

Respectable Sins: Worldliness and Greed

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 05 October 2014

Preacher: Bernard Yee

[0 : 00] When we trusted the Lord for this church, we realized right away that I didn't want to be the only one preaching. And so in the history of Watermark, we've had 12 other men from within the congregation come to preach and to bring God's Word.

We've had only two from the outside, which has been exciting to me because God keeps raising up people from within the church family to preach and bring God's Word. And so today we have Bernard Yee, Bernard and Angie.

Bernard and Angie have been with us for a long time. When Christina and I were praying about the church, we didn't know a lot of people, but we knew Bernard and Angie and their kiddos, and we prayed that God would allow them to have the same heart and to join us to be a part of this journey. And it was really encouraging that he did. So if you turn in your bulletins, the passage today is from the first book of John. John chapter 2.

Follow along in your bulletins. Do not love this world nor the things it offers you. For when you love the world, you do not have the love of the Father in you.

[1 : 11] For the world offers only a craving of physical pleasure, a craving for everything we see, and a pride in our achievements and our possessions.

But these are not from the Father. These are from the world. And this world is fading away along with everything that people crave.

But anyone who does what pleases God will live forever. This is the reading of God's Word. Good morning, everybody.

Good morning. Thank you, Tobin, for the introduction. For those who are visiting us, please do come back next week. It does get better. Okay? So unfortunately, you have struck amateur night today.

So we're in the middle of a three-part series titled Respectable Sins. Okay? So these are sins that we think are kind of lesser sins that somehow that we feel justified in committing.

[2 : 26] Chris started this series two weeks ago and shared with us that we are much like the Israelites that return from exile.

And Chris's sermon was on apathy. So like the Israelites, not that they didn't love God. They loved God. But they were busy. They were busy rebuilding their city.

They were busy rebuilding their nations. So they thought, wow, you know what? The things that I know I'm supposed to do for God, I can do that when I'm a little less busy.

Which sounds a lot like us in Hong Kong. Last week, Eric reminded us and talked to us about people-pleasing. And especially highlighted that in this day and age whereby every one of us has got a smartphone and we're kind of very connected and we're in every social media known, that it's very easy to live our lives for the likes.

The likes in the Facebook, for your Twitter comments. And that it's very easy to fall into this world of people-pleasing. Hi.

[3 : 42] Okay. Today, I'm going to talk about, just spend a bit of time and talk to us about really a topic that none of us believe we have a problem with.

Okay. And that's precisely why we need to take time to talk about it at church. And that's a topic of worldliness. Okay. And the most common manifestation of worldliness is greed.

So I'm going to use the words worldliness, materialism, and greed interchangeably today. Now, I'm going to break the sermon into three parts. The titles may be a little strange to you, but just stay with me.

You'll get to know, you'll get to understand it. The first part I'm going to talk about is, has anyone seen the monster? The second part, the monster's under the bed.

And the last part is, how do we tame the monster? Okay. So the opening line in verse 15, in 1 John 2, said, Do not love this world, nor the things it offers you.

[4 : 45] What John is warning us against here is the love of the things of this world. It's important to clear up what it's not saying.

John is not telling us that we should hate the world. Okay. Because John, in John 3.16, said, For this is how God loved the world.

He gave His one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in Him will not perish, but have eternal lives. So John himself wrote in John 3.16, For this is how God loved the world.

It's important for us to clear this up because, you know, the other major religions of our world do not have the same view of the world that we currently live in.

Let me just share with you a few of them. Buddhism, for example, says, Your purpose in the world is to avoid suffering and gain enlightenment and release from a cycle of rebirth.

[5 : 40] Confucianism says the purpose in life is to fulfill one's role in society. Hinduism said, In the world, humans are in bondage to ignorance and illusions.

Purpose is to gain release from rebirth, or at least a better rebirth. In Islam, in this world, humans must submit, and that's what the word Islam means, submit, to the will of God to gain paradise after death.

