

One Month to Live #4
What Is Your Motivation?
Matthew 23 - 25; John 13 - 16
3/13/16

- The proper motivation is a powerful thing. We all need motivation in life to get things done. Otherwise, we might just sit around and be lazy. Or be content to do what is comfortable or what we already know how to do rather than to branch out and do something that would better.
 - o Bob Kuechenberg, who once was a great player for the Miami Dolphins, originally had no desire to go to college. Once, he was asked what motivated him to go to college where he played football which then opened up the opportunity for this great college player to be recruited to the NFL.
 - o He said, "My father and uncle were human cannonballs in carnivals. My father told me, "go to college or be a cannonball." Then one day my uncle came out of the cannon, missed the net and hit the ferris wheel, I decided to go to college."

- We certainly need motivation to do things that we don't typically like to do or to follow rules we don't like or don't understand.
 - o We motivate our children with consequences for negative behavior and rewards for positive behavior so that they learn to follow the rules.
 - o Even as adults, we are motivated in the same way. I read a story about a museum that continued to encounter people touching their priceless items even though there were "Do Not Touch" signs clearly posted in several locations on displays. So, a clever museum worker replaced the "Do Not Touch" signs with signs that said, "Caution! Wash Hands after Touching!" That did the trick.

- The story might remind three other people in this room of the time when a group of us ladies from our church went to the Holy Land Experience in Orlando, FL while we were in Florida for a women's convention. They also had "Do Not Touch" signs on some of the exhibits.
 - o I thought they were on the exhibits because the objects were wax or something. But, I had this deep curiosity to find out. So, ever so cautiously, I reached my finger toward one of the objects. I wasn't going to pick it up. I just wanted to see what it was made of. I'm beginning to see, yet again, how much my son, Josiah is like me!
 - o As I was almost about to touch it, a loud beeping sounded. They had motion detectors or something that sounded an alarm! I quickly pull my hand back, not touching the item. The other ladies were looking at me. Avis was

saying, "Did you just try to touch that?? Our pastor isn't following the rules."

- I wondered if Holy Land security was going to come in and escort me out of the park. That was enough motivation for me not to touch one more thing!
- Some people can't seem to get anywhere on time. They aren't motivated to be on time. That one doesn't make a lot of sense to me, personally. It was ingrained in me to be on time.
 - A couple companies found some motivation for some folk. To get employees to work on time, a Michigan company provides 45 parking spaces for 50 cars.
 - Then, there's a story about a busy dental office where one patient was always late. Once when the receptionist called to confirm an appointment, he said, "I'll be about 15 minutes late. That won't be a problem, will it?" "No," she told him. "We just won't have time to give you an anesthetic." He arrived early.
 - I would love to be able to motivate a lot of us to be on time for church. It is so depressing to come out to only a few people here on time, even if I know people will be coming later. If you are motivated to bring me encouragement, be here a couple minutes early. And, I'm sure it makes guests wonder what is going on when people aren't here at the beginning of service. It might well give them impression that it isn't all that important. Maybe that will motivate you. Or, we can try the fewer parking spaces than people trick!
- Over the last few weeks, we have been looking at what Jesus did with the last month of his life as a guide to how we should be living every day. We've been asking a key question: **How would your life be different if today you know that you only had one month to live?**
 - And, we've been looking at a key Scripture, Psalm 39:4-5, to remind us that even though we don't know exactly how much time we have left – whether it's a month or more, we know that life is brief.
 - Psalm 39:4-5 says "Lord, remind me how brief my time on earth will be. Remind me that my days are numbered— how fleeting my life is. You have made my life no longer than the width of my hand. My entire lifetime is just a moment to you; at best, each of us is but a breath."
 - Since this was written as a prayer, last week we prayed that first sentence together. Let's do that again.
- If we really let that sink in, it would probably motivate us to do what we have been saying we need to do. We need to live as though we are dying. For the fact is that we all are dying. We just don't know when. But, if we knew that we only have one month to live, it would motivate us to do some things differently, to live differently.

