

Revelation: The Hope of the World

The Danger of Worldly Desires

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THE DANGER OF WORLDLY DESIRES Revelation 17-18

Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls came and said to me, "Come, I will show you the judgment of the great prostitute who is seated on many waters, with whom the kings of the earth have committed sexual immorality, and with the wine of whose sexual immorality the dwellers on earth have become drunk." And he carried me away in the Spirit into a wilderness, and I saw a woman sitting on a scarlet beast that was full of blasphemous names, and it had seven heads and ten horns. The woman was arrayed in purple and scarlet, and adorned with gold and jewels and pearls, holding in her hand a golden cup full of abominations and the impurities of her sexual immorality. And on her forehead was written a name of mystery: "Babylon the great, mother of prostitutes and of earth's abominations." And I saw the woman, drunk with the blood of the saints, the blood of the martyrs of Jesus.

When I saw her, I marveled greatly. But the angel said to me, "Why do you marvel? I will tell you the mystery of the woman, and of the beast with seven heads and ten horns that carries her. The beast that you saw was, and is not, and is about to rise from the bottomless pit and go to destruction. And the dwellers on earth whose names have not been written in the book of life from the foundation of the world will marvel to see the beast, because it was and is not and is to come. This calls for a mind with wisdom: the seven heads are seven mountains on which the woman is seated; they are also seven kings, five of whom have fallen, one is, the other has not yet come, and when he does come he must remain only a little while. As for the beast that was and is not, it is an eighth but it belongs to the seven, and it goes to destruction. And the ten horns that you saw are ten kings who have not yet received royal power, but they are to receive authority as kings for one hour, together with the beast. These are of one mind, and they hand over their power and authority to the beast. They will make war on the Lamb, and the Lamb will conquer them, for he is Lord of lords and King of kings, and those with him are called and chosen and faithful."

And the angel said to me, "The waters that you saw, where the prostitute is seated, are peoples and multitudes and nations and languages. And the ten horns that you saw, they and the beast will hate the prostitute. They will make her desolate and naked, and devour her flesh and burn her up with fire, for God has put it into their hearts to carry out his purpose by being of one mind and handing over their royal power to the beast, until the words of God are fulfilled. And the woman that you saw is the great city that has dominion over the kings of the earth."

After this I saw another angel coming down from heaven, having great authority, and the earth was made bright with his glory. And he called out with a mighty voice, "Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great! She has become a dwelling place for demons, a haunt for every unclean spirit, a haunt for every unclean bird, a haunt for every unclean and detestable beast. For all nations have drunk the wine of the passion of her sexual immorality, and the kings of the earth have committed immorality with her, and the merchants of the earth have grown rich from the power of her luxurious living."

Then I heard another voice from heaven saying, "Come out of her, my people, lest you take part in her sins, lest you share in her plagues; for her sins are heaped high as heaven, and God has remembered her iniquities. Pay her back as she herself has paid back others, and repay her double for her deeds; mix a double portion for her in the cup she mixed. As she glorified herself and lived in luxury, so give her a like measure of torment and mourning, since in her heart she says, 'I sit as a queen, I am no widow, and mourning I shall never see.' For this reason her plagues will come in a single day, death and mourning and famine, and she will be burned up with fire; for mighty is the Lord God who has judged her."

And the kings of the earth, who committed sexual immorality and lived in luxury with her, will weep and wail over her when they see the smoke of her burning. They will stand far off, in fear of her torment, and say, "Alas! Alas! You great city, you mighty city, Babylon! For in a single hour your judgment has come."

And the merchants of the earth weep and mourn for her, since no one buys their cargo anymore, cargo of gold, silver, jewels, pearls, fine linen, purple cloth, silk, scarlet cloth, all kinds of scented wood, all kinds of articles of ivory, all kinds of articles of costly wood, bronze, iron and marble, cinnamon, spice, incense, myrrh, frankincense, wine, oil, fine flour, wheat, cattle and sheep, horses and chariots, and slaves, that is, human souls.

