

1 JOHN

Part 4: “The End of the World”

1 John 2:15–17

By David A. Ritchie

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Scripture Reading

“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. 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. And the world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever” (1 John 2:15–17).

Introduction

In the gospel of John, the Apostle John describes a fascinating interaction between Jesus and Pontius Pilate.

Jewish religious leaders have recently captured and arrested Jesus in the darkness of night. They hold a corrupt kangaroo court and charge and condemn Jesus of blasphemy against God. However, because the Roman Empire is in charge, they cannot punish Jesus the way they would like. So, they concoct a plan wherein they will arrange for Rome to do their dirty work.

So, they bring Jesus beaten and bound to Pilate, who at the time serves as the Roman governor over the region of Judea. What is the charge they levy against Jesus?

Treason.

They tell Pilate that Jesus is a revolutionary and a would-be insurrectionist [show **1Jesus Before Pilate**]. They warn that Jesus is gathering followers. They claim that, if left unchecked, he would make himself a king and rebel against the authority of Rome.

As loyal subjects of Caesar, the Jewish leaders must bring such a man before Pilate so that Pilate might make an example out of Jesus. You see, the Jewish leaders don't just want Jesus punished. They want Jesus eliminated and humiliated. They want Jesus dead.

But Pilate is a politically savvy man. History remembers Pilate as a rather brutal ruler, so he is no softy. However, upon meeting Jesus, he knows there is more to the story than

what the Jewish officials are saying. Pilate has seen plenty of zealots and political revolutionaries. However, something about Jesus makes Pilate suspect that Jesus isn't the insurrectionist type.

As his enemies accuse him, Jesus stands confidently but silently. He seems almost immune to intimidation and threats. When Pilate tells Jesus that he has the power to set him free or send him to death, Jesus simply tells Pilate that he has no authority that has not been given to him from above. Jesus's persona is so vastly different from the vast myriad of people Pilate has judged that he is amazed.

So, he cuts to the point. He asks Jesus, *“Is it true that you are the king of the Jews?”* Jesus doesn't deny the charge. Instead, he looks Pilate in the eyes and answers his question. He says, *“My kingdom is not of this world”* (John 18:36).

But what does Jesus mean by “kingdom of this world”?

For Pilate and for the Jewish leaders—and for virtually everyone else in the ancient society—when people heard words like “kings” and “kingdoms,” all they could imagine is *worldly* power. They thought of violent warlords like Alexander the Great and brutal empires like Rome.

But then Jesus came and defied all categories of worldly kings and kingdoms. He was the king who was born not in a palace but in a manger. He came proclaiming a kingdom that was not for the powerful but for those who were poor in spirit.

Standing before Pilate, Jesus is not interested in the petty political games of this world. He has come to completely alter the way we see the world and what it means to be God's people in this world.

Indeed, Jesus has not come to merely change the world. His life, death, and resurrection will mark **“The End of the World,”** as we know it, and the inauguration of a new kingdom and a new creation.

So, for the rest of our time today, we are going to explore the three short verses of our Scripture reading. And in so doing, we will get a deeper understanding of what John means when he uses the word “world” in this passage.

We're going to talk about **1.) The Definition of the World, 2.) The Desires of the World, and 3.) The Death of the World.**

Exposition

1) The Definition of the World

What does John mean when he uses the word “world” (κοσμος)? It's actually a tricky question because John uses the word “world” in different ways.

Sometimes John uses the word "world" in a positive way. For example, God so loved the world that he gave his only so that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life (John 3:16). Earlier in 1 John, John writes that Jesus's atoning sacrifice is for the whole world (1 John 2:2).

But it is also clear that in today's passage, the word "world" refers to something that is profoundly negative. It is something that the people of God are to separate from and beware of. In this text, "the world" is something irreversibly corrupt and broken, and it is seeking to corrupt and break us as well. Therefore, the world is something that we cannot love.

John writes, *"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 John 2:15).

Oftentimes when we think of evil, we think of evil as an individual problem. And that is true. Other times, we think of evil as something that is a spiritual problem. That is also true. But the Scriptural term "world" helps us understand that evil is also a cultural and corporate problem as well.

I've recently engaged the work of a scholar named Dr. Ryan Tafilowski, who has spent years studying Nazi Germany and specifically the German pastors and theologians who promoted and defended Adolf Hitler and the Nazi regime [show [2Nazi Church](#)].

It's absolutely haunting to see how many Germans and even German Christians were willing to get so swept away by the current of their political moment in such a way that they were willing to support and even participate in the blatant evil of Nazism. People, who would otherwise seem moral and upright, were somehow formed and malformed by the fears and forces of culture around into justifying violence, racism, tyranny, and even genocide.

Now, Nazism is admittedly an extreme example. But it is an extreme example that shows us a high-contrast example of what John is talking about when he talks about the world.

