

Rev. Seth D. Bode † Sermon 410, 01-24-2021 † Epiphany 3

“Lord God, you have appointed me as pastor in your Church, but you see how unsuited I am to meet so great and difficult a task. If I had lacked your help, I would have ruined everything long ago. Therefore, I call upon you: I wish to devote my mouth and my heart to you; I shall teach the people. I myself will learn and ponder diligently upon your Word. Use me as your instrument -- but do not forsake me, for if ever I should be on my own, I would easily wreck it all.”

“Sir, we would see Jesus.”

1 CORINTHIANS 7

²⁹I also say this, brothers: The time is short. From now on, let those who have wives live as if they had none; ³⁰those who weep, as if not weeping; those who rejoice, as if not rejoicing; those who buy, as if not possessing; ³¹and those who use the world, as if not getting any use out of it. For the way of life that belongs to this world is passing away.



Live like nothing lasts. Our son enjoys taking a bath. He is fascinated with water toys. Some of the most enjoyable toys allow water to pour out. (Water has this tendency to slip through your fingers.)

This is true at the end of bath time. Our son tries to keep the water from draining. He will lie flat on his tummy before it all drains just so he can enjoy it just a little more. Then there is a time of mourning when he must leave the tub and dry off because the bath is over.

Imagine living life like that. Imagine gathering your excitement for this great thing adults call a “bath,” but then knowing that every time you take a bath, it will all eventually drain away. But you attempt to live as if the bath lasts forever, and hold onto that bathwater as if for dear life. Imagine mourning the loss of water every time the last drops slip down into the drain. “If only that water could have stuck around.” “We could have done so much more, but it all went down the drain.” Dramatic, right?

Yet we also spend plenty of time trying to hold onto the things of this slippery world. It’s like we think we can gather up so much water only to find it slipping through our fingers. But trust this, that our God is the eternal God. Our time

here is short and we are drawn ever closer to our Father in every utterance of gospel.

So I have set before you the theme:

How To Hold Onto This Slippery World

And I wonder if you think I have something to say here. Do you think I can give you an answer? Could it be a 5-step process or a DIY project that somehow really succeeds? No. Full disclosure: There is no holding on to this world. There is no gathering up of drain water with your hands; there is no stopping the sands of time; there is no nailing jello to a wall. It's too slippery. There is no holding onto this world with anything but your soul. So I should have gone with my other theme idea: LIVE LIKE NOTHING LASTS.

The Corinthians had asked Paul about marriage, and this was part of Paul's answer. What does Paul really say? Marriage, tears, joys, purchases, the whole world of earthly things—yes, we Christians *may have* all of them. But how? We may have them **for what they are**, as belonging to the scheme or way of living in the world.

This really is the theme of chapter 7, that “*the scheme of the cosmos is slipping by.*” We are a referent point, not a moving piece. The world is circling the drain.

Let me give you a very clear example. If the church dispensed a cure for some great illness, people would form long lines to get in. In fact, I saw photos this past week of long lines of people waiting to get into large, beautiful cathedrals. The reason they finally formed long lines to enter these cathedrals was not the gospel or any worship services; they were lining up for the vaccine, because apparently some of these European cathedrals are dispensing the vaccine. But just think about what God designed churches to be. (Please don't take this to mean I am against God's gifts of science and medicine. I'm making the point about what we have as a church already.) Jesus Christ never gave us a commission to dispense temporary medicine that saves you a few decades until you die of old age; Jesus Christ commissioned us to dispense the medicine that overcomes death, and no one bats an eye. Where are the lines?

And I will tell you the thing that scares me to death in this pandemic is that you, dear brothers and sisters, may get so wrapped up in temporary medicine here on earth ... that you will very nearly forget the medicine that lasts to eternal life.

What is that which lasts? It is the medicine for the sin that causes us to doubt and cling to the world as if it lasts. It is the good news of our Savior Jesus Christ, who lived for us and who died for us. He came with a twofold message when He called His disciples: "*Repent and believe.*" This is the forgotten medicine. This is the medicine that overcomes death.

Do not be taken up with the affairs of this life. The things of this passing world dare not displace our eternal good. We are participants in life's experiences, but we keep an inner distance from them. We do not try to get everything we can out of this life, lest we forfeit our eternal inheritance to transient gains and pleasures.

This is really nothing different than what Jesus tells us: "*Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh*" (Luke 6:21) or to *rejoice in the day of insult* (Luke 6:23). Moses said, "*Teach us to number our days aright, that we may gain a heart of wisdom*" (Psalm 90:12).

Luther caught Paul's meaning: "And take they our life, goods, fame, child, and wife; Let these all be gone, they yet have nothing won; The Kingdom ours remaineth."

Live like nothing lasts.

Legend has it that one of the first Christian kings took his faith very seriously. He did what Paul tells us to do: he wept as if not weeping, he rejoiced as if not rejoicing, he bought as if not possessing, etc. The king's brother noticed this and asked the king, "Why? Why do you take life seriously? Why don't you eat, drink, and be merry like the rest of us? Why so serious?"

The king replied, "Don't worry about it. I'll show you in a few days." In the meantime, the king had his people dig a deep pit and fill it with fire. Over the pit the king had them suspend a chair. All around the chair he had them place sharp weapons. Then the king surprised his brother with a trumpeter and the decree that he was to be put to death. His brother was placed on the chair. Then the king also brought in the sweetest luxuries of meat and drink and had

them play music. The king shouted out, “Brother, be cheerful and enjoy yourself. Eat and drink. The music is lively, so, if you want, you can dance.”

But his brother answered, “How can I be cheerful? You have decreed my death, and all around me and beneath me death stares me in the face. Please spare my life!”

The king said, “But this is what you said. You asked me why I seemed sad and serious. In the Word of God I learn that I must die. Nothing is more certain. Above I have God’s wrath, below I have eternal damnation, around me is the unbelieving world and my own flesh and blood. Why shouldn’t I live thoughtfully, seriously, trusting in my God and not my lusts?” Then he set his brother free.

Friends, why do we live like nothing lasts? Where does this lead us? It leads us to eternal God.

God is eternal. “*I am the Alpha and the Omega,*” says the Lord God, “*who is, and who was, and who is to come, the Almighty.*” (Rev 1:8) Eternity: God in His essence, His will, and His actions is independent of any succession of events. The great I AM views all things in a never-changing absolute present, to which there is no transition from a past, from which there is no transition to a future. He was there at the beginning and He is there at the end. He is your point of beginning and your end point, your A to Z.

As such an eternal God, God offers you His eternal promises. In Jesus Christ, God offers you relief from guilt. He offers you meaning in the midst of temporary panic. He will not let you slip through His fingers, because through His hands were driven the nails of our punishment. Our eternal Jesus, who is the same yesterday and today and always, did this out of love. Jesus loves to be the capital letter and the period of your life. Hold onto Jesus Christ, for there is nothing but Him to hold onto; in His name, Amen.