Introduction
Perhaps you remember a popular T.V. show that aired in the 80’s and 90’s called *Lifestyles of the Rich and Famous*, with Robin Leach. For those who haven’t heard of this show, perhaps you have heard of shows like *MTV Cribs* or VH1’s *The Fabulous Life*. These are all shows where normal people are given a chance to peer into a celebrity’s life where money is no object. And so we get to see amazing houses, exotic cars, private jet airplanes, multiple plasma T.V.s, private tennis courts, private bowling alleys, swimming pools with waterfalls, and the list could go on. These are shows where we are given a chance to meditate for about 30 minutes on everything we don’t have and a celebrity gets to boast in everything he has. Now I am not saying that watching these shows is inherently evil, but they can very easily become an opportunity for sin.

John warns us this morning about the sinful desires of the eyes and pride in possessions. Last week we heard about the benefits that we have as those who belong to God’s family. John reminded us that our sins are forgiven, that we know the Father and the Son, and that we have overcome the evil one. He goes on then in our passage this morning to warn us of worldliness. Even though John just got done speaking confidently of his children in the faith he realizes that he still must warn them about love for the world. As one commentator put it, “Christian people have entered into a great inheritance in the forgiveness of sins, fellowship with God and the conquest of the evil one, but their temptations have not come to an end.”

In other words we must not become overly confident. Let us take heed lest we fall. But as we heed John’s warning this morning we must remember what he just told us. We must remember that we fight the battle against worldliness knowing that the outcome of the war has already been decided. And so notice with me our theme this morning:

Theme: Overcoming Worldliness
1. The Heart of Worldliness
2. The Antidote to Worldliness

1. The Heart of Worldliness
In the first place, we need to ask what does John mean by the term “world”? Even the person who has little knowledge of the Bible knows John 3:16 where we read, “John 3:16 *God so loved the world, that he gave us his only Son.*” So in what sense is John using the term world in John 3:16 and in what sense is he using it here? The word world can mean a lot of things. One Greek lexicon gives the following meanings among others: “the universe” “life on earth” “the life of human society as organized under the power of evil.” It is this last meaning that John is using here.

Later John will speak of the world in the following way: *John 3:1* The reason why the world does not know us is that it did not know [Christ]. *John 3:13* Do not be surprised, brothers, that

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the world hates you. 1John 4:1 many false prophets have gone out into the world. 1John 4:3 This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you heard was coming and now is in the world already. 1John 5:19 We know that we are from God, and the whole world lies in the power of the evil one.

So according to John, the world is fallen humanity who hates Christ and hates Christians. The world is the realm of false prophets, antichrists and the evil one. The Christian has three great enemies: the world, the flesh and the devil, which are all mentioned within the space of 3 verses. The world is our flesh and everyone else’s flesh combined. It is fallen humanity as a whole, hostile to God, under the power of the devil. One commentator says, “John is thinking of the world insofar as it has become rebellious, the source of desires which stand in opposition to the love of God: anything in the world can become a source of sinful desire, even though it is good in itself.”3 And this last part is an important point to camp on.

One thing that John is NOT telling us is to hate the created order. C.S. Lewis was correct when he said, “God likes matter. . .He invented it.” If we take John to mean that we must hate the material world, then John would be telling us to do the very thing that the Gnostic false teachers were doing (and which John is condemning). Remember it was the false teachers who said that matter is evil. In fact, John says that God so loved the world that he sent his only Son in the flesh to redeem it.4

So we have to be careful that we don’t add to God’s law by forbidding things that John is not forbidding. To be specific, John is not forbidding, things like cigarettes, alcohol, playing cards, tattoos, piercings, movie theaters, television, and other assorted man-made laws.5 John isn’t so concerned about things outside of us, but desires within us, and anything in the world can become a source of sinful desire. In other words, food, clothing, shelter, children, a job, a successful church, anything can become a source of sinful desire. And so, the ultimate answer then to our real problem is not to eliminate these things, but to put to death our sinful desires. We need renewal within.

John gets to the heart of the matter in v. 16 when he says, 16 For all that is in the world— the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride in possessions—is not from the Father but is from the world.

