



MORRISON ZION EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

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October 27, 2013

Pentecost 23

Sermon Text: [1 John 2:15-17](#)

Pastor Randy Ott

First Lesson: [Joshua 7:1, 19-26](#)

Psalm of the Day: [Psalm 119b](#)

Second Lesson: [1 John 2:15-17](#)

Gospel Lesson: [Luke 18:18-27](#)

The Believer Grows in Christian Character Christians Serve God Above All Else

In Christ, our risen and ruling Savior, dear fellow redeemed:

"If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him." I just read that a little bit ago, right? It was the first verse of our Second Lesson. It comes from the apostle John in his first letter. But maybe the first verse you ever learned as a young Christian was also written by the Holy Spirit through the apostle John in John 3:16... *"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life."* So which is it? God loves the world? The Father doesn't love the world? What is going on? It's not making any sense, is it?

It's quite clear in what I read to you. It says, *"Don't love the world or the things in this world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him."* So what is going on? The thing you have to remember is that in Scripture God uses the word "world" in three different ways.

Sometimes he's talking about what he created. *"For in six days God created the world. On the seventh day he rested."* ([Exodus 20:11](#).) What he created.

Sometimes he's talking about the people in the world. *"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him..."* ([John 3:16](#)). He's not talking about fish that believe in him. He's talking about people, right?

But he also talks about the world as the domain or the place where the prince of darkness rules in Scripture. *"The world in this evil age in its form is passing away."* ([1 Corinthians 7:31](#).) He's talking about the things that are opposed to the will of God, the things that tempt and try to put a division between us and our God, the things that our sinful nature embraces, and the things that God says to stay away from. In that context, that's what the Lord means in this section of Scripture when he says "the world."

So why is John stressing this? Why is John, who is all about love, saying "don't love the world"? Last week we talked a little bit about 1 John. We talked about the air that was there of the Gnostics. They claimed to have a special knowledge that no one else had. They knew more than anyone else knew. Some of the things that every

generation knows more than the last. These guys were saying the apostles were fine, but “we know things they didn’t know.” One of the things they “knew”, that they taught people, was the material things... like your body is made of material things, things you can touch... those things are evil. Whereas God, who is Spirit, has no body or no material things, so Spirit is good. They taught material things are evil. So some of these people said that if material things are evil, then Jesus, who came down from heaven as God, never became flesh, never became material, because material is evil. They said he only appeared to look like a man or it looked like he had flesh but he didn’t really have flesh. Or they said, as a man named Serinthia said, that God came down and joined himself to flesh but then left that flesh before he suffered and died, because God can’t die.

Because they said all things material are evil, one of the things they did is physically beat themselves to put down the flesh that was evil. They punished the flesh that was evil. They did some of these things that were physically abusive to themselves because that was one of the things they were teaching.

But on the other side of that coin, they also taught that because your flesh itself is evil, what you do while you’re in the flesh is not morally right or wrong. So if they say certain things are no longer morally right or wrong, guess what your sinful nature is going to want to do. It’s going to want to do those things because it’s the body that’s evil, not what you do that is evil. That’s some of the special knowledge they claimed to have had from God.

That’s really weird. No one would ever say it doesn’t matter what you do, just do whatever you think is right. That is certainly not around yet today, is it? Gnosticism is around and alive and kicking right among us in the world all over the place, they just don’t call it Gnosticism. Now we just say to be tolerant of everything and if you decide it’s okay for you, then do it. One of the reasons John wrote his first letter to them was to tell them you can’t buy into that.

Last week we saw how he stressed I know, I know, I know to fight that false teaching. This time he is saying, “Don’t buy into this lie, what your sinful nature wants to eat up that says it doesn’t matter whatever you do, that’s neither good nor bad before God. God has said that certain things are bad. Certain things are sins. Don’t do them.”

Then he lists some of them for us. *“For all that is in the world—the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life—is not from the Father but is from the world.”* What do those phrases mean?

The desires of the flesh, the cravings of the flesh, the things that our sinful nature craves and tells us this is going to bring us happiness and joy, in reality it’s something that every person really wants, right? Happiness, joy, it’s something we want. Every human being has this desire for life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. We said it in our government, right? The problem is that we don’t try to find happiness where God tells us to find it. Our sinful nature tells us there are other places where you are going

to find it. Then these cravings that are going to fill that happiness come. And sometimes the cravings that are going to make our life happy when we are facing things that aren't happy just make things even worse. Because we live in this sinful world, it becomes obvious we face a lot of heartache, a lot of difficulties, a lot of trouble.

What cravings of the flesh do a lot of people have that they try to satisfy when they're not feeling that happiness they'd like? Some of it's diluted by ice, right? It comes in a bottle and you pour it in a drink. Some cravings of the flesh that people go for to try to numb themselves to the pain of this world and to try to find some sort of happiness comes in pills, needles, something to alter our state of mind so that we can find something to maybe calm the pain that we feel in life. I suppose those parts are cravings of the flesh where people try to find happiness, but it's hollow. It's empty. It doesn't bring it. It just leads to worse and worse things. But that's where some people try to find it.

The desires of the eyes, that is literally the lust of the eyes. Trying to find happiness in things that God says are sexual sins is what a lot of people do, right? They chase after this and chase after that and say "It doesn't matter. It doesn't hurt anyone. It's just me, myself. How can it hurt anyone else if I have this affair? After all, God would want me to be happy. This makes me happy." This leads to even more problems and heartache. If you think that the lust of the eyes isn't where a lot of people go to find some kind of happiness or something in their life, then explain to me how pornography is a billion dollar industry in our country. Explain to me how you search for something on the internet and all of a sudden you found something that was not at all what you were looking for. It's all around us, right?

