

MESSAGE TRANSCRIPT //

STILL STANDING | LOVE & WAR

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Hi. Well, it is really, really good to be with you. And if you have a Bible, go ahead and grab it and find 1 John, chapter 2—1 John, chapter 2 is where we are going to be today.

I just want to welcome those of you who may be joining us online or wherever you may be tuning in from as well as everybody gathered across all of our campuses.

And as you are finding that passage, I've just got a couple of things to announce and celebrate campus wide. First of all I just want you to know that here very, very soon three of our campuses, we're going to be changing the names of those campuses to better reflect the geographic location that they are in and to kind of pave the way for future campuses we might want to launch, Lord willing.

So, I just want you all to be aware of this. Our North campus we're going to be changing the name of that campus to the Carmel campus. Our Northeast campus, which is going to be launching next year, we're changing that to Fishers. And then West, we're going to change that to Plainfield.

I just want to go ahead and acknowledge our West crowd right now. And I just want to formally apologize to you for this name change because I know so many of you love saying, West is best. And now you can't say that anymore. I don't really know what rhymes with Plainfield, so good luck with that.

Anyway, I just want you to know about those three campuses and their name change. Our Northwest campus, Downtown, and Midtown will keep those names the same but there is a whole set of reasons why we're changing the names of those three campuses to kind of set us up for the future. So, I just want you to be aware of it.

The other thing that I want you to know is that we have hired a campus pastor for our Fishers campus, which is going to be launching the first part of 2024, Chad and Katie Lunsford. I think we have a picture of them and their family. They are going to be launching that campus.

Chad and Katie, today, are actually at the Carmel campus and they are going to be in the lobby after the service. So, if you happen to be there, go up and introduce yourself and welcome them to our church and encourage them. If you have any interest at all in the



Fishers campus they are here to talk to you or if you know somebody who does if who is not there today you can go to tpcc.org/Fishers and get all of that information.

And then one last thing I want you to be aware of. This is related to our Midtown crew, guys we have started construction on your permanent home for Midtown. We will be moving you in to that the first half of 2024. So a lot to be excited about. God is on the move.

And if you're just now joining us, we are in this message series called *Love and War*. We're walking through this short little epistle (and an epistle is just a fancy word for letter) that is at the end of your New Testament called 1 John.

And I said this a couple of weeks ago in setting up this series, that most of the epistles in the New Testament are named for the geographic region that they were written to. What I mean by that is Ephesians is called Ephesians because it was written to the church in Ephesus. Galatians is called Galatians because it was written to the church in Galatia.

But here we've got an epistle that doesn't have a geographic name attached to it. And I think that part of the reason why is because John writes this generally to the church at large. He knew that all Christians everywhere across all time, including us today, would need what it is that he is writing.

And he's writing two primary things that we all need. John writes to give us assurance: assurance that we are loved, assurance of salvation. And he writes to bring conviction.

I said this a couple of weeks ago. There are some verses in 1 John, you read them and in the same sentence he offers us this incredible assurance as well as conviction. And both of those things, the tension between assurance and conviction, is what bring about transformation. That's actually one of the characteristics of John's writing, both in his epistles and in his gospel. John will often take two contrasting (or they seem contrasting) terms and he'll set them up and use them together.

Some examples of this would be sin and holiness, acceptance and forgiveness. Two of John's favorites are light and darkness. And that's why we are calling this series *Love and War*. John is the love disciple. He describes himself as the disciple that Jesus loved. He's the guy who wrote John 3:16, "For God so loved the world..." And yet, at the same time, he wants us to know that we are all in a war. And you cannot win a war that you are not aware of.

There is a spiritual element to this war, the principalities and powers of darkness in this present age. There is the tangible war that is in front of us that we see every single day.



And then there is the internal war that goes on in our bodies, that goes on in our minds and our conscience. And John wants us to know that we cannot win a war we are not aware of.

What I want you to get a picture of is that by the time he writes this epistle he's an old man. He's seen a lot in his life. He's been through a lot of battles of his own. And now he writes to us to give us assurance and conviction to face our own battles.

