

Take the World but Give me Jesus

1 John 2:12-17

Exegetical Big Idea: The authentic Christians in Ephesus belong to Christ and therefore have everything. It is on the reality of this truth that John exhorts them not to love the world and its evil, passing desires.

Homiletical Big Idea: **Nothing chases away sin and its desires faster than beholding the glory of Jesus**

Fallen Condition Focus: Authentic Christians have warring desires with us all. We are not to give in to the desire of this world, and yet we too often do. We need a stronger desire than the desire of the things of this world, and that desire is the glory of Jesus.

Intro:

[I remember as a kid my favourite toy. Do you remember yours? There was this show about robots from space who lived on earth that could transform into everyday things like vehicles to disguise their identity. They were called “transformers”. Of course kids’ shows only exist for one purpose, to sell toys. And it worked on my parents! I had a lot of transformers. They expanded the show to have a spin off series of these robots that could transform into animals. Those were my favourite. I wanted all of them on the show and I had most of them. I spent hours transforming them and making them fight each other. And my brothers had a few as well but they never played transformers with me because I had more than they had and I always won the pretend battles. Well that was more than a few years ago, I can report with honesty that I don’t own any of those transformers today. Do you know why I don’t own any of them? It’s not that I lost them, or that they were taken from me. No in fact, I actually make more money now than I did as a kid, and if I wanted to I could go to the toy store and buy more. I don’t have them anymore because I don’t want them anymore. As I got older, other things took the place of importance in my life that those little toys once held. I realized that other things brought me more joy, and were worth pursuing, than those toys.]

You’ve heard a lot in this pulpit about killing sin in our lives. It’s essential for the Christian life. We’ve heard over the past few weeks, and we’ll hear it again today, that authentic Christians strive to do away with sin. But you know, just trying not to sin isn’t good enough. If we really want to see our desire for sin get smaller and smaller, then something needs to take the place of our greatest affection in our hearts. We need to realize that treasuring Jesus, and realizing what we have in him, is the best way to let go of the pleasures of this world. If we truly treasure Jesus more than anything, then like old childhood toys, our affection for sin will grow smaller and smaller.

**Nothing chases away sin and its desires faster than beholding the glory of Jesus**

**Verses 12-14: In Christ, we already have everything**

We’ve seen John’s writing style to be equal parts blunt truth and gentle affection. I think John, after just dishing out the reality of what hatred means in the life of a person, then turns and encourages his authentic brothers and sisters in a way of say “but I am sure of better things for you”.

John here in a very poetic kind of way addresses 3 different groups of people. He gives them specific encouragement in reminded them what they have in Christ. Now, in the end it’s clear that what John writes to each group is true of all of them. And therefore, though John writes specific things to specific groups, all Christians clam the truth of what John writes.

## Take the World but Give me Jesus

So I see three groups of people here, and each group corresponds not to age, but to spiritual maturity. Now there is some overlap between age and spiritual maturity just because the longer someone is a Christian, the older they get in age, that's just how it goes. It's impossible to have a spiritually mature young child. Of course that's why this analogy works.

Now John addresses each group twice, the children, the fathers, and then the youth. I think it's best to group the statements together.

John says of the children in verses 12 and 13 that their sins have been forgiven on account of his (that is Jesus') name, and that they have known the Father.

John is speaking to a group of new believers. Generally speaking, first and foremost in the minds of new believers is the reality of their sins forgiven in the name of Jesus. John also says that they "know the Father". Of Course Jesus says that nobody comes to the Father except through him. John encourages them in their new-found hope that Jesus is their sacrifice to take away their sins and through faith in Christ they know the true God of the universe. It's interesting that in verse 12 John puts the emphasis on the word "forgiven" and literally he writes "forgiven! Your sins are".

The joy, or "first love" of the new believer is generally reveling in the assurance that Jesus has taken away their sins as far as the east is from the west.

[It's the honeymoon phase! There is joy and celebration and not enough time has elapsed yet for true testing of their faith, as we will see in a moment.]

