

Who Owns You?

May 13, 2018

Pastor Scott Austin

artisanchurch.com

[Music Intro]

[Male voice] The following is a presentation of Artisan Church in Rochester, New York.

[Voice of Pastor Scott]

OK, I want to dive right in because I have a lot to, I have a lot to get and a lot to say today. What I want to do is read part of today's Gospel reading from the lectionary, but I'm going to do something that I don't usually do. Two things that I don't usually do in fact. First I'm going to read it a different translation than we usually use here at Artisan and second I'm going to ask you not to open your own Bibles, not to find it in the red Bibles just yet. We'll get a chance to read along in a minute, but first I want you to hear the words in the translation that I'm going to read and not see the differences that exist there. Um, because part of what I want to do today is work a little bit with with the translation of the text. This is an important concept, right. There many translations of the Bible. And just like with the Odyssey or The Little Prince or the poetry of Ryan or Maria Rillica. When you have some of this written in another language and you translate it into your language there is something that's lost in that process. And depending on who does the translation and how they do it, different things might be lost. Now some translations are just not as good as others. Some are better than others. And most of the time translations are good in some places and not as good in other places. And the last thing I would want to do is with my nine credits of Biblical Greek twenty years ago is to tell you that I think I'm better at translating the Greek than the editors of the NIV Bible except for one bit here. No, I want to be aware of the distinctions and how that might influence how we read the Bible because all translation is inherently interpretive. Does that make sense, that sentence? And anytime you translate something, you're bringing your own set of values and priorities to the text.

So the passage is John seventeen, verses eleven through eighteen. It's actually a part of today's lectionary Gospel reading and I'm going to read it, as I said, from the NIV. Now what's happened here is Jesus has just had the last supper with his disciples and there's been a lot of drama, Kristen pointed that out last week, and he's now bringing it all to a close by praying for them because as any good spiritual leader knows, if a meeting is going to long and if there's too much drama, you just need to pray a good closing prayer. And everybody will go home. No, but

2018-05-13 *Who Owns You?*

seriously, this is an important prayer. It's a prayer that Jesus prays for the unity of his disciples and he includes us in that. It actually just misses the lectionary text today. It's right after where the lectionary cuts off. Jesus says, "I ask not only on behalf of these (meaning the eleven disciples who are in the room at that time) but also on behalf of those who will believe in Me through their word." That they may all be one. That includes all of us. And don't we need unity in the church today? I could go way down that rabbit show but I'm not going to. Here's the text in the NIV. Jesus praying he says, "I will remain in the world no longer but they are still in the world. And I'm coming to you Holy Father. Protect them by the power of your name. The name you gave me so that they may be one as we are one. While I was with them I protected them and kept them safe by the name that you gave me. None has been lost except the one doomed to destruction so that the scripture would be fulfilled. I am coming to you now, but I say these things while I am still in the world so that they may have the full measure of my joy within them. I have given them your word and the world has hated them for they are not of the world any more than I am of the world. My prayer is not that you take them out of the world, but that you protect them from the evil one. They are not of the world, even as I am not of it. Sanctify them by the truth. Your word is truth. As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world."

Now, if I were to use just these seven verses from just this particular translation, I could give a sermon something like the following (and let me say I've heard this sermon before). It goes like this, if you are a follower of Jesus you may live in the world, but you must not be of this world. Verse eleven says they are still in the world. Verse sixteen says they are not of the world. Couldn't be any clearer, in the world not of the world. Sound familiar to anybody? Have you ever heard the sermon before? And the world hates you because you follow Jesus and the world hates Jesus. So you, Jesus, and the world are at odds with each other. They are total opposites, and so when you start to follow Jesus the world is going to hate you the way the world hates Jesus. Now, you're only in the world until the time that you die and then you go up to heaven, just like Jesus went up to heaven and you leave the evil world behind you. That every minute you spend in this world between now and that time is bad. And you going to fight against it the whole time. But if you are of the world, in other words, if you are worldly you won't get that benefit. Because that will mean that you also hate Jesus. You are in opposition to Jesus. So don't be worldly, don't be of the world.

And what does it mean to be of the world? Well, different things to different people. It's kind of a generic phrase isn't it? Which is extremely convenient because that means the meaning can become a little bit pliable. You can kind of make it mean whatever you want it to mean. So if you're part of the Holiness tradition, which is the tradition of the church that I was raised in, being of the world, or being worldly -which is the term they would have preferred,

2018-05-13 *Who Owns You?*

probably can mean that you spend your time in movie theaters and dance halls and saloons. Sounds pretty great actually. If you're part of the Southern Baptist tradition, being worldly might mean that the wife works outside the home or that you voted for a Democrat or you had an uncle who voted for a Democrat that's worldly enough. If you're part of the Roman Catholic tradition being of the world might mean that you don't go to confession, or that you eat meat on Fridays. Different things to different people. And I didn't even get into sex drugs and rock n' roll which is very worldly, very of the world. You're supposed to be in the world but not of the world.

