

- I. Introduction
 - A. Everyone wants our loyalty.
 1. Loyalty programs (discounts, rewards, and other special incentives to attract and retain customer loyalty)
 2. Two functions:
 - a. Reward customers for desirable behavior
 - b. Gather information and data about said customer
 - B. Matt's brand loyalty
 - C. The Gospel announcement that God has raised the crucified Jesus from the dead and seated Him in the heavenly places (ascension) as the rightful ruler of the cosmos not only identifies Him as our rescuer, but as the only one worthy of our loyalty.
 1. Every other allegiance, then, is subordinate to His lordship.
 2. Seek first the Kingdom of God
But seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you. (Matthew 6:33)
- II. Loyalty and the world
 - A. What is it?
 1. Someone whose behavior and actions are consistent toward someone or something over time, especially when it's hard. You can expect a loyal person to be faithful and true no matter what.
 2. Fears, trials, persecution, and suffering challenge and test one's loyalty.
 - B. Loyalty is universally expected
 1. We live in constant tension because of the universality of expected loyalty.
 2. Example: Government
 - a. Christians are not necessarily called to overthrow governments.
 - 1) But we do teach people to put faith in the perfect government of God, which does expose every single world government's faults, limitations, and even their wickedness.
 - 2) Government that demands total submission finds this especially hard to accept.
 - b. Mark 13:9-13; Luke 21:12-15
But be on your guard. For they will deliver you over to councils, and you will be beaten in synagogues, and you will stand before governors and kings for My sake, to bear witness before them. And the Gospel must first be proclaimed to all nations. And when they bring you to trial and deliver you over, do not be anxious beforehand what you are to say, but say whatever is given you in that hour, for it is not you who speak, but the Holy Spirit. And brother will deliver brother over to death, and the father his child, and children will rise against parents and have them put to death. And you will be hated by all for My name's sake. But the one who endures to the end will be saved. (Mark 13:9-13)

But before all this they will lay their hands on you and persecute you, delivering you up to the synagogues and prisons, and you will be brought before kings and governors for my name's sake. Settle it therefore in your minds not to meditate beforehand how to answer, for I will give you a mouth and wisdom, which none of your adversaries will be able to withstand or contradict. (Luke 21:12, 14-15)

- 1) Because of this, when we are loyal to the kingdom of God, we will run the very real risk of persecution and it will cost us.
- 2) Jesus does not identify this as a bad thing or something to escape from by running away and hiding somewhere safe.

*In fact, Jesus says that the persecution for loyalty to His Kingdom is a divinely appointed way of witnessing Jesus to others for their salvation (Mark 13:9; Luke 21:13)

- 3) At that time, God, through the power of the Holy Spirit will give you how to accurately reflect Jesus to your persecutors.

*As citizens of God's Kingdom, our loyalty and obedience places us at odds with the world. The resulting disfavor (including persecution) is a divine opportunity for witnessing the Gospel message of Jesus!

c. Danger of misplaced loyalty

- 1) When we connect God's favor with a nation, we place ourselves in a position of competing loyalty.
- 2) Imagine a nation that ...
 - A) has a law-and-order approach to society
 - B) has pride in their nation
 - C) opposes pornography, prostitution, abortion, obscenity in the arts
 - D) advocates discipline, punctuality, cleanliness, and respect for authority
 - E) What's not to like? Well, other than this is the description of the rise of Nazi Germany under Adolf Hitler ...

*The Germans were told that God was on their side with the evidence of a morality that paralleled the teachings of Scripture.

III. Loyalty and the Kingdom of God

A. The treasure principle

Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. The eye is the lamp of the body. So, if your eye is healthy, your whole body will be full of light, but if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light in you is darkness, how great is the darkness! No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money. (Matthew 6:19-24)

1. As human beings, we were designed to have an object of primary or ultimate loyalty. That is where our heart and minds will focus and follow.
2. Jesus teaches that we cannot have two primary loyalties.
 - a. Cannot serve God and money (primacy of wealth or property)

- b. Economics (scarcity, resources, incentives, decision-making, both personally and globally) is the primary competition to the Kingdom of God for loyalty—they both demand it.
- c. We would be dishonest to say that our economics do not affect how we view God's Kingdom—and not in a good way.

