

Learning to be Rich toward God
 Luke 12:21
 Prepared by Patrick J. Griffiths ©

The topic is giving, but before we begin we must lay a foundation for financial giving. In the absence of this foundation, all calls to give financially to the work of Christ in the church will be met with resistance.

Theme: We will always struggle with our financial giving if we are not first seeking the kingdom of God. If our passions are singular, then financial gifting is natural.

Introduction:

We live in the land of opulence, where needs are defined by wants. We find inconvenience to be the measurement of purchase. If somehow we find deficiency, we must fill it with “things;” nothingness and vacuum demand to be filled with stuff. We find ourselves caught in a vortex of our own making. It pulls us closer to self gratification and away from God. It is this constant tension that Luke confronts in his twelfth chapter.

Luke’s Gospel:

While reading through Luke’s Gospel, I came across the narrative that is a part of the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew’s Gospel. In it Jesus speaks of “life not consisting in the abundance of one’s possessions” (v. 12:15). Such thinking meets us at a fundamental level. Most of us are impacted by what we or others possess. It shapes what we think of others and influences us to think and act certain ways. Is it not interesting how often we evaluate spirituality/maturity or prosperity by the accumulation of things?

Verse 15 tells us to “Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed.” The issue is not simply one of finances. If you are a greedy person, you are choking the life out of yourself.

ILLUSTRATION:

Think of Israel gathering their daily ration of manna. God specifically told them only to gather enough for the day, but some would gather more than was necessary for their daily bread and as a result what was gathered was lost (Exod. 16:16-21).

¹⁶ “This is what the LORD has commanded, ‘Gather of it every man as much as he should eat; you shall take an omer apiece according to the number of persons each of you has in his tent.’ ¹⁷ The sons of Israel did so, and some gathered much and some little. ¹⁸ When they measured it with an omer, **he who had gathered much had no excess, and he who had gathered little had no lack**; every man gathered as much as he should eat. ¹⁹ Moses said to them, ‘Let no man leave any of it until morning.’ ²⁰ **But they did not listen to Moses**, and some left part of it until morning, and it bred worms and became foul; and Moses was angry with them. ²¹ They gathered it morning by morning, every man as much as he should eat; but when the sun grew hot, it would melt” (Exod. 16:16-21).

Consider this same idea in what we call the Lord's Prayer,

² "And He said to them, 'When you pray, say: 'Father, hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come. ³ **Give us each day our daily bread**'" (Luke 11:2, 3).

Because we are people of sight, we fail to live as people of faith. Notice the tie in with His kingdom and our daily bread. I cannot tell you what this looks like in our culture and in our day, but somewhere in this life we have lost the simplicity of following Christ by faith.

- Luke 12:13-34:

Verse 21 sets two thoughts in opposition, "So is the man who stores up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God." The text appears to deal with us by contrast. You and I are either storing up treasures for ourselves or we are becoming rich toward God, but the two are not the same and are, in fact, in conflict to each other. Verse 21 begs the question, "How does one become rich toward God?" The connector in verse 22 explains what has just proceeded and calls us to see true riches as those connected with "seeking first the Kingdom of God." It is only as His kingdom/work become primary that we are truly rich toward God. The contrasting thought of verses 15 and 21 are restated in verse 34.

"For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also" (Luke 12:34).

How do I find where my heart is? By noting what I treasure. I will either be accumulating things on earth, or I will be seeking the kingdom of God. Whatever I possess more of possesses me. If you have set your sights on making your life comfortable at the expense of seeking first the kingdom of God, then you are a fool.

Our Lord is not teaching sloth nor is He saying you cannot possess anything. But He is teaching that those things cannot possess you.

- Luke 16:1-15:

This same thought is laid before the reader in 16:11 where "worldly wealth" and "true riches" are set in opposition.

It appears from both passages that most of our waking moments are filled with thoughts about our lives, as to what we will eat and with what we will be clothed (12:22). Apparently, to be concerned by these "things" is to be worldly (12:30). Somehow we, the children of a heavenly Father, are to be concerned with other things, namely: "Seeking His Kingdom" (v. 31). It is this singular mindset placed on God that sets His people apart from those who do not know Him (12:31 and 16:13).

"No servant can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth" (Luke 16:13).

We show this singularity of devotion by selling our possessions and giving to the poor (12:33). What we treasure is what we love and what possesses us (12:32 and 16:15). God knows your heart. He knows what you treasure.

