

Walking with God in generosity

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[0 : 0 0] From Matthew chapter 6, verses 19 through 34. Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moths and vermin destroy, and where thieves break in and steal.

But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moths and vermin do not destroy, 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. If your eyes are healthy, your whole body will be full of light. But if your eyes are unhealthy, your whole body will be full of darkness.

If then the light within you is darkness, how great is that darkness! No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other.

You cannot serve both God and money. Do not worry. Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink, or about your body, what you will wear.

[1 : 1 5] Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothes? Look at the birds of the air. They do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them.

Are you not much more valuable than they? Can any one of you, by worrying, add a single hour to your life? And why do you worry about the clothes?

See how the flowers of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these.

If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, he will not much more clothe you, you of little faith.

So do not worry, saying, What shall we eat, or what shall we drink, or what shall we wear? For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them.

[2 : 1 8] But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself.

Each day has enough trouble of its own. Amen. Good. Let's go back to Matthew now. Matthew chapter 6.

And we read there just where Jesus is talking to us about where we're storing up our treasure. So thinking through these last number of weeks, some of the habits that we form in life and how that shapes us.

So today I want to think about the habit of generosity and what it means to walk with God in generosity. Because as we think about the habits of prayer, of Bible reading, of walking with Jesus as our friend, or walking with God in generosity, that's going to change us.

I've got a book, Alan Noble's book, Disruptive Witness. It's a really great book. And he's got this quote on spiritual habits. He says, the result of these habits should be a deeper sense that we live in a created world sustained by a loving God.

[3 : 34] So as we think about these habits, it's not just to have good habits for the sake of having good habits. It's so that we've got more of a sense that we're living before God's face and in his presence.

Because so often God feels absent from our world and he's not really, you know, we don't feel like he's piercing through into our own personal reality.

And so these habits disrupt that and change things. Coronavirus, God has certainly used coronavirus to disrupt the world. And it's just as Tess has said, it's changed our habits, habits of prayer, habits of thinking and behaving, realigning our lives towards what's good.

Certainly, it's changed our spending habits. And in April, the UK population saved 16 billion in their saving accounts.

The average UK household has been spending 162 pounds a week less. So some people have struggled financially and have had to borrow money to pay off bills.

[4 : 47] And if you need help with that, Cornerstone is here to help you. But others have really prospered through lockdown because they're spending less, but their income is the same. So those of us who've prospered have to think about what do we do with that money and how do we help others who struggle?

Has the pandemic made you more or less generous? Surely this is a great time to rethink money and materialism.

So I've given you that thought. I want to give you a thought experiment now. Imagine taking a table, clearing a table, and then putting on that table your pay slips, your bank accounts, your saving accounts, your share portfolios, your property title deeds, the V5s for your cars, the insurance documents for your valuables, spreading it all out on the table and say, look, God, this is all the stuff that you've given to me.

And now I'm laying it out before you. What do you want me to do with this? How can I use all of this for your mission, your kingdom, your glory?

That's what we're thinking about this morning. How can we be extravagantly generous with all the things that God's trusted to us so that that will be used for his glory?

[6 : 09] So we're storing up treasures in heaven, not on earth. So two thoughts. First thought is about looking in the money mirror. And second is about looking in the Jesus mirror.

So looking in the money mirror. Jesus is holding up money here and saying, look at what you do with money. Look at how you value money. Because that reveals your heart.

Money is a mirror to your internal life. There's two views here of life, isn't there? Two kinds of treasure. Treasure on earth, treasure in heaven. Two ways of seeing.

Seeing and looking into the light or looking into the darkness. Investing in God's kingdom or in our own kingdom. Two kinds of masters. Being mastered and owned by money or having Jesus as your master.

And that speaks to the fact that Christians have got a radically different view of life. Paul says in Romans, he says this, offer your whole life as a living sacrifice to God.

[7 : 17] Jesus says, take up your cross, deny yourself if you're going to follow me the way Levi did. So we view the whole of our lives as something that we just live for God and for his glory.

