

Seeing Things As They Are

Pastor Mark Hoffman
Foothills Christian Church
February 11, 2018

I want to start off with a Joke. This young man, or this man, like a yuppie, if you know what a yuppie is, just a very materialistic guy, he's driving down in his BMW, and he's got his girlfriend and his dog in the car. They make a turn too sharp and he loses control of the car and it begins to flip and the door is thrown open and he's thrown out. He watches the car as it tumbles down a cliff, and it's just crushed and burst into flame. And there's a man who witnessed the whole thing, and he walks up. The rich yuppie guy is looking over, and he's going, "Oh, my BMW! Oh, I miss you so much! If only I could have you back!" And the man says, "What's wrong with you? You almost lost your life, and your fiancée and your dog was in that car. And you're so caught up in the BMW, you probably haven't even noticed that your left arm was torn off." And he looks over, and his arm is missing and he goes, "Oh no, not my Rolex too!" (*laughter*). That's a materialist. I want to talk to you today about the spirit of our age which is the spirit of materialism. It's the spirit behind many of our values that we have as a culture. And it's the guiding principle behind our education system, our media, our entertainment, and it's the guiding light of how we do science.

What is materialism? Materialism is the belief that the material world, the physical world, is the highest reality, and therefore should be the focus of all of our attention. For many, there's nothing beyond the material world. And for those people, religion is nothing more than make-believe. You may remember Carl Sagan, he produced the multi-series PBS special called "Cosmos" years ago. He's a scientist. It is the most widely watched PBS documentary in history all around the world. And if you remember, that series started off with Carl Sagan saying, "The Cosmos, or the Universe, is all there is, all there ever was, and all there ever will be." Now, materialism is everywhere you go, and it wages war against your soul, as you try to walk by faith and keep focused on God and the unseen great realities of life. Very few people in this room would say, "Well, I'm a materialist". However, we have to realize it influences each and every one of us because it surrounds us. We're like a fish in water, we're surrounded by it. We get materialistic philosophy in thinking and perspectives almost every time we take a breath. Materialism is the enemy of spiritual growth because materialism says that your attention should always be on the physical, on the material all around you. And it also says that you can find happiness and fulfillment and peace in the material world. Now, materialism, the philosophy of that, is always the enemy of religion, of Christianity. And wherever materialism gains ascendancy, it begins to persecute religion. And so, for instance, when atheistic materialism took over in Russia, they killed 300,000 priests and pastors in just a few years, and they imprisoned so many Christians. And that's been the story wherever it's gone. North Korea, Cuba, China, for instance. I just read yesterday that China just passed a law, this is amazing, that minors (they have some legal churches there) minors are not allowed to go to church. And that a pastor is required by law to turn away every minor that tries to come to church even if they are accompanied by their parents. And that by law, they are required now to put a sign outside their church that says, "No minors allowed." You see, materialism and Christianity, they don't coexist well. They not only don't coexist in a nation, they don't coexist in a human soul, in a

human heart. One wants to drive out the other. Jesus said this in Matthew 6:24 about materialism and discipleship...

Matthew 6:24 (NASB)

“No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth.”

Or, as the King James says,

“You cannot serve God and mammon.” God and the worship of material things; materialism.

Now, many Christians are torn between two masters. They're torn between two hopes. They're torn between two sets of promises that are contradictory; the promises that the material world makes, (that it can make you happy and take care of you and give you security), and the promises of God. Now, Jesus used a very interesting phrase. He talked about the “deceit of riches”. And He did it in the Sermon on the Mount in Mark 4:19. The deceit of riches is a lie that material things *can* give you identity, that worldly acclaim or earthly success or material things can give you identity or security or peace or joy. He said that in the Parable of the Sower, that's where that phrase came from. And he said that the deceitfulness of riches was one of the weeds that came up and choked out the seed so that it didn't bear any fruit. Now, materialism is deceitful. That means it gives us a false view of everything. It darkens our mind, it clouds our thinking, and it makes us look at things wrong. And this sermon is called, “Seeing Things As They Really Are”. Materialism; that philosophy, that orientation, makes you mis-see things, not see the world as it really is. Here's the truth: the spiritual is greater than the material. The spiritual controls the material. The spiritual world was here long before there was a physical world. The physical world was created out of the spiritual world. And the spiritual world will be here long after the material, physical world is gone. And as a matter of fact, a right spiritual state can help bring material blessings into your life, but the reverse is not true. Material things cannot bring spiritual well-being, and cannot heal your soul, and cannot make you whole. Third John verse 2 is an interesting verse, let's look at it. It really helps us to put this in perspective.

