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**Lent 3 B – Treasure Principle Series – March 3, 2024**

**“Living for the Line”**

**Read: Hebrews 11: 13 - 16; Memorize: Hebrew 11: 13**

**Anybody remember who this is? (picture of Christine) Remember what was happening? (Dedication of her home) For those of you who were not with us at the beginning of the Go campaign, heard us talk about it and wondered what it was, let me explain. In Dec of 2021 we launched a ministry campaign to help us accomplish two things: Provide resources for a pastoral transition; provide resources for needed repairs and improvements for our building.**

**We were working with an organization called Lutheran Church Extension Fund. They were helping us to raise the money. One of the things they asked us to do was set aside 10% of what was committed to the campaign over the three years to use in missions.**

**As a congregation we made the decision to help somebody locally change their life. We partnered with Habitat for Humanity of Ontario County to help build a house for Christine. Very early in the process, Habitat helped us to understand something. We were not helping build a house. We were building a home for Christine and her son. They explained that there is a big difference between a house and a home.**

**We buy a house and turn it into a home by creating special memories. Christine had shared with us that she hoped to pass this home on to her son, Jayvon, someday. Our homes are special to us. Sometimes, we might talk about this world as being our home. In our physical bodies we create lots of memories about living here.**

**Mr. Alcorn, the author of our book, wants us to understand something even more important. Our home is not here. We are housed in these bodies for a period of time on this earth, but earth is not our home. In Hebrews we are reminded that “we are foreigners and strangers” here. Perhaps you’ve felt uncomfortable about life here at times. You should be. God did not plan for us to live here forever. We’ll talk more about that latter. The guiding principle of our society, as we said previously, is the culture of getting and keeping.**

People even talk about it this way: “the person with the most toys at the end wins.” Randy reminds us, “Actually, the person with the most toys at the end dies just as we all do” No amount of toys changes our fate. If we only live for this world, our lives will be pretty sad. Here’s the third key: “Heaven and the future earth, not this fallen one, is my home.”

You may not agree with Randy and all he says and does. You might hear some things from me you don’t agree with, that’s ok. Neither of us are God. I hope His message is coming to you clearly. Last week you heard that God is the owner of everything. You’re His money managers. Each of us is to manage the time, talent and treasure that God has entrusted to us to be a witness to His love and care.

We are to do that according to God’s calling. We are responsible to Him. I should not judge you for how you do it. You should not judge me for how I do it. And all of us need to be careful about how we do it. Paul warns us in Romans 12: 3 “Do not to think of yourself more highly than you ought.” As Christians, we want to come humbly to the cross, which we all need.

Sometimes, people understand being managers of God resources as a call to give everything away and not care for yourself. I think at times I hear that in Randy. I think he’s extremely enthusiastic and dedicated and that’s great for him. But as a manager, you are the one who has to make the decision in accordance with God’s direction. At the same time, God does want us to be generous to others. He’s challenging us to balance those two things.

If I have a home and let it become a rundown shack, it’s not a very good witness to the Lord who provides all things. It may lead people to think that He is a poor provider. He has called us to manage things. He wants us to enjoy the blessings He has given us.

God is speaking to our heart. If we let things become our greatest love, we’re going to want to hold onto or get more of them and build our lives around things. We might even decide to stock our houses so full that you can’t move. God wants us to enjoy the gifts He gives us while remembering that we’re to serve Him by serving others. Remember, He’s the owner. We’re the money managers.

We hear that play out in the story of the master who entrusts his servants with different amounts of money to manage. Then he goes off. When he comes home he asks for an accounting of what they have done. The first two explain what they have

done and how they have prospered Him. He commends them for their wise management. The third, because he knew the master was a hard man, buried the treasure so he would not be punished, if he lost it.

He failed to do what the master told him, manage the treasure. He loses out because he has no concern for the master's instructions. By his actions he is actually saying, "I don't want to be responsible, yet the master had specifically put him in charge, so he was responsible.

We know that God is a God of love and care. He forgives us. He has shown us that forgiveness in Jesus Christ. It's easy for us to focus on things because we are physical beings. Because of our culture it is easy to be misled into thinking those are the most important things that we have. God is warning us not allow things to become a prime relationship, replacing Him. That's the danger that we all live in.

You might remember back in 2008 there was a big housing crisis. People were buying houses with no money down and no income to pay for them. The whole idea was that if you owned a house you'd be able to flip it and make a lot of money because prices were going up thru the ceiling. It all crashed down.

What caused them to do that? It was the love of money. Everybody thought they could make a lot of bucks easily. The love of money replaces the love of God. It is a very tempting thing to us. How do we avoid falling into the love of money?

Randy gives us the answer in his fourth key: "I should live not for the dot but for the line." When I seek to have more and am not generous towards others, I am living for the dot, the time and space where I am. We might view Zaccheus as a person who lived for the dot. He was a tax collector.

Tax collectors in the time of Jesus worked for the Roman authorities. So, the money they collected went to Rome, not to help their communities or schools. In essence, the Jewish people were paying the oppressors to oppress them.

There were no forms to fill out and no schedule of what you would pay. The tax collector would tell you what the tax was and then skim off as much as they could to become rich. Even worse, you might pay a road tax to a tax collector and 2 miles down the road, another tax collector would tax you, so they were basically thieves.

Tax collectors were examples of people living for the dot: get what you can, while you can. As you may remember Zaccheus wanted to see Jesus but he was a short guy so he climbed up in a tree so that he might see Jesus passing by. Not only did he see Jesus, but Jesus didn't pass him by.

He told him to come down from that tree because He was coming to his house today. Jesus took a lot of criticism for that. He was consorting with the enemy. But He changed Zaccheus' life.

Because Jesus came into his life. He made a promise, he told Jesus he would give half of what he owned to the poor and if he had ever stolen from anyone, he would pay them back four times what he stole.

Jesus congratulates Zaccheus for being a "true Israelite," who understands the generosity of God. Jesus took Zaccheus from being a man who lived for the dot to a man who lived for the line. He understood that God had come to him and changed his life. He was now living for God.

Just as our home is not here but the new earth and heaven, so how we manage the gifts that God gives us are not just for here, they remind us that we have a home in heaven and heaven promises us eternity. We get to choose whether to live for the dot, keeping things or for the line, helping people meet Jesus and live forever.

That's what sending our treasure ahead means. But here's a key issue: no person can tell us how to do that. We have to listen to God. What does He want us to do? He wants us to live our lives in such a way that we are living for the line rather than for the dot!

Followers of Jesus understand they are living for the line. That changes their relationship with possessions. The line takes us straight to heaven because of what Jesus has done. We are not prideful about what we are doing because we know God calls us and enables us to do it. We humbly offer our gifts as a way of being the blessing that God intends for us to be to glorify Him.

Count me in: How will you "live for the line" this week?