

Wayfinding in a Weary World
Part One: We Are Pilgrims
I John 2.15-17 (Hebrews 11.13-16, 13.14, I Peter 2.11-12)

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Series Intro

We all feel it. Every direction we look there are dynamics of life that contribute to our sense of life's uncertainty.

We've been talking about this recently as a ministry team and we've all noticed the same thing. People just seem to be tired, distracted, unsettled, weary.

We don't have to look far to see why. Some of the challenges are painfully obvious: a world at odds, hostility toward strangers in our own backyard, political divisions and animosity.

Others are quieter but no less wearying to deal with: the uncertainties of AI technology, social media pushing its way into relationships, a sense that our identity is constantly up for grabs, unrelenting pressure to perform, feeling as though we are on our own and it's all up to us.

All of these things leave us filled with anxious unease and distraction. The weight of the world hangs over us and we are *tired*.

You may have seen the comic strip *Pearls Before Swine* that came out a few weeks ago (3/23)

In the first frame Pig is praying:

God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference.

In the second frame Goat steps in and says to Pig:

Praying before you start your day?

In the third frame Pig points to a TV screen:

Before I watch the news.

In the fourth frame Goat screams:

Teach me that prayer!

At which point Rat steps into the frame, turns to us, and says:

And here, I just turn it off completely.

Some of you may remember a message a few months back in which I shared the story of how some of the stuffed animals made to commemorate The Year of the Horse, which is the name of the new Chinese New Year, were accidentally made with the muzzle upside down.

Kukuma the Crying Horse



Somehow they managed to capture the spirit of the times perfectly. They instantly became a best-selling symbol for the trepidation many of us feel as we watch events unfolding around us. Right?

For years this passage in Isaiah 50 has been a daily prayer for me:

The Sovereign Lord has given me his words of wisdom,
so that I know how to comfort the weary.
 Morning by morning he wakens me
 and opens my understanding to his will.
 The Sovereign Lord has spoken to me,
 and I have listened. (Isaiah 50.4-5 NLT)
 God, make it so.

It was out of that prayer, and listening to the Lord, and talking together, that our new sermon series came to be. I was thinking we were going a completely different direction after Easter, but, in conversation together we agreed that this seemed to be the direction the Spirit wanted to take us.

So this morning we begin a new sermon series called *Wayfinding in a Weary World: A Pilgrim's Guide*.

In this series we will be working hard to remember ourselves and to remind each other what is true as we walk through this overwhelming world of ours.

Along the way we'll be considering lots of pressing and challenging issues: social media, politics, our borders, AI, performance pressure, individualism.

But here's the lens through which we'll be looking at all of this. It's captured in the subtitle of the series:

If we belong to Jesus, our citizenship has been transferred, and we no longer belong to this world. This world is no longer our home. If we are Christians, we are pilgrims. This is a pilgrim's guide to wayfinding in a weary world.

And here's the underlying premise of this series. This is the biblical truth we'll be unpacking: as soon as we forget where our true home is, we will begin to find ourselves worn down and overwhelmed by the weariness of this world, and the more we forget, the more weary we will become.

So while we'll be tackling some challenging issues, we're not looking at them in isolation. We'll be looking at them in the light of key truths about who God is and who we are as human beings and what's true about this world of ours and what's true about God's design for our relationships with friends and strangers alike.

Three thoughts about how to get the most out of this series. First, we have created what we call *The Weary Pilgrim's Reminder Guide*. I hope you all take one of those home with you today and spend some time exploring these foundational passages over the next two months. These are some of the core truths, truths we can all agree on, that will inform the way we respond as pilgrims to the challenges before us.

Second, some of the things we talk about will likely invite further discussion. So every Wednesday night at 7:00 during this series we'll host a conversation about the message here at the church for those who'd like to come take part in that.

And one other thought as we go through this. Ethan Hall had the great idea of using this series as a time to read through John Bunyan's classic book *A Pilgrim's Progress*. If you do, I'd encourage you to think about reading both Part I and Part II. There are some good modern paraphrases and there are some good versions for kids as well.