3 John 2 (NASB)

²“Beloved, I pray that in all respects you may prosper and be in good health, just as your soul prospers.”

So first of all, He's saying, “Since your soul is prospering, then I pray that also your body and all your material needs would be met.” Now, most people think, “If I have health and I have wealth, I'll be happy.” Most people think, “If I have good health and I got money for everything I need plus everything I want, then I'm going to have no worries in my life, and I'll be happy, and I'll be content, and I'll be somebody and I'll be at rest.” But that's not how it happens. First comes the well-being of the soul. It doesn't work the other way. That's an illusion. That's not how things really are. The opposite is true. First has to come the well-being of your soul. Then that can bring along lots of blessings. I don't have time to reiterate it this time, but some months ago, I went through all the statistics that prove that people who are well in their soul, that is, people who go to church regularly and read their Bible regularly, have lots of benefits. They live longer. They enjoy better health. They recover quicker from illnesses and things like that. They have

less depression. They report being way more happy. Their marriages last longer. You can go on down the list, but it doesn't work in reverse. Now, we all know that everyone wants joy, and everyone wants peace. Everyone just wants to be able to sleep at night. A lot of people can't sleep at night because they don't have peace. They're not at rest. They have worries. And everybody wants to be free of worries and have good relationships. And the Bible tells us that these things are natural byproducts or fruit of prospering in your soul. And the best way to prosper in your soul is to be filled with God's Spirit.

Galatians 5:22-23 (NASB)

But the fruit (or the natural byproduct, or the evidence) ***of the Spirit*** (in your life) ***is love, joy, peace,*** (everybody wants peace) ***patience, kindness,*** (we want to be kind) ***goodness,*** (we want to want to do good things and do good things) ***faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.***

Everybody wants to break the addictions and break the habits and have the self-control to live out good choices. And the Bible says that comes from the inside. That's the fruit of the Spirit. And everyone seeks these things. But many people don't realize it's beyond the ability of material things to produce them. But the other way, inward prosperity can help bring outward blessing. Deuteronomy 28:1-12. Moses is talking to the Israelites before they go into the Promised Land, and here's a promise he makes. It's actually a whole chapter, but we're going to look at just two verses.

Deuteronomy 28:1-2 NASB

Now it shall be, if you diligently obey the LORD your God, being careful to do all His commandments which I command you today, the LORD your God will set you high above all the nations of the earth. ² All these blessings will come upon you and (as a matter of fact, they'll overtake you, no matter how fast you're moving, they're going to come and...) ***overtake you if you obey the LORD your God.***

So as they're going into the new land, he's telling them the way things really are. And the way things really are is if you get your inner-state right before God, and you walk in fellowship and obedience then all the blessings will overtake us. This is a principle for life every one of us has to know and have a conviction about. Jesus reiterates it in the New Testament in the Sermon on the Mount. Familiar words. Matthew 6: 31 and 33.

Matthew 6:31 (NASB)

"Do not worry then, saying, 'What will we eat?' or 'What will we drink?' or 'What will we wear for clothing?'"

Aren't these the things that people worry about? How will I pay my rent? What about retirement? How will I get my car fixed? He says don't be focused on those things, that's materialism. He says instead,

Matthew 6:33 (NASB)

"But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will (overtake you, all these things will come upon you and) ***be added to you."***

He says, get that order right in your heart, in your mind, in your thinking, and in your actions. Now, we just made the point that material possessions and wealth and success cannot bring inward peace, prosperity, a healthy, healed soul, spiritual well-being. And even though that's true, they can't do that directly, here's the amazing thing: they can have indirect effect. Here's the next point. **Material things can help us gain spiritual ends.** Once you understand that principle, it will help you understand one of the most difficult parables that people struggle with of all the parables Jesus told. And that's the parable of the unjust steward.

