

GIVE

SERMON 3

SCRIPTURE FOCUS:

LUKE 16:1-15

2 COR. 9:6-14

GAIN
SAVE
GIVE

GIVE ALL YOU CAN

INTRODUCTION

If you have ever read Charles Dickens' *A Christmas Carol*, or watched any of the movie versions of this classic tale, you are probably familiar with the character of Ebenezer Scrooge. In Scrooge, we see this iconic character whose entire focus in life is on gaining as much money as possible and holding on to every last cent. In some ways, Scrooge seems to understand the lessons from the first two weeks of this sermon series, the same lessons John Wesley gave us in his sermon over 200 years ago. Scrooge gained all the money he could and he saved all the money he could.

But, had Scrooge heard a Christian sermon on gaining money and saving money, he would have recognized that he was falling short of what scripture means when it calls us to gain all we can and save all we can. Christians must gain all they can in a way that does no harm to our bodies or souls, nor to others' bodies or souls. We are not to gain all we can by taking advantage of others or ignoring our conscience, to the point that that we lose our souls in the process. Also, when we are called to save all we can, it is not so we can be misers with our money and hoard it for ourselves in bank accounts and investments. No, as Christians, we are called to refuse to waste money on luxuries and items that serve only to impress others and instead save that money to be used for the good of others.

Had Scrooge heard these first two principles of "gain all you can" and "save all you can" without hearing the reasoning behind them, he could easily misunderstand the Biblical approach to money. However, when we come to this third and final principle, there is no mistaking its meaning. We are not just to gain all we can and save all we can, but we are to do these things so we can ultimately *give all we can*.

This is the crisis Scrooge faces. In gaining all he can and saving all he can, he is actually doing harm to his workers and their families. If Scrooge wants to save his soul, he must move beyond merely gaining and saving. He must move toward giving.

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This morning, we return to our main sermon text for this series: “The Parable of the Shrewd Manager” (Luke 16:1-13). As we read through this parable again, listen to how the shrewd manager accomplishes good as he gives away money. Again, this can be a tough parable for us to understand, because the shrewd manager is giving away someone else’s money, but the principle remains: we will either serve money or use money. The manager chooses to use money.

SCRIPTURE: Luke 16:1-15

¹ Jesus told his disciples: “There was a rich man whose manager was accused of wasting his possessions. ² So he called him in and asked him, ‘What is this I hear about you? Give an account of your management, because you cannot be manager any longer.’ ³ “The manager said to himself, ‘What shall I do now? My master is taking away my job. I’m not strong enough to dig, and I’m ashamed to beg— ⁴ I know what I’ll do so that, when I lose my job here, people will welcome me into their houses.’ ⁵ “So he called in each one of his master’s debtors. He asked the first, ‘How much do you owe my master?’ ⁶ “ ‘Nine hundred gallons of olive oil,’ he replied. “The manager told him, ‘Take your bill, sit down quickly, and make it four hundred and fifty.’ ⁷ “Then he asked the second, ‘And how much do you owe?’ “ ‘A thousand bushels of wheat,’ he replied. “He told him, ‘Take your bill and make it eight hundred.’ ⁸ “The master commended the dishonest manager because he had acted shrewdly. For the people of this world are more shrewd in dealing with their own kind than are the people of the light. ⁹ I tell you, use worldly wealth to gain friends for yourselves, so that when it is gone, you will be welcomed into eternal dwellings. ¹⁰ “Whoever can be trusted with very little can also be trusted with much, and whoever is dishonest with very little will also be dishonest with much. ¹¹ So if you have not been trustworthy in handling worldly wealth, who will trust you with true riches? ¹² And if you have not been trustworthy with someone else’s property, who will give you property of your own? ¹³ “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.” ¹⁴ The Pharisees, who loved money, heard all this and were sneering at Jesus. ¹⁵ He said to them, “You are the ones who justify yourselves in the eyes of others, but God knows your hearts. What people value highly is detestable in God’s sight.

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1. MONEY AS A POWER

Money is a power. It is not a neutral means of exchange. As previously mentioned, the NIV translation capitalizes the “M” in money because the Greek term *mammon* carries with it the understanding that it is a power. This power behind money acts like a god, and people treat money like a god. Many people experience guilt associated with their use of money. Many prioritize the gaining of money in their lives. Many feel great happiness when they possess a lot of money and feel great anxiety when they do not. Many people are willing to kill and take advantage of others to obtain more money. This is the dark side of the power of money. It seeks to control, to use, to manipulate.

