

## **The Pathway to Heaven is Paved with Generosity**

Luke 16:19-31

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August 6, 2017

I was shocked when I read that we are exposed to 4,000 to 10,000 advertisements each day, which includes brand labels, print ads, Facebook Ads, Google Ads, commercials, and billboards - anything that calls our attention to a product.

One writer, thinking those numbers were inflated, got up one morning and just started counting all the ads he was exposed to and he'd already reached 487 before he'd eaten breakfast. We are not even conscious of most of them. Only a few of them make it through our screening process. (<http://www.redcrowmarketing.com/2015/09/10/many-ads-see-one-day/>)

Even our computers know our buying history and our desire history. A day or two after we have looked at an item to buy but didn't, the computer invades our space and drops an ad on the screen to remind us that we were thinking about buying that item.

A lot of people are working very hard to get our attention because what we have to give is valuable. People want our money, time, bodies, devotion, votes, allegiance, and our talents.

If we listen to the wrong things, the wrong people or the wrong passions, we can end up getting run over by overwhelming debt, by our own worldly and selfish desires, or fall into traps because we believed the lies the world sold us.

If we are not disciplined, we will become people who are greedy, self-centered, and ungenerous, not only with our money but also with our time and our talents.

If we are in touch with God, seeking God's will, trying to place our lives and all that we have under the Lordship of the Lord, then God will show us the proper use of all that we have. The word for this is stewardship.

Out of all the other competing voices, out of all the other hands that are out there asking for our money, time, thoughts, actions, including our own wants and desires, there is God's voice.

To help determine if God's voice is getting through, I came up with this question: "Do you see your life as a gift from God to be given away or do you see the world as a treasure trove of stuff to acquire?"

If we are going through life like we run around a Monopoly board seeing how many properties we can acquire and thinking that we win if we have the most stuff at the end of this life, we really need to hear Jesus' story this morning.

Jesus told a story about "a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and lived in luxury every day." (Luke 16:19)

We are not told how the man earned his money. However he came into his money, chances are good that he listened to the common teaching of his day that his money was a sign that God was pleased with his life.

Conversely, it was believed that if God were displeased with you, God would take your riches away. So any time misfortune came to people it was seen as God's punishment.

When it came to his money and how he should use it, this man chose to spend lavish amounts on himself, evidenced by the way he dressed and the luxurious life he lived.

Since he believed God had blessed him, why shouldn't he spend his money on himself?

Being wealthy is not seen as a bad thing in the Bible. Many people in scripture, especially in the Old Testament, were wealthy: Abraham, David, and Solomon are a few. Even in this story, Jesus did not condemn the man for being wealthy.

Wealth is a relative term anyway. I don't believe I'm wealthy. But compared to the average Liberian or Peruvian or Haitian, I am an extremely wealthy person. Even compared to many people in this country, I am wealthy.

Which brings up an interesting question: "When it comes to your money and how it should be used, should you give any of it away, or should you keep it all for yourself?"

Most people give away less than 3% of their money, regardless of how much money they make.

A lot of people say, "Well, if I had more money, I'd give more away." However, I think you will notice that most of us just spend more on ourselves when we make more. Our toys just get bigger and so does our debt.

Last week a well-known professional athlete from the Atlanta Falcons had some divers look for a \$100,000 earring he lost in Lake Lanier while jet skiing. Most of us find it a little difficult to feel much pity for his loss because we see a \$100,000 earring as an unnecessary and wasteful luxury.

But we can't point fingers at this man unless we look in the mirror ourselves, because we all have our own forms of excess and waste.

When we make more, we usually spend more on ourselves. The percentage of our generosity rarely increases.

Regardless of how much we make, we often have just as little left over to give away because we don't build generosity into our budgets.

Jesus said, "Whoever can be trusted with very little can also be trusted with much, and whoever is dishonest with very little will be dishonest with much" (Luke 16:10).

If we are generous when we have a little, we will be generous when we have a lot.