Luke 16:1-2 (NASB)

Now He was also saying to the disciples, "There was a rich man who had a manager, and this manager was reported to him as squandering his possessions. (So, he was misappropriating and probably stealing from his boss) ² And he called him and said to him, 'What is this I hear about you? Give an accounting of your management, for you can no longer be manager.'"

Now, what's happening here, he's just been told that he's fired, has to get the books together, and he has to turn them back in. But here's the point you have to grasp; for just a little while longer, he still has control of the books. He still has the power of a steward.

Luke 16:3-8 (NASB)

³ The manager said to himself, 'What shall I do, since my master is taking the management away from me? I am not strong enough to dig; I am ashamed to beg. ⁴ I know what I shall do, so that when I am removed from the management people will welcome me into their homes.' And he summoned each one of his master's debtors, and he began saying to the first, 'How much do you owe my master?' ⁶ And he said, 'A hundred measures of oil.' And he said to him, 'Take your bill, and sit down quickly and write fifty.' ⁷ Then he said to another, 'And how much do you owe?' And he said, 'A hundred measures of wheat.' He said to him, 'Take your bill, and write eighty.' ⁸ And his master praised the unrighteous manager because he had acted shrewdly; for the sons of this age are more shrewd in relation to their own kind than the sons of light."

Now this is where people have difficulty. They think, how can Jesus be praising this man? This guy's a real snake in the grass. To help us understand it, we have to understand something about interpreting parables, and that is a basic truth that most parables, the great majority of parables are about only one thing. The parable has just one point that it's trying to make. And so what's the point? What do we know about this man? We know he's a thief who stole from his master. We know that he's lazy and proud. He's too lazy to dig, he's too proud to beg, so that can't be it. So what is the one thing we're supposed to learn from this man? Here is it, here is why he's praised; because he understood something that God wants every one of you to understand. This is so important, He wants each of us to understand this truth that this man understood, and that was this: as long as he was a steward, he had the ability to use what belonged to somebody else in order to get for himself what he needed, to provide for himself. Does that make sense? Now, it didn't belong to him, so he couldn't simply take it and put it in the bank. He couldn't steal it and buy a house, because that would be discovered and he'd have to give it back. But what he could do is he could use it to gain favor with other people. That's the point. He could use what belonged to another to gain favor for himself. Now, everything that we

think we possess belongs to God. God created the world, He created everything in the world, He owns it, and He never, ever, ever relinquished ownership to anybody else. It all belongs to Him. Now, you may think of your money as your own money that you can spend however you want. Your own gold, and your own silver. But what does God say?

Haggai 2:8 (NASB)

‘The silver is Mine and the gold is Mine,’ declares the LORD of hosts.”

We may act like our house is our own house, and we can buy and sell and do whatever we want anytime we want. And our cars, and all our possessions, and our property. What does the Bible say?

Psalm 24:1 (NASB)

“The earth is the LORD’s, and all it contains, the world, and those who dwell in it.”

So the truth is, we don’t own anything but we have a stewardship, and so we can use it to gain God’s favor.

Proverbs 19:17 (ESV)

Whoever is generous to the poor lends to the LORD, and he will repay him for his deed.

Did you see that? Whoever is generous to the poor lends to the Lord. And so the Lord will have to repay you for your deed. How would you like to put the Lord in your debt? How would you like the Lord to have to repay you, to owe you something? The Bible says that we can use the things that we have temporary stewardship over to gain a blessing and a favor and a repayment. It doesn’t have to be money. It’s anything in the material world. So it can be your labor, it can be your effort, you might have a car and you can help a single lady down the street get her kids to school and back, maybe when you just load them up with your kids. Here’s the secret, my friends, if you want to put the Lord in your debt. I don’t care who you are or how many problems you have or how little you possess, you can always find somebody that has less and has more problems. Is that true? So it doesn’t matter. All you have to do if you want to make this work for you and open the windows of Heaven and have God’s favor rest in your life, all you have to do is find somebody that has a need, somebody that has less, and bless them. And you’ll have God’s favor. Imagine what it would be like to live under God’s favor. Do you know somebody, and you just think, “Wow, God’s favor is on that life. They are so blessed. Whatever they do, God blesses. He seems like He’s always with him.” How would you like that to be you? How would you like people to look at you and say, “God’s hand is with them. God prospers them wherever they turn. God just encourages them and strengthens them, no matter what.” Wow.

