

Creation-Providence-Redemption - Part 2

by William MacDonald

William MacDonald contrasts the fleeting nature of the world with the eternal reality of God's kingdom, urging believers to commit fully to Christ.

Duration: 39:18

Scripture: Genesis 12:1

Topics: "Redemption"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher emphasizes the contrast between the world system and the kingdom of God. He describes the world system as shallow, glitzy, and unreal, comparing it to a movie set with only the front of buildings. The preacher also highlights the negative influence of television, stating that it blunts the spiritual edge of Christians and takes a toll on their spiritual lives. The purpose of the sermon is to make the listeners hate the world system and be weaned away from it, while still engaging with the world to share the message of Jesus Christ.

Transcript

Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life is not of the Father, but is of the world.

The world is passing away, and the lust of it, but he who does the will of God abides forever. In these morning sessions, I'd like to speak on the subject, Two Kingdoms, Worlds Apart. Two Kingdoms, Worlds Apart.

I think it greatly simplifies matters if we realize that basically there are only two kingdoms. One kingdom is what the Bible calls the world. The other kingdom is the kingdom of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

These two kingdoms are diametrically opposed, and I'd like to, in these studies, just contrast them and show you that the world kingdom is a kingdom of fantasy, whereas the kingdom of our Lord is a kingdom of reality. The one is shadow, the other is substance. I would like it so that at the end of our studies, we could look with contempt on the world system, not on the people, but on the world system, and realize that it's all glitz, shallow, unreality.

It really is. Years ago, I was down in the Los Angeles area, and right across the street from where I was staying, there was a movie lot, and I walked across the street and peered through the cyclone fence one day, and here was a fascinating little western village. But then I went around the corner, and I realized all it was was the front of buildings.

There were no buildings there, it was just the front. And I thought, well, that's the world. It's all façade, but nothing behind it.

The word of God distinguishes clearly between the world and the Lord's kingdom, very clearly. The lines are clearly drawn, and we read that in the passage that was before us. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.

The lusts that we mention, not of the Father, but of the world. Unfortunately today, the lines are obscured. It's not as clear-cut as it used to be.

Somebody said, I looked for the church and found it in the world. I looked for the world and found it in the church. It makes it difficult.

What is the world? Well, I confess to you that most of my early years, I heard the word. I heard the word world, and I heard the word worldliness, but it never created a clear definition in my mind of what people were talking about. For instance, I was brought up by a strong Presbyterian mother who never allowed us to go to the show, and we'd say, why not? She'd say, because it's worldly.

Well, it didn't say too much to me. I knew it wasn't good by the tone of her voice, but if you had asked me, well, what's your definition of the world? I wouldn't have been able to give you any. First of all, let's eliminate some things.

When the Bible talks about the world in this sense, it doesn't mean planet earth, which the Lord has given us as our temporary dwelling place, and it certainly doesn't mean the world of nature, which the Lord has given to us to enjoy and to see his handiwork in it. It certainly doesn't mean the world of mankind, because God loves that world of mankind, John 3, 16, and he wants us to love it as he does. The world is the civilization which man has built up to enjoy himself without God.

That's what it is. It's man's ordering of things not only without God, but in opposition to God. It's not only independent of God, but violently opposed to him.

This world system is founded on false principles, and it promotes false values. It's largely self-centered, and it's concerned mostly with wealth, sex, and power. I think when you've said those three things, you've encapsulated what the world is all about.

Wealth, sex, and power. These things are central in its culture. As someone has said, all civilization without God from the beginning has been stamped with his curse, and what men call improvement and invention and progress without God seems simply to be the erection of a Babel tower, essentially idolatrous and the center of self-glory.

This system is inspired and energized by Satan. Just as the kingdom of our Lord has angelic beings as guardians of God's people, so demon powers are involved in the affairs of the world. Actually, the world is empty.

It's, as I said, a façade. It's a sick joke. The world is a sick joke.

All that it offers cannot satisfy the human heart. In fact, a whole book of the Bible is devoted to that subject, isn't it? The book of Ecclesiastes. The key of the book of Ecclesiastes is the expression, under the sun, found 29 times in that book.

The book was written by the wisest and richest man who sought meaning in life, in everything that he could afford. He came to the end and said, it's just a chasing after wind. You know that's true.

Life without the Lord Jesus Christ isn't worth living, really isn't worth living. You have to get above the sun to find real meaning in life. Malcolm Muggeridge said something quite good.

