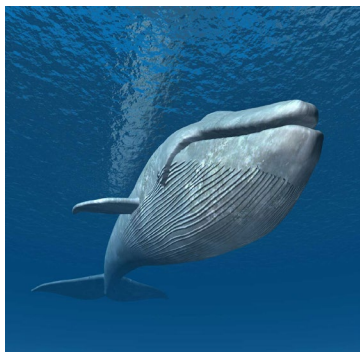


2026 10 11/ Matthew 22:15-22

Rev. Dr. Hae-Jeong Yoon

Being Held

Let me begin with a whale. I don't mean Jonah's whale. I mean the great whale we all live inside: the money system. We didn't design it. We were born into it, the way you're born into a language. It was already moving when we arrived in the world, and it carries us along through paychecks and prices, interest rates and markets that rise and fall far above our heads. Most days we don't notice it. We just feel the current.



And the whale speaks in symbols. Long before, there were coins, stamped with faces and promises. Then paper. Then numbers in a ledger, then a credit score, then a balance. They became a way of saying who counts, who is secure, who is behind, who is enough. We learned the whale's language so early that we forget it's a language at all. Thankfully, I grew up in a family that nothing lacks. Still my parents wanted me to save for the unknown future. I grew in the spirit of scarcity. My parents didn't teach me the spirit of generosity. I began to learn it from God.

Every so often, the whale shows its teeth. It causes us to fear an unknown future and fear not having enough. This is very much a human thing. However, it has skewed my perspective and decreased my enjoyment of life. Because I do love to be generous. I believe and have experienced that giving creates incredible blessings and feelings of well-being—whether that is giving of money, time, attention, love, grace and forgiveness. And I want that in my life.

In today's scripture, Jesus teaches us what it means to be bearers of the image of God. Our first scripture is from Matthew 22. Jesus is teaching in the temple, and his opponents have gathered to trap him. Beginning at verse 15: **"Then the Pharisees went and plotted how to trap him in his words. ... 'Teacher, we know that you are truthful and teach the way of God in truth, and you do not care what anyone thinks, since you don't show partiality. Tell us, then, what you think. Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar or not?' But Jesus knew their evil intent and said, 'Why are you testing me, hypocrites? Show me the coin used for the tax.' So, they brought him a denarius. He asked them, 'Whose image and inscription is this?' 'Caesar's,' they said to him. Then he said to them, 'Therefore, give back to Caesar what is Caesar's, and to God what is God's.' When they heard this, they were amazed, and they left him and went away.'**

It's a clever trap. Whatever Jesus answers, he is in a trap. And that coin was not a neutral thing. The denarius carried the face of the emperor Tiberius, with an inscription naming him *the son of the god Augustus*! For a faithful Jew, that was deeply offensive. Jesus drew a line. Caesar gets his coins, his taxes, his systems. Those are tools, and they have their place. You can use them without being owned by them. The coin belongs to Caesar. Your heart, your very self belongs to God. That's the line Jesus draws. We can use the coin. The coin cannot have us. However, until we are sanctified enough in the Spirit of God, we can be in any state of the spirit of money.

And let's speak through the movie, *It's A Wonderful Life*. The village of Bedford Falls shows us several spirits. Remember Mr. Potter, who tried to hire George away. Now watch him again. When the bank run hits, Potter shows up offering fifty cents on the dollar, ready to buy the town's panic at a discount. That is money with a grip. It holds on and it controls. It only tightens. We cannot breathe in it. Potter owns almost everything in

Bedford Falls, and he is the loneliest man in it. Then there are the neighbors at the doors of the Building and

Loan Association. That is money as fear. Nobody in that crowd is wicked. They're scared, and fear is contagious. One person pulls out their savings, and suddenly everyone feels the floor tilting. We know that spirit. And then there is George. The Building and Loan is money that flows, creating and supporting life. It's a tool in open hands. George is never rich on paper. But the money that passes through him blesses everyone it touches. Here's the honest truth: all of these spirits live in us. One day, I can be Potter, gripping. Another day, the crowd, afraid. And sometimes, I let money flow. What is the direction?

