

“THE GREAT BATTLE WITHIN US”
Psalm 91:1-6, 14-16, I Timothy 6:6-19, Luke 16:19-31
September 28 & 29, 2019

Throughout September we have been looking at making a choice between loving God and loving the world. We started by investigating how we have turned away from God’s Word and have fallen victim of following the ways of the world which are contrary to God’s Word. We asked the question, “Have I forsaken the Lord?”

Then we looked at the cost of following Jesus with all our heart, soul, mind and strength, and what that would look like if we were to truly let Jesus be the Lord of our life. We saw that our faith is not free, but it cost Jesus His life, AND that it costs us our own life as we give up on the things of this world and take on the things of God.

Then we investigated our call as Christians to reach out to those around us, even to the enemy, with the Good News of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Recognizing that all of us are sinners in need of God’s grace, we found that we can be categorized as the “chief of sinners” and saw the need for us to offer forgiveness and love to the other sinners in our life so that the love of God might be proclaimed to everyone. Aren’t they worth hearing about Jesus, too?

Last week we looked at a very important concept – choosing this day whom we will serve, either the false gods of this world or the Almighty God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. We saw that we cannot be in both the light of the Lord and the darkness of the world at the same time, so we have to choose which side we will be on, and which “lord” to lead us – Satan or Jesus.

Today I want to conclude this challenging series by helping us see the great battle that rages within each of us, and the consequences of the choices we make. So we begin today by looking at God’s **PROMISE To Be Our Protector**. These promises extend to those who seek the Lord and desire to follow His will and His ways. They are intended for ALL of us, but they go to only those who strive to follow God in all His ways. So let’s look at this promise as it is laid out in Psalm 91.

The psalmist, King David, tells us right away, “*Whoever **GOES to the Lord for safety**, whoever*

remains under the protection of the Almighty, can say to Him, 'You are my defender and protector. You are my God; in You I trust' (91:1-2). The promise is that when we turn to the Lord, when we trust in Him and follow Him and obey His commands, He will keep us safe and protect us.

There are some who will come to me and say to me, "Pastor, you know this isn't true. I am a believer and follower of God through Jesus Christ, and look at all the messes that I'm in. How can you say that God will keep me safe and protect me?" And I respond, "You are here right now, aren't you? Throughout the messes in your life, you've always had God with you, right? Well, having faith in God through Jesus Christ does not guarantee us a perfect, care-free life." Even Jesus told us that we would have troubles and trials here on the earth. He says, "*These things I have spoken to you, so that in Me you may have peace. In the world you have tribulation, but take courage; I have overcome the world*" (John 16:33). We have an enemy, Satan, who desires to destroy our faith and separate us from the Lord Jesus Christ, so he will do whatever he can to make our life miserable with all sorts of pains, struggles, trials and sorrows.

But Jesus has already overcome the world, so you will be **SAFE** in His care. The psalmist tells us this, too, in verse 4 of Psalm 91. "*He will cover you with His wings; you will be safe in His care; His faithfulness will protect and defend you.*" Just consider for a moment where you might be if you DIDN'T have Jesus Christ in your life. Then look at where you are right now and you will see that God has indeed fulfilled His promise and cared for you and kept you safe.

The psalmist continues, "*You need not **FEAR** any dangers at night or sudden attacks during the day or the plagues that strike in the dark or the evils that kill in daylight.*" You see, none of these can take our faith away from us. None of these can separate us from the love of Jesus Christ (Romans 8:37-39). Though Satan may pummel us with all of these things, and many more, He cannot take our hope in Jesus away from us. Only we can give it up willfully. That's the only way we can lose our hope, is for us to give it up ourselves. Nothing can take it away, but we can give it up. So Psalm 91 tells us not to fear when these things affect us, but to remain faithful in the Lord and to watch His deliverance in the

midst of it all. God takes care of His family, and when we give ourselves to Him, believe in Him, receive Him and follow Him, He encourages us and strengthens us to endure the struggles and trials we face.

Jesus even warned His disciples, and us, that persecutions would come to us, that we will face hardships and trials, that many sorrows would come our way. He says, “*do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul; rather be afraid of God, who can destroy both body and soul in hell*” (Matthew 10:28). When we have faith and trust in the Lord our God, through Jesus Christ, though the world turn against us, we will have hope in Him.

Psalm 91 continues to give us encouragement. God tells us, “*I will **SAVE** those who love me and will protect those who acknowledge me as Lord*” (91:14). Why should God save the enemy? Why would God protect those who are adamantly against Him? Even the Israelites, His favorite people, suffered horribly when they walked away from God and followed the false, foreign gods. Yet God will save and help and encourage and support those who seek Him and choose Him to be the Lord of their lives. That’s where the choice comes in – God goes with those who walk with Him and trust in Him and follow His ways.

