

Summer 2007 - King's Centre Church, Sheffield

Engaging with our world : OF the world, but not IN it.

Based heavily on 'Love not the World' by Watchman Nee

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Intro

We sang a worship song last week with a line about 'not of this world'. It struck me that perhaps many of us don't really understand what that really means in practice. What does it mean, and how should it affect me? As I live IN this world, as I seek to engage with this world and bring in God's kingdom to everything around me (because we are all missionaries)... What does it really mean to be IN the world, but not OF the world, as followers of Jesus?

The main point I'm going to make is that you and I are spiritual beings, now – not just after we die. There is a spiritual reality to our lives, to our surroundings, to our cultures and countries. There is a hugely powerful force for good in the world in God (Father, Son, Holy Spirit) and there is an evil which opposes the things of God in this world too. And we live in the middle of it all! So we are called to be distinct and live in distinct way.

Clip from The Matrix movie (red pill or blue? "Do you want to know what it is?")

There are some reasons why I showed that clip. To demonstrate that

1. our Christian reality is not what it may seem on the surface
 - a. there is a 'system', a 'matrix' that we live within – the bible calls it 'the world'
 - b. but when you become a follower of Jesus, its like you take the red pill! You move from death to life, from one spiritual reality into another. You stop being part of the system, the matrix – because Jesus frees you from it by the power of the cross.
2. when we grasp the true reality of our situation, we should view the 'world' and how we live in it very differently that how non-believers view and act
 - a. the rest of the Matrix movie is about how Neo begins to fight and resist the very system he used to be a part of. And how ultimately in Movie 3 he and his other friends who've taken the red pill set the other human beings free from their bondage.

What is the 'system' the 'world'?

The NT has frequent references to 'the world' – the original Greek word commonly used in *kosmos*. In the NT it tends to be used to mean 3 different things, they are:

1. John 3:16 – For God so loved the world..... **(the material earth or universe)**
2. John 1:1,10 – The word became flesh and dwelt among us... but the world did not recognise him (paraphrase) **(the inhabitants of the world, and the race of humankind alienated & hostile to God)**
3. 1 John 2:15 “Do not love the world or anything in the world.... For everything in the world—the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does—comes not from the Father but from the world. The world and its desires pass away, but the man who does the will of God lives forever.” **(the material or spiritual/moral 'stuff' of life – goods, riches, pleasures which appear good and stir our hearts, even though really they are fleeting and hollow and can block our relationship with God (like a fast car that will one day inevitably end up as scrap metal, or a passing love-affair that seems so exciting at the time but actually will poison your relationships and leave you far worse off in the long-run).**

And the NT explains that behind these 3 ideas is something more. A system, an order – the world order (like The Matrix).

The world order is hostile to God

The reason why Jesus taught his followers to be a part of the world, to take part in it, but NOT to be **defined** by this *kosmos* is that the world system has shown itself to be hostile to God.

- Since evil entered the world right back with Adam & Eve
- John 15:18 – Jesus says to his followers “If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first.”
- James 4:4 – “...don't you know that friendship with the world is hatred toward God? Anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God.” But good news... v7 “Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.”
- So this is why Jesus was clear – he said ““My kingdom is not of this world.” (John 18:36)
 - More than that he said he has said “In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.” (John 16:33)

The ‘World’ is hostile to God, because it is governed by Satan

So there is a ‘system’ (like the matrix) which is currently hostile to God. The reason for that is that there is a controlling force, a master-mind if you like, behind the system.

Book of John covers this repeatedly

- Refers in 3 places to ‘The prince of this world’ being Satan (John 12:31, 14:30, 16:11)
- Described as ‘he that is in the world’ (1 John 4:4) who is matched against the Holy Spirit of truth who in IN – who dwells within – believers in Jesus.
- Similarly, Paul writes imploring us to put on our spiritual armour as we walk through life under God’s covenant because “our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.” (Eph 6:12)

The NT, and Paul especially are very clear - we are *part of the battle of defeating evil now on earth* – so lets get on with it! Christ has won the ultimate victory over this tainted ‘world’ system. Before you all get horrible worried and scared, always remember that Christ has won the ultimate victory over this tainted ‘world’ system. The good news in all of this is always – John 3:16 – “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.”