He said, human life, I have come to feel, in all its public or collective manifestations, is only theater and cheap melodrama at that. I think that's a very incisive comment. And he was speaking of the world when he said that.

Human life without God, all it is is theater and cheap melodrama at that. Somebody said, I think it was E. Stanley Jones said, the world's way is make-believe. The kingdom is eternal reality.

People of the world are trying to get more out of it than there is in it. And yet it's very attractive to people. It presents itself as the greatest good in life.

And people are dazzled by its psychedelic lights and by its contemporary music and its sensuous clothes. And everybody in Marlborough country is good looking and has a convertible and leans against the front fender of the convertible and is charmed by some beauty queen nearby. It's a never never land.

It's an artificial society. It's glitz and glitter without any worthwhile substance. What is worldliness? Well, worldliness is the love of passing things.

That's what it is. The love of passing things. It's anything that pulls the believer away from the Lord Jesus Christ.

A worldly person is a person all of whose plans end at the grave. What a sad thing. Of a few shovels of dirt thrown over your body.

That's the end as far as the world's plans are concerned. Jowett, one of my favorite authors, I think said it well. He said, worldliness is a spirit.

It's a temper. It's not so much an act as an attitude. It's a pose.

It's a posture. Worldliness is human activity with God left out. That's very good.

Worldliness is human activity with God left out. Worldliness is life without heavenly callings, life without ideals, life without heights. Worldliness recognizes nothing of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.

It has no hill country. It's horizontal life. That's good, isn't it? It has no hill country.

It's horizontal life. Worldliness has nothing of the vertical in it. It has ambition.

It has no aspirations. Its motto is success, not holiness. It's always saying onward, never saying upward.

A worldly man or woman is a man or woman who never says I will lift up my eyes to the hills from whence come. Now I know that in some circles worldliness has been largely confined to going to the show, to dancing, to smoking, to drinking, to gambling, to card playing, and similar activities. But it's more than that.

It's a lot more than that. Dr. Dale wrote, to be worldly is to permit the higher law to which we owe allegiance, the glories and terrors of that invisible universe which is revealed to faith, our transcendent relations to the Father of spirits through Christ Jesus our Lord, to be overborne by inferior interests. If a believer goes back to the world, you have to go back through the grave of Jesus.

The Lord Jesus died to deliver us from this present evil world. To long for that world and to want to go back to it is to be a traitor to him. The world cast him out and we were buried in Christ by the world that hates the church.

Those who try to get the best of both kingdoms are tempting the patience of God. God draws the lines more clearly than the average preacher draws them today. In contrast to that is the kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Here I'd just like to pause for a minute and explain a little about the kingdom, because somebody here might be thinking, well brother, don't be talking about the kingdom. We're not in the kingdom, we're in the church. Actually, the kingdom has five different phases in the word of God, and I think that any reference to the kingdom in the scriptures you can put in one of these five pigeonholes or categories.

First of all, you have the kingdom predicted. The prophets of the Old Testament were always looking forward to that glorious era of peace and prosperity, where animals would be domesticated, where the desert would rejoice and blossom like the rose, where a king would reign in righteousness. The kingdom in prophesying.

Then with the arrival of the Lord Jesus, you had the kingdom present in the person of the king. Both John the Baptist and the Lord Jesus himself said, the kingdom of God is among you. What did he mean? The kingdom of God is among you.

He meant that in the person of the king, the kingdom was there. The Lord Jesus had come to make a bona fide offer of the kingdom to the people of Israel. Of course, you know what happened.

They rejected him. And then the kingdom passed into the third phase. We sometimes call it the mystery aspect of the kingdom.

And you have that in Matthew chapter 13, where you have the parables of the kingdom. In this phase, and this is the phase that we're in today. In this phase, the king is absent, but we own allegiance.

We acknowledge allegiance to him. I'll come back to that in just a minute. The kingdom in mystery form, Matthew 13.

That's where we are today. That extends from the ministry of the Lord Jesus here on earth to the end of the tribulation period. Then you have the kingdom in manifestation.

That's when the Lord Jesus comes back and literally reigns upon the earth for a thousand years. The kingdom in manifestation, the millennium. And finally, you have what Peter calls the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and savior, Jesus Christ.