Do you see a common theme? When I did the research into these different world religions, basically, if I could sum it up in kind of layman's term today, is you're working very hard for parole so you can get out of jail.

So the view of this world we live in for much of the world is not a world that is good and we should love it, but one we should try to escape from.

In contrast, the Bible tells us God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son. In 1st Genesis 10, when God was creating the world, he said, God called the dry ground land and the water sea, and God saw it was good.

[6 : 53] God saw it was good. God loved the world. God loved the world. So what John is warning us in 1st John 2 is not love the world.

Just do not love the world more than God. Do not love the things the world provide us more than God. You know, in all of us, we have things in our lives that we think, if we only have those things, our lives, we would be happy.

That's all I want, okay? If I could only get that promotion, if I could get that spouse, okay? If I could have that perfect family, if I could only get into that university, then my career would be set.

Even in the Bible, Abraham. For Abraham, it was Isaac. For the Samaritan woman at the well, it was her relationships with men.

And in Matthew 19, for the rich young ruler, when Jesus said that you should give away all that you own and come and follow me, it was his wealth that defined him.

[8 : 01] You know, for many years, when I read Matthew 19, it really kind of disturbed me a little bit, because I read it as, if you want to be a Christian, therefore you should give everything away and just follow Jesus.

Then I actually dug into the verse and tried to understand it a bit better, and it became clear to me, nowhere else in the Bible that we are told as Christians to give away everything we own and come and follow him.

Even with the extreme case of Zacchaeus, he only gave away half his wealth. So what Bible commentators have said, what this verse means is, Jesus looked, when the rich young ruler came to Jesus, Jesus looked into his heart and saw that his identity was in his wealth.

Okay? So what God wants is to free us from the treasures that you think, that we think, that would give us a life of joy and happiness without God.

So let me repeat that. What God wants is to free us from the treasures that we think, that would give us a life of joy and happiness without God.

[9 : 15] Our problem is not the desire to get into that college, or that next promotion, or that relationship with that special someone. Our problem comes about when we want those things more than God, more than we want God.

This is not a new problem. Genesis 3. Let's go right back to creation. Okay? Genesis 3, 5, it says, God knows that your eyes, this is the serpent talking to Eve, okay?

God knows that your eyes will be open as soon as you eat it, and you will be like God. You will be like God. Last week, I think Eric used a quote from St. Augustine, so I'm going to borrow that today. Augustine understood that desire itself is not the problem. It ain't wrong to want. It ain't wrong to want. Indeed, none of us can actually stop wanting.

The real problem resides in our disordered loves, is what Augustine said. Either we love the wrong things, or we love the right things in a wrong way.

[10:22] We want things more than we want God. In other words, we want to be our own God. Augustine said, Without you, what am I to myself, but a guide to my own self-destruction?

Augustine knew how easily we want things that bankrupt us, how diligently we will pursue success and pleasure. Which is only ever a promising note.

An American author from the middle of last century, F. Scott Fitzgerald, you might have heard of him, in his book, *This Side of Paradise*. So please, get the image of Leonardo in a white Ralph Lauren tuxedo out of your head now.

Different book. That was the *Gatsby*. This one is *This Side of Paradise*. And in his book, one of the characters, Emory Blaine said, I'm a slave to my emotions, to my likes, to my hatred of boredom, and to most of my desires.

I'm a slave to my emotions, to my likes, to my hatred of boredom, and to most of my desires. For us, we all know from experience that there are some things that we think, if we only have those things, we would be happy.

[11:44] But we also know from our own experience that those things never fulfill their promise. They are only ever a promissory note.

The promotion that we worked so hard to get, that we thought would satisfy us, just becomes another job. That dream apartment, suddenly, after you move in, a few months after you move in, it feels just that little bit small.

It could do with a little bit more room. And you know what? If we bought just another five floors up, the view would be just so much better than what we have now. And I hate to say it, the spouse that we thought was going to complete us, it's no longer the same person we married.