Now, as we come to 1 John, chapter 2, we're actually going to just study together three little verses—verses 15 through 17. But don't worry, I'm going to preach just as long. Alright? I could tell that you were worried. So 1 John, chapter 2, verses 15 through 17.

Let me just go ahead and say this. It's going to take me a while to set the table before we get into the text. I just want to go ahead and acknowledge that. So if you go, "Man, it seems like he's taking a long time to get into the text," the reason why is because it's taking me a long time to get into the text. And I want to just kind of set the table here.

Quite possibly these three verses that we're going to look at and study together today are some of the most misunderstood passages in all of the Bible. Not because they are hard to understand. When we read this, I don't think it is super hard to understand. It is super hard to know how to apply these three verses.

Now, I want to teach these three verses through two different sets of lenses. I want to go ahead and acknowledge right now that there may be somebody watching this, listening to this today, whether you're here physically or you're tuning in virtually online, for lack of a better term you would just call yourself a non-Christian. You're outside of the line of faith. You don't know that you believe in God. You don't know if you can trust the Bible.

But you're listening. You're open. You're on a spiritual journey. Maybe somebody invited you and you would put yourself in the category of non-Christian. I want to teach this passage through that set of lenses.

I also want to teach this passage through a set of lenses of a Christian. You have responded to Jesus, saved by grace through faith. Now you're in process making progress. And we're reading this passage through that set of lenses as well.

Whether you would call yourself a non-Christian or a Christian, it is easy to misapply what John writes. And when we do it has big implications for each. If you're a non-Christian it might keep you from giving your life to Jesus even more. If you're a Christian what it might do is it might alienate you or cause you to maybe let go some of your

convictions in the name of wanting to reach people. The implications are really, really huge.

Many of you know this if you've been in our church for a while. Roughly, a little over 20 years ago, in 2001, Lindsay and I moved to northern California to start a brand-new church. We were in our mid-twenties. We moved into an area right outside Sacramento. It was a parachute drop. We dropped into this community and we didn't know anybody. We got an apartment and we just started meeting people and we started a Bible study in our apartment. And out of that Bible study we were able to rent a movie theater and we started a church. One of the hardest things that I've ever done in my life.

I remember, we had moved to California. We'd been there about three months. We didn't know anybody. So we're just praying for friends. And our apartment complex had a swimming pool and a hot tub. So one night we went out to the hot tub and we were just kind of hanging out there, talking. And this other couple from the apartment complex walked up. We'd never met them before. They were roughly about our age. Maybe a little bit older. And they got in the hot tub with us.

We introduced ourselves and we were having this great conversation with them. And we thought, "Well, maybe they might friends." You know? So we were talking to them. And then he asked me what could potentially be the friendship ending question. He said, "What do you do?"

Always a loaded question for me as a pastor. And I'm not ashamed of it but I just know it's tricky ground. So I just looked back at him and I said, "I'm a pastor." And he was like, "Oh, really." And I said, "Yeah. And we just moved here and we're starting a church." I kid you not. Immediately his wife got very, very uncomfortable and she got out of the hot tub, dried off and left.

So then I said, "Well, what do you do for a living? And he said, "Well, I own and operate a book and music store that sells to the kind of things that you Christians hate." And that was Lindsay's cue to get out of the hot tub and dry off and leave.

So he and I are left in there, talking. And his whole body language changed. It was very, very clear that he had had some experiences—and he told me a few of them—some experiences in his past with Christians and with the church that had sort of put him on the defensive.

So his basic view of Christians and Christianity was that what we were about was what we were against. And it just kind of set us up to have this tense conversation.



That's one side of it. Then the other side of it is, if you are a Christian kind of approaching the world, it's essentially this question, "How do we hold on to our convictions? How do we remain orthodox in our beliefs and yet at the same time be winsome in this world? To be on mission.

Remember the Great Commission? Go and make disciples of all nations. We are to be on mission in this world. We are not just saved for ourselves, we're not the frozen chosen, but we are on mission with God to reach as many people as possible. How do we do that in a winsome way without watering down orthodox faith or our convictions?

