

"Lesser Known People of the New Testament"  
"Demas"

We're continuing this series of messages where we're highlighting some of the lesser known people mentioned in the New Testament. Today we'll look at Demas. He's only mentioned briefly in 3 passages of Scripture:

Philemon 23-24 "Epaphras, my fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus, sends greetings to you, and so do Mark, Aristarchus, *Demas*, and Luke, my fellow workers."

Colossians 4:14 "Luke, the beloved physician, and *Demas* greet you."

2 Timothy 4:9-10 "Do your best to come to me soon, for *Demas*, in love with this present world, has deserted me and gone to Thessalonica."

We can see a progression here (more like a *regression*). He's first mentioned as a missionary partner of the Apostle Paul, along with notables such as Mark and Luke. Then he's simply mentioned in a greeting (along with Luke). Finally, this biting epitaph: *Demas, in love with this present world*, has deserted me.

I can't help but wonder what happened. What's behind those haunting words? What really happened?

*Maybe Demas rushed into missionary work without counting the cost.* After all, teaming up with Paul as a missionary was not an easy life. Rugged journeys over land and sea, facing cold and hunger, the scorn of hostile crowds, being away from your family for long periods of time – it wasn't a piece of cake! Maybe it was just more than Demas expected, and he opted for a more safe and secure kind of existence.

*Maybe he just got burned out.* Sometimes we just get tired of what we're doing. We lose our enthusiasm for it. Maybe the missionary-evangelistic work had taken its toll and no longer held the excitement for Demas that it once did.

*But perhaps it's just what it says – Demas fell in love with the world.* Worldly things stole his heart. The lure of the world doused the spiritual fire within him. "Demas, in love with this present world, has deserted me and gone to Thessalonica" (2 Timothy 4:10).

Are you and I in love with this present world to the point where it hinders us from being a serious follower of Jesus? Apparently "worldliness" got a hold of Demas' soul! "Worldliness" is not a term we use much anymore. It comes across as old-fashioned. But the Bible warns against being too much in love with this world. Hear these words from 1 John 2:15-17: "Do not love the world or the things in the world. The love of the Father is not in those who love the world; for all that is in the world—the desire of the flesh, the desire of the eyes, the pride in riches—comes not from the Father but from the world. And the world and its desires are passing away, but those who do the will of God live forever." This says don't love the world, or the things in the world. The love of God is not in us if we love the world.

Does this mean we can't enjoy life, have fun, appreciate the beauty of God's creation? History is marked by hermits, monks who've retreated from normal activities and human contacts – sometimes going without eating, even torturing their bodies, to tame and escape worldly passions and pleasures. Are we supposed to be like that? My early years as a Christian I was pretty strait-laced. I thought you were "worldly" if you played cards, went to the movies, danced, drove a sporty car! Pastors, especially! I remember years ago at Annual Conference, seeing pastors drive up in plain looking vehicles. No splashy colors or fancy hubcaps! That's changed! (Not too many years ago I had a bright yellow Saab convertible. 6-speed manual transmission!

*What is worldliness? What's it look like if we're too much in love with this world?* Let's look at the Scriptures to get a better sense of what "worldliness" really is. We'll continue with this passage in 1 John. "Do not love the world or the things in the world...for all that is in the world – the desire of the flesh, the desire of the eyes, the pride of riches – comes not from the Father but from the world" (1 John 2:15-16).

The whole description here suggests life where you leave God out of the picture - God's laws, God's standards, God's values. *The desire of the flesh* – the lust and craving for all types of forbidden sensual desires. The Common English Bible has it: "the craving for whatever the body feels." Overeating, overdrinking, overindulgence, giving in to all sorts of unrestrained sensual cravings. Then it says *the desire of the eyes* – we see something, we want it! Acquisitiveness. Materialism. Maybe Demas just had a hankering for more material things than his missionary life could afford him. We don't know. But if that were true of him back then, the pull on us is so much greater in our consumer-oriented society. We can be more in love with "stuff" than with God and the pursuit of God.

It also lists *the pride in riches* - the self-conceit, the empty pride in our riches or accomplishments. This suggests the prideful attitude of the person who says, "Look at me. Look at what I have. Look at all I've done!" These things – "the desire of the flesh, the desire of the eyes, the pride in riches" show *that we love the world, and not God the Father*.

John goes on: "And the world and its desire are passing away, but those who do the will of God will live forever" (1 John 2:17). The end result of being in love with the world is that we've built our life on things that won't endure.

Ok, if I do what the Bible says, and avoid becoming worldly and falling in love with the world, won't that make me into a dull, colorless person? A religious person who never lets loose and has fun, or thoroughly enjoys life? *No – not at all!*

Avoiding worldliness doesn't mean we can't enjoy the good things God's given us. God's created world is beautiful and wondrous! Life is filled with all kinds of interesting and exciting and fun things, and we can embrace it and enjoy it! The Bible says that God's creation is good and the physical side of life can be affirmed. In Genesis 1, God brings creation into existence and says, "It's good!" "God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good" (Genesis 1:31).

