

Is This World Our Home?

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As I suspect everyone here knows, one of the abiding interests of my life is in the hymns that we sing in worship. I am particularly interested in which hymns stand the test of time and why, so that I can attempt to replicate that formula in my own writing. The hymns that are now either passing permanently into our repertoire, or not, are the hymns from the radio era, approximately 1910-1960. These are the upbeat two-pagers with different parts in the chorus, etc.

It's now become obvious that one of the gems from that era, a hymn that will be sung as long as there are English-speaking Christians to sing it, is "This World Is Not My Home". It expresses the core difference between the people of the world and the people of God. The people of the world belong here. This is their home. The people of God, by contrast, belong in heaven, and they won't be happy till they get there. We sing this hymn often, as we should, and with great enthusiasm, also as we should. However, the words of this hymn aren't something we should merely be singing. We need to be living them as well. We need to ask ourselves honestly, "Is this world our home?"

Characteristics of Worldliness

Although this may be a painful question for us to answer, the answer itself comes fairly easily. The Bible clearly defines several characteristics of worldliness for us to use in our process of self-evaluation. The first of these is **MATERIALISM**. Consider the character sketch of Hebrews 12:16-17. Of all the foolish decisions in the Bible, Esau's is one of the most famous. As the firstborn of Isaac, Esau was the one who was in line to inherit the promise of the land of Canaan and even the promise that the Messiah would come through him. However, he traded his birthright away for a bowl of lentil stew. He was so wrapped up in the present that he abandoned his future for it.

Sadly, I fear that a lot of Christians make the same mistake today. We too have a birthright. We too have promises made to us. We too have an inheritance to look forward to. However, just like Jacob, the devil is always trying to get us to barter those things away. He wants us to trade them in for ever-larger houses filled with ever-larger piles of stuff, for the newest and best of everything. We can't come up with more than pocket change to give to the Lord's work or help a brother in need, but when it comes to our dream whatevers, we can always find the cash.

There are two problems with this. First, materialism doesn't satisfy. Esau ate his lentil stew, and a few hours later, he was hungry again. We buy our dream car, and in a few months, we've moved on to another dream purchase. Second, chasing that momentary satisfaction costs us the things that are truly important. Heaven is only for people who want to be there. If we would rather have treasures here than treasures there, we prove that we don't.

Second, worldliness becomes evident in **LOVING PLEASURE**. In this regard, let's look at 2 Timothy 3:1-2, 4. This is an awful list. If we were to read the entirety of the first five verses of 2 Timothy 3, we would see that it paints a truly hideous, evil picture of a certain kind of person. We need to recognize, though, that Paul doesn't write this list about unbelievers in the world. He writes it about those who claim to be Christians, people who love pleasure instead of God.

To put things in John's terms, materialism is really about the lust of the eye. This one is about the lust of the flesh. It's about our goals in life. We can love the things of the spirit. We can love serving God and other people. What pleases Him can also please us? Or, instead, we can love the things of the flesh. Our lives can be about nothing more than physical pleasure, what we can eat, what we can drink, what can give us sexual pleasure, what will allow us to be lazy.

There are millions of people who live that way, but in doing so, they have reduced themselves to nothing more than animals. After all, that's what a dog wants. A dog is happy with food and drink and sex and laziness. That's fine for dogs. A dog can't rise above his nature. However, it isn't fine for mankind. Unlike all the animals, we are created in the image of God. We can be so much more than animals. We can control all those desires in order to live lives that glorify Him. However, we can also let those desires control us, so that we amount to nothing more than Rover.

Third, our worldliness also becomes evident in our adherence to **WORLDLY WISDOM**. James describes this flavor of wisdom in James 3:14-16. We've already hit the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eye. This is the pride of life, the desire to prove to everybody else that we matter, that we are important. Jealousy and selfish ambition show up in any number of areas in our lives, but let's pick on one near and dear to the hearts of suburbanites everywhere: our children.