So we've heard that sermon before. I certainly have and I may have embellished it for the, you know, for the sake of our mutual amusement, but not that much right? Not that much. I've heard versions of the sermon based on this text from John seventeen or some other ones from the Bible probably more times than I can count but there are a couple of problems with applying this text in that way. First and foremost, the problem is that Jesus and the world are not inherently by their nature at odds with each other. This kind of us and them mentality that gets set up by that interpretation is not supported by the rest of the Biblical text. It's not even supported by the rest of this book of the Bible. You cannot read John seventeen and get that meaning from it if you read John one. Who remembers how the Gospel of John starts? We have kind of been dipping in and out of John for several years now. I think when we did John one, it was probably during the first Bush administration. It's been a while, it takes a long time. But here's what John one one says, "In the beginning was the Word. (The word, capital W, meaning Jesus) and the Word was WITH God and the Word was God. All things came into being through Him and without him not one thing came into being." Jesus made the world. So you can't assume that there's this innate oppositional relationship between Jesus and the world. You could be forgiven for taking that out of this little snippet of John seventeen but it would ignore the the very, like the topic sentence of the whole Gospel of John. And the consequences of that false assumption are quite grave.

The consequences of thinking that the world is evil and in opposition to everything that's good and holy are that bodies don't matter, that pleasure is always sinful, that ecology is a waste of time, that unbelievers are to be despised until such time as we can convert them. That cities can be left to rot because the world doesn't matter or worse the world is actually-evil. Now none of this is to say that you won't meet resistance from the world if you are truly following Jesus. He says that right in the prayer. You will, you will encounter hatred from parts of the world if you dedicate your life to following the Way of Jesus. But when we set ourselves up in the church as the sole defenders and possessors of truth and beauty, and as fighting against the deceit and ugliness of the world out there, we're missing so many important points. For one of them would be that we're actually part of the world. We're in the world is Jesus

2018-05-13 *Who Owns You?*

would say. So we're kind of part of the problem sometimes at least. I mean religious institutions fought tooth and nail against the way of Jesus in His own time and they still do it today. Some of those religious institutions actually bear his name and his title and they continue to fight tooth and nail against the way of Jesus. So that's the first problem with the "in the world but not of the world" sermon that I just described. And it's based on the false assumption that the world is inherently bad and anti-Christ.

Now the second problem, some of you are going to think this is petty. You may laugh but I want you to bear with me here because this is actually important. The second problem is a grammar problem. Oh here comes the word nerd nonsense. The translation that I read from the NIV of these verses is grammatically unclear. Now there's a very simple grammatical thing happening here in this passage. Let's do this, anybody here know how to speak French or Spanish like French one or Spanish one level. OK, I've some people in the front row. I lost my pencil. Just pretend that this very inferior pen is mine. I'm sorry, I had a pilot G2, but this will have to do. OK So this is my pen, this is Scott's pen. Scott may loan it to you but it's Scott's pen. Colleen, how do you say Scott's pen in French? Le stylo de Scott. Right, what does "le" mean? "The". Stylo is pen. Scott is my name. And what is "de"? Of the. Le stylo de Scott. Scott's pen or the pen of Scott. Right. Do you know Spanish? Were you raising your hand for Spanish? Who can say the Scots pen in Spanish? Go ahead yes, I took French so I can't do the accent as well as you did but the four words are the same, right? The pen of Scott, correct? That is how possessive is indicated in French and in Spanish and guess what other language, Greek. Greek.

By the way, before we finish up that thought. If you like foreign language, let me remind you that next week is Pentecost Sunday. And I am still looking for people who can read the text in languages other than English and for several people who would share a devotional reflection on those texts, OK. If I don't get lots of responses to this today we're going to do something totally different for Pentecost next week and that's fine. I just want you know OK.

Le stylo de Scott, the pen of Scott. Scott's pen. So let's look at verse sixteen in the NIV. They are not of the world even as I am not of it. Remember when I read that? Now if we look at it in the NRSV it says this, they do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to it. Why do they translate it that way? Because that's what of the world means in Greek. They are not the world's, just as I am not the world's. So, If we read this chapter, this passage from the lectionary today with our eyes peeled for the language of possession and ownership, rather than for language of despising the world that God made, watch what happens. I want to do this two different ways. The first way is auditory and physical, and then the second way -don't show us yet Avila- is a visual aid- OK. So we're going to engage several of the senses here. What we're going to do is read to you the lectionary passage today and here's what I want you to do; every

