

Dancing on Titanic

Letters from John, Part 7

1 John 2:15-17

Today happens to be the 101st anniversary of the sailing of ship known as the “floating city”. It set sail on its maiden voyage from England to New York City on April 14th – today – 101 years ago.

It has since captured the imagination of every generation since – it was the most luxurious vessel ever conceived of and built by the ingenuity and opulence of mankind.

The Titanic was designed to be the last word in comfort and luxury, with an on-board gymnasium, swimming pool, libraries, high-class restaurants and opulent cherry trimmed guest rooms.

She was crafted with advanced safety features such as a double hull with 16 water tight compartments including remotely activated watertight doors – a powerful telegraph system for operations and the latest in Maritime technology.

So confident that she was unsinkable, the ship carried only enough lifeboats for 1/3rd of her passengers and crew.

It was on this Sunday, April 14th, 101 years ago, when the Titanic approached the North Atlantic ice fields.

At 11:00 p.m. the crew spotted icebergs the size of mountains . . . frantic orders were given to reverse the engines and steer the massive ship to port to avoid a collision with one of them which was dead ahead.

While they avoided a head-on collision, they brushed the iceberg, and at 11:40 pm, the ice beneath the surface of the North Atlantic treated the ship’s steel hull like a knife cutting through warm butter.

Jagged ice sliced small openings no more than a quarter of an inch wide, more than 100 feet long. Five of those watertight compartments began filling up with water.

Eva Hart was 7 years old at the time and would actually remain involved throughout the rest of her life in recounting and remembering that voyage.

In one interview, she said that she and her mother were among the fortunate ones to board 1 of only 20 lifeboats. She talked about courageous men and teenage boys helping women and children board

safely. She also remembers some men dressing like women to try and fool the others.

She and her mother safely boarded Lifeboat number 14. Her father’s last words to her were, “Hold Mommy’s hand and be a good girl.” She would never see him again.

When she was interviewed several years ago, she still could vividly recall watching the ship sink. She remembered the flags, the colors, the sounds, the distress rockets fired into the air that went unheeded by a nearby ship.

Eva said that she could still remember listening as the ships band on deck played the hymn, “Nearer My God to Thee . . . still all my song shall be . . . Nearer, my God to Thee, nearer to Thee”.

She remembers from her lifeboat watching the ship tilt upright, and break in half and sink amidst explosions and rumblings . . . and then, she said, the deadly silence that followed as if the whole world was standing still.”¹

1,522 people would die that night as the unsinkable Titanic sank.

After the disaster, several people were overwhelmed with emotion, realizing they had come so close. J.P. Morgan had booked first class passage – his accommodations had been built to his specifications, down to the private balcony – but at the last minute changed his mind. Milton Hershey of Hershey chocolate, had booked passage in order to be a part of history, but the night before his wife became gravely ill and he chose to remain at home instead.

But can you imagine anyone, for any luxury or claim to fame, be willing to buy a ticket on the Titanic – or take one offered as a gift . . . if they knew what was going to happen?

A first class ticket in today’s economy was \$75,000 dollars. You were somebody if you were a first class passenger on this historic voyage.

But if you knew the boat was going to sink, you wouldn’t have paid 75 cents for a ticket . . . in fact, you couldn’t have been paid to get on board.

There are times when the Apostles deliver a message to the believer that provides a motive or incentive for loving God and living for God

- Motives might include living a life of obedience out of a heart of gratitude for having been saved by grace alone – (*Ephesians 2:10*)
- Incentives might include the coming reward of the believer as they stand before Christ – (*2 Timothy 4:8*)
- Another incentive to follow Christ is the fact that He is going to come at any moment for the believer (*1 Thessalonians 1:10*)
- Still another incentive for godly living is that our lives might suddenly end (*James 4:13-15*) and so, like Jonathan Edwards you resolve to not do anything that you would be ashamed of doing were it your last act on earth.

These are all good and godly incentives.

But sometimes, the Spirit of God through the Word of God motivates us to invest our lives in the glory of God simply because of the fact that any other investment is going to be wasted.

To set sail in life on any boat other than the vessel of God glory and will is to set sail on a ship that is never going to make it.

And that's basically the incentive the Apostle John uses now in his letter to believers in the first century.

Turn to the *First Epistle of John and chapter 2* – just a few pages before you get to the Book of Revelation at the end of the Bible.

Notice *verse 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.*

You might notice that this paragraph began with a prohibition – *do not love the world* – and ended with a promise – *the one who does the will of God lives forever.*

And in between the prohibition and the promise is John's inspired motivational technique, at least for the moment, as to why you need to heed the prohibition and set sail for the promise.

