

Matthew 23:17

by William MacDonald

The sermon teaches that our connection with Calvary is the most wonderful thing about us and that the kingdom sanctifies what we have, not the other way around.

Duration: 34:26

Scripture: Exodus 34:29, Psalm 126:5-6, Matthew 23:17, 1 Peter 5:7

Topics: "Pharisees"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher warns against the danger of trading away one's spiritual birthright for temporary pleasures. He emphasizes the importance of prioritizing righteousness and divine communion over worldly desires. The preacher also encourages believers to cast their cares upon God, highlighting His care and provision for His people. Additionally, he challenges listeners to live sacrificially and invest their resources in the work of the Lord, such as missions, spreading the gospel, and supporting the local church.

Transcript

It's kind of a daily devotional book, and it will take up isolated verses of scripture and seek to draw spiritual lessons from these verses. And I thought during these afternoon sessions this week I would take up some spiritual insight with you. And the first one I'd like to look at is found in Matthew 23 and verse 17.

Matthew 23 and verse 17, and there we have this expression, for whether is greater the gold or the temple that sanctifies the gold. Now, to get the real context, we have to go back to verse 16. It says, Woe unto you, ye blind guides, which say, whosoever shall swear by the temple, it is nothing.

But whosoever shall swear by the gold of the temple, he is a debtor. Ye fools and blind, for whether is greater the gold or the temple that sanctifies the gold. And, whosoever shall swear by the altar, it is nothing.

But whosoever sweareth by the gift that is upon it, he is guilty, or he is a debtor. Ye fools and blind, for whether is greater the gift or the altar that sanctifies the gift. Now, the scribes and Pharisees of Jesus' day had a completely warped sense of values.

They said, for instance, it was all right to swear by the temple, but don't swear by the gold that's on the temple. They said, it's all right to swear by the altar, but don't swear by the sacrifice that's on the altar. And

the Lord Jesus said that their sense of values was completely twisted.

You see, they valued gold above the temple. They were mercenary, and they valued that animal that was sacrificed on the altar more than they valued the altar. And the Lord Jesus is teaching here that the temple was the dwelling place of God on earth.

It was really tremendous, when you stop to think of it, that the glory cloud came down and dwelt in the Holy of Holies there in the temple. And what he's saying here is that the highest honor that could come to any gold on earth would be to be used in connection with the temple of God. A lot of things you can do with gold, make rings with it, make inlays for your teeth with it, a lot of things.

But this gold was special, and it was its connection with the temple of God that set it apart in a special way. And that's what he means here. He says, whether it's greater the gold or the temple that sanctifies the gold.

That word sanctified means set apart. The temple set apart the gold. It wasn't the gold that set apart the temple.

And he goes on to say the same thing with the sacrifice. It's the altar that sanctifies the sacrifice, not vice versa. That was the altar of God.

Let me say, perhaps I could give you an illustration that would help us to understand this. Years ago, I used to go down to a young people's conference that was held on Labor Day in Augusta, Georgia. And every year they had a barbecue there.

And when they would announce that barbecue, they used to say that it was the ambition of every pig in Georgia to be used at that barbecue. Well, the Lord Jesus is saying something like that here. He's saying that the highest honor that could come to any sacrificial animal would be to be used on the altar of God.

Does that ring any bells in your mind? What is the application of all of that for you and for me? Well, of course, the first application is that we're nothing in ourselves. The only wonderful thing about any one of us is our connection with Calvary. You know, you hear people say, boy, it would be wonderful if that man got saved.

You know, he has such wonderful gifts and talents. What he could do for God. Well, this passage of Scripture says, don't talk such nonsense.

That's really what the passage is saying. Don't talk nonsense like that. It's God that would sanctify that man, not that man that would sanctify God.

Here's a man with a brilliant mind. He has a mind for the ages. But I want to tell you something.

It's only when that mind is used for Jesus Christ that it fulfills its highest destiny. But I don't care how brilliant a mind it is. I like to tell the story of William Kelly.

William Kelly was a Greek scholar in England who lived over 100 years ago. He was not only a Greek scholar, he was a deeply spiritual man. And he tutored his nephew in Greek.

