pain or sorrow, tears. Where there are no car accidents, and there is no cancer... there is no socio economic divides, or racial divides... Everything that is broken here can not exist, at least in its broken state, in the unbroken age. And that is what we represent today to our community, our city, and our world.

So lets leave this place today, and step out into our community, and join them for the parade, and invite them to the things that are coming that will give them real, tangible help... and hopefully, they will come for the tangible, and they will leave with the eternal.

Its going to be a busy, amazing summer of loving Detroit.