And that's the eternal state. Now I think any reference to the kingdom in the Bible will fit into one of those five areas. The kingdom prophesied, the kingdom present in the person of the king, the kingdom in mystery form, the king absent, but acknowledged as king, the kingdom in manifestation, the literal reign of Christ on earth, and the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and savior, Jesus Christ.

Now, let me go back to the third phase. We don't have time to take up Matthew 13. There you'll find that the kingdom has both an outward aspect and an inward aspect.

You cannot understand the parables of the kingdom unless you see this. The kingdom in Matthew 13 has an outward aspect. Let me just say a large circle.

And then inside that, a smaller circle, that's the kingdom in its inward reality. First of all is evil in the kingdom. As you see by the parables, you see four different types of soil and only one of them produces fruit.

You see the wheat and the tares. You see the separation of the fish at the end of the period. The dragnet.

So the kingdom in its outward aspect includes everybody today in this age who acknowledges Jesus. You say to a person, are you a Christian? And he says, of course I am. What do you think, I am Jew? Well, he's in the kingdom.

In an outward profession, he acknowledges the kingdom. But then there's that inner circle, and that's John 3.16. Except a man be born again, he cannot see, or not John, John 3.5. Except a man be born again, he cannot see or enter the kingdom of God. There's reality there, and there's profession.

That's the kingdom at the present time. And that's the aspect of it that we'll be thinking about today. This is the kingdom that is so opposed to the world, the kingdom in its inward reality.

It's in sharp contrast to the world. In this realm, the spiritual is emphasized over the soulish, and the eternal is valued over the temporal. Completely different set of values based upon completely different principles.

In this kingdom, pleasure is not despised. It's just that the people of this kingdom look for it where it's truly to be found. In thy presence is fullness of joy.

At thy right hand there are pleasures forevermore. William Cooper wrote, I thirst, but not as once I did, the vain delights of earth to share. Thy wounds, Emmanuel, all forbid that I should seek my pleasure there.

It was the sight of thy dear cross that weaned my heart from earthly things and taught me to esteem as dross the mirth of fools, the pomp of kings. He saw the difference between these two kingdoms, and he made his choice. In Christ's kingdom, wealth is not something to be coveted.

Spiritual prosperity is the best prosperity, and the kingdom of heaven is concerned with righteousness and joy and peace. Christ, not self, is central. Self is off the throne.

Christ is the acknowledged king, and everything is valued only as it appears in the sight of the Lord Jesus. Whereas men of the world love money and hate God, men of this kingdom love God and hate money. Jesus taught that, didn't he? You cannot love God and man, and either love the one and hate the other, or else you'll hate the one and love the other.

You cannot do both. That's true of everybody in the meeting here today. You either love God and hate money, or you hate God and love money.

How do you hate money? You hate money by refusing to live for it and harnessing it for the purposes of God. Because there are only two kingdoms, there are only two rulers, and Satan is the ruler of this world kingdom, and Christ, of course, of the other. The devil is the world's monarch, and is he ever clever? He's called the ruler of this world.

He's called the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now works in the children of disobedience. He's called the God of this age. John later in the epistle reminds us that the whole world lies under the sway of the evil one.

People are held captive by him, and they need to be awakened from their sleep of death. But while the devil is very powerful, he's not omnipotent. I think it's good for us to remember that, and he's still under the dominion of Christ.

He's on a leash, and sometimes it seems like a very long leash, but never mind. He is under the dominion of Christ. The devil is the worst enemy of Christ and his followers.

The other two foes, of course, are the world and the flesh. Just as the devil is opposed to Christ, the world is opposed to the Father, you see that here in the passage we read, and the flesh is opposed to the spirit. And this trinity of evil has been described as follows.

The devil is the enemy against us, and the world is the enemy around us, and the flesh is the enemy within us. And the Bible tells us of some of the tactics of the king of this world, and we should know them. We're not unaware, Paul says.

Deceit. He's the father of lies. He's been a liar from the beginning.

He poses as an angel of light, and he sends his emissaries forth, posing as ministers of righteousness. The devil is at his best in a liberal pulpit, not a skid row, on a liberal pulpit, where men get up and use evangelical language to mean something completely different, and lead scores of people down the broad road to destruction by preaching salvation by works. The devil misquotes the word of God, as you very well know.

He performs miracles and lying wonders, which should be a word of warning to us in the day in which we live, and in the days that may lie ahead. We can expect to see demonic miracles being performed. This is part of his strategy.