But that’s not all. God says, “*When they **CALL** to Me, I will answer them...*” (91:15). When we choose to seek the Lord, He is delighted to come to us and help us and supply us with all our needs to continue with Him. And God continues, “*...when they are in **TROUBLE**, I will be with them. I will rescue them and honor them.*” Do you hear the promise of God’s care to those who seek Him and follow Him and obey His commands? These are the awesome promises that God not only gives to us, but fulfills to us when we let Him be the Lord of our lives.

In the last verse of Psalm 91, God promises us, “*I will reward them with long life; I will save them*” (91:16). God is telling us that we will be **REWARDED** as we put our trust in Him as the Lord God. Why wouldn’t God reward those who seek Him and diligently follow Him? He is pleased to bless those who actively strive to be His people. We see it throughout the Bible. We see it throughout

History. We see it even in our own lives today. When we choose to let the Lord be our God, when we turn to Him rather than trusting in the ways of the world, we find abundant lives. We still have the enemy trying to destroy us and we still have the enemy plaguing us with nasty issues of life, but God promises to reward us when we turn to Him and follow Him instead of following the world. That reward is His love, His peace, His presence and His Salvation to eternal life.

So once more we see that our choice between God and the world is key to our success or our demise. The Apostle Paul lays it out in his words in I Timothy 6:6-19. In verses 6-9 Paul lays it out well. He says, *“Well, religion does make a person very rich, if he is satisfied with what he has. We did we bring into the world? Nothing! What can we take out of the world? Nothing! So then, if we have food and clothes, that should be enough for us. But those who want to get rich fall into temptation and are caught in the TRAP of many foolish and harmful desires, which pull them down to ruin and destruction.”* Again, it’s our choice to either be content with what God provides for us, or to desire to become rich with the things of this world.

It doesn’t take us too long watching TV to have that desire grow in us to want more, and bigger, and better, and become dissatisfied with the things we already have. Let me ask right now, “How many of you are rich?” Realistically, every hand should have gone up right then, because we are truly wealthy when we compare ourselves with the lives of those around the world. We are truly blessed people in ALL that we have because God has provided abundance to us as we seek to follow Him. To have food and clothes SHOULD be enough for us, and yet god has given us so much more.

The trap is that we are convinced that we don’t have enough of the things of this world, so we desire to get rich and we focus on the stuff of this world as being what gives us purpose and meaning and value in our lives. But that’s not the case. We have purpose and meaning and value in our lives as we follow Jesus and obey His commands.

And Paul explains what gets us turned around away from God. He says, *“For the LOVE OF MONEY is a source of all kinds of evil”* (I Tim. 6:10). Money itself is not the root of all evil, but it is

the LOVE OF MONEY that is the source of all kinds of evil. Here is the conscious decision to forgo trust in the Lord's provision, and we begin to love the things of the world more than we love the Lord. The love of money is our choice to trust money more than God. And we heard last week that we cannot serve both God and money at the same time. We have to choose which one will be "lord" in our life.

Paul goes on: "*Some have been so eager to have it (money) that they have wandered away from the faith and have broken their hearts with many sorrows*" (I Tim. 6:10b). Here is the DANGER of the desire for more and more and more – we give up on trusting God, and we make money our god. When the acquisition of money becomes the focus point in our lives, more than anything else, we have replaced God with money as the first in our hearts.

Yes, it's nice to have good things, but when we are no longer content with what we have and we gain that craving to have bigger, better, faster, more expensive, more fancy, more anything else, we choose the things of this world as being what guides our heart, and we give up on God being our Lord and Savior. Yet, Paul addresses the issue head on, "*What did we bring into the world? NOTHING! What can we take out of the world? NOTHING!*" (6:7). It all stays here, so no matter who has the most toys when they die, they still die! The things of this world are empty, temporary, and only distract us from the One who provides it to us in the first place.

So Paul tells Timothy (and us), "*But you, (followers) of God, avoid all these things. Strive (instead) for righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance, and gentleness*" (I Tim. 6:11). Paul is saying, "Make a choice to give up the stuff of this world and follow the things that are best, the things that last, and the things that make the greatest difference – righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance, and gentleness!" You see folks, these things are what matter the most, not the wealth of this world. Paul calls us to strive for the BEST OF GOD, not the hand-me-down stuff of the world. God delights to give us His BEST, but we are enticed to settle for much less and find hardship and struggle and ruin and destruction by the things of this world.

So Paul tells us, "*Run your best in the RACE OF FAITH, and win eternal life for yourself...*" (I

Timothy 6:12). Running for the things of this world is not the best we can do. Running for the Best of God as we travel this Race of Faith is God's desire for us. And that means being content with what we have, using what we have for the benefit of those who have less than we do, and trusting the Lord Jesus Christ to guide you to do the work He has for you. Money can't make us happy, but it can separate us from the love of God as we put our trust in it rather than in Jesus Christ. So how do we do that?