So, do you see the monster that's in our lives? Just to sum up this section, I want to say, the monster we have is not loving the world.

The monster we have is loving the world more than we love God. If Scott Fitzgerald reminds us, it's a small step from having desires, from having desires to having those desires, to being a slave to those desires.

[12:55] And we can't easily see the monster because it's hiding. So, the monster is under our bed. The problem with greed and williness is it hides itself in our lives.

Like the monster underneath our beds when we were a child, we don't dare to go and look, we don't dare to go and investigate, we don't dare to go and look under the bed. I think David Foster Wallace, the American novelist, puts it best in his commencement address to the graduating class at Kenyon College in 2005.

Let me just read this to you. David Foster Wallace wasn't a Christian, so he was just a contemporary novelist. because there's nothing else that's weird, there's something else that is weird but true.

In the day-to-day trenches of adult life, there's actually no such thing as atheism. There's no such thing as not worshipping. Everybody worships.

The only choice we get is what to worship. If we worship money and things, if they are where you tap real meaning in life, then you will never have enough, never feel you have enough.

[14:08] That's the truth. Worship your body, beauty and sexual allure, you will always feel ugly. And when time and age start showing, you will die a million deaths before they finally grieve you.

Worship power, and you will end up feeling weak and afraid. And you will never, ever, you will always need more power over others to numb your own fears.

Worship intellect. Be seen as smart. You will end up feeling stupid, a fraud, always on the verge of being found out. But the insistent thing about these forms of worship is not that they're evil or sinful, it's that they're unconscious.

They are our default settings. Wallace warns us, there's no such thing as not worshipping.

Everybody worships. The only choice we get is what we worship.

The only choice we get is what we worship. He warns us. And you know what? In the world of worshipping the world, we slip into that unconsciously.

[15:16] Tim Keller, in his book, *The Counterfeit God*, puts it this way. Nowhere is this slavery more evident than the blindness of greedy people to their own materialism.

Notice in Luke 12, Jesus says, watch out, be on your guard against all kinds of greed. That's a remarkable statement. Think of another tradition, a traditional sin that the Bible warns against, adultery.

Jesus doesn't say, be careful, you are committing adultery. He doesn't need to. When you're in bed with somebody else's spouse, you know it. Halfway through, you don't say, oh, wait, I think this is adultery.

You know it. But nobody thinks that we have a problem with spending too much on ourselves. The monster that is greed is camouflaged and has a cloaking technology, to use an analogy, from the Predator Trilogy, which is a, I, it's a sore point that the Academy has always overlooked, a great actor like Arnold Schwarzenegger.

But in the Predator Trilogy, for those kind of, in my era, know that he had this cloaking technology. It was on his arm, he pushed it and he became invisible. The monster that is greed in our life also have this cloaking technology.

[16:36] For the younger ones among you, it's the Harry Potter invisibility cloak. So, so, okay, personal confession time. So, just, when, when Tobin asked me to share on this topic, I immediately thought, hey, I'm pretty good.

I don't have a problem, you know, with, with greed and spending too much on myself. And after much soul searching and some amateur repressed memory therapy, I was able to identify, I did have a monster of materialism.

And it was right under my bed. You see, I have a problem. I can't walk away from bargains. Okay? I have a fear of missing out on a deal.

And for those of you who are from Hong Kong, okay, there's a very at Hong Kong saying, ■■■■. Okay?

So, ■■■■ is a technical term that basically saying you have this fear of missing out on a deal. And, and I do have that. Just give you an example.

[17:39] The other day, I was walking in Wan Chai and I was walking past 298 Hennessy Road which is a dingy computer mall, total fire trap. I don't expect, you know, I don't advise you to go in there.

I walked in there and I saw this Bluetooth speaker. Okay? And, and the shopkeeper said, it sells for \$3,000 at the Apple shop but for you, \$1,400.