2018-05-13 *Who Owns You?*

time you hear me say a word or phrase that indicates ownership or possession I want you to make a little clap, OK? Doesn't have to be a loud clap, just a little one. Doesn't have to be more than one. Just a single clap OK. And if you if you're all on the same wavelength, you are going to clap together in perfect time, and dare I say unity. All right I will read it slow so you can get your claps in. Ready? Starting in verse six of Chapter seventeen: "I have made your name." OK, we got to work on this. Let's try again. "I have made your name known to those whom you gave me from the world. They were yours and you gave them to me." Your claps are not together everybody. "And they have kept your word. Now they know everything you have given me is from you for the words..." See, I'm not going to ask you do that for the whole passage. What I want to do next is show you my highlighting of this text printed out, and I have highlighted in big bright yellow highlighting every instance of possession or ownership in the in this part of the text. You see how many big yellow splotches there are on that page? What is this passage about? It's about possession and ownership. It's not about being at odds with the world. It's clear to me that this section of Jesus' prayer is not about arming ourselves for battle against a world that hates us but rather about remembering who we belong to, or since we're being grammar nerdy today, remembering to whom we belong.

So yes, you and I and all the disciples of Jesus from the eleven people in that room on down through history to get to our time, we have all been -in -the -world. We have all been since the moment of our birth part of this world which God made and which the enemies have of God have assaulted. We've all been part of the pain and frustration yes, but we have also all been part of the incomprehensible beauty, and the love, and the constant reminders of God's presence in the world. But we do not belong to the world. We are not own by it. We have not sold out to it and we must not. We belong to it, we are owned by it, and we are sold out to nothing and no one other than the God who created that world. Perfectly revealed in the incarnation of God's Son Jesus Christ. Made known to us by the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit. And belonging to God might mean that sometimes the world, including the Church, hates us. But it does not mean that we hate the world. On the contrary I would suggest to you that the opposite is true. If God deemed the world so worthy of love, that God took on human form and bodily flesh- truly went in the world- do you see how important that phrase is now given the incarnation of Jesus? If God went in the world then how much more should we who bear God's image and carry the good news of Jesus celebrate the fact that we too are in the world. No, belonging to God does not mean that we hate the world even when, not if, the world hates us. It means that we love the world. And there's no doubt in my mind, that at this point in the sermon many of you are hoping that I will give you one or two or maybe even the magical three application points. Specific things to do, or say, or pray to indicate that you belong to God - to increase your belonging to God -to make this grammatical exercise into a

2018-05-13 *Who Owns You?*

reality this week, maybe before you get home from church today. Well it's not that kind of sermon.

Sometimes I do give those kind of sermons. I have nothing against those kind of sermons. But this kind of sermon is the one that is intended to upset your world view a little bit. It's intended to up end the way you think about things. And the unfortunate part of sermons like that is they're very hard to apply in one or two or three quick little bite sized ways aren't they. If by grace God has used this sermon to upset or up end your world view, that means that there isn't going to be like a single thing you can do in the car on the way home to check off the box "I applied pastor sermon". It means that everything you do has to change. It means the whole way you look at the world in your life in it is going to change. Everything you do has to be submitted to and filtered through the idea of your belonging to God and not belonging to the world. Your being owned by God and not the world. Your being sold out to God and not the world. All while accepting, embracing, even celebrating the fact that you are in that world. And my prayer for you, and for me, and for Artisan Church as a community of Christian faith is that this will become true for us, for all of us. Not, not instantaneously -because we would know then that it was just a shadow of the real thing -but little bit by little bit, day by day, week by week, month by month, year by year, decade by decade. Until that day when Jesus calls us home. May it be true for all of us. Amen.

Thinking about faith that way reminds me of why it's important for us to celebrate communion every week. Because celebrating Communion every week, eating a meal with Jesus, if you will, reminds us of the fact that our bodies get hungry. You could eat the biggest meal ever eaten and within a day or two, probably sooner- but you know, you'd be hungry again wouldn't you. The same goes for receiving the grace of God, the mercy on offer, at the table of the Lord. You take this communion, remember Christ sacrifice, his broken body, his shed blood- you receive it as food for your hungry weary souls and it strengthens you for today. And by the time you get back here next week you're going to hungry again. That's why we celebrate it every time. And if you can spend the rest of your life figuring out how to belong to God rather than to belong to the world that you live in, you need this kind of sustenance. Day in day out, week in week out, month in year in decade in and out. And so our table is open to all who are seeking to make that your way of life. You don't have to be a member of our church, or of any church. You are a member of the Body of Christ by faith and by trusting in him and following his ways. If that doesn't describe you, we are so glad that you're here with us today. And it's OK if you don't take communion. No one looks at those people sideways when they don't go to the table and just sit and pray or meditate or think. That's all right. We will have a member of the prayer team at the back of the room who be happy to pray with you in person if you like that regardless of where you are in your spiritual journey. And children are also

2018-05-13 *Who Owns You?*

welcome at our table. Many of them are down the other in the building so go and collect them if you would either right before or right after you take communion. The band going to come back up and lead us in a couple of songs while we continue to respond to God's Spirit at the table in prayer in worship come as the spirit leads Amen.

[end of sermon]

[Male voice] For more information visit us at ArtisanChurch.com