Paul explains, “...*obey your orders and keep them **FAITHFULLY** until the Day when our Lord Jesus Christ will appear*” (I Timothy 6:14). What about these orders? Who's orders? “...*It was to this life that God called you when you firmly professed your faith before many witnesses*” (I Tim. 6:12b). When we proclaimed to the world that we would follow Jesus, when we confirmed our faith in Jesus Christ to be Lord of our life, God took that profession of faith seriously and called you to no longer live according to the ways of this world, but live according to HIS Ways, follow His commands. In that profession of faith, we claimed to the whole world, right before God and those within the church, that we were choosing His ways to the abandonment of the world's ways. And God took those vows very seriously. But “*If, then, we say that we have fellowship with (God), yet at the same time live in the darkness (of the world), we are lying both in our words and in our actions. But if we live in the light – just as He is in the light – then we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, His Son, purifies us from every sin*” (I John 1:6-7). That choice we made to be a follower of Jesus Christ demanded the change in our hearts to no longer follow and crave the things of this world, but to follow and crave the Lord Jesus Christ. That is how we remain faithful to Jesus until He returns. But it's our choice.

So Paul encourages us, Do not put your **TRUST IN RICHES** (I Timothy 6:17). They are uncertain and they are empty and they cannot give you love. Trust in God who provides those riches so that you may experience His presence, His certainty and His fullness of love.

Instead, “...be **RICH** in good works...be generous and ready to share with others” (6:18). Be using the things that God has supplied to you to help others find the love of Jesus Christ by supporting

them, and encouraging them, and generously putting them to work. The works themselves cannot save us, but they are what help others see the love of Jesus. Remember, what we have is not ours, but is given to us to manage for the work of the Lord Jesus in our world today. We are merely stewards of all the riches we have. Paul calls us to use them well to touch the lives of others.

And when we do that we will be **STORING up treasures for ourselves** as a solid foundation for the future (I Timothy 6:19). What we do here with the things we have, go on ahead of us to establish and enrich our place in God's house. Our heavenly homes are built with the things we send on ahead of us through the good works that we do here with the blessings of God given to us to manage.

And we see this very thing in the lesson that Jesus gives to the people. It's found in Luke 16:19-31. Listen to how Jesus identifies the **BATTLE** before each of us. (READ Luke 16:19-31)

The **RICH man's situation** was not much different than ours today. He was tremendously blessed with a great abundance. He ate well, dressed well, and enjoyed the amenities of all that life could afford to him. He enjoyed the power and prestige that his wealth gave to him. He and all of his household relished the wealth of the things of this world.

Lazarus' condition was quite different than the rich man's. Lazarus was poor, had no home to live in, and lived in great depravity. He didn't even have clean water to bathe in to keep himself clean. And his health showed this difficult condition. He was covered with sores and was in great pain and agony. The best healthcare this man could get was the local dogs coming around him and licking the wounds of the sores. Not the best medicine for open sores. Folks would take Lazarus to the door of the rich man where he hoped to get enough food to sustain him, but that came only from competing with the dogs for the scraps that fell from the rich man's table. Not really a good or reliable source of nutrition. But that's all that he had, so it was what he knew and relied upon for keeping his life. He had no family to mention, so he was forced to do what he could. Sounds like many of our own homeless people today.

But the problem comes in as we look at the **CONDITION** of each of their hearts. The rich man enjoyed all of his opulent wealth for himself and his family. He could certainly have brought Lazarus

into his home to give him somewhere to sleep. He could certainly have cared for him, given him enough to eat so that he could gain his strength and maybe even become a servant in the house. The rich man could certainly have gotten healthcare for Lazarus so that his skin could heal and he could find dignity again.

But none of this happened. The rich man didn't even see Lazarus. Though he sat by the door to his mansion every day, Lazarus was one of the glaring reminders of how blessed this rich man was. Instead of seeing Lazarus, instead of having compassion for him, instead of reaching out to help him and encourage him and provide for him, the rich man ignored the plight of Lazarus, enjoying his wealth only for himself. He refused to use the blessings of the Lord to touch the life of a desperately poor man right there at his doorway. In his eyes, he deserved everything he had, while Lazarus deserved everything he had. And he was not about to waste a single penny to make a difference in Lazarus' life.

Lazarus, on the other hand, was at the mercy of those around him. We're not sure why he was poor, but it was obvious that he was unable to change his situation. He had a hard life and suffered greatly.

The surprising thing about this lesson is the **RESULT** of their actions. When each died, Lazarus was welcomed into heaven, and the rich man found himself in Hell. Strange? Yet in the dialogue between him and Abraham, it is discovered that the choices he made to focus on the things of this world and refuse to do the work of the Lord with them, disqualified him from receiving a good reward – heaven. So the two of the men's situations were reversed, only for eternity.

So, what is **OUR** future going to look like? Which will be our fate? It all comes down to the choices we make as to who will be the Lord of our lives. God has promised to take care of those who trust in Him, and those who refuse to trust in Him will suffer an eternity in His absence. Which will it be for us? Which will we choose? Let's pray.

Father, open our eyes and hearts to see the condition of our own hearts toward You. Give us the courage to change what we need to in order to bring You glory, in Jesus' Name. AMEN.