Okay? So, without a second thought, I just bought it. Okay? So, I took it home. Now, it doesn't seem like a big deal until you know the fact that this is the fifth Bluetooth speaker I've bought.

Okay? So, the point is, it's so easy for me just to go and buy that. I don't even think. Okay? The speaker itself is not the problem. It's not the issue.

But the fact that I didn't even think about it. I didn't even want to pass up on this bargain. I mean, if I walked away, I would have thought, you know, I could have got this \$1,400. For \$1,400, I could have got a \$3,000.

[18:40] speaker that they're selling. And every time I walked past Apple Shoppe, there would be a speaker shouting to me, you missed out on this deal. So, I've asked Angie for permission to share that, you know, what is the monster in her life.

And she's not much of a shopper, but she does love good food. She loves to cook. Okay? So, sometimes, she asks that we should go to a nice restaurant. Nice and expensive.

Okay? It's what nice means. Okay? So, I'm sitting there, I'm looking at the menu, and I am having, you know, a heart attack on just the appetizers.

So, I'm going through in my head, okay? So, I studied finance, I'm going through in my head, I'm calculating how much this meal is going to cost me, and Angie's like, uh-huh-huh, enjoying the ambiance, and, you know, the next thing you hear is, you know, pass me that pink Himalayan rock salt.

Okay? Pink, any restaurant that has pink Himalayan rock salt, it's a pretty good recipe that, you know, you're going to get overcharged for the meal. Okay? So, what's the monster in your life?

[19 : 53] You know, I mean, if we are honest as to ourselves, is it passing up on a bargain? Is it, is it, you know, is it good food? I mean, there may be just other things. So, but, what is this thing with just money flying out of a wallet?

Okay? Now, there's another danger with greed. If you know anything about drug addiction, when you're addicted to drugs, to get that same high, you're going to have to take more and more of the drugs or a stronger and stronger dose of that drug.

That's known as the tolerance effect. Okay? That is the same problem with materialism and greed. Okay? So, I'll give you an example. We all live a certain way.

We all live within our, the means of the income that we have. But if we come into possession with a little bit more money, we go out and we maybe buy that little extra thing that we would consider as a luxury that we wanted.

But very soon, those luxuries becomes necessities. You may have heard of the saying that yesterday's luxuries becomes tomorrow's necessities. That's the tolerance effect.

[21 : 04] Okay? So, it's very easy for us with these little micro upgrades that next minute all the things that we used to consider as luxuries becomes necessities and we always, we always don't have enough because we're always looking at that next upgrade.

But ultimately, we'll need our worldliness and the love of the things that are money, the love of the things that are will can become monsters in our life and feel like we deserve more.

I work hard. We deserve more. Why isn't God blessing me with more? Okay? Two weeks ago, Chris, in his sermon, referred to an ancient philosopher.

Her name is Madonna. And in 1986, her famous vanity article quote said, because even though I've become somebody, I still have to prove I am somebody.

My struggle has never ended and it probably never will. Now, 1986 is a long, long time ago, right? The world has changed. We've gotten smarter. Eric reminds us.

[22 : 08] We now have more friends on Facebook. We've got more followers on Twitter. So, what has modern philosophers got to say about how this generation is interacting with money?

So, two contemporary philosophers that I like to use today in my sermon is Eminem and Rihanna. Just an explanation for those who were born before the 90s, Eminem is actually a rapper from the United States.

It's not the color-coded candy from Mars. So, don't think of a big yellow kind of with an M on it. Eminem is actually a legitimate name of a rap artist.

So, in his 2013, last year, hit song, The Monster, Rihanna, in the opening line, sang, and I won't sing it to you, I'll just quote it. I'm friends with the monster that's under my bed.

Get along with the voices inside my head. You're trying to save me, stop holding your breath. You think I'm crazy, yet you think I'm crazy. I wanted the fame, but not the cover of Newsweek.

