

“Two Masters?”

Deuteronomy 8:10-20; Psalm 49;
2 Corinthians 7:1-7; Matthew 6:19-34

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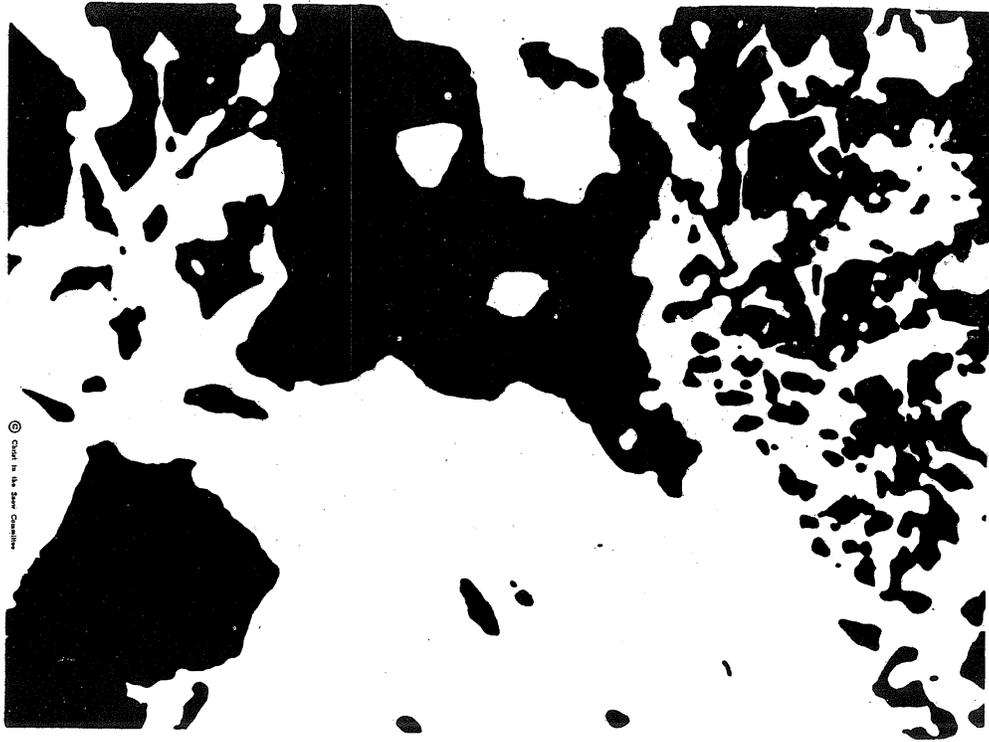
We have been working our way through the Sermon on the Mount, and the last three Sundays, I would say that we have been talking about spiritual disciplines. The first was about giving—giving and not getting. The second was about praying simple prayers, like the Lord’s Prayer—remembering who God is, who we are, and what we need. Last week we talked about fasting, that appetite-denying discipline. When we think about all those, I think they sound pretty simple. Giving, praying, fasting—pretty simple stuff.

It’s interesting the very next thing Jesus says, because it feels to me like Jesus must know something about me when he says, “And don’t store up treasures on earth.” It feels to me like he’s beginning right away to talk to me about exactly what gets in the way of my giving, my praying, and my fasting. He seems to recognize that instead of giving, I usually am looking for what I can get. Instead of praying to God humbly in secret, I want to do something that shows my importance, my value. Instead of some kind of appetite-denying discipline, I’m usually looking for ways I can fulfill my desires rather than setting them aside so I can open my life to God. It feels like Jesus knows me all too well, and he knows the world we live in and the struggles we have with it.

In that first phrase or two about where do I store my treasure on earth and what do I treasure, it makes sense that I would let that get in the way. He says, “Don’t do that.” My response might be, “How do I not do that?” He says, “The eye is the lamp of the body.” OK, what does that mean? I’ve heard a lot of different ways of trying to talk about that, but what really struck me this week was how often what I do, what I believe, how I run my life, is all based on what I think I see, what I perceive, and the world view I have of things. Do I see a world that is pretty mechanistic, where God seems pretty distant or not around at all? That’s kind of the world view I feel like I grew up with, that society trained me to have. It’s all just mechanistic and it all works in a particular way. You just go after what you need. So you try to get what you need, and tell people how important you are, and fulfill your desires. Is that the world we see?

