

Sermon on the Amount
Matthew 6:19-24
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Today's passage is part of a section of Jesus' teaching known to us as "the Sermon on the Mount".

Riddle: We all enjoy having it, frequently we don't think we have enough, and either way, most of us don't like to talk about it.

What is it? Money!

I read about a pastor who was praying one day and he asked God: "How long is 10 million years to you?" God replied: "One second." The next day the pastor asked God: "How much is 10 million dollars to you?" God replied, "A penny." The third day the pastor prayed: "God, can I have one of your pennies?" To which God replied, "Wait a sec!"

In our economy money is necessary for the basics. Today very few of us grow all our own food, make all our own clothes, build our own homes, and so on. We are interdependent, not self-sufficient even for our daily bread. So in November we shall be thinking about gratitude and giving...about stewardship as a lifestyle to which God has called us.

Christian stewardship is not just about finances. Nope. It is about *all* we do with *all* that God has given us. That includes money. Consider this: The Bible has about 500 verses on prayer, about 500 verses on faith, and about 2000 verses on money and possessions. Of the 38 parables that Jesus told, almost half have to do with how we handle money and possessions. Money is not all that stewardship is about but stewardship includes money.

In this brief passage Jesus talks about two investment accounts, two priorities, two bosses.

Most of you are aware that my husband and I recently "downsized". Our "new" smaller home closed in July and our larger home did not close until the end of September. Briefly our savings account received an infusion of cash when the sale closed. Within a few weeks, it was re-directed to pay down the new mortgage, but in between, I received a call from the banker. Yes, the bank had noticed this significant infusion of cash and he hoped to help us re-direct it into an investment vehicle that would earn a better

return. The banker told me that it simply was not a good idea to have money in the bank—even in his bank’s savings account—as it would earn so little interest!

Jesus says we can invest one of two places: in the things of this world, or in heavenly/spiritual, i.e., the Kingdom of God. Jesus says we can invest in what is immediate and temporary, or in what is eternal and lasting.

Now if you read my article in the caller, I wrote about the actual physical impact of letting go of possessions/stuff, and how freeing that is! I admit, that at first it was hard, but it got easier as I went along. Perhaps that is true of almost anything. The point was, that divesting myself of stuff...possessions...things still useful but no longer needed by Rob and me, was freeing. (It was also necessary since we moved to a considerably smaller place.)

Mother Teresa said: *"The more we have, the less we ARE."* This speaks to the fact that the more we own, the more likely we are to be possessed by what we own!

Jesus acknowledges that all of us value something, people are born with an instinct to invest, to save, to treasure. *This desire is not bad, it is a matter of focus.*

How we answer these questions is important. Have you ever made a bad investment? Maybe you purchased a product that did not live up to all the hype or advertising? Perhaps you put some money into a particular stock at a time when it tanked or the parent company went belly-up? The stuff of this world is not a reliable investment, there is no guaranteed return. Sooner or later, moths will destroy that cashmere sweater. Rust will destroy or corrode that new car, or thieves will break in and steal that new "____"/you fill in the blank.

When the grandfather of a friend of mine died, and his wife was moved to assisted living, the family decided to ready their home for sale. However they knew that Grandpa and Grandma had lived through the depression and that Grandpa especially, was distrustful of banks. They knew that he had hiding places where he stashed cash, saving it up for a "rainy" day. So they spent several weekends going through the house. They looked under floor boards and in any nook or cranny they could think of. Eventually my friend

and his brother decided to crawl under the house. They took shovels with them and began to dig. Their efforts were rewarded. Buried under the house in coffee tins (if you remember those you are older than I am) they unearthed rolls of dollar bills.

Now moisture and mold had taken their toll on some of the bills, but according to the US Treasury, if the denomination can be determined, they are bound by law to replace it dollar for dollar. My friends dug up a grand total of \$32,000!

That's a significant sum of money, isn't it? However, it might have been worth *considerably more* had it been properly invested instead of hidden in the ground. It was poorly invested. And Grandpa couldn't take it with him!