I don't care who you are. That is a tension to manage. So, regardless of where you might be in either of those two groups, the one thing that we all have in common, regardless of our system of belief or lifestyle choices is that we are all in earthly human bodies stuck in this world here, and we're sort of saturated in this world.

As we look out across this world, which God created, by the way, we can see that there is so much to love about it. There is so much that we love in the world. And we're commanded in the Scriptures to love the world and have compassion upon it. And at the exact same time there is so much to guard against.

Here's the thing. The brokenness and the beauty of our world are intertwined. Everyday I can get up and look out and I can see glimpses of heaven in this world. And I know the promise that God created this world and He's coming back to redeem and restore this world. We call this the new heaven and the new earth. Therefore we love and we have compassion for it. I see glimpses of heaven every day. I also see glimpses of hell every day. And you do too.

So this just brings up all kinds of questions, all kinds of questions. How do we live out our faith? How do we draw a line between personal enjoyment and when does it cross the line into sin? How are we to live in the beautiful yet broken world without coming across, like my friend in the hot tub, as judgmental or condescending or holier than thou when you know just as much as I do when you call yourself a Christian... If we've been walking with Jesus 25 years or for five minutes, we still have sin struggles. So where do we call people out in sin and when do we confess our own sins?

When we look at the culture around us, what should a Christian's response be to Target? Should we boycott Target? Should we shop there? What should our response be in that?

It's pride month. This is right up in our face. So how should we respond? What should a Christian's response be? Should it be all of the way over to just loving and affirming everything that everybody does? Or should we hold onto our convictions and lovingly engage? What should our response be to all of this?



Can a pastor, hypothetically here, can a pastor get a tattoo? What if he got it in the Holy Land? Does that kind of cancel it out?

Where is the line on all of this? And for some of you this message is going to drive you crazy because you want these nice, clean, easy categories. And it's not to say that we can't do that. I'm going to try to be very, very clear about orthodox faith and conviction and what the gospel message is and isn't. At the same time there is some tension here for us to kind of manage.

1 Timothy, chapter 4, if you read the entirety of that chapter says that no created thing is bad, but our use of it makes it bad. And at the very end of that chapter, Paul offers this warning. He goes, "Hey, keep a close watch on how you live."

So this whole tension, these are all questions that are going to fit under the umbrella of these three little verses that John writes in his epistle. And there is so much at stake. I know so many people, their primary barrier to coming to Jesus is their experience with churches and Christians that have been condemning and judgmental of them, so it's keeping them from coming to faith.

And then on the other hand I've known lots and lots of Christians who in the name of trying to build bridges and love people where they are end up falling away from orthodox faith and eventually from Jesus.

So here are a couple of tensions that we need to be aware of.

Tension #1: Legalistic Christianity: We're saved by grace and _ _ _.

Tension number 1 is what we might just call legalistic Christianity. Legalistic Christianity, if I could just define it is, "Yeah, we're saved by grace and..." And there should be no *and*. We're saved by grace through the finished work of Jesus but oftentimes it seems too good to be true so we want to add something to it. So we're saved by grace and our morals. We're saved by grace and our behavior. We're saved by grace and a Bible study or our generosity or our politics. We're saved by grace and...

So we acknowledge our primary need for a Savior but then we're really not living that way or it's not getting translated that way. And I think that maybe for those of us who are kind of wired up a little more perfectionistic or we're high justice people or maybe we're the kind of person where there is no gray, it's either black or white, this can be particularly challenging for us.

And legalistic Christianity is toxic to the gospel. Because the gospel message, guys, is a standing that we have made possible through Jesus, not an achievement that we earn. It's super quiet in here. That's clap worthy right there. Alright. And if you are taking notes at all, you write that down. Your faith, the gospel message is a standing not an achievement.

What this does is it guards us from one of two extremes. The longer that you follow Jesus the more susceptible we can be to legalistic Christianity. And I speak as somebody who, at times, wrestles with it. We just want to add to faith. And it will inevitably lead to one of two conclusions. It will either lead to burn out or spiritual pride.

