

Place: Lurgan Baptist
24:10:2004

PRACTICAL CHRISTIANITY

Readings: 1 Jn 2:12-17 James 4:1-5

25. WORLDLINESS

It has been well said that the first call from God to a person is this question “Heaven or Hell?” One has to decide how he wants to spend eternity. He can spend it as a child of God and joint heir with Jesus Christ in the mansions of glory, or he can spend eternity forever lost in the blackness of darkness, cut from God and His grace in that terrible place where is weeping, wailing, and gnashing of teeth. Here then is the first question

“Heaven or Hell?” But once a person decides that at cost he wants to go to Heaven, a second question surfaces. “Heaven or Earth?” As Christians we have to decide which world we are going to live for. You see, its tragically possible for a person to have a saved soul and a lost life, to see one's whole life as a Christian go up in smoke as *“wood, hay, and stubble,”* at the Judgement Seat of Christ. (1 Cor 3:15) To be saved, but *“so as by fire.”* So let me ask you, which world are you living for ? “Heaven or Earth ?” Which disturbs you most ?

A soul lost in hell or a scratch on your new car ? Your missing the worship service or missing a days work ? A church not growing or your garden not growing ? Your Bible unopened or your newspaper unread ? Which disturbs you most ? Missing the Bible Class or your favourite T.V. soap ? The millions who don't Christ or your inability to keep you with your neighbours ? Your tithes decreasing or your income decreasing ? The cry of the masses for the Living Bread or your desire for another piece of pavlova ? My which disturbs us most ? Are you living for time instead of eternity ? For self rather than God ? Has worldliness infiltrated into our lives ? Some years ago musicians noticed that errand boys in certain parts of London, all whistled out of tune as they went about their daily work. It was talked about and someone suggested it was because the bells of Westminster were slightly out of tune. Something had gone wrong with the chimes and they were discordant.

The boys did not know that there was anything wrong with the peals and quite unconsciously they had copied their pitch. My is it not the same with us ? We tend to copy the people with whom we associate, we borrow thoughts from the books we read, we reflect the programmes that we watch. Almost unconsciously we become more like the world. Has worldliness infiltrated into your life ? Now the Greek word translated

“world,” is *“cosmos,”* which means *“a human society apart from God.”* It refers to the invisible spiritual system of evil. The whole system of things in this society of ours is Anti-Christ and Anti-God. So its very easy for us as believers to become like the Christians to whom James was writing. People who in their thinking, their speaking, their attitudes, their standards, their scheming, their selfish ambition revealed their affection for the world and their likeness to the world. You say, “what is worldliness ?” John Wesley says, “Anything that cools my love for

Christ is the world.” When James uses this phrase he just means “*society without God.*” My Satan is the Prince of this world, (Jn 14:30) the lost are the children of this world. (Lk 16:8) As the children of God we are in the world physically, but not of the world spiritually. (Jn 17:11-16) We are sent into the world to win others to Christ (Jn 17:18), but it is only as we maintain our separation from the world that we can serve others. Now I want to talk to you this about **Worldliness !**

(1) THE DANGER OF WORLDLINESS

There’s a story told of a Puritan who was out for a walk in the country with a friend. The friend noticed a very lovely flower at the side of the road and said, “*that’s a lovely flower.*” The Puritan replied, “*I have learned to call nothing lovely in this lost and sinful world.*” Now that is not James’s point of view. James would have agreed with Christ that this material world, is the creation of God and would have rejoiced in the beauty of it. No, James is thinking of society apart from God, people who live for this world and think little of the next world. Now the world system is committed to at least four major objectives.

1. Fortune

Money, the world system is driven by money, it thrives on materialism.

2. Fame

Another word for popularity. Fame is the longing to be known to be somebody in someone else’s eyes.

3. Power

That is having influence, maintaining control over individuals, groups, companies, whatever.

4. Pleasure

At its basic level, pleasure has to do with fulfilling one’s sensual desires. It’s the same mindset that’s behind the slogan, “*If it feels good do it.*” So you can see right away that worldliness is a tremendous danger to the Christian. First, there is “*the friendship of the world,*” (4:4) this results in being “*spotted,*” by the world, so that areas in our lives meet with the approval of the world. (1:27) Friendship leads to “*loving the world,*” (1 Jn 2:15) and this makes it easy “*to conform to the world.*” (Rom 12:2) The sad result of it all is being

“*condemned with the world,*” (1 Cor 11:32) our souls saved “*yet so as by fire.*” (1 Cor 3:11-15) (1) Now this danger can be seen,