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Message

Here's how I'd like to begin. This came at the suggestion of one of our staff team. It's the way we'll start every one of these messages over the next eight weeks.

This is a reading from I Peter chapter 1. Listen to God's word:

Peter, writing to God's chosen people who are living as foreigners:

Put all your hope in the gracious salvation that will come to you when Jesus Christ is revealed to the world.

Live as God's obedient children. Don't slip back into your old ways of living. Be holy in everything you do, just as God who chose you is holy.

Live in reverent fear of him during your time here as "temporary residents." For you know that God paid a ransom to save you from the empty life you inherited. It was the precious blood of Christ, the sinless, spotless Lamb of God. God chose him as your ransom long before the world began, but now in these last days he has been revealed for your sake.

Through Christ you have come to trust in God. And you have placed your faith and hope in God because he raised Christ from the dead and gave him great glory.

You were cleansed from your sins when you obeyed the truth; so now, show sincere love to each other as brothers and sisters. Love each other deeply with all your heart. For you have been born again, but not to a life that will quickly end. Your new life will last forever because it comes from the eternal, living word of God.

As the Scriptures say,

"People are like grass;
their beauty is like a flower in the field.
The grass withers and the flower fades.
But the word of the Lord remains forever."

This is the Good News that was preached to you.
(1 Peter 1.1,13-25 NLT)

That passage – written by Peter, one of Jesus' first followers, writing to fellow followers of Jesus who have been scattered throughout the Roman Empire – is a great introduction to this series and a great reminder that our pilgrim status really should transform our experience of walking through this world of ours.

When we think of pilgrims, what first comes to mind might be a bunch of people with odd looking hats crossing the ocean in a boat called the Mayflower. But a pilgrim is just another word for a traveler passing through one place in order to get to another place.

So we begin with the biblical affirmation that for us as followers of Christ, this world may be where we live, but this world is not our home. **We are pilgrims on our way home.**

As we just heard, 1 Peter chapter one is one of the places that theme comes through.

Another is in the Book of Hebrews, in chapter eleven. First it describes Abraham, living in a tent in the promised land, as one who was "looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God." (Hebrews 11.10)

Then it goes on to speak of other men and women of faith who, like Abraham, realized this world was not their home, and put their hope in something beyond this world.

Hebrews 11.13-16

All these people were still living by faith when they died. They did not receive the things promised; they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance, admitting that they were foreigners and strangers on earth.

People who say such things show that they are looking for a country of their own.

They were longing for a better country—a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them.

Then the writer of Hebrews throws the scope even wider, and, two chapters later, in 13.14, he includes every one of us who is a follower of Jesus when he writes:

For here we do not have an enduring city, but we are looking for the city that is to come.

Not home now, but making our way home, and sure to be home eventually. That outlook is what defines being a pilgrim.

Think about the people you find in an airport. 11,000 people work at the Indy airport every day. And on a typical day, somewhere between 17,000 to 20,000 people pass through the airport.

How do you tell the two groups apart? Easy. Those who work there never look at the Departure Screen, and none of them have a ticket in their pocket.

Where are your eyes? What is in your pocket? Where is your heart?

Pilgrims are here now, but they are on their way somewhere else.

The early church fathers recognized how important this theme of pilgrimage was to understanding how God would have us walk through this beautiful and broken and burdensome world of ours. It's a theme that comes up again and again in their writings.

For example, in the Letter to Diognetus, one of the earliest Christian writings after the New Testament (section five, written about 130AD), it says:

Christians do not inhabit separate cities of their own, or speak a strange dialect, or follow some outlandish way of life... They follow the customs of whatever city they happen to be living in.

And yet there is something extraordinary about their lives. They live in their own countries as though they were only passing through. They play their full role as citizens, but they endure life and its hardships as strangers. Any country can be their place of residence, but for them that homeland, wherever it may be, remains a foreign country...They pass their days upon earth, but they are citizens of heaven.