There is no way that you can fulfill all of the righteous requirements that God requires of us. That would actually be the law. You can find it in the Old Testament. It's quite extensive. Most of the time we kind of boil it down to the top ten, but it goes way beyond that. And Jesus even said... The law was not designed for you and me to fulfill. It's impossible. Jesus said, "If you break the law even in one place, you're guilty of breaking all of it." And that is just a statement to say that there is no way that you can fulfill it all.

So what is the purpose of the law? The purpose of the law is two things, primarily. The purpose of the law is a picture and it is a mirror. It is a picture of the holiness of God to help us to understand how far short we fall, and it is a mirror for us to recognize our need for a Savior.

If you're trying to justify yourself through your behavior, it will lead to tremendous cynicism and burn out because you'll never ever get there. Or, here's what oftentimes many of us do. We have a tendency to look around at the people immediately in our circle and we grade on a curve and we say, "Well, I'm not as good as some, but I'm not as bad as most." We kind of justify ourselves that way and what we end up doing is we're like that Pharisee in the New Testament, "God, thank You that I'm not like that man. Thank You that I'm not like those people." And we become modern day Pharisees.

Here's tension number 2:

Tension #2: Progressive Christianity: It's not a sin if you're following your heart, being true to yourself, and not hurting anyone.

Progressive Christianity. So maybe your thing isn't falling into legalism, maybe your thing is you are becoming too influenced by the culture around us. And progressive Christianity just refuses to call anything sin. It's not a sin if you are following your heart, being true to yourself, and not hurting anyone. This is the problem that had infiltrated the church in Corinth and what Paul writes so extensively to combat. And it's still a problem today.



So it's like this idea: In the name of trying to reach people for Jesus we're not going to call that a sin. What we need to do is properly define sin going back to 1 Timothy 4, where it says, "No created thing is bad, it's the use of it that makes it bad." So all sin is taking a good, created thing and making it ultimate. It's a short cut to fulfillment because we don't trust that God will fulfill us. So you take the Ten Commandments, you take any sin that's out there, you can boil it down to primarily to these three big categories: sex, money, and power.

Let's just use another word for power—accomplishment. Sex, money, and accomplishments recognizing that God is the author of all three of those things. Those things in and of themselves, in the proper context, are not bad. It's when we make them ultimate. It's Romans 1. Worshiping created things over Creator God. It's a short cut to fulfillment.

What we need to understand is that God is the designer and the author of those things and therefore He knows how they best operate. He knows how to maintain them. And He's actually given us an instruction manual for how to do so.

Back at Christmas I bought my wife this really sophisticated Italian coffee maker. I bought it for her, but I partake as well. It's actually easy to use, but it's a very complicated system. And it's actually a little intimidating at first. It's a big white box and there are all of these electronic things. You basically wake up in the morning, hit a little button, and it will make you a latte. It will make you a cappuccino. You just have to make sure the top half has enough coffee beans in it. It's incredible. You don't have to clean out the little coffee maker thing every day. It's incredible.

Here's the thing. We used it for about three months, didn't touch the thing, did no maintenance on it. After about three months in it started making really funny noises. And we were like, "Did you read the instruction manual?"

"No, I didn't read it."

And so we end up reading it and recognized that there are some things you need to do to maintain it, there are some things that you have to do to properly operate it. Things needed to be cleaned out once a week and every month or so it needed a full-on cleaning. But we were using it in such a way that it was going to lead to dysfunction.

That's one of the best ways I can think of it. When it comes to what the Bible calls sin, whether it's a sexual sin, whether it's a sin around money or power or accomplishment—we are just disregarding the Designer's instruction manual for it.

And I recognize that God has created these things for our joy and His glory. But when we don't trust that His way is best for us we kind of take a short cut to it, and that is called sin.

So we don't call people's sin out because we've moved beyond it and now we are looking down at their sin, that's what can create an unnecessary barrier for people. You've heard of the phrase love the sinner hate the sin. And that is not Biblical. We need to change it to love the sinner, hate my own sin and invite them to do the same. Not because we have moved beyond our sin, but because we are in just as desperate need of the grace of God as anyone else.