The Bible states in Genesis that God created humans in his own image. And breathed into us the Breath of God. You carry God's likeness, stamped in your very being. You don't earn the image. You bear the image of God. God is our dear parents, who says that "I will never leave you and forsake you; you are held in my loving, powerful, and resourceful hands." Is your heart with the word? Did you hold it and meditate it deeply? Do you know truly that you're held? Then, your perspective changes.



Let me take you to a kitchen table, late at night. The house is quiet. The bills are spread out in front of two tired parents. Rent, utilities, the car repair, the school trip form that needs a check. "How are we going to make this work?" Then a small sound from the hallway. A child in pajamas, who was supposed to be asleep, shuffles in holding a piece of paper. It's a crayon drawing: four stick figures holding hands under a big yellow sun. "It's us," she says. "I made it for you." She climbs into a lap,

completely at ease, with no idea what the balance is. She doesn't know. She doesn't need to. She knows she belongs there, and that is enough for her to rest.

To be a child of God is of course more than the simplicity of the illustration. It means that you fully trust God who prepares your future while you do not even know what would happen. (Deuteronomy 31:8) At the same time, it gives you rest from the whole culture of fear and burden. (Matthew 11:28) In that trusting spirit, you can be generous, and your use of money will create incredible feelings of joy.

Holding this picture, we turn to Jesus' words in Matthew 6. A similar explanation! He looks at birds and flowers, the most unanxious things on earth, and says, "Look how held they are. Aren't you worth more to your Father than they are?" His word, seeking the Kingdom of God first, means turning toward the place where we already belong. To find the place beloved of God again. It's God's arms we're already in.

We are children of God. The entire world belongs to God, and all we have belongs to God. We are here on earth as stewards of God's resources. It gives us the shift of our thought process. It invites us to change us from owners to stewards of what we have. An owner says, "This is mine, and if I lose it, I lose myself." In this spirit, there is no joy. A steward says, "This has been entrusted to me, and I'm held by the one who entrusted it." A steward still cares. A steward still budgets, pays bills, and plans.

Here is a practice I'd like us to try this week, something small and repeatable. Once this week, set aside ten quiet minutes. Pick a time and a place, maybe the kitchen table. Bring your budget, your bank statement, your bills, whatever shows you where things stand. Sit down with them, and before you add or subtract anything, say a simple prayer, something like: **"God, this is yours. Help me see it as you see it. Help me be a faithful caretaker and remind me that I'm held."**

Then look. Look honestly at what has come in and what has gone out. Look at what you've spent, saved and given. If you feel fear, give it to God. If you see something that needs to change, ask for wisdom. If you see something to be grateful for, say thank you.

It isn't a magic ritual, and it won't fix your finances in ten minutes. But it will change who is sitting at the table. You'll no longer be a lonely owner defending a fortress. You'll be a caretaker with a loving God at your side. Do it once this week and see what shifts.

Let's go back to Bedford Falls one last time. It's Christmas Eve. George has hit rock bottom. The money was missing and the bank examiner was at the door. He entered deep depression. Even he wanted to die. An angel named Clarence showed George what the town would be like without him. There were big holes in everybody's lives that he touched. Seeing that, he was changed. He wanted to live life again. He was even willing to go to jail.

When he gets to that point, he finds that the whole town has come to him. Neighbors pour through the door, many of them the same people who once crowded the Building and Loan in panic. Now they're pushing bills and coins into a laundry basket. They're holding him. His brother Harry lifts a glass and says, "To my big brother George, the richest man in town." He was surrounded by people who loved him, and he had been giving himself away for years without counting the cost.

You are held, in the lean months and the full ones, with money and without it. You are the beloved of the mighty and heavenly Father. You are loved like God loves Jesus.