

“TREASURE (#3): GIVING YOUR TREASURE BACK TO GOD”

(Matthew 6:1-6)

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--I--

1. Read CEB Text: Matthew 6:1-6 and Pray.
2. Sometimes in life we get the chance to be part of something bigger than ourselves.

A--Our name might not be mentioned, and we may not hoist the trophy on the stage. But as the confetti falls, *we'll* know that we played a role in making it happen. It won't matter that we don't get the glory; the glory will be in knowing that we were *part* of it.

B--Now, that's happened to me several times, but one was at a church where I once served.

1--Several million dollars were being raised to build a new facility to reach new people, and while my family's contribution was significant to *us*, it wasn't really very big compared with the *total* amount raised.

2--Nevertheless, we knew we were *part* of it, and that felt good! Our small gift was playing a role in creating a tool that *God* would use to bring people to Christ many years after we were dead and gone -- and *that* was powerful! <sup>1</sup>

C--Well, today we're continuing our stewardship series "TREASURE," <sup>2</sup> in which we've been taking inventory of *where* we spend our time, energy, and money *so that* we can invest them in the work of God.

D--And today, I want us to talk about *the value and importance of giving our treasure back to God*, and how -- like it did for my family and I -- *giving* enables US to be part of something *bigger than OURSELVES*. <sup>3</sup>

--II--

3. Now, at first glance, today's scripture from Matthew 6 may seem like a rather odd passage to use to accomplish this.

A--After all... far from *encouraging* public religious practices like prayer, fasting, and giving, today's verses seem to be actively *discouraging* such things.

1--How does Jesus put it? “*Be careful that you don't practice your religion in front of people.... Whenever you give, don't blow your trumpet... in the synagogues and in the streets, [and]... don't let your left hand know what your right hand is doing.... [and] When you pray, don't... pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners.*”

2--It all sounds like a very clear indictment against religious practices, doesn't it?

3--And if we interpreted it this way, it might suggest -- for example -- that in church, we shouldn't pass offering plates, or ask annually for financial stewardship commitments, or even pray a Pastoral Prayer or The Lord's Prayer!

4--But are these kinds of things *really* what Jesus is warning us about here?

B--Look again at today's verses:

1--In Verse 1, Jesus *doesn't* say "*Don't practice your religion in front of people*" but "*Be careful that you don't practice your religion in front of people [in order] to draw their attention.*"

2--Likewise, Verses 2-3 do *NOT* say "*Don't give...*", but "*Whenever you give...."*

3--And in Verse 5, Jesus doesn't say "*Don't pray... standing in the synagogues...*" but "*When you pray, don't be like hypocrites, [who] love to praying standing... so that people will see them.*"

C--In other words, Jesus' cautions here are *not* a blanket condemnation of *all* religious practices, but only a warning against those practiced with the *wrong motivation*. <sup>4</sup>

1--He's warning that when we're trying to do good, don't call attention to it or make a *performance* out of it. <sup>5</sup>

2--Instead, our practice of things like prayer, fasting, and giving should lead us and others to focus on *GOD*, rather than on *ourselves*. <sup>6</sup>

4. So, Jesus is again giving us these words of warning *because he cares about our hearts*.

A--He knows that if we start thinking it's all about us -- seeking credit for the good we do; making our actions into a *performance* -- then our hearts will suffer because we'll be missing out on the "*reward*" that Jesus keeps talking in these verses.

B--And what is that "*reward*"? Well, that "*reward*" we get from investing ourselves and our treasure in God's work is simply ***to BE part of that work!***

1--When we do good things for their *own* sake (rather than to gain *attention*), then WE don't get the credit -- GOD does!

2--And that means that when WE pray, or fast, or give to God's work through His church, then being part of that work is *far better* than having our name in lights

3--You see, when we're part of *God's* work, we're part of something *bigger than ourselves*, and (as we've said earlier) *THAT*, in itself, is a unique reward, because it's *much better* than anything WE could achieve on *our own*. <sup>7</sup>

## --III--

5. So, if we want to receive God's "reward" for us -- to experience life more fully, and have a deeper and more meaningful relationship with Him -- then we need to respond by seeking to participate in what God is doing in our world.

A--And we do that by choosing to be a part of (e.g., *investing our treasure in*) GOD'S work through His church by *Praying* and *Giving*, and doing so in such a way that gives *glory to God*, and not to *us!*<sup>8</sup>

1--Author Jacob Armstrong wrote, "*As we examine our treasure, we will find that a relationship with God leads us to give things away; and in giving them away, we find more than any god or possession could ever promise.*"<sup>9</sup>

2--Another author put it this way, "*We make a living by what we get. We make a life by what we give.*"

B--So, are you just living? Or have you discovered true "life" through the power of Prayer and Giving?<sup>10</sup>

C--You see, as we "***Give Our Treasure Back to God***" (our time, energy, and money), we'll find ourselves standing in the midst of God's "confetti," finding joy and meaning in the knowledge that we played a part in something much greater than ourselves!