Augustine, writing a couple of centuries later, wrote something similar:

We are merely travelers on a journey without as yet a permanent home; we are on our way, and not yet in our native land; we are in a state of longing, and not yet of full enjoyment. So let us continue on our way, and continue without weariness, so that we may ultimately arrive at our destination. (*City of God*)

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If we are not citizens here, if this world is not our home, what is?

Heaven? Yes. Paul in Philippians 3.20 says:

Our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ.

But when Paul speaks here of heaven, he doesn't just have in mind a place that awaits us when we die, though that certainly is included. He is thinking of the realm of God, and all of the places that realm reaches. In that sense, heaven isn't something only outside of this physical realm. It reaches into and is part of this earthly existence. It is something we participate in now.

That's what Paul is getting at when he writes in Ephesians 2.19:

You are no longer foreigners and strangers [to the things of God], but fellow citizens with God's people and also members of his household.

So, as followers of Christ, our home – the kingdom of God, the colony of heaven – is a realm that is established by God's power and ordered by God's purposes and defined by God's presence.

So really it's just a small step for us to take in order to say with the psalmist:

Psalm 90.1

Lord, through all the generations *you* have been our home!

Do you remember I Peter 3.18? It says:

Christ suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you safely home to God.

God himself is our home. Randy Alcorn is absolutely right when in his book on heaven he says heaven is a place but heaven is also a person.

The essence of heaven is the presence of God, just as the essence of hell is the absence of God. God himself is our heart's true home.

* * *

Let me take this one step further.

You may remember that Augustine says every human being is shaped by a deep and driving and gripping desire. It is the longing for peace and rest and fulfillment.

And only the God who created us can satisfy that longing. As Augustine says in his *Confessions*,

You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless until they find their rest in you.

And Augustine says that God made human beings to enjoy two kinds of loves.

The first kind of love is the love that enjoys God for who he is, finding our rest and peace and joy and fulfillment – finding our home – in him.

But God also gave us a second kind of love. It is a love that sees everything and everyone else that God created with reference to the God who created them. We love people and we love things for his sake and not for our own. We see ourselves as his gift to them, and we see them as his gift to us.

There is an ultimate love, a *destination* love, a love in which we look to God for peace and rest and satisfaction.

And there is penultimate love, an *on-the-way-to-our-destination* love, a love with which we love others and they love us – ever keeping God in view.

CS Lewis captures powerfully what happens when we forget to see all things with reference to God, and we try to find our home in them. He says, "We may give our human loves the unconditional allegiance which we owe only to God. Then they become gods; then they become demons." (*Four Loves*)

So much human misery is rooted in mistaking where our home is, and looking to the things of this world as though they were able to give us the peace and rest and joy and satisfaction that only God can give.

That puts us in a perfect place to hear John's advice to us when it comes to living as pilgrims in this world – residents here, but with hearts elsewhere.

Look at I John 2.15-17:

Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, love for the Father is not in them. For everything in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—comes not from the Father but from the world. The world and its desires pass away, but whoever does the will of God lives forever.

Do not love the world or anything in the world.

There is a right way and there is a very wrong way of making sense of those words.

Are we called to see the world as a good gift from God to be enjoyed, and to see the people in this world as ones to be loved? Absolutely. But this verse is talking about something completely different.

The "world" that John is referring to is the whole realm of human affairs when that realm is separate from God and his purposes.

And the love he's talking about is fixing our hearts on the things that surround us in a way that not only takes God out of the center, but leaves God out of the picture altogether.

If anyone loves the world, love for the Father is not in them.

You can only have one destination love. You can't love God as God ought to be loved and try to hold onto the world as the object of your peace and rest and satisfaction at the same time. Which, asks John, will it be?

This world offers us *the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life.*

Think for a minute about what we know about lust and pride.

Lust always involves *a twisting of desire* in upon ourselves. Lust is any desire that morphs from grateful enjoyment into the need to possess or consume. That's what happens when you take the giver of the gift out of the picture and just see the gift in relationship to yourself.