And his motivational technique is basically three warnings.

A Three-Fold Warning

The first one is this:

1. Warning #1: Loving the world reveals your true disposition

Verse 15. (Here it is) Do not love the world nor the things in the world for if anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.

And maybe you're immediately filled with dread – oh no, you think. I think I might love the world, so I must not be a Christian.

I mean, I really like shopping at the mall – and that's in the world; and I enjoyed my vacation in the mountains and at the beach and that's in the world too and I attended the world's greatest university – the University of North Carolina – or maybe that was NC State, I can't remember, but they were actually pretty worldly after all, but I kept my diploma; oh and my family and I had a really wonderful vacation at Disney World, I mean, Disney World has the word, "world" right there . . .

While you at it, you love playing golf because of the nature trails you end up hiking as you look for your ball; and you love hiking in the mountains too and you love being out in nature – in fact, yesterday was such a beautiful day that I just couldn't stay in my study to finish this sermon, so I took my laptop out on the deck to write – the birds were singing; the red-throated hummingbirds were back this week.

I'm out there loving the world – writing a sermon on not loving the world.

So I guess we love and enjoy things that are in the world and that must mean we don't love God??

Well hang on. Don't burn your bird feeders yet – or your golf clubs – you might burn them for other reasons, but not this one.

What's John really talking about?

The Apostle John refers to *the world* throughout his letters. And he can be referring to 1 or 3 different dimensions.

The Greek word translated world is *kosmos*. It can refer to something that is well ordered. So, first of all, it can refer to the world of God's divinely ordered creation.

In fact, *cosmos* – with this in mind – gives us our word *cosmetics* – well ordered – literally, well-ornamented.ⁱⁱ

Secondly, the word *cosmos* can be used to refer to the world of humanity. This is the idea where John writes that God so loved the world – he's not referring to mountains, pine trees or planets, but to the human race – the world's population.

Thirdly, John uses this word to refer to the world system – and that usage is most often negative. John writes of this world, with its godless values, anti-God ambitions, and god-denying pleasures – this fallen world system which is actually owned and operated by the evil one (*I John 5:9*).

This is the idea that John has in mind here in *I John 2*. In fact, he uses *kosmos* six times in these three verses here.

Paul uses the word *cosmos* when he refers to the wisdom of the world system (I Corinthians 1:10)

Both John and Paul are referring to the world system that denies the authority of God and the gospel of Christ.

So you can paraphrase *verse 15* to effectively read, “Do not love a world system that rejects Jesus Christ – for how can anyone say that he loves a godless world and at the same time say that He loves God the Father?”

John even makes it clearer, by the way, with the fact that he uses the word *agape* for *love* here in this verse.

Don't agape/love the world.

Agape is the word for faithful, dedicated, self-sacrificing commitment to the object of your love. It is the direction – the disposition – of your heart.

So to love a world system governed by godless values and to claim to love God at the same time is a contradictory disposition.

It would be like a policeman saying that he really loves his job and what it stands for but at the same time say that he loves the Mafia and he's committed to all the drug dealers out there succeeding.

Someone's confused. He can't love both.

What true believer would say, “I love God, but I also think the God-denying, Satan controlled world is fine just like it is and I love that too!”

That would actually reveal the true disposition of their heart.

2. The second warning John the Apostle delivers is that loving the world promises tantalizing delusions

And this is where John goes much deeper in defining the world system and why the believer will struggle against its temptations and truly agonize over battles won and lost against it.

Why? Because the believer views the world of humanity and its systems as tragically lost and we're grieved when we act like them.

Because we know that in spite of its accomplishments, it's unable to save itself. We know in fact, that the human race has lost its purpose; it can no longer glorify God as He originally intended – we see the world as a mass of mankind entangled in sin and headed for calamity.ⁱⁱⁱ

The journey might include sumptuous meals and first class cabins, and sunny skies, but the ship is going down . . . it's going to sink.

So John describes the delusions of mankind on their voyage through life.

He writes *in verse 16*, *effectively saying*, “*Here's what the world system is all about* – three delusions:

a. The lust of the flesh.

John uses the word *lust* here collectively – that is, he grammatically bundles every possible craving you could ever think of that violates the boundaries of God's pure and noble design and says, that's the package here.

The word for *flesh* is a reference to self – a self-centered orientation, which pursues its own ends, one author defined it, in self-sufficient independence of God.^{iv}

And that's what it's all about – the *lust of the flesh* wants to do whatever it wants to do and doesn't want any moral restriction.

