

Series: Jesus Changes Everything
Generosity—Life with More
Sermon by Lead Pastor Paul Joslin
Matthew 6:19-21, First Timothy 6:17-19
Waterstone Community Church, Littleton, Colorado
Sunday morning, February 16, 2025

Sophie: A reading from Matthew 6:19 through 21, and First Timothy 6:17 through 19: “Do not store for yourselves treasures on Earth, where moth and vermin destroy, and where thieves break in and steal, but store for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and vermin do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal, for where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” “Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant, nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share. In this way they will lay up treasure for themselves as a firm foundation for the coming age, so that they may take hold of the life that is truly life,” the word of the Lord.

Paul: Thanks, Sophie. Last night, as I was getting ready to come up, we did the scripture reading, and then I totally missed my cue, and I forgot that I was supposed to come on stage after the scripture, so I nailed it today, but it is really bad. Yeah, thank you. We are all doing the best we can, so it is great. It is really bad, because every week it is my cue, so I should have it down by now, but that is all right. If you were here with us last week, we just had an amazing time. We were able to say goodbye to Larry Renoe and celebrate and honor him and Jan and the boys. If you were not here, I would encourage you to go back and see that weekend on the church’s website. There were a lot of beautiful moments as we heard Larry’s last message, and one of the things, any time a pastor retires or transitions, the question is, “Will we see him again?” and some of you have asked that, or “Is Larry going to preach again?” and the truth is Larry has decided that at least for a year he just wants to step away from Waterstone, so we do not know if we will see him or when we will see him. We hope that we see him, but we are leaving that in his court as he just figures out what retirement looks like and what it looks like to not be a pastor at Waterstone anymore. We are just trying to give him some of that space, so I am sure that that question will come up, and if you want to talk about that or anything, we would be happy to talk, but here is the reality of that. It is that we are going to miss Larry so much. We are going to miss his voice. We are going to miss his shepherding, and we are just so grateful for everything he has done for our church, and so again, we encourage you to go back to the Waterstone website and look at some of the ways we were able to honor him last week.

Today we are continuing our series on Jesus Changes Everything, and over the last couple of weeks as we have been in this series, I have asked a few different people in our congregation to share their stories about how Jesus has changed their lives, so we have heard from Peter. We heard from Dawn. Today we have the privilege of hearing from Avery Kohler. Is she out there? I am pointing her out right there. She is one of our awesome students, and so we captured her story on video, so I would love for you to take a look at the screen and hear a little bit about how Jesus has changed her life.

Avery: I grew up in the church, but I never really had that connection with Jesus directly, and I never really understood what He could do for us and what He has done for us. I faced a mental health problem growing up, especially around the age of 11 and 12 and those preteen years. I was in a pretty dark place, and I just had a lot of anxiety and depression that built up, so that I felt like I could not really get away from that, and it was really hard to reach out to people, and I just struggled a lot with that. Around I think the summer of 2023, my parents wanted to help my relationships grow with the people around me and God too, so they signed me up for a summer camp through Waterstone, and I went to that, but I felt really nervous and uncomfortable, because I had not really been in a faith-based community in a while, so I felt a little bit out of place, but the teachings and the community really helped me to feel at home. It felt like I was meant to be there. I started believing, and it was still hard, but I was able to put my worries at the feet of Jesus, and I got baptized in August of 2023, and it is the best decision I have ever made in my life. I obviously still get angry and depressed sometimes, but I just try to look towards the positive and find ways to maybe talk to my family to help, and to pray for me. I pray throughout the day about my worries and how God can lift me up in that. I picture almost like a ball of worries, and then Jesus is holding a box, and then I am able to take my worries and place it in the box and let Him just work it out for me. You do not need to clean yourself up for God. You do not have to get all ready and then prepare to talk to Him. He always will meet you where you are and then continue to work with you and help you and just help you to achieve that happiness and that peace in Him.

Paul: Avery, thank you so much for sharing your story. For those who followed along with Avery and her family through that journey, she got baptized at the lake, and there was just not a dry eye there. That was such a beautiful, beautiful moment, so thank you for sharing your story with us of how Jesus has changed your life. It is beautiful. My favorite line in what you said is you do not have to clean yourself up to come to Jesus, and that will preach, so thanks, Avery. Let's pray together.