He also talks about the pride of life, another way that has been translated as the boasting of possessions. We try to find satisfaction in having more, having more money, wealth, power, influence over other people, and the things that make us think it will bring us happiness and joy. So we exercise power at times just for the sake of power because then it's all about me and I look more important and that makes me feel better because I have justified myself somehow in my own mind.

God talks about these three things... the cravings of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, the boasting of possessions or what we have and thinking that is going to fill this hole in our life. You probably can think of all kinds of people that do that. The question I have for you is, do you think it yourself at all? Or do we think that's just out there?

I know it's not just out there. I know some of these sins are among God's people too. They are there. But even if you aren't caught up in some kind of addiction or some kind of craving after wealth and things like that, even if you think you aren't doing all that, it becomes crystal clear that you and I do it when you start looking at it another way. God wants us to put him first above all else and live according to his desires, not according to our desires. He shows us our desires and says "Those are wrong. Do what I want you to do."

Ask yourself, when is the last time you thought your life would be better if only you were closer to God? How often do you think to yourself, my life would be better if only I had more money, or if only I had more influence at work, then everything would start getting better? It becomes obvious that we don't put God in front of everything else even if we aren't a meth-head. We still are falling short of what God wants us to do in this area. So don't spend all your time just throwing stones at the people like Achan, who messed this up. See where you mess it up. It's there. I guarantee you it's there.

Here's another way to think about it... What is our purpose on earth? Doesn't God put us here so that we come to know him, believe that Jesus lived and died in our place, so that we can spend eternity with him? Isn't that the will of God? Isn't that what he wants? That's his greatest desire, right? Yet you and I, I think we all buy into this at times, you and I at times focus only on what we see and forget about what we can't see. We focus on the here and now. We don't focus on forever.

What I mean is this... a saint of God, a believer in God dies young. We say, "What a tragedy because they are going to miss out on this, this, this and this." We list it all out. Doesn't that reveal that our eyes are all too often focused on the here and now? If I drop dead before this sermon is over, maybe you'll be happy, but I know I will be happy. I'll be with the Lord and, I'm sorry, I'm not knocking down the gates to come see any of you. I hope you all come see me eventually, but I'm not knocking down the gates to come back down here.

Do we have that attitude in life? Or do we think that's just an attitude for someone that's in their 80s or 90s? That's when you start thinking about "I desire to depart and be with the Lord, which is better by far." Or for a Christian, do we live saying "I'm an alien and a stranger here"? We sing it. "I'm but a stranger here and heaven is my home." But do we really mean it? Do we really think that way? Or are we at times just so often focused on the here and now that even thinking that way just gets weird and kind of creepy to us, like "You've got a death wish. What's wrong with you pastor?" Isn't that what God is telling us though?

If we're going to be Christians who have a First Commandment attitude, that I'm here to serve God above all else, isn't it his will that I want to put first? If he wants me to stay here for another 50 years, 100 years, whatever he wants, that's what I'll do, because his will comes first, not mine.

I can sin in the other direction, can't I? If the Lord wants me to stay here and I say "Lord, I want to go to heaven now. Why aren't you taking me now?" I'm still sinning against him because I'm not submitting to his will. I'm saying it's all about me and I know better than you Lord. That's where you and I mess up, isn't it? I don't think we should go around patting ourselves on the back because we don't commit the sins we see others do that we think are worse. I think we should just look and see where we don't put God first. That's where the rubber hits the road.

Put yourself in God's shoes. You are God. Just for a minute, pretend you are God. I know you want to do it all the time, but for a minute pretend you are God the way God is, not the way you think he should be. You sent your son, you yourself went into the world and became human for 33 years and lived with all the human frailties that we have, endured all of the attacks, endured everything he had to endure, even though he was true God from all eternity. You obey the law perfectly because you know they can't. Then you die because they are sinners and you aren't, but you still die for them anyhow. You willingly drank that cup and you suffer and die for their sins. Then you pour out the Spirit on them in Baptism, and in the Word, and in the Sacrament, and they piously say, "We believe. We believe. We believe. We love you Lord. We'll do anything. But we won't ever fall away from you" when they made their confirmation vow, and then you watch them during the week living as though you aren't around, doing the things they want to do, not the things you told them to do. You're God now. How would you feel?

If Randy (Pastor Ott) got to be God, he'd squash you all like a bug, spray the wiper juice and wipe you all off his windshield and start over with someone else. Be doggone thankful that I'm not God, right? Be happy we have a God that is so loving and so patient that he puts up with us, that he loves us perfectly, that he just can't wait to hear us say, "Lord, forgive me for the sake of Jesus," because he wants to just throw his arms around us and say "You are forgiven." A God who loves us so much that he gives us his very body and blood time and time again so he can say "This is the depth of my love for you. This is how much I want you to be united to me. This is how much I want you to be a part of my family. This is what I was willing to do."

Man, the love and patience of our God is amazing! And he's that way every day of the week, whether we are paying attention to it or not. If we focus on that truth and we think about it, then focusing on him and saying "Lord, I want to do what you want me to do. I want my eyes to focus on what you want me to focus on. Lord, help me so I don't focus only on what I want because we sure are prone to focus only on what I want. Help me to grow out of that. Help me to mature in the faith so even my service of you is not all about me, but it's about you." The Lord will bless us and answer those prayers because those are according to his will.

"Whoever does the will of God abides forever." We don't have to focus only on the here and now because we've got forever. So grow in that faith so that we focus a little more on forever and let it shape how we serve God here and now. Let it shape us and direct our actions in ways that are pleasing to God, not because we have to do that to get to heaven, but because he has already given us heaven. He's given us his love. He's given us his forgiveness. And he continues to give it to us day after day after day. Amen.