Even when I was growing up, there was a whole lot of pressure on kids to succeed and get into good colleges, but in the years since, that pressure seems only to have intensified. Parents, both inside and outside the church, will invest huge amounts of time and money in making sure their children are in a good school district, are involved in all kinds of activities, and are generally spending their lives building a resume for their college applications.

Don't get me wrong, folks. I too value education. I too would like to see my children embark on stable, prosperous careers. However, those things can't be our biggest priorities. Let me ask you this: Would it be better for our children to spend their lives scrubbing toilets at Wal-Mart and go to heaven, or to earn an M.B.A and millions with it, but lose their souls because they didn't love God? We all know what the church answer is, but we must make sure that we truly live that way. Do we really fill our children's lives with God first, and make education and activities fit around that,

or does all the other stuff come first, and God second? On Wednesday nights, where are we? Here, or doing homework and going to softball practice? We need to be careful here, friends. We will surely reap what we sow. If we teach our children by the choices we make for them that the things of this world are most important, they will reflect those values in the lives they lead.

Finally, worldliness motivates those who desire **FRIENDSHIP WITH THE WORLD**. James addresses this in James 4:4. At first glance, this seems like a strange thing for James to say. It's odd to identify a spiritual problem with wanting to be friends with somebody and wanting to be likable people generally. To some extent, Christians certainly should be. We should always be gracious and respectful in our conduct toward others. We should be the first to lend a helping hand when one is needed. We should be the hardest workers in our place of employment. However, our reason for doing all of those things should never be to win the praise of men. It should be to win the praise of God.

The problem with being concerned about what others think of us is that many times, their priorities don't line up with God's. God wants us to tell others about the gospel; people in the world usually don't want to hear it. God wants us to stand strong against sin; people in the world would prefer that we stay silent to keep the peace. God wants us to live pure lives like Jesus did; people in the world want us to live like they do. If friendship with the world is our goal, we will put others over God, and we will destroy our relationship with Him as a result.

Jesus on Worldliness

Now that we've set out some of the most important indicators of worldliness, we need to consider what our Lord has to say about the severity of the problem. Let's consider Jesus on worldliness. This will help us to prepare our minds for the Lord's Supper. First, He reveals that worldliness is **UNBELIEVING**. Consider the exclamation recorded in Luke 12:28. Here, we find a truth about worldliness that we don't often consider, but that is extremely important. When we focus on worldly things, it reveals a lack of faith. We won't enjoy life if we put God first. We'll stunt our children's developments if we put God first. Nobody will like us if we put God first. And so, because God isn't going to take care of us in those areas, we have to take care of ourselves. Friends, it is hard to imagine a more foolish conclusion than that one! There is nothing, absolutely nothing, I can do to ensure any of those outcomes for myself. If I make my life about pleasure-seeking, I can end up with a debilitating illness that fills my days with pain. If I make my life about the future of my children, they can choose to be drug addicts instead of useful members of society. If I make my life about people liking me, all my co-workers can decide I'm a jerk on purely secular grounds. On the other hand, the things that I can't do, God can. God can help me to find joy. God can watch over my children. God can fill my life with innumerable people who love me. When He can do it and we can't, we have no reason to trust ourselves.

Second, Jesus tells us that worldliness is **UNFRUITFUL**. We return here to a familiar text, Matthew 13:22. For all of us who are gathered here this morning, this passage highlights the greatest spiritual danger we face. After all, we obeyed the gospel in the first place and are still faithful, so the first two types of soils don't have anything to do with us now. However, it is entirely possible for us to be faithful, yet simultaneously be unfruitful. It's not some minor problem when we are useless and unproductive as Christians. Instead, it is a spiritual disaster. When we don't bear fruit for God, we frustrate His very purpose in saving us in the first place. We are prepared for good works, and God expects us to walk in them. However, when we dedicate ourselves to the things of the world instead of the things of the Lord, unfruitfulness is the inevitable result. In my gardening, I don't have any interest in keeping around flowers that don't bloom and garden plants that don't produce fruits and vegetables. All they do is take up the ground, and I get rid of them. If we are unfruitful, we appear no more useful in the Lord's eyes, and He will surely remove us from His kingdom.