The most loving thing that you can do is to help someone see God's best for them rather than to just agree with the direction that they are already going.

I know the people in my life, the ones who love me the most... The ones who just agree with everything that I am doing—they want something. The ones who love me enough to stand up and are courageous enough to actually call me out on my junk, but they are wise enough and loving enough to do it with grace—I know that they are the ones who really love me.

You guys have heard me say this before. All truth and no grace—I can't hear you. But all grace and no truth—it won't change me. And the gospel message is grace and truth—those things in tension.

For some of you, you've got to self-apply right now, self-diagnose. Are you the kind of person who would lean more toward grace? Maybe you need to come back more toward truth. Are you the kind of person who leans more toward truth, maybe you need to come back more toward grace. And Jesus is the embodiment of both.

Hedonism // Moralism // Gospel

Some of you are wondering what this rope is behind me. This is kind of a tug of war for every single one of us, things right now in our lives some of us are kind of wrestling with. Maybe it's a tug of war with moralism; that we are saved by grace and our good behavior. But see, that is not the gospel message. You drive to far; you're falling outside of the scope of the gospel of grace and truth.

Others of us, it's a tug of war this way toward hedonism. And we obviously know that Christianity is not hedonism, but it also cannot be moralism. There is just going to be this tension in all of our lives.



So, I think that is the record for the longest set up ever to get into the text. Alright? I want to acknowledge that. With that entire set up let me read these three verses. Here's what John writes, verse 15:

"Do not love this world nor the things it offers you, for when you love the world, you do not have the love of the Father in you. For the world offers only a craving for physical pleasure, a craving for everything we see, and pride in our achievements and possessions." That's money and power. "These are not from the Father, but are from this world. And this world is fading away," another way to say this is it's all temporary, "along with everything that people crave. But anyone who does what pleases God will live forever." 1 John 2:15-17 (NLT)

Not hard to understand. Super hard to know how to apply. How do we apply it? How do we apply this as a non-Christian. What's your view of Christianity as you read this? It could be very, very easy to misapply. You read that and you're like, "Oh, Christians are supposed to hate the world." That's not what he says.

On the other side, Christians, are like, "Whoa, I'm not supposed to enjoy anything in this world. I'm just supposed to call people out..." That's not exactly what he says.

Let me just go ahead and acknowledge here that it can be a little bit confusing to hear John say we're not to love the world. Why? Because this is the same guy who wrote John 3:16, "For God so loved the world..." You're like, "John, have you changed your mind? John, did you hit your head. Which is it? Are we to love the world or are we to not love the world?"

See, in order to understand this passage accurately and apply it effectively, we need to understand what John means by the word *love* and what he means by the term *world* specifically, and even drawing the distinction between *world* and *worldliness*. This is really so crucial.

You know that words can be used in different senses. We all know that. So if I were to say to you, "I love my wife and kids," and then right after that I say, "I love pizza," you know that I'm using the word in a different sense. I don't love pizza with the same weight that I love my wife and kids.

The way that we use words is super important. Otherwise it can lead to massive misunderstanding. It reminds me of that *Calvin and Hobs* cartoon. Remember that old cartoon? Calvin is pretending like he is in a fighter plane and Hobs is behind him being the gunman. And he's the gunner. And he says, "Enemy planes at 2 o'clock." And Calvin is like, "Got it. What do we do until then?" Give it a minute, it will sink in. Alright?

So the way that we use words is like really, really important. It's critical to understand. So what does John mean by *love the world*? We know that what John writes in other places in Scripture and throughout the entire teaching of Scripture that we are to love the world, John 3:16, "For God so loved the world..." The verse that comes right after that, verse 17, doesn't get as much play. "God did not send His Son into the world to condemn, but to save."

If God didn't send Jesus into the world to condemn, then it's not our job to condemn either. But that doesn't mean that we let go of orthodox faith or our convictions. What does it mean to love the world? Well, we are to primarily recognize first and foremost that God is the Creator of this world. And there is so much in this world to love.