And he did it so well that when the nephew went to the university and was in there in the Greek department, the professors raised their ears and they said, who taught you Greek? And he said, my uncle,

William Kelly. And so when there was an opening in the Greek department, they formed a committee to go and wait on William Kelly and offer him, as they say, a chair in the Greek department at the university. And they talked with him and they pulled out all their big cannons and presented all their strong reasons why he should do it and he wasn't interested.

And they said to him, what's the matter, Mr. Kelly, don't you want to make a name for yourself in the world? And he said, which world, gentlemen? He realized that the highest use of his intellectual capacities would be to pour them out at the feet of the Lord Jesus. Young people and older people today, Christians have talents for which the world is willing to pay a high price. I would say to you today, it's the church that sanctifies your talents, not your talents that sanctify the church.

Some years ago there was an American traveling in Paris and he wanted to buy something for his wife and he went into a used shop there in Paris and he saw an amber necklace. And so he bought it quite inexpensively, this amber necklace for his wife. So when he came through customs at the John Kennedy Airport, he was really surprised at the duty he had to pay on the necklace.

It kind of awakened his curiosity. So he took this amber necklace to a jeweler and he said, would you mind looking it over and telling me what it's worth? And the jeweler, you know how he has that little magnifying glass in his eye? And he looked at it and he said, I'll tell you what, I'll give you \$25,000 for it. Well, he went to another jeweler and this jeweler looked at it and he said, how much is it worth? He said, well, he said, let's say \$30,000.

And he said to him, why? Why is it worth that much? And he said, well, you take the magnifying glass. And he took the magnifying glass and looked at it. He read these words from Napoleon Bonaparte to Josephine engraved on it.

Now, you see, the amber necklace wasn't worth \$30,000 in itself, was it? But its connection with Napoleon Bonaparte is what really made it valuable. So that's what the Lord Jesus is teaching us in this passage. And I hope we never forget it, no matter how gifted we are, no matter how talented, no matter what intellect we have.

The most wonderful thing about us is our connection with Calvary. And the finest use of anything we have, our money, or anything else, is to use it for the kingdom. It's the kingdom that sanctifies what you have, not what you have that sanctifies the kingdom.

For our second verse, would you like to turn back to Psalm 126, verses 5 and 6? Psalm 126, verses 5 and 6. There we read these wonderful words. Now, first of all, it's important for us to understand these verses in their context. What is this psalm all about? Well, this is a song that the Jewish people sang when they returned from Babylonian captivity.

How do you know? Well, look at verse 1. It says, When the Lord turned again the captivity of Zion, we were like them that dreamed. Then was our mouth filled with laughter, and our tongue was singing. Then said they among the heathen, The Lord has done great things for them.

The heathen used to say that. They would say, Boy, the Lord has really been good to those Jewish people. And they respond in verse 3, The Lord has done great things for us, whereof we are glad.

Turn again our captivity, O Lord, as the streams in the south. Well, they faced a problem coming back from captivity. And if any of you are farmers, I think you'd be especially sympathetic with their problem.

No crops. I mean, they come back to a barren land. And it's going to take time for them to plow and plant and cultivate and reap.

And undoubtedly, they brought back seed with them from Babylon. The psalm almost insists on that. They had seed to sow.

And here's an individual man, and let's say he has some sacks of seed. And he faces a question. He faces a question.

Shall we eat it or shall we plant it? Shall we eat it now to satisfy our current appetite? Or shall we live sacrificially now and plant it in hopes of a more abundant harvest in the future? And so here's a man that goes forth and he has the seed in his apron here in front of him. And he's going forth and he's putting his hands in the seed and he's broadcasting it over the land. And the tears are dropping down into the apron.

Why are the tears up? Because he's thinking about his wife and his children. They're really doing without. I mean, they're not starving, but they're doing without looking forward to the harvest.

And the verse says, they that sow in tears shall reap in sowing. He that goeth forth and weepeth bearing precious seed. What's so sad about bearing precious seed? Well, just as I've explained to you.

Shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him. In other words, there's another day coming. This isn't the whole story.

