

**Occasion:** Midweek Lenten 2

**Date:** 02-25-2010

**Text:** Isaiah 55:1-7; Matthew 16:24-27

**Title:** "Letting Go of What is Worthless"

## **Introduction:**

### **The Parable of the Wealthy Rancher**

The congregation of a small town in Texas had just installed their new pastor. Eager to make an impression on the members of the church, the pastor wanted to go out and gain some new converts to the faith for the small church. The board of elders told him that the pickin's in that small town was mighty slim, so he better not set his hopes to high.

The next day, the pastor drove just outside of town and stopped at the first ranch he came to along the road. It had a long drive way that lead up to the house. So the pastor drove down the drive way, stopped his car in front of the house and went up to the door. When he pushed the door bell, the butler came to the door and welcomed the pastor into the house. He took the pastor to the owner of the ranch and introduced him. The owner was cordial, but very direct with the pastor. The wealthy rancher told the pastor that he was an atheist, that he didn't believe in God. *"Everything I own, I have worked for. Your so called God has done nothing for me."*

To impress the pastor with his wealth, he invited the pastor to go on a tour of his ranch. He took him down the road about a mile from the house, where he showed the pastor a large herd of cattle, grazing on the prairie. There were thousands of cattle. *"You see all those cattle. Every one of them is mine."*

They went about another mile down the road, and there was a large field stretching to the horizon, filled with oil wells pumping oil from the ground. *"Every one of those rigs is mine,"* he told the pastor. After finishing the tour of all the property, the wealthy rancher returned with the pastor to the house.

Thinking he could stump the pastor, the rancher said to him, *"So you see, pastor, what more could your God give to me that I haven't already earned for myself?"* With just an ever so slight grin on the right side of his cheek, the pastor answered him, *"Ask me that question again in about a hundred years, and I'll give you the answer!"*

**The Moral of the Story is: *Wealth is not measured by what you possess, but for how long what is in your possession remains yours.***

The reality is, for the "wealthy" rancher, he had not discovered yet that what was in his possession today, would soon be parted from him forever.

*[Texas Wisdom: Possessions are like coffee or beer. You really don't own coffee or beer, you merely "rent" them. You put out the money, consume the coffee, the beer, it goes through your system, your body, and before you know it, it's gone out of your system on the other end. You really only have use of either for a few hours at most. You didn't own them, you just "rented" them for a limited time. So it is with everything in life.]*

## **Setting:**

The people of Israel to whom the prophet Isaiah was writing were in exile in Babylon. When they were in the land of Israel, they did not seek the Lord or His ways. Instead, they sought power over others, possessions for themselves and popularity with the Canaanites of the land. At best, these are only temporary pleasures of the body, and at worst, these are poor substitutes for what God offers to those who seek Him and His ways. So, God had to give a real life demonstration to the people of Israel, that what matters is not having what is temporary and fleeting, but what is eternal and enduring. When the Babylonians came and attacked Israel, from the king right on down through the royal officials, to the wealthy land owners and the common peasant, everything was lost, and the survivors from the attack were taken away into exile. What so many had worked so hard to gain for themselves was lost, and what so many had forsaken from God was all that was available to their empty lives and souls.

### **I. CHASING AFTER WHAT IS WORTHLESS:**

To enrich themselves with wealth, to gain power over others, many in Jerusalem had become corrupt. Bribery of officials and judges was common. There was no justice, only the pretense of a legal system. Those who had something to offer as a bribe were in the position to exploit those of lesser means. The poor, the widows, the orphans, were in no position to defend themselves and what little property or possessions they had from the false charges and corruption of the legal system. Over and over again the weak were exploited by the strong—those who were wealthy or powerful.

In the very opening chapter of Isaiah, God said:

<sup>21</sup>See how the faithful city has become a harlot!  
She once was full of justice; righteousness used to dwell in her—  
but now murderers!

