



November 16, 2014  
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*The Revolutionary Disciple: Bounti-full*  
Matthew 6:19-24

There are so many things that I love about this Sweetheart Church. One of them is how ready you are to accept a challenge. I challenged you to join me in fasting and praying on Wednesdays during this November month of Covenant. Many of you fasted from food for the day. Some fasted from email. The Burgess family talked together about fasting. High schooler Casey decided to fast from telling jokes at other people's expense. His sixth grade brother Ryan piped up, too: "I've got three things I'm going to fast from today! 1) Fruit and vegetables, 2) school and 3) Listening to my parents!"

Well... it's a start! But at least he's in the game! How about you? Maybe you intended to work on your journal and forgot. Intended to fast on Wednesday and forgot. It's not too late! This is our last week. Take five minutes in the morning, pick up that journal and read what Jesus wants you to do as his disciple. This Wednesday we will fast and pray again. Join us. Wednesday night we will meet for our last Table and break our fast together. Come. On Saturday we begin a 24-hour Prayer Vigil. There are still a disappointing number of slots open. Don't leave it to someone else to pray. You pray! Sign up after the service.

And then next week is Covenant Sunday. We will take this card and write down what we sense God is telling us to do to be a more faithful disciples. This will be between you and the Lord, private and confidential. Then, we will present it as an act of worship. And after we have all made our covenant, we are going to party! The Gathering Place will be decorated, we will have food... and we will just hang out with our church family and celebrate the fact that hundreds of us are seeking to become better disciples of Jesus. Please, will you make next Sunday worship a priority?

We continue this morning with Jesus' description of what it means to be a revolutionary disciple. Brace yourself... this is going to get very personal!  
[Read Matthew 6:19-24]

It is a sad fact that many who claim the name of Jesus do not live like Jesus and do not care to obey him. I suspect that a large percentage in this room would like to believe they are Christians because Jesus has saved them from going to hell when they die, but do not understand or care that Jesus wants to save them from

the way they live, too. Yet when we read the Sermon on the Mount, it is clear: Jesus actually expects us to obey him.

Revolutionary disciples of Jesus keep their word and control their anger and love their enemies. They do not nurture bitterness, but forgive! They respond to persecution with kindness. They don't cultivate lust and they preserve their marriages and fight against divorce. They give and pray and fast secretly so as to please God, not for show.

Well, this morning, Jesus really meddles with our lives. He talks about money... again. Did you know that of all the topics Jesus preached on, aside from the "Kingdom of God," money was number one... more than heaven or hell or love or forgiveness? I wonder if Jesus got anonymous notes on his blue cards saying, "All you ever do is talk about money?" Well, he did talk about money a lot. Why? Because he had a big church to pay for and staff salaries to cover and ministries and missions that depended on the faithful giving of his congregation? No. He had none of those things. Jesus didn't have a budget to raise or debt to pay off. And yet, he still talked about money... a lot. Why? Because, apparently he thought that the way his disciples handle their money—or are handled by their money—is essential to their discipleship.

Is it any less true today? Billy Graham once said, "Give me five minutes with a person's checkbook and I will tell you where their heart is." So...would you be WILLING to hand Billy Graham your checkbook? And if you did, what would it say about YOUR heart? About what matters most to you? What would it say about you as a disciple of Jesus? Would your check register give ANY indication that you are a follower of Christ?

So let's see what Jesus has to say about this important matter. We don't have pledge cards to fill out. We aren't running a stewardship campaign. We are simply trying to take Jesus' teachings as they come to us, and this morning he has some very pointed things to say about money and wealth.

First he asks, "What are you investing in?" <sup>19</sup>"Don't store up for yourselves treasures on earth." Like any prudent couple, Cyndi and I save—about 20% of our income—and invest, so that one day we will be able to retire comfortably. And scripture affirms the wisdom of saving. But the emphasis of this text is not saving... it is hoarding. "Storing" is the word Jesus uses; amassing a huge pile of wealth—more than you could ever spend—that will just sit there so long that the corrosive effects of nature and time and humanity—moths, rust and thieves—eat it away. Last year I opened our safe to take out some cash. It had been awhile and the money smelled like mildew. I remember wondering how long it would be before it just rotted away.