The harvest is coming. And when it comes, my, it'll be a joyful time for him and his family. Now, what is the application for us? Well, we can think of this in connection with our own stewardship of material things.

The Lord entrusts each one of us with a certain amount of money in our lifetime. We can spend it on self-indulgence. We can live it up.

We can buy everything that our heart desires. And a lot of people do that. Their life is one continuous shopping spree, sailing like a gallant ship from one mall to the other, accumulating more junk per square inch than has been seen in any flea market.

We can do that. Or we can live sacrificially so that we can invest it in the work of the Lord. We can say, no, I can do without that electric toothbrush.

I hope I'm not stepping on toes. I don't like to step on toes. We can do without that gadget or that gimmick and invest this money in foreign missions, invest it in Bibles, invest it in Christian literature, invest it in gospel radio, invest it in the local assembly so that men and women will not perish for want of the gospel of Christ.

Dear friends, we live in a world where 7,000 people die daily of starvation and over half the world has never heard of man's only hope. The question is, what kind of a stewardship are we going to carry on? This would mean choosing a modest standard of living now, living on a restricted budget so that souls will hear the gospel. I may have told some of you before, I was out in Yosemite at the conference some years ago with Stacy Woods and after the conference a young couple came to us and they said, how would you like to go and have a malt or something, I forget.

So anyway, they took us out to get a cold drink after the meeting and when we were sitting there they started talking and he had a job and he was moonlighting. He had a night job as well and he was raking in

the money and she had a job and she had a moonlighting job as well and between the two of them and the four jobs they were really doing quite well and this was the subject of conversation. And then Stacy Woods said to them, have you ever considered deciding on a standard of living that you'd be satisfied with so that everything above that could go into the work of the Lord? And really I don't think the bomb dropped on Hiroshima had any more effect than that.

It was devastating. It was really a bomb. Have you ever sat down and thought about a standard of living that you'd both be satisfied with so that everything above that could go into the work of the Lord? Well you know, that bomb had its effect.

And that dear couple turned their backs on a life of luxury and money grabbing and accumulating and they forsook it all for Jesus. And they're out on the field today serving Him. What this passage is saying is that any sacrifices that we make now in order to forward the work of the Lord won't be worth mentioning when the time of harvest comes.

One soul saved from hell to become a worshipper of the Lamb of God for all eternity will be worth any sacrifice we make now. Right? He that goeth forth and weepeth darning precious seeds shall doubtless come again with rejoicing bringing his sheaves with him. May the Lord apply these truths to our hearts.

The next verse is in Exodus chapter 34 and verse 29. Exodus chapter, as you'll see, we're skipping all over the Bible and there's no necessary connection between these verses. The connection is that there's teaching in it for each one of us.

Exodus 34 and 29. Moses has been up on the mount with the Lord and it says in verse 29, And it came to pass when Moses came down from Mount Sinai with the two tables of testimony in Moses' hand when he came down from the mount that Moses whisked not that the skin of his face shone while he talked with him. The revised version says, by reason of his speaking with him.

When Moses came down from Mount Sinai after being there with the Lord there were two remarkable features. Two noteworthy things happened. First of all, his face was radiant.

That's the first thing. The second thing is, he didn't know it. It says he whisked not, he didn't know that the skin of his face shone.

First of all, his face shone. He had been in the presence of Jehovah and the radiance was a borrowed glow. I think that's lovely.

When a man is in the presence of the Lord there's a borrowed glow that comes off on his countenance and after speaking with the Lord he carried away something of the effulgence and splendor of the glory of God. Two, he didn't know that the skin of his face shone. He was unconscious of this unique cosmetic.

This is a cosmetic that won't come out of a bottle. You get it in a different way. F.B. Meyer says that the crowning glory of that transfiguration was that Moses was unaware of it.

Worth thinking about. Now, Moses' experience can be ours. When we spend time with the Lord, it shows.

I think sometimes it actually shows in a person's face. Have you ever come in contact with spirit-filled Christians and their faces glowed with the borrowed glory of God? I have. There's a very close connection between the spiritual and the physical.

But I don't press the point about the physical. The important point is that fellowship with the Lord transfigures a person spiritually and morally. It has its changing effect.

