

## *“With enlightened eyes”*

**November 23, 2008**

*Text: Ephesians 1:15-23, Matthew 25:31-46*

### I.

Well, the news these days continues to be dominated by the CRISIS in our economy. And still, nobody seems to know what do to.

With the current administration *on its way out* and our new President-elect less than two months from his inauguration, there seems to be confusion about who ought to be saying what ... and in effect taking charge ... and showing leadership.

There is some good news these days with the economy. Gas prices have dipped below \$2 a gallon. Wow! Who would have thought? Still, the instability of the stock market, with its constant fluctuations and over-all decline, makes us all more than a little nervous.

And as if that weren't bad enough, our nation's three major automakers, forever a cornerstone of our economy, are lining up before congress to be bailed out from a long history of arrogance, poor management and failed imagination.

They didn't help their cause any when the CEO's of the BIG THREE—General Motors, Chrysler, and Ford—arrived in Washington for the senate hearings ... each of them in their own private jet (at who knows what exorbitant expense ... some estimates suggest \$20,000 each way).

But the point is, what message does that send? People have been talking about this everywhere ... couldn't they have *plane pooled* ... or at least flown first class in a commercial airliner?

When we think about what these people make (in the twenties of millions) along with their extravagant bonuses and life styles, it doesn't settle in very well does it? And then they want us (after all, *we the people* are the government) ... they want us to bail them out.

### II.

It's Thanksgiving, friends ... and for sure, we have lots to be thankful for. Even with all our problems, we live in a great country. God has blessed us abundantly through the years. Still, in recent times, it seems, we've lost our way.

How did this happen? How did we get here?

The easy answer is *greed, greed and more greed*. The more complicated answer, however, is that somehow we haven't remembered who we are.

In **Deuteronomy 8**, there's a poignant passage where Moses—speaking for God—warns Israel. (This is compelling because, at this point, Israel is on the edge of entering the *promised land*, the land of abundance and prosperity.)

Check out these words and see for yourself if they apply to our times ...

***Take care that you do not forget the Lord your God, by failing to keep his commandments, his ordinances, and his statutes, which I am commanding you today.***

GET THIS: ***When you have eaten your fill and have built fine houses and live in them, and when your herds and flocks have multiplied, and your silver and gold are multiplied, and all that you have is multiplied, then do not exalt yourself, forgetting the Lord you God ... who brought you out of Egypt ... and who lead you through the wilderness.***

***Do not say to yourself, My power and the might of my own hand have gotten me this wealth. For if you do, if you forget the Lord your God, I solemnly warn you today: you shall surely perish.***

Whoa! These words come at us with biting power don't they?

The starting point for remembering who we are as children of God is to be **thankful** and **humble**. Always, that's the starting point: approaching God with a **humble** and **grateful spirit**.

When we're humble and grateful, God can work with us; and God can open our eyes to God's eternal purposes.

Let's look at our reading from **Ephesians** ...

### III.

In the letter to the **Ephesians**, the author—most likely a disciple of the Apostle Paul (and writing a generation after Paul)—... the author is giving thanks for the *new faith* that is rising up in the Ephesus church.

No doubt, this disciple of Paul—along with others—has been working hard, perhaps under considerable duress, to encourage and strengthen the fledgling churches that have been planted in what is now *western Turkey*.

And so, in our reading this morning, **Ephesians** is praying that God will continue to give them wisdom and revelation as they grow in their understanding of Christ ... so that ...

... *with the eyes of your heart enlightened* ... you may come to know *what is the HOPE* to which God is calling you.

This HOPE is a marvelous and wonderful thing; because it's all about God's compassion ... and love ... and forgiveness ... and grace.

**Ephesians** is praying that these early Christians—and now us, too—that we embrace the world—everyday—*with enlightened eyes*. When we're *enlightened*, immediately, we're grateful and humble, which, again, are *the way* of the Christian life.

#### IV.

*Enlightened eyes* see the BIG PICTURE. Enlightenment means to *see* the light ... the light of wisdom and truth; and therein the light of how we're all in this boat called life together ... all, interconnected. Enlightenment is all about *seeing the BIG PICTURE*.

In the BIG PICTURE, we're all interconnected ... rural and urban America, all across the spectrum of income and ethnicity ... we're ONE people, one nation.

The reason we talk about the BIG PICTURE so much in our church is because the BIG PICTURE includes everybody; and, from the biblical point of view, especially the poor.

The repeated gospel emphasis *That the first shall be last and the last first* means that, when things get *sorted out* at the end of time, the poor go to the front of the line—the poor, the marginalized, the oppressed ... the *little ones* ... the ones who, otherwise, might be left out.

All the time, you see, God cares about the disproportion.

*With enlightened eyes*, we, too, see the disproportion ... we see the injustice ... we see the greed and the arrogance that swirl about us. And we care about what we see.

These processes are both important: seeing ... and then ... caring about what we see. And then, thirdly, acting—doing something about it.

#### V.

In Matthew's graphic account of the final judgment, it's a dramatic moment. We've got to make choices. And by the choices we make, we either *get it* or we don't. And again, according to the Bible, there are consequences.

When we *get it* ... when we see the world *with enlightened eyes* ... the meaning of the Matthew's **Parable of the Final Judgment** becomes, instantly, more clear.

At the *final judgment*, when the Son of Man comes in all his glory to check out what we've made of things in this life, the ones who are *blessed by God* and invited to come and share in God's abundance are the ones who care.

They're the ones with compassion—the ones who roll up their sleeves, put their money and their actions where their words are and their beliefs are ... and live their lives trying to make things better.

They feed the hungry ... give drink to the thirsty ... welcome the stranger.

They clothe the naked ... care for the sick ... and visit those who are in prison ...

And why? Because when we do it to the least of these—to those who might otherwise be left out ... to the most needy, the most vulnerable—we do it to Christ himself.

What this is all about is CARING—for all people: rich and poor ... strong and weak ... old and young ... with and without education ... those who've had a good life and those who've had a hard life. **Christ cares for every human person.**

What makes this parable such a standard of Christian passion and commitment over the centuries is that, unmistakably and with graphic language, it lays it out there for us—what it means to be a Christian ... and what it means to be a human being.

Again, what it means is that we care for one another. *With enlightened eyes*, we see that we're all in this life together ... all brothers and sisters.

And so our mission becomes trying to make things better ... trying to find common ground, uncover the common good ... *share the wealth* with one another. I know that phrase became an issue in the recent campaign; but, hey, from our earliest days, Christians have been about *sharing the wealth*.

*All who believed were together and they shared all things in common.* –Acts 2

## VI.

So, what to do? These are scary times. Times like we've never seen in my life time.

Everyday, more lay offs ... more homes going into foreclosure ... more corporate and other business failures.

And according to news reports, there's no money. People don't have money ... governments don't have money ... education and health care don't have money. Our retirement accounts have less and less money.

Still, through it all, we give thanks. Because God is generous and good and God's compassion and love for us know no bounds.

The mess we're in is NOT God's doing; it's ours. But still, God will guide us through. And with God's hand upon us, if we remember who we are as children of God, we'll make it to the other side.

Again, there are two KEYS:

1. Stay close to God with humble and grateful hearts ...
2. And embrace one another with CARING and COMPASSIONATE spirits.

**All praise be unto God! Amen!**

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