He first speaks of, “the desires of the flesh.” This is the most general of the three things that John mentions. Here he is simply speaking of our fallen sin nature. The New Testament authors often use the term flesh in this way. It refers to our old corrupt nature that we were conceived and born in (Ps. 51:5). In Christ we have been forgiven of all of our sins and our guilt has been removed, but we still have to deal with this old sin nature. This is why John Owen wrote his book The Mortification of Sin and said things like, “When sin lets us alone we may let sin alone.” You see there is this corrupt nature that we must battle daily until we die or Christ returns. But

5 ibid., 1, 6.
we don’t battle in our own strength. We have been given the Holy Spirit to fight against the flesh.

Paul describes this battle in Galatians 5: *Gal. 5:16*  But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. 17 For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do. 18 But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law. 19 Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, 20 idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, 21 envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. Paul gives us a long list of what the desires of the flesh are.

John simplifies things for us and give us two of the most common examples: the desire of the eyes and pride in possessions. The desire of the eyes refers to the lust and covetousness that we experience when we see things that we don’t have. Some obvious Biblical examples would be: Eve’s desire for the forbidden fruit that appeared pleasing to the eyes (Gen. 3:6); Achan’s covetous sight of the forbidden spoil after Israel had defeated Jericho. (Job 7:21); David’s lustful looking after Bathsheba (2Sam. 11:2)

But the desire of the eyes is not merely what you see with the external eye. It is really anything you covet that you don’t have. For us today it could be just about anything: perfect children, perfect spouse, perfect house, perfect job, perfect figure, perfect car, perfect computer, perfect cell phone, perfect wine collection, perfect toys, perfect vacations, perfect income etc. Whatever you can think of that causes you sinful discontent is what John is speaking of.

And the question is not whether we have these desires, but which ones do we have and how can we expose them and put them to death? Tim Keller, in his book *Counterfeit Gods*, gives us a few questions that we might ask in order to discern these idols of our heart. What do your thoughts effortlessly go to when nothing else is demanding your attention? What do you enjoy daydreaming about? What occupies your mind when you have nothing else to think about? Do you develop potential scenarios about career advancement? Or material goods such as a dream home? Or a relationship with a particular person? One or two daydreams are no indication of idolatry. Ask rather, what do you habitually think about to get joy and comfort in the privacy of your heart?” These things that we covet in our hearts reveal to us the sinful desires that we must hate and put to death.

Secondly, John speaks of pride in possessions. Some translations say the pride of life while others have this idea of pride in possessions. John is more literally speaking of pride in possessions. He uses the same word that is translated as life or possessions elsewhere: *1John 3:17* But if anyone has the world’s goods (bios) and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God’s love abide in him? What John is referring to here is not the desire for things we don’t have but the sinful pride in what we do have. In other words, it is the desire to shine or outshine others whether it be luxurious living, ones superior status, ones perfect family, or any of the other things I already mentioned with reference to the desires of the eyes. The only difference is that you have these things and take sinful pride in them.
And it doesn’t take much for us to realize that we all struggle with this. How often do we sinfully show off our house, or our kids, or our car, or our jewelry or our iPod? Once again, not that there is anything inherently sinful about these possessions, nor do I think it is inherently sinful to give someone a tour of your house or to show someone what you got for your birthday. But we can so easily turn that which is good into an occasion for sinful pride. Rather, we should be humble and thankful to God for them because James 1:17 Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights. Well if this is the heart of worldliness, what is the antidote to worldliness so that we might overcome it?

2. The Antidote to Worldliness
John gives us two reasons why we should not love the world. First he says, 15 If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. 16 For all that is in the world . . .is not from the Father but is from the world. Love for the world and love for the Father are mutually exclusive.

This is similar to what our Lord Jesus told us in Matthew 6: Matt. 6:24 “No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money. James also speaks in this way: James 4:4 You adulterous people! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.

So the first reason we should not love the world is because love for the world is incompatible with love for God. Now before we move on to the second reason we need to note that John doesn’t just forbid us of things in our passage. The implication is that we are commanded to love the Father instead. And this is extremely important for us to recognize in our battle against worldliness.

A man by the name of Thomas Chalmers (1780-1847, Scottish divine and a leader of the Free Church of Scotland) once preached a sermon titled, “The Expulsive Power of A New Affection.” And his main point is that when we are trying to rid ourselves of old affections there is a power that comes when we consider a superior pleasure.