God sent Jesus to ransom and redeem. God has created every person in His image. Therefore, that means that there isn't another person that you look eyes with, whether they are a different generation, whether they have different politics, or whether they see the world very differently than you they still deserve dignity, value, and respect because they have the Imago Dei implanted in them. This has massive implications for how we treat one another and talk to one another regardless of our differences.

In Genesis, when God created the world, He prayed a prayer of benediction over the created world. Remember the benediction God prayed? He said, "This is good. This is so good."

The ultimate compliment that God could pay our human body is that He sent Jesus wrapped in one. There is no other belief system out there in which the divine wrapped themselves in human flesh. But Jesus did. When Jesus was crucified, and He was placed in a tomb, He didn't say, "Finally, I can be done with that filthy body," and He comes back in some different state. No, He actually wrapped Himself in that restored, resurrected, redeemed body.

He entered our material world and He will redeem it. He loved it so much. And so should we. Jesus looked upon the people how? Not with disdain, but in compassion as sheep without a shepherd. And so should we. The prayer on our lips should be, "God, break our hearts for what breaks Yours."

So what does John mean by verse 17. Look at it one more time. He says:

"Do not love this world nor the things it offers you," that's key to understanding how he means the terms, "for when you love the world, you do not have the love of the Father in you."

John is describing worldliness. And that's different than world. So we look at the world as sheep without a shepherd. We have compassion. We're on mission with God to reach people. And then there is worldliness. Here's the definition of worldliness:

Worldliness: system of thinking in which the material world and all it offers me is all there is and therefore becomes ultimate in value.

And both the hedonist and the moralist can be guilty of worldliness.

Here's how the hedonist is guilty of it. The hedonist says, "What I see, feel, taste, and experience is all there is, and so I'm going to live it up. I'm just going to take this short cut to fulfillment because I don't believe that God will come through on what He says He will do." This is what John is saying we should not love.

However, the moralist does this as well. The moralist says, "I believe in God. But really, when it comes down to where the rubber meets the road, how I live out my faith, it doesn't really seem that way. I'm still placing my faith and my hope in functional saviors."

So, we're saved by grace through faith but because we're moralists, we've got a functional bank account. How do you know your bank account has become your functional savior? When it drops below that imaginary amount and you start to panic. That's worship. You're saying, "Well, I've got to have enough to actually be okay."

How do you know...? One of the reasons politics are so divisive in our country is because it's our primary religion, whether you call yourself a Christian or not. If you find yourself getting so worked up over it, it's because somebody is messing with your functional savior—or your achievements or your fulfillment. Instead of making the gospel of grace the primary thing, a moralist uses the gospel of grace as the backstop and says, "Well, it's there. If I strike out, it's there, but I'm swinging at this life with everything else I've got." And John would say that's worldliness too.

Someone who is trying to satisfy themselves through hedonism will see the world only as ultimate.

Someone who is trying to justify themselves through moralism will see the world only as wicked.

And this is why the hedonist and the moralist both need Jesus. They both need to be saved because both make the world ultimate.

Guys, you can be religious and still be lost. This also explains, and I know that there are a number of you...

Let me speak to the non-Christians here. I've heard this from so many. One of the reasons keeping you from faith is because you've seen so many Christians who live a lifestyle that doesn't match what they say that they believe.

And you would say it this way, "Well, I know a lot of people who are not Christians, but they are more moral than many Christians I know." And you are like, "That keeps me from faith."

And I just want you to know that the gospel message explains that. The gospel message isn't that we are saved by God and have this right standing because we are more morale. The gospel of grace is that we are saved by grace through Jesus and because we are sinners we are never as good as our accurate theology should make us. Because everybody is made in the image of God that also means that if you're not a Christian, you are not as bad as your flawed theology makes you.

Christianity is not so much what we do, say, and believe as much as it is what God says about us. It is a standing, not an achievement. So does that mean that we... There's a faint clap over here. That's something you don't know whether to clap for or not because you're like, "I don't know what you just said."

