

Seeking True Wealth

May 5th, 2013

Luke 12:32-34

³²“Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom. ³³Sell your possessions, and give to the needy. Provide yourselves with moneybags that do not grow old, with a treasure in the heavens that does not fail, where no thief approaches and no moth destroys. ³⁴For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.”

I'm going to start this message at the end of the text, because the way Jesus concludes this exhortation shows why we're moving slowly through it (not including verses 32-34 with verses 22-31). Jesus comes to the end of His teaching on wealth (which has included a warning about covetousness, encouragement about not being anxious, and a command to radically sacrificial generosity) and says, "³⁴For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also." We're moving slowly through these verses because Jesus says that the way you use your money and possessions reveals what your heart truly values.

In one sense, money in itself is simply pieces of metal and pieces of paper. But in our society, this paper and metal function as currency, so we exchange it for what we value. We value nourishment and taste, so we give money for food. We value education, and so we give money for books and tuition. We value entertainment, so we give money for Netflix and ballgames and concerts. We value the ministries of the church and the spread of the gospel, and so we give money to the church and other ministries.

What you do with your money shows what you value with your heart. That's what Jesus is saying in verse 34. And what your heart values shows whether you are saved. That's a lesson we learn later in this book, in chapter 19, from Zacchaeus. Remember, he was the rich tax collector, and when Jesus visited his home his heart was changed and he stood up and said, "Half my possessions I give to the poor." When Jesus heard that, he said, "Today salvation has come to this house."

Did He mean Zacchaeus bought salvation? No, He meant salvation changed Zacchaeus radically, and the evidence was his radically different attitude toward money.

How you handle your possessions shows where your heart is. And where your heart is determines whether you are saved or not. That's why this is a big deal; that's why we're not rushing through these verses too quickly. So from these verses let's consider the command, the motivation to obey the command, and the heart of the Commander.

A Radical Command

So first, let's look at the command Jesus gives, and it's a radical one: "³³Sell your possessions, and give to the needy..." Beginning in verse 13, Jesus gives an extended teaching on how to relate to money, and this is where it's leading. He has warned about the danger of covetousness, and He has encouraged His disciples not to be anxious about the provision of their needs. How much your heart is being ruled by money (and as different as the greedy and the anxious may look from the outside, Jesus is teaching that both are allowing money to rule their hearts) will be revealed by how you respond to Jesus saying, "Sell your possessions, and give to the needy."

Who is Jesus speaking to here? Verse 22 tells us He was speaking to His disciples, and we know these weren't people of great wealth. They didn't have savings accounts or investments. They didn't have a lot of possessions. But the call on their lives as Jesus' disciples is to sell their possessions. Why? Because using your money to show love for those without the necessities of life and without the gospel (the necessity of eternal life) is so important that if you don't have any liquid assets to give, you should sell something so you can give. The assumption seems to be that these disciples lived close enough to the edge that they didn't have cash to give, so sell something in order to do it!

So I hear in these words a strong inclination towards simplicity, and away from accumulation. To be clear, that doesn't mean it's wrong to make a lot of money. I don't believe Jesus is against six or seven-digit salaries. What He's against is the American, status quo assumption that a six-digit salary should have a six-digit lifestyle. A more biblical assumption is that if you've been given abundance, it isn't for you to store it up. It isn't given to you to terminate on you. As Randy Alcorn says, "God doesn't prosper us to increase our standard of living, but to increase our standard of giving."

Now I want to be careful here so as not to establish some rule about how much we need to sell and give. As Luke keeps writing, it becomes clear that he is committed to having us not go down that road. So in chapter 18 Jesus says to the rich young ruler, "Sell everything," but in the very next chapter Zacchaeus sells half his possessions and repays those whom he has defrauded fourfold, and he's commended. And in Acts 4, Barnabas is commended for having sold a field, and laying the proceeds at the apostles' feet.

There's no simple rule, or number, or amount that we are to come up with. The key question is, what (or who) are you making that money for? Does your lifestyle demonstrate and signify a level of luxury enjoyed in thoughtless unconcern for the needs of others, or does it demonstrate and signify having enough to live on (which is almost always less than we think it is), and then using the rest for all kinds of good works that alleviate the physical and spiritual misery of others? Is it the thrill of your life to live in such a simple, sacrificial way that people can see that God is your treasure, not things? Let each person seek the Spirit's leading on this.

But seek His leading in light of the fact that Jesus has already said that the man who uses his excess money to increase his own comforts is a fool (v.20), and that the antidote to this condition is to give it away, even if you can't afford it! Sell a TV, get rid of your cable, or that

second or third car, or downsize from a venti to a tall! Cooking something at home instead of going out to Outback! Plan! Be intentional! This is a call to *do*!

A Rational Motivation

All that (and more) is implied in the words, "Sell your possessions, and give to the needy." It's a radical command, a radical attitude towards our wealth. But make sure you understand that in saying this, Jesus is not anti-treasure. In calling us to a life of simplicity and sacrifice, Jesus is not calling us to a lifestyle in which we grit our teeth to do what is right, even though it's really an awful burden. As Paul said in Acts 20, quoting Jesus, "³⁵'It is more blessed to give than to receive.' "" What Jesus is after -- what I'm after -- is your blessedness, your joy.

As radical as the command may sound, the motivation He gives is really very rational: "³³Sell your possessions, and give to the needy. Provide yourselves with moneybags that do not grow old, with a treasure in the heavens that does not fail, where no thief approaches and no moth destroys." New gadgets and new cars and bigger homes and HD flatscreens and fancy meals at the nicest restaurants and lavish vacations, all that good stuff, it feels good for a little while. But it's perishing (moth and rust destroy).