Third, worldliness is **POINTLESS**. Consider the words of our Lord in Matthew 16:26. Now, as far as I know, we don't have any budding dictators in attendance this morning. None of us are going to take over the whole world. Instead, we have only a tiny share of the world, and all of our scraping and striving can only increase that tiny share by an even tinier amount. World domination, then is not in our future. But even if it were, even if by some bizarre quirk of fate, I ended up the owner of the world and everyone in it, but I wasn't faithful to the Lord, what would that matter? Sure, I might live it up for a few decades, but eventually, I would die just like everybody else, and when I did, all the material things I had would pass into the hands of my successors. I myself would pass on to face a judgment for which I was brutally unprepared. A few short years of pleasure in exchange for an eternity of torment is a miserable bargain!

And yet, friends, when the devil invites us to put God second in exchange for some worldly thing, the deal he's offering isn't anywhere near that good! Even if the devil holds up his end of the deal, which he usually doesn't, what, at the end of the day, do we end up with? An admissions letter to U of I? A few friends? Some stuff? A few moments of pleasure? Judas valued his own soul at thirty pieces of silver. I'm afraid that a lot of Christians are currently in the process of surrendering their own souls for a lot less than that. When we make that bargain, we get what we deserve.

Finally, worldliness is **FATAL**. Christ warns us about this in Matthew 10:32-33. In my life, I've felt some sinking feelings, but nothing to compare to this. Imagine this, here we are on the Day of Judgment, and we figure that we're

perfectly fine with the Lord, and we come strutting up to the judgment seat: "Heyyy, Jesus! Nice to see You!" And Jesus looks at us and replies, "Who are you? You're not one of Mine. You belong to somebody else."

What a horrible, horrible feeling that would be! And yet, that is the fate we bring on ourselves when we deny Him. This verse is often used as support for the idea that we need to confess Jesus before we are baptized, but that's not really what it's about. It's easy to affirm that Jesus is our Lord here, where we are surrounded by people who feel the same way. It's much more difficult to make that same good confession out in the world, where we are surrounded by people who don't feel that way and don't want to hear about it from us. However, that's the confession that Jesus expects us to make. We need to lift Him up as Lord, by talking about Him, by teaching about Him, by following Him, even in and perhaps especially in the settings where no one else is doing that. If we live that way, Jesus will confess us before the Father. If we are seduced by worldliness and deny Him, we can be certain that He will also deny us.

Before the Lord's Supper, then, let's reflect on these things. We have been bought with the price of the blood of the Son of God. He died in the flesh so that we might live in the spirit. However, Jesus died for a reason. His intent is not for us to pay Him lip service here and then fling ourselves into the things of the world all week long. He died so that we would follow Him and glorify Him. Are we doing that? Let's examine ourselves as we partake.

Making Our Home Elsewhere

Certainly, the first two-thirds of this lesson have been quite grim. After all, we're contemplating people who are Christians who go astray anyway because their eyes are fixed on the things of this world instead of on God. In the final portion of our study, then, let's accentuate the positive. Let's consider what we must do to make our home elsewhere.

The first attribute that we must develop is **TRUST**. Solomon famously advises this in Proverbs 3:5-6. We've already talked about the opposite, about the faithlessness that leads to second-guessing God. Here, though, we should focus on the simplicity of life that accompanies genuine faith.

Let's put it like this: There are many problems that accompany lying, but one of the most dramatic is that it is much more complicated to be deceitful than to tell the truth. We have to decide whether we're going to lie or not, what lie we're going to tell, and how to tie it in with all of our other lies. On the other hand, telling the truth requires very little thought at all. We tell the truth, and it automatically lines up with all the other truths we've told.

In the same way, friends, once we make trusting God or not into a decision, our lives get a whole lot more complicated. We have to decide whether we're going to trust Him in this situation, how much we're going to listen to the wisdom of the world if we decide not to, and so on. If all we do is put God first, though, that's simple. It's not necessarily easy, but it's simple. We figure out the right thing to do, we do it, and we trust Him to take care of the rest.