John then turns to the other end of the spectrum and encourages the fathers. By fathers John means believers who have been in Christ for a long time. He calls them fathers because have seen, and presumably taken part in, a few generations of believers coming to faith and serving in ministry. Remember that this letter was written likely after John is released from Patmos and John is an old man himself. Decades have passed since Christ's return to the Father and Paul has planted these churches. By now you have men and woman who have been through a lot, and have remained authentic at each step. John encourages them by bringing the focus on the eternal. John says the exact same thing twice that "you have known him who is from the beginning". We've heard this phrase before! John speak of Jesus as being from the beginning when he opens his letter to remind us that the eternal God of the universe has stepped into time. For the mature believer, who has been around a while and may not be able to do the things they once were able to physically, their crown of glory, their eternal reward, their victory, is closer to them than it ever has been. John implies here that they know him who is the eternal one, and that is where they themselves are heading.

And then John turns to the young men, or literally the "youth". He addresses them in verses 13 and 14. He calls them strong, because the Word of God dwells within them, and then twice repeats the phrase "because you have overcome the evil one. These are the Christians who are in the thick of things. They are not new converts, but have endured some hardships and tests. They are active in the ministry of the gospel in one way or another. This is probably the largest group. Note John calls them strong in verse 14. But look also that they are not strong in and of themselves. They are strong because "the Word of God lives in you". They know the Word of God, they live out the Word of God, they are empowered by the Word of God, and they joyfully obey the Word of God. That's what makes them strong, the Word of God that lives in them.

## Take the World but Give me Jesus

And not only are they strong, but they have victory over the evil one. And this is a very profound statement that John makes here. It's that weird verb tense that Greek has that you've heard Mike point out a number of times. It's that verb tense that means an action that happened in the past, but the result of that action, the ramifications of it are still felt in the present.

[English doesn't have anything like it but the best way I can explain it to you is if I tell you I got my drivers' license when I was 16. Now you know what I mean when I say that. What I mean is that the action in the past (getting my license) has lasting consequences in the future (I can still drive with it today).

John is reminding the people that victory over the evil one was an event that happened in the past with the death and resurrection of Jesus. He beat sin and death and secured victory for his people, and that action means that all Christians going forward have overcome the evil one and have the power of God in them to accomplish the tasks that he has called them to do.

So you see, it's not that what John says to each of these groups is for them only. It's not that the young Christians are the only ones to see God as Father and have their sins forgiven, and only the mature Christians tend to live in the light of eternity. But really all of these truths are equally present in each and every Christian, regardless of how you perceive them. The young Christian who trusted in Christ yesterday is every bit living in light of eternity as a mature believer that has trusted Christ for decades. And a mature believer is not *done* with his or her battle with the evil one at retirement age, but this battle (and assured victory don't forget) rages on until we are with Christ.

All believers, regardless of maturity and understanding, but all authentic believers in Jesus have: the forgiveness of sins by the grace of the Father in sending the Son to be the sacrifice for us. The assurance of a battle finished against sin and evil, the guidance of the Word of God, and the power of the Spirit to accomplish any ministry to the glory of God that he has given us to do, and the hope of eternity itself with the eternal one when we are finished on this earth.

In other words, we have it all.

The point of all this is an encouragement to the authentic Christians in these churches, that if they are in Christ, then they already have all they could ever want or need.

And this is important because of what is coming next.

If authentic Christian already have all they need, then they will less and less desire the things of this world.

### **Nothing chases away sin and its desires faster than beholding the glory of Jesus**

#### **Verses 15: We cannot let love for the world steal our love for God.**

We need to take a second and talk about that "the world" means. That familiar verse should come to mind "for God so *loved the world* that he gave his one and only Son that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have everlasting life". God loved the world, are we not also to love the world? Well in one sense yes! We saw last week that love for each other is a necessary result of loving Jesus. We ought to have concern for each other and for the lost. If God loves the world, we too, in the same sense should

## Take the World but Give me Jesus

love the world. So that's clearly not what John is talking about. The "world" here means the fleeting, selfish and evil desires that are contrary to God's commands, and which our sinful nature wants. John goes into details about what those are in the next verse. But that's what John means by the world.