Rather, Jesus says, "...store up for yourselves treasures in heaven." "Make investments that will benefit more than just yourself. Invest in the work of the

kingdom. Spend your money in a way that lives are touched, the needy are helped and the work of God's kingdom is advanced." And then the punchline: "For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also." Isn't it true that the things we invest in—the places we park our money—become the places dearest to our hearts?

I was watching one of these real estate shows set in Los Angeles. In one episode, a guy came in, bought a \$10,000,000 home and pushed it over with a bulldozer to build a \$30,000,000 home. This meant, he had just bought a \$10,000,000 lot. Where do you think his heart is?

If you invest in making yourself more and more wealthy, your heart will be in your balance sheet. If you invest in luxurious cars or opulent homes, your heart will be in those beautiful things. If you invest in extravagant vacations, your heart will be in your trips. But Jesus says, if you invest in the things of the kingdom, caring for the poor, supporting missionaries—and, yes, supporting your church—then your heart will be there.

One of the few disappointments of my long ministry here is that more Chapel Hill folks have not left a portion of their estate to the Lord's work. I don't get it. They work hard to leave huge legacies to their kids, and honestly, I have never seen a trust baby that wasn't damaged by too much money. Cyndi and I have tithed our estate to the Lord. It is a witness to the world that, in life and in death, our hearts were not held captive by more and more beautiful things, nicer and nicer homes, more expensive cars or nicer vacations.

This last week I celebrated another birthday. I was talking with someone about how my perspective on life has changed. I'm convinced that one of the most telling qualities of a fulfilling Christian life is contentment; being able to reach the point where you say, "You know what? I have enough! I don't need one more thing. I am content." I read a quote this week: "Discontentment makes rich people poor—while contentment makes poor people rich." You might also add, "Contentment makes rich people generous." When we learn to be content, money loses its power over us and our hearts are drawn to invest in things that make an eternal difference and not just to buy more baubles that will corrode with time... every one of which we will leave behind when we die.

Throughout the Sermon on the Mount, the heart is the heart of the matter. Jesus doesn't care what you do on the outside. That's just being a what? Hypocrite. It's not enough that you don't murder someone. If you have hatred in our heart, you are a murderer... not enough that you don't commit adultery. If you look at someone to cultivate lust, in your heart, you are an adulterer. Not enough that you give big gifts and pray big prayers and fast dramatically... if you are not performing those acts of worship to please God alone... in your heart, you are a hypocrite. The heart is the heart of the matter.

Now Jesus gives us one practical way to shape our hearts. If we want our hearts to be good and better—if we want our hearts to look more like His heart—then one way is to invest in things of the kingdom. Invest generously in things that please and serve God. When we do, Jesus says, our hearts follow our money. In fact, if you have a stingy heart, one of the best ways to retrain it is to start giving obediently.

I was taught as a child to tithe by generous parents that always tithed. I was trained to understand that the first ten percent of everything I make belongs to the Lord. To spend that money would be, to my mind, stealing from God.

Of course, non-tithers complain, "That's an Old Testament principle. Tithing is not found in the New Testament." Okay, let's pretend that's true. [It's not, by the way; but let's pretend.] Then tell me this: What should a New Testament believer give? All the Old Testament folks knew was that someday a Messiah would come. Well, he has come and we know him. Jesus saved us and gave us life. So how does your giving reflect your gratitude for what Jesus has done for you? Are you \$5 a week grateful? 1% grateful? 2% grateful? If not the tithe, what would be the number you would choose to express to the Lord your gratitude for his generosity to you?

Lots of Christians never even think about it. They are so busy storing up wealth for themselves that they give little or nothing to the work of the Kingdom. Really, though, can you imagine that a true disciple of Jesus would be less generous than Old Testament believers who could only long for his coming? You know that commercial that says, "What's in your wallet?" Well Jesus asks, "What's in your heart?" Where your treasure goes is one sure indicator of what is really in your heart.

