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 Stewardship

A Giving Spirit
Matthew 6:19-21

Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust^[g] consume and where thieves break in and steal; ²⁰ but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust^[h] consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal. ²¹ For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

What does *treasure in heaven* mean to you?

One day I was eating with my Dad across from a funeral home in Tulsa. Right *behind a hearse was a moving van*, loading furniture, the truck was labeled “Relocation services”.

The *Egyptians* used to have their belongings buried with them. Some people still want to *take it with them*.

It’s kind of like the man who asked his wife to *bury his money with him* in his casket. So she did. She wrote him a check.

Maybe none of us want to ‘take it with us’,
 But what do we want?
 What are we *looking for*?
 What are we *worrying about*?
 What are we *holding onto*?

And are we seeking *earthly* treasures that can be destroyed,
or eternal ones that last forever?

Jesus knew our *temptation is to seek EARTHLY treasures*.

It’s why he told so many stories about money, over 60% of his parables!
 Stories like the *man who kept building bigger barns* to secure his future,
 until his life was taken from him.

Like the *rich man* last week, who literally walked away when Jesus told him to sell his stuff and follow him.

Jesus *two favorite topics were money and the kingdom of God!*
 Why? Because the two things are so *intricately connected!*
 So when Jesus talks about treasures in heaven,
 or eternal purses like in Luke,
 he's talking about *life in the kingdom of God.*

The *kingdom* of God—that's what Jesus preached—
 it's God's will and work, on earth as it is in heaven.
 It's who God is and what God is doing in our midst—right now, today.

In **Luke 12: 32-34** Jesus says:

Do not be afraid, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom. ³³ *Sell your possessions, and give alms. Make purses for yourselves that do not wear out, an unfailing treasure in heaven, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys.* ³⁴ *For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.*

In **Matthew 6:33**, Jesus sums up his words about money and worry when he says:
seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added unto you as well.

The problem with seeking the kingdom and heavenly treasures is,
We KEEP SEEKING the earthly kind of treasure.

We're almost hardwired to do so.

And I wonder if it comes from two places: **WORRY AND FEAR**

We *worry* about having enough.

And we have a lot of *fear*—in the present and the future.

This is probably why Jesus says *do not worry, and do not fear*, again and again!

So, how do we *overcome fear and worry* when it comes to money?

There's a great quote by missionary Amy Carmichael:

She said: You can give without loving, but you can't love without giving.

What if we looked at money like LOVE?

What happens when we *give love away?*

Loving *expands our heart*, right?

And the more we give love, the *more love we have!*

Doesn't make sense, but it's true, isn't it?

What if giving to God is the same?

What if our *hearts expand*?

What if the more we give, the *more blessings*--The more we have to give!

This is what *Malachi* is talking about this morning,
in his call for God's people to bring in their tithe
of what they have received.

Malachi is *not being legalistic*.

Malachi is talking about the *unique "math" of God's kingdom*,
where the *more we give, the more blessings we receive*.

This is why he says:

*Bring the full tithe into the storehouse, ..and thus put me to the test, says the Lord ..
see if I will not open the windows of heaven for you and pour down for you an
overflowing blessing.*

Does this mean that we give, just to get more?

No—it means *giving grows our faith, our hearts, and our lives*—
And we receive God's blessings!

But, what about fear and the FUTURE?

The great John Wesley had a saying.

He said, *EARN all you can. SAVE all you can. GIVE all you can.*

I love that.

Does this mean we can *SECURE our lives and our future*?

No, nothing is certain.

The man who kept building *bigger barns* was trying to secure his future—
but his life ended.

In Luke 12:16-21 Jesus says that man wanted it all for himself,
and soon his life was taken away from him.

Then Jesus says: *"This is how it will be with whoever stores up things for
themselves but is not RICH toward God."*

Rich toward God.

Heavenly Treasures.

Eternal purses.

Are you hearing a *theme*?

Seeking these things does ***NOT SECURE our future.***
 All of that ultimately depends upon God, and God alone.
 We all know, there is ***no guarantee about tomorrow.***
 If there is one thing that I hear all the time as a pastor, it's that—
Do it today. Don't wait. Tomorrow may not come.

So if ***heavenly treasures are the goal—how do we store them up?***
 How can we be ***rich toward God?***

What if the answer is ***INVESTING?***
 Investing ***in the KINGDOM*** of God?
 What would that look like to you?

Isn't there a way to invest in the lives of ***people?*** And the ***church?***
 And ***God's work*** in the world?

Think of the ***little hearts*** you filled out last week.
 You shared so many good ***reasons*** for giving to God—
 to show care, love, grace, faith, mercy,
 help for those in need, supporting the work of the church,
 to bless others.
 There are a ***million reasons to give to God***, aren't there?
 But all of them start with that one thing: ***GIVING.***

Giving is the thing that changes our lives, perhaps MORE than any other action.
 It makes sense.
 Because God is the greatest giver, and has been giving to us since creation.
 So why wouldn't we be called to give as well?

I once heard something that forever ***changed my attitude about life and death.***
 It's about what we see on a tombstone.
 You may have heard of it too.
 It's about ***the DASH***—you know, ***between the date of birth and the date of death?***
 We all have a dash there—the question is,
what was the meaning of the dash?

