

St. Augustine's Sermons

Calgary, Alberta

August 12, 2007

10:00 am, Holy Communion

“Patterns of the Heart”¹

The Text: Luke 12:32-34

32 "Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom. 33 Sell your possessions and give to the poor. Provide purses for yourselves that will not wear out, a treasure in heaven that will not be exhausted, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys. 34 For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

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Introduction

The inner essence of worship is the treasuring of God as infinitely valuable above everything. I have entitled this sermon “Patterns of the Heart” because who and what we worship shapes the pattern of our heart, our inner being. When in our heart we treasure God as infinitely valuable about everything, the outer forms of worship are the acts that show how much we treasure God. Therefore all of life is meant to be worship. Paul makes this point succinctly in 1 Corinthians 10:31 when he says to us: “So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.” Money and things are a big part of life, and therefore God intends them to be a big part of worship - since all of life is to be worship. So the way you worship with your money and your possessions is to get them and use

them and lose them in a way that shows how much you treasure God - not money. And therefore we can say that how we deal with money sheds a light on the patterns of our heart. That's what this text is about. And so it is really a text about worship.

Now there is a place for corporate worship - what we do here together on Sunday morning. And the same definitions hold here as everywhere else: the essence of worship here is the inner treasuring of God as infinitely valuable. And the forms of worship are the acts that express this inner treasuring of God (preaching and hearing the word of God, praying, singing, giving, sharing the Lord's Supper, and so on). One of those acts of corporate worship here at St. Augustine's is what we call "the offering" – the point that bridges the hearing of the word of God with the celebrating of Holy Communion. Here we worship with our money, by putting it out of our hands and our banks, and into the mission and ministry of Christ.

So this particular act of worship in the corporate worship service is one small part of the larger pattern of worship with our money that we do every day in the way we earn and spend and save and give our money. Today's text, Luke 12:32-34, has to do with the big pattern of how we worship with our money, and so by implication it relates to what we do with our money in corporate worship as well. So let's look at some of the main points in this text, and let it apply to our lives in general and to our corporate giving in particular.

1. Do Not Fear

The first point of the text (in verse 32) is that God commands us not to fear when it comes to money and things. "Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom." Don't worry, don't be afraid. But there is another way to say the point that goes deeper. The reason God wants us not to be afraid concerning money and things is because that would magnify five great things about him. Not being afraid would echo how much we treasure these five

¹ I am grateful to the Rev. John Piper for much of the content of this sermon at: http://www.desiringgod.org/ResourceLibrary/Sermons/ByScripture/23/1021_Magnifying_God_with_Money/

things about God. In other words, not being afraid would become a beautiful inner act of worship.

First, not being afraid shows that we treasure God as our Shepherd. "Do not be afraid, little flock." We are his flock and he is our Shepherd. And if he is our Shepherd, then Psalm 23 applies: "The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want" - that is, I shall not lack anything I really need. Not fearing magnifies the preciousness of our Shepherd.

I think it is worth noting that Jesus calls us his "little flock". The word used in Greek for "little" is "micron" As a measurement a micron is really small. It is a unit of length equal to one thousandth of a millimeter.² In Greek this word has about it the sense of least importance, insignificant, humble

When we hear Jesus speak these words they are said with a tone of endearment. God seems to love the small things, small and insignificant people of the world. How different this is from the spiritual principalities ruled by Satanic forces. In his realm it is all about affirming significance, size and prestige, what we could call the world's values.

The world's values can be like a current that as Christians we have to resist. When I was kayaking off Thetis Island two weeks ago I had to use the paddle to keep me on course. Therefore I had to weight my strokes accordingly to compensate for the pull of the current. If I had allowed the current to direct me I would have ended up other than where I needed and wanted to be.

The current that influences the world wants to lead my heart to a place where what I want is to be impressive and to be important. Someone who is noticed! Perhaps you deal with the same pull on your heart. In this battle for significance, Jesus suggests that God sees things differently. Jesus uses an adjective that

² "micron." *Webster's Third New International Dictionary, Unabridged*. Merriam-Webster, 2002. <http://unabridged.merriam-webster.com> (10 Aug. 2007).

assures us that God loves to shepherd those who in the world's eyes are least important but oh so valuable to him.