Heavenly Father, God, what a deep truth that we do not have to clean ourselves up to come to you. Father, today there are probably people in this room that maybe question that, maybe wonder if that is true. There are things that they have done, things in their story that maybe they are still holding onto, still hiding. God, I pray that today this moment, whatever is said in the message, that God your Spirit would just speak to those of us who question and wonder whether or not we are fully accepted by you. May the truth of the gospel that you love us unconditionally just be the place that we worship from today, the place that we listen from today, and the place that we encounter you from today, and it is in Christ's name that we pray, amen.

We have been teaching through this series, Jesus Changes Everything, and the undercurrent of the series is we have been looking at our mission statement at Waterstone, which is to become like Jesus and live for others. Over the course of the series, I will admit that for most of it has been bent a little bit more to this idea of becoming like Jesus. We started this series, and we talked about what is our identity in Christ and what does it mean that we can be found in Christ and in the gospel. Then we spent some time looking at discipleship and being a people of presence and how we encounter God's community, which helps form us, and now today I want to take a little bit of a shift, and we are going to start this week and next week talking a little bit about this idea of what it means to live for others, because this is the reality about spiritual formation and transformation according to Jesus. It is that Jesus' mandate or his call, his

invitation to you to become more like Him, is not actually about you. It is partly about you. Jesus wants to transform and change your life, but if all we do is become better people, then we are really not any better than the self-help books or the gospel of piety, personal fulfillment. That is not what Jesus is after. Jesus is after changing our lives so that we can join Him in changing the world, and so over the next couple of weeks, I want to talk about a few ways that Jesus invites us to live for others, and today we are going to look at one that I know you are super excited about if you have been reading along in the devotional and you know where we are going. It is the practice of generosity. It is like everybody is saying, “Oh yeah, generosity, yeah, all right, we are excited. Yeah, the practice of generosity.” I want to talk about this idea. This is one of the main ways that scripture calls us to live for others. It is through the practice of generosity.

Now, as I was studying for this message and thinking about this message over the last few weeks, I realized something. I have never preached a sermon on money before, and I could say, “Larry was really in charge of the preaching calendar, and so he never trusted me with it,” or something. I have been a pastor for seventeen years. I mean, I do not think I have ever preached a sermon on money. I even tried to go back and look through my sermons. I have never preached a sermon on money, which is ironic, because if I say I want to become like Jesus and help our church to become like Jesus, Jesus talked about money a lot, like all the time. He talked about money more than anything else in his ministry except for the kingdom of God. In fact, if you add up all of the different topics and things Jesus talked about, Jesus talked about money three times more than he talked about love, which feels a little shocking, because if you say, “What is Jesus about?” most people would say “love,” and actually, He had a lot to say about money. He actually even talked about money seven times more than He talked about prayer. He talked about money more than He talked about heaven or hell or eternity. Jesus talked about money all the time, and in fact it is estimated that 50 percent of his parables had something to do with finances or money or material possessions and that 25 percent of his teaching had to do with money, so Jesus talks about money a lot.

When it comes to money and the church and talking about money and the church, we all get a little nervous, and I feel a little nervous even talking about money with you, because I have seen the way churches sometimes talk about money and or handle money. We have talked before about the “Preachers and Sneakers” Instagram account, where preachers are spending thousands of dollars on shoes that they preach in, and these shoes that I am wearing are not those. I can promise you that. We have seen the pastor that has the private jet so he can proclaim the gospel to the whole world, and it is like, I do not know, but you are just going to Malibu a lot. I do not think that counts. We have seen how the church acts, and so when it comes to the church talking about money, we are a little bit suspicious. We have this paradigm that church plus money equals really, really bad stuff, because we have seen what the church can do with money and the ways that it can misuse money, and so we have this healthy suspicion about what the church has to say about money. Let’s just be really clear and upfront. It always feels a little bit when the pastor or a preacher talks about money that there is an ulterior motive, that we have to talk about money so that we can do this next giving campaign or so that we can keep the lights on in the church. It feels like a hidden agenda, and yet Jesus talks about money way more than the church tends to talk about money, and He has some very intense things to say about money and generosity.

