

Title: What are you looking at?

Text: Matthew 6.22-23

Theme: Freedom begins with focus

Series: Free to Serve – pt.2

Prop Stmt. God gives us resources to test us to see if our affections are truly in Him.

Read Text:

Most sermons have 3 parts; introduction, main section, and conclusion. Typically, the introduction is when I tell you what I am going to tell you. The main section is when I tell you what I tell you and the conclusion is I tell you what I told you. This morning, the introduction is really long. I just want you to know that I know that it is really long, but that it is long on purpose. But after this really long introduction is the main section. The main section is not long, but it is the BAM! And the conclusion is the HMM -1 and HMM – 2. L-O-N-G; BAM! HMM – 1 HMM – 2. Here is the L-O-N-G.

The Bible begins with God creating the universe, and in the incredible vastness of this time, space and mass continuum that we call the universe, He places the earth as the center stage. The focal point of His creation on earth is a garden, and there in the garden He has a man and a woman to whom He comes in the cool of the day to relate with. This is apparently a daily event. This is how God set things up to function. The original picture and plan was this; God, the Creator, the Ruler, is relating to His children, in a garden. In this garden were trees that were pleasing to the eye and that were good for food. Also in this garden was a river that watered the garden. God told Adam and Eve, to rule, to subdue and fill. God's children were to relate with God and they were also to rule under the authority of God. God made us to relate and to rule. We relate to Him in order to relate to others. We live under His rule in order to be able to rule our lives and learn to be part of His kingdom.

The Bible ends (Rev. 21) with God recreating the universe, and in the incredible vastness of this time, space, and mass continuum that we call the universe; he places a new earth as the center stage. The focal point of His creation on earth is a city called the New Jerusalem and in the middle of that city is a garden. There in that garden is a throne, and from underneath that throne is a river that waters the tree of life that stands on each side of the river. "Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people and God himself will be with them and be their God." (21.3) And there in that garden, in that capital city, his servants will see his face and his name will be on their foreheads, and (22.5) they will reign for ever and ever.

The Bible begins with and ends with God creating a place where He can live with and relate with His children who reign under His authority over all of the territory that He has made. In the beginning you have a kingdom (garden – earth) a King – God, ruling over and through His people – Adam and Eve. At the end, (the new beginning) you have a kingdom (garden – new earth) a King – God, ruling over and through His people. But, something happened in the first garden that affected everything that God had made. That something was SIN. Genesis 3 is an enormous paradigm shift. Sin in the garden is like a

grease fire in a house. The smoke and the residue gets on everything and ruins everything. Only in the case of sin, sin doesn't get on the outside of everything, it now comes from the inside of every person. The first garden is blocked. The kingdom as it was originally designed has been destroyed. Adam and Eve are put out of the garden because God in His unveiled holiness cannot dwell with and relate to mankind in his unchanged and sinful condition.

So, in between the first garden and the last garden, we have another garden. In between the dwelling of God with Adam and Eve and the dwelling of God in the New Jerusalem, we have God, in the middle coming to His people. The language of creation is very, very intentional on the part of John who wrote at the beginning of his gospel, "In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning...The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us."

Here it is again. The Creator has come to dwell with His creation. But, the purpose of His coming was to recreate us so that we could be suited for life in His eternal kingdom. Jesus Christ came to the earth to present Himself as the King. The rejection of His authority became the occasion of his death for us, which paid for the sins of those who are His. His perfect life and substitutionary death accomplished His plan to make a way for His children to be able to have their sins forgiven and be credited with His righteousness. Interestingly enough John writes, "At the place where Jesus was crucified, there was a garden, and in the garden a new tomb." (19.41)

Christ came to this earth to restore the kingdom, by reclaiming and redeeming His people. That is why, when Jesus started to preach and teach, He was preaching about His kingdom. When Christ returns to the earth, He comes back to reign. He comes back to claim that which is rightfully His. The initial part of his physical and literal reign on this earth is called that the Millennium or the 1000 year reign of Christ on this earth. That is an awesome time. But what will be even more incredible will be this: After the 1000 year reign of Christ and one final rebellion of Satan, God is going to recreate this whole thing and then there will be the Eternal Reign of King Jesus. So, what is God doing in this world? He is getting things ready for His Son to come back and take over. What is God doing in your life? He is preparing you to live with and reign with Christ. That is the goal!! That is where all of life is heading. Your mission on earth is to cooperate with God's plan to prepare you for the coming Kingdom of His Son. That is the mission of the church. Christ is calling people to follow Him, so that He can prepare them to rule and reign with Him. The church is the greenhouse, the boot camp, the training ground for kingdom life. What will we do in the kingdom? We will reign. What does that mean? We govern people, make decisions, solve problems and manage resources.

