

0423 Worship Together – 7 March 2010

Stewardship 6 – “Two Masters” – Psalm 135:1-3, 15-23 & Mt 6:19-24

Well - are you ready for the last one? It's been quite a journey, hasn't it?

Over the past weeks, I feel we've been led by the Holy Spirit
to concentrate on God's abundant grace
and on our heart for him
and to focus on trusting in God's promised provision
while tithing to the church

I'll be coming back to these themes a little later
but before that I want to take a different tack
... I want to approach it from a different direction
I want to look at the bigger picture
... at the wider context

The church in the West, that is Europe and now in the US, is in decline

Every year the Church of England
takes its own pulse to see if it's dead yet
and slowly we're waking up to the fact
that if isn't dead, then it certainly ain't half sick

Church as we've known it
... embedded in the nation's psyche
... having a seat at the tables of power
... having a major influence in schools
is probably terminal

The tremendous Christian foundations on which our nation was built
are rapidly being dismantled and forgotten

When I went to school fifty years ago, we sang grace before lunch
now teaching assistants are sacked for offering to pray for a pupil

There are umpteen reasons why this transformation has taken place
and if you've got a spare weekend,
perhaps we could look at some of them

Suffice it to say
we live in a culture of spectacular achievements
... of marvellous sophistication
... of vast knowledge
... and of abundant wealth

But below all this lies massive brokenness
we live in Broken Britain

Am I bovvered? Yes, of course I am
it's not nice to see your nation going to the spiritual dogs

But in another sense I'm not bovvered
Why? Because I know God is on the move, stirring his people
God and one person forms a majority as someone once said

From my reading of the Bible
I can see that 12 Spirit-filled disciples was all it took
to spark a movement that brought down
the most powerful and corrupt empire known up to then
- the Roman Empire

If God can do that
he can work through our church to bring change
can't he?
What would that require? What kind of a church?

I recall seeing, some time ago, an advert in a supermarket
for a cleaning product described as “industrial strength”
not just ordinary strength, normal domestic strength
stronger even than Barry Scott's Cillit Bang
this was industrial strength
innocent members of the public were warned to be careful

You couldn't mess with this stuff
you had to take extra precautions
this stuff was really going to shift the dirt

This idea made me think
we have to build an industrial strength church
we need to shift some pretty serious dirt - right?!
Those stubborn stains of the heart
that nothing else will shift

Wouldn't it be good if people knew they couldn't mess with the church
because they feared the Spirit would get 'em?

For too long, the church has been a weak domesticated product
luke-warm ... half-hearted
OK, we've been nice - but not necessarily effective

If we're to take on the destructive powers of secularism
with its false creed of political correctness
if we're to mend the broken of Britain
then we've got to have an industrial strength faith
industrial strength in grace
industrial strength in love
industrial strength in faith
and, I believe, industrial strength in stewardship

Turn, would you, to Psalm 135

If you sat down and read in the OT some of the history
... of Israel, of God's people,
more than likely you'd find them turning to false gods

In spite of being God's chosen, they constantly went after false gods
they made idols out of wood stone or metal
and put them in special places in their homes

At frequent intervals, God would send a prophet or two
to try and sort them out
so they could figure where their true loyalties should lie

The Psalmist makes it clear why
it's not exactly smart to bow down before idols

** READ Psalm 135: 1-3, 13-18

Idolatry isn't some kind of harmless, quaint practice
which is what some anthropologists might have us believe

Verse 18 "Those who make them will become like them"

We become like what we worship
for good or bad
worship God for good
worship idols for bad

Worship of idols (v16 and 17)
makes you deaf (deaf to God's voice)
makes you blind (blind to what he's doing)
takes away your breath (leaving you lifeless)
And without the breath of the Spirit

It's dumb to pursue idols
because it involves colluding with the powers of darkness

Does our culture have idols?
Not many in wood or metal, maybe
They've gone more up market
we put our trust in things that are not God
which become, in effect, modern day idols

One, in particular, we have to square up to
we won't become an industrial strength church
... if this dark power isn't overthrown

This false god has to be unseated in our hearts
any allegiance with it broken
if we are to be who God intends us to be
and to do what he intends us to do
we can't divide our loyalties

Turn now, if you would, to Matthew 6:19-24

** READ

Notice anything unusual about v24?

Money has a capital "M"
money elsewhere has a small "m"
so why capital "M"

Word used here, translated capital M money,
is actually Mammon
some Bible translations, like old KJV, keep word Mammon

The origin of the word isn't certain
some say Mammon was the name of a N African god of wealth
I'm not sure about that

More likely is that it comes from the word for entrustment
the idea: Mammon was what the money given to a banker was called
it was entrusted to him
eventually, the money itself was the thing to be trusted

Either way, what Jesus means here
is money that has a kind of spiritual attachment to it
because it is what trust and faith is put in

Money with a capital "M", mammon, has become an idol, a kind of god
think of money as having velcro attached
what Paul calls principalities and powers are kind of velcro'd onto it

As most of you know, we are part of a Team Ministry
the six Anglican Parishes in High Wycombe make it up
St Mary and St George's church on Dashwood Avenue
have a new Vicar - Yvonne Murphy

At a Team Clergy meeting, Yvonne was telling us
she'd been asked to be a chaplain at the White Horse pub
to the lap dancers and strippers

The management invited her to provide some pastoral care
most of the dancers are from other countries
Russians, Latvians, a couple of Poles (Pole dancers?)

