



June 3-4, 2017
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Beyond These Walls: Consecration

Matthew 19:23-30

Welcome to a momentous weekend in the life of this church; a weekend when we set a course toward the financial freedom that will allow us to give ourselves away as never before. The fact that you are here this evening/morning when you know very well what we're gonna do says so much about your love of this church. Of course, it could also say that you forgot what weekend this was! Or that you're a visitor and had no idea what you were walking into. If that's you, relax! This is family business. But you have a chance to witness a time of commitment that will change the trajectory of this church forever.

So, from the bottom of your grateful pastor's heart, I say to my Sweetheart Church, thank you for joining us on this journey we are calling "Beyond These Walls." At its heart, **this is a journey of discipleship**. We have looked at key moments in the lives of the disciples that prepared them to make history. Today, it is a moment of Consecration. To "consecrate" is to set something apart for a holy purpose. That is what we will be doing tonight/today as we make our sacrificial commitments to the Lord. And it's what the first disciples did when they left behind everything to follow Jesus.

Jesus spoke many times about the importance of being generous. His most famous teaching on money came after a rich young ruler asked to be his disciple. This young man was religious, moral, upstanding, and he had great reputation in his community. He seemed like a perfect candidate. But Jesus, sensing that he was addicted to his money, asked him to do something radical: "Sell all you have, give it to the poor, and follow me." The young man went away very sad because, we are told, he had "great possessions." As Jesus watched him leave, he spoke these words. Matthew 19:23-30:

And Jesus said to his disciples, "Truly, I say to you, only with difficulty will a rich person enter the kingdom of heaven. Again I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God." When the disciples heard this, they were greatly astonished, saying, "Who then can be saved?" But Jesus looked at them and said, "With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible."

Then Peter said in reply, "See, we have left everything and followed you. What then will we have?" Jesus said to them, "Truly, I say to you, in the new world, when the Son of Man will sit on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or lands, for my name's sake, will receive a hundredfold and will inherit eternal life. But many who are first will be last, and the last first."

The first thing to understand is that first-century Jews believed wealth to be a sign of God's favor. It was like Jewish Karma. If you were poor, it was an indication you had done something to displease God. But if you were wealthy, what else could this mean except that God was really happy with you? Can you see, then, how upsetting Jesus' words would have been? "Only with difficulty will a rich person enter the kingdom of heaven." His listeners would have been shocked, because they assumed that wealth was a *sign* of salvation. We hear that in the response of his disciples: "Who then can be saved?" Jesus turned Jewish Karma on its head.

And then, he doubled down. He repeated himself even more emphatically with a vivid illustration. "*Again I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God.*" You might have heard it taught—because I have taught it—that the "Eye of the Needle" was the name of a gate in Jerusalem that was so low, it forced camels to stoop down to get through. In other words, a camel could get through the Eye of the Needle, but only with great difficulty.

But the more I study this text, the more I believe that isn't what Jesus is saying at all. Jesus was talking about a *real* camel going through the eye of a *real* needle, which would be, of course, what? Impossible. He was saying that the wealthy can become obsessed with their money and view it as their source of security. We trust our money, our IRAs, our pension plans, more than we do God for our future. I know this is true because I find myself obsessing about such things the older I get! When we worship and trust our wealth, it makes it *impossible* for us to worship and trust God.

And let's add this quickly: do not turn and look down the pew at the person *you* consider to be the richest one in your row. These words of Jesus speak to every person in this sanctuary because, beloved, the poorest person here is wildly wealthy by the world's standards. All you need to do is walk with me through a village in India or the slums of Tijuana or Haiti from which our team just returned to remind you of our incredible prosperity. And if you'd like to prove it to yourself, write down this website: www.globalrichlist.com. Enter your income, and it will tell you where you stand relative to the rest of the population of the world. It will astound you. For instance, if you have an income of \$50,000 annually, where would you fall in relation to the rest of the world? What percentage? .31%!

There are some in this congregation who struggle to make ends meet, but most of us have a warm place to sleep, food to eat, a TV (or two) to watch, a car (or two) to drive, a cell phone (or two) to answer. If we have those things, we are RICH by the world's standards. So none of us can dodge the implications of Jesus' words: it is very difficult—even impossible—for a rich person to enter the Kingdom of Heaven.

But the good news: with God, all things are possible. Even the salvation of rich people like us. And when we manage to trust our finances to the Lord, he promises blessings for us—blessings that exceed anything we would have known if we had hoarded our wealth. Peter says, "Lord, we have given up everything to follow you." And Jesus says, "Anyone who has sacrificed to follow me—whether relationships or houses or wealth or land—will receive back a hundredfold what they gave up. And, by the way, they will also receive eternal life. There's that little perk, too!"

That's what Jesus promises. Again and again. And we *know* it's what Jesus promises. And yet, this matter of trusting the Lord with our money: it can be so hard, can't it?

Martin Luther the great reformer once said, "There are three conversions necessary to every man: the head, the heart and the purse." Of the three, for many, the third is the most difficult. During the Crusades, before a knight departed for war, he would be baptized—immersed—but with his sword arm out of the water, because he did not want to consecrate *that* part of his body. The rest of his body he would give to the Lord, but not his sword arm. Today, many baptisms look like this. (Wallet above the head.) We want to consecrate everything about us—we want Christ to claim and to clean everything—except our wallets. We'd prefer to hold on to the purse strings. We don't want Jesus to claim *that* part of us.

