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What in the World?

John 17

“This world is not my home, I’m just a-passing through...”

Most of us remember those familiar words from this old gospel song. It goes on, “Lord, You know, I have no friend like You. If Heaven’s not my home, then Lord what will I do? The angels beckon me from heaven’s open door; and I can’t feel at home in this world any more”. This song poignantly speaks of a believer’s desire to go home to heaven to be with Christ. Later verses tell of loved ones who have gone on before and of the victory and rejoicing that takes place in heaven. It reminds of Paul’s teaching that **“our citizenship is in heaven”** (Philippians 3:20) and that we should **“set our minds on things above”** (Colossians 3:2). While we might certainly long for the peace, joy, and victory of heaven, we are left here on earth to face the trials, challenges, and difficulties of life in this world. While our hearts may be in heaven, Jesus has left us here in this world for a reason. **We will be more effective in living out our Christian lives and sharing the gospel with the lost by learning from Jesus’ descriptions of our relationship with the world found in His prayer in John 17.**

Remember the context of Jesus’ prayer here in John 17. He is with His disciples at the last supper only a few hours before His trial, crucifixion, and death. He is preparing them for the fact that He is leaving this world – leaving them behind. They are upset, distraught, and afraid, and in John 14-16 He is giving them wonderful words of encouragement and promises to encourage and sustain them. In John 17 He prays for them – and for us who will follow after. As we read Jesus’ prayer we see a word repeated over and over, indicating it is an important theme of this prayer. It is the word, “world”. Jesus uses the term 18 times in this prayer. Why is it such an emphasis? He is leaving the world. He is leaving them behind in the world. He is teaching them what their relationship with world will be.

What does Jesus mean when He speaks of “the world”? The term is used at least three different ways here and elsewhere in scripture. It may refer to the earth, to this planet (vs. 5, 15). It may refer to all people on in this world (vs. 21, 23). Or it may refer to the world system which is arranged, ordered, and organized in rebellion against God and His reign (vs. 6, 14, 16). You have to look at the context to determine which use is made. So what is Jesus teaching us about our relationship with the world?

We are Saved Out of the World – John 17:6

“I have manifested Your name to the men whom You gave Me out of the world; they were Yours and You gave them to Me, and they have kept Your word...”

Paul clearly describes our relationship with the world before and after we trust Christ. In Ephesians 2 Paul writes how we were **“dead in our trespasses and sins in which we formerly walked according to the course of this world...”** (Eph. 2:1-2) The good news is that **“God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus...”** (Eph. 2:4-6).

The world, made up off all those who rebel against God and reject Christ, are already under God’s judgment (John 3:17-18). But God sent Christ so suffer, die, and rise again that all those who believe in Him might be saved and delivered from that judgment. Paul says those who have trusted Christ have **been “rescued from the**

domain of darkness and transferred into His kingdom” (Col. 1:13).

We are In the World – John 17:11; 15

11 I am no longer in the world; and yet they themselves are in the world, and I come to You. Holy Father, keep them in Your name, the name which You have given Me, that they may be one even as We are.

15 I do not ask You to take them out of the world, but to keep them from the evil one.

This is rather obvious. Jesus has left His follower in this world. We have to work in the world’s businesses. Shop in the world’s stores. Eat in the world’s restaurants. Go to the world’s schools. The question is, why has Jesus left us here? The answer to that question a little later. While we are certainly in the world and take part in the world’s activities, what is our real relationship with the world?

We are Not of the World – John 17:14-16

14 I have given them Your word; and the world has hated them, because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. 15 I do not ask You to take them out of the world, but to keep them from the evil one. 16 They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world.

We often describe someone who is “of the world” or “worldly” in terms of outward actions. John in his 1st letter describes it in terms of a heart attitude – loving the world:

15 Do not love the world nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. 16 For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world. 17 The world is passing away, and also its lusts; but the one who does the will of God lives forever (1 John 2:15-17).

Jesus told us we cannot serve two masters (Matt. 6:24). James warned us that friendship with world is enmity with God (James 4:4). While we must be in the world, we must constantly strive to make sure we are not being of the world.

The World will Hate Us – John 17:14

14 “I have given them Your word; and the world has hated them, because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world.”

Jesus warns His disciples that the world is going to hate those who faithfully follow Him. He described this more fully earlier in the evening:

18 “If the world hates you, you know that it has hated Me before it hated you. 19 If you were of the world, the world would love its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, because of this the world hates you. 20 Remember the word that I said to you, ‘A slave is not greater than his master.’ If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you” John 15:18-20

Jesus warns us of the trials and persecution that is sure to come if we seek to follow Him and stand for Him and His Word as we are living in this world.

We Are Sent Into the World – John 17:18; 21

18 As You sent Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world.

Some of Jesus’ last word to His followers are similar: “Peace *be* with you; as the Father has sent Me, I also send you.” (John 20:21)

Why are we left in this world? Jesus has sent us on a mission. His original disciples faithfully fulfilled that mission. The fact that we are today following Christ is a testimony to their faithfulness.

What is our mission? Jesus describes it in His prayer: “...So that the world may believe that You sent Me” (vs. 21); “...So that the world may know that You sent Me” (vs. 23). We are sent into the world to share the Good News that God sent His Son to suffer and die for sin so that those who repent and place their trust in Christ might be saved!

- **Let us make sure we have been saved out of this world through repentance and faith in Christ?**
- **Let us strive not to love this world or the things that are in this world.**
- **Let us strive to fulfill the mission on which Jesus has sent us – to share the good news of the gospel.**

BIBLE STUDIES

Thursdays, 12:00 Noon

TREASURER 'S CONFERENCE ROOM

(EB 54 – Basement East Wing)