

“Wealth, Wisdom & Me”

First Presbyterian Church
Pastor Dave Carlson
October 14, 2018

Old Testament Lesson: Psalm 90:12-17

New Testament Lesson: Mark 10:17-24a

The classic novel *Catch 22* is about a soldier who fakes illness to escape the war and protect his own life by hiding out in a hospital ward. Capt. John Yossarian is eventually found out and sent to the front. There he meets a soldier named Clevinger.

Clevinger argues with Yossarian about whether or not people should obey the government and fight in the war, saying that if they do not fight, others will be killed because of their cowardice. Whether to save your own life at all costs or to sacrifice yourself for the sake of others?

That's exactly what Jesus is dealing with in today's New Testament lesson. Jesus is approached by a man who asks, "Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" Jesus says to him, "You know the commandments: 'You shall not murder; You shall not commit adultery; You shall not steal; You shall not bear false witness; You shall not defraud; Honor your father and mother.'"

And he says to Jesus, "Teacher, I have kept all these since my youth." Here we see that the rich man has lived a good life by all earthly standards. Each of the commandments Jesus asks about deals with our day-today relationship with one another – murder, adultery, stealing, lying, cheating, and honoring father and mother.

Interestingly, the other ten commandments not asked about – no other gods, don't make your possessions an idol to be worshipped, keep God's name holy, and keep the Sabbath – all of these deal with our relationship with God. The rich man has done a great job treating people in a decent, godly way. By all evidence, he is a loving, honest person. But his love only goes so far. He loves his possessions and his wealth more than he loves God.

Do we? Do we love our possessions and other stuff more than we love God? Is there a limit to what we'd give up – or what we'd do, or where we'd go – when it comes to drawing closer to God? For the rich man, it was his money, his wealth. What is it for you?

For some of us, it's our busy lifestyle. Society tells us we need to be involved in so many activities that we don't have time to just be – be a family that actually spends time together, talking with each other, sharing in life.

For some folks it's gaming and electronics-tech-devices- that have taken over their lives, crowding out schoolwork or other studies, sitting with a good book or *the Good Book* – the

Bible – spending time outdoors with friends or working in the yard; visiting with neighbors or helping someone in need.

Just like Jesus told the rich man to go and give his money to the poor, Jesus says to us: Go, and give your time, talents and treasures in service to God, “and you will have treasure in heaven; then,” says Jesus, “come, follow me.”

The point is, we cannot truly follow Jesus while holding to our own agendas at all costs. Jesus is always calling us to stretch ourselves, to go that extra mile, to give of ourselves, or to step back from doing too much and settle down for a little God time.

When we give of ourselves in the Spirit of Jesus Christ – not begrudgingly but joyfully – we get so much more than we give. On the other hand, let’s look at the rich man. He was drawn to Jesus, not because of his love of God, but because of his love of self.

“What must I do to inherit eternal life,” what must I do to get ahead? And Jesus, looking on him in the love of God, says to him, “Go, sell what you own, and give the money to the poor.” He’s told to give of himself – sell all that he has – for the sake of others, out of love for God.

And how does he respond? Mark tells us, “(the man) was shocked and went away grieving, for he had many possessions.” He had possessions. No, his possessions had him. His possessions grieved him. Why? Can’t we have nice things and still be followers of Christ? Of course we can. It’s not about what we have. It’s about how we hold onto what we have. Do we cling to our money and covet our time and hold back our talents for fear of scarcity? Or do we give of ourselves freely and joyfully out of our love of God and faith in Jesus.

Despite all of his wealth, the rich man lacked one thing: The spiritual wisdom to hold onto to his wealth loosely – in service to God – rather than tightfistedly in service to himself.

Anyone not willing to grow spiritually as a follower of Christ will have all that they have – their time, talents and treasures – not multiplied – but tarnished, always running out of time and energy and constantly worrying about money, chasing after wealth.

It’s like the wealthy man whose money came from his wife. One evening, the woman asked her husband, “Would you have married me if my father hadn’t left me a fortune?” “Honey,” the man replied sweetly, “I’d have married you no matter who left you a fortune.” Now that’s a marriage – not blessed – but tarnished by wealth.

Don’t get me wrong. God has nothing against having money and taking pleasure in life, as long as it doesn’t get in the way of our spiritual growth and development.

No matter how much we have or don’t have, all that we have is to be used in service to God. What would that look like for you? To release something you’re holding back-time,

talent or treasure-in service to God? Think about what area of life you might be called to turnover to God.

Think about it, Joseph Heller who wrote that book I talked about titled "Catch 22;" he was once told about a wealthy investment manager who had made more money that very day than Heller had earned from all his books combined. Heller's response? "Then I have something he will never have. Enough." Spiritual wisdom is knowing what's enough, that when it comes to the most important things in life, you have enough.

You have enough time to do things that build up the family – including this, your family, your family of faith. You have enough energy to do something to bless the life of another person. You have enough money to give something in service to God's work and purpose – we all do.

What we may or may not have is the spiritual grounding to see our way clear to give of ourselves. If you are holding back your money, what are you afraid might happen that God can't take care of. If you don't have the time, what are you so busy doing; try setting it aside and trusting God to take care of it. If you don't have enough energy, what would it take to reach out to someone in need with a card or phone call?

Sharing of ourselves – whether it be our time, talents or money – is not a matter of having enough of any of these things. It's a matter of having enough faith in Christ and where he leads you, love of God and the protection that brings you, and confidence in the Holy Spirit and the power that that gives you.

So let's not be rich in possessions but poor in spirit. Instead, let's each pick one area of life to stretch ourselves in the coming weeks, one area of giving that would reveal to us and to the world our love of God, faith in Christ, and trust in the Holy Spirit. Amen.

PASTORAL PRAYER

God our Father, guide our hearts. Free us from ourselves. Teach us to be content in all circumstances.

Even now, we are concerned about the money we do have, or the money we don't have. We are constantly bombarded with the things we need and the things we want.

But, today, we want to recognize that all we have is from you. You are our provider, and you know our needs better than even we know them.

Teach us to be content in all circumstances. Free us from ourselves. Guide our hearts, Father. They are yours.

There are so many whom we keep in prayer these days. You know them, Lord. You have drawn near to them. You are even know preparing for them a way forward.

Thank you, Lord. Heal them, comfort them, provide for them as only you can.

We pray all this in your powerful name and as you taught us, saying together:

**Our Father, who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy name.
Thy kingdom come,
thy will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread;
and forgive us our debts,
as we forgive our debtors;
and lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.**