

## Message for February 4, 2018

“Am I a Generous Person?”<sup>i</sup>

Matthew 25: 14-30 <sup>14</sup> “Again, it will be like a man going on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted his wealth to them. <sup>15</sup> To one he gave five bags of gold, to another two bags, and to another one bag, each according to his ability. Then he went on his journey. <sup>16</sup> The man who had received five bags of gold went at once and put his money to work and gained five bags more. <sup>17</sup> So also, the one with two bags of gold gained two more. <sup>18</sup> But the man who had received one bag went off, dug a hole in the ground and hid his master’s money.

<sup>19</sup> “After a long time the master of those servants returned and settled accounts with them. <sup>20</sup> The man who had received five bags of gold brought the other five. ‘Master,’ he said, ‘you entrusted me with five bags of gold. See, I have gained five more.’

<sup>21</sup> “His master replied, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master’s happiness!’

<sup>22</sup> “The man with two bags of gold also came. ‘Master,’ he said, ‘you entrusted me with two bags of gold; see, I have gained two more.’

<sup>23</sup> “His master replied, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master’s happiness!’

<sup>24</sup> “Then the man who had received one bag of gold came. ‘Master,’ he said, ‘I knew that you are a hard man, harvesting where you have not sown and gathering where you have not scattered seed. <sup>25</sup> So I was afraid and went out and hid your gold in the ground. See, here is what belongs to you.’

<sup>26</sup> “His master replied, ‘You wicked, lazy servant! So you knew that I harvest where I have not sown and gather where I have not scattered seed? <sup>27</sup> Well then, you should have put my money on deposit with the bankers, so that when I returned I would have received it back with interest.

<sup>28</sup> ““So take the bag of gold from him and give it to the one who has ten bags. <sup>29</sup> For whoever has will be given more, and they will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what they have will be taken from them. <sup>30</sup> And throw that worthless servant outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’

Prayer: Dear God, we really tend to measure our lives by the material things we acquire. We are thankful that the Bible points us towards very different values. Help teach us how to live more fully by your measure of what life in Christ is. Amen

1. Last week, we started off with looking at the theme of how do we measure our life ---
  - a. is it measured by financial wealth –are we wealthy or do we just get by –
  - b. is it measured by how much power we have – or by the lack of power
  - c. We examined Jesus’ most remembered parable the Parable of the Sower,
  - d. It is a parable about how we will measure our lives. In it Jesus uses soil, planting and harvesting crops to describe what he sees in people.
2. **Remember, we’re all like one of the soil types Jesus describes. The soils represent the condition of our hearts, how we respond to the good news of the Kingdom he proclaimed.**
3. Jesus said some people’s hearts are like the **hardened soil** on the path. It has been walked upon, and is so packed and hard that any seed, any message of the good news of the Kingdom of God cannot penetrate the heart.

4. Second, some people have **shallow soil**. I think of many people who receive the message of God's love, who say they have been saved, who may even join a church, but who quickly fall away when trouble comes because their faith never went any deeper than the surface, a kind of superficial faith. Shallowness really destroys the working of the Holy Spirit.
5. Now **third**,
6. Some people, Jesus noted, **are like the soil which is covered in weeds, thistles and thorns**. These, Jesus says, represent the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of wealth. So the gospel takes root in their lives, but the cares of the world and the desire for wealth choke out the gospel.
7. And finally:
8. There's the **good soil**, the heart that welcomes the good news Jesus preached about the Kingdom of God. People trust Jesus, they join his mission, they seek to follow him and to do God's work in the world. They grow deeper in their faith and they have an impact on the world, bearing fruit, producing a harvest.
9. **We're meant to measure our life by the harvest we produce....** Last week we found that the first part of measuring our life is about love and how love can change the human heart.
10. **Today** we come to the **second way** that human beings tend to measure their lives, and Jesus corresponding response. We often measure our lives by wealth and a possession....it's not just the super-rich who focus on wealth. Our economy is built, and jobs and wealth are created, by the selling and buying of goods and services. Some of those are necessities, but many are non-essentials. There's nothing inherently wrong with this—this is how human commerce goes.
11. But there are inherent dangers. We always have a tension between our needs and our wants –we need food, shelter, clothes, transportation, communication and such. We need the staples for life – for a quality life. But the tension comes from our wants – things that may not add to the quality of life – but things that in effect enhance our image to others.
12. **The first danger! Credit!** Do you remember when you got your first credit card? For me, it was when I just entered college – it was a new thing --- **I could buy more than we can afford, and use tomorrow's income to pay for yesterday's pleasures**. How quickly we can build up debt and how hard it is to pay it off. We went from a cash society to a credit society. Credit Finances are a leading cause of marital break-up, anxiety, stress and depression.