I'm not trying to throw orthodox theology out the window. I'm not trying to throw convictions out the window. I'm saying that it's a standing before God. Jesus transfers His righteousness to us and now, because of that right standing, we live our lives out as a response, not to achieve but as an act of worship. It's a miracle! It's a miracle.

So that explains why a lot of non-Christians may be more moral than a lot of Christians you know because there are a lot of Christians who have a lot of stuff that needs to be cleaned up. And we are in process.

Here's the posture of a Christian. It's not, "I'm going to condemn and judge you because you don't live like me." No. The posture of a Christian should be, "It is a miracle that God has received me. I am saved by grace through faith. It is a miracle and you can have this miracle too. I am just one beggar telling another beggar where to find food."

So why does John say that we shouldn't be worldly. Well, primarily, in a nutshell, this world is fading away, it's passing away. One time Jesus addressed all of the worldly worries and concerns that are on our minds in Matthew, chapter 6.

Jesus knows what it is that we are wrestling with and He says these words. He says, "Don't worry about what you eat or drink or wear." He says, "The pagans run after those

things.” That’s another way of saying they make them ultimate. “Your heavenly Father knows you need them.” And then He says these words in verse 33:

“But seek,” what? “first” that’s an order thing. He goes, “Seek first, make it primary, his kingdom.” So a Christian’s primary aim, we’ll do it imperfectly, but our primary aim is to make ultimate God’s kingdom:

“...and his righteousness,” not ours, and then He says, “...all these things will be given to you as well.” Matthew 6:33 (NIV)

Guys, that’s it! That’s it. He says, “I want you to seek first My kingdom. I want you to have a proper understanding of who you are, who I am, and who the world is and I want you to see the world through the lens of His kingdom and righteousness, not through the lens of sin, which is a short cut to fulfillment on this temporary earth because you don’t trust that I will provide it.”

C.S. Lewis famously said this:

“Aim at heaven and you’ll get earth thrown in. Aim at earth and you’ll get neither.”

And then John goes on to explain this in verse 17—why we should not make the world ultimate. It is so, so practical. He goes:

“And this world is fading away,” it’s temporary. Those desires that you get wrapped up in, that thing that you think you need to find fulfillment is fading away. It is temporary. It is not eternal. “...along with everything that people crave.” Or desire, “ But anyone who does what pleases God will live forever.”

It’s just another way of saying, “Don’t trust the temporary to bring a permanent sense of fulfillment. It is a temporary thirst. Don’t try to quench it with temporary solutions.

The term literally means... Craving literally means over desire for something that is good. We can take any example. There is nothing wrong with food, eating to live is great. But we all know living to eat is not. What happens when you are living to eat? Well, you’re making it ultimate.

There is nothing wrong with money or earning money or making money. And some of you are really, really gifted at that. Money is not the root of all evil. It’s the love of it, which is another way of saying making it ultimate. So earning to live, nothing wrong with that. But living to earn is a little bit different of a thing.

There is nothing wrong with sex the way that God has designed it. Remember He's the creator of it. He offers us this owner's manual for it. Here's why sex is a big deal to God. It reflects the covenant relationship that He makes with His people. And so He says, "Save it between a man and a woman within the confines of marriage."

And by the way, it is a really, really good thing. God invented it. He invented the mechanics of it. He invented the pleasure of it. He doesn't get enough credit for that. God gets blamed for being a prude about this. and He's like, "Hey, wait a second guys. I designed it. I made it." Just thank God right now, "God, thank You so much for that gift. That's an incredible gift."

There is nothing wrong with it but when we take that desire and we make it ultimate... How do we do that? We make it part of our identity. We're like, "Oh, no. I've got to chase after it, I've got to fulfill it every time I have the urge. Or, I'm not fulfilled if I'm not having it. Or, I'm using it to medicate an emptiness inside." We're misusing it.

G. K. Chesterton said this:

"Every man who knocks on the door of a brothel is looking for God."