Paul teaches that in a verse we've already quoted, but we all with unveiled face, beholding as in a glass, the glory of the Lord are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord. Let me just take that verse apart for a minute. It says, but we all, that means all Christians, with unveiled faith.

What does that mean? Well, this would be a veiled faith, something coming between the light and my faith. It's a veiled faith. What comes between me and the Lord? Sin comes between me and the Lord.

When I confess and forsake the sin, the veil is removed. We all with unveiled faith, doing what? Beholding as in a glass, the glory of the Lord. Perhaps we can think of the Word of God as the glass.

And we go to the Word of God and we behold the glory of the Lord. Are changed into the same image. What does it mean? It means we become Christ-like.

Changed into the same image from glory to glory. That means from one degree of glory to another. It's a gradual process.

It doesn't take place all at once. Who brings it about? Even as by the Spirit of the Lord. So Moses' experience can be ours in a very special way.

But, when a man has been in touch with the Lord, and when he's transfigured by the experience, he doesn't know it. He doesn't know that the skin of his face shines. Others can tell, but he can't.

The change is hidden from his eyes. Why is that? Why is that? Well, I'll tell you what. When we're with the Lord, the closer we are to the Lord, the more conscious we are of our own utter unworthiness.

Peter says, Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord. Well, he was close to the Lord when he said that. Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord.

The closer I am to the Lord Jesus, I don't become inflated with pride. But I see myself in all the ghastly horror, sinfulness, unworthiness, and wretchedness, and I'm filled with deep repentance and self-abhorrence. You see, if we were conscious of it, it would ruin everything, wouldn't it? Suppose we go into the presence of the Lord, and we're just transfigured by His glory, and then we're inflated with pride.

The glory would depart in a second, in an instant of time. Pride. The radiance would be repugnant.

So really, it's a blessed circumstance that those who've been on the mount with Him carry away the borrowed glow, and they don't know that the skin of their face is shining. Hebrews, chapter 12 and verse 16. Hebrews, chapter 12 and verse 16.

It says, I'm just breaking into the middle of a paragraph, but you'll understand that we have to do that for the sake of time. It says, lest there be any fornicator or profane person as Esau, who for one morsel of meat sold his own birthright. It's really a mess of meat, it says in the original.

And meat there means solid food in contrast to liquid. Doesn't necessarily mean flesh. Esau, for one morsel of meat, sold his birthright.

Let me first of all review the story with you. Esau is out in the field. He's an outdoorsman, as you know.

And he came in tired and hungry. And Jacob was inside there, and he was cooking up, let's see, what would you call it? Chili? Kidney bean soup? It was some delectable red meal that he was cooking, and he was very good at it. And Esau said, in effect, I'd give anything for a bowl of that red stuff.

It sounds very much like that in the Genesis record. Red stuff. And Jacob, crafty bargainer that he was, said, sure, I'll give you a bowl of it.

You give me the birthright. The birthright? What's the birthright? Well, the birthright was a valuable privilege that went to the eldest son in Israel. It meant, it was really a spiritual thing, basically.

The birthright was basically a spiritual thing, but it meant that, among other things, that the eldest son would get a double portion of the inheritance, and that he would become the eventual head of the tribe or family. And here is Esau, and he's coming in from the field, and he's dirty and he's tired, and at that moment he considered the birthright worthless. What he wanted was a bowl of red soup.

He said, in effect, what good is a birthright to a man dying of hunger? Well, he wasn't dying of hunger. I mean, he would have survived. But that was his attitude.

His hunger was so overpowering, his appetite was so overpowering that he was willing to give almost anything for it. And so to pacify his momentary appetite, he was willing to surrender something of enduring value. For his physical appetite, he was willing to surrender the spiritual, and he made the awful bargain.

And this scripture that we read in Hebrew speaks of him as a profane man. That means he had no regard for spiritual values. Lesson for us, it's often possible to barter life's best values for a momentary gratification of physical appetite.

Here's a man, let's say, just for illustration, and he's maintained a good testimony for the Lord Jesus for years. He has a fine family, and he's respected in the assembly, and when he speaks, there's spiritual authority behind what he says. His service has been blessed of God.

