



## MORRISON ZION EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

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September 22, 2013

Pentecost 18

Sermon Text: [Genesis 14:8-24](#)

Mr. Rick Muchka

First Lesson: [Genesis 14:8-24](#)

Psalm of the Day: [Psalm 38](#)

Second Lesson: [1 Timothy 6:6-16](#)

Gospel Lesson: [Luke 16:1-13](#)

### **The Believer Grows in Christian Character Christians Have a Right Relationship with Worldly Wealth**

Anybody here have the middle name, Mamre? How about Eshkol? Maybe Aner? No? Didn't think so. Names have changed over the course of 4,000 years. I doubt any of you even read those as suggestions in a baby name book (if you have ever read one). Popular names change from generation to generation, let alone over thousands of years. But there are truths that these strange names teach us that are timeless. These men with their strange names had front row seats to an event in Abram's life that teaches us that Christians Have A Right Relationship With Worldly Wealth.

Consider this account from the life of Abram from the point of view of these three men. At this point in time in Genesis 14 Abram was living by the Oaks of Mamre, an area that was named after one of these guys. Evidently he was big stuff in the land of Canaan about 2,000 BC. His brothers Eshkol and Aner probably were well off also. The three of them had made some kind of pact with Abram. They are described as allies in what I read to you earlier. So, we are left with the impression that these three guys are fairly well off and recognized that Abram was doing well also. Abram is described as a "Hebrew" here. It is the first time this word is used in the Bible. It comes from a root word that means "to wander, or pass through." Abraham lived as a nomad in the land and moved his herds from place to place, so the name fits. As far as nomads go, Abram had done very well. He would have told the three guys (let's just call them Mo, Andy, and Eddie to make it easy on us) that the LORD, the only true God had blessed him greatly. Mo, Andy, and Eddie probably had heard Abram when he "Called on the name of the LORD" or told them about the promises God had made to him. God had promised to bless him, to make his name great, and that all the people of the earth would be blessed through Abram. I wonder what Mo, Andy, and Eddie thought about Abram's sermons?

In any case, the three Canaanite brothers learned what importance richly blessed Abram attached to his worldly wealth after Sodom was defeated. Kedorlaomer was a king from the area of Mesopotamia who had made the kings of the cities in that area his subjects for over a decade. The three brothers would have known how powerful he and the kings with him were. They were no doubt aware that the five kings who rebelled against Kedorlaomer were walking on thin ice. Within a year's time that thin ice broke underneath them. Kedorlaomer came and put down the rebellion. Now the cities were no longer paying tribute to Kedorlaomer, they had become the plunder that he was

carrying off the battlefield. Maybe when Mo, Andy, and Eddie heard the news they just shook their head and said, "It was easy to see that coming."

Abram had a different response. His nephew, Lot, had chosen to live in the plush land near Sodom when the land could no longer support both Lot and Abram's herds. Evidently, by this time he had moved into the city that was probably already known for its wickedness. Lot was now part of the "possessions and provisions" that Kedorlaomer carried off. I suppose it would have been tempting for Abram to say, "Serves him right for making such a poor decision." Or maybe just a "Gee, that's too bad for Lot." Mo, Andy, and Eddie would have understood and maybe even sympathized with a response like that. But that is not what Abram did. He got the 318 trained men of his household together and sent word to Mo, Andy, and Eddie that evidently informed them that he was going after Kedorlaomer to bring Lot and the others home.

I wonder what thoughts went through Mo, Andy, and Eddie's heads. Lot chose to live in a city known for being wicked. Why would Abram put his considerable wealth on the line for the sake of a nephew who (possibly from their point of view) had taken advantage of Abram's kindness? You wonder what they discussed among themselves before they honored their pact with Abram and went.

We don't know how many men Mo, Andy, and Eddie had, but it is safe to assume that they were outnumbered by big, bad, Kedorlaomer. But they followed Abram. They listened to him and divided their force into two groups and attacked at night. It was a good plan to cause maximum confusion on the enemy. Perhaps the enemy had let its guard down and were enjoying some of the plunder. Who knows? What we do know is that God gave Abram a great victory that night.

So Abram, Mo, Andy, and Eddie start to return home. But on their way they met a man who was both a king and a priest. His name was Melchizedek. Melchizedek was the king of Salem, or Jerusalem. He was called a priest of God Most High. He comes and blesses Abram. And then the three brothers saw Abram do something that might have seemed odd. He gave a tenth of what he had there to this king! Why? He hadn't put his life on the line like they did! Why would Abram give him a tenth? If they asked I imagine Abram told them that it was because Melchizedek was a priest of God Most High. God had given them the victory so now Abram was going to honor God with a thank offering.

