

3/27/19

I John 2:15-17

Sermon Series: Lord, I'm Tempted
Pastor Larry Lineberger
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"Trouble in River City"

"Friend, either you are closing your eyes to a situation you do not wish to acknowledge; Or you are not aware of the caliber of disaster indicated by the presence of a pool table in your community; Well, you got trouble, my friend, right here, I say, trouble right here in River City. That's trouble with a capital "T", and that rhymes with "P" and that stands for pool." Or maybe it should be an "F" and that stands for fool.

I guess we can call this a commentary on the text, offered by Meridith Wilson in the Broadway hit, The Music Man. Apologies to those who may not be familiar with this music. If you know the story and the song, you know it's about the huckster who comes to town and dupes the local yokels. And you understand that he is talking about more than pool tables. He is talking about the presence of temptation and the ability of smooth talking people to lead our hearts and lives astray. He is talking about the gullibility of human nature. He is talking about how easily we are duped into the believing things that are simply not true, and following the crowd like lemmings over a cliff.

John tells us that *if anyone loves the world, then the love of the Father is not in him.* Well, my friends, we are in trouble...with a capital "T" There is trouble right here in River City. There is big trouble, because you and I are in love with the world.

You can wear your Sunday clothes seven days a week, if you want. You can display your best "job interview personality" if you want. You can wear your most pious countenance, if you want. You can to put your best foot forward, if you want, but your other foot is where you really spend most of your time. You can live in denial, if you want. But the hard truth is that we are in love with the world. As the Music Man says, we regularly close our eyes to situations and realities that we do not wish to acknowledge. We really don't reflect on the caliber of disaster that we are flirting with when we believe the smooth-talking people who tell us that old-fashioned, biblical moralities and sensibilities are out-moded...that the good life is about having more, and more, and still more.

I suppose we need to be explicit about what John means by "the world". Christians are not to withdraw from and hate the world which is God's creation. He made all things well. Solomon and all his glory does not compare with the lily of the field. The earth is not of the devil...even all the stuff of the world that makes our lives comfortable, good

food, climate controlled homes, warm clothes, reliable transportation, all that stuff is not of the devil. *The earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof.* There is "the world" that is threatened with ecological disaster because of "the world" of which John is speaking,, the world which has forsaken the God who made it. The world which God loved enough to redeem it. The world and the stuff of the world is not the trouble. It is our grasping, greedy, insatiable love of all that stuff. We can't ever get enough! No matter how much we have, to quote another song, "*we can't get no satisfaction.*" That is the trouble. Trouble with a capital "T".

I think it is important to note that at the time John wrote, the Church may not have been popular, but it was not under persecution. Thus the temptation was to compromise with the world, to conform to the popular standards, to adjust their faith life so that the difference between church and world would be minimal. You fly under the radar. Live and let live. Don't make waves. you just blend in, so that you hardly know if your neighbor or your co-worker is a Christian or not. Do you? Or your neighbors and co-workers would hardly know if you were a Christian or not. Do they? Sound familiar? Applicable? Is John speaking to our culture?

When John speaks of the "desire of the flesh" ...or the "lust of the eye" he is not just talking about sexual sins. He is talking about life which is dominated by our senses. It is to be so discriminating, and perhaps gluttonous of food, extravagant regarding our clothing, so concerned about how we look..infatuated with upgrading our lifestyle, living in luxury without much concern, thought, or response to those living in want. It is saying, as we do, that "*the best things in life are free*" but living in a manner that says what we really value costs a lot of money.

John says that "*the world and its desires will pass away*". Do we have to be reminded of this? That we squander so much of lives on things that have no future, things that change and decay, things that will finally disappoint us.

As every preacher has said, one time or another, in one way or the other, "*You can't take it with you...I've never seen a hearse with a U-Haul attached.*" That's what we say, but there isn't much proof in our lives that we really believe it.

Yes, there is trouble in River City, trouble with a capital "T".

And about this time you are beginning to think, "*Well, preacher, are you just trying the make us feel guilty? Well, yes, as a matter of fact, I am. How am I doing?*"

I know I feel guilty. I know that I am in love with the world. The hymn writer asks, "*What Is the World to Me*" and I have to confess, "*It's a lot more than it ought to be.*" I don't know how anyone with any breath of God in him at all cannot feel some guilt. It's a real challenge for us...the temptation is so great... living as we do in this context of affluence and moral laxity... where guilt and shame are considered obsolete.

It always jars my mind to reflect on the fact that I live with more comforts, better food, more safety, a longer life expectancy, thanks to modern medicine, than anyone in the world prior to the 20th century...and most of the people in much of that century as well. What do you think John D. Rockefeller would have paid for an air-conditioned house? Or to have his child contract pneumonia and take him to a doctor and get some antibiotics and take him home with every assurance that in a few days he would be out playing again. What do you think someone living just a hundred years ago would say or think if they were able to walk into a Harris Teeter...with this wide array of delicacies, from all over the world, eating what we want, no matter the season.

And the guilt is not that we have all this and enjoy it. It is all God's blessing, and we should enjoy it and be grateful. The guilt is that we are still not satisfied! We still have this hunger for a little more, a little more of what he has or she has, stuff that we think is so important. This is what reveals the fact that we are in love with it! We are in love with the world.

Or, if like me, and many retirees, you don't especially want more, but you are scared to death of losing what you have. It's the same difference. We love the world.

There are **better things to love. Love justice. Love mercy. Love the Lord your God, and love your neighbor as yourself!**

I read a little quip recently noting that *older people read the Bible more than younger people. They are cramming for the final exam!* Well, whether young or old, you can cram all you want. I can tell you right now.. You are going to flunk it, just like me. We don't have a prayer of a chance. The lottery is a really good, safe bet..compared to this. As St. Paul reminds us, any good that we muster up, anything we might have to brag about, any flimsy comparisons we might make with others whom we deem to be worse than we are..it's all like garbage, filthiness. ***Our hope is built on nothing less than Jesus' blood and righteousness. His perfect life..His sacrificial death. The cross. The empty tomb. That's our only chance.*** And it's a solid bet. It is 100% guarantee. He says," *My grace is sufficient!*" It's all you need. He says, "*he who lives and believes in Me shall never die!!*

Wow! What a promise. .. by the One who never breaks his promises. Can we do anything but THANK, and PRAISE, SERVE AND OBEY!

Lord, help us to be content with what we have. Help us to withstand the temptations that confront us every day in our affluent, materialistic culture. Enable us to use our abundance in ways that glorify your Name, building your Kingdom and sharing with those who have so little. In Jesus Name, Amen.

