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Peace, Sun Prairie  
July 12, 2020  
Pentecost 6  
1 John 2:15-17

## LOVING THE WORLD OR LIVING FOREVER

A fantasy story written by C.S. Lewis entitled *The Great Divorce* tells of a busload of individuals who travel from the abyss that separates heaven from hell up to heaven and are given the opportunity to remain there. When they get off the bus one of the first things they find is that heaven is a place so real that the light shines right through them as though they were merely shadows of people, mere specters. Heaven is also a place of such permanence that as they step off the bus the blades of grass do not bend for them or give way, but stab through their feet like knives.

These details to the story bring to mind what the Apostle John wrote in his first epistle that the world and its desires are fading away but the one who does the will God remains forever.

If you had come off from that bus, what would you have done? Would you have wanted to get back on that bus? Or would you have tried to stay in that place of realness? C.S. Lewis explores a variety of reactions from the people who got off the bus. Not all of them were convinced that to remain there would be a good thing. In a similar way 1 John chapter 2 sets these two options before us today: Loving the world or living forever. Which will it be for you?

I imagine that deep down every one of us wants it to be a little of both. We know we want eternal life in heaven. At the same time we like our nice things here on earth. A popular, old hymn begins, "I'm but a stranger here. Heav'n is my home. Earth is a desert drear. Heav'n is my home." Have you achieved that view of the world? A desert drear? Nothing helps us to gain such a perspective more than suffering and disappointment. I wonder if God permits us to suffer and have problems more and more the older we get so as to prepare us for the life to come and make us all the more glad to leave this place.

High schoolers and college students, perhaps the world you live in, a totally virtual, online world, seems so real, so overpowering – it feels like this is what the whole world is thinking or saying or doing. But it's not real. It's not permanent. It's all just so much smoke. Listen again to this message from your God: *The world and its desires are passing away*. Not only does the Bible say this world is wearing out, but on the Last Day when Jesus returns this whole planet is going to go up in flames and be destroyed.

For this reason, 1 John 2 urges us: *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*. This is that special Bible word for "love"—agape love. It's the kind of love by which we make something our highest concern. It's the same word used in John 3:16 that says, *God so loved the world*. But how is it that God can agape love the world, but we should not? It's because you and I become a slave to whatever we make our highest concern. Thus if things pertaining to this life become your highest concern, the world owns you. Only God can make this world His highest concern and still remain independent and free of it and be its Lord and Master. Our highest concern needs to be to God Himself. Even when the Holy Spirit enables believers to agape love another human being it's only because by faith our highest concern is to God first. I wonder how much relief we would all feel if we made God our highest concern?

Jesus once said, *No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to one and despise the other*. Here in 1 John 2 we are told the same thing: *If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him*. Then John describes what that unsanctified, worldly love looks like. He writes: *For everything in the world—the lust of the flesh, the desire of the eyes, big talking about the stuff of life—is not from the Father but from the world*. The degree of our love for this world oftentimes has a direct

correlation to how distraught we are when we are denied something or we lose something. Or it may correlate to how much media or social media can distress us or how many likes can satisfy us. Insofar as God is not our number one priority, we have sinned. Making God take a back seat to anything buys us a one way ticket on that bus back to the abyss.

The wonder of it is that God still so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son. The worldly-based love John describes is exactly what Satan tempted Jesus with out in the wilderness. John describes the lust or the appetite of the flesh. Satan tempted Jesus with turning stones into bread. John describes the desire of the eyes. Satan presented to Jesus all the kingdoms of the world. John describes big talking about the stuff of life. Satan tried to inflate Jesus' sense of entitlement by suggesting Jesus throw Himself down from the temple and expect God to catch Him.

But in Jesus we see a perfect love, a perfect concern, for His Father and no self-concern for the things of this world. As a human the Son of God earned a complete and flawless righteousness before His Father. Do not imagine that this was a light, easy task. He succeeded only by the greatest sweat and loneliest anguish. It has been said that Jesus is the only one in history who actually struggled against sin, because Jesus never did sin.

Jesus did this not for His own sake. He did it for us. For the Father's main concern was our salvation. When the Bible says God judges the world in righteousness, it means on the one hand He judges all unbelievers according to their sins. But it also means He gives those who believe in Jesus the credit for Jesus' righteousness and He judges you according to Jesus' righteousness. In this way, Luther once wrote that the same God commands and then fulfills and then gives. Having Christ's righteousness through faith, we are rescued from death and rescued from God's judgment so that we may live forever with Him in the Permanent Place of heaven.

Thus, 1 John 2 sets before us these two options: loving the world or living forever. It does not offer anything in between. It says: *The world and its desires are passing away, but the one who does the will of God remains forever.* But wait! What does it mean to do the will of God? It means our first concern is to give God glory by turning our sins over to Him and trusting in Christ for forgiveness. That is God's will. That is to be our highest concern: Turn your sins over to God and trust in Christ for forgiveness.

And as God freely replaces our sin with Christ's righteousness, thus providing everything we need to be saved, we are then released from self-concern. We are redeemed from slavery to the love of this passing world. We are set free to a new life of concerning ourselves with the permanent things of God – His enduring truths, His unchanging designs, His everlasting promises, His eternal grace – leading us to that never-ending, never fading place of truth, life, reality, and glory.

Loving the world or living forever. May the Holy Spirit compel each of us to flee the first and pursue the second.