Or can we see a world that is created by an incredible God who has given us life and love and grace and hope? It feels to me like the way we perceive the world makes a lot of difference. I’m not going to try to give of myself, to pray, or to make room if I think the world is all mechanistic. But if God is present, and if God is listening, and if God is leading, and if God is loving us, there are some good reasons to stick with that relationship and to work on it and to think about it.

What do you perceive in the image below?



Pretty much nothing? As you continue to look at it from different angles and different distances, does your perception change? Can you begin to see something there? Perhaps a face?

Really, all I'm trying to do is illustrate what I've been saying. Our perceptions affect how we experience our lives. It's not just a bunch of blotches once you begin to see the face. Maybe that's a lot like life. Sometimes, especially when I'm up close, it just seems like nothing but a bunch of blotches. But if I begin to allow God to give me some perspective, to perceive what's going on, it changes the way I see things.

I think Jesus is inviting us to recognize the things that will influence how we see the world, and inviting us to think about how we can see the world—a God who's present, a God who cares about us. So we can ask the question, "Is God present?" I think God is. God is guiding us. God is giving us Jesus.

As we think about trying to perceive our world, I was thinking about times when I have particular kinds of perceptions or have been in the dark, for example. I think about one time where I went on a tour into a cave. We had a couple of tour guides with us who were carrying lights. When we got to a certain place, they said they were going to turn out their lights. At that point, it was the darkest place I have ever been in. There was absolutely no light. If they had snuck away, I would have been in real trouble, having no idea where I was. Luckily they were trustworthy. They turned their lights back on and led us out of the cave. That moment I perceived that they were the ones I needed and trusted.

This week, I went to visit my mother in Iowa, and to do that, I had to take a plane. Every time I get on a plane and sit in that seat, I think about how out of control I am. I think about the people who built the plane. I think about the people who have maintained the plane, hoping they have found all the stress fractures. I think about the pilots, and that I'm putting my life in their hands, especially when it's bumpy. Again, I recognize that I must trust them.

In the movie version of Aladdin that Disney put out a number of years ago, Aladdin is a street urchin, and Princess Jasmine is trying to get out of the palace, and they end up getting chased by the guards. At one point, he puts his hand out to help her up and says to her, "Do you trust me?" Later in the movie, he does the same thing, only this time he is dressed up as a prince, and he's going to take her on a magic carpet ride. She is hesitant to go with him. He puts his hand out to her and says, "Do you trust me?"

In this last piece that Jesus goes into here, he's suggesting that how we see the world matters. Where our treasure is matters. How we respond to God matters. He says, "Look at the world around you. Look how it works. The birds eat. The flowers bloom." He doesn't quite say this, but he implies, "You didn't do a thing to cause it." He says, "And God cares for you, too. This creation God made works." I think what he's saying is, "Do you trust us? Do you trust God? Don't worry. Do you trust us? Do you trust me enough to come with me? Because if you trust me, there are enough worries for today and we'll work through them. Give of yourself, pray, put yourself aside and allow God to be present, listen to my guidance."

Today is Stewardship Sunday, and we think about how we respond to God. How do we step in and do what he calls us to do? How do we take hold of his hand? It's more than just listening. It is giving of ourselves. It is praying. It is taking time. So as we hear Jesus say, "Don't worry. Look at what God can do," he is reaching out to us and saying, "Do you trust me? Will you come with me?" I think he's also inviting us on a ride—a ride into an incredible life, a real life, an everlasting life. He says, "Do you trust me?"

Let's pray:

Gracious God, we have so many things that would influence us and would say they would give us what we want. There are so many things that encourage us just to get, to think we need to show how important we are, to fulfill our own desires. You simply invite us to trust you and to realize that giving, praying, and making room for you enable us to perceive the world and the wonder of it, the beauty of your creation, the life you have given us, and the grace you have shown us, and how in that, you lead us into life and invite us to participate in what you do. Lord, thank you that you are the one we can trust to show us the way. Through Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.