

Lent: A Time For Renewal of Priorities

1 John 2:15-17

March 21,2012

Lent 5

Tonight, we would like to consider PRIORITIES. Priorities refer to what is most important in your life, what is second most important in your life, and so on. Our priorities will influence our actions. We live according to our priorities. Maybe you already know what your priorities are. Maybe you have never thought what your priorities are, but nevertheless, you still have priorities.

Pontius Pilate had priorities and he lived according to his priorities. Our text for tonight was about Pilate judging Jesus. The text clearly shows Pilate's priorities and how his priorities influenced his actions. The Jewish priests and leaders brought Jesus to Pilate. They wanted Pilate to sentence (command) Jesus to death. But there was a problem: Jesus had broken no law. Jesus was not guilty and did not deserve to die. Pilate knew that. He questioned Jesus and found no reason to charge Jesus with (for) a crime.

Pilate tried to release Jesus, but the Jewish crowd protested. Pilate tried to force the crowd to release Jesus by offering the people a choice: Jesus or a terrible criminal named BARABBAS. The crowd chose BARABBAS. Pilate ordered the soldiers to whip Jesus so the people would feel sorry for Jesus, but they had no sympathy and demanded that Jesus die. Finally, Pilate gave up and ordered his soldiers to crucify Jesus. We may ask, "Why?" If Pilate knew that Jesus was innocent, why did he not release Him? Pilate had the right to release Jesus. Pilate had the authority to release Jesus. Why did he not do that? The reason: freeing Jesus was not Pilate's top priority. Pilate had other things that were more important than doing the right thing.

Pilate's first priority was to stop a riot and keep the peace. The Jewish leaders had stirred up the people to anger. The Jewish crowd was shouting, "Crucify Him! Crucify Him!" If Pilate freed Jesus, the crowds would become even angrier and begin rioting. Pilate did not want that.

Pilate's second priority was to keep his job. Prior to this, another riot had happened. Pilate ordered his soldiers to go into the temple and kill some people while they were worshipping. The

Jewish people were outraged. Pilate's superiors in Rome were not happy about this. If Pilate messed up again, he would lose his job. If a riot occurred and Pilate sent out the soldiers to stop the riot, then people may have died. Pilate's bosses would hear about that and fire Pilate.

Pilate's third priority was to advance his career. It was not easy to rule the Jews. Pilate didn't understand their religion and they seemed so stubborn and strict. However, if Pilate wanted a better job, he must do a good job here and remain friends with CAESAR, the Roman king. When Pilate tried to release Jesus, the Jewish crowd shouted, "If you let Jesus go, you are not Caesar's friend." What they meant was: "We will send a delegation to Rome and snitch on you and Caesar will not like you, not honor you, and not promote you."

So, you see that helping Jesus became a low priority. Many Christians criticize Pilate for not helping Jesus. We feel so superior to Pilate. But what are our priorities? What is most important in our lives? Where is Jesus on our priority list?

The verses I recently read warn us about our priorities: *"You must not love the world. You must not love anything in the world....desires for self, things people see and desire, and everything in the world people are proud of"* .

Often, our top priorities are for ourselves. We live to please ourselves and make ourselves happy. People often say, "You have to look out for #1" Who your #1? Yourself. That saying means you are first priority and you must take care of yourself. How? There are many things that people see and desire: lots of money, big house, fancy car, nice clothes, and so on. Those may be high priorities for us. People also want success so they can be proud of themselves. When we are students, we want to succeed in school and sports. When we are adults, we want to succeed in our jobs and be proud of that. Perhaps success and pride is a high priority for you.

So if pleasing yourself, gaining material things, and becoming successful are your top priorities and you love them the most, the Bible says, *"If any person loves the world, the Father's love is not in him"*, that is he does not love the Father and he does not allow the Father to love him. We need to change our priorities, but we are unable to do so. Thinking of ourselves first is natural

because we are sinners. Sin means to think of self. So we are trapped in sin and misplaced priorities.

Jesus also had priorities. Do you know what His top priority was? You. Jesus came here not for Himself. Jesus came here for you - to bring you back to God. And Jesus was willing to accept whatever happened for you. Pilate was not willing to give up his job and his honor. But Jesus was willing to give up all the glory of heaven to come here for you. Jesus was even willing to give up His life for you.

Jesus died on a cross for sin, but not for His sin. Jesus did that for you and your sin. God must punish us for our sin, but Jesus took our punishment in our place. Now, God doesn't punish us, but when we are selfish, lust after the things of this world, and feel so proud about ourselves and our accomplishments, He calls us to repentance and forgives us. He cancels our punishment and takes away our sinful behavior.

During Lent, we dwell upon Jesus' suffering and death. That's good and proper. But we must remember that is not the end of the story. On Easter, Jesus rose to live anew, but not for Himself. Jesus did that for you, too. Jesus rose to prove that God forgave our sins and has accepted us. Jesus also rose to live anew so that we Christians could also live anew. God gives us His Spirit and His power so that we can rearrange our priorities to be in line with His will.

How will this happen? God's Word must determine our priorities. Do not let the world determine your priorities. Don't let your own opinions or desires determine your priorities. God's Word will help us see the world and things in the world in a different way. Loving and dwelling upon worldly things is foolish. Our text says that these things do not come from the Father. As Christians, we will want only that which comes from the Father. And the things in this world: money, material things, success, and so on do not last forever. Our text says "The world and its desires pass away."

Secondly, God's Word will change our priorities. So, hear God's Word, read God's Word, study God's Word. Don't give an opportunity to the devil, the world, and our sinful flesh to fool you. The Holy Spirit will use God's Word to help us have God as our top and sole priority. When God is

our top priority, that will influence how we live and act. Our text says, “The person who does God’s will - he lives forever.” What does God want? Does He want us to give up all of our money, possessions, and pleasure? No. God wants us to put our faith in Jesus Christ and live to serve Him. We will still use and enjoy the things of this world - money, clothes, homes, cars, and so on. That is not wrong and those things are not bad. These are gifts from God. They help to support our bodies and lives, but not the most important thing in our lives. But we will not lust after them and we will not love/dwell upon them.

Instead, we use everything to serve God. We will use our money and possessions to serve God. We will use our time to serve God. We will use our talents to serve God. This doesn’t mean we give all our money to the church and work for the church 24/7. We serve God by serving our neighbor. We will serve God here in church - true , but also in our homes, in our schools, in our jobs, and in our communities. We will not live for ourselves to please ourselves, but we will live for God and to please God.

Lent is a time to renew our priorities. Where is God and His will in your life? I mean really – not what you say, but what is the truth. I would encourage each of you consider your priorities, learn from and dwell upon the Word of God, and allow the Holy Spirit to transform your priorities. Your life and actions will change. You will choose to have different things. You will choose to do different things. You will have different priorities. And God will take care of you as you make those choices and do those things. Jesus said, “Seek (dwell) first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness and all other things - God will give you.”

GALE SAYERS is the name of a very famous football player for the Chicago Bears. He wrote a book about his life called, “I Am Third” It seems like an odd title. But Gale Sayers explained the meaning in his book. He was a Christian and the title showed his priorities. The title meant: “God is first, other people are second, and *I am third.*” May God work in you and change your priorities likewise during this Lenten season and from now on. Amen.