

A Passion For Christ Pt 2

Undivided Heart

Luke 16:13

By
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Often times it is the things we can't see, smell or feel that are the most dangerous – things like cancer; largely because we're unconscious that they're there until it's too late. This is true not only in the physical realm of nature, but also true in the spiritual realm. I'd be willing to say that the greatest dangers to our faith and to our spiritual lives are not the things we can see, smell and touch, but the things we can't see, smell or touch - the things we're not even aware of.

You see, unbeknownst to us, we have forces at work which slowly siphon spiritual energy, drain us of power and choke out our passion for Jesus, leaving us weak, nominal and inert. Though you may not be aware of what is causing it, you can easily discern its effects. Many people at conversion experience an abundance of passion for Jesus Christ – sharing about him to others, exhibiting excitement for his word and for prayer. Then, with the passage of time, the sickening effects of silent and invisible forces slowly eat away at the new convert's heart until at some point, he too has joined the ranks of the spiritually nominal and indifferent Christians. Like spiritual termites, they eat away at the spiritual foundation of our lives bringing spiritual ruin.

This morning I'd like us to look at one of these invisible, passion killing forces that are all around us. It is without question of the chief tools used by the evil one to subvert, draw away and paralyze Christians. This silent assassin is as old as time. What's more, his success rate is staggeringly high. Throughout the ages he has repeatedly drawn people away from God to worship at a different altar.

Who, you may ask, is this invisible attacker? What is the spiritual leach that drains and suffocates the passion of God's people? It's called by many names, but the one I will give it is the god of "more." Others have called it "materialism" or the "love of money." We might also aptly call it the god of "perpetual upgrades." And while we may know it exists, what we're not aware of is how powerful its subliminal whispers are that subtly woo our affections toward the "more," the "bigger", the "better" and the "upgrade."

The Bible is filled with warnings about this subtle enemy. Too, Jesus considered it to be such a danger that he addresses it repeatedly in his teaching and preaching. In fact, in the passage we're going to be looking at this morning, one verse, he teaches us as his disciples that Christianity and materialism are completely and utterly incompatible. To live for the attainment of the "more" in this life and yet attempt to follow Jesus is like trying to walk east and west at the same time. This is a truth that we desperately need to hear, because we think in our minds that we can pursue Christ and the "more" at the same time. That is, we think we can have both, that we can love the "more" and love "Jesus" too. This passage, however, argues precisely the opposite informing us that it is utterly impossible to pursue both. Jesus says in Luke 16:13:

¹³"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."

The central thrust of Jesus' words here is incompatibility. We cannot be passionately living for Jesus and at the same time passionately living for cars, houses, bigger paychecks, bigger retirement,

blouses, dresses, computers or technology. This central thrust rests on two complementary principles which we'll spend the remainder of our time understanding and applying.

Let me preface our study, however, with one clarification (and I say this because some will conclude before I start that I am only speaking to the "rich" people and that it doesn't apply to the middle or lower class). This is far from the truth. The heart of the issue is not wealth itself, or how much one has, but the love and pursuit of wealth. It's wealth that dominates the heart. That means it's a universal issue. Whether one is on welfare or one lives in Beverly Hills there is a propensity to love money.

I. The principle of incompatible submission: We can only serve one God.

The verse begins and ends with the same basic assertion. The first is general stating that "No servant can serve two masters," while the second is specific clarifying who those two masters are saying, "you cannot serve both God and money." Jesus is simply stating that it is an impossibility to live a life in service to God while living a life in pursuit of wealth. The word serve here emphasizes action and will. It speaks of how we live out our lives.

But why is serving money and serving God incompatible? Why is it utterly impossible to serve both? There are two biblical reasons why these are incompatible.

A. The exclusive demands of God

One clear reason is because of the character of who God is. One of the things that we learn very early in the history of the Bible is that God does not share worship with other gods. The first of the Ten Commandments is "You shall have no other gods before me" (Ex. 20:3). God declares through Isaiah, "I am the LORD; that is my name! I will not give my glory to another or my praise to idols" (Is. 42:8). The Bible is replete with this truth that there can be no other gods. Israel's repeated judgments were largely due to a failure to obey this primary command of God.

To stop here, however, would be to miss the other side. It's not simply that he demands exclusive faith and devotion, but he alone is the only one worthy of such. As our God, he promises to be a refuge and a fortress to those who trust in him. He is their provider, their sustainer and will not allow his righteous children to fall. He is the means to eternal pleasures at his right hand. He is the giver of all good gifts, the one who supplies the food, the water and the clothes! He alone is the one who redeems and saves. He is perfectly just, unfathomably loving, and unwaveringly good. That is, he ALONE is worthy of our faith, our love and our hope. And as such our lives are to be lived in service to him.

B. The god-like ability of money

But what is it about money that makes it a master we can serve? Why does Jesus refer to it as a master that we can serve? It is here that the rest of scripture gives insight. In the Bible, men repeatedly and foolishly trust in money as a type of surrogate god. They trust in it for security (Prov. 18:11; Jer. 48:7; 49:4); they trust in it for power (Dan. 11:12); they trust in it as their hope (1 Tim. 6:17).