There is a battle waging on in each authentic Christian. Our new nature that is hidden in Christ wants to love him and obey him, but our old nature will rear its ugly head and convince us to love its evil desires. Paul famously wrestles with this in Romans 7 when he says that he knows what is good to do but he lacks the desire to carry it out. And the good that he knows he wants to do, he doesn't do it. And on the flip side of that, the evil that he does not want to do in his heart of hearts, that he ends up doing. And then he says that it's the sinful nature inside of him, an authentic Christian, that is causing him to do this.

Though Christians have a great inheritance in the Lord, we still have temptations. We saw last week that the darkness is passing away and the true light is already shining. The destruction of the realm of sin has been declared. The Kingdom of God is here, and it is advancing against the gates of Hell, and hell cannot stand up to it. But even in this age of the Kingdom of God being built by Christ, it is not fully realized yet. Even though we have such a great inheritance in Christ, we are tempted by the things of the world.

John exhorts his dear friends to not let the love of the world push out their love of God. He's not saying that you will never sin again if you are an authentic Christian, but he is saying that if you let your sinful desires push out your love for God, then you don't know the love of God.

Do not let anything replace God as the most gratifying and glorious thing in your life. Whatever that thing is that replaces God, it can never actually do so.

[Alana and I had our anniversary last month. We didn't do anything big for it, but Alana did get a nice print to put up in our room, and we exchanged cards. Alana is always great at writing things in cards, she's always very thoughtful. Now when I open up and read that card, who do you think I turn to and thank after I read it? Do I give the card a hug and thank the card and walk around the house with the card and talk to the card and tell the card how much I love it? No that's ridiculous. The right response is to turn to my wife and thank her and give her a hug. The card is an expression of love from the one who wrote the card. The card itself isn't the point, it's that my wife was the one who wrote in it and gave it to me. To worship anything other than the God of creation is to worship creation itself.]

All of creation is an expression of love and glory of the one who created it! It's him that is worthy of worship, not his creation.

What an empty form of worship, to worship the *creation* rather than the *creator*, and yet that's the pull isn't it? You will either love the creator, or you will fall in love with the creation. The creation, unlike the creator, cannot give you what you are looking for. Instead, let's turn our eyes and hearts to the creator, and receive from him all that we are and all that we need.

Jesus says, you cannot serve two masters. Either you serve God or you serve the world. No middle group, there never is.

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Take the World but Give me Jesus

**Verse 16: The pleasures of sin are not from God, and are not good for us.**

Why do not love the pleasures of this world? Because they do not come from God, and if they do not come from God, they are not good for us.

John describes the desires of the world in three ways. Many commentators see these three categories as covering all the bases of sinful desires. The categories aren't perfectly distinct, they overlap, but the point is to show that nobody is free from this temptation.

First he talks about the cravings of sinful man. These are the cravings that come from within us. These are the desires that dwell within us all. Laziness, selfishness, pride, anger, or even gluttony. These sins you don't even need to act out! These can often be sins in your own mind!

John call the next one "lusts of the eyes". If the first group of sins is an assault from within our own hearts, these sins are an assault from the outside. Jealousy, lust, coveting what others have, stealing, adultery.

And then to top it all off, John says "the boasting of what he has and does" literally it means the arrogance of life. Thinking that you are better, more important, deserving more, have a higher value than someone else. Treating others as sub human to make you feel important.

What do all three of these have in common? They are all lies that claim we don't have enough already. All of these are lies that say that what God has for us is lacking, that he's holding back something good from us, and if we could just get that we'd be happy.

[When Joshua took the land of Israel in the Old Testament, he divided up the land into sections according to tribe. Each tribe got a parcel of land that belonged to them and their families. They could buy and sell land to each other within Israel, but after 50 years there came a year called the year of jubilee. During this year, debts were forgiven, Israelite slaves were freed, and any land that was bought or sold to a fellow Israelite returned to their original family. This way, there would always be the same portions of land given out to each tribe every 50 years. The land was the inheritance of the tribes, and God gave these laws to make sure no tribe would eventually own the whole land of Israel. There was one tribe however that never got a piece of land. Remember which tribe that was? The tribe of Levi. That's because the tribe of Levi were set apart by God to be the priests in the tabernacle and temple, and workers in the temple. And because they were set apart by God for a special purpose God, their inheritance was different. Listen to what their inheritance was in Deuteronomy 18 "They shall receive no inheritance among their fellow Israelites, the LORD is their inheritance, as he promised them". Did you catch that? They were not to love the things of this world because God himself was their inheritance. Of course they received food and resources from the other tribes but the point was that they were supposed to be different. They were supposed to be a testament to the goodness of God, and their willingness to give up everything to gain God. This was expanded to the whole nation of Israel by God calling them all a nation of priests, and it's no coincidence that in the New Testament Peter calls the Church a "nation of priests".]