Here, the term **"The World"** refers to corporate, systemic evil within a sin-fractured creation. **"The World"** refers to the way sin is woven into the fabric of society and how sinful desire is often incentivized, normalized, and provoked through culture.

The world will often cause to see that which is good as evil and that which is evil as good. For example, it was once a worldly norm for people in our nation to enslave and own other people as property. There have been times in history and current societies in which women are abused and treated like second-class humans. There are places where kindness is viewed as weakness, and brutality is viewed as strength. There are cultures in which corruption is expected, and integrity is a liability.

This is the power of the world at work.

So too, in our own society, the sin of lust is enculturated throughout social media, marketing, fashion, and entertainment. In the same way, much of corporate business culture rewards and incentivizes unrestrained greed and workaholism. Especially in these latter years, the world seeks to keep us in a state of constant fear and outrage.

But here, Scripture has given us language to define the world so that we might have eyes to discern how the world is attempting to form us and those around us. We are to be mindful of the ways we could easily fall into the ways of the world by the information and entertainment we consume and the social norms we tolerate.

The world possesses immense power. It pulls us down to itself like gravity pulls us to the ground. But we must learn to resist the way the world seeks to form and conform us to itself. As the Apostle Paul says elsewhere, *“Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect”* (Rom 12:2).

We must learn to see the world for what it is so that we can be different than the world. How do we do this? First, we must question the world.

We must learn to

- *Where can I see the world at work around me?*
- *Is this habit or this perspective leading me to become a person that is more like Jesus or more like the world?*
- *If more people were to think like I think, speak like I speak, and act like I act, would our society look more like the kingdom of God, or is my life indistinguishable from the kingdoms of this world?*

2) The Desires of the World

God is not against our desires. In fact, God created us as desiring creatures.

But it is crucial to understand that not all our desires are good and noble. Some desires are intrinsically evil because they would lead to us hurting ourselves or others.

That means that some of our desires need to be redirected, and some desires need to be denied altogether.

The great North African theologian Augustine of Hippo famously described sin as disordered desires. For Augustine, our problem is not *that* we love; it is that we love the *wrong things* in the *wrong order*.

But the Apostle John shows us the world conspires against us to actively and intentionally bends our desires toward disorder and death. He writes, *“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” (1 John 2:16).

John describes the desires of the world as 1.) desires of the flesh, 2.) desires of the eyes, and 3.) the pride of life (or some translations say “the pride of possessions”).

For the sake of clarity, I will define desires of the flesh as “worldly pleasure,” desires of the eyes as “worldly perspective,” and pride of life as “worldly glory” [Show **Table 1**].

Desires of the flesh	Worldly pleasure
Desires of the eyes	Worldly perspective
Pride of life	Worldly glory

Table 1

Let's briefly tackle each of these one by one.

Firstly, desires of the flesh are simply desires for worldly *pleasure*. Eugene Peterson describes the desires of the flesh as “...*the corruption that sin has introduced into our very appetites.*” This includes an idolatrous craving for comfort, food, drink, sex, and sedation. It can also include the temptation to substance abuse and escapism into entertainment. It also encapsulates our hunger for power and control.

Desires of the eyes refer to worldly *perspective*. In other words, it is a vision of life or worldview that is completely unconnected from the reality of God. In our culture, desires of the eyes often manifest in unrestrained materialism, consumerism, and expressive individualism.

Now that that is a lot of *isms*, let me put it into simpler terms. It is shockingly easy to envision your ideal life as nothing more than some version of the American Dream in which God is completely unnecessary. Even Christians can functionally live for nothing more than material wealth and comfort. In fact, for many American Christians, the worship of Jesus has been reduced to nothing more than using Jesus as a stepping-stone that we use to acquire our true objects of worship, which are health, wealth, material prosperity, and power.

Lastly, the pride of life is another way of describing the desire for worldly *glory*. The pride of life is projecting your identity into the world so that the world can give you a sense of validation and worth. It comes from a need to be applauded by others and feel superior to others. At its root, it comes from a desire to fashion ourselves into our own little gods.

So again, we would do well to ask ourselves some hard questions as a result of this passage of Scripture:

- *What is the world teaching my heart to desire, and how can I redirect the love of my heart to that which is good, beautiful, and true?*
- *How is the world shaping my vision of life, and how can I learn to place my hope in the things that are eternal and unseen rather than the things of this world?*
- *Am I living for my own glory, or can I experience the greater joy of knowing God, abiding with God, and living for him?*

And there is a good reason to seriously ask these questions. By itself, the world will never make you truly happy. The world will never give you true joy. Chase it all you want, but it will leave you empty and craving for more.

To paraphrase Augustine, “*Our hearts are restless until they find their rest in the Lord.*” But the desires of the world will only end in death. And that leads us to our final point.