The reason we celebrate and reflect upon the cross and resurrection so much, is that that act Jesus’ defeated evil and death. They don’t have a long-term future, they are destined for defeat.

- God reached out with salvation to this world – salvation , to save this order.
- His plan and heart is to put it right again ultimately
- And for you and me as his followers to be a part of that plan of salvation right now!

There’s no point in pretending that the world system is simply fine and lovely. Because its not. Of course, there are some wonderful things about this material world and humans, life is fantastic, but there is some serious evil around us too. And these things are not to be explained as some kind of failure of God, sometimes they are actually direct attacks on the values and rule of God by evil.

The reality is that once you become a Christian, you have taken the red pill. You have been freed from being a citizen of one world into being a citizen of the kingdom of God. You are no longer a slave to the system, and you need to remember that and live like it. We can *learn* to see the matrix, the system around us, the spiritual realities around us.

That’s why Jesus ends some of his parables saying ‘he who has ears, let him hear’. And ‘my kingdom is not of this world’. Yes, we live in the world but we are no longer ‘of’ it. We are ‘of’

God's spiritual reality now, while still operating within the flawed system of this world. (Col 3:3 – "For you died, and your life is now **hidden** with **Christ** in God.")

The answer is NOT to run away!

Its not about denial of the world. Jesus never taught his followers to run away from the world. To flee these things (how can we anyway, we live amongst them!). I can't exactly deny that I live in Sheffield, I buy goods on the internet, I shop at supermarkets, I have a pension plan, I travel in planes and have holidays, I love Spurs and the Premiership (I don't like Arsenal), I earn money from my job, etc etc.....

Quite the opposite. Having explained that the 'system/cosmos/world in which we operate is fundamentally anti-God, Jesus then tells us that we are:

- to part-take of this world's 'stuff' (Mark 16:15 "He said to them, "Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation.")
- and we, the church of Jesus, ARE the light of the world – so don't go and hide your light, get out there and shine it into the world! (Matt 5:14)
- be salt and light to the world – don't go into cold storage, sealed away from contamination!

The bible does not teach us that we must necessarily deny ourselves from these things, from living in this world and system.

The issue is one of attitude.

- **Who is king of my heart? What is first in my heart – is it things of the world** (which the bible calls idols – if they come ahead of God in your pecking order)? Or is it seeking first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness – in the knowledge that 'all these other things' which your father in heaven knows you need will be added to you as well.
- There are legitimate things we need to get by in this world, this life: Money, love, mortgages in some cases, pensions, promotions, running a business, buying Teletubbie videos to keep the children entertained.....
 - **The question is: Are we weighed down by them?**
- Who is in control of the situation? **Are you being controlled** by the things of this world? **Or are you using them**, holding them lightly as useful tools to accomplish life and see God's agenda done as much as possible in everyday life?

Don't seek to remove the obstacle from the way. Outward actions are not really the point here. Allow God to deliver our hearts from the GRIP of the 'thing' of the world

Are the cares of this world weighing us down, or are we laying them down in our hearts every day at the foot of the cross, willing to let them go altogether if that's what Jesus asks us to do?

Our aim should be a light-weight, low maintenance lifestyle focused on the Kingdom, living out of the Covenant.

Holding these things FOR GOD, and dropping them if necessary. Don't stop doing your job, being a doctor or a teacher or a mechanic or whatever – but tread carefully and deliberately, because you are operating on territory which is controlled by God's enemy, and unless you are on your guard you are as liable as anyone else to fall prey to his devices. But equally – don't invest who you are in something that is anti-God, and perishing.

For example, if you knew Lloyds TSB was on the brink of bankruptcy next week, all the newspapers are predicting its closure in a matter of days..... you wouldn't take your life savings over to Lloyds and open a new account would you!? NO – you wouldn't pay them a penny more.

Open your eyes – see that the world system is corrupted and facing closure when Jesus comes again to judge it and bring in a new world order. Invest yourself instead in heavenly things which last – and which make a positive difference to life on earth now

Distinct

So the issue is attitude. Its also about being distinct.

