

St. Paul: On The Same page

09.15.13 Week #265

Day One: *Amos 8:4-7*

Hear this, you who trample the needy and do away with the poor of the land, saying, "When will the New Moon be over that we may sell grain, and the Sabbath be ended that we may market wheat?"—skimping the measure, boosting the price and cheating with dishonest scales...

“Who, me?” The prophet Amos condemns greedy merchants who can’t wait for the Sabbath to end in order that they may continue cheating their customers.

That’s not us, right? We certainly don’t believe in cheating anybody. And we love to criticize the greedy.

But see if this statement sounds familiar: “It’s not my fault if someone bet money they couldn’t afford to lose. I won fair and square!” Or try this one on for size: “It’s a big corporation. They won’t miss the little bit that I get from them.” That sort of justification for the mistreatment of others is common. We can’t help it if

“The eyes of all look to you,
and you give them their
food in due season.

You open your hand;
you satisfy the desire of
every living thing.”

Psalm 145:15-16

poor people are “bad at math” and don’t read the fine print. Not our fault! And I deserve more from the rich corporate bosses!

But God reminds us that he cares about the poor. He even loves the wealthy. He sent his Son for the foolish and the uneducated, just as much as for the university graduate and the financially savvy. We are eager to make money, but God is eager to regain those who are lost to him. In God’s books, the greatest treasure is you.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, I have loved money too much. I love the things which it can buy for me. But you have loved me more than gold. Lord, help me to love like you do. Amen.

Day Two *1 Timothy 2:1-5*
I urge, then, first of all, that requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for everyone—for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness. This is good, and pleases God our Savior, who wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth.

Paul says we should pray for kings and rulers so “that we may live peaceful and quiet lives.” That would be nice. If our lives were peaceful we could rest assured that all we have built will be safe.

So when was the last time you prayed for Bashar Assad? Or President Hassan Rouhani of Iran? When have you even prayed for our own president, or the mayor, or your boss? These are people who may lead us into conflict. Shouldn't we be praying for them? We don't follow God's instruction even when we know it's good for us.

Paul says that God desires us to pray for rulers, in order that we may live in peace. But God wants peace for a different reason than ours. He's not just interested in a world without war. He

wants all people to be saved – those who are lost to be restored to his family.

We'd like life to be peaceful so that we can keep busy earning money and making our life nicer. We link these two words together: peace and prosperity, and we hope that if God gives us peace we will use it to build a better, that is a more comfortable, world.

But if we pray for a restored economy, an end to war, a healing of national divisions, and so on, it should not be for our own benefit. It should not be only to obtain things that last for a few years and then rust or break or become obsolete.

If God gives us peace, then we should seize the chance to share the good news about real peace, the kind that lasts forever... in Jesus.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, establish peace in our nation and world. Most of us do not know what war is like. But those who do not know you live in a world of death and destruction. Grant that I may share with someone today the peace that you have put in my heart. Amen.

Day Three: Luke 16:1-15

"No servant 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."

Hate and Love – we talked about this in an earlier text when Jesus said that his followers should hate the members of their family. This a way of speaking in the Hebrew language that sounds outrageous to us. But the contrast of hate and love is not about emotions – it's about choosing one thing and rejecting another.

So... would you ever reject money? Who would turn down free money???

Probably every one of us, at some time, has expressed the need for more. And yet... what if it's actually dangerous?

Is money really a dangerous enemy – or does it feel more like a friend? If money were an enemy, you wouldn't want it around. But normally we'd like to gather as much money to ourselves as we can. Is that how you treat a dangerous foe?

Or do you think that you could manage a little compromise with Jesus'

instructions? Perhaps Jesus could be your master, but money could still be an occasional foreman. Or maybe Jesus could be the one who tells us what to do in "religious" things, and money can determine what we do in "secular" things. Isn't there a separation of church and state?

Sadly, Jesus doesn't leave us any room for a compromise. That "hate" and "love" language means that it is either one or the other. Unless we deny money its hold over us, it will control us. And if we admit that Jesus is our Savior from sin, then he must rule over all our life.

Can you think of any downside to Jesus ruling your life?

Rejecting money doesn't mean taking a vow of poverty, just as putting Jesus above our family doesn't mean leaving those we love. But it is time to take a close look at who we really trust.

Prayer: Dearest Jesus, I love you and want to follow you, but I keep turning back for another glimpse of the things I love. Send your Spirit to focus my heart and give me freedom from that slavery.. Amen.

Day Four:

Money, Money, Money!

Two of our Scripture lessons for next Sunday are about money. That's no surprise. Some people accuse the church of talking too much about money. But the truth is, we talk about money because YOU talk about money.

Wages and salaries, the debate over the minimum wage, the national debt, the cost of living, the price of the next nice thing we'd like to buy, worries about retirement, the cost of health care – all of these are topics that we hear talked about on an almost daily basis.

Why is money such a common subject of conversation? Some would say it's because we don't have enough, so we're all talking about the thing we need. But rich people talk about money just as much as poor people.

No, we talk about money because it is our scale for measuring the value of things. It's like carpenters talking about feet and inches, or cooks talking about cups and ounces. We measure the value of things, and even of people, by money.

But what does God say about money?

He says that it comes from him. ALL our material gifts come from him. "You open your hand; you satisfy the desire of every living thing." Psalm 145:16.

He says it is fleeting, and temporary. "When your eyes light on [your wealth], it is gone, for suddenly it sprouts wings, flying like an eagle toward heaven." Proverbs 23:5

He says it is a great blessing. "It is the blessing of the Lord that makes rich, and he adds no sorrow to it." Proverbs 10:22

And he says it is a great curse. "Come now, you rich, weep and howl for your miseries which are coming upon you." James 5:1

Most importantly, God says that money cannot save you. "He who trusts in his riches will fall..." Prov. 11:28

We have a treasure that no money can measure.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, teach me to keep my treasure close. Let me hold you in my heart. Amen.