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October 14, 2018

Letting Go
Mark 10:17-31

As he was setting out on a journey, a man ran up and knelt before Jesus, and asked him, "Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" ¹⁸ Jesus said to him, "Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone. ¹⁹ You know the commandments: 'You shall not murder; You shall not commit adultery; You shall not steal; You shall not bear false witness; You shall not defraud; Honor your father and mother.'" ²⁰ He said to him, "Teacher, I have kept all these since my youth." ²¹ Jesus, looking at him, loved him and said, "You lack one thing; go, sell what you own, and give the money^[a] to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me." ²² When he heard this, he was shocked and went away grieving, for he had many possessions.

²³ Then Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, "How hard it will be for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God!" ²⁴ And the disciples were perplexed at these words. But Jesus said to them again, "Children, how hard it is^[b] to enter the kingdom of God! ²⁵ It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God." ²⁶ They were greatly astounded and said to one another,^[c] "Then who can be saved?" ²⁷ Jesus looked at them and said, "For mortals it is impossible, but not for God; for God all things are possible."

²⁸ Peter began to say to him, "Look, we have left everything and followed you."

²⁹ Jesus said, "Truly I tell you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields, for my sake and for the sake of the good news,^[d] ³⁰ who will not receive a hundredfold now in this age—houses, brothers and sisters, mothers and children, and fields, with persecutions—and in the age to come eternal life. ³¹ But many who are first will be last, and the last will be first."

Most of us don't consider ourselves rich, right?

And yet, Americans are literally the **wealthiest people** on the planet, even those who are struggling.

Did you know: America controls nearly 20 percent of the world's wealth...with less than 5 percent of the world's population?

One billion people in the world do not have access to clean water, while the average American uses four hundred to six hundred liters of water a day.

Every seven seconds, somewhere in the world a child under age five dies of hunger, while Americans throw away 14 percent of the food we purchase.

Nearly one billion people in the world live on less than one American dollar a day.

The average American teenager spends nearly \$150 a week.

Forty percent of people in the world lack basic sanitation, while forty-nine million diapers are thrown away in America every day.

1.6 billion people in the world have no electricity.

Nearly one hundred million children are denied basic education.

By far, most of the people in the world do not own a car. One third of American families own three cars.

One in seven children worldwide (158 million) have to go to work every day just to survive. ... Americans spend more annually on trash bags than nearly half of the world does on all goods.

From Rob Bell and Don Golden, *Jesus Wants to Save Christians*, 2012,

We truly are the ***wealthiest*** nation on earth,
but we are also ***in serious debt***.

The average American in 2017 owes over \$16,000 on credit cards.

Some people tend to live above their means,

But many people are just trying to get by.

The cost of living has outpaced income growth over the past 13 years.

Median household income has grown 28% since 2003,

but the cost of living has gone up 30% in that time period.

Medical costs have increased by 57%

and food and beverage prices by 36% in that same span.

Just making more money doesn't solve debt problems.

In fact, debt loads often increase as income does;

It can become a vicious cycle.

<https://www.nerdwallet.com/blog/average-credit-card-debt-household/>

So we've got ***riches***, and we've got ***money problems***.

And Jesus says that it's easier for a ***camel*** to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of heaven!!!

We are the rich!

So, what can we do?

What if we have to look at money.
And talk to God about it.

I want to give you something.

Look at the **dollar bill**.

What does it say on it?

In God We Trust—**what would it take for you to trust God** with not just this dollar I'm giving you, but **ALL** of your money?

What does that mean in your life?

How do we trust God for what we need,
And tell the **difference** between a need and a want?

We should probably start with **Jesus—who had some great ideas.**
He had a lot to say about our attitudes towards money!

Jesus knew that even if we don't "love" money,
we get pulled in by its **power**.

We have that temptation to see our **wants as needs**

And we get stressed when having to make it **stretch**.

Jesus himself was an itinerant preacher,
who relied upon the generosity of others to live.

Jesus actually talked about money **more than any other** topic
besides the kingdom of God—
almost 1 out of 10 verses in the gospels have something to do with money!

It's tempting to take **Jesus' teaching seriously** in other areas,

And ignore his words about money....

But deep down, don't we all know that money can be
a **chain** around our hearts, right?

Just like that rich young man?