Many of them are homesick and lonely or have other problems
some lead double lives - their parents don't know what they do
so Yvonne has been into the White Horse
and is getting along side them

What's the attraction for these girls?
The money - it's well paid
Some hate what they do
but the money keeps them at it

I mention this because it's an example of mammon's power
its power over morality
its grip on the lives of those girls

The management are genuinely concerned for the girls
but not to the extent of stopping making money out of them
it's mammon winning out over morality
and Yvonne can see the damage it's doing

I also mention this because I think it's important to pray for Yvonne
I think she's pretty courageous going in there
she's not being judgmental
she's just engaging the girls in conversation, letting them talk
JAY - when we come to the prayers ...

There's a verse in the Bible that has to be the most misquoted
any guesses ...?

I Tim 6:10 - "The love of money is the root of all kinds of evil"

It's often wrongly quoted as money being the root of all evil
but it's not - it's the LOVE of money

Money itself is neutral
possessions are neutral
there's nothing wrong in having money
nothing wrong in having possessions
there really isn't
having plenty, a lot, in itself is of no concern to God

The issue is: not that we have possessions, but
do the possessions have us?
Now THAT God IS concerned about

Jesus said in that verse 24
that we cannot have two masters
we cannot love both God and Mammon

How do we know if we love Mammon rather than God

Go back to that Psalm (ps 135)

We know our heart is divided
if we have had trouble hearing the messages over the past weeks
if a strange deafness comes over us

We know there are still issues to resolve
if we find stewardship messages are uncomfortable
if this is the case, we need to seek the Lord further

Listen to this verse from Jonah
Chapter 2 v8

"Those who cling to worthless idols
forfeit the grace that could be theirs"

With a divided heart, we forfeit what God wants to pour out on us
can you see that?

Grace - the empowering presence of God
enabling us to be who he created us to be
and to do what he called us to do

We give up that gift
the cost of non-discipleship is high indeed

The last thing I want to introduce is
to share a prophetic word that was given to me

Last October, as some will know,
I visited Bethel church in Redding California
I went with my sister - and Ron joined us with his friend Alan
we had a great time

I was sitting next to Ron on the first evening before the talk
when someone in the row behind leant forward
and tapped me on the shoulder

The man's badge told me it was a Tim Purdue of Weaverville, CA
anyway - he leant forward and asked if he could share
what he believed was a word from the Lord for me

He had no idea who I was, where I was from
He just said he had a word for me
(For us, actually, as Ron was included)

He said that I would receive a substantial amount of God's favour
including a financial outpouring for our church
also for our community

What a great word to receive - that's the kind of prophecy I want more of

I don't think it's wishful thinking on my part to believe it's from the Lord
because Mr Purdue had never met me before

OK - What am I supposed to do with it?
And what are we supposed to do with it?

Perhaps the best thing to do is to think of this word as an invitation
an invitation onto a path the Lord has prepared
an invitation to lay hold of a promise

When a word like this comes
I don't think we should expect a ton of money simply to be dumped
... into our laps (although the Lord may choose to do that)

When a prophetic promise like this comes
I think there's a choice involved for us

The way it works is that this word is meant to produce in me and in us
a longing
a yieldedness
a prayerful searching

We are meant to discover more of God's heart of generosity
... as well as just receiving from him
we are meant to seek his transforming grace
I think we've been invited into a process

So that as we yield
as the stranglehold mammon has on us is loosed
as we learn how to handle money in a God-honouring way
so the heavenly resources are released

As we learn how to use money in the kingdom
as we learn how to deploy money as a kind of weapon
so that verse we looked at last week will come true

"God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that in all things at all
times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work."
2 Cor 9:8

An industrial strength church is where much grace abounds
it's where prophecy like that can come true
because the people are yielded
... because hearts are surrendered

We've come to the end of the sermons
and now we will have to see what the response is

My desire has been to be careful not to apply undue pressure
not to induce undue guilt
but rather to say let's get our lives firmly in God's grace

My desire has been to say that God honours those who give sacrificially
that tithing to the church is the norm
and that joyful giving is what God seeks

My desire is that we build here an industrial strength church
which can defeat the powers of darkness
by resourcing what we're called to engage in

And this isn't just for this stewardship campaign
this is meant to be a lifestyle

So what now ...
What I've said virtually every week
pray ... let's do business with God
let's hold the Scriptures in front of us as we pray
let's have the pages of Malachi 3 and 2 Corinthians 8 and 9 open
let's study them
let's make our prayer petitions filled with the words of Psalm 67
as we ask for blessing so we can bless others
as we seek ask to belong to God's grace recycling programme
(There's a sheet with a number of Bible passages ...)

When you've prayed

when you've done business with the Lord
when you have peace over the matter
when you've cut loose from Mammon
then ... fill in the forms

Please state what your pledge is - it's helpful to Charles

complete the Standing Order form and the Gift Aid form
(If you need to)

We would like everything back by the end of March

that's Palm Sunday

An industrial strength church with industrial strength giving

... let's get building that kind of church

PRAYER

- What would you like me to pray for? What do you need?

- Open stopped ears and blinded eyes

return your Spirit to us