

My Dear Friend,

Recently, I have been asking myself this question. What are the ways I reveal that I prefer Jesus Christ to everything else? Does the way I treat people, the way I use my time, the way I spend my money, the way I use my mind and my body, the way I enjoy the pleasures of this life reveal that Jesus Christ is better to me than the entire world? I've thought about the parables of the buried treasure and the pearl of great value in Matthew 13:44-46. If you'll remember, in the first story a man finds a treasure buried in a field he doesn't own. Out of joy in his discovery, he sells all he possesses in order to buy the field to get the treasure. In the second story a pearl merchant discovers the most precious pearl he has ever seen. Therefore he sells all he possesses in order to purchase the pearl.

Here are graphic pictures of what faith in Christ looks like. These men did not simply assent to the fact that the treasure was valuable or the pearl was the best, but they actually sold everything else, joyfully, in order to have the treasure. They believed that to obtain the treasure or the pearl would be far better than continuing to own what they currently possessed. They gave away what was less valuable, their entire life, in order to gain what was extremely valuable. Like sports fans that give away hundreds of dollars and hours of their time in order to attend the game. Like lovers who can't think about anything except their beloved and spend lots of money on gifts and "hours of time on the telephone line to talk about things to come."

So here at the end of 2002 and the beginning of 2003 I'm thinking about my life and how do I show that Jesus is better to me than money or hunting or being respected or being admired or vacations or eating or getting my way or...? As I reflect on my life I find that I am very glad that Jesus Christ is a Savior for sinners. I rejoice that when "I was dead in my sins and the uncircumcision of my sinful nature, God made me alive with Christ. He forgave me all my sins, having canceled the written code with its regulations, that was against me and that stood opposed to me, he took it away, nailing it to the cross." (Col. 3: 13-14) I know that I'm not going to heaven because of my denying myself the pleasures of sin. I'm going to heaven because of what Jesus did by his life, death and resurrection.

However, I also know that because I've been "made alive", because I have believed the promise of eternal life in Christ, then I will make choices on a daily basis to deny myself, take up my cross and follow after Christ. Therefore, it is right (even required) to evaluate and to seek ways to be more satisfied with Jesus and all he promises to be for me. How can I love my wife more to show the all-satisfying love of Christ for sinners? How can I encourage and correct my children in a way that reveals the sufficiency of Jesus' promises more? How can I spend my money in 2003 in a way that will express my hope in heaven more than my hope in earthly comforts? How can I love others more so that it is obvious that my security lies in Christ's love for me, not getting my own way? How should I change the way I invest my time so that I display the greatness of God?

As I have been thinking about my own life, I have also been thinking about our life as a church. 2003 is going to present us with at least three challenges that we have not faced before. First, we continue to grow numerically. Enfolded new people into our community and providing the encouragement that we all need to persist in following Christ will require more of us to invest

more time in people and organizing strategies to nurture people. Second, we are going to send a team of people to Mongolia to assist the Mongolian church in sharing the gospel. Those who go are investing money and vacation time. Those who do not go will need to invest money, time in prayer and encouragement to get them there and back again. Third, we need to build a sanctuary where we can join together in the worship of God and a facility to help us “serve others for joy and the honor of Christ”. This is going to require the investment of time and money significantly beyond what we are currently investing. In short, we, as a church are going to need to deny ourselves in greater ways than we have to this point in order to accomplish these three things. The question each of us has to answer is this: Do I believe a growing, spiritually thriving, missionary sending, worshipping church is better than the time and money I must invest for this to happen?

It is my earnest prayer that each of us will demonstrate in our personal lives that Jesus Christ is better to us than anyone and everything else. Additionally, I am praying that we will joyfully work together to build a church that displays the greatness of God by declaring his greatness and serving others for joy and his honor. I want us to be a community in this city that shows by our individual and corporate life that Jesus Christ is a better treasure than a comfortable, middle class American life.

Treasure hunting with you,