*No one under any economic system is exempt from distortion of God's Kingdom. That is why Jesus gives us so many warnings.

*We are called to make intentional and repetitive decisions to remove everything from our primary focus in favor of the Kingdom of God as revealed in the whole of Scripture.

B. Ordered loyalty

- 1. Love of one's country is a good thing, just as honoring father and mother, cherishing one's spouse or children, or enjoying what God has blessed an individual or group with is a good thing.
- 2. Yet these things can refuse to be subordinate "goods" and can instead insist on being primary or ultimate goods. That is called idolatry.

*Putting God's Kingdom as our primary loyalty actually enables us to love all those other things better.

- 3. If love of anything, whether people, politics, or possessions, becomes my identity, I will in time grow to hate that thing because nothing but God can carry the weight of that expectation.

*Every idol, sooner or later, is seen to be too weak to do what is asked of it.

- 4. When these things are in their rightful place, I can show gratitude for (fill-in-the-blank).
 - a. I can show gratitude for my nation when it is rightly placed—participating in criticism of its mistakes and celebrating its achievements
 - b. I'm concerned that the Church today has misplaced its loyalty—unable to boldly criticize or to celebrate our nation. The church is called to lead, not simply react to culture. We should be the first to point out injustice and achievement.

*When my loyalty is solely to Jesus and the seeking of His Kingdom, then I can see the world around me as He sees it. If I have a divided loyalty to Jesus and anything else, then I am blinded to what Jesus sees. When I am loyal to Jesus, I no longer have to take sides.

C. Impact of rightly placed loyalty

- 1. We can love and recognize the secondary better when our primary loyalty is solely toward the Kingdom of God.
But our citizenship is in Heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, Who will transform our lowly body to be like His glorious body, by the power that enables Him even to subject all things to Himself. (Philippians 3:20-21)
- 2. Peace is only possible when our loyalty is placed on Jesus alone.
 - a. When our primary and ultimate loyalty is for the Kingdom of God, then we not only will have peace with God but also with those whose loyalty lies with Jesus. *For He Himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in His flesh the dividing wall of hostility by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances, that He might create in Himself one new man in place of*

the two, so making peace, and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility. (Ephesians 2:14-16)

- b. We will have division when anything other than Jesus and God's Kingdom is mixed in with our primary loyalty

Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the Earth. I have not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. And a person's enemies will be those of his own household. Whoever loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me. And whoever does not take his cross and follow Me is not worthy of Me. Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for My sake will find it. (Matthew 10:34-39)

*Our loyalty to our clubs all too often tend to be more defining of us than our loyalty to Jesus. Our loyalty to Jesus determines whether we experience peace or a sword.

- 3. God will give His people opportunity to confirm their loyalty and obedience to Him.
 - a. Remember the story that Steve shared about the family from Minnesota who felt called to Somalia?
 - 1) Did you struggle with that?
 - 2) I did...
 - b. Genesis 22, specifically v11-14

But the angel of the Lord called to him from Heaven and said, "Abraham, Abraham!" And he said, "Here I am." He said, "Do not lay your hand on the boy or do anything to him, for now I know that you fear God, seeing you have not withheld your son, your only son, from Me." And Abraham lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, behind him was a ram, caught in a thicket by his horns. And Abraham went and took the ram and offered it up as a burnt offering instead of his son. So Abraham called the name of that place, "The Lord will provide"; as it is said to this day, "On the mount of the Lord it shall be provided."

- 1) Since we know the outcome and that God did what we want Him to do, we're ok with this story.
- 2) But if we didn't or God didn't rescue the way He did, would we have called Abraham irresponsible and concluded that he didn't remotely hear God?
- 3) "Now I know ..." and now you know ...

Here's my ask of you:

-Write a name down: someone who has discernment and is willing to be honest and who you won't dismiss when they tell you something you don't like or agree with.

Someone who cares about you enough to tell you what might even make you angry.

-Now, let them identify your divided loyalties that you don't see or don't want to see and give them permission to help and evaluate your growth.

-Oh, and one more thing, if they don't see any divided loyalties in you, they're not the right person. Find someone else because you're not that good.