

To God Alone Be The Glory

I like asking people if the weather has been hot enough for them lately. Their reaction tells me how well they like summer weather. I'm impressed by how many people love hot weather. If you listen to the news casters at weather-reporting time, you'd think that we're all supposed to comment or even complain about how hot it's been.

The thing about hot, humid weather is that it can kill people. According to TheGuardian.com (16 June 2020), heat now causes more deaths than hurricanes, tornadoes, or floods in most years. And when hot, humid weather isn't killing people, it can spawn heavy rains. Remember how wet last summer was? And this year eight states are suffering extreme or exceptional drought (drought.gov, July 1-7, 2020).

Do you think God could be sending us a message through all these weather episodes? But what could the message be? How can we interpret these signs from God? If only we had a way to break the code, some book from God by which we could look into his mind...

Hey! We do! We have the Bible, God's Word, God's message. Although it doesn't always help us explain every detail of our weather phenomena, it does help us know what's on God's mind. And therefore it can help us

interpret the signs around us, including the weather. Take, for instance, today's epistle lesson. *15Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. 16For everything in the world—the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does—comes not from the Father but from the world. 17The world and its desires pass away, but the man who does the will of God lives forever.* "Pastor, there was nothing in those verses about the weather." That's true. But if we understand these verses, we will also be able to process the meaning of our weather in a helpful way. Let's take a closer look.

15Do not love the world or anything in the world. "Pastor, that sounds like I'm not supposed to appreciate my home or my possessions. How could this be?" It will help if we remember how the apostle John uses the word "world." He's usually referring to the world as 'the world tainted by sin'—things yes, but also the people in the world. For instance, "*God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son*" (John 3:16). God didn't give his Son for the Grand Teton mountains or the corn fields of Minnesota. He gave his Son for the people in the world. He wants everyone to be saved through faith in Jesus, even unbelievers in the world.

“So, Pastor, when he says, ‘*Do not love the world,*’ I’m not supposed to love the unbelievers? How could this be?” It will help if we hear the whole verse. *15Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.* See how ‘love for the world’ is pitted against ‘love for the Lord’? John is trying to help us see that only one thing can hold our highest love.

Think of it this way. Let’s say you have a friend that you used to spend a lot of time with. But recently you have been spending a lot of time with a new friend. Your first friend asks, “Why do you hate me? What did I do wrong?” “Oh, there’s nothing wrong? I’ve just been spending time with this new friend?” “Well, may we do something together soon?” “I’m sorry, but I’m spending all my time with this new friend.” “Why don’t you like me anymore?” “Look, I still like you. I’m just spending my time with my new friend.”

Scenarios similar to this play out in real life again and again. They demonstrate what God is trying to teach us: there can be only one first place in every heart—at least one at a time. And those who aren’t first anymore don’t feel second, they feel hated. The fact is: we are all constantly choosing how we will spend our time, who or what we will pay

attention to, who or what we will love the most at this moment. This is what the apostle John is warning us about, and why unfavorable weather phenomena feel like warnings from God: *15Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.* You can’t give first place to the things of this world or the people of this world and still keep God in first place.

For example: I love my car. It has many features I wanted. I spent a year and a half picking it out and then watching for it to go on sale. But if my car got smashed up in a wreck, I’d say, “Oh, well,” and I’d go buy a different car. I learned this from my mother. She used to collect all kinds of decorative plates and figurines. The walls and the shelves of my childhood home were well populated with pretties. My mother kept them dusted, and she would tell us about their history and their meaning: it was a lesson in artistry. After supper we would have devotions, and the Bible passage one evening had the same message as our text. We children challenged Mom on her love for the things of the world, her pretties. She was ready. She said, “Yes, I love these things, but if my children were hungry, I’d sell my plates in a heartbeat.” Her God-given responsibilities were still her highest priority.