So, we have this suspicion mindset when it comes to money, but we also live in a culture and in a world that operates out of a scarcity mindset, a place where we always think and assume that there is not

enough to go around, that life is a zero-sum game, and so if I want to win, then I have to make sure that I get what I need, because if I do not get what I need, someone else will take it from me, and so it is like we all have this competition to see how much we can get and make sure we have enough and make sure that we take what we need. We become really good at being the winners in the game of life, and we have this idea that the world has a fixed amount of resources, and we need to get what we can. When asked, “How much is enough,” the most common answer given is, “Just a little bit more,” and it does not matter how much people have or how little they have. That is the typical answer. It is what we tend to do, draw the line of what is enough just a little bit further than we have. In fact, and this is not a political statement at all, but Donald Trump was asked one time how much would be enough, and he said, “I think probably about ten percent more.” There is always this thought that if we could have just a little bit more, we would be okay, because we are worried that there is not enough in the world, and so then what does it look like for us to live for others and practice generosity in a world of scarcity?

I will be honest with you; if we buy into this scarcity mindset that there is not enough in the world, and we have to get what we need, if we live with that mindset, then the act of generosity makes zero sense. It makes no sense if you are living the game that way, because generosity is about making sure others have what they need, but a scarcity culture says you need to make sure you have what you need, but here is the issue with that. It is that this scarcity mindset is a false narrative. It is not true, and in fact, when we go to scripture, and we look at the story of scripture, there are so many different places we see that God is not a God of scarcity. In fact, all the way back at the very beginning, God creates in Genesis one and Genesis two, and the picture we are given of his creation is that it is teeming with life. It is abundant. It is fruitful. It is overflowing with blessing and with life, and we see this attitude of God even after the fall. He interacts with his people, and so one of the classic examples of God being a God of abundance is when He comes to the people in Exodus, and they are going through the desert, and they do not have any food, and God says, “I will provide for you every single day of your journey. I will make sure that you have enough.”

There is a secondary element to what God says about that, though, because He says, “I want you to make sure that as you gather what I provide for you, this manna, this bread and meat from heaven, I want you to make sure that you do not take more than you need, and so only take enough for one day.” There is this principle at play here, God teaching his people how to interact with Him. One, God is teaching them, “I want you to trust me that I am not a God of scarcity. I am a God of abundance,” but going even to a level deeper, God says that if you take more than you need today or tomorrow, then that means your neighbor will not have enough for today. So, for the people who start to gather and hoard and save up for more than one day, God sends maggots to consume the food, and it rots, so they cannot have it, and He is trying to teach daily provision, daily dependence on God and concern for your neighbor.

You see this same principle play out in Leviticus, and I know all of you are wishing we could go back to Leviticus, like we did last year, just like, “When do we get to go back?” but in Leviticus, God comes to the people of Israel, and He says, “As you are planting,” it is an agrarian society. Everybody has fields, and they are all trying to grow food. He says, “As you plant your fields, as you plow the field and plant the seeds, and as you care for the plants, when it comes time for the harvest, do not take everything in the field. Leave the corners and the edges of the field. Do not go back through it two times to make sure you got everything. Just go through it once, and whatever is left, I want you to leave it for the immigrant

and for the widow, for the poor, for those who do not have enough,” and it is not a suggestion. God gives it as a command a law that these people who have worked in their fields, who have done the most and are trying to reap the biggest harvest, God says the harvest is not just for you. It is also for your neighbor, because God is a God of abundance, and there should be enough for everyone.

We see this play out all sorts of places in the New Testament. Jesus steps into the scene, and He does things like turn water into wine, and it is like the best wine people have ever had. He did not have to go that far, but He is a God of abundance. He takes five fish and two loaves of bread, and He turns that, this little lunch, into enough food to feed five thousand. We see Jesus when He tells the disciples to cast their nets into the water. They do not just catch some fish. Their nets are breaking with fish. Jesus is a person and a God of abundance. This narrative that there is not enough in the world, it seems like again and again and again, God is trying to show that He has a different narrative at play, that there is enough, and it goes beyond Jesus, because when He establishes his church, we are told in Acts chapter two that everyone in the church shared everything they had among them. Who is up for communal living? Does anyone want to sign up right now? Like, okay, wow, we got some whistling. All right. Great. I’m sure some people will find you after church, and they are with you and want to do that, right?

We operate like, “It is my stuff. I want to hold on to it” and sharing everything with anyone, like you just let someone come and borrow your truck whenever they ask? Like, what does that look like? We do not even have a paradigm for that, but it was a belief that they believed in a God of abundance, not of scarcity, and the God of abundance is a giving God. Even when it talks about the way that we receive grace, it uses language again and again and again of God being a generous God, who gives abundantly of his grace, so we believe in a generous God. So, if we believe that God is generous, and we believe God has called us to reflect his character and be generous to others, why is it so hard to escape the scarcity mindset? Why is it so hard to get to a place where we want to be generous too? Why do we struggle so much with this idea of generosity?

