

St. Luke's Evangelical Lutheran Church – Watertown, WI
Pastor Mark Gartner
Sermon for Epiphany 8 – February 24th and 27th, 2011

Matthew 6:24-34

“No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money.

“Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more important than food, and the body more important than clothes? Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life?

“And why do you worry about clothes? See how the lilies of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? So do not worry, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.

Dear Children of God,

I think that you can learn lots of things by looking at the ads on TV. In many ways it gives you a slice of what the people of this country are like. One of the companies that has lots of ads on TV is the credit card company Capital One. One of their ads from about 5 years ago depicted a family that had purchased a large number of Christmas gifts. The wife innocently asked the husband, how did you pay for all those Christmas gifts? At the same time as this question is being asked, the camera zooms off to a large mob of barbarians or Vikings who are storming towards the couple. Just before the mob of Vikings is to attack the young couple, the husband says that he paid for all these gifts with his Capital One card. At that very moment the angry mob of Vikings stops and walks away looking sad. This ad was used to depict how their Credit Card can save you from that wild mob of barbaric Viking warriors. Pull out the Capital One card and your frightening debt will go away. Wow. A credit card that can offer you forgiveness and freedom! But I would like to use their catch-phrase to get us going this morning. Their commercials always end by asking you *“What’s in your wallet?”*

In our Christian living, as we examine what our priorities are, we need to ask ourselves a slightly different question, *“What’s in your heart?”* Our answers to that question just might reveal if our priorities are a little out of whack or not. Our sermon text this morning challenges each of us to look directly at what is in our hearts. Our search will reveal a lot about our attitude, our real treasures, and our priorities. So let’s use this question as our theme for today:

Theme: What’s In Your Heart?

- 1. The worries of this world**
- 2. The confidence of God’s righteousness**

1. The worries of this world

When was the last time you cleaned out your purse or wallet? I bet you don’t even know half the stuff in there and you probably don’t even need most of the rest. That got me thinking, what actually is in our wallets or what have we spent our money on over the last couple of weeks? I bet we would be

amazed at how much junk we find in our wallet or purse or checkbook log. I think it is accurate to say that what's in your wallet (or checkbook log) is a decent indicator of what is in your heart. What would you find in your wallet or purse or checkbook log? I bet we would find old store receipts to places like Wal-Mart, Pick n' Save or Piggly Wiggly. Maybe there would be receipts for McDonalds, Perkins or other food places. If we look deeper into our checkbook we might find entries for car loans, mortgages, Cable or Satellite TV, Cell phones and the like. There might be other things in our wallets and purses such as Business cards from salesmen, Credit cards -- some of which we use and others we do not need and will never use. It is amazing how much junk we pick up and put in our wallets. Revealing?

It is even more eye-opening when we look into our heart and see how much junk we have picked up and put in there. In setting our priorities, have we all too often become guilty of conforming to our materialistic culture, or have we found joy in celebrating Christ with the gifts he has given us? Where did all that stuff – our attitudes, habits and priorities – really come from? Some from God, but a lot, sad to say, comes from the world and culture in which we live. We are not all that different from the children of Israel. The Bible reveals that over the course of the thousands of years from Abraham to the time that Jesus spoke the words of our text, the Israelites managed to pick up some of the “bad habits” or sins of the world around them. They had allowed the truth of God's grace to be overrun by the uncertainty and worries of the heathen people all around them. Even with Jesus right in their midst, they were still stuffing their hearts with junk – like allegiances that needed to be broken, idolatry that needed to be destroyed, garbage that needed to be tossed out.

Like the children of Israel, we also are surrounded by people who worship false Gods. Pretty much every world religion can be found right here in our melting pot. And religious or not, we live among people who also view money and stuff as a god. People love money and what it can buy. We call it materialism. The King James Version translates it “*mammon*.” And if we look today, I am afraid that we will find that *the love of money* is one of those things we have picked up along the way and unknowingly placed in our heart. Even after God has proven to be far more valuable and precious than anything money can ever buy, we are still foolishly tempted to place the two side by side in our hearts. So Jesus says to us, “**you cannot serve both God and money**” (Matthew 6:24). God has gathered us together today to look where our hearts are.

Let's get this straight before we move on. It is not wrong to have money or be rich according to the world's standards. God blesses many of us like he blessed Abraham – and he asks us to use those blessings for his glory. But beware! Money and what it buys can be like cancer if it makes its way into our hearts. God's Word is very clear that the LOVE of money is the root of all kinds of evil (1 Timothy 6:10). That is why it is so important to ask the question, *What's in your heart?* What is your motive in spending? What is your motive in doing anything? What have you set your heart on? What treasure is stored there? One of the ways that you can examine your heart is by looking at your lifestyle. You can look at your checkbook entries. You can look at your credit card reports. You can look at all the stuff you are spending money on.

What do you see in your heart? What is your priority? It is time for us and all Christians to make a clear choice. With all the blessings we receive, let's celebrate Christ! You became a treasure to God through Jesus who offers you forgiveness and freedom. What difference does that make in your life? It sure was big in the life of the Apostle Paul, wasn't it? Scripture – particularly Paul's letter to the Philippians – reveals how his heart was filled with Christ. Paul knew that Christ was his “**greatest treasure**”. Paul clearly said for him there was no greater joy than “**the righteousness from God**” that he had picked up by faith. Paul said that he was willing to endure anything for Christ and considered everything he previously treasured to be “**garbage**”. His whole life took on that singular focus – as he pressed on to live for God, celebrating the life and freedom that he had been given in Christ!