This is such an important lesson that it's taught repeatedly in the Bible. Jesus says in Matthew 6: 19*“Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. 20But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. 21For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”* If what you treasure is stolen or rusted or dries up in a drought or washes away in a flood or gets mangled in a car crash or has to be sold to fill hungry stomachs, you want to be able to say, “Well, I knew that the things of this world are temporary. I expected to have them for only a while. Now they're gone. I thank the Lord who allowed me to enjoy them for a few moments. But I still have the Lord, and more importantly, he still has me. Thank you, Jesus.”

The apostle Paul teaches this in 1 Corinthians 7. 29*What I mean, brothers, is that the time is short. From now on those who have wives should live as if they had none; 30those who mourn, as if they did not; those who are happy, as if they were not; those who buy something, as if it were not theirs to keep; 31those who use the things of the world, as if not engrossed in them. For this world in its present form is passing away. 32I would like you to be free from concern.* If we are free from these earthly concerns, we can better focus on

the Lord and on his ways of thinking about this life and eternal life. With the Lord first in our hearts, we can make use of the things of this world without becoming engrossed in them, without treating them like they are more important than Jesus or his Word.

The apostle Peter puts it this way (in 1 Peter 4): 1*Since Christ suffered in his body, arm yourselves also with the same attitude, because he who has suffered in his body is done with sin. 2As a result, he does not live the rest of his earthly life for evil human desires, but rather for the will of God. 7The end of all things is near. Therefore be clear minded and self-controlled so that you can pray.* Ah yes, so you can pray. Have you noticed that when you get engrossed in the things of this earthly life, your prayers become less frequent or less intense? See what ‘loving the world’ does to us?

John says: 16*Everything in the world—the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does—and we might add “the striving for good looks, beauty, a sculpted body, a positive self-image apart from God, the ‘likes’ on your postings, and so forth—comes not from the Father but from the world.* Do you see what people are trying to accomplish by these kinds of cravings? They are crying for significance. “Notice me. I’m here. Give me some

of your attention and love.” How much better to realize that we are significant because of how God treats us. He should send all of us world-loving sinners away from him forever. But instead he found a way to draw us close to him forever. He doesn’t want us to give up such a great treasure so quickly by loving the world.

For this reason we can benefit from a loss, or from witnessing others going through loss! Remember the strong winds or tornado that damaged Lake City last summer? I know of at least three of our member households whose property was damaged from tornadoes even before I came to Lake City. This tells me to expect tornadoes here. When tornadoes do damage, do you pray for the people whose homes or businesses were damaged? Do you also thank God that your home wasn’t damaged? Do you stop to think, “Someday a tornado or some other tragedy could hurt my home, or the people I love”? What if Lake City becomes a hot spot for COVID-19 and takes 15% of our people who are over 80, and 8% of our people in their 70s? Armed with Scripture, you can remind yourself of what John says: *17The world and its desires pass away.* This is a message we can take to heart from all the difficulties we have heard about or experienced ourselves. Everyone and everything that we can see is temporary. It is all slowly passing away. But eternity awaits, and everyone is going to spend eternity somewhere. We might as well spend it with Jesus.

This is why I say: what a blessing to go through loss ourselves! The book of James agrees: *1:2Consider it pure joy, my fellow believers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, 3because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. 4Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.*

17The world and its desires pass away, but the person who does the will of God lives forever. “Pastor, that sounds like I can be saved by what I do. How could this be?” It will help if we realize that this is just a statement of fact. “The sidewalk that gets rained on is wet.” The people who do the will of God live forever. Many other Bible verses assert that the path to eternal life is through faith alone in Jesus as Savior from sin. But the Bible also teaches that faith in Jesus is never alone. Those who have faith in Jesus LOVE THE LORD. They show their faith by caring about the will of God and doing it, as the Holy Spirit works in them through his Word. They live forever because God redeemed them through Jesus. Because God redeemed them, they do the will of God.

Don’t love the world or anything in the world more than you love God. LOVE THE LORD. LIVE FOREVER.