Do you see it now? This life, right now is a dress rehearsal for life in the kingdom. We are learning now, what it means to live under the authority of and rule with King Jesus. If you say, I love Jesus, but I don't want anybody involved in my life and I don't want to be responsible for anyone else – then you don't understand Christ and His kingdom. If you say, I love Jesus, but my stuff is my stuff, my life is my life, my time is my time, I just don't want to go to hell when I die – you don't understand Christ and His kingdom.

So many people think that Christianity is basically an eternal life insurance plan that keeps you out of hell. All you have to do is pray a prayer to ask Jesus in your heart, and after that, if you want, you can go to church, if you want you can give a few dollars, if you want, you can get involved, if you want you can invite others to church, if you want, you can use your talents. In fact, if you do those things, some people say that your kids will turn out better, and if you tithe your tires will last longer, you won't get as many cavities, you won't lose your job. There is some truth to that in the sense that God does bless obedience, but we do not give for the ultimate goal of getting. When it comes to giving money back to God we often hear – "Look what you get in return." OK...but that isn't the main point. The main point is: I give a portion to remind myself that all of it is His, and the way I handle what He has loaned me is a test to see whether or not my heart is really trusting Him.

Now, here are the two options that you have. Option 1 – Live under the authority of Christ now and get ready to reign with Him in His Kingdom forever and ever or Option 2 – be under the judgment of God in Hell forever and ever. Coming to faith in Christ does rescue you from the judgment of God, but it saves you from the kingdom of darkness into the Kingdom of His Son – Jesus Christ. You see, God made you to rule, but you can't rule, unless you are under His reign. You can't rule unless you following Him. How do you know, if in this dress rehearsal called life, you are getting it figured out and you have truly come to faith in Christ? Well, that is why we have this book. The Word of God becomes the standard by which we measure the authenticity of our faith. Now, all of this is introduction to our text. I have not forgotten our passage, but when you get this, then the text is like a sledge hammer. So, hang in here, because I want to review with you a story that Jesus told. L-O-N-G

Matthew 25.14-30 – It is often called the parable of the talents and many remember the story basically going like this: A wealthy estate owner/ruler was going on a journey and was going to be away for a long time. He called his servants together and gave one – 5 talents, another – 2 talents and to another – 1 talent; each according to his ability. Then he left, and after a long time, he came back. The man who was given 5 talents had invested them and gained 5 more; the man with 2 also put them to work and gained 2 more and the man with 1 buried it so as not to lose it. The owner was delighted with the first two guys and really disappointed in the 3rd guy who had basically wasted his talent. Therefore, you need to look at the talents that God has given you and realize that it does not matter if you have 5 talents, 2 talents or 1 talent, you need to use that for the Lord, or otherwise, when the Lord returns, if you have wasted the talents that he gave you, then he will really be disappointed. So, if you can sing, sing in the choir, or play an instrument – join the orchestra, or can teach, get involved in Sunday School and on and on the list of ministries goes. But, that really isn't the main point that Christ was making.

Notice that this parable (Matthew 25) was part of discourse that Christ gave (I am guessing) on Tuesday of his final week before the cross. He never wasted words, especially at this time. In addition to that, Christ was answering a question that his disciples had asked about the signs of his coming. The last two parables that Christ gave

dealt with how His return will bring rejoicing for those ready and judgment for those not prepared. To say that the owner will simply be disappointed in the one who wastes his talent is a fatal understatement. When you read the text, you read that the owner said to the servant, “You wicked, lazy servant!” (v.26) The parable concludes with the owner saying in reference to the wicked, lazy servant, “Throw that worthless servant outside, into darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.” (v.30)

What is Jesus saying? This man is thrown out of the kingdom, because he did not obey the king. He proved, in the king’s absence that he really did not trust or love the king enough to do what the king told him. He wasted his life. He wasted what the king gave him. The wasting of his life by doing what he wanted instead of what the owner charged with him was evidence that he did not really obey the king. The king/owner who came back to reign is only going to put people in positions of authority in his government who will follow his instructions. The rest will be rejected. The issue is this: Are you a person who lives with a heart that desires to trust and obey the king, even in his absence?

