

Luke 16:14-18 Early AM

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Preacher: Sungtaek Kim (Artizo)

[0 : 00] Please join me in prayer. Lord God, we give you thanks just for the very breath in our lungs and just for your faithfulness that we may gather here together to read your word, to sing worship to you, and to be in your presence.

So Lord God, I pray that for each and every one of us that your presence may be made known to us not only here, but in every aspect of our life going forward. Lord, we pray all this in your name. Amen.

Please be seated. Forgive me if my voice sounds a little bit funky. I was sick this past week. I'm not anymore, so it's all good.

So, as Ben mentioned, my name is Sung Tech Kim. I'm one of the artisanal apprentices here at St. Peter's Fireside, and it's my pleasure to be here with y'all this morning to have this opportunity to preach.

Now, as a guest preacher here at St. John's, I'm reminded of how difficult it can be when meeting someone new and trying to get to know them. And one of the things that I personally enjoy doing when meeting new people is asking some icebreaker questions.

[1 : 11] And one question that y'all might have heard before is, if your house was on a fire and your family was safe outside already, what would be the first thing that you would grab? Some people might say their family photo album, or their family pets, or maybe even their laptops.

Depends on who you ask. But the purpose of these icebreaker questions are not only to be humorous, but they're also meant to reveal a little bit about ourselves as people and what our hearts value.

And it's in today's passage that Jesus especially presses into our hearts and reveals what we love. As Susan had read for us, we're in the Gospel of Luke.

And this passage follows right after Jesus' parable of the shrewd or clever manager. It is from this previous parable that Jesus says in verse 13, that no servant can serve two masters, for 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 God and money. What Jesus is saying isn't groundbreaking. It's the simple truth. You can either love and serve one master or the other, God or wealth.

[2 : 26] And it seems pretty clear-cut, right? Love God, not wealth. But in today's passage, we're going to see just how much sin muddles with our hearts.

You see, in verse 14, we see the Pharisees not only ridicule Jesus, but they are described as lovers of money.

Although it's not included in the passage, I can imagine that Luke knew this about the Pharisees because he saw the way they lived their lives. And they can already see the false pretenses cracking that they are not really the supposed lovers of God.

And Jesus calls out directly to them. He presses into their hearts in verse 15 by saying, You are those who justify yourselves before men, but God knows your hearts.

For what is exalted among men is an abomination in the sight of God. From the beginning in the garden until now, God has always understood our hearts and inner thoughts better than we ever could.

[3 : 30] And Jesus' reproof of the Pharisees was revealing how at their very core, they believed that justification came from men rather than from God.

And this disorder of valuing people's approval more than God's approval manifested itself in the Pharisees' exalting wealth above all. And what is most striking is that Jesus declares this, that God judges it as an abomination.

It is an abomination because the Pharisees' love of wealth and praise from others had not only blinded them to what God valued as worthy and good, but because it was also deceiving themselves that they were justified before God.

As Jesus was peeling back the layers of the Pharisees' hearts in regards to wealth, he was also confronting how they had distorted marriage and divorce. In verse 18, Jesus says, everyone who divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery.

And he who marries a woman divorced from her husband commits adultery. Although Jesus' pivot to marriage may sound a bit strange to us, he does this and he needs to do this because he is confronting how the Pharisees had not only exchanged their love of God for wealth, but also for religious authority.

[4 : 59] During this time, men were divorcing their wives, not for any legitimate reason, but because of their own selfish desires and their love of sexual passion. Men were remarrying and divorcing however they wished, simply because they desired it, and the Pharisees had simply stood by and affirmed what they were doing as permissible according to the law.

It's here that the Pharisees' disorder of love is on full display again. Instead of rebuking these men out of godly love for selfishly breaking God's union of marriage, the Pharisees believed that they alone had the religious authority and power to judge what was right and wrong.

That they alone understood what God's will was and that God approved of their actions. And if we're honest with ourselves, we can often be just like them.

In many ways, we may look at our own lives and completely ignore our hidden faults or sinful desires that draw us away from both God and from others. And if we were left to our own devices, our false loves would continue to blind us.

But by God's grace, just as Jesus did not leave the Pharisees alone in their self-deception, he does not leave us as well. But how does Jesus press into our self-deception?

[6 : 27] He does this in verse 16 by saying that the law and the prophets were until John. Since then, the good news of the kingdom of God is preached and everyone forces his way into it.

Now, what is most curious about this passage is Jesus saying that because of the gospel, everyone is forcing, I'm sorry, everyone forces his way into it. While this certainly is one way to translate this phrase, the ESV includes the footnote that it could also be translated as everyone is forcefully urged into it.

I believe that this translation better expresses how Jesus' gospel presses into our lives and challenges what we love. Throughout his ministry, Jesus had revealed that the kingdom of God included healing the sick, opening the eyes of the blind, and the forgiveness of sins.

But Jesus also spoke about how the kingdom would be rejected. It would be rejected by those like the Pharisees, those whose hearts were so closed off and had refused to acknowledge their own false loves and had been blinded by their own self-righteousness.

Yet even in the Pharisees' rejection of the gospel, it was accomplishing what it had come to do. The gospel had come to challenge our idolatrous loves, and the Pharisees could no longer hide behind their wealth or their religious authority as excuses for their idolatry.

[7 : 57] And why not? Because Jesus was here. He was here, and he had declared that now the kingdom of God was present in the world, and that in God's kingdom, every false love, every idolatry that would draw us away from him was to be cast down.

Jesus' very presence confronted the Pharisees' self-deception and idolatrous loves as simply brittle and empty. And we as a church also experience this pressing in, this pressing in by the gospel to confront our shortcomings.

This pressing of the gospel is not one of God bringing either shame or guilt upon us. That's not what the gospel was doing either for the Pharisees back then or for us today. No, you see, the gospel is a calling.

It's a calling to have an honest understanding of ourselves. Like bread dough being pressed down to squeeze out air bubbles for the dough to become bread, we are being pressed by the gospel as well to push out our sinful desires in order for us to become more like Christ.

And this pressing in this process can reveal many parts of ourselves that we may not like or that we may want to cover in shame. But this pressing is never something that we do alone or to ourselves.

[9 : 24] It is always done within the gracious and loving presence of God. Jesus reassures us that through the pressing that there will be nothing that will either surprise him or be judged as irredeemable.

For Jesus stayed even with the Pharisees as the gospel pressed into their hearts and revealed their idolatrous loves and was calling them to repentance and to turn their love towards God.

And for each of us here today, I wonder how the gospel may be pressing into our hearts. What are some of the places in our lives where we are being called to acknowledge and let go of our false loves that lead only to emptiness?

I pray that for each of us when we are confronted with our false loves, that we recognize who is doing the pressing. That this pressing is indeed the all-encompassing embrace of God.

Just as much as the gospel presses into our lives and reveals our hearts, it also molds and forms us into who we are meant to love. And from the beginning, we have always been meant to love God, the good Father, the one who has both forgiven our sins and drawn us into communion with him.

[10 : 45] So as we go out from this service today and from every day forward, my hope is that as Jesus continues to press into our lives and molds and forms our hearts, that people would know us as lovers of God and of the fullness of life found in him.

Amen.