

## **“What Dominates Your Life?”**

**Sermon by Pastor John W. Bengston  
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The Gospel of Christ Jesus sure has some hard sayings, and today we heard some of them from the 6<sup>th</sup> chapter of Matthew. “Do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink...” (Matthew 6:25). And why do you worry about clothing? (Matthew 6:28). Eat, drink, wear. Our main worry regarding those items is which, of several options, shall we eat, drink, or wear? What’s the big deal? Our situation is so different that it is difficult to hear and make sense of the words in Matthew 6:24-34.

Maybe the earlier statement is one that might provide more of a confrontation: “You cannot serve God and wealth” (Matthew 6:24). But what is wealth? We usually define wealth in terms of money, but wealth is anything of value – cash, investments, precious metals, minerals, real estate, antiques, art – those items that retain a store of value. And when they are in our possession, they are very “me” oriented. Only if we decided to give them away, is there any connection with another person or entity involved. That’s why Jesus spoke as he did: You cannot serve God and wealth. Different translations of Matthew 24 use a variety of words. Some use wealth, some money, and some mammon. But they all convey the same challenge: serve one Master, and the Lord God is to be the only one worthy of our trust and service.

What drives our actions? We all know that our actions are driven by our priorities and values. The follow up question then is: what do we value or what are our priorities?

On the announcement sheet contained in the bulletin for today is a list bearing the title “For Use This Morning.” Will you please find that? In that list are sixteen components of life, not a complete comprehensive list, but sufficient for our use. I want to you to take a minute and select those that are your seven top priorities of life. I’ll give you a minute to do this little exercise. Don’t think about it too long; just number them 1 through 7.

Was that difficult? What did you include? Are you surprised at those components that you had to exclude from your top seven ranking?

Sitting in this somewhat removed environment with little activity, you were asked to declare your priorities or values. That’s a lot different than being engaged in the daily conflicting demands of life in which priorities seem to change, values are often in flux, and one day’s ordering may be quite unlike the next day’s. Life is a dynamic experience, not a static one. Listing values and priorities is not an easy assignment.

Now, if someone were to live with you or me for two or three months and then be asked: on the basis of your observations, what are that person’s priorities, what do you think the

observers list would look like? Would the observers top seven match what you and I have declared on the list before you and me? How consistent would our declared priorities (what we say is important to us) be with the observable priorities and values (what we make important by our actions)?

As we read the Bible and come to the Commandments given to Moses, we read: I am the Lord your God. You shall have no other gods before me. Only the Lord God, as revealed in and through his Son, Christ Jesus, is to be worshiped. No one or any thing else. That's easy to understand. Not so easy to live. We all have to ask ourselves and be willing to submit to honest self-examination. I once saw a video of a lecture given by Dr. James Nestigen, formerly of Luther Seminary, in St. Paul, Minnesota. In that video taped presentation, he asked the question: what dominates your life? He went on to say that whatever dominates your life is your god. Wow! That puts it where it is, doesn't it.

The Associated Press reported an incident from Darwin Australia on May 13, just 12 days ago. An Australian man was pulled over by the police for driving an unregistered car in the central Australian town of Alcie Springs. In the back seat were two other men and between them was a case of beer containing 30 cans of beer. The case of beer was secured by a seat belt. On the floor of the car in the back seat area was a five year old child. The officer report that the child was sitting on the hump in the center of the floor. "This is the first time that the beer has taken priority over a child," remarked the officer. The driver was fined 750 Australian dollars, about \$710 US.

Now there is a declaration of priorities – probably not what the driver would have said was his priority of life, but in that instance a declaration by action of what he and his friends valued.

Our conflicts may not be so blatant and crass, but are nevertheless conflicts in values and priorities. So Jesus keeps speaking to us, "You cannot serve God and wealth" so that we must consider the implications of his teaching day after day after day, and we are called to examine our lives in the light of his teaching day after day after day.

The purpose of such self-examination is not to make us feel badly, but to help us see the need for God's marvelous grace, our need for forgiveness, and the power to continually re-order our lives in conformity with the will of the Lord. Paul wrote so succinctly to the Church in Rome, "Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God – what is good and acceptable and perfect" (Romans 12:2). The process of being transformed began when the Savior accomplished the forgiveness of our sin through his crucifixion and resurrection, and goes on every day by the presence and power of the Holy Spirit calling us to ever deeper devotion, commitment, and discipleship. The Lord God showers grace upon us so that we can feel free to engage in honest self-examination and then receive the discernment and strength to be transformed from the inside out. Thank you Lord Jesus for teaching us that the love of the Lord is to be first – ever and always, as much as we struggle with this teaching. Grant us, we ask, understanding of your will and the desire to do it. Amen.