That might have seemed strange to the three brothers but the next thing Abram did probably knocked their sandals off. Another king came out to speak with them. It was the king of Sodom. No doubt he was profusely thankful for what these men had done. And his thanks were not limited to words. He told Abram to give the people back to him (he needed someone to rule as king, right?) and keep all the goods for himself. That is a very nice thank you card. Maybe Mo, Andy, and Eddie are getting a little excited right about then. But then Abram does something they might not have expected. Abram informs the king that he had taken an oath to the LORD that he would not take even a sandal strap from the king. He wanted the king, Andy, Eddie, and Mo to all know that it

was the Lord who had blessed him with wealth. He did not want to leave the door open for any Canaanite to say they had made Abram rich. He wanted all the credit and all the glory to go to God alone. That is a pretty powerful testimony to Abram's trust in and love for the LORD.

Abram did see to it that Mo, Andy, and Eddie could take some of the goods for themselves. They had honored their pact with Abram and put their lives on the line and their wealth on the line also. Abram's request was fitting. No doubt it was honored. As the three brothers returned to their homes I wondered if they talked about what Abram did? Do you think they put more or less stock in what Abram said about the Lord after they witnessed what Abram did? He had a lot of wealth. But he used it to help someone else. He used it in such a way that all credit was given to the Lord. He refused to give in to the desire to crave more wealth and take what you could say was rightfully his, because he did not want anyone but God to get the credit for blessing him. He left wealth on the table, so to speak, so that God would be honored. I have to think that Mo, Andy, and Eddie looked at Abram and thought to themselves, "Here is a man who genuinely loves his God and serves him not just in words, but also in actions!" It had to make an impression on the three brothers.

In our Gospel today Jesus points out that quite often the people of the world are more shrewd in using wealth to achieve their goals than are the people of God. Our goal should be to honor God with our wealth and use it in such a way that others can see that we love and serve someone besides our pocketbook. We serve a God who had changed us. Quite clearly Mo, Andy and Eddie learned that from their dealings with Abram. The question for us today is: Do others learn the same lesson from interacting with us? Do they see our love for God in how we use our wealth and how we talk about our wealth? Do we credit God as the source of all our blessings as often as we could, or do we tell others about how hard we work for our money? Do we stick out from the American attitude that "It is MY money. I worked for it. I can do what I want with it!" Or do we blend in to the crowd? When is the last time you told someone you trusted God to take care of you through thick and thin? When was the last time you showed someone that trust by putting yourself on the line? You may not be called upon to go attack a neighboring king, but God certainly does provide us with the chance to use our resources to help others and to spread the gospel.

The fact is that each one of us here has failed God in this area. We have loved money more than God. We have bought in to the lie of society that more wealth will make everything better. We know that more God (that is being closer to him) will bless us but we still spend more time thinking about wealth, how to get it, how to preserve it, than we do thinking about how to serve God with it. We are sinners.

The only answer for our sin is the God who gave us the wealth in the first place. He sent his son to live and die for each time we loved and served money instead of God. Each time our relationship with wealth imposed upon and pushed to the background our relationship with God has been forgiven through the life and death of Jesus. We do

not have to beat ourselves up over our failures in this area. Christ was beaten, crucified and buried for them. He rose again to assure us that ALL is forgiven.

Because we are forgiven we rejoice and now want to live in a right relationship with worldly wealth. It is a means to an end. Wealth is not the end in and of itself. The closer we live to God in his Word and Sacrament the more we realize this truth. Then we see that using our wealth to help others or to share the gospel is not wealth that is lost to us. It is wealth that is returned to the one who gave it to us in the first place. When we realize this truth and live this truth we will find joy in serving God with our wealth. We will find peace in trusting that God will give us what we need. We may even get a little better at learning to want whatever it is that God gives us. That is exactly what Paul was talking about in our Second Lesson when the Spirit had him tell us that "Godliness with contentment is great gain."

We may also have an impact on the Mo, Andy, and Eddies that come into our life. People who will see in our words and actions people who have been changed by the transforming power of God Almighty. They may ask us why we look at wealth and money differently than every other person that they know. Then we can "Call on the name of the Lord" like Abram did. We can tell them all about a God who so loved us and them that he gave his one and only Son that everyone who believes in him will not go to hell. We then will get to be the voice that the Holy Spirit uses to work his miracle of faith in someone's heart. How cool would that be? In reality, I would take one more soul in heaven with me than Powerball winning numbers any day of the week! How about you? Amen.