Believe me when I say I am still trying to understand what this means to me and to my family, but I cannot simply dismiss it without the principle challenge of having a singular eye on seeking the kingdom of God. I am aware of dispensational shifts and the theology of the cross, but there is a principle that transcends all of this.

- Mark 4:13-20 and 1 Timothy 6:6-12:

When Jesus gave the story of the soils in Mark 4, He spoke of a soil where when the word of God is received it is choked off because of “the worries of the world, and the deceitfulness of riches, and the desires for other things” (Mark 4:19). This is covetousness. It is greed. The disciples of Christ see the potential danger of “things” to make the word of no consequence in their lives. This is why Paul exhorts Timothy to be on guard when it comes to the love of money in 1 Timothy 6:10, “For the love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.”

Perhaps we are an anemic church because we are a covetous church? Perhaps we have division and darkness because we are not seeking the kingdom of God first, but are consumed with our own “kingdoms.” I cannot answer for any of you. I can only answer for myself. It is my passion that the Word of God thrives in me and through me. It is my desire to seek first His kingdom. If you and I were to seek first His kingdom, then most of the struggles we have in this life would be of no consequence because we would no longer be seeking our own, but His.

- Luke 14:25-35:

In Luke 14 Jesus speaks of discipleship. Today’s church has made discipleship a sub-set of super saints within nominal Christianity, but discipleship is the normal Christian life. Discipleship is the essence of biblical Christianity. Listen carefully to the words of Luke 14:26, 27, and 33.

²⁶ “If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple. ²⁷ And whosoever doth not bear his cross, and come after me, cannot be my disciple. ³³ So likewise, whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple” (Luke 14:26, 27, 33).

We do not have any kind of agreement inside of this small fellowship as to what constitutes biblical discipleship. You would think if Matthew 28:18 makes discipleship the core of the New Testament Mission that it would be readily understandable. This does not appear to be the case. Many think discipleship is evangelism. Others think discipleship is bible study while still others think discipleship is marked by such activities as prayer, giving, church attendance, and such like. Yet discipleship is none of these things and all of these things. Biblical discipleship is simply following Christ in every area of your life. Our problem is that we have too many people professing to be Christians who do not either know Christ or are refusing to follow Christ and either way there is a significant problem.

It is the book of Acts that helps us understand this issue.

- The Book of Acts:

This same idea is present throughout the book of Acts where all believers are called disciples. The word “Christian” is found only twice in Acts (11:26; 26:28). These disciples were sacrificial in the giving of their person and of their possessions. Notice how 2 Corinthians 8 notes this principle of priority in verse 5, “and this, not as we had expected, but they first gave themselves to the Lord and to us by the will of God.”

Biblical discipleship seeks first the kingdom of God.

APPLICATION: (What is the NEXT STEP?)

I am not always sure what this means to each one of you, and I can only answer for myself, but there is a real application of this idea in the lives of each one who claims to be a Christian.

First, you are either pursuing the wealth of this world or rich toward God, but not both at the same time. No matter how we might wish to excuse our excess or see our wants as needs, there is a real difference between these two things. It is not the amount of the gift, but the motive behind the gift that determines whether or not you are rich toward God (Luke 21:2, 3).

Second, the only way to be rich toward God is to treasure Him above all else. Seeking His kingdom and the King of that kingdom is the only way to be biblically wealthy. All that you possess means nothing unless you prize Him above all that you possess.

Third, God is sought by what you give from what you have. This is true with your income, your time, and your abilities. A poor stewarding of these gifts is simply that “poor stewarding.” And this stewarding is a reflection of your desire to seek first the kingdom of God.

- You have wealth, so how are you using it?
- You have a spiritual gift, so how are you using it?
- You have priorities, so what do they reflect?

To neglect His church in the giving of your wealth, spiritual gifts, and priorities is simply wrong. To say that you are serving Him through the church universal is to significantly misunderstand the nature of His church local. If this is not a fellowship that you can get behind in your pursuit of God, then find one that you can get behind. But do not live a non-committed life.

So we are all left with a question, are we seeking first the kingdom of God and His righteousness? Is our gaze singular? It is only as we answer these questions that we can approach the topic of giving in 1 Corinthians 16 and 2 Corinthians 8 and 9.