When we surrender our life to Christ, one of the things that we do is we acknowledge that everything that we have is His. So we’ve been fighting God for everything, our autonomy, our possessions, and now we finally, when we come to Christ, we surrender and we admit; You made me, You created me, You own me, You own everything that I own. Juan Carlos Ortiz, years ago, he once explained it in a way that really stuck with me. He said, “Imagine a man comes to the altar. And that man, or woman, goes to God and says, ‘God, I surrender my life to You, will You be my Lord and Savior? I surrender and I accept You as my Lord and Savior.’ And

Jesus says, 'That's fantastic.' The man gets up and He goes, 'Tell me, what do you have in your pocket?' 'Oh, a wallet.' 'Ok, that's Mine. Everything in that wallet is Mine. As a matter of fact, everything in your bank account is Mine.' And the man gets up to leave, and He goes, 'Anything else?' 'No, nothing else, just my car keys.' 'Oh, you have a car? Well, the car belongs to Me too.' 'But Lord! If I don't have a car, how will I get home to my house?' 'You have a house? Oh, the house belongs to Me.' 'But Lord, if I don't have a house, where will I put all my furniture?' 'Oh, furniture? That's Mine, too.' 'But Lord! If you take my furniture, I won't have any beds. Where will my kids sleep?' 'Oh, you have children? They belong to Me, too. Everything you have belongs to Me. Your body, your future, your job.' And then God says this, 'Now let Me tell you how this is going to work. I'm going to give it all back to you as a stewardship. And I want you to use it to advance My Kingdom, but also I want to give you the opportunity to use it to gain My favor. So that I can open the windows of Heaven. So that My hand will be with you at all times, and you'll be blessed.'" Here's the amazing thing. Ready? You can use the riches of this world, you can use the material things of this world to release the blessings of Heaven, to release the riches of the Kingdom of God into your life and the lives of the people that you love. Now, Jesus was not a rich man, and yet, He had every need met. The world, all of creation, just seemed to come together to give Him every need He had. I mean, food multiplied, fish coughed up coins, the blind saw, the crippled walked. And it wasn't just Jesus. Paul could say, "I travel light." Paul could say, "You know what? I criss-crossed the entire Roman Empire, all of it, with just what I can carry on my back. And yet, all my needs are always met. And I can say this, I can say I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me, because God has given me access to not my riches, but His riches." And He said this of Himself in 2 Corinthians 6:10. He said he was as **"poor yet making many rich."** In other words, he didn't have a lot of possessions because he was an itinerant, travelling around. And yet, he had the ability to enrich all those around him materially, spiritually, because he had the ability to see Heaven's supply come. He said as **"having nothing yet possessing all things."** Why? Because in a sense, whatever God had could be made available to him. When you stop being a materialist, when you stop thinking like a materialist and worrying like a materialist and pursuing things like a materialist, then all God's possibilities become yours.

Now, I want to ask you a question. Do you ever find you have a wandering heart? In other words, you have a heart and you point it towards the Lord but it begins to wander into the cares and the worries and the lusts of this life and the material world. And you keep thinking, "What's wrong with my heart? I'll get really close to God at a conference, or I'll have some situation, some blessing or some challenge, and I'll get all focused, and then, a little bit later, my heart's grown cold. It's wandered off. Man, I wish I could just have a different heart. Something's wrong with my heart. I wish I had a heart like Bob because Bob just always seems to be walking with the Lord and always have joy in his life. I wish I had a heart like Bob. Something's wrong with my heart." There's nothing wrong with your heart. Here's the problem: you don't understand how the heart operates. Nothing wrong with your heart; you just don't understand what makes it do what it does. But Jesus taught us. And He taught us something called The Treasure Principle. It's a great secret. Matthew 6:19-20. This can change your life.