And money is a great way of finding out whether that's true for us. Money doesn't lie. Money doesn't lie. Money speaks in an undeniable way.

So here's some money. What's it saying? What's the way you think about money saying about your life? Because, you know, often we think we've given up our lives for Jesus.

Often we think we're living the Christian way. But actually we're just using Jesus to make us feel better about ourselves. And we remain just as materialistic and godless in the day-to-day patterns of life.

And we're just as self-centered as we've ever been. Our religion, our Christianity is a thin veneer. So money doesn't lie.

[8 : 29] Take a look at your bank account. Take a look at your spending priorities. Look at what you do with your money. Are you really living a life for God?

Are you giving away what God has trusted to you? Or are you accumulating and storing up treasures on earth? Because a radically different view of life means a radically different view of money.

Jesus is literally saying here, don't store up lots of stores here on earth. That's verse 19. The Greek language is don't store up lots of stores here on earth.

Don't cling to your wealth and to your money. Don't make every penny a prisoner. Instead, store up your stores in heaven, the place where God dwells.

Use what God's trusted to you to contribute to things that will last for eternity. Invest in mission. Invest in church. Invest in the gospel.

[9 : 29] The things that have eternal value. It's great to realize, isn't it, that we don't own anything. Everything we have actually belongs to God.

The stuff in your bank account, that's not your money. It's his. Your house, sorry. It's not your house. It's God's. He gave it to you. God gives us all these things on loan to see what kind of person we are, to see what we'll do.

Will we invest what he's given to us wisely for the kingdom, or will we hoard it up for our own benefit? Stewarding the gifts of God is so important.

Seeing money as something that's external to us, not as ours, part of who we are. There's a quote here from A.W. Tozer.

The world said, Abraham is rich, but the aged patriarch only smiled. He couldn't explain it to them, but he knew that he owned nothing, that his real treasures were inward and eternal.

[10 : 38] He owed nothing. I was reading a quote from a woman called Melissa Kruger this week. She's an author. She says, the biggest thing I've learned about stewardship is this. I don't look at myself as an owner of the things in my life.

We don't own anything. God has given us good things to steward. I have good gifts from God for the time being. So that's all about our attitude to money.

Does money rule us? Does it own our hearts? Or do we see it as a gift from God to be given back and used for God's kingdom and God's glory?

Look at how you're spending your money. Look at what you do with it. Secondly, though, look not just in the money mirror, but look in the Jesus mirror. Look into the mirror.

Look at who Jesus is and then say, does my life reflect his generosity? As I look on Jesus and see his generosity to me, does my life reflect that back?

[11 : 40] How do I show generosity as a Christian? I'm going to run through a list of points here. And so just pay attention. Keep up if you can. First of all, when we're saying that Christians have to be generous and give away, I'm not saying that we are anti-wealth.

This is not about how much we have or how little we have. God entrusts different amount of resources to different people. God's interest is in what we do with what he's entrusted to us.

Are we lining our own pockets, feathering our own nests? Or are we radical givers? And let's remember this. If we live in Edinburgh, none of us are poor.

We have houses to live in, running water, no food scarcity, electricity, access to good health. We are the rich of the earth. Let's be generous.

So God has blessed us. He's not against wealth per se. He's about don't be greedy. Secondly, be good stewards, obviously.

[12 : 45] You have to provide for yourself and for your family. It's not wrong to save. It is wrong to hoard. I think God wants us to live a restingly simple lives.

Our prayer in Matthew chapter 6 is for daily bread. And maybe through the pandemic, you've realized that your weekly coffee spend doesn't have to be 25 pounds. That you don't need to eat out three times a week or buy all those clothes or have all those lunches.

Maybe you're learning you can live more simply, more wisely and more generously. Thirdly, let's worship God for his goodness to us. Let's move towards God in thankfulness for his gifts.

And fourthly, that movement is a double movement. We move towards God in response to his goodness and then we move towards others. We express our gratitude to God by giving away to others what God has given to us.

So we show our gratitude to God by generosity to others. Six, how much should I give? That's always a question, isn't it?