- Over the last weeks, we have been looking at what things we might do differently if we knew how short our time was. We looked last week at what our relationships with others would look like – how we would reach out to folk rather than hold grudges and unforgiveness in our hearts.
 - Before that, we looked at the kind of priorities we would have. We looked at how we wouldn't put off things that we have been intending to do. We looked at how we would give our hearts completely to Jesus.
- Jesus' example of how he lived is what we have been using for this series. Now, Jesus did have an advantage. Jesus knew when His death would come. We don't know when he knew the exact timing, but from the earliest days of his public ministry, Jesus began to hint that he would be killed and would rise from the grave.
 - On three separate occasions as time was drawing near, Jesus directly predicted the kind of death he would endure – crucifixion. He knew other details as well like that he would be betrayed and he would be beaten.
 - And, he moved intentionally toward his death because he was motivated to do so. He lived life to its fullest by moving toward his purpose. His actions before he died give us an example to follow as how to move toward our purpose as well.
- See, living like you are dying requires the right motivation. Psalm 39 is a great verse to motivate us, if we let it sink into our hearts and really remind us of our brief life. Yet, I just bet that most of us don't think of death all that often or the shortness of life. I even doubt that Jesus thought about it all time.
 - His death isn't what motivated him, it was something else. Something more. What motivated Jesus was something that, if we tap into, we will also be motivated to live as though we are dying. After all, isn't that something that we are called to do – to die to ourselves so that we might live as living sacrifices?
 - So, let's look at what motivated Jesus. But, first, Jesus is going to expose some false motives.
- After Jesus entered Jerusalem, he gives three final teachings during that week that are going to expose the wrong motivations of the human heart. These are things that might motivate us toward something, but they aren't the right motivations that will really bring full life.
 - Jesus gave one of these teachings to the crowds who were following him and two teachings to his disciples and close followers. Two of them disclose motivation that is religiously motivated compared to a motivation that is relationship motivated.
 - Motivation that is religiously motivated will always lead to an unfulfilling life. That's because religion is our human attempt to get to or impress God. But, motivation that is relationship motivated will always lead to a full life. Relationship is God's design. Jesus tells us the difference.

- He starts with the religious motivation in Matthew 23. Jesus is surrounded by people, both religious leaders and regular folk. Like always, the Pharisees are trying to trick him by asking religious questions. Like always, Jesus trumps them at their own game.
 - o But, this time he confronts their dead religiosity head on. He exposed that their religious efforts were all motivated by Greed, power, position: The religious leaders.
 - o Nearly all of Matthew 23 is directed at confronting the motivations of the religious leaders. Let's look at a few.

- Let's read **Matthew 23:2-5a** together. Ouch! Religious motivation is all about position and pointing to the position you have, while demanding things from others that you can't do yourself!

- Go down a few verses to **Matthew 23:25-28**.
 - o Religious motivation revolves around looking the part while a whole bunch of mess is in the heart. Greed and impurity can still reside in the heart of someone who can look like a saint.

- This is why I don't really care what people wear when they come to church. As long as you are not trying to lead worship in provocative attire, I'm not going to say much. Now, I know the idea of wearing your best for the Lord. And, I get it. That is why I'm up here in a skirt and not jeans. At the same time, even if I were up here with jeans, would it actually communicate that I don't love Jesus as much? I don't think so.
 - o I worked with an African American woman in Anderson when I was the supervisor of a group home. She was the case worker for the kids. She went to church and we often had conversations about our churches.
 - o Before Easter, she came to my office and went into great detail about her new Easter outfit that she was having made. She showed me pictures of the dress, the jewelry, the hat. She was from a tradition that the really spiritual wore hats.
 - o Yet, over the time of knowing her, she had also told me of the drama between people in the church and the relationship statuses of people in the church and they were not godly, pure relationships!
 - o I don't care how big and beautiful your hat is or how expensive your Easter outfit is. If you are only cleaned up on the outside, but your inside is still a mess – woe to you! You are not living!

- Here's one more statement from Jesus in **Matthew 23:15** "What sorrow awaits you teachers of religious law and you Pharisees. Hypocrites! For you cross land and sea to make one convert, and then you turn that person into twice the child of hell you yourselves are!

- Double ouch! If our hearts aren't right and we go out and try to convert someone, they will follow our example and have hearts that are more wrong than ours!
- Obviously, according to Jesus, these motivations did nothing but point people away from God. They didn't point people to real life. They pointed people to death. The religious leaders were missing true motivation completely and leading other people astray. Jesus wanted people to know this.
 - Greed, power and position as motivators leave people empty inside even though they look good on the outside. And, all of the wealth that might be acquired or the power or the position you have attained will one day disappear. You can't take it with you.
- At the same time, he wanted his followers, his disciples to know about something else that would lead people astray when they didn't mean for it to. It was another false motivation. That's the motivation of Fear: The disciples.
 - After Jesus slammed on the religious leaders for a while, he left the Temple and again predicted his death and the destruction of the Temple. This obviously put some fear in the disciples because in Matthew 24:3 we read this, "Later, Jesus sat on the Mount of Olives. His disciples came to him privately and said, "Tell us, when will all this happen? What sign will signal your return and the end of the world?"
- Fear is what often motivates us to question the future and to want to know the future. Now, we can call it whatever we want – anxious, nervous, even curious – the root of it all is fear. We don't know what is coming and what we don't know, we often fear.
 - Why are horoscopes, psychics, palm readers, mediums and the like so popular even among Christians and even though Scripture clearly says they are Satanic at their core? Because they claim to be able to bring insight into the future.
 - We want to know and if God isn't telling us, we just might find another source, although it is going to be a false, deceiving force, to tell us.
- The disciples ask this question that is motivated by fear. So, Jesus answers their questions. In Matthew 24, Jesus tells them that things will get tough in the last times before he come.
 - There will be wars and threats of wars. False teachers will try to deceive God's people. God's people will turn against one another. Sin will be rampant. There will be famine and earthquakes in many parts of the world.
 - But he says, "Don't fear! You know the One who is in control! And, if you endure and abide in me and in my love, you will be saved!"