Our own experience teaches us that money can do amazing things. It is looked upon as the key to everything we desire. It is the means to a happy life. If I have enough money, I can go to Hawaii instead of Lake Berryessa, or purchase the loaded car instead of the base model, I can eat at my favorite restaurant instead of Carl's Junior. What is the key to this happy life? Money is the key. What about freedom? If I only have a little to spend, my freedom to go where I please is severely limited. Money is viewed as the key to freedom! Or what about security? Money also holds out the false hope of security and peace. We easily believe (again in our innermost being) that since I have a good retirement, a good house with lots of equity, I can feel secure and safe. We could go on and on, but the point is to show that money possesses power to supply the means to happiness, freedom, security, status, self-worth and pleasure. It's no wonder, given all that it can do, that people come to place their trust in it to supply what God himself is said to supply. Thus, money becomes the object of our faith.

Believing that mammon can do all of this, we work for it, work to make more of it, invest to increase it, secure it to keep it. Believing what it can do for us, we make decisions about jobs based upon how much of it we get. We daydream about all that we will be able to do with it and feel the thrill of excitement, the joy, of its benefits when we hand it over the counter in exchange for the DVD player we wanted.

It offers us so much, and unlike the true God, we can touch it, feel it, sense immediate gratification for the delights that it offers us in this life. So, subtly it woos us to serve it with our lives while we serve God only with our lips.

For these reasons, Jesus says, "You cannot serve God and money." You can work for only one! You can either submit your life and your wealth to the pursuit of God and his will, OR you can submit your life to the pursuit of wealth and the satisfaction it supplies. But there's a second principle.

II. Principle of incompatible passion: We can only love one God.

Service to God, or money for that matter, is driven by something deeper. The way we live out our life is powered by affections of the heart – passions. Jesus makes this perfectly clear in the way he moves from service to the heart saying, "Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other." The words "hate," "love," "devoted" and "despise" are all "heart" words. The reason we can serve only one is because we can love only one.

If we deep down love our wealth, love our money and look to it longingly to provide what we lack or what we want, then we will have no true passion for God. Rather, we'll be indifferent toward God and even despise him, which means we'll treat him as of little value. He won't be the governing master in our lives.

On the other hand, if we truly have a passionate love for God, we will not have a love for wealth or money. It will simply be a means by which we can worship him and accomplish his work. Money will not be an object of our affection it will become an expression of affection for how much we love God.

As I was meditating on this passage it occurred to me that perhaps the reason there is very little true passion these days for the Lord demonstrated in tangible active service is because we have become, unbeknownst to us, infected with the fatal poison of “love for more,” “love for stuff,” “love for money.” That is, maybe there is little passion for God because God is not the treasure of our hearts, this world is.

If God is our treasure, he will by necessity be our passion. Jesus teaches us this in Matthew 6:21 when he says, “Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” Or, to put it in my own words, “What you treasure you will have a passion for,” “What you treasure, you love. What you prize, you serve. What you value most, you’re passionate about. If there is no passion, that means there is no treasure. If there is no passion for God then God is not the treasure of your heart. And if God is not the treasure that fuels your life, then what is?”

Given the fact that we live in the richest country on the face of the planet, that our culture is overtly materialistic in its decision making processes, its ethics and its excessive consumption, I would be willing to argue that if the church is lacking love and passion for God, it’s reasonable to assume that it’s at least in great part due to the seductive and subtle influences of another treasure.

At this point, most of us are probably thinking, “I’m not materialistic,” “I don’t love money,” “My life isn’t about stuff.” And perhaps for a few that is true. However, the kind of materialism I’m speaking of is subtle and almost indiscernible. It’s nearly indiscernible, not because it can’t be detected, but because we live in it, we breathe it, it’s all around us, like a powerful marinade affecting our souls, our hearts and our minds. It’s on the TV, in the newspaper, on the radio, in conversations, in education, in our friendships. The New York Times estimated that the average American is bombarded by over 3500 ads per day. Rodney Clap, in a recent article, spoke of how pervasive it is saying that we are, “so inundated, we are hardly aware of how pervasive and invasive these images and messages are.”¹

You even get a sense of the subtleness of it in the verses that follow. It was the Pharisees who are the lovers of money. These were the worshippers of God, the ones who read their bibles constantly, prayed several times a day, and were leaders in the synagogues. These were religious people who uttered the shema all the time which contains the greatest commandment in the Scriptures. Yet, they had fallen prey to the love of mammon. And if it is possible for Bible-reading, always praying, ever devoted leaders of the first century synagogue, then it is certainly possible that we likewise have been captivated by its powerful grip.

If you want to examine where you are, I’d urge you to do a couple of things. First, pray that the Spirit would reveal what the treasure of your heart is – whether it is him or mammon. Secondly, fast from the normal things you do with money; golfing, eating out, going to movies or shopping (obviously not for the essentials) and see if your joy dies. Thirdly, take note of what you think about constantly – is it remodeling, upgrading your computer, getting the new Sony play station,

¹ Rodney Clap, “Why the Devil Takes Visa”, Christianity Today, Oct. 7, 1996

upgrading your house? If such things dominate your thinking, then I'd be willing to bet they dominate your heart. Fourthly, listen to what you or others talk about and see if it's God-oriented or "more" oriented. "For out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks" (Matt. 12:34). Fifthly, when finances get cut, what's the first thing to go? Is it the tithe?

This passage demands that we make a choice between loving God or loving our money, serving God and serving money. Both cannot be done. They are incompatible. So choose this day whom you will love and whom you will serve.