I have personally struggled with this idea. I believe what Jesus says in Acts 20:35, where He says, “It is more blessed to give than to receive.” I know that that is true, but I don’t live like I believe it, because when it often comes down to it, to be honest with you, most days I would rather make sure I have what I need than give it away, and this idea that it is more blessed to give to others than to receive what I need is something I struggle with. I feel like I got the worst of both worlds, where I’m really suspicious of how people use their money when I give it to them, and then I am also very, I have the scarcity mindset that there is not enough to go around, and I need to make sure I have what is mine. I think it is one of the reasons why Martin Luther said this: “People go through three conversions in their life. The first is the conversion of their head, what they believe, what they think, what they know about God. The second is their heart, their love for God. The third is their pocketbook, and unfortunately not all at the same time.” I think what he is getting at is something that is very true within this journey of transformation, that many of us get to a place where we believe and know God, and we have been converted in our heads. We come to a place where we love God deeply, but what he is saying is that if it does not result in a life that looks like it has been transformed by those things into a place of generosity, then we have not been converted in that area yet. I find for myself that that is the place that the conversion is often hardest for me to find in

my life, and so Jesus has a lot to say about this, and so what I would like to do with our time left is look at two passages, the one we read from Matthew 6, and the one we read from First Timothy.

Beginning in Matthew 6, verses 19 through 21, you can flip through your Bibles there, or you can follow along on the screen. You can even open up your phones if you want to do that, because there is no football anymore, so you do not have any scores to check, right? All right, so 6:19: “Do not store up for yourselves treasures on Earth, where moth and vermin destroy, and where thieves break in and steal, but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and vermin do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal.” What is Jesus saying here? He is saying that there are things that we can chase after, treasures we can accumulate in this life, and what He is saying is that in this life, those things will not last, that whether someone tries to take it from you, or it is just the natural decay of time, those things will be taken from you. They will not last, but there is a place where we can store up treasures for ourselves that will last forever, and then He finishes with this statement: “For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”

This is really important to pull from this passage. Generosity, according to Jesus, is not about money. It is about the heart. What Jesus says is where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. Jesus is not after your money. Jesus is after your heart, and what He says is one of the places that is most likely to pull your heart away from Him is your financial wealth and your earthly possessions, that those are the things that will pull at your heart, so generosity is not actually about money. It is about the heart, but there is another perspective that Jesus brings about generosity. We can see it especially in the scarcity mindset. If I give to someone else, then it is a loss to me. If I give to this organization, if I give to this church, if I give to this person who is in need, then that means I have less for myself, but Jesus seems to be saying that generosity is not a loss. It is an investment in something that lasts. Scarcity says that what if I do not have enough, and I need to make sure I get a little bit more, but generosity says that if I give to you, there is some sort of eternal impact that that has. That means that when you sponsor a Compassion child, it is not just about giving someone daily bread and food so that they can survive, and helping them get to school, although it does that, but something happens when we give to those who are in need, and we sponsor a Compassion child, that actually lasts into eternity.

I think this happens in two different ways. One is that the eternal impact happens in our hearts, because suddenly the things that we have hung onto, the things that we think we need, the things that we can't let go of, we are being transformed by this act of generosity, recognizing that we need less than we think, even when it hurts, but it also has an impact on eternity, that it makes a difference not just in this life. To be honest with you, I do not even understand fully how this works, but what Jesus seems to be saying, what scripture seems to teach is that when we are generous, it is not just an investment in the people that we are helping now, but it is an investment in eternity. I think we struggle sometimes to grasp that idea, because everything in our culture tells us to live for this moment and what we need right now.

The best illustration that helps unpack this idea I have seen, and Colton, do you mind coming up? I asked one of the students if he would be willing to be a volunteer for me. Would everybody give it up for Colton? He is one of our students. He is awesome. All right, Colton, what I need you to do is I need you to take this rope. Some of you have probably seen this before. I am totally stealing this illustration. I

have used it here before, but others have also, so Colton, you are just going to have to keep walking and just keep going. Keep going all the way to the end of the rope. Yeah, all the way. Yeah, there you go.