Therefore, Jesus calls us to throw off this power of money in our lives. Instead of serving money, believing that accruing more of it will make us happier, we are instructed to use it. As the shrewd manager in our parable reveals, by choosing to use money, he secured a future for himself.

Jesus says we should learn to turn the tables on money, and, instead of serving it, use it for our good and the good of others. The shrewd manager used money for more than just conducting business. He used it for greater purposes, reducing the debt of others and making friends in the process.

2. GENEROSITY BREAKS THE TYRANNY OF MONEY

When we are generous, we break the tyranny of money. The dark side of money tells us to gain all we can and save all we can so we can put all our hope and confidence in money itself. What we find is, no matter how much money we earn and no matter how much we save, if we are serving the power of money, we will never be able to make enough or save enough. Hoarding money never brings security. It only feeds a desire to hoard even more.

But, if we are instead able to gain all we can and save all we can, and then give out of our abundance from what we have gained and saved, we will find freedom through *using* money, through giving money, rather than *serving* it.

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A word of warning: the call to generosity is not a call to recklessness. We should not take our entire paychecks and give them all away, believing we will open our mailboxes the next day and find even more money. We are called to gain all we can so we can provide for our needs. But, once we have provided for our needs (not our *wants*, but our *needs*), we will have some money left over to use generously. In 2 Corinthians 9:11, Paul says, **“You will be enriched in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion, and through us your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God.”**

Generosity does not come easily. The culture in which most of us have been raised believes you can never have enough. It equates being satisfied with laziness. But, as we saw last week, when we can learn to be content with what we have, we can then learn how to be generous.

Are you waiting to be generous, hoping in some magical future when you have an abundance of extra money lying around? If so, the lies of the dark side of money are deceiving you. Since we are taught to believe we can never have enough money, one of the best ways to break its tyranny is to be generous, right now, with however much or little you have.

3. GENEROSITY BUILDS THE KINGDOM

Generosity does not just break the tyranny of money; it also builds the Kingdom of God. Our church could not conduct the ministries we do without the deep generosity of time and talents that so many of you invest into the Kingdom of God. But it takes more than time and talents—it also requires the deep generosity of your *treasure* as well.

It is important to note that it is not our *money* that builds the Kingdom of God, but our *generosity*. Going back to 2 Corinthians 9:11: **“You will be enriched in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion, and through us your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God.”**

There are many things your time and talents can accomplish for the Kingdom of God. But there are some things only your generosity with money can accomplish. For example, ministries such as food pantries, homeless shelters and the local ministries within our own church

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need your time and talents to operate. Without volunteers, they could not exist. But, in a very real way, they also need you to be generous with your treasure.

Take our denomination for example. We are an international denomination, with pastors and laypeople in 162 world areas. A percentage of the money you give to this church is used to further the Kingdom of God around the world. Our local church cannot go everywhere the Gospel is needed. We cannot respond to every natural disaster. We cannot build hospitals on our own. But, because we are part of a denomination of over 30,000 churches, when we give generously of our money here, we can bring hope, healing and the Gospel to people around the world. Yes, our denomination needs you to be generous with your time and talents here in your local church, but we also need you to be generous with your finances to help the church make *Christlike disciples in the nations*.

[Spend a few moments here to talk about ministries your local church supports or operates, and explain how these ministries could not happen without financial support, in addition to volunteers.]

Friends, when you are generous with your finances to this local church, you help maintain a building for ministry. You are providing for a pastoral staff that is on call twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, for prayer, guidance, hospital visits and responding to crises. But you are also providing for a pastoral staff that spreads the good news of the Kingdom of God to our community.

CONCLUSION

Look at the world around you and you will see lives being destroyed by the love of money. Look at your own life and you might recognize stress and anxiety brought upon your household by the love of money.

This morning, I ask you these questions: Are you a generous person? Have you turned the tables on the power of money so that you no longer serve its hollow promises? Have you chosen to use money to help build the Kingdom of God here in your local neighborhood, in the surrounding communities and around the world?

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