June 5, 2016

“Wealth and the Choice before Us”

Matthew 6:19-24

**FCF**: Allure of materialism. Drawn to and destroyed by it.

**PROPOSITION**: (anchor) Christ calls us to follow Him – “saints”.

(magnet) This demands a different approach to money and wealth.

**SCRIPTURE INTRODUCTION:**

In 1987, with the fall and ouster of the Philippine dictator Ferdinand Marcos, his people finally discovered the full extent of the corruption. His palace was filled with the plunder of a nation, estimated in the billions of dollars. Crowds of Filipinos besieged that palace – yet not to burn or pillage it but to observe this luxurious opulence with hushed silence, almost reverence.

Now think of that. This was the wealth that had corrupted their ruler and brought his reign to its knees. And yet that very wealth drew throngs and filled them with awe. Such is the power wealth can have over us. Jesus, knowing that, speaks directly to us. May we hear Him.

**SCRIPTURE READING**: Matthew 6:19-24

**PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION**

**SERMON INTRODUCTION:**

You may have heard that Jan Crouch died last week. She and her husband, the late Paul Crouch, co-founded Trinity Broadcasting Network in the 1970’s. TBN is the largest Christian cable network in the nation and plays host to several talk shows and popular televangelists. But the Crouches and TBN have a history of corruption and scandals. Accusations of sexual abuse and cover ups, questionable financial practices, frequent expenditures on opulent luxuries – all make for a dubious reputation and a clouded legacy. And bear out (READ 1 Timothy 6:10).

Jesus bids us to follow Him. That is to say, He has made us saints, a people set apart for His purposes. We are to be both “in” but not “of” the world. As we have seen over the last few weeks in Matthew 6:1-18, Jesus’ followers are to be distinct and different from the hypocrisy of the religious. And, as we see here in vv.19-24, they are also to be distinct and different from the materialism of the irreligious. Put another way, we are not to live for status or for stuff.

Jesus calls us to follow Him. And that demands a different approach to all of life, including money and wealth. Now what does this mean? Jesus shows us in our text by forcing three choices. First, between two treasures. Second, two visions. And, third, two masters.

1. **TWO TREASURES**

First, the treasures (READ Matthew 6:19-21). We need to choose between two treasures.

1. *On Earth*
2. What they are

On the one hand, we have treasures on earth. Clothes, precious metals – Jesus lists the luxuries of the ancient world. And then also how they could be lost. For they are frail and vulnerable.

1. Jesus’ command

These things we are not to hoard. Note that Jesus is not speaking against saving, planning, and wise investments. Those things He commends. He is attacking a life of selfish accumulation.

1. *In Heaven*
2. What they are

So, on the one hand, we have these fleeting treasures on earth. And, on the other hand, we have treasures in heaven. That is, investments in God’s causes and the good of others. These last forever. They are secure and safe. Nothing can touch them for they are treasures in heaven.

1. Jesus’ command

And so Jesus says we should devote ourselves to these things. (READ Matthew 6:21) Our hearts follow whatever we invest in. They are tied together. So, with that in mind, Jesus is then prompting us to consider, “*What is your heart tied to? Something passing or forever lasting?*”

Clearly, He is saying we need to choose between these two treasures.

*Application:*

Perhaps we would do well to really consider how we are budgeting our money, our time, and our energy. Yes, we are to give sacrificially. But to lay up treasure in heaven would also mean investing in whatever makes for faith, hope, and love. To pursue reconciliation between and with others. To press for justice, mercy, and faithfulness. These things last. For people last.

Jesus calls us to follow Him. This demands a different approach to money and wealth.

1. **TWO VISIONS**

Which brings us to the visions (READ Matthew 6:22-23). Again, a choice set before us.

1. *The Role of the Eye*
2. How it functions

Consider this image of the eye. The eye is what illumines the body. That is, the eye lets in light. And so the body finds its way. A good eye brings light. But a bad eye brings darkness.

1. Akin to the heart

Which is akin to the heart – the mind, the will, the affections, and the conscience. We say, “her eye is fixed on that” or “his heart is set on that”. They both mean pretty much the same thing.

1. *Our Course of Life*
2. How we see

Well, the role of the eye is critical to our course of life. There’s a wordplay in the text. The word for “healthy” can also mean “generous”. The word for “bad” can also mean “stingy”.

1. Where we go

All that put together, you can paraphrase it this way, “*If your eye is good and generous, then your whole body will be full of light. But if your eye is bad and stingy, then your whole body will be full of darkness*.” Meaning how we see drives where we go, what we do, and how we live.

And so, again, Jesus is forcing this choice here between these two visions.

*Application:*

Which should prompt some questions. “*Why do I spend and save as I do? Why does my life look like material things are all there is to live for?*” And the answer to that can only be “*Because that’s where I’ve fixed my eyes and set my heart*.” We need to hear this warning.

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1. **TWO MASTERS**

Finally, the two masters (READ Matthew 6:24). Again, we are told to choose.

1. *The Reality of Slavery*
2. Not employers

To get at this, we need to see the reality of slavery here. Jesus is not talking about employers. This is not, “*I can work as a fisherman and then as a craftsman or a farmer on the side.*”

1. But masters

You can have multiple employers. But that’s not what Jesus is talking about. He’s talking about masters. This is an image of slavery, of ownership, of one party with control over another.

1. *A Question of Loyalty*
2. The words used

You see it with the words used – feeling and acting one way to one and one way to the other.

1. Exclusive claims

These are exclusive claims and rights. The stark reality is that you can be loyal to and owned by but one master. As Jesus says, we can serve one or the other. Either “mammon” (which comes from a word meaning “a trusted thing”) or God. Our service and trust goes to one or the other.

So again, Jesus is forcing this choice. Here, it’s between God or money.

*Application:*

The rub is that we question if this is true. So we try to serve both at the same time. We serve God with our lips and wealth with our hearts. We trust God on Sunday and wealth the rest of the week. In the temple of our hearts, we think wealth can be given just this little spot.

And none of that will work. The living God can only be served exclusively. It’s all or nothing. So to divide our allegiance at all is to then give it all to mammon, to money and wealth.

Jesus calls us to follow Him. This demands a different approach to money and wealth.

**CONCLUSION:**

This may surprise you but Jesus taught more on money and wealth than any other social issue – more than marriage, politics, work, sex, or power. Why? For two reasons. First, the goodness of the gifts. That is, however broken this world, it is still filled with God’s good gifts. Money and wealth are part of that. So we have the goodness of the gifts. But also the hardness of our hearts. That is, however much we still bear the image of God, we are deeply broken within, so easily settling for so much less than we were made for. So we find meaning in the enjoyment of the gifts rather than in relationship with the Giver of the gifts. The very things He puts all around us to point us to Him we take hold of as substitutes for Him. Which can put us on a trajectory of destruction and disintegration, beginning now and then carrying on for eternity. And so Jesus puts the choice before us between two treasures, two visions, and two masters.

In response to that, we may be tempted to accuse Him of being narrow and exclusive – an unpardonable sin in our culture today. Well, is He? Is Jesus narrow and exclusive? Perhaps. But it is a narrowness such as when we cry for a friend to come away from the edge of a cliff. That’s what Jesus is doing here. It is a narrowness that knows the temptation, that sympathizes with the pull and attraction. It is a narrowness borne out of a clarity of the stakes and a loving heart – things that, if you take the time to listen to Him, you cannot question or doubt.

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