And whether we have plenty, or things are tight

Money can weigh us down!

So, what if Jesus tells us how to **avoid that trap**?

What if Jesus has the answer for this problem we all face?

What if we want us to simply, let go---and **GIVE**?

What if GIVING is our ***path to freedom***
 the way ***out of temptation...***
 the way to find ***contentment***....and gratitude?
 What if that's the point of today's story?

What if GIVING is ***God's answer*** to our money troubles?
 It makes sense, our God is the greatest giver,
 And we are called to follow God.

Giving is ***as old as creation***, when God showered humanity with gifts.
 And God's people responded.
 Abraham gave a tenth of what he had to honor God.
 Moses and the Israelites were asked by God to bring the first fruits of their
 harvest to God in the tabernacle.
 In biblical times a tithe of ten percent was
 to be set aside, first thing, and from the very best,
 to support God's work and those in need.
 This idea continues today.

Jesus spoke constantly about the ***need of believers to give***.
 He said things like '*do not store up treasures on earth,*
but treasures in heaven' (Matt 6)
 '*where your treasure is, there your heart will be also*'...
 '*from those whom much has been given, much will be required*' (Luke 12:48)
 '*Be on your guard against all kinds of greed, your life does not consist of the*
abundance of possessions' (Luke 12:15).

And then there are the ***difficult stories***: of the rich man and Lazarus,
 a beggar that lived outside the palace of a rich man—
 who gave nothing more than the crumbs off his table to poor Lazarus.
 And then he was surprised to learn he ended up in hell, begging Lazarus to
 come down from heaven and help him!

And the ***rich young man*** who wants to inherit eternal life.
 Jesus says you lack one thing—
 go and sell all you have, and follow me.
 But his wealth meant too much to him, and he walked away.

What if Jesus' answer to the problems of money is to: ***GIVE***.

And what if his words are not just for the **rich**,
 not just if we have some to **spare**.
 Not once we have our finances in **order**....

Jesus said that a **poor widow's** two small coins given to the temple,
 meant more than all the rich people's offerings put together,
 because she gave what she had, a **sacrifice**, an offering.

What does it mean to us, to give what is **costly**,
 Not what's left over.
 Because God is not fundraising,
 And our giving is more than money—**it's an offering**.

This story today---some think Jesus' words are too **harsh**.
 Is he saying we all have to give everything away?
 No.
 And Jesus does not say money is evil.
 The Bible does not say money is evil.
 The problem is **trusting** in money--- instead of on God.
 The other problem is too much concern for ourselves, and not enough for
 others. The rich man is all about **himself, and his salvation**.
 No wonder Jesus said give your money to the poor.

Jesus knows, there's a pathway to freedom—**GIVE**.

When we think about our own giving,
 the truth is **our need to give is far greater**
 than the church's need to receive.
 Sure we should all be responsible to help do God's work.

But God isn't about balancing budgets,
 God wants us to **grow** in faith.
 Even if the church had millions we would still need to give.
 Our God is a giver, so we are called to give.

What does giving do?
 It shows our **gratitude**.
 It shows our **dependence** on God.

Winston Churchill once wisely said,
*We make a living by what we get. We make a life by **what we give.***
 Jesus talks about this again and again.

So--How do we get this ***giving life?***

Jesus says that it's easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of heaven,
 Wow.

But what does he say right after that?

"For mortals it is impossible, but for God all things are possible."

That's where we get the strength and power to give—from God.

God is the one who opens our hearts and wallets,

Who shows us the power and joy of giving.

We need only *approach the **throne of grace with boldness**, so we can find mercy and help in our time of need....Hebrews 4:14-16*

And when we do give—well, you know what happens.

Lives are changed, especially ours.

And if you want to see the effect of your giving, you need only walk into this church, or OCR, or the Youth Café, or Meals on Wheels...because your gifts change lives in all those places.

Look at that ***dollar bill*** again.

In God We Trust—***what would it take for us to really do this?***

What if we take this dollar—as a reminder to let go, let God be in charge,
so we can trust, and give?

Friends, hear the ***Good News of the Gospel*** for us today:

Our God is a giver,

Who calls us to give.

The path to ***freedom, joy, and peace***, whether we are rich or poor...
 is through giving.

And to that all God's people said, Amen.