There you go. Yeah, and all right, Colton's off the stage now, so well done, Colton. You do not have to be in front of anyone. This is the illustration, okay? I do not even know if you can see it, but there is a little knot here on this rope okay, and the illustration goes like this. It is that this is your life. Let's say it is ninety years. It is a hundred years if you are blessed with a long life. So many of us live to accumulate and find as much as we can have in this short time span, and the rest of this rope is eternity, and the question is, "Which are we living for, and which is a better investment?" That is what Jesus is getting at with this Matthew 6 passage. It is you can store up for yourself all sorts of things, and you can have the good life, and you can have all the things that you think you need and that you want and desire, but there is an eternity waiting for you, and which is the better investment? Colton, good job. You can, do you want the rope? Do you want it? Yeah, you can just have it. Actually, I need it back. We use this for camp, so sorry. I was trying to be generous, and I was like, "No, I need that," so not living what I preach, Paul.

Randy Alcorn, he has a great question that helps us reflect on this idea when he says, he has written a lot about giving and about heaven, but he says this, "When you leave this world, will you be known as one who accumulated treasures on Earth that you could not keep, or will you be recognized as one who invested treasures in heaven that you could not lose?" That is the question before us. It is so easy to get caught up in the living for now and trying to get what I need and to make sure we have the house we want or the car we need, or the school that we want for our kids, and Jesus never says that those things are not important, but He says when they take a place in your heart as the ultimate, then it is going to get in the way of the transformation that you are looking for.

In First Timothy chapter 6, Paul is teaching, and he says this: "Command those who are rich in this present world" and all the sigh, a big sigh of relief, because "Oh, it was just for the rich people, and I am not one of them, so this does not apply to me, Paul. You do not have to say anything else. I can check out," and I was thinking about that. We have this way of talking about the rich and assuming that we are not those people. It made me think of when I was a kid, and there were certain ways that I could always tell as a kid which of my friends was rich. In my family, when we went out to eat, we only ever got water to drink, because water was free, and if I went out to eat with a friend, and their parents were like, "Hey, do you want a soda?" I was like, "Wow, you spend \$2.95 on a soda when I am with your family? Like, you guys must be so rich," right? Or like a friend invited, I am not at all trying to condemn or condone, but when my family went to movies, we would often go to the dollar movie theater. Yeah, that is, people like the dollar theater. Great, and I do not know if I will get arrested for this, but we would often go to Walmart before we went to the movie theater and buy candy, and because it was like a dollar for a bag of Skittles, and at the movie theater it was \$13.00, so it was just like a wise choice, and so we would do that, but then if I would go to a friend's movie party for their birthday, and their parents were like, "Hey, you can pick anything you want," I was like, "You guys must be zillionaires. You have so much that you can buy candy at the theater." I remember my friend Jeff. I thought his family was so, so rich. You know why? Because he lived in a two-story house, and he had a pool and a trampoline in the backyard. It was basically like a resort, and they had cable television. I was like, "Man, they might be, is his dad like a CEO of some

sort? You must be so, so wealthy,” and here is the point. It is we often draw the line about who is wealthy and who is not, based on what we do not have in comparison to others, not based on what we have.

We very rarely decide who is rich or wealthy based on the level we ourselves live on. We often draw the line just above where we exist, and it is fascinating, because I would say that the other thing that happens when we think about generosity, when we think about who is rich and who is not is we not only tend to draw the line of who is rich above us, but we also tend to live right at our means or right above our means, and so we tend to think that we do not have enough. Sometimes I wonder if we maybe flipped that, if we looked at who is rich based on what we have, and if we chose not to live at our means or above our means, if we might think that there was more available. Paul says to command those who are rich in this present world, and we can have all sorts of categorizations about who is rich and who is not. What we have to understand is that while Paul is also talking about the financially wealthy, what he is talking about more and more in this passage in First Timothy is that the wealthy are those who have received grace. It is actually not a money thing, that those who are wealthy, those who are rich, are those who have received the gospel of Jesus and experienced the grace of Jesus. They are rich, and so then it really applies to anyone who is a follower of Jesus, and he says, “Those who are rich in this present world, do not be arrogant, nor put your hope in wealth, which is so uncertain.” That is one of the things that scripture reiterates again and again and again. It is not a safe place. You are looking to find security there. It is an uncertain place. You will not find the security you are looking for. He says, “But put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our,” and what does it say? Not our needs, but our enjoyment. Again, He is a God of abundance. He could just say, “I will make sure that you have what you need,” but it goes a step further. He is providing for his people beyond even what they need. Then there is a second command: “Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share. In this way they will lay,” and he is riffing off of Jesus, “They will lay up treasures for themselves as a firm foundation,” something that is secure, something that is not uncertain, “in the age to come.” Why? “So that they may take hold of the life that is truly life.”

