**St Martins C3 – March 23, 2025**

**Ground Work – Our Priorities Matter**

**Sermon Summary:**

The priorities we choose in our lives will shape the person we become and ultimately our eternal destiny. That may sound a little extreme, but Jesus clearly outlined this truth on a number of occasions. Here are some examples: Matthew 6:19-33, 16:24-26 and 19:21. In particular 6:21: *“Wherever your treasure is, there the desires of your heart will also be.”*

The main point that Jesus is making is, in order for us to receive the life He has to offer we have to surrender our desire to live our lives our way. When we prioritise God’s work in us and around us, He will honour this commitment and oversee the care of other areas of need in our lives. This is also the main point of the third type of seed that falls among the weeds in the parable of the Sower.

**Read:** **Matthew 13:22-23**

1. **God’s goal for your life is that you produce fruit.**

To produce Kingdom fruit, we need a Kingdom focus. That focus won’t happen if we are focused on worldly pursuits. Rather, it happens as we adopt God’s vision for our lives. Where our priorities line up with God’s priorities.

In these verses, Jesus is dealing with issues of the heart and explaining that what we prioritise every day, and the actions that flow from those priorities will flow from the person we believe God has called us to be. Therefore, our understanding of our identity in Christ, will naturally shape the priorities our lives. Or, to put it another way, we will never sustain motivation to live God’s way, without an appreciation of our identity in Christ. Our priorities are a reflection of our identity. Therefore, the clearer our vision is of a fruitful Christ-centred life, the easier it will be to order our priorities.

1. **Bring God’s priorities into all your responsibilities and the rhythm of your life.**

One of the “weeds” that Jesus refers to is, “the cares of this life.” These are not sinful things, these are just the responsibilities that come our way, which we need to fulfil. Sure, we need to do them, but our focus while we are doing them is to bring something of God’s life into our family, our relationships, our work, etc. We don’t let the responsibilities of our lives overpower God’s Kingdom work in us, rather we bring God’s Kingdom work to those various responsibilities in our lives.

The other Biblical precedent that we can apply here, is the command to take a Sabbath rest. We are to develop a rhythm of rest and reflection in God, which is to replenish us and empower us for the other responsibilities in our lives.

1. **Surrender worldly motivations and desires to Christ.**

Jesus identified the “lure of wealth,” however, any “love for the world,” (1 John 2:15-17) would fall into this category. How do you know if you are motivated to grow in Christ or whether you are seeking after things in this world? Firstly, do a stocktake of desires in your life. What are some things this world has to offer that you would find hard to give up? Are you in control of those desires, or are those desires controlling you? If you are not sure, do a “fast” from whatever it is. EG – Technology or social media. Then, surrender it to Christ. Maybe, share your journey in this area with someone you are in a discipling relationship with.

**Main point to ponder and questions for Connect Group discussion:**

Becoming the disciple that God has called us to be (fruitful wheat), we need to prioritise Christ and His Kingdom, while at the same time eliminating (weeding out) anything in our lives that is drawing us away from that priority.

*What are some typical priorities that people who don’t follow Christ may adopt?*

*What are some high priorities that Christ calls us to adopt?*

*How might we identify what we are truly prioritising in our lives? (In contrast to what we think we are prioritising)*

*What have you done to help yourself integrate Kingdom priorities into your life and maintain a God honouring rhythm?*

*Are you aware of an area of your life that you find hard to surrender?*

*What is your strategy for surrendering it more to Christ?*

*How could we support you in developing Godly priorities and letting go of worldly priorities?*

**Monday’s Devotion – Resisting temptation**

**1 Corinthians 10:13**

*The temptations in your life are no different from what others experience. And God is faithful. He will not allow the temptation to be more than you can stand. When you are tempted, he will show you a way out so that you can endure.*

This week we will explore together how sin in our lives can take hold and how we can become free of it.

Our first step into sin, comes via a temptation to sin. Firstly, let’s be clear on the fact that temptation isn’t sinful. Just because you are tempted to do something, doesn’t mean that you have already sinned. (That would be unnecessary condemnation) Temptation is simply the “bait” that Satan is using to satisfy some human desire in you, but fulfilling that desire in an inappropriate way. Therefore, as annoying as it is to be tempted, it is a fact of life in a fallen world and living in a body with fallen desires. The important thing is learning how to resist it.

Secondly, what this scripture points out, is that God will empower us to resist temptation. We don’t need to give in to it. As appealing as it may be to go along with the temptation, the important thing to keep in mind, is that it is easier to resist it now, than to repent of it later. As later, the sin will have an even stronger hold on us.

Finally, let us remember why we are resisting temptation. We resist, because we know that there is something better. That better, is the life that God has for us.

