

Sermon for April 5, 2025 – 5<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Lent

1 John 2:15-17 EHV

Theme: **What do you value most in life?**

- 1) Don't love the things of this world.
- 2) Love the LORD, and his gracious will for you.

*<sup>15</sup>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. <sup>16</sup>For everything in the world—the lust of the flesh, the desire of the eyes, boasting about material possessions—is not from the Father but from the world. <sup>17</sup>The world and its desires pass away, but the one who does the will of God remains forever.*

Ask any Christian what they value most, and they would likely answer Jesus, right? But do our lives truly reflect this? We claim to love Jesus above all else, but how often do we meet with Him in prayerful meditation on His Word? In the morning we are too busy and too tired in the evening. Besides, we want to use our time to advance our careers, enjoy our hobbies, enrich our relationships, expand our experiences, and be entertained.

The LORD has lovingly granted us many earthly blessings to enjoy to the glory of His name. The devil, however, uses these same blessings to draw us away from God: enticing us to focus so much on them that we become sinfully proud of our accomplishments, overly attached to our earthly relationships, and lustful of material wealth.

The LORD is acutely aware of the danger love for worldly things poses for us Christians, seeing the devil use it to tempt us away from Him. Perhaps that is why He inspired the apostle John to write our sermon text, inviting us to reevaluate **what we value most in life**. 1) Don't love the things of this world. 2) Love the LORD, and his gracious will for you.

Part One: Don't love the things of this world.

Our sermon text is from the apostle John's first epistle. If a person wanted to choose a one-word theme for this letter, it would be "love." Love God and love your neighbour in response to God's incredible love that saved you. However, there is one type of love John warns us to avoid.

*<sup>15</sup>Do not love the world or the things in the world.*

What exactly does the apostle John mean? Didn't *God so love(d) the world that he gave his only-begotten Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish, but have eternal life*<sup>i</sup>?

Yes, God wants us to love the people of our world the way He does: desiring their salvation as much as He desires it. For that reason, He commands us to share the Gospel with them, pray for

them, and in all things lead them to Jesus. But that is not the kind of love John is talking about in our text.

He defines what he means by writing: <sup>16</sup>*For everything in the world—the lust of the flesh, the desire of the eyes, boasting about material possessions—is not from the Father but from the world.*

Worldly-minded people do not consider sex, money, leisure, entertainment, prosperity, wealth, and health as temporary blessings to be used as God intended. Instead, they twist these things into idols—something to be pursued, prayed for, and grasped at all costs. Such are the cravings of people who don't have the Spirit of God to guide them.<sup>ii</sup>

And yet, while living in this world, we Christians are also tempted to act on our fleshly desires: to indulge in fornication, pornography, greed, gluttony, and laziness. Our sinful flesh often values earthly experiences and relationships more than our relationship with the LORD. We are constantly tempted to pursue the idols of this world, but God warns us not to. Why?

Because *if anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.*

To this point, the evangelist Matthew once recorded Jesus saying: *No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and mammon.*<sup>iii</sup>

Our text and Jesus' words from Matthew make the same point: if you prioritize the things of this world over God, you risk losing God and your salvation. The New Testament writer James states that it is impossible to pursue worldly interests simultaneously with the Lord: *“Don't you know that friendship with the world means hostility toward God? So whoever wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.”*<sup>iv</sup>

Why does James make this assertion? Because this world, led by its prince, the devil, detests God. Everything it does seems to contradict the LORD's good and gracious will. Humanity is inherently selfish, often boasting about its accomplishments and pleasures. It asserts that it has no need for the LORD and blames Him for all that is bad.

The same selfish pride that led Satan to rebel against heaven,<sup>v</sup> and Adam and Eve to fall into sin,<sup>vi</sup> is the same selfish pride that permeates our godless society. Love for this world and what it offers is hatred toward God because it fails to recognize Him as the source of everything and transforms His gifts into idols that He never intended them to be.

Another reason the apostle John provides for why Christians should not love the world is because such love is futile. <sup>17</sup>*The world and its desires pass away.*

Everything on our earth is temporary. Fashion, technology, toys, money – everything loses value, gets corrupted, or decays over time. Even people's love for others is growing cold. Want proof? Consider the war in Ukraine, the terrorist groups in Africa, the drug cartels in Mexico and Central America, and the increase in violent crimes in North America. Add to these all the natural disasters we hear about, and it's hard not to conclude that our world is passing away right before our eyes.