So Jesus says, sell your stuff now (which sounds crazy), so that you'll have real, unfailing, imperishable assets forever. That doesn't sound crazy, does it? In fact, it would be crazy *not* to do that, like a man offering to give you \$100,000 tomorrow (and every week for the next year) if you'll give him \$1 today, but saying no because you only have a dollar left and you have your heart set on a candy bar this afternoon!

There is a way to use your money now so that in ten billion years it is still reaping benefits for you! As Jesus said a bit later in Luke, "⁹Make friends for yourselves by means of unrighteous wealth, so that when it fails they may receive you into the eternal dwellings." And I can

picture a financial investment into the ministry of To Every Tribe, to help with their spreading of the good news to the unreached.

So you make this donation (or your weekly offering), and you go on living, and then you die. Your money and possessions are gone. It has failed you, in that it has not come with you into eternity. But then you see a nameless Mexican (or a Bosnian child who was saved through our ministry there) and he welcomes you into Paradise with hugs and you celebrate the Lamb who was slain and now reigns forever and ever. Your money has failed, yet there is your investment right in front of your eyes, prospering you for all eternity. That is an investment plan that no financial planner on earth can guarantee!

What would keep you from wanting to make that investment? Only a heart that doesn't value the worldwide expansion of the worship of the crucified and risen Christ (v.34).

A Revelation of the Commander

Now, as powerful and persuasive as that motivation is, Jesus is willing to give us even more help in becoming this kind of simple, radically sacrificial people. He knows that this is a fear-inducing message: "Fear not..." (v.32). When I say these things, there may be a fear in many of you that God's will for you might be a lifestyle very different than the one you are striving for or living in. Or you may fear that if you obey Jesus and commit to living sacrificially, that maybe your needs won't be met in the end. Jesus knows it's a fearful message.

But underneath those fears is another fear, a deeper fear. Listen to Jesus and see if you can identify what this other fear is: "³²Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom." In saying this, I believe that Jesus is trying to alleviate the fear that God is not the kind of God who really wants to be good to His children, that deep down, He doesn't want to be gracious and generous to us, that He's not truly committed to pursuing our best interests. And

if you're not absolutely convinced that this fear is ungrounded and untrue and a vicious lie, you'll never give sacrificially.

So listen to Jesus as He labors here to give us a revelation of the One who makes this radical command. Every little word here is carefully chosen to alleviate this fear and show us the true heart of God for you.

"Little flock" -- If we're God's little (weak, small, helpless, dependent) flock, then He is our Shepherd, and that means Psalm 23: ¹"The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want. ²He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters...Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life..." And Jesus Himself says He is the good shepherd, who lays down His life for the sheep. Does He do this grudgingly, or with constraint? ¹⁸"No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord," for the joy set before Him! He's an eager Protector and Provider for His sheep!

"Father" -- Not employer, or slavemaster, or even King (which He is). He's your heavenly Father, your Dad. As Jesus said in verse 30 about the necessities of life, ³⁰"For all the nations of the world seek after these things, and *your Father* knows that you need them." You may not have had an earthly dad who cared for you, but this Father knows and cares for what you need, and will work for you to make sure you have all you need (though we may define "need" differently than He does).

"Kingdom" -- The only One with the right and power to give us the Kingdom is the King, which means this Father/Shepherd has sovereign power and authority and dominion over all, and nothing or no one can thwart Him from taking care of you. The omnipotent rule and authority of the King of the universe will be engaged forever and ever on your behalf, little flock! What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man conceived, God has prepared for those who love him (1 Corinthians 2:9). This is a treasure of such value that when a man saw

it hidden in a field, he went away and in his joy sold everything he had to buy that field. If you have that, what do you have to lose?!

"Give" -- Not sell, or barter, or trade, or loan, or rent. He *gives* you this Kingdom. It is His gift to you. But we know what a costly gift it was to give. It cost the Son of God His life. On the cross, Jesus lost His Father's love, He "sold His possessions", His heavenly wealth, and made Himself poor on your behalf, to make us eternally rich, heirs of the Kingdom of God, and co-heirs with Christ! He is not stingy; He's not reluctant or begrudging to share His benefits. He gives lavishly, and abundantly (Romans 8:32).

"Good Pleasure" -- And joyfully. It pleased God, He chose gladly, to give you the Kingdom. This His delight, a deeply pleasurable thing for Him. He rejoices to do us good with all of His heart and all of His soul (Jeremiah 32:41). Can you conceive of what intensity of desire this must be?! Take all the desire for food and sex and money and fame and power and success and love and security in the hearts and souls of every human being on the earth, and put all that desire into a container. How would it compare to the desire of God to do you good "with *all* his heart and with *all* his soul"? It would compare like a dixie cup compared to the Atlantic Ocean! And this is the intensity of joy with which God delights to give you the Kingdom. It is His *good pleasure*.

Conclusion: See this God, and Give it Away!

Now when a God like this commands you, "Sell your possession and give to the needy," do we really need to fear that this is a command that is not for our highest, greatest good? Do we really need to fear that in obeying, it will deprive us of the good life? That He will in some way fail to come through and provide us with what we need?

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with moneybags that do not grow old, with a treasure in the heavens that does not fail, where no thief approaches and no moth destroys."

This is not a call to a gloomy lifestyle. God has given to you, that you might be conduits of His bounty and alleviate human need. This is about your joy. Jesus, who loves you immensely, who paid the bill once for all for your salvation and reconciliation to the Father, is trying to save you from you. He's pleading with you to leave behind a life of ease and luxury, from being swallowed up by trinkets and junk that are just a few years away from being in a landfill somewhere and invite you into a treasure that can't fail.

But it all starts with seeing, and remembering, the kind of God He is. So let's go to the Lord's table together and remember His great grace.