

Matthew 6:19-34
Accumulation Valuation
Rev. Jonathan P. Cornell
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I want to offer once again my greeting to you, and before we get into the meat of the message let you know what will be happening next Sunday. This week you should have received a letter outlining our stewardship focus for November, if you didn't we have letters and pledge cards available in the rear of the church for you.

Next Sunday will be Presbyterian alter call, yes we do those things. It will be our chance to rededicate our lives to Jesus' claim and call for our lives. Or it may be that you've never made that step of faith in saying: "Jesus I give you my heart, the very center of who I am and all that my heart, my mind, and my body pursues. I give it to you." If this is you we want you to feel comfortable in coming forward.

On your pledge card there is a space for you to write the amount you pledge for the coming year. But if you are not or cannot make a pledge, that's ok, we also invite you to write down what you are dedicating to Christ this year, it could be a prayer you are offering, or the desire to get involved in serving in some way. This is your chance to, by your word and action, make your commitment public for how you will be giving of yourself to God in 2020. Can you believe it? 2020! We want that kind of clarity of vision for our church in the coming year.

This morning we are continuing in a short series of messages still in the Sermon on the Mount where we are looking at the flourishing life. Today we focus on the gift of giving, the joy of generosity, and the freedom from anxiety as it relates to money.

The treasure of giving

It's interesting. The only motivation Jesus offers us for giving is self-interest. He says, "Lay up for yourselves treasure in heaven." In Luke 6:38, it's "Give and it will be given to you. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you." I know someone who is businessman, he tithes (10%) and is always saying, "When I shovel out, God shovels in. And his shovel is so much bigger than mine." The Old Testament prophet Malachi says, "'Test me in this,' says the LORD Almighty, 'and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that you will not have room enough for it'" (Malachi 3:10b).

The bible says it is more blessed to give than receive.

Do this for me. Imagine yourself alone in a room totally alone, by yourself. In that room is a table and on that table is everything you have everything. Nothing stays under the table, nothing in the closet. It's all there on the table. There's a knock at the door. You go to the door; you open it up; and guess who's standing there? It's Jesus. He wants to come in. Obviously we are going to let Him in, right? So you let Jesus in, shut the door behind Him, and He stands there looking at everything on your table.

As he looks at our tables this morning, what does our king say to us?

First, he says, “You’re not going to have that stuff for long.” You are a momentary manager of these resources which will someday be passed on to others. Think of it, for many of us our job will one day be done by someone else, your stuff will get passed on, sold in an estate sale, or down at an antique store. You’ll notice that when you see a funeral processional there is never a U-Haul following behind.

Time eventually undoes everything we do in this world. Heaven, not earth, is our home. Paul says in Philippians “Our citizenship is in heaven.”(3:20) Ponder these words of Randy Alcorn: “We are made for a person and we are made for a place. Jesus is that person and heaven is that place. We will never be satisfied with any other person less than Jesus, and we will never be satisfied with any other place less than heaven.”

Generosity goes out the window when we make the mistake of seeing earth as our home.

Success is not what you have.

True success is what you do with what you have. The quote that is a tagline on my social media page is one of JRR Tolkien’s from LOTR: All we have to decide is what to do with the time that is given to us.

There is great weakness in wealth. That’s a theme of a best-selling book by Malcolm Gladwell, called David and Goliath. One chapter is on the weakness of wealth.

Gladwell sat down with one of the most powerful men in Hollywood, a movie mogul whom he does not name. The man told how he grew up as a boy in a poor neighborhood in Minneapolis. He told how as a boy every winter he’d would go down the street to the neighbors and get commitments from those who wanted their driveways cleared of snow. Then he’d contract out each job to other children. He paid each kid immediately with cash because he saw that’s how they worked the hardest. Sometimes he had up to 8 or 9 kids on the payroll. In the fall he switched to raking leaves.

He did this all by the time he was ten years old.

He wore hand-me-downs. His dad grew up in the Depression and whenever he left the light on his dad would yell at him. Later in college he started a laundry service. One thing led to another. He found bigger and bigger jobs and today Gladwell says the man lives in a home in Hollywood that’s “the size of an airplane hangar” and has a “a never-ending drive- way, with a front gate that looks like it came from a medieval castle.” There’s a private jet and a Ferrari in the garage.

Sitting in his home office the size of many people’s houses, the man talked about his own children with sadness. He said “I love my children. I want what’s best for them.” But he said, “I have created a giant contradiction.” He said, “I am happy and successful precisely because I have had to work long and hard over the years, and scrapped my way to the top, learning the value of every dollar to get what I have. My joy and fulfillment come from having struggled to make my way in the world.

But now because of my success my children will never experience themselves what made me who I am.” Children of multimillionaires don’t rake the leaves of their neighbors in Beverly Hills. Those dads don’t angrily wave the light bills in the face of their children when they leave the lights on.

He was saying, "I'm afraid that my wealth is going to ruin my kids and they're not going to have the same pride and self esteem that I have." What an irony! Even with hundreds of millions of dollars he's saying, "I'm not going to be as good as my dad was in that poor neighborhood in Minneapolis."

The magic of money is this: everything changes when you give it away. You break the spell of materialism. The very money you've been using to insulate yourself from the brokenness of the world now becomes a way of healing the brokenness of the world.

Hold On Loosely

Jesus says "Do not be anxious, your life is so much more valuable than the stuff you accumulate—whether its physical stuff or accolades or titles. And if you're worried about not having enough, look at the birds of the air they don't store they don't sow or reap, everything they have is given to them freely by God. Look at the lilies of the field, how dazzling they are, even Solomon was not as breathtaking as they. And they wither and die every year, how much more valuable are you than they?"

Bonhoeffer: "Be not anxious! Earthly possessions dazzle our eyes and delude us into thinking that they can provide security and freedom from anxiety. Yet all the time they are the very source of all anxiety. If our hearts are set on them, our reward is an anxiety whose burden is intolerable. Anxiety creates its own treasures but then in turn require more care. More care, more burden, more worry when we seek our security in possessions."

To illustrate Jesus told about a pearl merchant. He said, "The kingdom of heaven is like a merchant looking for fine pearls. When he found one of great value, he went away and sold everything he had and bought it."

Jesus' pearl merchant knew what he was talking about. He was a pro. This pearl was one in a million. This was a chance of a lifetime, not to be missed. This savvy pearl merchant knew that if he could scrape together \$10,000 he could get his hands on a pearl worth a million. He had to have it. Suddenly his attitude toward everything else in his life changed. Everything else was expendable for this and he liquidated everything to have the pearl.

Tim Keller says suppose you were dying of a disease and someone came and said, "I have some medicine that will cure you." You say, "Wonderful. This is incredible." They say, "But it's very, very expensive. You're going to have to sell your house in order to get it. You're going to have to sell your beloved collection of original recordings of southern blues .that you've spent years assembling – and this – and that – and your Bulldog memorabilia. You'll never be able to afford cable again." What would you say?

I'll tell you what you'd say. You'd say, "I used to think I couldn't live without my southern blues collection and my Bulldog memorabilia and my house, but now that medicine is so precious to me that all these other things that used to be so important to me, I don't even care that much about now. After all what good are they if I don't have this?"

When you see what the medicine can do, your attitude toward everything else changes. When you see what Jesus can do, your attitude toward everything else changes. Do you love him? Has he healed you? Is he your pearl of great price? If so, your money follows your heart.