

“Who’s in Control of Your Life – You? or God?”

²⁴ *“No one can serve two masters... you cannot serve God and wealth.*

²⁵ *“Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life....*

³² *...indeed your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things.*

But strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, & all these things will be given to you as well.””

Actually the word “wealth” in our reading today

does not adequately express the meaning of the Greek word, “mammon”.

It means more than money or material wealth.

It means the things that we value more than God, the things in which we trust more than we trust in God, the things that determine our thoughts, words, and actions that are not of God.

From almost the beginning, we humans have wanted the freedom to make our own choices, control our own lives, take charge of our own destinies.

Most of us do it from the time we become capable of independent thought,

when we hit the age of the terrible 2’s, when our favorite words become “Mine!” & “No!”

With good parenting most of us learn to control our behavior – at least for the most part, most of the time – but that inner drive to control our own lives and circumstances and futures never really leaves us.

With the onset on hormones at puberty, that need for freedom to control our lives again often erupts into uncontrolled behavior.

And then again, we learn how to rein ourselves in – at least to some degree.

And yet that inner yearning to be in charge of our own lives, to control every part of our lives, and to exert control over everything and everyone around us so that we get what we want, is always there.

That’s the other “master” – it’s not just one thing – like money –

but it is anything and everything that keeps us from saying and doing what God asks of us.

I must confess that I’m still learning what this means.

I used to think that believing certain things about God,

going to church and Bible study, giving time or money to help people in need, tithing, and basically trying to live a moral life based on scriptural principles –

like the golden rule and the 10 commandments – was what it meant to be a Christian.

That’s what I was taught in the church.

It’s what was modeled for me.

But what I was taught – and perhaps what you were taught – was wrong.

For that is certainly not what the prophets taught and it certainly is not what Jesus taught.

All of those things that I was taught comprised the Christian life, you see, were just surface things, external things, structural things.

They were the “whats” of the Christian lifestyle, not the “why”.

They were like the cosmetic aspects of a building –

like the fresh paint and new carpet that can make it look good –

but not the structural aspects that tell you whether the building is safe and sound or at risk of failing or falling

They were like the outer part of a body that might look healthy, but not the inner parts that might carry a serious disease.

I remember looking at one of my more evangelical Christian friends
and wondering why she wasn't taking more charge of her life.
She was so talented,
and yet it seemed that she lacked drive or a clear goal and that she was wasting her life.
But she told me that she was just following where God led her – one step at a time.

I found that difficult to comprehend.
How could she know where God was leading her?
How could she even be sure God WAS leading her?
And if God were leading her, shouldn't she be making better progress?

Well over the course of the last few years I've seen God work through her in remarkable ways
that I never expected and that I doubt she expected either.
And looking back at where she was 5 years ago and where she is now,
I can clearly see that her following God step-by-step has taken her on a remarkable journey.

And even more remarkable than I find her journey is how I look back at my step-by-step journey.
It wasn't anything that I set out to do, but something got me from where I was to when I am now –
which is an entirely different place.

I think it may have begun with my reluctant commitment to a prayer gathering once a week,
and then a year or more later another reluctant commitment
to a very early morning prayer call most every day.

There was the commitment to a weekly Bible study
that focused going beyond information to transformation,
and then the particular decision to study the book of Acts.

There was my growing understanding that to follow Jesus step-by-step
means seeing everyone who comes into my life as being sent by God,
seeing every invitation as an opportunity to say "yes" to God,
and not only being open to God's signs & wonders & miracles, but coming to actually expect them!

What I've learned about this passage is that the choice between serving the 2 masters
is the choice between trying to do something my way and allowing God to do that thing God's way
It's a choice between me trying to take control of an entire situation
and me turning it over to God and just doing the little bit that God calls me to do
It's the choice between me trying to make an impossible situation right
and putting it in God's hands and waiting for the miracle.

The main thing I've been learning is that the heart of the Christian life isn't really about
those outer things we've been focusing on for as long as I've been in the church
It's not about our what our theology is, or about the way we worship,
or about how many good deeds we do, or how generous we are.
It doesn't really matter how much we know about God, or how we worship,
or how well versed we are in scripture, or how many hungry people we feed,
or how much money we give away.

I'm not saying that those aren't important or good things.
But what I am saying is that any one of those or any one of a million other things
can be our god, and none of them is the one thing that God wants.

All God wants is your heart – your love and devotion and commitment.
God wants you to love him more than anyone else you have ever loved –
the kind of love where you can't wait to spend time with him,
where you hang on to his every word,
where you feel completely safe and secure in his love,
where you trust him completely and are not only willing but eager to do anything he asks.
That's what it means to seek first the kingdom of God –
to seek to live every moment listening to and obeying God's commands.
Because when we do what God asks, no matter how foolish or risky or scary it may seem,
we can trust that God will work it out for our good and for the good of the entire kingdom.

It took me a long time to even begin to live this way
and I'm nowhere near where I need or want or hope to be.
But what I've learned is that when I follow God, God does the most amazing things.
And each and every amazing thing God does makes me want to follow God even more
so that I can see even more amazing things!

That friend I told you about in the beginning?
The one I thought was wasting her gifts because she was not taking control of her life
but instead doing this crazy thing of following God step by step?
Well, she got an email last week from someone who asked if they could share her story
since she was a "present-day history maker".
She was completely astounded that someone saw her as a history maker!
And yet that is what God has made her.

And that's what God wants to do for each one of us.
Jesus only had 12 disciples, 11 that stuck with him plus Paul called after the resurrection.
Just 12 ordinary people.
But those 12 ordinary people are still impacting the world over 2000 years later!
They changed the world because they chose to serve God and nothing and no one else.
They changed the world because they gave up their freedom to serve Christ.
They changed the world because they stopped trying to control their own lives,
and let God control each and every step.
God calls each and every one of us to do the same.
I can't even begin to wrap my mind around all that God has done in my life
since I first began to give him control,
but it's been an absolutely amazing journey that I can't wait to continue.

God wants your love and your trust and your willingness to let him lead.
And when you give yourself over to God, when you fall in love with God,
when you let God guide your every step,
I know that you, too, will be utterly amazed at the things God will do through you.

And the ripples of what God will do through us will touch more lives than we will ever know
and our impact will continue on into the future just like that of the disciples –
for tens and hundreds and thousands of years to come.

Seek first the kingdom
and you will be utterly amazed at all the things that will be yours as well!
Thanks be God! Amen!