**Tuesday’s Devotion – Freedom from sin**

**1 John 1:8-9**

*If we claim we have no sin, we are only fooling ourselves and not living in the truth. But if we confess our sins to him, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all wickedness.*

The first point this scripture makes, is that we all sin. It points out that fact, not to condemn us, but to help us face up to the reality of our situation. Don’t live in a fantasy world where you believe that you are righteous without Christ, when you are not. Humble yourself and come clean about your sinful actions and attitudes to God.

The main thing this scripture points out, is that when we repent of our sin before God, and ask Him to deliver us from our sin, God will do just that. God will remove the sin and the power of that sin from our lives and restore our innocence before Him.

Sinning is when we fall for the temptation. When we agree with some lie that Satan has presented us with. Sin will destroy our lives. So we need to take repenting of sin seriously. We will feel guilty about what we have done, and this is a good thing. True guilt is healthy, as it will lead us towards repentance.

One of the themes of this letter from John, is to keep short accounts with God. Don’t let sin become entrenched in your life. As soon as you are aware of it, repent of it and restore your soul to a healthy guilt free openness with God.

**Wednesday’s Devotion – Power and permission**

**Romans 6:12-13 & 16**

*Do not let sin control the way you live; do not give in to sinful desires. Do not let any part of your body become an instrument of evil to serve sin. Instead, give yourselves completely to God, for you were dead, but now you have new life. Don’t you realize that you become the slave of whatever you choose to obey? You can be a slave to sin, which leads to death, or you can choose to obey God, which leads to righteous living*.

The point that Paul is making here, is a really important one in relation to sin. When we sin, (especially when we regularly keep sinning in a particular area of our lives), we are not just choosing to do something wrong, we are allowing something that is not of God have a measure of control over us.

What is happening in the spiritual world around our lives is a shift in permission. We have taken an area of our lives, which we had previously submitted to Christ and now submitted that area of our lives to Satan.

That may all sound a bit dramatic, but it is the clear teaching of scripture. There is no middle ground when it comes to moral issues. We are either on God’s side or Satan’s side. We are either agreeing with one or the other. That is why sin is serious, because there is a power behind the sin that is seeking to control your life. If you keep sinning, then you are welcoming that evil power into your life and you are become a slave to it. Paul’s encouragement is, choose to be a slave to God, rather than sin. You will be a lot better off. You will be free and whole.

**Thursday’s Devotion – Overcoming spiritual powers.**

**2 Corinthians 10:4-5**

*We use God’s mighty weapons, not worldly weapons, to knock down the strongholds of human reasoning and to destroy false arguments. We destroy every proud obstacle that keeps people from knowing God. We capture their rebellious thoughts and teach them to obey Christ.*

Although this scripture primarily refers spiritual powers operating in a group of people who are resisting the gospel, it can also be applied individually, as we can all develop “strongholds” in our thinking.

Paul uses the analogy of a stronghold, because a stronghold was a localised fortress that the enemy had entrenched themselves in. Likewise, when we persist with sinful patterns of thinking, our enemy of Satan entrenches himself in that part of our lives.

The symptoms of being in this level of bondage to sin, is when we realise that we keep defaulting to a sinful pattern of thinking. That part of our lives has become enslaved to sin.

Spiritual weapons need to be deployed at this point. Firstly, repent and ask forgiveness. Secondly, ask God to reveal the spiritual lie that is causing the bondage and pray that God would break the power of that lie off your life. Finally, the appropriate truth of what God has revealed in Scripture needs to replace the lie that you had previously been believing. In going through these steps, we are shifting our allegiance in this area of our lives, from Satan back to Christ.

**Friday’s Devotion – Deliver us from evil.**

**1 Timothy 4:1-2**

*Now the Holy Spirit tells us clearly that in the last times some will turn away from the true faith; they will follow deceptive spirits and teachings that come from demons.**These people are hypocrites and liars, and their consciences are dead.*

The deepest level of slavery to sin, is when we have consistently and persistently given permission to sin and Satan in our lives. Then an area of our lives will be fully possessed by evil. This is a tragic and dangerous place to be. Those around us will be aware how trapped and sinful we have become, but we are unlikely to see it in ourselves, because we have given ourselves over to the deception associated with the sin.

The example that Paul is using above in his letter to Timothy is referring to people who think they are religious, but are actually completely deceived. Jesus also encountered this with the Pharisees, as recorded in John 8. In both situations these were religious people who would not acknowledge that Jesus is God.

What we have hopefully learnt this week is that sin is dangerous. It progressively ensnares and deceives us. However, when we surrender every area of our lives to Christ, He takes control of every thought and action and frees us from sin and the power of sin. May we seek that deliverance from the one who can truly set us free. *“For when the Son sets you free, you are free indeed.” (John 8:36)*

*(If you need to talk or pray with anyone concerning the content of this weeks devotionals, please contact one of the Pastors).*