He seeks to sow doubts and denials about the word of God, and he seeks to divert God's people from pure and sincere devotion to him, as well as tempting us all to lie. Another of his tactics is slander. Just think of this.

Last night when you were sleeping, he was before the throne of God accusing the brethren. Day and night, the scripture says, he's the accuser of the brethren. One of his tactics is imitation, too.

He has a counterfeit for everything that's of God, and that's what makes it so confusing to people today. You remember how he empowered the Egyptian magicians to imitate the miracles of Moses. The tares of the kingdom look just like wheat.

It's difficult for people to discern the difference. The tares in that parable are sons of the wicked one. The wheat are sons of the kingdom.

No wonder that Augustine called the devil the ape of God. He has his own trinity, the devil himself, the beast, and the false prophet. He has his own church, the synagogue of Satan.

He has his own apostles, ministers of righteousness. He has his own gospel, which Paul in Galatians calls another gospel, and that, of course, is salvation by works. He has his own theology, the doctrine of demons, his own sacrifices offered to demons, and his own table and cup.

He has all of those things, imitating the things of God. Another of his strategies is discouragement. Discouragement really comes from the evil one, and I'm tempted to be discouraged.

I often think of what Moody said. He said, I've never known God to use a discouraged person, and that makes me want to snap out of it when I think of that. I've never known God to use a discouraged person.

Satan tries to take advantage of Christians by causing them to be swallowed up with too much sorrow, and he can oppress the believer with gloom and despair. Certainly, as we've heard this morning, we're occupied with our circumstances, and to get our eyes off the Lord, we can be plunged into that. Of course, persecution is one of his ploys.

He goes about as a roaring lion, seeking whom he may destroy. In fact, the invariable strategy of the devil is to kill and destroy. The thief cometh not but for to steal and to destroy.

I am come, Jesus said, that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly. I think one of his other strategies is incomplete commitment. He tried to dissuade Jesus from going to the cross, and he seeks to dissuade Christians today from turning their lives over in utter abandonment to the Lord Jesus Christ.

Pride is a strategy of the devil. He knows by experience that pride goes before destruction, and so he uses this device on others. And of course, moral failure.

He tempts people because of their lack of self-control. And what a sad chapter it's been in the history of the evangelical church in the United States in these last few years. What's it all about? All the scandals that have erupted.

The devil working against the forces of God. False doctrine. The very dawn of civilization.

He tempted Eve to believe that she could become like God, which is, of course, new age in old clothes. And then bodily affliction. I don't believe that any sickness, pain, comes from the Lord.

He permits it, but I don't think it comes from him. Paul had a thorn in the flesh. He called it the messenger of Satan to buffet me.

That's where it came from. Why does God allow it? Because he can glorify himself through it, and he can witness to others through it, and he can refine his people through it. He sifts us, the devil does, by difficult circumstances.

Hindering of the gospel, he snatches away the seed from shallow listeners, and he blinds the minds of unbelievers, lest the light of the glory of Christ should shine unto them that they should be saved. And of

course, procrastination. I'm sure that many of us experienced that before we were saved.

Not tonight. Some other time. Trust Christ.

Put off the time of action and decision, especially with regard to the gospel. How wonderful it is to turn from that to the other king, the Lord Jesus Christ, no less than the creator and upholder of the universe. And he has what no other ruler has, and I'm so glad for that.

He's all knowledge, all power, and he's in all places at one and the same time. Marvelous. This is the king that we acknowledge today.

Perfect God, and perfect man. The perfect savior from sin. I want to tell you, the Lord Jesus is not an amateur savior.

He's the perfect savior who finished the work of redemption at the cross. The Lord Jesus combines in his person every virtue, every excellence, every beauty, physical or spiritual, that you could ever think about. When you go through life, you meet people and you meet this person and he or she, well, they have humility in a marvelous way, but they might not be so strong in other areas.

It's wonderful to have the Lord Jesus Christ, and he has every perfection in him. Wouldn't it be wonderful to see him, to fall at his feet and to worship him. He's infinite, unique, and incomparable.

And at the present time, he reigns from his throne in heaven over us, all of us who acknowledge him, that soon he'll return to earth as king of kings and Lord of lords, with Jerusalem as his capital. That is after the rapture, after the tribulation. The citizens of the world.