- Instead of allowing fear to motivate you, be ready! Be watchful! He shares the parables of the foolish and wise virgins, waiting for the bridegroom. Some were ready and they went to the wedding and others were not and were left behind.
 - He shared the parable of the three servants whose master entrusted them with money to invest and grow. Two of the three did just that, but one didn't. He was motivated by fear and he buried the money. He wasn't ready when the master returned and he had nothing to show for the master's investment.

- Fear is a horrible motivator. It will keep you paralyzed, not moving forward so that you aren't ready for what is to come. Or, it will keep you fighting the very one who is really the answer to life.
 - I have heard sermons of fire and brimstone in my life and I have heard from some folk how they love those kind of sermons. The ones where you can almost feel the fire of hell nipping at your back end during the sermon! And, hell is a real place where people will really go if they reject Jesus. While Jesus was speaking to his disciples in this Matthew passage, he gave a vivid description of hell. We should speak about the reality of hell.
 - Yet, there are probably a good number of people who accepted Jesus as their Lord after one of those sermons. They became afraid of burning and so they turned to Jesus. But, I would just bet that a good percentage of those who came to Jesus through fear, either never really grew in their faith, never really moved forward because they not only feared hell, they feared Jesus who they thought would send them to hell. Or, they ended up fighting Jesus on some points in their lives and ended up rejecting his ways because they didn't fully understand him or his ways.

- That's because fear is a horrible motivator. Instead, in Jesus' final teaching with the disciples, he shares the real motivation that will keep them moving forward and will fill them up to experience a full life. It is the same thing that motivated Jesus to leave heaven, to become human, to serve and to sacrifice.
 - It's LOVE.

- This motivation is clearly stated in the central verse in all of Scripture – John 3:16. Let's say it together if you know it. God so loved that he gave. God so loved that he gave someone who could save us.
 - Is that good news or what? God is all about love. He's not about joining a certain church, or getting religion, or turning over a new leaf, or becoming a nicer person. All those things are good, but they aren't what motivated God or what will motivate us.
 - It's all about his love for us motivating him to act on our behalf so that we might be saved or rescued from the fate of death. He's not looking to control us by fear. His love motivated him to give us life – both now and forever!

- His deep love is the only thing that made Jesus emotional. The Bible only records two places where Jesus actually wept.
 - o The first is when His friend Lazarus died. Even though Jesus was about to raise him from the dead, Jesus was cried because he friend had died and because his other friends were grieving. He loves his friends deeply.

- The second is when He comes into Jerusalem and laments the lost condition of His people.
 - o Luke tells us that as Jesus looked over Jerusalem, he wept. Matthew 23:37 tells us what he says...“O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones God’s messengers! How often I have wanted to gather your children together as a hen protects her chicks beneath her wings, but you wouldn’t let me.”
 - o Jesus longed to protect and care for and love his people. But, they wouldn’t let him. And, he knew that they were about to reject him fully with death on the cross. Yet, he would love us enough to rise again! Hallelujah!!

- You know, when much of religion seems to cry out to sinful generations in hateful speech, Jesus always cried out in love. Religious motivation tries to control or motivate with greed, power, position and fear, making people feel unworthy, belittled and lowly. Jesus motivates with love.
 - o This is the condition of so many in our world today. They’ve been hurt, mistreated, disillusioned, confused both by those outside the church, and at times, unfortunately, by those inside the church.
 - o Maybe I’m talking about you today. You have never really connected with church or with Christ because you have only seen horrible motivations. Maybe you came to Christ and even still come to church out of fear or obligation or whatever it is, but it’s not because you really connect with Christ through love.
 - o I want you to know that the last thing Jesus did on earth, was to weep for your soul. He wants you to know that you don’t have to keep living life like you have been. He wants you to know that there is more than what you have experienced when you really have a relationship with him. He wants to show you the love that motivated him to sacrifice for you...if you will let him.