There is a spiritual element to it. Lust literally means an over desire for something that is good. So to live to eat, to live for sex, to live for money—that's worldliness. It's another way of saying, "I don't trust God to come through on what He says He will come through for. So I'm going to take matters into my own hands."

I'll give you one last C.S. Lewis quote. He said this as it relates to happiness:

"God cannot give us happiness and peace apart from Himself. It is not there. There is no such thing."

It's only when you see this world from the perspective of eternity that you will see it rightly. John says, "Everything that we see, everything that we touch, everything we experience is created by God, it is good, but it is fading away. It is temporary. So don't allow the temporary to rob you of the eternal. When all else fades away, make sure that your feet are standing on solid ground."

There is a lady by the name of Peggy Noonan and she wrote this article in Forbes Magazine decades ago. I really don't know where she is, faith wise, but she writes something so insightful here. She says:

I think we've lost the old knowledge that happiness is overrated—that, in a way, life is overrated... Our ancestors believed in two worlds, and understood this to be the

solitary, poor, or nasty... short one. We are the first generations of man that actually expected to find happiness here on earth, and our search for it has actually caused such unhappiness. The reason: If you do not believe in another, higher world around you, if you believe that this is your only chance at happiness... you are not disappointed when the world does not give you a measure of its riches, you are despairing.

Whenever I take my family to the beach in the summer... Have you ever walked into the ocean about ankle deep and you just stand there. And the sand is flush under your feet on relatively level ground, but as the waves wash in and wash back out, what happens? Well, the sand around the edges of your feet begins to wash away. And all you're doing is standing there and the ground begins to be somewhat unstable.

This is just the image that comes to my mind as I think about just an over focus, whether the side of the rope is more on the hedonist side or the moralist side, it's when we begin to focus too much on what is right in front of us. Really what John is trying to do is he's trying to lift our heads up to the eternal.

Guys, what would be true about your life five million years from now? Live for that. What will be true? "What will remain true about my life when all of this gives out and fades away?"

See, the truth is not in a set of beliefs. The truth is not in a set of behaviors. The truth is not in a set of feelings or propositions. The truth is in a person. His name is Jesus.

And today what He is offering is this great exchange. You just simply confess your sin and you give your sinfulness over to Him and He transfers His righteousness into your account. And it is from that standing that we begin to operate out of.

The truth of the gospel says you don't have to give way to hedonism and you don't have to rely on moralism regardless of who you are, you just come. You just come.

How does this practically get flushed out in our lives when we relate to a culture around us that can be so hostile to the things of God? Well, the way of Jesus. Jesus went on a rescue mission to ransom and redeem and restore a corrupt tax collector in a tree, an adulterous woman who hung out at wells. He looked at them with dignity and respect and He honored them and He had compassion and He loved them. And then what did He say as He departed from them? Go and sin no more.

Guys, it is possible to do both. This world will tell you you cannot but Jesus did and we must. And it is the invitation that is open to all of us.

So today we want to do that right now, regardless of whether you would fall into that first camp of a non-Christian or the other camp as a Christian. If you are a non-Christian maybe today you're ready to respond to that gospel, that Jesus becomes your mediator and advocate before a holy God. And if you're a Christian who has been relying too much on moralism, would you come back to the heart of the gospel message to recognize that it's not because of anything you can do or do do, it's what Jesus has done for you?

So it is with that prayer on our lips that we pray:

Father, we live in a contentious, divisive, hostile, broken, sinful world that we are all a part of. So, God, today I pray that we would understand what the heart of the gospel message is so that we don't get tripped up or confused by all of the mixed messages we get on a daily basis through our screens. Keep our eyes fixed upon You, God.

God, right now, if some of us are allowing the rope to get tugged a little too far toward the hedonistic side, the self-indulgent side because we honestly don't trust You, we don't take You enough at Your Word, God, may we bring that back to center today.

For others of us, we're allowing the rope to go too far to the moralist side, we're leaning too much on our behaviors and our morals and not enough upon the person of Jesus. May we bring that back to center and know that there is a watching world that is looking at us and we are ambassadors for You?

God, help us to live out of that standing that Jesus died for us to have. We're so grateful. We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.