Celebrating Christ does involve your whole life – your attitude, your treasures, your priorities, and your choices. Celebrating Christ with sound stewardship is not just about money. We need to ask ourselves often, *What is in our heart?* With Jesus as our treasure, we can be free from the burden of guilt and the problem of greed. With Jesus as our treasure, we can be free from the burden of worry. With Jesus as our treasure, we can all experience the joy and satisfaction of living for him who died for us.

2. The confidence of God's righteousness

But how are we going to accomplish all of this. It is true that that just looking into our heart is not going to change anything. It is trusting what is in our heart that makes all of the difference in our hearts and lives. We are different. We are new people. We are new creations. To help illustrate this wonderful point, let's play a little game. What do you know about me – Pastor Gartner? We will play a little game of 10 questions. But before we ask these questions, I want you to think about how you know the answers to these questions. Most likely you will know the answers to these questions because I have told you these things at one time or another or I have worn something that may have tipped you off, or someone else has passed the answer on to you. Let's get started:

- Where was I born? (Showlow, AZ – my Dad was a teacher in the Apache Reservation)
- In what city did I spend most of my childhood? (Milwaukee, WI -- my Dad taught at ST. Marcus in Milwaukee)
- Where did I go to High School? (Northwestern Prep – in Watertown)
- What sports did I play in High School and College? (Football, Basketball and Baseball)
- What is my wife's name? (Betsy – But officially on the Birth Certificate it is listed as Betty)
- How many children do I have? (4 boys: Nathan, Zachary, Caleb and Eli)
- What is one of my favorite things to do? (Watch sports – especially my son's sports)
- What is my favorite College sports team? (Duke basketball – who is by the way #1 at this time)
- Do I like coffee or not? (No – Can't stand the taste)
- What is my favorite dessert? (Anything with chocolate?)

That's me, but what about you. I know a little something about many of you, but honestly there are many more things I need to learn, but there is one thing that I do know about all of you. How do I know this? I know this by your words and actions which show me the faith in your heart. In a way you have told me that you have something very special deep inside your hearts. I know that you have the righteousness that God won for you on the cross of Calvary firmly rooted in your hearts by the power of the Holy Spirit. I know that you truly understand by faith alone that you have been given something very special. But I wonder, how many times we have forgotten how special we truly are.

Jesus in our text was reminding us that we are very special, and that we never need to worry. He uses some very beautiful pictures to describe this wonderful fact, **“Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more important than food, and the body more important than clothes? Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life?**

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Too often, we let the worries of this world, choke off the wonderful truth that God has already done everything for us and he will never leave us alone. Every now and then it is possible for any one of us to suffer from an “identity crisis.” And that is not good. An identity crisis can be paralyzing - because how we view ourselves has a big effect on our emotions and our decisions and how we respond to God’s grace. So today I want you to remember who you are and what this means for your life. No matter what you think, **GOD SAYS YOU ARE SPECIAL.**

And as God's special children, he wants us to live for him. Jesus said, **“Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness”** (Matthew 6:33). The better we understand why Jesus is our treasure, the more firmly we believe that heaven is our home, the more excited we are about our mission to show others the way to heaven, the easier it becomes to **“Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness.”**

How are we doing at that **“seeking first his kingdom and righteousness”** stuff? Good sometimes, horrible at other times, but let’s bring this all to a focus. We pursue God’s Kingdom when we spend time in his Word, through which Jesus strengthens his rule in our hearts and lives. We seek his kingdom when we accept and live our mission to connect people to Jesus. The kingdom is established in our hearts as the Holy Spirit leads us to believe and trust in God and his promises. The kingdom is established around us as we support our Gospel ministry commitments through our offerings. As we pursue his kingdom, by God’s grace we are seeing it grow. God promises it will work through the power of his Word.

And as we pursue his kingdom, God promises that he will take care of all the other details as well. **“Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness and all these things will be given to you as well”** God has never made a promise he doesn’t keep! Stepping out with bold faith will be rewarded. That’s how God works. Abraham stepped out in faith to follow the lead of the Lord even though it meant tearing himself from family and living an uncomfortable life on a journey to a place not yet revealed to him. He was rewarded with prosperity, descendants too numerous to count – a family from which would come the Savior of the world. Abraham stepped out in faith when God tested him to see if he was willing to follow orders to sacrifice his son even though it made no logical sense to him. He was rewarded with a substitute sacrifice and an even greater faith. Caleb and Joshua stepped out in faith as they encouraged the children of Israel to trust God’s promises and enter the Promised Land even though the odds seemed to be heavily stacked against them. They were rewarded with the blessings of the Promised Land. David boldly stepped out in faith to take on Goliath because Goliath had challenged the honor of the true God. He was rewarded with victory. The Apostle Paul boldly marched into new mission fields even when he was often rejected and brutally beaten. He was rewarded with countless trophies that he has already laid at Jesus’ feet.

Stepping out in bold faith today – we will be rewarded. It is promised and proven! We have been given so much. Knowing that God wants to bless us with so much more, I pray that we never let worry win again. I pray that God fills you all with the strength that steps out in bold faith every day. I pray that we all see the spiritual blessings that we have in our hearts, which will in love show itself as we seek first his kingdom and his righteousness. Amen.