You could translate this phrase, *the base cravings* of the human heart – the base cravings, one author wrote, pervert and distort all normal desires and sends mankind into a relentless, unsatisfying pursuit of evil.^v

And you might notice out on the street that the world will defend its moral independence with the argument of creation – if you've ever questioned or challenged someone on their moral decisions.

Have you noticed that?

You challenge someone bound to sexual lusts of the flesh and they will more than likely say, “Well, that's the way God made me.” I didn't know they believed in God. And I really didn't know they believed in a Creator God who made them . . . that's actually a step in the right direction – we can work with that!

It's interesting that creation by God becomes a person's argument for denying the authority of God.

The problem is, the lusts – the cravings – of the flesh that a Creator God does not affirm, are nothing more than cravings after a mirage – they will not satisfy but only bring greater craving and greater disillusionment.

- b. John goes further to describe another distracting delusion – not only the lust of the flesh, but *the lust of the eyes*.

This isn't simply referring to attraction to something forbidden; this phrase can actually refer to anything that entices the eyes – and they might not be wrong things.^{vi}

But once they are seen, there comes a growing dissatisfaction until you possess it – it becomes a lusting – a coveting – a craving – a pursuit to own, possess, enjoy, experience.

And the warning here again, is that it breeds the delusion that if you can have whatever you see and want, it will produce satisfaction.

This is the advertising strategy of our civilized world – to present things to your eyes and attempt to prove to you in 30 seconds that you need to:

- buy it
- wear it
- talk on it
- drive it
- live in it
- decorate with it
- travel to it
- sit in it
- swim in it
- retire to it
- depend on it
- invest in it
- drink it
- eat it
- play it
- frame it so that you can hang it on the wall . . . and more.

And the delusion is that you will satisfy that dissatisfaction with life once you've got it.

John is effectively asking, "What are you craving?"

You could ask it this way, "What really matters to you in life?"

One author wrote a book that recorded the results of a question he asked – and the question was this, "If your house was burning down, what would you grab on your way out the door?"

And as you can imagine, no one grabs their flat screen TV or their designer blouse. Here are some of the answers:

- My childhood teddy bear
- My journal

- My grandfather's Bible
- My daughter – that's reassuring
- The earrings I wore on my wedding day
- The ring my father gave me when I was 12
- One woman responded, I would grab my husband and our three cats^{vii} (Not in that order, I hope!)

All of the things that mattered were irreplaceable.

The truth is, the delusions of the world have us racing after stuff that wears out, rusts out, rots out . . . or simply goes out of style.

It's the promised delusion of satisfaction.

- c. John adds a third delusion here – *verse 16, not only lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes, but the boastful pride of life.*

The word translated boastful pride occurs only here in the New Testament. It's a word that literally refers to someone exaggerating or bragging in order to impress someone else.^{viii}

It happens to be an epidemic today in the world of resume's. One employment studied more than 2,000 professionals at small, medium and large businesses and found that 70% of their applicants lied on their resume – most typically about education, former salary, reasons for leaving their former job or their accomplishments before they left.^{ix}

Lying is epidemic in the world system – especially if financial or personal or political advancement is to be gained.

This isn't a new problem, by the way – this is the corrupted nature of a fallen world system and a fallen human race.

Go all the way back to Plutarch, the Greek Historian who lived during the days of Christ and he describes this same Greek word that John the Apostle uses here for a boastfully proud man.

He writes, "This is the person who will tell perfect strangers about his investments, how large they are, and what gains and losses he has made, but when he sends his boy to the bank, his balance is only a shilling. If he enjoys company on the road, he is apt to tell how he served with Alexander the Great, how he got along with him and how many jeweled cups he brought home from his travels, even though he has never been away from Athens. He will say that he was granted a free permit for the export of timber, but didn't do it so that he could avoid ill-natured gossip; and that during the corn-

shortage he sent gifts of money to needy citizens; he lives in a rented house, although he will tell you that this is his family residence, but he is going to sell it because it's too small for his [busy lifestyle].^x

This person's favorite topic of discussion is themselves – and they believe that by building themselves up in the eyes of others, they will feel better about themselves – which is only one more delusion . . . one more mirage they chase after in their self-centered, vain, corrupted lives.

John writes, at the end of *verse 16*, ***none of this comes from the Father*** – in other words, these cravings for self-satisfaction, for self-promotion, for self-glory do not come from the Father – they come out of the sewer of fallen flesh and a fallen world system.

And with that, John delivers one final warning.

Loving the world reveals a person's true disposition; loving the world promises tantalizing delusions;

3. Thirdly, Loving the world ends in tragic destruction

Verse 17. The world is passing away, and also its lusts. And here's the promise – ***but the one who does the will of God lives forever.***

John isn't setting up a works salvation system here. He's contrasting the unbeliever who desires to do the will of the world with the believer who desires to do the will of God.