Second, not being afraid shows that we treasure God as our Father 32 "Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom." We are not only his little flock; we are also his children, and he is our Father. The significance of that is clear from verse 30 of Luke 12 where Jesus says: "All these things the nations of the world eagerly seek; but your Father knows that you need these things." In other words, your Father really cares and really knows what you need and will work for you to be sure that you have what you need.

Third, not being afraid shows that we treasure God as King. 32 "Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom. " He can give us the "kingdom" because he is the King. This adds a tremendous element of power to the one who provides for us. "Shepherd" connotes protection and provision. "Father" connotes love and tenderness and authority and provision and guidance. "King" connotes power and sovereignty and wealth. So if we will trust God as Shepherd and Father and King, and not be afraid about money and things, then we will show how real and precious God is to us in all these ways. God will be worshipped.

Fourth, not being afraid shows how free and generous God is. "Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom. Notice, he gives the kingdom. He doesn't sell the kingdom or rent the kingdom or lease the kingdom. He gives it. He is infinitely wealthy and does not need our payments. Anything we would try to give him would already be his anyway. "What do you have that you did not receive?" Paul asks in 1 Corinthians 4:7. So God is generous and free with his bounty. And this is what we magnify about him when we are not afraid but trust him with our needs.

Finally, not being afraid shows that we treasure God as happy "Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom. " It "pleases" him to give you the kingdom. He wants to do this. It makes him glad to

do it. Not all of us had fathers like this - who loved to give us themselves, who were made happy by giving instead of getting. The healing of the heart from this absence or abuse is something that is on-going in our lives. It is God's will for us that as we see him as our generous father, caring shepherd and kind king, that our hearts are made right and find restoration. Then the outward patterns of our hearts will magnify that we know God to be our happy and generous shepherd, father and king.

This is the first point from this text. God wants to give us His kingdom - to give us heaven, to give us eternal life and joy, and everything we need to get there. If we treasure God in this way - if we trust him - we will understand what Jesus means when he says to us "Do not be afraid." This is the foundation of all the rest of this text and this sermon. What is coming is possible because of this promise.

Because of God's action in our lives Jesus then goes on to show us what our reaction can be. This can be summarized in the second point:

2. An Impulse Toward Simplicity Rather than Accumulation

Jesus says in Verse 33 "Sell your possessions and give to the poor. Provide purses for yourselves that will not wear out, a treasure in heaven that will not be exhausted, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys."

Focus for a moment on the words, "Sell your possessions." Who was he talking to? Verse 22 of chapter 12 gives the answer: "Then Jesus said to his disciples." Now these people were by and large not wealthy. They didn't have a lot of possessions. But still he says, "Sell your possessions." He doesn't say how many possessions to sell. To the rich ruler in Luke 18:22 Jesus said, "Sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me." Sell all your possessions. When Zaccheus met Jesus, he said (Luke 19:8), "Look, Lord! Here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount." So Zaccheus gave fifty percent of his possessions. In Acts 4:37 it says,

"Barnabas sold a field he owned and brought the money and put it at the apostles' feet." So he sold at least one field.

So the Bible doesn't tell us how many possessions to sell. But why does it say sell possessions at all? Why? Giving alms - using your money to show love for those without the necessities of life and without the gospel (the necessity of eternal life) - is so important that if you don't have any liquid assets to give, you should sell something so you can give. But now think what this means in context. These disciples are not cash-poor rich people whose money is all tied up in bonds or real estate. Most people like that do, in fact, usually have fairly deep savings. But Jesus didn't say, "Take some of your savings and give alms." He said, "Sell something, and give alms." Why? The simplest assumption is that these folks lived close enough to the edge that they did not have cash to give and had to sell something so they could give. And Jesus wanted his people to move toward simplification, not accumulation.

So what's the point? The point is that there is a powerful impulse in the Christian life toward simplicity rather than accumulation. The impulse comes from treasuring God as Shepherd and Father and King more than we treasure all our possessions. And the impulse is a strong impulse for two reasons. One is that Jesus said, "How hard it is for the rich (literally: those who have things) to enter the kingdom of God!" (Luke 18:24). In Luke 8:14 Jesus said that riches "choke" the word of God." But we want to enter the kingdom vastly more than we want things. And we don't want the word of God choked in our lives. So there is a strong impulse to simplify rather than accumulate.

The other reason is that we want the preciousness of God to be manifest to the world. And Jesus tells us here that selling things and giving alms is one way to show that God is real and precious as our Shepherd, Father and King.

