

What Do You Do With What You Have?

A sermon by David Roquemore
 First Presbyterian Church, Newton NC
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Joshua 24: 1-3, 14-25

So here the question is, are you going to follow God or not? Are you going to commit to his way, or follow some other way?

The ancient Hebrews could follow the Lord God, or choose some god of the Amorites. Not an easy life. Not an easy choice. For us, it's much simpler; a meme I saw said,

We might have a mortgage, a family, and an extremely demanding job. What we don't need is a religion that complicates our lives with unreasonable ethical demands.

Spiritual providers in the past have required a huge amount of commitment — single-deity clauses, compulsory goodness, and a litany of mystifying mumbo-jumbo. It's no wonder people are switching to Mammon.

Mammon isn't the biggest player in the spiritual race. But our ability to deliver on our promises is unique. And our moral flexibility *unmatchable*. MAMMON *because you deserve to enjoy life — guilt free.*

That's funny — in a way. But like a lot of comedy, it's mostly funny because it hits very close to home.

When Jesus condemned mammon he probably wasn't thinking of cell phones and vacation homes, but he might have been.... For sure he meant the things that distract people from God. All the "things" we serve; our possessions soon come to possess us.

I said once in a sermon that "we need transportation, but we want a Corvette." A guy who was doing really well in the business he owned came up after worship and said, "I just bought a Corvette." What I want to say to him is — and I don't remember what I did say — "where is your heart?" Does having it make you feel better? Different? How much time and money do you dedicate to maintaining it? You see, if having something -and it can be anything — makes you feel like you are finally worth something, maybe you need to sell it! Only God can give you that feeling that you are truly worth something!

The stewardship question is “what are you going to do with what you have?” It’s that simple, really. What are you going to do with it?

I am conscious of this as I get older. Some day I will die; and who will deal with all my stuff, all these things that meant something to me? I knew a woman who said she wanted to kick her mother’s tombstone when she was cleaning out all the stuff in her mom’s basement. Then she retired and moved, and she said she’d be lucky if her daughter didn’t come and kick her tombstone! I don’t want my children looking for my tombstone to kick it!

I went to a woman’s house once after her husband’s funeral. All her children were there. Her son took some foil off of some food, and his mother took it to add it to her drawer. That drawer was so full of foil that one more piece would not fit! The son said, “Mother, you are 85 years old — you won’t live long enough to use up all this foil.” And he threw that last piece away. But she had grown up during the Depression, when you saved everything that might be reused. That explains why we save so many things, with the comments, “I might need that someday!”

Let’s face it: because of personal history, or inclination, or upbringing, or culture, or something, we all have too much stuff! We don’t need it, we won’t use it, and it just clutters up our houses. And God asks, “what are you going to do with all that stuff?”

Well, wait a minute! We can’t all be like St. Francis, and give up everything and undertake voluntary poverty! I agree — we can’t all do that and we aren’t all called to do that. That isn’t what I’m saying. I am saying we can do with less; it’ll be good for our mental health, for our spiritual health, for our sense of well-being and peace.

Joshua warns the people that it will be hard. He tells them not to commit to serving the Lord God, because God will be angry if they turn away and run astray, chasing after other gods. The people insist, “we *want* to follow the Lord God!”

And that’s what *we* want, right? Or it is until we get to the mall, that great temple of our times. You know, at the mall we get our brokenness fixed — (our sins forgiven) — as we buy stuff. We are fed (think the sacraments) at the food court. We go forth into the bright sun and parking lot renewed and refreshed and ready for another day. The trouble is, that never lasts too long, and we have to go back, and buy more stuff.

The prime value we are taught at the Mall is “choice” — you have endless choices. You are entitled to endless choices! That’s the overwhelming message from the world, while in the Church the message is self-denial. It is reducing the focus on myself, and putting the focus on Jesus Christ. That’s the difference. That’s what we are about here.

Back when I was younger and on staff as an associate pastor (who could be safely ignored) I used to point out that if all of us just tithed the poverty level, we’d have more money than we know what to do with! I stopped saying that because no one listened. But it’s true.

We aren't going to tell you what to give, or even that you have to give. That's up to you. But if any of this means anything to you, if you keep coming back because you like it, if you have any desire to worship God and know God better, if you want to learn about God, if you like the music and want to sing, or listen, if any of that rings a bell, then I hope you will put a commitment card in the plate this morning. As we have heard, we have staff to pay. We have buildings to keep up. We have mission commitments to honor and serve. We have all these things going on, and it takes funding to keep doing it the way we want to.

None of this money is wasted or spent on unnecessary stuff. In fact, this church is really good at making good decisions and spending money before emergencies arise. We have a group of knowledgeable financial people keeping track of our stuff; we thank God for them.

Joshua tells the people to choose — “choose this day whom you will serve.” Then he says “as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.” Maybe you have seen that on a little plaque, — maybe you have one! — posted near your front door, announcing your commitment to God to all who come to your house.

Well, whether you have that plaque or not, you have a choice to make. Joshua asks each of us, whom will we serve? What will we do with what we have, with what we are given? God asks us that, and our response must be, can only be, that we will serve him, our creator and redeemer!

Thanks be to God!

Amen.