And pride always involves *an elevating of self*. You remember last Sunday we talked about the difference between *bios* life and *zoos* life. Pride of life is elevating ourselves on the basis of *bios* life instead of our being raised up by God into *zoos* life. So pride of

life is defining our value or importance apart from God, basing it on fleeting things such as power or position or possession or popularity.

Loving this world with lust and pride means going through life bent in upon ourselves, instead of opened up to God and out to others in love.

As a strategy for peace and rest and joy and fulfillment, loving this world dooms us to disappointment, and discontentment, and dis-ease.

A poignant prayer from the 1600s puts it like this:

As one who has buried his treasure,
And now cannot find the place,
So am I distraught and without peace.
Prayers and Meditations, Everyman's Library

Where is your treasure?

The world and its desires pass away.

John reminds us that this world is only a stop along the way, not our destination. A beautiful stop! An enthralling stop! What a wonderful world! But it is a stop nonetheless. As it says in the New Living Translation, "this world is fading away, along with everything that people crave."

Nothing but God satisfies . . . and nothing but God lasts. There is only one thing you can lay hold of, and *know* that once you have laid hold of it, you will have it and you will hold it for all of eternity, and that is the God who created you.

He is our destination. He is the home for our hearts.

I know many of you were glued to your screens watching the launch, the moon fly-by, and the landing of Artemis II during the past two weeks. Incredible, wasn't it?

As you probably know, the Artemis program is paving the way for a landing on the moon, with the ultimate goal of establishing a long-term, sustainable presence there.

Someday astronauts will be *living* on the moon! But no matter how excited they are about going there, and no matter how fond of the lunar landscape they become, not one of those astronauts will be the least bit confused about the answer to the question: "Where is your home?" Without a moment's hesitation, every one of them would raise a gloved hand and point to that glowing blue marble in the black sky a quarter of a million miles away.

Home isn't where we live, much as we may love it. Home is where our hearts live.

And for us as followers of Christ, our hearts are joined to the heart of God. We have set our hearts not on anything in this world, but on him whose presence we will enjoy forever.

Whoever does the will of God lives forever.

Doing the will of God doesn't just mean making God-honoring decisions each time you happen to come to a fork in the road. Though it certainly includes that, it is so much more than that. Doing the will of God means living your life for God as opposed to living a life bent in upon yourself. It is another way of saying "whoever follows Jesus."

John puts the choice in front of us starkly: honor God, put him at the center, live for him, and love the world rightly, or love the world wrongly, put yourself at the center, live for yourself, and dishonor God.

It's so easy for us to forget, to let our hearts fall for things closer to home, and like the family in the *Swiss Family Robinson*, to piece together a good enough life from the wreckage on the island where we've washed ashore, instead of keeping our eyes and our hearts fixed on our ultimate destination.

So we benefit from the perspective of the psalmist, who prays in Psalm 39.6-7 and 12:

Lord, remind me how brief my time on earth will be. You have made my life no longer than the width of my hand. My entire lifetime is just a moment to you; at best, each of us is but a breath. For I am your guest—a traveler passing through.

His words remind us what's true, and when we say them and pray them often – I pray that prayer every time I have a birthday – they help form in us the sort of eternal perspective that the saints of old managed to retain, such as ...

Teresa of Ávila

From heaven even the most miserable life will look like one bad night at an inconvenient hotel.

Blaise Pascal

Eternally in joy for a day's training on the earth.

And so we also pray the Pilgrim's Prayer of Perspective in Psalm 73, words well worth memorizing:

Psalm 73.23-26

I am always with you;
you hold me by my right hand.
You guide me with your counsel,
and afterward you will take me into glory.

Whom have I in heaven but you?
 And earth has nothing I desire more than you.
 My flesh and my heart may fail,
 but God is the strength of my heart
 and my portion forever.

God calls us to love him and to find our home in him, determined *never* to love this world or the things in this world.

But – and here comes the twist – for the very reason that we love God and find our home in him, we also live determined *ever* to love this world and the things of this world, to love it in the right way, offering ourselves as gifts to this world, keeping God ever in view.