Living out of the reality that you and I are children of the living God. Inheritors of the promises of God. That's Covenant thinking.

Why do I pray for healing with faith, and see some people and conditions healed? Because I am not part of the matrix – the *kosmos* 'world'. I am a citizen of heaven, you and I have been set free from the confines of this [evil] system and are in touch with the heavenly reality of God the creator.

I know that there is no sickness in God. There is only perfection, and a heart to see his own creations free and well on earth. And I'm called to be salt and light on earth. And to pray and operate 'your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven'. So I pray for healing and call down the reality of heaven onto earth. I pray to break into the system. To see the power of our Good God messing up the hold and power of the enemy of our souls at work in the world around us.

(In the same way as Neo freezes in mid-air and does karate – defies the system)

You and I are tasked with coming against the system, from within!

- We're revolutionaries!
- But we don't come with guns and violence – that is the way of the world
- We come with love, peace, patience, joy, faithfulness, self-control, hope, healing, kind words. The power of sacrificial love.

We overcome the world not by giving up the world's things, but by being out-of-this-world in a positive way – love, joy and peace as we live in the Holy Spirit (Romans 14:17)

How do we live 'in the world' but not 'of it'?

Jesus taught some simple principles, backed up in NT authors

- Remember your spiritual reality (remember we are outside of the matrix)
 - You are free, redeemed, living a life of promise, in the Covenant, child of God, inheritor of the kingdom on earth and later in heaven
 - In otherwords, you've been washed already. The normal state for us, metaphorically, is that we are 'clean' from the things of this world. (John 13)
 - Naturally, we pick up dust and dirty on our feet as we walk through life. We pick up some of the 'things' of the 'world'
 - All we have to do is regularly wash our feet. At the Last Supper Jesus symbolised this when he told Peter he didn't need a full bath because he was already 'clean' – he just needed his feet washed from time to time by Jesus (John 13)
 - **How do we 'wash'?** Live in repentance and faith – Mark 1:15 ("The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!")

The Holy Spirit will tell us when we are stepping near of over boundaries.

- The peace of Christ 'referees' in our hearts (Phil 4)
- Given that we operate in a battle situation – put on the full armour of God (Eph 6)
- Pray on every occasion as the spirit leads (Phil 4, Matt 6:5-15)
- Actively 'put off' our 'old self' (Eph 4:17 to 5:21)
 - Some of this involves choosing to do something, and stop doing another thing

Use the Lifeshapes triangle and circle all the time.

- Be aware of the need for balance in UP, IN, OUT
- Continually repent and believe
 - observe, reflect, discuss what's happening as we live in 'the world'
 - plan, be accountable, and act to change our hearts and minds towards Jesus in response

Inner transformation is the key.

A good way of summing this up is to live the spiritual disciplines. They train us towards Christ-likeness. They foster positive behaviour and positive spiritual climates, and they actively help us to battle against negative behaviour and negative spiritual realities.

- Egs: prayer, worship, community, Confession, silence & solitude, simplicity...

Final example:

When I scuba dive, I enter an alien environment – the sea. For a while I feel at home – I float, I swim, I can see the same things as the other creatures down there, I feel pressure but I can 'equalise' inside my head. But I am limited by the very fact that I'm human!. I am 'not of' this under-sea world!

As soon as I take the mouthpiece out – cut off the air supply from the tanks – then I realise very soon that I'm an alien here, in alien territory! I can't breathe!

It's like for Christians in our world. As soon as you take the air-supply away, as soon as your relationship with God (Father, Son, Holy Spirit in different ways) dries up..... You start choking on the 'things of this world'.

We operate in an alien environment – the bible calls it an evil environment. You've got to stay connected to the air supply. You've got to stay within reach of the boat and dry land to survive, or you will get choked up by the atmosphere of this 'world'. Keep the air-supply connected with your creator and redeemer at all times! **That's why it's vital to practice some or all of the disciplines as LIFESTYLE not an occasional one-off.**

Conclusion

Remember – Jesus said not to be afraid because he has overcome the world, and our father is pleased to give us the things of the kingdom.

Instead – live in close relationship to the Trinity, and always seek to transform the world, not allow it to transform you.