- Love is what motivates relationships. We talked last week about how important relationships are to God. He is completely relational and made us so that we cannot live apart from being in relationships with others. Above all, Jesus wants a love relationship with you and me. That is the only kind of relationship that is real.
 - o So, in his final teaching with his disciples in John chapters 13 – 16, he stresses with them how love is must be their motivator in all things with him and with others.

- In John 15:4a Remain in me, and I will remain in you. And, again in John 15:9 he says “I have loved you even as the Father has loved me. Remain in my love.” Remaining in his love is the only way to have a real relationship with him. It is the only thing that will really motivate you to have a relationship with Jesus.
- Likewise, love is the only thing that will motivate any of us to get along with one another. So, Jesus commanded that of us. In John 13:34-35, Jesus says, “So now I am giving you a new commandment: Love each other. Just as I have loved you, you should love each other. Your love for one another will prove to the world that you are my disciples.”
 - If we don’t love each other, we will never be motivated to get along. Some of us are just too different from each other. We will get on each other’s nerves! It will be hard to overcome disagreements.
 - Love has to be what motivates us to do this life together.
- Love is also what motivates obedience. It sure isn’t fear. It sure isn’t obligation. It’s love.
 - Jesus said in John 15:9-10 “I have loved you even as the Father has loved me. Remain in my love. When you obey my commandments, you remain in my love, just as I obey my Father’s commandments and remain in his love.
 - If you are struggling to do what you know Jesus desires, check your heart. If you struggle with spending time in prayer or in reading God’s Word or wanting to come to church, check your heart. Are you in love with Jesus?
 - Love will motivate you to do those things, nothing else.
- Love motivates the ability to lay down your life. John 15:13 says “There is no greater love than to lay down one’s life for one’s friends.” This is the love that motivated Jesus. If we don’t love enough to be in relationship, to get along, to be obedient, we will never lay down our lives for Jesus or for anyone.
- Finally, love motivates us to stay the course of our mission. Jesus never left his mission. No matter what he knew was coming, he stayed on mission. Next week, we are going to look at Jesus’ last hours and his words and how they pointed toward his complete focus on his mission in the middle of the torture he endured.
 - Where did that focus come from? Where did that motivation come from?
LOVE! LOVE! LOVE! LOVE! LOVE!
- Not only was Jesus motivated to stay on his mission by that kind of love, he tells us that we can do the same with the proper motivation.
 - John 14:12 “I tell you the truth, anyone who believes in me will do the same works I have done, and even greater works, because I am going to be with the Father.”

- How can we do greater works than Jesus? By tapping into his motivation to love. It is the only real motivation.
- What is your motivation for living? Is it true motivation? Is it relational motivation? Or, is it merely human motivation or religious motivation?
- The fact is that we can go to church and be a good, moral and ethical person and do most of the seemingly right and responsible and religious things, but be missing out on real life, life to its fullest, the kind of life that Jesus wants to give us, because we are motivated by the wrong things.
 - This can be seen in the story of a little Russian boy. At the village church in Kalonovka, Russia, attendance at Sunday school picked up after the priest started handing out candy to the peasant children. One of the most faithful was a pug-nosed, contentious little boy who recited his Scriptures with proper piety, pocketed his reward, then fled into the fields to munch on it.
 - The priest took a liking to the boy, persuaded him to attend church school. This was preferable to doing household chores which his parents were willing to excuse him from if he went to church school.
 - By offering other incentives and rewards, the priest managed to teach the boy the four Gospels. In fact, he won a special prize for learning all four by heart and reciting them nonstop in church.
 - Sixty years later, all grown up, he still liked to recite Scriptures, but in a context that would horrify the old priest. The prize pupil, who memorized so much of the Bible, is Nikita Khrushchev, the former Communist czar.
- As this anecdote illustrates, the "why" behind memorization is fully as important as the "what". The same Nikita Khrushchev who nimbly mouthed God's Word when a child, later declared God to be nonexistent -- because his cosmonauts had not seen Him.
 - Khrushchev memorized the Scriptures for the candy, the rewards, the bribes, rather than for the meaning it had for his life. He memorized the words, but dismissed the love relationship that Jesus offered. Artificial motivation will produce artificial results.
- What is your motivation in life? Anything other than a consuming love for Jesus first and foremost which then extends to obedience to him because of that love, which then overflows on to others around us, which then will prompt us to be willing to lay down our lives for others by caring for them, meeting their needs, forgiving them and sharing with them how they can have a love relationship with Jesus, which is the mission of all of us...anything other than that is merely artificial motivation.
 - This morning, tap into Jesus' motivation. Love and live.