As followers of Christ we will necessarily be out of step with this world, and the world will be out of step with us. When we live a life shaped by the will of God our lives will be baffling and incomprehensible to the world around us.

But as Peter urges us in I Peter 2.11-12:

Dear friends, I urge you, as foreigners and exiles, to . . . live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us.

I was blessed this week to hear two neighbors of a Covenant family talk about that family and its unearthly joy and its sacrificial love in ways that took my breath away.

As we walk along the pilgrim way, making our way home, we are called to live compelling lives, even as they remain baffling, lives that keep the world curious, lives that draw the world near. Why? So that they too might join us as we make our way to our eternal home.

Adeline Jolley is one of our awesome college students and a former Next Gen intern. As it happens, she was one of a number of women from Covenant who walked portions of the El Camino last summer.

The El Camino is a five hundred mile trail that stretches from France across the top of Spain and culminates at the Cathedral of Santiago de Compostela next to the Atlantic.

Hiking the El Camino is meant to be a way of reenacting the pilgrim-y nature of the life of a follower of Christ, as each day you walk a new stretch of road with whoever God puts beside you, and each night you stay in a new and different inn, but always, day and night, your heart is on the destination that awaits you at the end of the *camino*.

I asked Adeline to describe what that experience was like. She said that the thing that struck her most was when she came to the very end, and about three miles from the end, she could finally see the cathedral that she'd been walking toward all this time.

She said for her and the new friends she was walking with, it was an incredibly joyful moment, and they were crying and jumping up and down and filled with awe. But what struck her in that moment was the sea of people walking past them with their heads down, oblivious.

And she found herself thinking: we have this promise of this amazing thing that awaits us that fills us with so much joy, but all around us there are people whose heads are down and who don't yet see it, and it is our privilege to share our hope with them as we make our way toward our destination, with the hope that some of them might join us.

We're going to close this morning by hearing from another fellow pilgrim, this one someone who has walked the pilgrim road longer than me and Adeline combined.

I've asked Jerry Dewey if he would come share with us his perspective on making heaven our home.

I was born in late July of 1928 in Oakland, Ca. The young widow who gave me life was unable to care for me and instead of choosing abortion, she took me to a Salvation Army Home for adoption. When I was 12 weeks old, a young pastor and his wife, childless and looking for God to answer, stopped by and chose me to be their son.

The following years included a lot of travel, and my mother and Father and I visited many of the States as my dad was called as an evangelist.

From the beginning, I was taught that Jesus loved me and died for my sins and I can't remember a time when I didn't believe He was my Savior and best friend. I had been adopted again...by God

My parents saw that I got to Taylor U., and graduated from Wheaton College, where I met a beautiful blonde girl with laughing eyes named Dee Eldridge, followed by marriage, and 3 lovely daughters...Jill, Linda, and Sharon ..and a slew of kids, And grandkids, and greats and even great greats.

Well, here I am, almost 98. It's an incredible thing for me to have lived this long. A little over a year ago the Lord took Dee home (literally out of my arms into His). We had 73 1/2 years together, and I thought I would die from grief. But now, I'm so grateful she will never again feel death or pain.

And here's what I'm noticing the most.... Life races by ... It needs to be slowed down and enjoyed. ... because it's only temporary. and soon passes. But it's ok, because truly, "This world is not my home ". we're just passing through. If Heaven's not my Home, then Lord, what will I do?" Heaven is a place I think about a lot. Randy Alcorn wrote the

book" Heaven" which was life changing for me. He opened my eyes to the many references in Scripture to our final destination and exercised my imagination to cause me to long intensely for it.

I find that friends and the people we meet need to be treasured, because Jesus treasures them. .and they may meet Him through you and me. What an exciting thought. Heaven, , and the kingdom He's preparing for us is my main focus these days. It's the only thing that's permanent and sure, based on God's promises to everyone who loves Him. And so, we should be the happiest and most grateful people on Earth. Our future is glorious. Our present lives are part of God's eternal plan...and He is in control.. so be encouraged.