3) The Death of the World

In the mid-1800s, scientists formulated certain laws about energy and movement operating within our universe. These laws are known as the laws of thermodynamics. The second law of thermodynamics describes how all matter and energy in the universe is unraveling toward disorder and chaos.

This is a law of physics, but it is also a parable describing something true about spiritual reality. As John writes, “*And the world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever*” (1 John 2:17).

This sin-fractured world is spinning towards death and decay. And if we let it, the world will pull us toward that death as well. No matter how rational or justifiable the desires of the world *seem* to us, the desires of this world will lead us to destruction.

Again, I will offer another extreme example to illustrate how this works. One way we can see the world at work today is in the way the industries of advertising, fashion, and entertainment have seemingly co-conspired to create absurdly unrealistic expectations about beauty, particularly among women.

Many people have been conditioned by the world to desire a version of beauty that is not only unrealistic but oftentimes totally unhealthy. And sadly, that desire can grow so large that it manifests in the form of various eating disorders.

One of the more known and dangerous eating disorders is called *anorexia nervosa*, in which a person has a visceral fear of weight gain combined with a distorted perception of their own body. Many people who have suffered from anorexia are victims whose desires have been disordered by the world in such a way that it has endangered their very lives.

So too, all of us are tempted by various worldly desires that would eventually lead us to ruin if we were to allow them to do so. The desire to indulge our lustful impulses. The desire to find escape through alcohol, substance, or entertainment. Unrestrained professional ambition and the endless chase for "enough" wealth.

We can allow the world to convince us that these desires are all justifiable, rational, and safe. But if, as Proverbs says, "*There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way to death*" (Prov 14:12).

The world is passing away along with its desires. But Christ will return again to judge the world. He will right all that is wrong. He will heal all that is broken. And when Christ comes again—he will not just make things better—he will make all things new.

But in the here and now, the people of God are not to live according to the ways of this world. Rather, our lives are to be signposts that point those around us to the kingdom that is coming. We are to delight in God's will and walk in his ways to the glory of his name, knowing, in the words of the Apostle John, that the will of God abides forever.

C.S. Lewis penned his book *Mere Christianity* during the German air raids on London during World War 2. So, it is unsurprising that he would choose a wartime analogy to describe Christians' relationship with the world.

Because, in one sense, the world is still God's good creation. It is just God's good creation that has been fractured by sin. So Lewis invites us to see the world as a place that a rebel has invaded and then unleashed a reign of cruel tyranny and oppression.

But the true ruler has returned. He is preparing to reclaim his people and his kingdom for himself yet again. He is on the verge of restoring peace and justice and righting all that is wrong. And we have been given the privilege of not just witnessing the coming of his kingdom—we are called to be active participants in the work of our coming king.

Lewis writes, "*Enemy-occupied territory—that is what this world is. Christianity is the story of how the rightful king has landed, you might say landed in disguise, and is calling us all to take part in a great campaign of sabotage.*"¹

Conclusion

So, as Jesus stands before Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor has no idea who he really is [show [1Jesus Before Pilate](#) again]. He is so unlike the kings of this world. Yet, he is the true king, the king of all kings, the king before which every other king is a cheap parody and imitation.

¹ C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 45–46.

Jesus is the king who denied himself the desires of worldly pleasure and instead came to us as one who was poor and despised by men.

He is the king who denied all worldly power and instead came to us as one who is gentle and lowly.

He is the king who denied all worldly glory and instead glorified his Father in heaven.

He is the Suffering Servant whose kingdom would come not through conquest but by his own cross.

He is the one who would humble himself to the point of death, and that is why he deserves the name that is above all names.

As a man, he overcame the desires of the world that led to death. And as God, he overcame the power of death itself.

You see, the resurrection of Jesus is not just a miracle. It is the beginning of the world that is to come, the singularity of a new creation, a foretaste of the new heavens and the new earth.

And now, we, as the people of God, are called to live as emissaries of the new world that is coming in Christ. The church is to be a colony of heaven in the land of death.

As the Apostle Paul once said, *"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ, God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us"* (2 Cor 5:17–20a).

So, Redeemer Christian Church, may we have eyes to see the world for what it is. May we be given hearts that desire the kingdom above all else. May we be ambassadors of our future hope.

For this is the will of God, and the will of God will abide forever.

AMEN.

Discussion Questions for Gospel Community

1. *Read 1 John 2:15-17 out loud. Define the meaning of the word "world" in this passage. How do you see the world at work around you and in your culture?*
2. *What is the world training your heart to desire?*

3. *How is the world shaping your vision of life?*
4. *In what specific ways does the world tempt you to live for your own glory?*
5. *According to this passage, what is the ultimate destiny of this world? How should knowing this truth about the nature of the world shape the way Christians live today?*