He's a model believer. But then there comes a moment of fierce passion, and it seems as if he's consumed by the fires of sexual temptation. And nothing seems as important to him at that moment as the gratification of physical drive.

And so that man abandons all the powers of rational thought, and he's willing to sacrifice everything for an illicit alliance. And perhaps he leaves his wife and goes off with another woman. He takes the insane plunge, and for one moment of passion, he's willing to exchange the honor of God, his own testimony, the esteem of his family, the respect of his friends, and the power of a sterling Christian character.

It's insane. You see, Esau had his bowl of soup, and three hours later he was hungry again, and the birthright was gone. And a lot of people today have their bowl of soup, and they lose out on what's really important in life, and they can never retrieve it.

Alexander McLaren describes it this way, and I think it's good. He says, he forgets his longings after righteousness. He flings away the joys of divine communion.

He darkens his soul. He ends his prosperity. He brings down upon his head, for all his remaining years, a cataract of calamities.

And he makes his name and his religion a target for the barbed sarcasm of every succeeding generation of scoffers. He sells his birthright for a mess upon it. It's something that you and I can do.

May the Lord preserve us from it. Well, just in closing, let's look at one more verse, and that will be 1 Peter 5, 7. On a happier note. Let's just end on a happier note.

1 Peter 5, 7, it says, Casting all your care upon him, for he careth for you. You know, that's a wonderful thing. Just take those words, and let's just chew them this afternoon.

Let's just roll them over like a sweet morsel in our mouth. For he careth for you. You know, the Bible is filled with tokens of the Lord's care for us.

I think of Israel in the wilderness. The tremendous care that God took for that people, providing food and water, manna from heaven, clothing that didn't wear out, shoes that didn't wear out. God really cared.

I think of how God cares for sparrows. He provides their food. Not one of them is forgotten by Him.

As Ironside said, God attends the funeral of every sparrow, and we're of more value to Him than many sparrows. God really cares. Think of the wildflowers about us today, and God cares for those wildflowers.

We read in 1 Corinthians 9, He cares for oxen. Does God care for oxen? Yes, God cares for oxen. And He cares for His people much more.

As our high priest, the Lord Jesus, bears our names on His shoulders, the place of strength. He bears our names on His breast, the place of affection, and our names are engraved in the palms of His hands. Dear friends, we cannot think of that passage without thinking of Calvary and of the nails that engraved our names in the palms of His hands.

He numbers the hairs of our head. The psalmist tells us that He numbers our tossings at night. I love that.

I toss a lot. It says that. Turn to Psalm 56 and verse 8. It might not say it in your version.

Psalm 56, 8. But what it really means is this. Psalm 56, 8. Thou tellest my wanderings. Tellest means countest.

My wanderings. Put thou my tears into thy bottle. Well, if you have a more modern version of the Bible, it might say this, that He numbers our tossings at night and keeps count of our tears in His book.

Some of you come to camp with hidden tears. Nobody knows about them. He knows about them.

And He counts our tears in His book. Whoever touches you touches the apple of His eye. No weapon formed against you can ever prosper.

When we go through the rivers of the fire, He's with us in all our afflictions. He is afflicted. A good shepherd who gave His life for the sheep will not withhold any good thing from us.

He cares for us from the beginning of the year to the end. He bears us even to old age. In fact, He will never leave nor forsake us.

God really cares. He careth for you. Shall we pray? Father, we pray that You will remind us of these truths day by day, that it's the temple that sanctifies the gold and it's Calvary that sanctifies anything that we

have and the greatest use of anything we have or are is to take it all and lay it at the pierced feet of the blessed Lord Jesus Christ.

Lord, we know that if we sow in tears, living sacrificially now, we'll reap with joy. Help us to obey Your words. Help us to live lives of communion with You, Lord, so that although our faces will be aglow, yet we will not be conscious of it.

Oh, Father, most of all, we pray this morning that You'll keep us from following Esau's example for bartering the greatest spiritual values in life for one moment of passion. What an awful thing. And then finally, Father, we do thank You for these tokens of Your care.

The Bible is full of them, and we experience them day by day. Help us not to take them for granted. We ask it in Jesus' name.

Amen.

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