And the person who pursues the will of the world is reminded here by John that the world is not going to last forever.

In fact, John uses the present tense for "***passing away***" – in other words, he's actually saying, the world system is already in the process of disintegrating.^{xi}

The world is already passing away . . .

It might look like a party, it might be all the rage – things might seem wonderful and you've got a ticket – and you're all giddy inside and you might think the party's just getting started, but in reality, as one author put it, you are dancing on the deck of the Titanic.^{xii}

Your party is on a vessel that is already beginning to sink.

Listen, here is the only answer for our cravings . . . here is the only solution for dissatisfaction – it is found in loving and following and obeying the will of God – for God lasts forever and so will the joy of His followers.

In the meantime, John leaves this subtle reminder that we as Christians are also – right now – on the deck of a sinking ship.

We are in the world which is already passing away – and for a reason.

We have been assigned by God, at this particular point in the voyage of human history, to our place of influence on the Titanic.

John would effectively say here to us, "Just don't buy into the delusion that God placed you on board so that you could live and think and grow up and grow old with the same shallow, self-centered, limited, perspective of everybody else."

No, we happen to know the future of the ship.

And that should change everything from our love for God our Redeemer – our Rescuer – to our passion to warn the unbeliever of their imminent and eternal danger.

That kind of perspective actually played out in the sinking of the Titanic 101 years ago.

Aboard the Titanic was a 39 year old pastor named John Harper, a widower, traveling with his 6-year old daughter Annie along with his sister. He was on his way to become the new pastor of Moody Church in Chicago.

When the ship struck the lifeboat and began to sink he got the women safely into a lifeboat but then began looking for others to save. Survivors remember him shouting, "Women, children and unsaved into the lifeboats."

He began witnessing to anyone who would listen. During the two hours and forty minutes it took for the Titanic to sink, John Harper actually preached on deck. His text was ***Acts 16:31, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved."***

Just before jumping into the icy water – the ship was nearly under – John gave his lifejacket to another man who was not a believer – exhorting him to trust in Jesus Christ. Even in the water, he pled with those around him to be saved.

Only 6 people would be rescued out of the water by those in the lifeboats – John Harper was not one of them.

But one man, who went on to spend the rest of his life telling of his encounter with John Harper, said, "I was floating in the frigid water when Mr. Harper clinging to a piece of wreckage floated near me. "Man," he said, "are you saved? "No" I said, "I am not" fully understanding the question of spiritual salvation through Christ. The waves bore him away, but strangely enough, brought him back a little later and he said to me again, "Are you saved now?"

“No,” I said, “I cannot honestly say that I am.”
He said to me, “Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved.”

Moments later, hypothermia claimed him and I saw his body sink beneath the waters – and just then I was pulled out by survivors in one of the lifeboats. And there, that night, with two miles of ocean underneath me, I believed in Jesus Christ.”^{xiii}

Have you believed in Christ? Is your confidence in the unsinkable reputation of the world you’re sailing on? Haven’t you discovered by now that the delusions of the world only leave you wanting something more . . . something missing?

Listen, the time to sing, “Nearer My God to Thee, still all my song shall be . . . nearer, my God to Thee, nearer to Thee” – the time to start singing that in your heart, is now.

Right now.

And for the believer, never stop singing it for others to hear . . . never stop living it . . . never stop loving . . . and desiring . . . nearer my God to Thee, still all my song shall be . . . nearer, My God to Thee, nearer to Thee.

This manuscript is from a sermon preached on 4/14/2013 by Stephen Davey.

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i Wikipedia, “Eva Hart”

ii James Montgomery Boice, The Epistles of John (Baker, 1979), p. 2

iii Adapted from Joel Beeke, The Epistles of John (Evangelical Press, 2006), p. 90

iv D. Edmond Hiebert, The Epistles of John (BJU Press, 1991), p. 102

v MacArthur, p. 87

vi Frank Gabelein, The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Volume 12 (Regency, 1981), p. 321

vii Foster Huntington, The Burning House (It Books, 2012)

viii Fritz Rienecker/Cleon Rogers, Linguistic Key to the Greek New Testament (Regency, 1976), p. 788

ix Orange County Register, “*How Many Lie on Resumes?*” by Mary Ann Milbourn, July 7, 2012

x Quoted in Expositors Bible Commentary, p. 322

xi Hiebert, p. 103

xii Tim Stafford, quoted and adapted in Robert Jeffress, The Solomon Secrets (Waterbrook Press, 2002), p. 103

xiii Moody Adams, The Titanic’s Last Hero (Midnight Call, 1997), p.122