It seems like what Jesus is saying and what Paul is saying in this passage is that again and again and again, we think the key to the abundant life is what we can accumulate in this life, and scripture says you may find it there, but it will be an uncertain master for you, because it will not provide you with what you are looking for, but it is actually in generosity, in giving away and being kind and generous towards others that we take hold of the life that is true life. The abundant life you are looking for, the good life, as we call it, the life that Jesus offers you, is not found in accumulating more and more things. It is in giving your things away and not being tied to them, finding freedom in generosity. A scarcity mindset says, “I need just a little bit more.” A mindset of generosity says, “Can I give just a little bit more?” and there is a huge difference between those two.

Then it comes to the question, “Oh, how much do I give, or how much less?” and there are some churches that say, “It is ten percent. It is really clear in the Old Testament.” We are not one of those churches. The truth is that I think pretty much after the Old Testament, there is really not any line that says you are supposed to give this much or that much. There is direction. There is principle, but there is never a number. Even Paul, when he says here to command the rich to give, he does not say, “Make sure they give this much,” because generosity is a heart issue, not a money issue. What Jesus says in Matthew 6:24

just a few verses later than the one we looked at, He says, “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,” and He says, “You cannot serve both God and money,” and if you have heard this verse before, you know that “money” is a loose translation. A better word for that is “mammon,” and mammon is not just money. It is not talking just about your bank account. It is talking about all of your stuff, the things you have and the things that you want. It is talking about your possessions, your wealth, all of it. All of it is mammon, and what Jesus says is that the greatest competition with Jesus for your heart is your stuff.

Think about that for a moment. Jesus is saying that the greatest competitor for the throne of your heart is not your struggle with something like lust or some other sin. It is not a dysfunctional relationship. It is not even the baggage you carry with religious institutions. The number one competitor for the throne of your heart is your things, your possessions. Where we struggle is that we want and we believe that we can serve God and have whatever we want, and what Jesus says is that He is a God of abundance, and He wants to bless us. He wants to care for us, but when we try to take things from this mindset of scarcity, when we try to live for ourselves, when we try to take possession of what this world offers, it will compete with our hearts and prevent us from experiencing the life that is true life. Generosity is not a money issue. It is a heart issue, and Jesus demonstrates this again and again and again, and there is never really a set standard.

We talked a few weeks ago about the rich young ruler, and Jesus tells him to give away everything he has, and that is the only person in scripture that is told to give away everything that they have. There is a story just a few verses later that I think helps us understand when we compare these two stories that generosity is not actually about money, but it is about the heart, because in Luke 19, Jesus encounters another rich young ruler by the name of Zacchaeus. Listen to this story. It is just a few verses, and then we will close. It says, “Jesus entered Jericho and was passing through, and a man was there by the name of Zacchaeus,” and all we know about Zacchaeus was this, “He was a chief tax collector, and he was wealthy,” which means he was the top of the top of the tax collectors, so he had completely sold out. He had alienated all his people. He had ripped off, cheated, trying to get his wealth, and he had succeeded. He had become wealthy, but this man, Zacchaeus, wanted to see who Jesus was. He is curious about this rabbi that he has been hearing so much about, but he was so short he could not see over the crowd.

The image we are given there is that not only is Zaccheus wealthy, and not only is he a chief tax collector, but also is he somebody that nobody else wants anything to do with. They will not even make way for this person to come to the front of the parade so that he can see Jesus, “and so he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore tree to see Him, since Jesus was coming that way.” Notice how Jesus interacts with him: “When Jesus reached the spot where Zaccheus was in the tree, he looked up, and He said to him, ‘Zacchaeus, come down immediately, because I must stay at your house today.’”

Now we miss this, but Jesus here is not inviting Himself over to Zacchaeus’ house. It is that, but it is actually something much deeper. Jesus is inviting Zacchaeus to be generous, because Jesus did not travel alone. He at least had the twelve disciples with Him and often had a larger crowd that was following Him, so Jesus is saying, “Open up your home to me and all of my followers. We are going to eat your food. We are going to sleep in your beds. We want you to be generous to us and invite us into your house.” He is inviting Zacchaeus, this wealthy cheater, to be generous, and Zacchaeus, it is such a fascinating

response. He gets this invitation to be generous to Jesus and his followers, and so, “He came down at once.” It says he is like just jumping out of the tree, “and welcomed Jesus gladly.”