[23 : 20] And the song goes on to tell the anguish Eminem has, or is having, coping with the fame and the attention that came with his global music success, and how that has created a monster that's killing him.

He can no longer control it. His success and fame is controlling him. He needs to keep writing new songs and performing hits, otherwise his ego is going to crush him. We'll come back to Eminem a little bit later.

So, just to sum up this section, David Foster Wallace said, everybody worships. The only choice we have is what we worship. He also warned us we will gradually slip into worshipping the world because that's our default setting.

Tim Keller warns us that in his 40 years of pastoring, nobody has ever come to him to say, pastor, help me, I'm greedy and materialistic. We don't think it's a problem that we have.

In Luke 12, he said, watch out, be on your guard against all kinds of greed. There is a monster hiding in our lives. We know it's probably under our bed, but do we have the courage to go and look for it?

[24 : 30] And can we tame it? So, in my final section, how do we tame the monster? Remember earlier we said, all of us have this thing in our life that we think if we only have that thing, we would be happy.

We refuse, sometimes we refuse to look for the monster, to confront it and to tame it. But if we do that, if we refuse to look for it, it will one day surface, it will overrun our lives and we won't even know it.

Anything that we believe would allow us to have a life of joy and power without God will not only disappoint, it will become the monster. That's why God had to bring Abraham to the point of sacrificing Isaac.

That's why Jesus had to reveal to the Samaritan woman her issues of men before she could understand her real spiritual thirst. And that's why ultimately the young rich ruler ultimately went away downtrodden.

Money, and more precisely the perception that money would allow all of us to have total control of our lives is often the hidden monster in our lives in Hong Kong. We love money because it gives us power, gives us status, gives us recognition.

[25 : 47] But most dangerously, we love money because it gives us control. We think that what money would do is free us from the basic worries and anxieties of everyday life.

If we have lots and lots of money, we can weather any storm. We would be able to maintain our same style of living even if we lose our job. But ironically, the reason, but the irony is the reason our lives is out of control is because we are afraid of losing control to God.

The reason our life is often out of control is because we are afraid of losing control to God. Eminem had this to say at the end of his song, The Monster.

He was talking about how fame and his success, and he always wanted that, but now he's got it. It didn't give him fulfillment, it didn't give him happiness, and certainly didn't give him control.

He said in the end of his song, fame made me a balloon because my ego inflated. When I blew, see, but it was confusing because I needed an interventionist to intervene between me and this monster and save me from myself in all this conflict.

[27 : 06] Because the very thing that I love is killing me and I can't conquer it. My OCD is conking in my head. Keep knocking, but nobody's home. He said, I needed an interventionist to intervene between me and this monster.

And Eminem knew he wasn't going to be able to overcome this monster on his own. He said he needed somebody to intervene between him and his monster to save him from this conflict that's killing him.

And he was looking for help, and he said, keep knocking, nobody's home. keep knocking, nobody's home. When I hear Eminem's cry out for help, it just brings me to Revelation 3.20, where Jesus said, look, I stand at the door and knock.

If you hear my voice, open the door, I will come in, and we will share a meal together as friends.

Christ is standing at our door, knocking, ready to come in and have a relationship with us.

the will needs to hear the gospel message, the will needs to hear Revelation 3.20. Because success and money will not give us control, ultimately it will control us.

[28 : 22] In Eminem's words, because the very thing that I love is killing me, and I can't conquer it. Williness, the love of money, and worldly success is dangerous.

It can kill us, just like it was killing Eminem. it's not only money and success per se, but the desire for it, the desire that is greater than our desire for God.

God wants you to give up control and hand it over to Him. Jesus wants us to give up trying to control our lives with money, and instead trust in control of Him.

But that's hard, right? Giving up control to God, how do we fight the monster? How do we give up control? The last part of the verse, in 1 John 2, 17, it says, this will is fading away, along with everything that people crave.

But anyone who does what pleases God will live forever. We need to see and understand what it means to live forever with God. Do we see Christ and what Christ has done for us?

