

Love is the End Game
1 Corinthians 13:8b-13
Rev. Hannah Coe, First Baptist Church, Jefferson City, Missouri
September 23, 2018

WATCH/LISTEN: <http://www.fbcjc.org/sermon/love-is-the-end-game/>

The Devil Wears Prada (see clip <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2PjZAeiU7uM>) is a funny movie that takes a serious look at the choices we make that ultimately give shape to our lives. After college Andy Sachs (played by Anne Hathaway) gets a job as Miranda Priestly's (played by Meryl Streep) assistant at the famous *Runway Magazine*. Near the end of the movie Andy asks Miranda "what if this isn't the life I want?" Miranda scoffs and says "Don't be ridiculous. Everyone wants to be us." In that moment, Andy knows she doesn't want Miranda's life. She doesn't want to become the kind of self-absorbed, empty, and lonely person Miranda is.

You've heard the phrase "time is money." This is, probably, our most fitting cultural slogan. Time is a dominant force in our lives. We can use our time for personal gain, as we saw in this clip. This is, in fact, a very reasonable way to understand time and what we get to do with it. Why not?

Sometimes it feels like time uses us. Going by faster than we can check off our to-do lists. Pushing us toward appointments and deadlines. Driving us full speed ahead, gas pedal to the floor, until one day we realize our time is up.

Time is like money. We will always want more.

The church in Corinth, which is who Paul is writing to in our scripture for today, got stuck in the same hamster wheel of needing more, more, more, more. Just like we do, they struggled with selfishness and greed. I came across a great phrase to describe the problem at the church in Corinth. The phrase is, "religious puffery."¹ Isn't that great? Religious puffery. The Corinthian Christians got a little puffy and elitist during the years they wrote back and forth with Paul.

They claimed they were the only ones who had the real "truth". They claimed to have secret knowledge about God and faith. They started saying that certain spiritual gifts were required in order to be saved—like speaking in tongues, for example.² You notice, all of these things are ways to make the Corinthians feel superior and make them the ones in power.

They got self-absorbed, doing things like having lavish celebrations of the Lord's Supper, as if it were the final messianic banquet at the end of time, where they stuffed themselves and didn't

¹ Calvin J. Roetzel, *The Letters of Paul, Fifth Edition: Conversations in Context*, Westminster John Knox Press (2003) 93.

² *Ibid.* 90-93

leave anything behind for the Christian slaves who arrived later to worship because of their duties.³

Paul said, look, your religious puffery doesn't leave room for love. "You may do all these wonderful things," Paul says, "like speak in the tongues of angels (which is what speaking in tongues was sometimes referred to), you may have marvelous knowledge and insight into the mysteries of God. You might give the most inspiring prophetic message, but without love, it is empty."

Early in Corinthians Paul explains that Christians should not be driven by the things of "this age". When Paul references "this age", he's talking about that which is fleeting, immature, a flash in the pan.

In one verse that's pretty familiar to us Romans 12:2 Paul says, "Do not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewing of your minds..." The literal Greek translation is "Do not be conformed to this age..."⁴

Paul contrasts "this age", with "the complete" in 1 Corinthians 13:10, "when the complete comes, the partial will come to an end." The Greek word for "complete" can also be translated as "end", or "end time."⁵ So, "when the *end time* comes, the partial will come to an end."

Paul used these phrases to teach Christians that following Christ changes not only the way we use our time, but also our perspective on time. As Christians, we understand the "end time" to be when God's reign fully arrives, when all that God is up to in the world is brought to its fullness. Paul wants the Corinthians to be focused not on "this age," but focused on the *end time*. He wants them to grow up in their faith.

It's funny what doesn't make the list. The Bible doesn't say a perfect theology is the end game. It doesn't say that spiritual perfection, or knowing the Bible well, or any of the other things we guilt ourselves into doing and being are what *really* matter in the end. Love is what lasts, what carries over into the "end time." Love lasts because love is the very essence of God. God is love.⁶ In the end there is only love. Love is the end game.

In his book, *The Great Spiritual Migration*, author and speaker Brian McLaren writes:

"Shortly after I left the pastorate, my wife and I moved to a new town in a new state. We didn't know anyone there. For the first time in my life, nobody would know whether I went to church or played truant. I was a little curious myself:...after over twenty years in the pastorate, would I

³ Ibid. 92.

⁴ Accessed from <https://biblehub.com/interlinear/romans/12-2.htm>, September 18, 2018.

⁵ Christopher R. Hutson, "1 Corinthians 13:1-13: Exegetical Perspective," *Feasting on the Word: Year C Volume 1 Advent Through Transfiguration*, David L. Bartlett and Barbara Brown Taylor (eds.), Westminster John Knox Press (2009) 305.

⁶ 1 John 4:8

still go to church...would I stop going entirely, or would I actually feel a need for church—for the sake of my own soul?

To my surprise, I did indeed feel a need. But what I needed as a parishioner was very different from what had preoccupied me as a pastor. I wasn't looking for clever sermons or a certain style of music. I didn't need a church that was 'cool' or 'contemporary' or big or small...

Instead I wanted and needed a church that would help me live a life of love, with as little distraction as possible...loving God, loving myself, loving my wife, loving my children and grandchildren...loving my neighbors, especially people I might struggle to love, and loving the earth."⁷

A life of love, with as little distraction as possible.

God invites us into a life of love. Think of love as a bridge between where you are now, and the next stage of maturity God is inviting you into.

Maybe you are at the beginning, God is flinging open the doors of your heart, you are discovering Jesus and wanting to be more like him, considering making a profession of faith and getting baptized. You are running and skipping across love's bridge. Maybe you are somewhere in the wide middle. You've been at this faith thing for awhile.

There are more questions now. Maybe some of what you first believed has been broken open so that it can give way to something new. You are needing the balm of love as you and God cross the bridge into a different season.

Maybe you are closer to the end. There is grief and then anticipation. There is turmoil and then peace. You are reaching out to God to hold your hand and walk with you over the bridge as you are born into love.

Wherever you are, God is inviting you into love. What a relief and a joy that every single one of us can be freed from the rat race, from that "time is money" hamster wheel, and spend our time instead as God's people, loving and being loved.

It is possible to be so busy doing "loving things", that they become a distraction from the work God is doing in our lives.

A life of outward love is sustained by internal love. God cannot fill our internal love tanks when we are distracted. God fills our love tanks when we step out of what the New Testament calls *chronos* time—chronological time—into *Kairos* time—or deep time. One of my favorite hymns begins "Come away from rush and hurry to the stillness of God's peace." That's what happens

⁷ Brian D. McLaren, *The Great Spiritual Migration: How the World's Largest Religion is Seeking a Better Way to be Christian*, Hodder: London (2016) 54-55.

in deep time. In all honesty, the only way we will be able to cope with the pain and mystery of living a life of love, is by practicing deep time. When we are in deep time, God is able to connect the dots for us. God is able to fill our love tanks and re-focus us on living a life of love.⁸

I'd challenge each of us to practice deep time this week. Maybe that's setting your phone timer and sitting there in silence and stillness for five minutes. Maybe it's a short, quiet walk outside. Maybe it's turning off the radio in the car for a little bit. We can do it. Stick with it. God is waiting for you there.

⁸ Richard Rohr and Krista Tippett, "Living in Deep Time", *On Being*, <https://onbeing.org/programs/richard-rohr-living-in-deep-time-apr2017/>.