1 Timothy 4:4-5 says this, "For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected, provided it is received with thanksgiving, for it is sanctified by God's word and by prayer." This was probably written originally as a corrective to the "Gnostics", people who looked on the material world and the physical realm as evil. This passage says, no, that's not the case. Everything created by God is good. *Our attitude towards it, how we use it, is the important thing.* Life and the world is to be received with humble thanksgiving, used prayerfully and in accordance with God's word.

So we can affirm the physical world and enjoy it. Christians, more than anyone, can appreciate and revel in this world and its beauty and goodness, because it's our heavenly Father's handiwork!

Two priests were going on vacation to Hawaii. They decided to make it a real vacation by not wearing anything that would identify them as priests. As soon as the plane landed, they headed for a store and bought really outrageous shorts, shirts, sandals, sunglasses etc. The next morning they headed for the beach. They're sitting on beach chairs, enjoying the sun and scenery when this gorgeous blonde in a bikini comes walking straight towards them. They can't help but notice, and as she's passing them, she smiles and says, "Good morning, Father...good morning, Father", then continues on. Well, they are stunned. How did she know they were men of the cloth?

The next day, they go back shopping and buy even more wild outfits. They make their way to the beach again, settle into their beach chairs, and after a while the same beautiful woman comes towards them, in an even skimpier bikini. As she approaches them, she again cheerfully greets each of them individually, "Good morning, Father" ... "Good morning, Father", and starts to walk away. One of the priests just can't contain himself, and says, "Just a minute, young lady. Yes, we're priests, and proud of it. But I have to know, how in the world did you know we were priests?" The woman replied, "Oh, Father, don't you recognize me. I'm Sister Angela!"

We are not "worldly" just because we may enjoy life: delight in our flower garden, soak up the grandeur of a sunset or a mountain view, or chuckle at the antics of a child or a kitten or a puppy. We are not "worldly" because we enjoy sex with our husband or wife, or feel a rush when we kiss our boy friend or girl friend. We are not "worldly" if we get great pleasure out of fishing, or camping, or doing crossword puzzles, or knitting, or following our favorite sports' teams. We are not necessarily worldly if we happen to be well off and comfortable financially.

*The issue is: Do these things have their proper place in our life?* Do these activities begin to consume us and become more important than God and the pursuit of God? For instance, playing golf or fishing or camping can keep us away from church and worship and the Christian fellowship. But in its proper place, these activities can provide times of rest and renewal, and actually help us be a more whole person, and a better follower of Jesus

Do our material possessions or accomplishments cause us to be full of ourselves, and boastful, or do we recognize that everything we have comes from God as a gift? 1 Corinthians 4:7 simply

says, "What do you have that you did not receive?" For some, having a lot of money, and an expensive home and cars, can produce a self-centered, self-indulgent life. For others, having a lot of this world's goods allows us to share generously with others, and give significantly to the work of the Lord.

Back to Demas. "For Demas, in love with this present world, has deserted me and gone to Thessalonica" (2 Timothy 4:10). We don't know the specifics of what happened to this man. He went from being a coworker with the Apostle Paul, working alongside noted Christian leaders like Mark and Luke (who wrote those gospels), to being a deserter. The world lured him away. He couldn't resist the pull to abandon Christian service for a love affair with the world.

We can't be in love with the world and love God at the same time. John made that clear. "If anyone loves the world, love for the Father is not in them" (1 John 2:15). This self-focused, earthly-focused mindset is in opposition to being a disciple of Jesus.

Jesus cautioned us: "Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal; but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also" (Matthew 6:19-21). Another time Jesus said what does it profit if we gain the whole world and lose our soul (Luke 9:25).

Worldliness is not about whether or not we enjoy life and relish the beautiful and exciting things that are part of God's good creation. It's about *the importance* we place on the material things of life. Loving the world too much can dull our love for Christ and pull us away from being useful for His purposes.

"Demas, in love with this present world, has deserted me" (2 Timothy 4:10). We don't know, ultimately, what happened to Demas, or the condition of his soul. Hopefully, he got back on track, and regained his love for and commitment to Christ and the work of the gospel. But we don't know.

The pull of the world and its "stuff" is great in our consumer-driven American culture, where so much emphasis is placed on accumulating material things. The words of Romans 12:2 are especially important for us: "Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God – what is good and acceptable and perfect." I love the J. B. Phillips translation: "Don't let the world squeeze you into its own mold."

A good antidote to loving the world too much is to let Christ renew our minds and our thinking. We can do that by feeding on His Word (the Bible), and meditating and praying – soaking up the presence of the Lord and His Spirit. This can do wonders in changing how we view life, and the material things of life! Because the "stuff" won't last. 1 John 2:17 reminds us, "The world and its desire are passing away...". *Passing away*. But... "but those who do the will of God live forever." *Hallelujah!*

