

First Baptist Church of Augusta
Psalm 24
Opening New Doors: Worship
October 5, 2008
Stewardship 2008

In all my years of preaching messages about stewardship, particularly with the concluding message focusing on something along the lines of “fill out your commitment cards and pray about your faithful contribution in the coming year”; I find myself at a most unique place. In the last two weeks, the financial world has somewhat imploded. Debates abound concerning the wisdom of bailing out banks and Wall Street and therefore further driving up our already significant national debt. Then, there is the proliferation of lay-offs and down-sizings going on all around us, that have directly impacted members of this church, let alone family members. We are weary with the constant stream of bank failures and stock market declines. Do I need to even bring up retirement savings that are disappearing? This past week, I have had more conversations, emails, and phone calls with anxious members, whose financial future has been seriously affected more than ever in my twenty years of church ministry. Can you think of a worse time to conclude a stewardship campaign than on this Sunday?

Or, maybe this is the best time. This time allows us to move beyond all the fluff and stuff of what we think we mean by faithful stewardship, to consider deeply and intently of what Jesus calls on us to do.

As you know, all during this series I have said that if we are invested in God’s mission and ministry, our financial gifts will not be an issue. I still believe that statement to be true and valid. I still believe it, even though Wall Street has had a meltdown. I still believe it, even though banks are failing. I still believe it, even though retirement options have dramatically narrowed.

I do not believe that faithfulness means that God will bless us with an abundance of material goods and consumables. That is a health and wealth gospel. And that, in my opinion, is heresy. That is greed, and that is why, at least in part, we are in the trouble we are in. What I do believe is that our value, our worth, is that we are in God’s image. This worth is not market-sensitive; it is not defined by job security, promotions or demotions. Your worth cannot be laid-off, down-sized or out-sourced.

For too long, we have allowed others to define us. I am guilty of this. My worth can be misconstrued according to the car I drive, the church where I am pastor, the house I live in, and the clothes, the grades, the activities of my children.

It was Jesus who said “22 ... *Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat, or about your body, what you will wear. 23 For life is more than food, and the body more than clothing. 24 Consider the ravens: they neither sow nor reap, they have neither storehouse nor barn, and yet God feeds them. **Of how much more value are you than the birds!**” (Luke 12:22-24)*

I ask you, do we really believe him? Do you really believe Jesus? Do you really believe that you are of great value to God, our Creator? If so, then where we go from here is rather simple, for Jesus says this later in verse 31: *strive for the kingdom*. That is how Jesus phrased it. Be faithful.

We are invited to **be faithful** in our relationship with God. What do I mean by faithful? Words that come to mind are loyalty, fidelity, reliable. The same kind of words we use in any meaningful relationship. It applies to our friendships, our marriages, our family, our church and in this context to the One whom we have come to worship this morning. To be faithful, is to live with the integrity of the Gospel’s claim of our life and lifestyles.