(a) **IN THE LIGHT OF SCRIPTURE:**

Listen to the testimony of Paul, “*Be not conformed to this world, but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind.*” (Rom 12:2) Do you recall what John says ? “*Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him.*” (1 Jn 2:15) What about Christ as He prays to His Father in (Jn 17:16) ? “*They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world.*” My is there anything that damages the cause of Christ more than the world ? Its not so much open sin, open

denial, but worldliness that damages the cause of Christ. It is the love of the world, the cares of the world, the business of the world, the pleasures of the world, the desire to keep in with the world. Do you know what I'm talking about ? Does this strike a responsive chord in your Heart ? (1) As seen (a) but think of this danger as seen,

(b) IN THE LIVES OF SAINTS:

1. Think of Lot in the Old Testament:

An old English proverb says, “ *You can't have both the penny and the bun.* ” Lot wanted both. That's why “ *he pitched his tent toward Sodom.* ” (Gen 13:12) “ *Dwelt in Sodom,* ” and “ *sat in the gate of Sodom.* ”

(Gen 14:12, 19:1) He so identified himself with the ways of Sodom that whenever he eventually tried to speak about the things of the Lord to his family, he seemed as one who mocked. Now Lot became an Alderman, he was a V.I.P. in Sodom. He was President of the Whatsits and Secretary of the Whoozits and he may have said, “ *If old Abraham wants to live in tents, let him do it, I've got it made here in Sodom.* ” But he lost his testimony and his family in the process. Have you not discovered that if you allow the world to come between you and the Lord you will pay for it ? Have you never found out that there is a cost in worldliness ? 1.

2. Think of Demas in the New Testament:

Do you know what Paul said about him ? “ *Demas hath forsaken me having loved this present world, and is departed unto Thessalonica.* ” (2 Tim 4:10) He had no intention in ceasing to be a Christian, all he wanted was that he should no longer be an out and out Christian. What was it that enticed Demas back into the world ? Was it love of possessions ? John Bunyan in his Pilgrims Progress pictured Demas as the keeper of a silver mine at the hill Lucre. How many an earnest Christian has been ruined through riches ! Was it love of pleasure ? Nothing wrong with fun and relaxation but it can run away with us if we are not careful. Was it love of popularity ? Many a believer has done wrong things, left undone right things, because of the fear of losing popularity. Maybe it was love of pride !

Something which is ugly in the Christian but which a worldly spirit will engender. What enticed Demas back into the world ? What has enticed you back into the world ? Materialism ! Sensual pleasure ! Fear of losing friends. What is it ? *What has made you turn your back on Christ to go back into the world ?* Oh, (1)

(2) THE DESCRIPTION OF WORLDLINESS

For did you notice that James gives us a three fold description of what worldliness is all about ? He says

(a) IT IS ADULTERY:

Look if you will at (4:4) The Amplified Bible says,

“ You are like unfaithful wives having illicit love affairs with the world and breaking your marriage vows to God.” A husband or wife made each other the vow they would be faithful to each other. As Christians we cannot love God and the world at the same time. To love the world is the same as having an affair with this world. It is being unfaithful to God. Now this opening phrase in

(4:4) is feminine in the Greek. Was James singling out only women here ? Are not men guilty too ? Well, I think that James uses the feminine because he was talking about the *“ bride,”* of Christ. Paul was thinking of the church as the *“ bride,”* of Christ when he wrote, *“ For I am jealous over you with godly jealousy, for I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ.”* (2 Cor 11:2) Now the Jewish Christians who read this letter would understand this picture of spiritual adultery, because the prophets, Ezekiel, Jeremiah, and Hosea used it when rebuking Judah for her sins. (Jer 3:1-5 Ezek 23:1 Hosea 1:1) Do you recall what God says through the prophet Jeremiah, *“ Turn O backsliding children saith the Lord, for I am married unto you.”* (Jer 3:14) What a beautiful picture of God’s relationship to Judah. But you see, by adopting the sinful ways of other nations, and by worshipping their gods, the nation of Judah committed adultery against her God. Are any of us guilty of spiritual adultery ? This is what worldliness, what backsliding is.

It is loving someone or something else more than the Lord Himself. (Rom 7:4) Did you ever watch a young couple in love ? Maybe they have just got married. See how they talk to each other, how they touch each other’s hands, how their eyes meet. Talk to them and they probably won’t even hear you. They are *“ spaced out.”* they are lost in each other. Do you recall when your heart was filled with love for Christ ? That was then, but what about now ? What is it that you love more than Him ? Having become friends with the world have you jumped into bed with other gods ? The god of materialism ? The god of popularity ? The god of pleasure ! (a)

(b) IT IS ANTAGONISM:

“ Know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God ?” (4:4) Do you know what one of the most terrible things that the Bible says about unsaved people ? Its this ! They cannot please God. Paul says, *“ the carnal mind is enmity against God they are in the flesh cannot please God.”* (Rom 8:7-8) My if you are unconverted, you cannot please God. Now you can please yourself, you can please the church, you can please the world, but you cannot please God, because your mind is hostile to God. And we were once like that.