We want to contract the citizens of the world, the citizens of the kingdom of our Lord. All unconverted people belong to the world, found in every level of society, from the cream of society to the dregs of society. Many of them are outwardly moral, decent people, the kind of people you like to have for neighbors, isn't it true? But they belong to the world.

Others are terrible. Their lives are given over to sensuality. Their speech is punctuated with profanity, every other word they say.

You just don't like to be in their presence. But they all have this in common. They refuse to acknowledge the Lord Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior.

They walk according to the course of this world, Paul says, according to the prince of the power of the air. And the God of this age has blinded their eyes, as we've already seen. What characterizes the citizens of the world is that they're at home in the world.

They like it and don't want anything else. They love the world, and the world loves them. They're enemies of God, held in the grip of the devil.

And David describes them as men of this world who have their portion in this life. On the other hand, believers are citizens of the heavenly kingdom, strangers and pilgrims on the earth. For citizens of this kingdom, the world is a very good school, but a very poor home.

It's a place where God is training us for reigning time. And as pilgrims in this world, we're passing through it. And the idea is to pass through the world without taking any of its character upon ourselves.

It's kind of strange to be saying these things today. We're committed not to be taking the character of the world upon ourselves. Jesus reminded his disciples they're not of the world.

They're in the world, but they're not of the world, as he is not of the world. How much is Jesus of the world? Well, he's not of the world at all. And so as he is, so are we in this world.

Paul likens us to ambassadors sent from heaven to represent the Lord Jesus in this world. Then having said when Jacob brought all his family to Egypt at the invitation of Joseph, they settled in Egypt in the country of Goshen. Today, God's people, the church of the kingdom of heaven live in Egypt as it were in this world, but not of it.

They're a spiritual colony of heaven, not citizens of earth going to heaven, but citizens of heaven making their way through this world, pilgrims and strangers, exiles and aliens, a holy nation within the nation, the family. We used to sing hymns about this. We don't sing them anymore.

And I'm glad because it would be pharisaical hypocrisy in many cases to sing some of them. J. G. Dick said, called from above and heavenly men by birth who once were but the citizens of earth. As pilgrims here, we seek a heavenly home, our portion in the ages yet to come.

We are but strangers here. We do not crave a home on earth, which gave thee but a grave. Thy cross has severed ties, which bind us here, thyself, our treasure in a brighter sphere.

That's beautiful. Let me read that second verse again. We're but strangers here.

We do not crave a home on earth, which gave thee but a grave. Thy cross has severed ties, which bind us here, thyself, our treasure in a brighter sphere. As Abraham, we're called to go out of the world because we're different and yet go back into the world because we're salt and light.

I don't know any better way for a person to understand the world than to turn on the TV. Because on TV, and I don't care whether it's secular TV or Christian TV, you see the world in living color. Or I could contrast them this way.

If you take Hollywood in one hand and look at it and take a godly assembly of believers in the other hand, that's the contrast between the world and the kingdom of our Lord. Just as clear as that. I don't know anything that has done more to blunt the spiritual edge of Christians in the United States than TV.

It's not a friend of grace, I'll tell you that. And you cannot sit couch potato-like and watch TV, I don't care who you are, and watch TV hour after hour without it showing in your spiritual life, without it taking its toll in your spiritual life. You can't eat the onions, leeks, and garlic of Egypt without people being able to tell.

Worst of all, without the Lord himself telling. Well, we'd like to go on with this subject. Our time is up, but we'd like to go on with this subject and continue this contrast.

And the purpose, of course, is to make you hate the world, make you hate the world system, and just wean you away from all of the world. We have a news radio station, KCBS, out in Oakland, and the theme of it, the motto of it, bringing you the world every 30 minutes. That's exactly what it is, bring the world.

Anything to do with gays or lesbians, prime time on that station. Prime time. Bringing you the world every 30 minutes.

And of course you've heard about the man that ordered TV and the truck drove up to his door and he looked out and it said on the side of the truck, brings the world into your living room. Shall we pray? Father, we're reminded today of this great world system that crucified your lovely son. We think of the appeal that it has for people today and we think of how it gets into the Christian church and into the lives of your people.

We pray, Lord, that we might see the evil of it all and separate ourselves from it, not be isolated from it, but insulated from it, that we might go forth to the world with the glorious message that there's liberty and freedom in the Lord Jesus Christ, beseeching men and women to be reconciled to you through the Savior. Bless these studies to our hearts, we pray in his name. Amen.

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