<sup>23</sup>Your rulers are rebels, companions of thieves;  
they all love bribes and chase after gifts.  
They do not defend the cause of the fatherless;  
the widow's case does not come before them. — *Isaiah 1:21, 23*

The wealth, the power, the popularity that so many had pursued, especially through such sordid ways, would be taken away from them. We read in Scripture:

<sup>24</sup>Therefore the Lord, the LORD Almighty, the Mighty One of Israel, declares:

<sup>25</sup>I will turn My hand against you;  
I will thoroughly purge away your dross and remove all your impurities.

<sup>27</sup> Zion will be redeemed with justice,  
her penitent ones with righteousness.

<sup>28</sup>But rebels and sinners will both be broken,  
and those who forsake the LORD will perish. – *Isaiah 1:24-25, 27-28*

What the king, the royal officials, the prominent, the powerful of the land had so valued and so sought after, would be taken from them. What they so sought after, even turning to corruption, would not remain in their possession.

## II. LETTING GO OF WHAT IS WORTHLESS:

To the exiles in Babylon, now broken and impoverished, God offered what is of lasting value, what is eternal and enduring. To those from whom God had pried out of their hands all that is temporal and fleeting, God spoke these words:

<sup>1</sup>Come, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters;  
and he who has no money,  
Come, buy and eat!  
Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price.

<sup>2</sup>Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread,  
and your labor for that which does not satisfy?  
Listen diligently to Me, and eat what is good,  
and delight yourselves in rich food.

<sup>3</sup>Incline your ear, and come to Me; hear, that your soul may live; – *Isaiah 55:1-3*

*"You work so hard for what is fleeting! You give so much of your time and your energy for what is temporary! WHY?"* God asked.

What God offered was a relationship with Him, a relationship that will last for eternity! What God offered was not food for the body, but bread for the soul, a bread that is life-giving. This bread God offers freely, **"without money, without price."** Now was the time to come to God, to reach out their empty hands, and to take hold of what is eternal and enduring!

<sup>6</sup>Seek the Lord while He may be found; call upon Him while He is near;  
<sup>7</sup>let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts;  
let him return to the Lord, that He may have compassion on him,  
and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon. – *Isaiah 55:6-7*

**The only real wealth, the only wealth worth possessing, is the wealth that cannot be lost, but last forever!**

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus taught:

<sup>19</sup>"Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. <sup>20</sup>But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. <sup>21</sup>For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

– *Matthew 6:19-21*

What do you value most? What *"wealth"* are you pursuing with your energy, your time? Is life all about the comforts and pleasures of your body? Or, is life about finding a *"wealth"* that will be yours forever?

As Jesus was preparing to go to Jerusalem to face His arrest, condemnation and crucifixion, He was forsaking everything of Himself and of this world, so that He could conquer sin and the devil and death (all those things that rob us of the everlasting life God wants us to have), so that He could buy with His precious body and blood, the redemption of our souls. Forsaking His own life, Jesus took up the cross, and submitted to the Will of His Father in heaven.

For all those who would take hold of the eternal life that Jesus would gain through His sacrifice, they also, would have to "Let Go of What is Worthless" of this world, to gain what is "Priceless" and of "Eternal Value" – **"treasure in heaven."** That is why Jesus said:

<sup>24</sup>"If anyone would come after Me,  
let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow Me.

<sup>25</sup>For whoever would save his life will lose it,  
but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.

<sup>26</sup>For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul?  
Or what shall a man give in return for his soul? – *Matthew 16:24-26*

The way to eternal life is to "Let Go" of what is temporal, "Let Go" of the wealth of this world, even to "Let Go" of life itself, so that, with empty hands, you can take hold of what is eternal and enduring.

## Conclusion:

King Solomon, who tried about everything under the sun there is to try, wrote of what this world has to offer:

<sup>11</sup>Yet when I surveyed all that my hands had done and what I had toiled to achieve,  
everything was meaningless, a chasing after the wind; nothing was gained under the sun.  
– *Ecclesiastes 2:11*

Remember that question the wealthy atheist Texas rancher asked the pastor, *"What more could your God give to me that I haven't already earned for myself?"* What answer would you offer him? What answer would you offer to you? AMEN