6. [PRAYER: "*God, we desire not only to receive but to give. Teach us in our time together how to give as you give. We know this will mean sacrifice on our part, but we are willing, because we know that it brings along with it the joy and reward of participation in your work that is greater than any one of us! Help us to be faithful and generous to and with you, just as you have been faithful and generous to and with us. In Jesus' name. Amen.*"]

**ENDNOTES:**

<sup>1</sup> God could have done that work of reaching new people with the gospel *without me and my family*, and *without* our financial gifts through our church. But the amazing thing is that He choose NOT to do so, and wanted to *include us* in His work. So, when we withhold ourselves and our treasures from God, we're missing out on His blessings by keeping us from seeing and experiencing the beautiful things that God's people are doing in our community and world. Jacob Armstrong once wrote, "*The purpose of giving and praying -- and really of life itself -- should not be getting personal recognition but giving glory to God. The things we do and say are to show others who God is*" [Jacob Armstrong, Treasure: A Four Week Study on Faith and Money (Daily Readings) (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2014), p. 75].

<sup>2</sup> This series is based on the "**Treasure**" stewardship program by Jacob Armstrong (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2014), and many (if not most) of the concepts and ideas in my series of sermons come from the books and other resources in and of this program.

<sup>3</sup> "*The great things that happen in this life will ultimately not be accomplished because of us. God is the one who does great things. But we get to be a part! We stand in the confetti and witness the beautiful things that only God can do. God gets the place on the stage. God gets the credit. God gets the glory. That is as it should be. Yet, what a wonderful thing that God lets us be included*" [Jacob Armstrong, Treasure: A Four Week Study on Faith and Money (Daily Readings) (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2014), p. 75].

<sup>4</sup> Usually we tell people to be careful if we think there's a good chance that they might get hurt. If I tell my children to be careful, it's usually because it appears the thing I'm warning against will happen soon. So, when Jesus says "*be careful*" in Verse 1 of today's scripture, he's giving this caution because he knows that what he's about to talk about is something that can cause harm to us if we don't pay attention and heed it!

<sup>5</sup> "*Our actions might be a good show, but God won't be cheering*" [Jacob Armstrong, Treasure: A Four Week Study on Faith and Money (Sermon Outline for Sermon #3 -- Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2014)].

<sup>6</sup> Today's scripture passage starts by talking primarily about giving, money and treasure. But then in Verses 5-6, Jesus makes an abrupt change and starts talking about prayer. Why? Is Jesus changing the subject? No. He's actually LINKING giving to the poor and spending time with God. He's saying that if we truly want to be generous givers and experience life more fully, we have to be people of prayer. We will never give in extravagant and sacrificial ways if we are not abiding with God. He's saying that we need secret places where God can speak to our hearts. No one gives in amazing ways just because there is a great need; extravagant, sacrificial givers do so because their hearts have been changed by spending time with God. Jesus here is acknowledging that prayer is the most effective when we are quietly drawn into God's presence, not when we are getting attention in public. Quiet, humble prayer leads us to give everything we have. That's why Jesus links prayer and giving. The closer we come to God, the less value earthly treasure seems to hold.

<sup>7</sup> When we seek recognition for doing God's work, we might get a pat on the back, but God is forgotten, and we miss out on the amazing reward of being able to participate in His work -- in something that only *He* can do!

<sup>8</sup> "*Our hope to be included in the things of God should affect the way we give and pray and live. Whatever we do, it should be done for God's glory*" [Jacob Armstrong, Treasure: A Four Week Study on Faith and Money (Daily Readings (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2014), p. 76].

<sup>9</sup> Jacob Armstrong, Treasure: A Four Week Study on Faith and Money (Daily Readings (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2014), p. 54. In that same vein, in one of his sermons, the founder of Methodism John Wesley wrote that his final of three rules for "*The Use of Money*" is to "*Give all you can*" (after "*Earn all you can*" and "*Save all you can*"). Later in his book, Armstrong says that "*Enough... is what we really need. Not more, not a lot, but enough.... The way to find enough is not in storing up things for ourselves, but in giving God first to demonstrate our trust and confidence. When we give to God, we are reminded that God is our source, the one who truly takes care of us. When we hold back, we put the burden and pressure firmly on our own shoulders, [which] leads to anxiety and unrest*" [Jacob Armstrong, Treasure: A Four Week Study on Faith and Money (Daily Readings (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2014), p. 73].

<sup>10</sup> And since God knew our human tendency to water down financial generosity, in the Old Testament, He established a tool to keep the practice of financial generosity on our radar: the **TITHE** -- It's the giving of at least the first 10% of our income to the work of God's kingdom through the ministries of our own local faith community (the church) -- and it's a practice, by the way, that Jesus didn't abolish, but added to (by inviting us not only to give 10% but "as much as we can" (Read Mark 12:41-43).