That is why I am curious who you listen to when it comes to the use of your money or your time or your talents because Jesus wants us to build generosity into our lifestyle.

How important is it that we do this?

Let me show you. The rich man in Jesus' story was not generous at all. Jesus said that the beggar named Lazarus was covered with sores. He longed to eat what fell from the rich man's table. Even the dogs came and licked his sores. (Verses 20-21)

Eventually, both men died, because that's what happens to the poor and the rich. We all eventually die.

Jesus said the rich man ended up in hell while Lazarus ended up in heaven.

The rich man wanted relief from his torment but didn't get any.

Abraham, who was in heaven, reminded the rich man that he showed Lazarus no compassion from his torment on earth and he would not be shown any in the afterlife.

But the rich man pleaded that Lazarus be allowed to return to earth to warn his brothers about the terrible torment he was suffering.

But Abraham said, "They have Moses and the Prophets; let them listen to them.' 'No, father Abraham,' he said, 'but if someone from the dead goes to them, they will repent.' He said to him, 'If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead.'" (vs. 29-31)

That made me curious. What did Moses and the prophets have to say about generosity?

In Exodus 22 and 23 the Israelites were taught to help the widows, orphans, immigrants, and the poor.

Included in these laws was a system of gleaning, which would have prevented starvation and malnutrition among the marginalized.

In addition to helping the poor, the Law of Moses stated that "a tithe of everything from the land, whether grain from the soil or fruit from the trees, belongs to the Lord; it is holy to the Lord... In addition, one should tithe of the herd and flock, every tenth animal that passes under the shepherd's rod will be holy to the Lord." (Lev. 27:30; 32)

So the Law of Moses established responsibility for caring for the poor and for tithing.

If the rich man had just listened to Moses and the prophets, the parable implies that he would not have ended up in hell.

Jesus said that the rich man's brothers could have avoided the same torment by listening to Moses and the prophets. Isn't that interesting?

So, this question is very important: "Do you see your life as a gift from God to be given away or do you see the world as a treasure trove of stuff to acquire?" You might win the game of Monopoly by acquiring a lot of property, but Jesus warns us that if we are not generous with our lives, we are in danger of hell.

Generosity is a very serious matter to God.

The rich man in Jesus' parable tells us how important it is to be generous.

When he died he didn't have a bank account in heaven. He didn't have anything credited to his account. He left all his riches behind.

I can assure you that when we die, we will leave all our earthly possessions behind, too. Someone else will inherit all of them.

This in no way means you can earn your way to heaven through generosity. Heaven is an act of generosity as well. It comes as a gift from God, which we accept by faith, through Jesus. However, generosity is one way that we live our lives in devotion and obedience to God.

It is a response to God's grace in our lives.

If we are wise, we will develop a discipline of giving away some of what we have. In fact, our lives should be lived as a "living sacrifice to God."

What this does is help us let go of the greed that can so easily entangle our hearts. As we give our possessions, time, and talents away, we do it as a way of acknowledging and giving thanks to the God who made it possible for all that we have to come our way in the beginning.

We give ourselves away out of obedience to the God who has instructed us to do so. This makes it possible for others to be blessed by God through us.

There is a proverb that says, "Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."  
If we say our hearts are with God, but we are not a generous, how can it possibly be true?

Our treasure tells the true story as to where our hearts are and who and what we are listening to.

If you need some indicators, look at your bank ledger. It does not lie. Look at how you are spending your time? Look and see how you are using the gifts and talents God has given you.

When generosity is a part of who we are, whether we have an abundance or whether we are in need, we have found one of the keys to living an abundant life and a key to the kingdom of heaven.

Jesus paved the way to heaven with generosity. He gave his life for the world. As we receive his grace, as his disciples he expects us to share our lives with others.

Will you ask yourself this question one more time, “Do you see your life as a gift from God to be given away or do you see the world as a treasure trove of stuff to acquire?”

Take an inventory of your life and make a decision today to make a change where change is needed.

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