"The fruit for which your soul longed has gone from you, and all your delicacies and your splendors are lost to you, never to be found again!"

The merchants of these wares, who gained wealth from her, will stand far off, in fear of her torment, weeping and mourning aloud, "Alas, alas, for the great city that was clothed in fine linen, in purple and scarlet, adorned with gold, with jewels, and with pearls! For in a single hour all this wealth has been laid waste."

And all shipmasters and seafaring men, sailors and all whose trade is on the sea, stood far off and cried out as they saw the smoke of her burning, "What city was like the great city?"

And they threw dust on their heads as they wept and mourned, crying out, "Alas, alas, for the great city where all who had ships at sea grew rich by her wealth! For in a single hour she has been laid waste. Rejoice over her, O heaven, and you saints and apostles and prophets, for God has given judgment for you against her!"

Then a mighty angel took up a stone like a great millstone and threw it into the sea, saying, "So will Babylon the great city be thrown down with violence, and will be found no more; and the sound of harpists and musicians, of flute players and trumpeters, will be heard in you no more, and a craftsman of any craft will be found in you no more, and the sound of the mill will be heard in you no more, and the light of a lamp will shine in you no more, and the voice of bridegroom and bride will be heard in you no more, for your merchants were the great ones of the earth, and all nations were deceived by your sorcery. And in her was found the blood of prophets and of saints, and of all who have been slain on earth." (Rev. 17:1-18:24)

If you have Bible and I hope you do, turn with me to Revelation 17. At the same time, I want to invite you to turn to one other passage as well, 1 John 2. It's just a few books before Revelation, so if you find Revelation 17, and then take a left, you'll go past Jude and then 3 John, then 2 John, and you'll come to 1 John. I want to invite you to turn to Chapter 2, 1 John 2. And I want to wait a moment to give you time to find it, and then to look up here.

My heart is really heavy today. In an excellent book entitled *Worldliness*, C.J. Mahaney says, "Today, the greatest challenge facing [Bible-believing] American [Christians] is not persecution from the world, but seduction by the world." Charles Spurgeon said in his day words that I'm convinced apply to our day. He said: "I believe that one reason why the church of God at this present moment has so little influence over the world is because the world has so much influence over the church." He said, "Put your finger on any prosperous page in the Church's history, and [you] will find a little marginal note [that says]: 'In this age [people] could readily see where the Church began and where the world ended.'"

The reality is we live in a day where you cannot tell where the world ends and the church begins. Study after study after study shows that our lifestyles as professing Christians look just like the world around us. We are just as materialistic, just as sexually immoral, and just as self-centered as the world.

Just as materialistic. Our spending patterns are strikingly similar to the world around us. Our giving patterns are strikingly similar to the world around us. Six percent of Bible-believing American Christians tithe. Six percent. And this is not just outside of us. This is us, in this room. We know from giving patterns here that the overwhelming majority of people in this room don't tithe. We spend our money on all the same things that the world spends money on. We're just as self-centered.

We're just as sexually immoral. The percentage of professing Christian men who view pornography is virtually the same as non-Christian men. Men all across this room have visited a pornographic site over the last week, the last month, or the last year. We in this room are just as likely to have sex outside of marriage—whether we're single or married, it doesn't matter. Sexual activity with someone who is not your spouse is almost just as common among professing Christians as it is among non-Christians in the world. And in marriages, we're just as likely to divorce as non-Christians. Just as likely. Some studies have even shown that divorce is more common among professing Christians than non-Christians. Other studies show that marital abuse is even just as common.

In parenting, the priorities of professing Christian parents for their kids look virtually identical to the priorities of non-Christian parents. We cart our kids all over town in the exact same way that non-Christian parents do, teaching our kids to be good at the things

this world says are most important, sports and entertainment. And it's not always what our kids are getting that's bad, but it's what our kids aren't getting that's bad. They spend hours in practices for this or that, hours in video games, hours in front of the TV, and minutes (at most) in the Word or in prayer with their moms and dads. And the effects are evident. Sixty to eighty percent of our kids will leave Christianity behind once they hit 18. Is this acceptable? Something's got to change.

