



All In?

What Sort of Life Have You Chosen?

After I graduated from high school, I went with my family for the last time on vacation with them. We spent four weeks camping through the western United States and Canada. We stayed in Yellowstone, the Grand Tetons, Banff, and Jasper National Parks in Canada. All of our camping was in tents, so we got to hear the sounds of the wild outdoors as we lay in our sleeping bags. One of the challenges to tenting rather than staying in a motel or an RV was that we got to walk down the road in the middle of the night to use the restroom. At Jasper National Park this was an adventure. The first time I had to make the trek to use the bathroom at night, I discovered that it was not just people in the campground. Large brown bears were roaming about. Several times I had to stop dead in my tracks as I waited for a bear to cross the road in front of me. I thought about just spending the night in the bathroom to avoid coming across the bears, but I was eighteen and too proud to do that. On the way back, I counted eight bears walking around the campground. The romance of sleeping out under the stars lost some of its luster that night as I carefully wove my way around the dreadful "guardians of paradise".

What makes you afraid? Is it death or dying, cancer or pandemics? Are you afraid of other drivers, crime, being alone, or unemployment? Some fears are legitimate while others are irrational. It seems to be that there is a fear we might need to give credence and it is rarely considered. Let's look at our verse for today. **As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world, and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath.** (Ephesians 2: 1-3 NIV) When you think of the world, does it make you afraid? What about the "ways of the world; is that scary? The Bible indicates that following the ways of the world makes us objects of wrath. Does that cause you to pause and consider the implications?

The Greek word "kosmos" translated world is an interesting term. The astronomer Carl Sagan used it as the jumping off point for his atheistic world view of the universe. At first, kosmos simply meant a form of decoration, something you used to beautify your home. Its meaning developed over time and came to be the term used to speak of the entire universe. Later it spoke of just our part of the universe, the world. It shifted again and came to be the label for the people of the world and finally as we see in our verse, kosmos was the way the people of the world lived. The Biblical idea of kosmos is anything or anyone in the natural realm that pulls us away from God and works against the Gospel of Christ. Music can do that. A friendship can too. A career might as well as a college degree program. TV and YouTube have that effect and so does Instagram and news stations. Facebook can be the world and is just as well as Twitter and your next door neighbor and best friend. Anything or anyone who turns you away from devotion to God and commitment to follow Him is the world. The world can be you. As Pogo the opossum once put it, "We have met the enemy and he is us." How many at one time or another have rephrased it this way, "I am my own worst enemy"?

What is it that the world promotes? Our passage tells us that it is transgressions and sins. Transgression is the translation of the Greek term *paraptoma*. It means to blunder, make a false step, fall off, slide off the road. It is not an accidental mistake. You should have known better. Sins is the rendering of the Greek term *hamartia* which means to miss the mark, to not hit the target. Combined, the two describe one ruining his life, making a mess of things because of terrible moral decisions. Most importantly, each on its own brings death; the destruction of our lives...the life God has in love given us. The world is always at it, trying to get you to turn from God here, make a bad decision there, go after a wrong dream and waste your life on poor pursuits. The possibilities for missing the mark and making bad decisions that impact us in sad and destructive ways are endless. Just let the world decide for you what to do and you will make a mess of your life and probably hurt others too. King Hezekiah lost his fervency for God and made a horrible decision to build an alliance with the Babylonians. He thought he was being clever by welcoming the Babylonians into Jerusalem and befriending the ambassadors of the king, but he opened the door to his country's destruction. The prophet Isaiah, speaking for God confronted Hezekiah about his *paraptoma*, his slide off the road. **Then Isaiah said to Hezekiah, "Hear the word of the Lord: The time will surely come when everything in your palace, and all that your fathers have stored up until this day, will be carried off to Babylon. Nothing will be left, says the Lord. And some of your descendants, your own flesh and blood, that will be born to you, will be taken away, and they will become eunuchs in the palace of the king of Babylon."** (2 Kings 20:16-18 NIV)

Hezekiah was far enough out of alignment with God that he actually was ok with what was coming because it wouldn't impact him. His life so badly missed the mark that out of all his sons, he chose his twelve year old Manasseh to take his place after he died, and this son became the very worst king in the history of Judah and Israel. That is what it is like when you sin, when you miss the mark. It impacts others too, not just you and the result for you is that you slip away from the wisdom and joy of God. Why are so many Christian people troubled and anxious and easily upset and frustrated and not happy with the life they have. It is because of *hamartia*, missing the mark with God. Paul was in the same boat before he met Jesus. He was angry and full of rage. Satisfied with his attack on the Church, he didn't realize that he had slid off the road, that he was way off target. After Paul became Christian, probably hardly a day went by that he did not feel shame and regret over the hurt he had caused. How many lives had he ruined because he self-righteously led the persecution against the Christian people?

When we sin, our text tells us that it is for two reasons. We have followed the pattern of the *kosmos*, of the world which pulls us away from God, and also because the "ruler of the kingdom of the air", or Satan, is at work in us. There is within every sin a supernatural aspect to it. Satan and the demonic realm play their part. Sin is both natural and supernatural at the same time. Before each *hamartia*, each missing of the mark, a meeting of the minds takes place, sometimes for a micro-moment and other times for longer stretches, between you and Satan just as there was when Eve thought about the forbidden fruit Satan tried to convince her to eat. The natural and supernatural merge when sinning occurs and with it comes an impulsive knee jerk desire to just "do it". Over and over we see this in ourselves. If we would stop a moment and give God a chance to get into our thinking through a scripture verse inspired by Him or a thought coming out of Him, you and I might not sin, perhaps wouldn't fall off track, not miss the mark. What if Eve had just waited long enough for God to strengthen her resolve to resist Satan, what if Adam would have walked away from Eve and called out to the Lord, our whole world would be different, everything would be perfect and full of joy, but it isn't. Cancer and divorce and coronavirus and fighting and depression are here, and they are all a part of the death sin brings.

You come to Christ, not because everything is right with the world, but because it isn't. That is the hard reality. When Mary Magdalene went to the tomb of Jesus, it was to weep, to accept the actual death of Jesus and face it. You must face these things too, that sin is the enemy and not your friend. The world that tries its best to turn you away from God is not your friend and Satan is real and pushing you off the road,

getting you to miss the mark. What Mary Magdalene found though at the tomb was not what she expected. Resurrection greeted her. Jesus met her. He meets you too. Right here. At this moment. His forgiveness taking away your sin. His life giving you peace and joy and healing you from all the damage sin has caused you. Stay awhile right here and meet Jesus. Wait and let His life settle into you...His life that takes away your sin...His life that washes out of you the damage sin has caused. Wait with Jesus. See what happens.