Near the end of this passage, Jesus gets even more explicit. <sup>24</sup>"No one can serve two masters. 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 both God and Money." Actually that word, "money" is literally the Greek word is "Mammon." Mammon was the personification of wealth. In later Christian art, Mammon was portrayed as a god or even a demon. And it fits with this teaching, doesn't it? Jesus is presenting two competing deities: God and Mammon, and it is not possible to worship both of them. If you love one, Jesus says, you will hate the other. In fact, he says it twice... it is IMPOSSIBLE to love God and love Mammon at the same time.

The key word is "serve." Jesus doesn't say, "No man can have wealth." He says, "No man can serve wealth." And we really need to understand how powerful that image is. The word for serve is actually "slave." Jesus paints the picture of someone in chains, held in bondage by the Lord Mammon. We may think we own our money, but if this is the state of our heart we discover that our money owns us. It is like the relationship between an abuser and his victim. Everyone can see she is being abused. Even she knows she is being abused in this relationship, and

still she keeps returning to her abuser... for more abuse. Money is an awful, abusive god. If we serve it—if we live for it, if it becomes the source of our identity—then no matter how much we have, it is never enough. We will never, ever be satisfied. Luther said, “The more you get, the more you will want; you will always be aiming for something higher and better.”

I think the reason Jesus preached so often about money was that it was such a problem. Money was a key source of anxiety and concern. So let me ask this: is it any different for us in Gig Harbor? Is the storing up of wealth and the pursuit of things that will make us comfortable and keep up our image and distract us from our emptiness... are any of these issues for us in Gig Harbor? Could anyone here be struggling in the battle between two masters... trying to decide whom they will serve?

I wonder how many here this morning long to be a better disciple of Jesus, and yet are in bondage to Lord Mammon. So how would we know if He is our abusive Master? Well, several ways. Like Billy Graham said, look at your checkbook. How do you spend your money? Do you give faithfully, generously and first to the Lord? Or does God get your leftovers? Are you unable to tithe because you have so much credit card debt from buying things you don't need to impress people you don't like that you don't have anything left to give away? If so, Lord Mammon might have his shackles on you.

Or how about your career? Do you make choices, not based upon what God wants you to do or what is best for your family or your health but on how big your paycheck will be and how juicy the perks? If so, can you feel Lord Mammon breathing down your neck? Or how about your attitude right now... do you find you neck stiffening and your face reddening when I talk about these things? Are you offended at what Jesus is really saying here: that the stingy person cannot possibly be a true disciple of the most generous person to ever live? If you are offended by this topic, perhaps that is the sound of Lord Mammon scratching on your cell block door.

During the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> centuries, knights were required to be baptized before leaving for the Crusades. Some felt conflicted because they couldn't imagine how they could kill in battle after being baptized in the name of Jesus who taught his disciples to turn the other cheek. So they came up with a solution. When the knight was being immersed in the waters of baptism, he held his sword arm above the water. In other words, he was saying, “I will let Jesus save every part of me... except for my sword.” It seems to me that today, Christians are baptized this way: [Wallet in the air] “I will let Jesus save every part of me... except for my wallet.”

John Wesley once said, “The last part of a man to be converted is his purse.” I wonder... how many here this morning would have to admit that this is true for them, too? You love God, you are trying to serve Jesus, but you have not baptized

your wallet. You have not given Christ the lordship over your checkbook. I do not know how we can read this teaching of Jesus and not be nervous about that fact. He could not be more clear: "Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also... no man can serve God and Mammon."

### **Sermon Questions**

- REFLECT & APPLY TOGETHER: Share your thoughts. Don't teach! Listen and reflect on God's word together; grapple with what God is calling us to do and be through this passage.
- PRAY TOGETHER: Tell the Lord one thing you are thankful for, and lay one concern before the Lord.
- DIG DEEPER
  1. Jesus seems to talk a lot about money. Why do you think he did? Does it bug you? If so, what do you think the Lord might be stirring in you?
  2. Jesus said that "Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also." Honestly, what does the allocation of **your** treasure say about your heart? Do you think the opposite is true? Does our heart **follow** our treasure?