We are living just like this world! We look just like this world! We, in this room, love this world, and 1 John 2:15 (underline it) says, "*Do not love the world or the things of the world...*" (1 Jn. 2:15). Period.

Now there are a lot of things this verse doesn't mean. It doesn't mean, "Don't love the people of this world." We know God loves the people of this world, John 3:16, so much that He gave His one and only Son to die for the people of this world. No, what John is saying here, commanding here is that we must not love the ways and practices of a world that is alienated from God and in so many ways against God. A world that goes on day-by-day with people gratifying themselves and indulging themselves and entertaining themselves and exalting themselves without regard for the character or commands of God.

John is saying, "The church should look different!" Very different. Our schedules should look different and our spending should look different and our marriages should look different. Our parenting, our purity, our possessions, our love, our lives should look different. Not for the sake of being different, but because we love God more than we love this world.

He says right after this, "*If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him*" (1 Jn. 2:15). And this is key. John says, "Worldliness is not ultimately a matter of externals." Okay, we just need to avoid this and do this and change this. No. Worldliness is a problem in our hearts. Listen to what he says next. "*For all that is in the world—the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life...*" These are things inside us, and John says they are "*not from the Father but from the world*" (1 Jn. 2:16). Then he closes with this warning. John says, "*The world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever*" (1 Jn. 2:17).

Now the reason I have us starting here today is because this is exactly what Revelation 17-18 is about. John—the same John who wrote these words—saw a vision, a picture of the world and its desires passing away. And he wrote it down for the church to see, to remind the church that this world and its ways are deceptive and dangerous and ultimately damning.

He's writing to churches and Christians who don't see this, who are being deceived by worldliness, to Christians whose lives were looking just like the rest of the world. And John is saying, "Don't love the world or the things in this world. They will destroy you." And this is a word we need to hear! We need to hear it desperately in this room. The Church at Brook Hills in comfortable, wealthy, and worldly Birmingham, Alabama, desperately needs to hear this word.

You say, "Well, we're not as worldly as some places, like San Francisco or New York or cities and communities like that in our country." Oh, the primary difference between this community and those communities is that we cover up our sinfulness with a dangerous and deceptive veneer or self-righteous religiosity that enables us to justify all kinds of worldliness. One article I read said divorce rates in the Bible belt for many years have been higher than the rest of the country.

Ladies and gentlemen, brothers and sisters, we are Laodicea in so many ways who this letter or Revelation was written to. Jesus says,

"I know your works: you are neither cold nor hot. Would that you were either cold or hot! So, because you are lukewarm and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of my mouth. For you say, I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing, not realizing you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked" (Rev. 3:15-17).

Oh, could this passage not have been written directly to contemporary American Christians. Enormously wealthy and proud of it, we think that most things are going well as we give ourselves blindly to worldly ways around us. These are strong words, but listen to the heart of God behind them. He says, *"I counsel you to buy from me gold refined by fire, so that you may be rich, and white garments so that you may clothe yourself and the shame of your nakedness may not be seen, and salve to anoint your eyes, so that you may see"* (Rev. 3:18). God says, "I want you to see the danger of the worldliness you are running after!"

He says, *"Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline, so be zealous and repent. Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me"* (Rev. 3:19-20). Hear the invitation of God to us this morning. "Repent! Repent! Repent! Turn from the ways of this world and experience the delight and satisfaction of fellowship with Me!"

So what I want to do today is to go simply, poignantly, and briefly through Revelation 17-18, which is basically a pictorial illustration of 1 John 2:15-17. Then I want to lead us into a time of extended prayer and confession and repentance all across this room. Of searching our hearts and seeing the subtle yet significant ways that worldliness is affecting our lives. This has been so humbling for me because I see worldliness is so many of my own thoughts and affections and practices. I'm not saying, "This is what's wrong with you." I'm saying, "This is what's wrong with me and with us, and we desperately need to address the danger of worldly desires in our hearts and to turn from them."