To make this truth even more personal, consider how temporary things are in your own life. As you age, you ache more, and pains start to increase. You start realizing that you can't think as swiftly as when you were younger. The people you cherish are dying. Yes, as time relentlessly marches on, every earthly thing we hold dear gradually disappears. Moreover, each passing day brings us closer to Judgement Day, when *the heavens will pass away with a roar, the elements will be dissolved as they burn with great heat, and the earth and what was done on it will be burned up.*<sup>vii</sup>

Understand, then, that valuing the things of this world is pointless. Why? Because they are all temporary. Worse still, our love for this wicked world separates us from God's everlasting love for us in Christ.

Part Two: Love the LORD, and his gracious will for us.

What, then, should we value most in life? That is simple: Jesus and His Word.

The apostle John proclaims: *the one who does the will of God remains forever.*

What is God's will, and who is the one who does it? Jesus tells us: <sup>40</sup> *For my Father's will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day.*<sup>viii</sup>

God does not want us to worry about our earthly life – what we shall eat, drink or wear. Instead, He wants us to *seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.*<sup>ix</sup>

The next question that should be asked is: "What does it mean to believe in Jesus?" It does not mean simply believing that there is a God. *Even the demons believe that--and shudder.*<sup>x</sup> It also doesn't mean viewing the forgiveness Jesus won for us as a license to indulge in any sinful desire we may have, simply because "Jesus will forgive us." Concerning such people, the Bible says: *Their condemnation is deserved.*<sup>xi</sup>

To believe in Jesus Christ involves recognizing your sinfulness, acknowledging your offence against your holy God, and understanding that you deserve the everlasting condemnation He threatens in His law. Subsequently, it comprises turning to God in repentance, placing your trust in His promised mercy to forgive your sins for Christ's sake. Jesus' perfect life, innocent death, and glorious resurrection have fully paid for your sins. Embrace this truth and apply it to yourself. In the peace of God's forgiveness, ask Him to help you live a life of thankful obedience to all His commands. Recognize that they are all meant for your protection and good. With His help, resist temptation and reflect Jesus' love to those He has placed in your life.

And if you fall into sin again – for no one will ever be free of transgressions this side of heaven? Go to Jesus in repentance, confident that he will keep his promise to forgive, love, and help you live as His cherished child on this earth.

That, brothers and sisters in Christ, is what it means to do the will of God. And what will God grant the person who looks to Jesus for forgiveness and lives a life of love in response to His mercy? Everlasting life, as Jesus once said: *My sheep hear my voice. I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish. No one will snatch them out of my hand.*<sup>xii</sup>

Yes, this world is passing away. But, *blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! By his great mercy he gave us a new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, <sup>4</sup>into an inheritance that is undying, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you. <sup>5</sup>Through faith you are being protected by God's power for the salvation that is ready to be revealed at the end of time.*<sup>xiii</sup>

So, dear brothers and sisters in Christ: whenever you are tempted to value the things of this perishing world<sup>xiv</sup> ahead of the LORD, go to Jesus in prayer, confessing your sinful desires and asking him to forgive you. Then, think about all the beautiful promises He gives you in the Bible. Thank Him for all the blessings He offers you in life, remembering the purpose behind them. Ask Him to help you let go of the world and cling to Him even more firmly. Press forward in faith, steadfastly pursuing the everlasting glory He won for you on the cross. Pray and trust that He will do what you ask, for it is in accordance with His will.

Then, in the peace of his forgiveness, live your life on this earth to God's glory. Thank Him for the material blessings and experiences He graciously grants you in this life; valuing Jesus above them all. Amen.

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<sup>i</sup> John 3:16 EHV

<sup>ii</sup> Cf. Romans 8:12–14

<sup>iii</sup> Matthew 6:24 EHV

<sup>iv</sup> James 4:4 EHV

<sup>v</sup> Cf. Isaiah 14:10 – Even though this section is a prophecy against Babylon, theologians through out the ages have noted that the language of this section seems to use Babylon as an illustration of Satan's pride and fall. Verse 12's reference to "the morning star" is where we get the name "Lucifer" for Satan.

<sup>vi</sup> Cf. Genesis 3:5–6

<sup>vii</sup> 2 Peter 3:10 EHV

<sup>viii</sup> John 6:40 NIV84

<sup>ix</sup> Mathew 6:33 EHV

<sup>x</sup> James 2:19 EHV

<sup>xi</sup> Romans 3:8 EHV

<sup>xii</sup> John 10:27,28 EHV

<sup>xiii</sup> 1 Peter 1:3–5 EHV

<sup>xiv</sup> Like Lot's wife. Cf. Genesis 19:17, 26; Luke 17:32–33