Matthew 6:19-20 (ESV)

¹⁹ ***“Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, ²⁰ but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. (Are you ready? Because here comes the key to The Treasure Principle) ²¹ For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.*”**

Here’s the truth: your heart follows your treasure. I want you to say that with me. Let’s get it right from the first time, because I want us to say it, to own it, to get it down into our souls and down into our bones how this principle works. Say: “My heart follows my treasure.” Now, what’s your treasure? You think about all the things that are precious to you, like your time, your energy and strength, your money, your love, all those things. Now, if you were to take those things and put them in a box, that would be your “treasure box”. And your heart will follow that treasure. It will always be there. So, if you invest the best of your efforts and your time and your worries and your thoughts and all that stuff into a box called “material things”, then you’re going to be a materialist. Your mind will be trapped. You’ll think like a materialist. You will act like a materialist. You’ll make all the mistakes that materialists make. You’ll carry all the fears and all the anxious thoughts that materialists have, and you’ll be shut off from the Kingdom. But, if instead of that box, you begin to focus your precious things; your time, your energy, your money, your dreams, your thoughts, on God, the things of God, the Kingdom of God, then you won’t be a materialist. You’ll be a deeply spiritual Christian. You’ll be a friend of God. You’ll be a person for whom the heavens have opened and the riches of the Kingdom are yours. And your heart will be in that treasure. It’s a little bit like simple physics. If you go out into space, you will begin to object, rotate, orbit around whatever is out there that has the greatest mass and the greatest size, correct? It’s the same thing in the spirit world. Whatever of your precious things, whatever has the most mass, you know, into whatever has been put the most love and thought and effort and money; you’re going to orbit around that. Here’s the key... (if you’re taking notes, you’ve got to get this one right here, this is the secret) you cannot directly control your affections. You can’t make your heart, for instance, say, “See that guy in the corner, I’m just going to really love and care about that person and think about him all the time. And this person that hurt me, I’m not going to be angry at him anymore. I’m not going to have any resentment or bitterness.” How many of you know you can’t control your heart like that? Is that right? You can’t make yourself feel. First part: **You can’t directly control your affections, but you can control your investment.** I’m going to say it again. You can’t directly control your heart’s affections, but you can control your investments. So if you invest in God and the Kingdom of God, then your affections are going to flow that way. If somebody made you angry and you begin to treat them kindly and do acts of kindness and pray for them, guess what? Your heart is going to change. And so, that’s the secret to your heart. For instance, if you’re a person who doesn’t invest in the stock market, guess what? You never pay attention to the stock market. You could care less. If the person sitting next to you has a lot of money in the stock market, they get up every day and they check the stock market. So, you invest in the Kingdom of God.

If you want to be a spiritual person, then you must learn to live simply. You must, first of all, always be content and thankful for what you have, and not worry about what others have. You don’t want to get so many possessions that they possess you, so that your life is consumed in paying for them, maintaining them, in cleaning them, in storing them, in insuring them, and then

trying to sell them so you can buy more, newer and bigger. That's when your possessions possess you. I'll tell you what happens; if you work real hard all the time, you start to think, "Well, I've got to justify all this work I'm doing", and you start buying things just to justify the fact that you worked so hard. Or, sometimes, I think this is something else we can do. We buy a vacation house, let's say, and then we have to justify how much we've put into that house. So, we have to take more and more vacations to justify the purchase which might mean that we stop doing things that really are more important. So I think, a lot of times you should just rent. You want to take a vacation? You want to go out on a boat? Consider just renting it when you want it, rather than being possessed by your possessions.