[13 : 57] People start getting worried here. Sweat breaking out. Well, give radically. Give surprisingly. Give sacrificially. How much should you give?

Probably more than you want to. And probably more than you think you should. More than you feel comfortable with. Giving should be sacrificial. We offer ourselves as sacrifices.

It should hurt. But then at the same time, it shouldn't hurt. Because it's not yours. It's only hurts if you've really taken too tight a grip on it. It's all just a loan to you anyway.

And so you should be joyfully giving it away. Happy that you can discharge this trust that God has given to you. Here's 2 Corinthians 9. Each man should give what he's decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion.

For God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to make all grace abound to you so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work. We can be generous because as Jesus says in Matthew 6, we don't need to be anxious.

[15 : 01] God takes care of our every need. It's out of trust in him that we can live generous lives. Radically generous lives.

In the Old Testament, they gave 10% plus free will offerings. If you gave 10% of your money to God's work, make the quick calculation, what would that be?

If you gave 10% to the church, what would that be? What if he gave more? I'm not here to tell you how much to give. You know that. God says, each man decides for himself, each woman decides for herself in their own heart what to give.

And it's not a pressure cell, this, because it's not to be done reluctantly. It's to be done cheerfully. So just try to give you, as I mentioned, tithes and those kind of things, some measurements that we find in the Bible that help us to think this through.

If you are a Christian, I want to say to prioritize giving to your local church. There's so many great causes, but we believe the local church is the hope of the world.

[16 : 15] It's through the church that God does his mission in this world. The gospel is proclaimed. People are pastored. And people are helped.

So give generously and give to your local church. So think about your routines of generosity each day. What do I spend each week? What do I spend each month?

What do my standing orders and direct debits tell God about what I love and treasure? As I read the Bible, as we think of these habits of prayer, of reading the Bible, of walking with Jesus as our friend, ask God, show me in your word.

Show me as I pray. Show me as we walk together how to live a generous life with eye-popping generosity. People should be really blown away by how generous Christians are because God's been so mind-blowingly generous to us.

And it's not just about what you give to church or to good causes. It's also the personal stuff, isn't it? It's like the personal level of being so generous to your family, the people you share life with day-to-day.

[17 : 23] Colleagues, friends, neighbors, be generous. Give good gifts. Church life. Show hospitality to the people around you as well.

So there's that sort of big level of, you know, how am I giving to the church and how do I split up my income? But it's also that kind of personal level of just, am I a generous person in my daily habits in the way that I treat other people?

So think about that very carefully. I'm not here to burden you, okay? So how can we do this? The bar is high in some ways.

But I just want to say this. It's not, Christianity is never about what you do, is it? It's not about placing more burdens on your shoulders of the kind of amazing person you've got to be.

It's all about what Jesus has done for you and what he is doing in you at this time in your life.

[18 : 26] It's a way that Jesus changes your heart that changes the way that you give. The Sermon on the Mount, which is part of this passage, is part of the Sermon on the Mount, isn't it?

The Sermon on the Mount gives a radically different vision of life in the kingdom of God. But Jesus doesn't just show us a different way of living and say, get on with it. He actually gives us a different life.

He doesn't just give us a new moral code. He gives us a new moral power because he gives us himself. It's the presence of Jesus in our lives that enables us to live the way that he asks us to.

This life of generosity flows from God's generous giving of his presence of himself to us in our lives.

The Apostle Paul puts it this way, he who was rich, Jesus, living in all the glory of heaven, became poor on the cross so that through his poverty you might be made rich.

[19 : 36] Spiritual. Spiritual riches. Rich in hope. Rich in life. He died in love for you. That's your wealth. That's your treasure.

That's what frees you to be generous to others. So I think I've got one last slide. Slides. It's the Thursday thought. Am I as generous as Jesus?

So think about that this Thursday. Am I as generous as Jesus? Look at the money mirror. What does it tell me about what I treasure? Look in the Jesus mirror.

Am I as generous as Jesus? Can I see his generosity to me? And now I see his friend.