(Col 1:21) But in God’s amazing grace that hostility of ours, with which we were born was overwhelmed in the death of Christ for *“ when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son.”*

(Rom 5:10) Now its against that background that James is saying, *that worldliness is going back in spirit to what we were before we were saved.* Its going back to the place where we were antagonistic to God. Its standing at Calvary uncommitted to Christ, fingering the nails, twisting the crown of thorns, handling the spear, passing a hammer to the Roman soldier. This is what worldliness is. Its antagonism to Christ.

Is that too strong ? Not according to Christ who said,

“ *No man can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will hold to the one and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon.* ” (matt 6:24) Not according to James who wrote, “ *whosoever the enemy of God.* ” (4:4) Do you recognise that worldliness is antagonism ? Do you realise that you are either a conformer or a transformer ? A conformer is controlled by the pressures from without, a transformer is controlled by the power from within. a b

(c) **IT IS AUDACITY:**

Where do we have that ? At the start of (4:5) ! Now it may well be that this phrase refers to what comes before rather than to what comes after. The force of the phrase would then be this, “ *Do you think that the Scriptures speak in an empty way, when they speak about spiritual adultery and enmity against God.* ” (Eph 5:14) You see, there may be a link between two phrases here. “ *Know ye not,* ” (4:4) and “ *do ye think.* ” They knew what the Scriptures said but they were taking a chance on God’s grace and goodness, or may be they were letting the Word of God go no further than their heads. Tell me, how do you treat Scripture ? How do you treat God’s Word ? Do you read it ? Daily ? Methodically ? Prayerfully ? Do you understand what it says ? Do you then go out and deliberately ignore it, disobey it, disregard it ! Well, that is audacity ! For you to come to the Scriptures and read them, understand them, and then go out and live as though they had not spoken at all is sheer audacity ! (1) (2)

(3) **THE DEFEAT OF WORLDLINESS**

How can we overcome the world ? This invisible spiritual system of evil ! John says, “ *this is the victory our faith.* ” (1 Jn 5:4) James says, “ *the spirit that dwelleth in us lusteth to envy.* ” Now this is one of the most difficult phrases in the whole of this letter. “ *the Spirit whom He caused to dwell in us yearns over us with a jealous love.* ” How can we defeat worldliness in our lives ?

(a) **REMEMBER GOD DOES INDWELL US:**

“ *the Spirit Whom He has caused to dwell in us.* ”

My what a glorious truth that is, and what possibilities it opens up, that if we are Christians at all,

however weak, unsatisfactory, young in the faith, the Holy Spirit of God actually does indwell us. (Rom 8:9)

“ *As soon as my all I ventured,* ” Paul was astonished that the Corinthian believers were ignorant of this fact. He says, “ *What ? Know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you.* ”

(1 Cor 6:19) My was this ignorance not the explanation of the sad failure, and the low level of their Christian experience. What about us ? Have we grasped this truth ? That God does indwell us ! (a)

(b) REMEMBER GOD DOES IMPLORE US:

“ The Spirit whom He has caused to dwell in us, jealously yearns for the entire devotion of the heart.”

My this is not the jealousy of selfish possessiveness, nor of carnal desire. There is a sinful jealousy but there is a rightful jealousy. This is the jealousy of loving concern. God says, *“ I the Lord thy God am a jealous God.”* (Exod 20:5 34:4) God is the jealous Lover of His people, who will brook no rival, who will share the human heart with no other love. My this is the jealousy of the God who loves you with an everlasting love, who was jealous for you the moment you first drew breath on this earth, who was jealous for you when you took those first conscious steps into sin, who was jealous for you when you rejected Him, who was jealous for your salvation. And my He is jealous for you now. Jealous lest you should be robbed by Satan, by sin, by stupidity. Jealous in case you should be robbed by worldliness, covetousness, prayerlessness ! The Lord is jealous that you should have that fullness of blessing, that He longs to give to each of His people. *“ The Spirit whom He has caused to dwell in us, jealousy yearns for the entire devotion of the heart.”*

My has the Lord got your heart ? All of it, in its entirety ? Or it is possible that your heart is wrapped up by the things of this world ? The Lord is challenging each of us this saying to us, *“ My son, give me thine heart ?”* (Prov 23:26) How will you respond ? *Remember you are not ruined by living in the world, but by the world living in you.*