Now over to Revelation 17. You have heard this Word read, this vision of a prostitute on a beast. Two questions I want us to walk through quickly. What is going on in this passage? And what does it mean?

What Is Going On?

First, what is going on? This is a vision that an angel shows to John. Quick side note. Last week I mentioned that a symbolic understanding of the book of Revelation is grounded in a literal understanding of the first verse of Revelation, and some people turned to Revelation 1:1 and said, "I don't see how that verse is saying that this book is symbolic." And that's where I would encourage you, if you want to, to go back to the first sermon in this series where I walked through how Revelation 1:1 is tied uniquely to Daniel 2, where God gave Daniel a symbolic vision of how the kingdom of God would be established. What John is saying there in Revelation 1:1 is that this book is filled with visions and pictures that communicate truth through signs and symbols. I think there was a bit of confusion on that, so hopefully going back to that might bring a little clarification.

But here we have this vision, verse 1, of the great prostitute sitting on a scarlet beast. This vision is an expansion of what we saw last week in the bowls of God's wrath. In fact, the angel here who was holding the seven bowls is the one who reveals this, so this is tied directly to what we saw last week. Basically the picture revolves around two main characters and two main actions that take place.

An attractive woman who symbolizes worldly seduction...

Two main characters. First, there is an attractive woman who symbolizes worldly seduction. Now she may not seem attractive because she's sitting on a beast, but this introduction to her in verse 4—where she's "*arrayed in purple and scarlet, adorned with gold and jewels and pearls*"—and the image of a prostitute is intended to evoke a picture of seduction. She draws people to herself. Even John, in a sense, is awestruck by her in verse 6. He marvels at this vision. There's a lot going on behind that marveling, but at least part of it is how attractive this woman on the beast is.

Now she is clearly a symbol of worldly ways. John tells us in verse 18 that she is symbolic of the great city Babylon. We've seen Babylon once already back in Chapter 14, but here Babylon is much more prevalent as a picture of worldly desires and worldly wealth and worldly pleasure and worldly fame that virtually ignores God. This goes all the way back to the Tower of Babel in Genesis 11, where men and women tried to exalt themselves above God. The nation of Babylon in the Old Testament both seduced and then attacked and destroyed the people of God in Jerusalem. And now, here in Revelation, it's almost certainly a symbol of Rome and all its luxuries and all its pleasures and all its economic prosperity that was seducing the nations of the world, including the church and first-century Christians. In this way, Babylon stands for worldly ways throughout history that have pulled the world, and even the church, away from God.

The image of the prostitute, though it certainly includes sexual immorality, is not just about sexual immorality. Ultimately, this image of a prostitute is a symbol of infidelity. It's similar to imagery all across the Bible of God's people turning from him to run after the things of the world, like a husband who goes running after other women instead of faithfully loving his wife. It's powerful, poignant, gripping imagery symbolizing the tendency of all our hearts to leave our God to run after love for this world.

She is a symbol of idolatry. We run from the one true God to lesser gods in this world. Just like a man pays a prostitute for services, so we give our lives to the ways of this world in hope of personal pleasure and selfish gratification. She is a symbol of immorality. Holding in her hand a cup filled with all sorts of impurities, she is drunk on them.

Sitting on a beast that symbolizes worldly persecution.

So we have an attractive woman who symbolizes worldly seduction sitting on a beast that symbolizes worldly persecution. We've already seen this imagery of the beast back in Chapter 13, a symbol of government that functions as god, and a counterfeit god at that. So here we see the social and economic and societal ways of this world cooperating in conjunction with the state and the political structures in this world.