Here's the deceitfulness of riches. The deceitfulness of riches is they promise that they can make you happy but they don't. The simple fact is, we all know it, the richest people in our nation are not the happiest. The most famous people in our nation are not the happiest. And yet, people from this church, right here, every year, go to third-world nations; they go to Kenya, they go to Cuba, they go to Nicaragua, El Salvador, places like that. And what do they always come back and say? "The people are so happy." Why is it that the people who have the least, as a rule, are happier than the people who have the most? That's the deceitfulness of riches, the deceitfulness of materialism; to promise what it can't deliver. To say you can have joy through physical sensations, or through worldly success. Now, I want to just say this, it's very important; I want to contrast Satan's plan with God's plan. Satan has a plan for the material things of this world, as does God. Here's Satan's plan; to use material things in order to trap your soul in worry, in anxiousness, in envy, and in lust. And thereby shut you off from the Kingdom of God, and from the riches of the Kingdom. To use material things to get you to see things, not as they really are, but as they aren't. Now God has a different plan. Here's God's plan for material things: it's that you enjoy the good things of the world (He wants us to enjoy the good things He made) but never forget their primary purpose. And what's the primary purpose of everything you're given stewardship for? One, to please God with, and two, to gain His favor. God wants to pour out favor. God wants to open the windows of Heaven. But in order for that to happen, we have to use things His way, do things His way. Materialism says "buy and sell." God says, "sow and reap." If you sow, just wait and be surprised and find out the harvest you're going to get. The world says, "Buy and sell things that rust and fall apart, and try and find your happiness that way."

Linda and I have had discussions (I've shared this before more than a couple of times), but years ago, when we were very, very poor, I was a seminary student, we had kids, we were so poor. We would get an opportunity to give, some need would come across. And I'd say, "Honey, we've got to give to that." She was always the one that balanced the checkbook. She'd say, "We don't have that. Have you looked at the checkbook? There is no way that we can afford to give anything to that." And I would say, "Honey, have you seen the checkbook? There is no way that we can't afford to give to that." Because if I have to live in our economic reality, we're dead. Here God's giving us the opportunity to enter into His economy, and whenever we did it, it was just multiplied. Our church has lived like that. It looked like when we were first building out this church, we were not going to be able to finish this job. We did not have enough money. Then we heard about a church up in Los Angeles, we really respected the pastor, he was from Phoenix and was planting out there. And so we took about a third of everything that we had and we sent it to that church. It was one of the biggest checks they got. And that seems insane; if you don't

have enough to finish, why would you take a third of what you have? But, you know within short order, God miraculously brought in everything we wanted. Neil told a story, I had forgotten it until he brought it up when he was preaching one day. One day, we were at Youth Venture, and we did not have enough money to pay the rents for that month. I think we had around \$5,000. It wasn't nearly enough to pay the rents which were due in a couple of weeks. And so, I got all the leaders together, the center directors, and I said, "OK, we don't have enough money to pay the rent. That must mean that God has a need that He wants us to meet, because we can't pay it. So let's pray and find out what need God wants us to meet." We found out, I had heard about a ministry, not dissimilar from ours, working with inner-city youth in the North Park area. So I took the \$5,000, I showed up at their door, kind of blew his mind, gave him a check for \$5,000. And do you know that by the time our rents were due, all the money came in, plus some? Giving opens up the floodgates. I mean, if you know it belongs to God, then when He asks you for it, you don't argue. You don't say, "It's not really in my budget. I had other plans for that. No, I'm sorry, I don't want to get up and do that. I don't want to help that person." When you understand it all belongs to Him, you do it joyfully and you always understand it's an invitation to experience His favor and His grace.

Let me say a prayer over you.

Heavenly Father, we just thank You for Your generosity and Your goodness. We thank You, Lord, that we don't have to fret and worry and strain in this life. We don't have to cut corners, we don't have to cheat, lie, or steal. That Lord, we can just trust You, Lord. Thank You for what You've given us stewardship for. Help us to use it in a way that advances Your Kingdom, and that brings evermore of Your favor down upon our lives. I pray that right now, You break anxiety and worry over people about their circumstances. I pray You break the power of lust, I pray You just root it out of human hearts; lust for things, and for experiences. And I pray, Lord, that You just release a love and devotion to our Creator and our Savior in our hearts. In Jesus' name, Amen.