Obedience is not optional for Christians because we are His body, we are kingdom people. Our life as members of His church on this earth is dress rehearsal for life in the kingdom. That is why Jesus said (in our text) that the way you handle treasure will indicate what or who you really believe. He then goes on to make a very interesting statement: (Matthew 6.22-23) “The eye is the lamp of the body.” What you look at, or based on the previous verse – what you are living for will either provide illumination or darkness for the rest of you. “God’s Word often uses the eye to represent the attitudes of the mind. If the eye is properly focused on the light, the body can function properly in its movements. But if the eye is out of focus and seeing double, it results in unsteady movements. It is most difficult to make progress while trying to look in two directions at the same time.

If our aim in life is to get material gain, it will mean darkness within. But if our outlook is to serve and glorify God, there will be light within. If what should be light is really darkness, then we are being controlled by darkness; and outlook determines outcome.”¹

If your vision is clear then your priorities and direction will be clear. If your vision (mind) is fuzzy and double-minded, then you will not know where to go. If your vision is clouded and dark, you will be lost and will live for the wrong reason. Hence, the warning: “If the thing that is supposed to bring understanding to you, like a light, is dark, then you can’t understand anything, and the darkness in which you live is great.”²

So, here is the BAM!! Your money is on loan to you as a test to see whether or not you have a believing heart. Your handling of money is an indication of the vision and focus of your heart. If you are hoarding money, wasting money and ignoring the priorities of God then you need to question the legitimacy of your faith because stingy, (“evil-eye”

¹Wiersbe, Warren W.: *The Bible Exposition Commentary*. Wheaton, Ill. : Victor Books, 1996, c1989, S. Mt 6:19

²Newman, Barclay Moon ; Stine, Philip C.: *A Handbook on the Gospel of Matthew*. New York : United Bible Societies, 1992 (UBS Helps for Translators; UBS Handbook Series), S. 182

was a Jewish expression for stinginess) self-centered people are not true followers of the king. The treasure that you have is loaned to you in order to help you see, by the way that you handle it, what you are really trusting in. No, you cannot buy your forgiveness. You cannot purchase salvation. You cannot use money in order to gain entrance into the family of Christ. You can only become a follower of Christ by faith alone in Christ alone. If you have truly come to faith, then your attitude about stuff, money, time, talents, etc. radically changes. But, if you are a genuine follower of Christ, then your trust will be in Christ and not in your stuff, and not in your money. And whatever you have, you will seek to invest it into the things of Christ. That is why Christ said, “But if your eyes are bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If the light within you is darkness, how great is that darkness.” This passage is a warning. Those who live for the wrong goal over time develop a darkness and dullness that swallows their spiritual sensitivities. There is no depth to their life. They get excited about a golf shot, a new restaurant, a sporting event or vacation and remain completely unmoved by the gospel. They are dull. There is no fire in their soul, no longing for Christ for they are so self-absorbed. The storms of life reveal how small and shallow their anchor is. Life consists almost completely of food, or sex, or clothes, or the approval and glad-handing of others. Without these, there is depression, despondency. Contrast that with the soul who has cultivated a deep and abiding trust in the goodness and grace of God. The joy of heart in the soul resting in Christ is infectious. The way you handle money is an indication to you of what you are trusting in. It is not the only test of authentic Christianity, but it is one. If the way that you spend your money is driven by, what do I want – instead of driven by a desire to honor the King, then it may be an indication that you do not really know and trust the King.

HMM – 1

Reading the Bible and praying on a daily basis, for a personal quiet time or devotional time has been a regular part of my life for many, many years. For a long time I viewed it as a necessary discipline, something to do so that I did not feel guilty the rest of the day. Then, getting it done, there was a sense of, “Ok, now that I got that over with, I can get on with the rest of my day.” However, I have learned that you give this time to the Lord so that you remember that the rest is for him as well.

Why does God ask for a tenth of our income to be given back to Him? We give a portion (tithe) to the Lord, not because the rest is ours to do with as we please, but to be reminded that all of it is His and how we use it is to be part of the creation mandate to subdue, rule and fill-with Christ and to prepare ourselves for His coming Kingdom. We don't give a tenth so that God will make the 90% go further – He may, but that is not the point. The point is, we are demonstrating that we can be trusted with resources. After all, that is part of what it means to reign with Him. In the Kingdom, there will be one King.

HMM - 2

“No man can serve two masters.” Christ not only loves you too much to let you think you can get away with that, but He is the rightful King and He will not tolerate competition.