The beast has seven heads symbolizing seven mountains and seven kings as John explains in the middle of Chapter 17. Images of strength and power that some say refers to seven Roman emperors, other say refers to seven empires that have come or are to come in history leading up to the return of Christ. There's almost certainly a reference in some way here to Rome and its worldly authority during the first century that was being imposed in many ways upon first century Christians, including their persecution. Yet it might easily stand for states and empires to come throughout the world that impose similar persecution

upon believers, and it may stand for a nation or empire to come that will persecute Christians in similar ways before the second coming of Christ.

But the overall picture of seven—complete, seemingly perfect strength and worldly authority is also echoed by ten horns symbolizing ten kings. John says leaders in this world who lead this world astray, operating under the authority of Satan (the dragon) and his beast to persecute the people of God.

So you've got this twofold picture. I go back to C.J. Mahaney's quote: "Today, the greatest challenge facing [Bible-believing] American [Christians] is not persecution from the world, but seduction by the world." And you have them both here—seduction by the world (in the woman) and persecution from the world (in the beast). Both were working together for sure in this first century context in both persecuting Christians and at the same time luring them away into worldliness.

The woman is devoured by the beast.

Now, as this vision progresses, we see two particular actions take place. First, at the end of Chapter 17, the woman is devoured by the beast. In graphic imagery, the beast turns on the woman, makes her desolate, devours her flesh, and burns her with fire. The picture is of an ungodly world system literally turning on itself and destroying itself. This happens, John writes, according to the purpose of God. Revelation 17:17, "*...For God has put it into their hearts to carry out his purpose...*" (Rev. 17:17). According to the "words of God," this will happen. God's sovereignty again on display in the end of world history.

The woman disappears from the earth.

And because of this, ultimately the woman disappears from the earth. That's what Chapter 18 is all about. Babylon falls; we see the smoke of her burning. In Revelation 18:21, an angel takes a millstone and casts it into the sea, saying, "*So will Babylon the great city—remember, a symbol of worldly ways with seductive promises of pleasure and wealth—"be thrown down with violence, and will be found no more"*" (Rev. 18:21).

And this happens as a result of the judgment of God. Verse 20, again, much like last week, we see God praised because of His just judgment of this sinful, fallen world. Revelation 19:2, which we'll get to next week, says, "*[God's] judgments are true and just; [and] he has judged the great prostitute who corrupted the earth with her immorality*" (Rev. 19:2). In other words, the prostitute who symbolizes worldly seduction receives the punishment that she is due.

What Does This Mean?

What we learn about this world...

Now what does all this mean? And what does all this have to do with life in Birmingham, AL, today? Well, think about what we learn about this world in this vision. See what we learn about this world in this vision.

Ladies and gentlemen, brothers and sisters, this world is full of deceptive attractions. Part of what John marveled at in Chapter 17 was this alluring picture of what seemed like pleasure and strength and power, the appearance was enticing. And almost certainly, first century Christians would have looked at the strength of Rome and the luxuries of Rome and the pleasures of Rome and thought, "Is this so bad? Because this looks pretty good." In the

same way that twenty-first century Christians look at the wealth and the technology and the things around us and we think, "Are all these things so bad?"

Think, here in this text and then in our lives about the lures of this world. Sensual pleasures. Delicacies and splendors and music and dancing, seeming prosperity and sensual beauty, worldly delight. Is this not what entices us? Why else would we treat sex so casually, even in this room among professing Christians, whether we're married or single, sexually involved with people who are not our spouses, period? Or pleasing ourselves while we look at images?

Is this not why we treat marriage so flippantly? Because we've been lured into thinking that if our needs are no longer met, we can throw aside our spouse in search of newfound pleasure? Is this not why our parenting looks the same as the world around us? Because we desire for our kids the same things the world desires for their kids? Is this not why we don't tithe? Because we desire the stuff of this world far more than we desire sacrifice for needs in the body and around the world?