Church, do not love this world of the things of this world because that's not our inheritance, God himself is our inheritance.

Take the World but Give me Jesus

The question we need to answer for ourselves church is “is God enough?” If he is all we have in this life, and the next, is that enough for us?

All of that doesn’t come from God, and if it’s not from God it is sub-par and inferior in every way imaginable. If you have all of these, and yet you do not have Jesus, you have nothing of value, and nothing that will satisfy.

And if you have the world, but not God, you have nothing

John records John the Baptist saying in testimony about Jesus “He must become greater, I must become less” Isn’t that the point of the Christians life? To testify to the greatness of Jesus! And the best way to do that is to get out of the way of his glory! It’s for our own good because:

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**Verse 17: This world is passing away, but Christ gives an eternal inheritance.**

This world, and all that it can offer will perish, because nothing lasts forever.

What’s the main reason why God’s people are commanded to not love the things of this world? Because they won’t last! God wants what is best for us, and the things of this world are not what is best for us.

The word here for “passing away” is the same word used back in verse 8 about the darkness. The realm of sin is going away, and what will be left is the glorious light of Jesus! You want to be among those who pass away into eternal separation from God with all your toys, or do you want an inheritance that can’t spoil or rot or be taken away? Anything that we amass in this world, however long it lasts, will eventually pass away with this age.

[The British are known for a lot of things, like fish and chips, big red double decker busses, Big Ben, the Beatles (if you’re into that). But one thing that they’re known for that I find just extremely fascinating is their massive stone castles all around their coasts. Some of them were built in the early 1<sup>st</sup> millennia, and some of them were built on sites of old Roman settlements, which of course were built many many years before that. So lots of these castles still stand today and you can visit them and walk in and on them. These things were built to last, and we humans are great at building things that are meant to last. Many of them have withstood canon fire, and even bombing from planes in World War II. But even though these impressive structures have survived a thousand years, they don’t look as new as I imagine they once did when they were first built. Those things were built with one purpose in mind, to last. But that is an impossible goal. It may take another 100 years or 1000 years or 5000 years, but eventually even those will crumble and fall.

But, says John, the man who does the will of God lives forever. In contrast to this world that will pass away, there is something that *won’t* pass away, and that is the person who does the will of God. Notice that there is no *thing* that lasts forever, but the *person* who will live forever. We are meant to be eternal beings, receiving our eternal life from God the only true eternal one. So why chase after finite things?

Why chase after sin, that is fleeting and will not satisfy? Why not instead chase after the glory of Jesus, since that is the only thing that will not pass away when this world and its desires do?

## Take the World but Give me Jesus

Eternal inheritance is found in obedience, because obedience as we have seen, is a sign that we are in Christ.

I end on this good news: look closely at the beginning of verse 17 with me. It says that not only will the world pass away, but what else will? Answer: its desires. The temptation to love the things of this world more than Jesus is going to pass away! That's good news!

So hold on! Take heart as you struggle to put to death the desire of your flesh. The desires of this world will win some days, but you can be sure Christian that those desires of the flesh that you wrestle with, and which every Christian wrestles with, which Paul wrestled with, will pass away with this world. Your desires will one day be fully for Jesus and his glory.

I can see now why John started this part off with the encouragement to the Christians of all levels of maturity that they already have all they need. They have the forgiveness of sins through Christ's sacrifice by the love and mercy of the Father. They have the strength of the Word of God and the Spirit to guide and battle against the evil one, and the assurance that that battle is won, and they have the hope of eternal life with the eternal one.

In other words, they have Jesus.

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