Second, we must lay up **TREASURE IN HEAVEN**. We see a slightly different version of Jesus' teaching on this in Luke 12:33-34. This too is fairly simple. Either our money belongs to us, or it belongs to God. If it belongs to us, we use it to try to make ourselves happy, and God gets the leftovers. If it belongs to God, we use it for godly goals, like providing for our family, contributing to the Lord's work, and helping the needy, and after we've done those things, we get the leftovers. In only one of those cases, though, do we get to keep the money we've spent. If we spend it on ourselves, all we get is possessions that wear out and perish. The money's gone. If we spend it on godly things, though, in addition to the satisfaction that comes from doing good and helping others, that's not money that we lose. It goes on to provide for us an eternal inheritance in heaven. We enjoy the rewards that come from righteousness here, but we anticipate with joy the even greater rewards that we will receive for our righteousness there.

Third, we need to be people who live with **INTEGRITY**. Paul points out one aspect of this in Ephesians 6:5-6. We've all worked with people who were two-faced. They would work like crazy when the boss was around, but when nobody was looking over their shoulders, they'd turn into the biggest slackers the world has ever seen. Christians can't be that way. God expects us to work just as hard when nobody's watching as when everybody is. We have to be the same.

We need to make sure that we show just as much integrity in our approach to God Himself. Here in the assembly, we're all about God. We're worshiping Him. We're praying to Him. We're studying from His word. That same devotion to the Lord must be evident in our lives the rest of the week. Sure, we have jobs. We have responsibilities. However, we need to carry out those jobs and responsibilities in the most godly way possible. In our free time, we need to be fascinated by the things of the spirit. We must pray throughout the week, not just for two hours on Sunday.

Friends, if we don't have any enthusiasm for the Lord outside of the church building, we are no different than the man who only works enthusiastically when his boss is watching. As long as we've got the other Christians fooled, we're good! When we live that way, we aren't truly people of integrity either. True integrity demands that God always must be foremost in our thoughts. Whether we are in church, at home, or on the job, He is always first.

Fourth, we must learn to **DESPISE THE SHAME**. The Hebrews writer applies this striking description to Jesus in Hebrews 12:2. We often think about the physical torment that Jesus endured during the last hours of His life, but as the Bible presents it, the emotional torment that He faced was just as powerful. His enemies didn't seek merely to kill

Him. They sought to shame Him. They paraded Him in a purple robe and a crown of thorns. They scourged Him publicly, in front of a whole crowd. Even when He was on the cross, they jeered at and insulted Him.

Jesus' response to this shaming was to despise it. He ignored it. He refused to let the contempt of others touch Him, because He knew He was doing the right thing. By contrast, for those who claim to be disciples of Jesus, we can be awfully sensitive to the possibility of shame. We can be deterred, for instance, from attempting to tell a co-worker about Jesus because we're afraid that we'll get a bad reputation if we do. Rather than despising the shame, we are ruled by it.

In response to that, I would offer two observations. First, whenever we get so stressed about about others' opinions of us, we need to remember that nobody else out there pays as much attention to us as we do. If we invite them to services and they aren't interested, in a week or two, they'll forget the whole thing ever happened. Even if people around us start to hate us because of our godliness, who cares? It wins the approval of God, and that's what matters.

Finally, if we want to make sure that this world is not our home, we must **DESIRE HEAVEN**. Look at the description of the patriarchs in Hebrews 11:16. This world was not their home because it wasn't good enough for them. They desired something better, and they could only find that something better in the eternal city of God.

When we think about it, though, this world isn't good enough for any of us. Is anyone here completely satisfied with everything they've experienced here? I'm not. My mother died. My daughter died. There have been plenty of good times in my life, but there has been plenty of pain and heartbreak too. And yet, when we are worldly, we fall into the trap of believing that our future here is going to be better than the past, that THIS time, the world isn't going to disappoint.

Brethren, that's ludicrous. This life will always have more sorrow to offer until, in the final sorrow, we die. Everyone who hopes in it will be disappointed. Only God won't disappoint. Only in Him can we find what we're looking for. Let's stop putting our trust in the things that won't satisfy and put it in the One who will.