Sensual pleasures, exemplified by desires for material possessions. Our wealth is killing us. It's not that money or possessions are bad in and of themselves, but we have no idea the measure of which our money controls us. We are so attracted by more and better and bigger and nicer and newer and cooler. We save more than we need, storing up treasures in barns. We spend more than we have, piling up debt with our desires for things. Simplicity in material possessions seems monastic to us, and as a result, you can hardly tell the difference between our spending patterns and the spending patterns of non-religious neighbors around us. The lure of material possessions.

The promise of satisfaction in the things of this world. This is what drives the desire for pleasure and possessions: the promise that once I get this, once I do this, then I will be happy, or at least happier.

The promise of satisfaction, and the hope of security. Listen to the woman in Revelation 18:7: "*In her heart she says, 'I sit as a queen, I am no widow, and mourning I shall never see'*" (Rev. 18:7). With all the things of this world, she says, "I'm safe. I have no reason to worry." The same thing that the church at Laodicea was saying, "I am rich and have become wealthy, and I have need of nothing." We think that the greater the pleasure in this world, the nicer the possessions in this world, the more we will be satisfied, and the more we will be secure.

Or maybe from this statement in verse 7, it's the insatiable lust for power. Here's a prostitute claiming to be a queen, thinking she is mighty when she is not. This is the danger of worldliness. We climb the corporate ladder, we achieve the cultural success, and we think we have arrived. We have made it. Look at us. But we have no clue the depth of our true place and position.

And that's just it. At the root of all of this is the subtle lure of pride. Verse 7, "*...She glorified herself...*" (Rev. 18:7). That's it. That's the root. That's the theme that dominates these two chapters. She sees herself not just as a prostitute, but as a "*great prostitute*," Revelation 17:1. She's "*Babylon the great*," Revelation 17:5. She's "*the great city*," Revelation 17:18. "*Babylon the great*," Revelation 18:2. The "*great city*," Revelation 18:10, 16, 19. Whose "*merchants were the great ones of the earth*," Revelation 18:23. At the root of all these worldly desires is a priority on ourselves.

We live in a world that plays on this and appeals to this, with pleasures and possessions that promise satisfaction and security, the desire for power and the danger of pride. See in this text a world that is full of deceptive attractions.

And see a world that is headed to a definite conclusion. It's fallen, John sees. Though Rome is still standing around him, God says, "It is fallen." Though the power and prestige of our culture and our country and our world, brothers and sisters, stands today. It is fallen, guaranteed.

This world will be destroyed completely. Look at this list at the end of Chapter 18. One day, no more music, no more craft, no more work, no more light, no more joy, completely destroyed. And this world will be destroyed suddenly. Kings and merchants and seamen who profited from the ways of this world observe the fall of Babylon. They say with astonishment, "*In a single hour all this wealth has been laid waste*" (Rev. 18:17). "*In a single hour your judgment has come*" (Rev. 18:10).

This world and all its ways will be destroyed completely and suddenly, and this world will be destroyed eternally. Its pleasures will perish forever, verse 14, never to be found again. See this! Learn this! Realize this! This world is full of deceptive attractions, and they will all one day be destroyed. The pleasures and possessions of this world will one day be no more. They're going to burn up; their smoke will rise forever and ever. Satisfaction and security in the things of this world will not last! Don't build your life on these things!

What we learn about sin and Satan...

They're deceptive and dangerous, which leads to what we learn about sin and Satan. Sin is self-destructive and eventually damning. Is there any clearer picture of the self-destructive nature of sin than this woman being devoured by the beast upon which she sits? This world will eventually turn on itself, according to the purpose of God, and God will make clear that sin always destroys. Always. When you and I sin, when you and I follow after the ways of this world, we are like cows going to the slaughter.

Listen to the words of Proverbs 7 through the lens of Revelation 17. Listen to this description of a man going after a prostitute, and see a picture of our lives, running after the ways and the things of this world.