Several years ago construction workers in Italy were laying a foundation for a building outside of the ancient city of Pompeii. They found the remains of a woman who was frozen in time, as she was most likely fleeing the eruption of Mt. Vesuvius, caught in the rain of hot volcanic ash. The woman's hands clutched jewels, which were preserved in excellent condition. She had her riches, but death had stolen it all. That is the bottom line—whatever we accumulate in terms of earthly wealth and riches, will remain behind—we can't take it with us.

People are natural investors. Perhaps you've heard that the most successful investor in the Bible was Noah: He floated stock, while everything around him went into liquidation.

By investing in God's Kingdom work here: supporting the various ministries of Calvary that teach and proclaim the saving news of God's love through Christian education, youth ministry, worship, and our mission work through POM and the food bank locally; and abroad, as we send mission teams to the Philippines, financial and prayer support for the Witherows, Village Steps and so on.

Salvation is God's free gift to us. It is our responsibility to share that with others and to care for "the least of these" who suffer because of earthly inequities.

Jesus talks about **eyesight—vision—focus**. He is really challenging us to live a healthy life, **focused on what is lasting and eternal: the light of the world, Jesus Christ and his Kingdom.**

Finally, Jesus says: "No one can serve two masters." You must choose, as must I.

Jesus didn't say: "*It's not a good idea* to serve two masters." Or. "*You shouldn't serve* two masters." Nope. He didn't say that because it is impossible. Each one of us will chose.

The word "serve" is a strong word. It means "slave".

Either we belong to God, lock, stock and barrel—or we don't.

Either we are all in, or we are all out.

Christian stewardship is often thought of as 10%. The meaning of the word "tithe", is 10% which is mentioned in the OT, so that's gotta be the best.

Some would argue that is the first step, not the last.

Christian discipleship is not even a 50-50 deal.

The truth of it is, God wants 100% of you and me.

When Jesus says we cannot serve both God and ***mammon***, he is using a word that **means more than money, more than possessions, more than whatever we might consider "gain" in this life.** D. Bruner says: "When we try to be a part-time devotee of the god of **success**, we will lose touch with the living Lord. We cannot work mainly for God and moonlight for success." ***It is either/or, not both/and.***

Jesus understands we must earn/provide a living for ourselves and our families. But there is a big difference between doing that and becoming a slave to work, to getting ahead, to "keeping up with Joneses". **We've got a problem when our net worth becomes the primary indicator of our self-worth. We were made for a relationship with the Living God, not a pay check. We were made to glorify God and enjoy God forever, not to flirt with spirituality and major in building our stock portfolio.**

I've called this message "The Sermon on the Amount"—not because I am going to address the "amount" of money you should be giving to CPC—as important as that is.

What is far more important is the amount of you/your life, you have given over to God's control.

Think about it this way....Paul wrote in Romans 8 (v. 31f) about the love God has for us...

³¹ What, then, shall we say in response to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? ³² **He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?**

God, in Christ, gave us his all—100%--Jesus was all in—even when it cost him his life on the Cross. God spared nothing—he did not withhold even 1% for himself, but he gave his all –for LOVE--of you (and for me).

So the question today in this Sermon on the Amount is this:

How much do you love God?

How might you measure the gratitude you have for this immense love that God has demonstrated for us in Christ's life/death/resurrection?

How much of yourself have you given to God?

Does God have 100% of you or just 10%? I can guarantee you that God will not be happy—and neither will you—until you surrender all--giving God 100% of your body, mind, and spirit, 100% of your time, talent, and treasure.

As a young man, Jim Elliott, went into the jungles of Ecuador to translate the Bible into the as yet unknown language of the Auca tribe with Wycliffe Bible translators. He and several of his companions were killed by the very tribe they came to "save". In his journal he wrote these words:

"A person is no fool to give up what he cannot keep, in order to gain what he cannot lose." It's not foolish to give up what you cannot keep, in order to gain what you cannot lose.

Would that it could be said of each one of us: She who did not spare one bit of herself, but gave up 100% of himself for the service of God and God's Kingdom!

Stewardship is **not primarily about finances. It is fundamentally about focus and faithfulness.**

Where is your heart? Where is your treasure?

Is your focus in the here and now? Or is your focus and mine on an eternal Kingdom?

Let's pray...