I have never heard someone memorialized for being miserly,
 or stingy with what they have, have you?
 Plenty of people are that way, but it's ***not a meaningful dash, is it?***
 A meaningful dash is ***a life of GIVING.***

Think about that with people you know—isn't that true?

My ***Dad*** was a university president who believed in the power of education, and the value of investing in people.

I was amazed at his memorial to hear all the people saying that ***he was like a Dad*** to them, that he had mentored them, encouraged them, and supported them.

I was inspired at how many people he helped ***go to college***, and get through college, not just emotionally, but financially.

He changed lives.

I knew he was the kind of guy who would ***pick up the tab*** for complete strangers in a restaurant, especially service members.

I knew he set up college accounts for the grandkids.

I didn't know how many people he helped to get an education, ***likely changing their lives forever.***

Can't each one of us change lives?

Can't we ***invest in God's kingdom?***

Of course we can!

We can ***give to God's work—regardless of what we have.***

On a fixed income? That's ok.

Most people are.

But no matter what we have, we can give.

We can ***invest in eternal treasures.***

Think about it this way---

What is the thing in ***this church that has CHANGED YOUR LIFE?***

Is it Worship? Music? Education?

Pastoral care?

This sacred worship space?

Mission opportunities?

Community outreach?

We can invest in ALL these things---

because we have the opportunity to give to the body of Christ, and Christ's work in the world.

When we give, we are ***building heavenly treasures***, and ***investing in God's kingdom!***

Think about *the 75 families* that are fed each month at the Matawan food pantry, and all that will receive Thanksgiving baskets on November 20th? That's a treasure in heaven!

What about the *19 youth, the 31 Sunday school students* we have? A treasure in heaven!

What about the *space and utilities for 10 Addiction support groups, the Spotlight Players, the Arcadian Chorale, girl scout troops, and Deeper Life Bible church*, who all use our building--- every single day and night? Another eternal treasure!

What about the *MISSIONS of this church*—Family Promise helping the homeless, the CROP walk for hunger, the Interfaith and Justice programs, the Bounty Sunday for all of us to bring food? Those missions change lives! That's a purse that won't ever wear out!

What about *June* in the office, *Ron* in the building, *Graham* in the Music department....aren't they treasures?

What about the *FELLOWSHIP events* that we enjoy, the *outreach and community gatherings* we host? Aren't those eternal treasures?

And what about the *dynamic MUSIC of this church*, the 4 bell choirs, the 2 youth drama groups, 2 choirs, 4 bands, traditional and Pathways services? Aren't these treasures in heaven?

What about the *technology and outreach ONLINE and in worship*? Another treasure in heaven, right?

You know most Christians give about 2% of their income, and 60 out of 100 families or individuals in this church pledge to FPC. Those pledges total about half of our budget.

So, just imagine what we could do if we committed to giving more, and if more of us could pledge and support these eternal treasures—these things that literally *change lives*,

our own and people all around us,
inside and outside this church!

And NOW is the time.

Because none of us know the future.

Now is the time to ***give and share and bless*** others.

If giving is truly the path to FREEDOM from all money troubles,
like we talked about last week,
then investing in God's kingdom is the path to ***life, peace, and joy!***

And did you notice what Jesus says about the ***treasures in heaven?***
He says ***where your treasure is, there your HEART will be also.***

Some people say the opposite--
dedicate your heart and the money will follow.
But Jesus put it the other way around:

"Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also."

In other words, if your treasure is dedicated to God,
your heart will be dedicated as well.

Isn't this how we learn and change as human beings?
We learn through actions.
Then our thoughts and feelings follow.
It takes action to create new habits, and change our lives.

If we want our hearts to be in God's kingdom, we give to the kingdom.
Don't feel like giving?
Don't feel you have anything to give?
Give anyway, and your heart will follow.

Here's what Pastor Mark Sargent wrote in Leadership Today:
*I've heard lots of folks in my churches through the years say to me, "Preacher, if we just get people's hearts right, then the money will come."
No, that's not it at all. ...
Jesus says that you get people's wallets right and then the hearts will follow.
Where do you want your heart to be? Put your money there.*

*And if we wish to be followers of Jesus Christ, ...
 then we **live more simply with less stuff and put more ... of our stuff into the hands**
 of those who don't have the stuff they need.
 It's not a hard concept to understand. **It is a hard concept ... to practice.**
 But it is the Gospel. It is **good news** (Leadership Today, Nov 2008)*

The way to give, and give generously,
 The way to seek treasures in heaven, and be part of the kingdom, **is to just GIVE.**
 And we can all give—of time, talent, and treasure.
 As we **give, our hearts expand, and our faith grows.**

That's what we mean by **A Giving Spirit**—
 Giving is the key to **growing our faith,**
 and **growing the kingdom** of God.

Giving means **life.**
 Giving means **joy.**

Stewardship is **putting our wallets in the right place, and our hearts will follow.**
 It's about **giving our first and best** to God,
 knowing that **our faith will grow,**
 and God's blessings will astound us.

Friends, hear the **Good News** for you today:
 We have a **choice** ---to store up **earthly treasures, or heavenly ones.**
 The path to life is found when we invest in the kingdom of God,
 and store up treasures in heaven.
 For **where our treasure is, there our heart will be also.**
 And all God's people can say together, Amen.