"For at the window of my house I have looked out through my lattice, and I have seen among the simple, I have perceived among the youths, a young man lacking sense, passing along the street near her corner, taking the road to her house in the twilight, in the evening, at the time of night and darkness. And behold, the woman meets him, dressed as a prostitute, wily of heart. She is loud and wayward; her feet do not stay at home; now in the street, now in the market, and at every corner she lies in wait. She seizes him and kisses him, and with bold face she says to him, "I had to offer sacrifices, and today I have paid my vows; so now I have come out to meet you, to seek you eagerly, and I have found you. I have spread my couch with coverings, colored linens from Egyptian linen; I have perfumed my bed with myrrh, aloes, and cinnamon. Come, let us take our fill of love till morning; let us delight ourselves with love. For my husband is not at home; he has gone on a long journey; he took a bag of money with him; at full moon he will come home."

With much seductive speech she persuades him; with her smooth talk she compels him. All at once he follows her, as an ox goes to the slaughter,

or as a stag is caught fast till an arrow pierces its liver; as a bird rushes into a snare; he does not know that it will cost him his life. And now, O sons, listen to me, and be attentive to the words of my mouth. Let not your heart turn aside to her ways; do not stray into her paths, for many a victim has she laid low, and all her slain are a mighty throng. Her house is the way to Sheol, going down to the chambers of death.” (Prov. 7:6-27)

Oh, hear the gracious warning of God. The ways of this world lead to death.

And behind them, there is an evil adversary, Satan, who is a destroyer and who knows he is inevitably doomed. His doom is all over this passage, and we will see the beast and the dragon dealt with in the chapters to come, but notice the correlation here. Satan knows he is doomed, and so he aims to deceive and destroy all that he can until he himself is destroyed.

What we learn about Jesus...

But in the middle of all this, see what we learn about Jesus. He is, Revelation 17:14, the conquering Lamb, the Lord of lords and King of kings, and by His overcoming grace, He calls us to be saved. Those with him, verse 14 says, are called and chosen.

Jesus calls us to himself, and for all who are in him, for Christians with His overcoming power, He calls us to be faithful. Revelation 18:4, talking about the woman, he says, “*Come out of her, my people, lest you take part in her sins, lest you share in her plagues*” (Rev. 18:4). God here is pictured as pleading for His people to turn from the ways of this world before it is too late. His judgment is coming on this world, so He calls His people out of this world. Not out of this world physically, but spiritually and ultimately to be set apart.

What we learn about our lives...

Which leads to what we learn about our lives. Clearly, this is abundantly clear in Revelation 17-18, and it’s the point of 1 John 2:15. “*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*” (1 Jn. 2:15).

Very clearly, love for the world and love for God cannot coexist. Here’s the way this works. It’s simple. Love for the world pushes out love for God. The more we love the things and the pleasures and the possessions and the pursuits of this world, the less we will love God. The more we nibble at the table of this world, at the things of this world, the more our hearts will be numb toward the love of God. Do we wonder why we don’t have a deeper hunger for God in our day? Isn’t it surely because our stomachs are full with the pleasures and possessions that we have partaken at the table of this world. The more we love this world, the less we love God.

And it works the other way, as well. Love for God pushes out love for the world. The more we love God, the more delight we have in God, the more we commune with God, the less we will love this world. The more we see God as infinite pleasure, and the more we see God as our supreme possessions, the less we will run after the pleasures and possessions of this world. The more we look to God as the sole source of our satisfaction and our security, the less we will look to this world for satisfaction and security.

Don’t miss this. The call to turn away from this world is not a call to a drab, dull, dreary life. The call to turn away from this world and to God is a call to delight that far surpasses anything and everything this world has to offer!

Remember what C.S. Lewis said:

"We are half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered to us, like an ignorant child who goes on making mud pies in the slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. We are far too easily pleased."