It also brings home again in this text the concern the Lord has for the micron people of the world. The little flock is to show generosity towards those who the world will so often ignore. The little and insignificant people.

So the second point is that trusting God as Shepherd, Father and King carries a strong impulse toward simplicity rather than accumulation. And this brings worship out from the inner, hidden place of the heart into more visible actions for the glory of God.

3. Maximizing our Treasure in Heaven, not on the Earth

The third point from this text is that the purpose of money is to maximize our treasure in heaven, not on the earth. Verse 33 again “Sell your possessions and give to the poor. Provide purses for yourselves that will not wear out, a treasure in heaven that will not be exhausted, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys.” What's the connection between selling possessions here so you can meet the needs of others (the first part of the verse), and accumulating treasure in heaven for yourself (at the end of the verse)?

The connection seems to be: the way you make purses which don't get holes and the way you gather treasures in heaven that never fail is by selling your possessions to meet the needs of others. In other words, simplifying for the sake of love on earth maximizes your joy in heaven.

Don't miss this utterly radical point. It's the way Jesus thinks and talks all the time. Being heavenly-minded makes a radically loving difference in this world. The people who are most powerfully persuaded that what matters is treasure in heaven, not big accumulations of money here, are the people who will constantly dream of ways to simplify and serve, simplify and serve, simplify and serve. They will give and give and give. And of course they will work and work and work, as Paul says in Ephesians 4:28, "so that [they] may have something to share with those in need."

The connection with worship is this: Jesus commands us to accumulate treasure in heaven, that is, to maximize our joy in God. He says that the way to do this is to sell and simplify for the sake of others. So he motivates simplicity and service

by our desire to maximize our joy in God. Which means that all of our use of money becomes a manifestation of how much we delight in God above money and things. And this is worship and shows that the patterns of the heart are set on glorifying God.

4. Your Heart Moves Toward What You Cherish

Now the last point this morning from the text is this: your heart moves toward what you cherish, and God wants you to move toward him. The pattern of the heart is famously summarized by Jesus at verse 34: "For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." This is given as the reason why we should pursue treasure in heaven that does not fail: "For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." If your treasure is in heaven where God is, then that is where your heart will be also.

Now what is this seemingly simple verse really saying? The word "treasure" I take to mean "the object cherished." And the word "heart" I take to mean, "the organ that cherishes." So read the verse like this: "Where the object that you cherish is, there will be the organ that cherishes." If the object you cherish is God in heaven, your heart will be with God in heaven. You will be with God. But if the object that you cherish is money and things on the earth, then your heart will be on the earth. You will be on the earth, cut off from God.

The heart is like a strong magnet. It will draw to itself those objects towards which it is directed. Jesus is teaching us here that he wants our heart to be directed towards God so that as we live in this world our heart will have attached to it those values and characteristics represented by the Kingdom of God.

This is what Jesus meant in Luke 16:13 when he said, "No servant can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money." To serve money is to cherish money and pursue all the benefits money can give above all else. The heart goes after money. But to serve God means to cherish God and to pursue all the benefits God can give. The heart goes after God.

And that is worship: the heart's cherishing God and seeking him as the treasure above all treasures.

Conclusion: The Offering - an Act of Worship

I close by simply relating these four points to the corporate act of worship we call "the offering." This moment and this act in our service will be worship for you, regardless of the amount, if by giving you say from the heart: 1) I hereby trust you, God, as my happy, generous Shepherd, Father and King, so that I will not be afraid when I have less money for myself in supplying the needs of others; 2) I hereby resist the incredible pressure in our culture to accumulate more and more and cast my lot with the impulse to simplicity for the sake of others; 3) I hereby lay up treasure in heaven and not on earth so that my joy in God will be maximized forever; and 4) with this offering I declare that since my treasure is in heaven, my heart goes after God.

Let us pray:

Gracious God, we thank you that you are our happy, generous, Shepherd, Father and King. As we focus on giving glory to you, inspire us to respond to Jesus' invitation to not be afraid. As we shape our heart based on this inner relationship with you, may our heart's outward and visible patterns show a willingness to live simply and generously in this world as we look for the Kingdom that is coming. Help us to truly show by our outer actions that our treasure is in heaven so that our hearts may be drawn heavenward as we live earthbound lives of charity towards those who are poor. This we pray in Jesus' name,

Amen.