And this is what we must keep in mind in our battle against worldliness. Because the problem is not desires and pleasures in and of themselves. These things are unavoidable. We all desire happiness. We all desire comfort and security. But our desires become sinful when they settle on the wrong object. C.S. Lewis once said, “The problem is not that our desires are too strong, the problem is that our desires are too weak. We are far too easily pleased. We are like a little child who settles for making mud pies in a tiny sand box, when the beach is right down the street.” And so, in the spirit of John Piper, we need to be real hedonists, i.e. Christian hedonists.

The Bible calls us to pursue our pleasure in God. Psa. 16:11 You make known to me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore. God never gave us sinful desires, but he did give us desire. And ultimately we are to desire God.

Now this doesn’t happen in some mystical way. None of us here has immediate access to God. Rather, we enjoy God through means. On the Lord’s Day we enjoy him through the means of
grace, the preached word and the sacraments. During the week we enjoy God through food, relationships, even entertainment.

The question we need to ask ourselves is are we using God to enjoy the world or are we using the world to enjoy God? Paul said, **1Cor. 10:31** Whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God. The way that you use the world to enjoy God is by being thankful for the gifts he has given you and by being content with what you have. To be thankful for what you have is the opposite of boasting in what you have. To be content with what you have is the opposite of coveting what you don’t have.

And if you are going to boast, boast in Jesus Christ, because in him you have everything! He earned for you an inheritance that is of far more value than anything you could desire or anything you could boast of in this world. There are Christians in this world who possess nothing by the world’s standards and yet they possess everything because they have Christ and the future inheritance of heaven. And there are people in this world who possess everything by the world’s standards and yet they possess nothing because they don’t have Christ, and they will perish forever with their possessions in hell. Jesus said: **Matt. 16:26** For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his life? Peter tells us that our inheritance is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading (1Pet. 1:4)

Our inheritance is the opposite of the transience of the world, which is John’s second reason for why we should not love the world. Second he says, **17 And the world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever.** In other words, nobody buys stock in a company that is sure to go bankrupt. Nobody sets up house in a sinking ship. John doesn’t just say that the world will pass away. He says that the world is already passing away! When Jesus died and rose again it was the beginning of the end of this world and its desires. And it will pass away for good when Jesus returns. And so, to set your heart on this world is only asking for heartache and misery in the end. Beloved, “there is no future in worldliness.”

And the irony of it all is that the greatest inheritance that could ever be imagined is something that comes to us by grace alone. The celebrities who boast of all that they have on shows like Lifestyles of the Rich and Famous and MTV Cribs had to work for their mansions. But Jesus earned and builds our mansion of glory. Our Lord Jesus said, **John 14:2 In my Father’s house are many rooms. . .I go to prepare a place for you**

And we don’t deserve any of it. It’s given to us by grace alone. We deserve the opposite. We deserve to perish forever with the world. The fact is that outside of Christ, we all love the world, and even after we have come to Christ there is still much worldliness inside of us. Who is the one who does the will of God and abides forever? Can any one of us really stand up and say, I have done the will of God? Thanks be to God that there was a man who did the will of God and overcame the world: Jesus said, **John 6:38 For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will but the will of him who sent me. . .John 16:33 In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world.”**

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And we can receive His victory over the world as we look to him by faith alone. John later tells us, 1John 5:4 For everyone who has been born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith. 5 Who is it that overcomes the world except the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God? Beloved, are you weary of worldliness? Are you tired of the same old struggles? Are you afraid that you might perish with the world and its desires? Take heart, Christ overcame the world and died for your sins and now He represents you in heaven: 1John 2:1 if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous one. 2 He is the propitiation for our sins. The good news is that if you repent of your sins and look to Christ by faith, your sins are forgiven and you are not condemned with the world. And not only do you have an advocate in heaven, Christ has given you an advocate on earth, the Holy Spirit, who dwells within you. And John speaks of the Holy Spirit when he says, 1John 4:4 he who is in you is greater than he who is in the world.

Conclusion
You see, the Triune God has saved you from worldliness and he is preserving you from worldliness until Christ comes again to bring you into the world to come. He is bringing you to a world where there will be no more suffering or crying or pain, a world where there is fullness of joy and pleasures forevermore.

Beloved, what an abundantly rich inheritance awaits us! In Christ, you have been set free not to love the world. To love the world is absurd in light of the glory that awaits us. So do not love the world, love our Triune God and the world to come.
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Bibliography


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7 This bibliography represents the regular works consulted throughout this series though not always quoted in every sermon. Stott’s commentary I highly recommend as the best balance between technical and pastoral commentary.