If you are turning aside from your spouse, if you are indulging in pornography, if you are casual with sex, if you think climbing the corporate ladder or achieving worldly aims (whether in your life or your child's life) is the end game, if you think a nicer car or a second home will make you happy... In all of these things, your problem is not that you desire pleasure too much; it's that you desire pleasure too little! You're playing with mud pies in a slum when infinite joy has been offered to you. Turn aside from the ways of this world. Throw aside the things of this world!

Every one of us has a choice. That's the point here. This is the point. There is no neutrality in this world. There is no riding the fence.

Two options. Either we can love the things of this world. If we do, let us know this: our pleasures will always be fleeting. The things that promise pleasure in this world will ultimately fade, guaranteed. Church, Christian, man, woman, student, teenager, please hear this: the pleasures of this world are fleeting. They look permanent, but they are passing away. They won't last.

If we love the things of this world, our pleasures will always be fleeting, and our destiny will be hell. If you love this world, it will pass away, and it will take you with it. You will not only lose true pleasure; you will lose your life. I don't know how else to say this more plainly. If you love this world, you will perish with this world.

So that is the first option: we can love the things of this world. Or, second option, we can love the God over this world. We can love the God who reigns supreme over this world. We can love the God who alone can satisfy in this world. And when we take this option, our pleasure will be unfading. There is pleasure in Him that far outweighs all the possessions this world could ever offer us. And we will know, that as we love the God over this world, our security will always be in heaven.

Here's what I want us to do. Don't start moving around and putting your things away. Just listen for a moment. There is no denying that we live in a day in which you cannot tell where the world ends and the church begins. Our lifestyles, in so many ways, look just like the lifestyles of our non-Christian neighbors. Just as materialistic, hedonistic, sensualistic, self-centered, sexually immoral, and the list goes on and on. And the Bible says, "No, the church should look different!" Your schedules, your spending, your marriages, your parenting, your purity, your possessions, your love, your lives should look different. Not for the sake of being different but because you love God and you don't love the ways and the things of this world.

So Jesus says to Laodicea, and I am convinced He says to us: "*Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline. So be earnest, and repent*" (Rev. 3:19).

Over the next few minutes, we're going to do something very different from what we normally do at this time. Matt's going to play in the background, and we're just going to have an extended time of prayer and confession and repentance. I want to invite you, all across this room, to search your hearts, to ask God to show you where you are desiring what the world desires, where you are living like the world lives. Some of those things may be obvious, and some may be not-so-obvious, but regardless, as the Lord reveals those

things in your own heart and life, I want to call us as a community this morning to repentance. To weep over sin, to be broken over sin, and to turn from sin.

That may involve you simply spending time in prayer and confession. Or, if you'd like, I want to invite many of you to come down here to the front, or to one of these places on the side, where you can kneel before the Lord in repentance. Obviously, you can spend time in confession at your seat, but I know that oftentimes it is good to physically move, to physically get on your knees before God, and to cry out for His grace to forgive and His strength to obey. So I want to invite some, maybe many of you, if you'd be willing, to just find a place where you can kneel before God in this room in confession and repentance.

You can do this alone, or you can do this together. Some of you need to turn to someone you know beside you and say, "Hey, I need to confess sin in my life, and I need you to pray for me." This is a very biblical thing to do—to confess your sins to each other, and to pray for one another. Especially if you have sinned against someone in this room, then during this time, go to them, and confess that, ask for their forgiveness, and maybe pray with that person. Or even if it's just something in your own life, I want to invite you ... We're a community of faith in this room, and we don't just confess our sins and repent individually. We do this in community, and this is a safe place to do that.

So I want to lead us into a time of repentance all across this room in different ways, whether that's praying there at your seat yourself, with someone, for someone, many kneeling before the Lord, maybe here at the front or elsewhere.

Let's repent, church. Jesus stands at the door and knocks. Let's open the doors of our hearts and our lives completely to him.

* NOTE: A list of additional resources to assist you in further study of the book of Revelation and eschatology are available as a PDF download at Radical.net/Revelation. Click on the "Materials" button under any message in the series for this and other weekly resources.

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