[29 : 29] He has purchased for us the eternal life through dying on the cross for us. The value of what that is worth far surpasses anything we can amass in this world. There, our treasure is in heaven.

Beyond seeing the value of what is installed for us in heaven, we also need to see how we are valued in Jesus' eyes. He left His Father's side to come down, to be broken into the world, and to die on the cross for us.

He wasn't just an interventionist in the sense a lawyer, as an interventionist, arguing our case. He was the ultimate interventionist. He took our monster.

He died on the cross to free us from our monster. He had to die on the cross because we chose the world and the things of the world more than we chose God. So if we let Christ and what Christ has

done dwell deeply in our hearts and our minds every day, we will be able to see money is just a tool, a tool for social justice, a tool to heal Hong Kong, a tool to build community.

We will not be a slave to this monster. But how do we know if we are making progress? So just to sum up, I want to get practical, and some of you are going to hate me by the end of this.

[30 : 51] Because it's pretty easy to stay theoretical and talk about Augustine and Eminem. By the way, I think that's probably the first time ever those two guys have been referred to in the same sentence.

We need to ask ourselves just two simple questions. Two simple questions. One is, are we spending too much on ourselves? Second is, are we giving back to God his share of what he has blessed us with?

Are we willing to be accountable to somebody about what we spend on ourselves? And are we willing to be accountable? accountable about what we're giving back to what God has blessed us with?

I mean, are we willing, I'm not asking you to provide a full gap compliant financial statement. All I'm saying is, I mean, are we willing to be accountable for our discretionary spending on ourselves? And are we willing to be accountable to somebody for tithing to the church? That's the monster x-ray. That's the monster x-ray. And now that I've said it in the sermon, it's on record, so we'll make it into your discussion questions for your CG.

[32 : 05] So that's a good place to start. And don't even think about missing next week's CG. Because, you know, it was just, you were just pleading guilty. Okay?

So, I told you you would hate me by the end of this, when we get down to where the rubber meets the road. But I think we need to hear this in Hong Kong. Some churches may skate around it for the fear of offending, but this monster of greed and williness will eat us alive.

And if we don't help one another here, we can tame it. And a good first step of breaking free from the grip of this monster, it's get accountable with one another about how we tithe and how we spend on ourselves.

And given I'm not part of the staff, nor part of the leadership, and I'll probably never get asked to preach again, I want to lay down a challenge for all of us to get accountable with this tithing to the church.

Are we willing to do this? Sure, the church needs our finances to keep the ministry going, and there's serious needs. But even more importantly, there's a real battle for our souls.

[33 : 16] It's fought on a battlefield of our bank accounts. C.S. Lewis said, enemy-occupied territories, that's what the world is.

Christianity is the story of how the rightful king has landed, and you may say landed in disguise, and calling us to take part in a great campaign of sabotage.

Are you going to join the revolution? Today, there's one out there in Aberlty, in Causeway Bay, in Mong Kok, but recognize there's another revolution.

It's fought in our hearts, and the barricades are not in Aberlty, but the barricades across our bank accounts. Are we going to make a stand against this monster called greed?

Are we going to help one another with this stand in our CGs? Am I going to see you at the barricades? Let us pray. Father God, we want to live up to you.

[34 : 21] We want to give you thanks that you have promised that where two or three are gathered together, you are in our presence. Lord, we just pray that you would help us, Lord, to find our identity in you, not in the things of this world.

Lord, we just ask you that we can't do it on our own strength, that we can come alongside one another in this community to overcome this monster that is williness and that's materialism and that's greed.

Father, we just pray that for each one of us that we recognize that there is a fight, there is a war, there is a revolution and it's in our hearts.

It's across our bank accounts, it's across our credit cards, it's across how we spend. Lord, we just ask you that you would come alongside us and help us in this battle.

All this we pray in the name of our Lord Jesus. Amen. Amen.