13. A **second danger is that our system fosters one of the seven deadly sins—greed.**  
We must see that just as drinking alcohol can lead to addiction and alcoholism; **our spending** can lead to greed – where our wants exceed our needs.
14. Greed is the desire to possess wealth, goods, or objects with the intention to keep it for one's self, far beyond the dictates of basic survival and comfort. Greed is, the desire to acquire or possess more than one needs.
15. Okay – so our desire for more things and more money or more credit can lead a most significant danger in our lives.
16. That most significant danger is that our desire for **more can itself become our religion.** We call this the religion of **materialism**, which worships the god of money and possessions.
17. So what does Jesus have to say about measuring our life with possessions and money?
18. Jesus warned against this in the first century—**Jesus said you cannot worship both God and money.** Why did he have to say this? Because people struggled with this in biblical times, before there were shopping malls, Amazon, television spots and online advertising that constantly tells us that we need just a little bit more than what we have.
19. Paul captures it this way in I Timothy 6: *“Those who want to be rich fall into temptation and are trapped by many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. For the **love** of money [not just “money”] is a root of all kinds of evil, and in their eagerness to be rich some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pains.”...*
20. **We need money to live, but we cannot live for money.**
21. Money and possessions cannot be a person's true measure.
22. The Scriptures say **one measure of our lives will be not how much we had, but how much we gave away.**
23. Ponder this statement: *“The only part of what we have--- that we can take with us ---is what we give away.”*
24. Let me share with you a story about an 8 year old girl – who understood this statement about giving away. Birthday party --- friends brought cash instead of gifts for her --- went to a food bank and used the cash to buy food for an organization that prepared meals for the homeless. It was a roaring success --- her friends had a lasting memory of the party and the 8 year old received far more --- not materialistic – but love and hope -- - she was generous with both her time and her money.

25. I'd like you to write this word across the top of your bulletin—**Generous**. – The theme of today – “Am I a generous person?” That is the measure of a person when it comes to money and possessions.
26. Let's take a look at Jesus' parable of the talents in today's Scripture .... He tells of a wealthy man going on a long journey. He calls his servants and says, in essence, “I will be gone a long time. I am entrusting my wealth to you; I want you to manage it well.” To one he gave five talents (our Scripture from the NIV says – 5 bags of gold), to another two bags of gold and to a third one bag of gold. The amounts are staggering. A talent was a unit of weight, or an amount of silver coins—6,000 *denarii*. A *denarii* was one day's wages, so a talent of 6,000 *denarii* would be 20 years wages for an average worker. If it were a weight in gold, each talent would be three 25 pound gold bars—about \$1.2 million dollars.
27. So this might be the parable of the money managers—let's call them Mr. Jones, Mr. Schwab and Mr. Price. If you had invested with three different firms for retirement, and checked back ten years later and found that two of them had doubled your money, you'd be thrilled with them. The master said, “Well done, good and faithful servants!” But the third investment manager said, “The more I thought about it, I decided I would just take your \$1.2 million and bury it in the ground. Here you go, ten years later—here's your \$1.2 million.” What would you do with that advisor? I'd fire them! This is what happens in the parable.
28. Here was the point. Everything we have is a gift. Your life—the air you breathe, the abilities you were born with—is a gift. If you have a high IQ, or the voice of an angel, or an athletic physique, or the skills you use in doing your work, you can enhance these, capitalize on them, but ultimately they were a gift. You are a steward of these gifts. Your life is lived both in gratitude for the gift, and in an effort to make a return on this investment—to **give back**....
29. **(Repeat)** *“One's life does not consist of the abundance of your possessions.”* I have to regularly tell myself that, because the world around me is constantly telling me my life does consist in the abundance of my possessions.
30. Jesus also said, *“It is more blessed to give than to receive.”* He also said, “Give, and it will be given to you...for the measure you give will be the measure you get back.” Does that mean, as TV evangelists and prosperity gospel folks like to teach, that if you give you'll get back even more money than you gave?

- 31. No. It does mean that you receive the things that really make for life when you are generous and you see yourself as a steward of the resources you have....**
32. Have you ever heard the statement *"We can tell our values by looking at our checkbook?"* Jesus taught us: *"Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."*
33. "How you allocate your resources can make your life turn out exactly as you hope or very different from what you intend." People who have poured their resources into short-term personal gratification, often end up living shallow lives.
34. We give – and we give generously when we give out of gratitude. Giving back out of gratitude is a spiritual quality --- we recognize that we have been blessed by God and need to be generous with our time and money. This gratitude --- gratefulness --- Hording our time and our money is not a measure of gratitude. God has been generous to us and we need to be generous in return.
- 35. In the end, the measure of your life will not be in how much you have saved, spent, or acquired, but in how much you gave to God and others.**
36. Ponder this: Don't let your life's work be what can be disposed of in four hours at a public auction. You see it every day --- peoples prized possessions that they have had all of their lives – sold to the highest bidder in several hours. It is better to slowly dispose of our stuff – give it away and be generous out of gratitude.
37. May your life's work be seen in the people, mission and ministry you invested in, and the ways you sought to help this world look more like the Kingdom of God.
38. And you'll find the Master saying, "I could trust you with a little, I'll entrust you with more," and ultimately you'll hear, *"Well done good and faithful servant, enter into your rest!"*
39. How will you measure your life?
40. Prayer: Gracious God --- soften our heart to hear the message from Jesus about our lives --- cause us to enhance the spirit of generosity and to give out of the gratitude that we have for you. Amen

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<sup>i</sup> Adapted from the Church of the Resurrection November 9, 2014