But in a moment of worship like this when, after prayer and conversation and listening to God, we offer a sacrifice to Him, this is the moment we do this. (Lower wallet). When we say, "Lord, baptize *this* part of me, too. Consecrate it. Use it for your sake, and I will trust you as the source of my security. *All* to Jesus I surrender, all that I have comes from you, and I offer it back to you."

One of the blessings of Beyond These Walls has been hearing your stories of sacrifice. I want you to be blessed by the stories of your pew mates. And I want to start with our widows. Our widows are leading us! One came up to me and handed me her card. She said, "This is the best I can do." I looked down and it was a commitment of \$20,000! I was speechless; I just kissed her on the cheek. Another emailed me to say she had met with her financial advisor and was donating one of her IRAs in the amount of \$30,000!

But the stories of sacrifice run the gamut. One person turned in a card without a number on it. He said he would give when the Lord provided work, but he wanted to be counted as all in! A college student told me, "I don't make much money but I'd like to pledge \$100 or 200 a year; is that okay?" What do *you* think my answer was? Then there's a young couple that postponed the remodel on their home and instead pledged \$60,000. Another couple has left everything to Chapel Hill in their will but they made a significant pledge because they want to be alive to see it put to work. And the couple that pledged our lead gift: this is the biggest gift by far they have ever made. It is an act of real prayer and sacrifice for them

Across the giving spectrum...from the smallest gift to mid-six figures, God is stirring our church family to be part of eliminating our debt and giving ourselves away as never before. We even have a visitor from Port Townsend who starting attending during Beyond These Walls. Over the weeks they visited all three services including renting a hotel one night so they could attend the 9:00 service. They are moving here, they love this vision, and want to experience everything about who we are as a church!

This is our moment; a moment of prayerful, faith-filled sacrifice when we step into our future. Beginning in 1962, when 96 charter members bought ten acres and built a huge sanctuary that seated 250 people, and through 1994 when we built a gymnasium because there was no place in our community for kids to play, and again to 1997 when we opened a sanctuary large enough to serve as the community meeting place, and then to 2005 when we dedicated a youth center and a Gathering Place large enough to host community functions (like the Gig Harbor Students of Distinction awards

which we hosted last week for the eleventh year) from our beginning, Chapel Hill has built buildings and built programs and built people to serve not only our needs, but the needs of our community.

We have *always* been about going beyond these walls. And with the sacrifice we pledge today, we will do so in ways that will shape and change our community forever. *That's* what is at stake here this weekend. Nothing less. This is a huge, sacrificial moment when we carry forward an outwardly-focused heritage that has been part of our DNA since 1962. I can hardly wait to see what the Lord does through you, my faithful, Sweetheart Church.

So, are you ready? You will find your commitment card in the bulletin. I'm going to give you a few minutes to fill it out. Then I will call you forward to place them on the altar. For the sake of clarity, let me say a few things. First, again, if you are a guest this weekend, we expect *nothing* from you! You happened to join us on a really momentous day.

Even if you have already submitted a card, would you please do so again as a public act of worship? And it will help because some of the cards we received were incomplete. Fill out both sides legibly. On the colored side, provide complete contact information. Also, please check the colored box that describes the step you are taking in your giving journey: initial, intentional, tithing or extravagant giver. For example, one man told me this week that he is using Beyond These Walls as a challenge to finally tithe—to give his full ten percent—for the first time. So he will select the third box from the bottom. That college student I mentioned is just beginning his giving journey and would check the bottom box.

Then, on the back, please indicate the best estimate of your total. Again, this is a prayerful, faith-filled estimate; it is *not* a contract. And it *is* a three-year gift. That longer time frame may be helpful for you. And this is *so* important: *this pledge is a gift over and above your regular tithe and offerings*. If all you do is transfer your present giving to Beyond These Walls, you cannibalize our ministries. So, it's above and beyond. And then, tell us how you intend to schedule your gift. This helps with our planning. Cyndi and I will make three annual gifts above and beyond our monthly tithe.

Finally, let me say this. We have said from the beginning that our number one goal is 100% participation. We hope everyone who considers Chapel Hill their church family will do something. **But I have also said** repeatedly that you should ask the Lord to tell you what he wants, and obey him. That is the most important thing. If the Lord tells you not to give anything, then it doesn't matter what I say. You must obey God.

But it could *also* be that the Lord is stirring your heart in a different direction. That he's inviting you to step out *more* sacrificially than you had planned. If you are here with your spouse, this is the opportunity to look each other in the eye one more time and ask, "Are we sure we are doing what Jesus is asking of us?" If you need to have one last conversation about this, please feel free to do so.

As you prepare to make your offering, you might want to think about it this way: if everyone in the church sacrificed at the level I am sacrificing, would we reach our goal? Not as a number, but as a proportionate sacrifice. Cyndi and I have made a commitment that answers "Yes" to that question; we invite you to join us.