This miserly Scrooge person who has been accumulating wealth, something is changing in Jesus’ invitation to generosity, but it goes even deeper. It says, “All the people saw this, and they began to mutter, ‘He has gone to be the guest of a sinner.’” They are judging Zacchaeus, and they are judging Jesus, and I know none of us ever judge people for the wealth that they have or how they accumulated that wealth. We would never do that, but that is what they are doing to Zacchaeus, but Jesus is doing something here too. Jesus is demonstrating a generosity to Zacchaeus, because He is inviting Himself to Zacchaeus’ home at great cost to Himself, because it is his reputation that is on the line, his grace. People are questioning why Jesus would go to a person like this Zacchaeus. In verse eight it says, “but Zacchaeus stood up as they were gathered around, and he said to the Lord, ‘Look Lord, here and now I give half of my possessions.’” He did not give it all, as Jesus said to the other rich young ruler. He is just giving half, “and if I have cheated anybody,” which we know you have, it says, “then out of my possessions, I will give and pay back four times the amount that I cheated,” and listen to Jesus’ response. “Jesus said to him, ‘Today salvation has come to this house.’” Now Jesus is not saying that because you gave all your stuff away, you are being saved. This word, “salvation,” has a much deeper meaning. It is salvation for eternity, but it is also salvation for now. It is this idea of healing, of wholeness, that there was something broken in Zacchaeus around his relationship to money and around this idea of charity and generosity, and Jesus says, because of what you are doing, you are experiencing salvation. You are experiencing healing and wholeness, “because this man too is a son of Abraham, for the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.”

It is when Zacchaeus encounters the generosity of Jesus that something within him begins to change, and when he accepts the invitation to be generous himself, something begins to change even deeper. Generosity is not an invitation to just give away all of our stuff. Generosity is an invitation to freedom, because this life is going to try to chain you to your possessions. It is going to tell you that you need to live for the moment, and that that is all there is. It is going to try to tell you that there is not enough in this world, and so you need to make sure you get yours, and Jesus’ message to us is that that narrative is false, that we believe in a God of abundance and a God who says there is enough for everyone in my kingdom, and so be generous. Practice generosity.

The teachings on generosity are always a little tricky, because if it is actually a heart issue and not a money issue, then I can’t just stand up here and say you need to start giving this amount or this percentage or you need to start doing this, because it is a conversation you need to have with the Spirit in your heart about what God might be calling you to do. Are there places in your life where you are living with a scarcity mindset? Are there places in your life where you are too suspicious of what other people might do with the finances you give them? What is the Spirit calling you to do, and what does it mean for you to practice generosity? I cannot answer that for you. I could give you some tools. If you are curious, we could go get coffee, and I could say to you, “This is what some people do and how they practice,” but it begins with a conversation in your heart of where you are living for treasure now, and Jesus is calling you to live for eternity.

So, as we close today, instead of having a very practical application and then singing a response, I am going to invite you into a space where you can have a conversation with Jesus. Maddie and her team

are going to lead us in a worship. You can take whatever posture you want. If you want to sing with them, if you just want to sit in your seat, you can do whatever you want to do, but here is the invitation. It is that we believe in an abundant God, and we believe that God has invited us to become like Him and live for others through generosity. Where might God be calling you to experience that today? Let me pray for us.

Heavenly Father, as we take this moment to pause and to have a conversation with you, we just pray that your Spirit would speak if there are places in our lives where we have brokenness around this idea of generosity and money, and I pray what Jesus said, that salvation has come to this house today. I pray for salvation, for healing, for wholeness for people who are struggling. God, I pray for those of us who live in a state of fear, of worry, that that is not just something that we come by accidentally. Many of us have traumas or frustrations or things that we grew up with that told us there is not enough in this world, and so we need healing in our view of your character. God, you have invited us into the freedom of a generous life, where we can see that impact now and are promised an impact in eternity. Help us to shift perspective and shift our hearts. May your Spirit speak to us, and it is in Christ's name we pray, amen.

44:32 minutes

Edited by Tom Kenaston

Message #830