

Abundance and Poverty

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 19 February 2023

Preacher: Matthew Capone

[0 : 0 0] You may be seated. Good morning. My name is Matthew Capone and I'm the pastor here at Cheyenne Mountain Presbyterian Church and it's my joy to bring you God's Word today.

Special welcome if you're new or visiting with us. We're glad that you're here and we're glad that you're here. Not because you're filling seats, but because we're following Jesus together as one community.

And as we follow Jesus together, we become convinced there's no one so good, they don't need God's grace, and no one so bad that they can't have it. Which is why we come back week after week to hear what God has to say to us in His Word.

We're continuing our series in the Gospel of Mark and you'll remember that the Gospels tell the story of Jesus in His life and His death and His resurrection. And we're picking up where we left off last week, which was with this discussion of the centrality of the human heart.

And I gave you this image of the elephant and the rider that comes from social psychologist Jonathan Haidt. And you'll remember that the elephant represents our heart, our desire, our longings, and the rider what we actually claim we believe.

[1 : 1 1] And when those two things come into conflict, it's always the stronger one that wins. It's the heart that has the last say. And so what we saw last week was a discussion of religious hypocrisy.

This idea that being in church, religious activity does not make us immune to loving ourselves more than God. Remember, we're in this section that began in verses 29 through 31, where Jesus gives the summary of the law.

And he says the summary of the law is simply this, love God and love your neighbor. And so we said we can love God and love our neighbor, or we can love ourselves and hate our neighbor.

And in fact, it's power and money that reveal our hearts, that turn up the volume on the song that is already playing inside of us. And so it makes sense that this week we're going to turn the spotlight on to money.

What is the connection between our loves and our bank accounts? What is it that truly impresses Jesus, that delights him when it comes to our giving?

[2 : 1 6] And so with that, we're going to turn together to God's word. We're in Mark chapter 12, starting at verse 41. You can turn in your Bible, you can turn on your phone, you can turn in your worship guide.

No matter where you turn, remember that this is God's word. And God tells us that his word is more precious than gold, even the finest gold, and it's sweeter than honey, even honey that comes straight from the honeycomb.

And so that's why we read now, starting at verse 41. Verse 43.

I invite you to pray with me as we come to this portion of God's word.

Our Father in heaven, we thank you this morning that your interest is not in our pocketbooks, but in our hearts.

[3 : 4 3] And yet we also confess that that perhaps is harder rather than easier. And we thank you for your word that teaches us and instructs us, that offers us more than what the world promises, that guides us and directs us, that tethers us to you.

We ask that you would do all of those things this morning, that you would use your word in a powerful way, that you would help us to hear it clearly and directly, that you'd use it to change our hearts and our minds and our lives.

And most of all, you'd use it to grow our love for you and our devotion to you. We ask these things in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen. Amen. I imagine that many of you, like me, living in 80906

specifically, or Colorado Springs in general, have made the necessary pilgrimage to the Cheyenne Mountain Zoo.

And when you go to the zoo, you know that as soon as you enter, you have this very important responsibility. You're given, as you go in, three tokens per person. And those three tokens are meant to represent the 75 cents from your admission ticket that's going to go to support, not animals in the zoo, but animals out in the wild outside of the zoo.

And so every ticket has these quarters, and you get to go up to the green kiosk, and you have to decide, where am I going to put my investment? Am I going to invest in the elephants and the rhinos?

[5 : 09] Is it going to be in the wild tigers? Am I going to go for the frogs or the ferrets? Am I going to support the giraffes? Now, in my previous visits to the Cheyenne Mountain Zoo, I've had a soft spot for the giraffes, you know.

I hope that makes sense to you. They're just so good, so tall. But the last time I was there at the zoo, they were actually, it was during the Christmas lights, and they were just handing out coins way more than they usually do.

So I had this whole handful, not just three, and I felt like it was important to sort of spread the wealth and diversify my investments. So I gave to all sorts of different animals.

I want to say the giraffe still got an extra portion, but my memory is not as good as it used to be. Whatever happens, you know that as you do this at the beginning of the zoo, this green kiosk is in view of everyone.

So it's no secret what it is that you're doing. If you decide to go all in on the ferrets, you can't keep that to yourself, right? You've got to own that in front of everyone. And it's a show, right?

[6 : 08] You watch the coin as it drops down from the different places and goes all the way down to the bottom. And then at some level, it must go out to support these animals. I tell you this because that scene at the beginning of the zoo at the green kiosk is similar to the scene that we encounter here in this passage with Jesus.

As you would enter into the temple, you'd be traveling from the east to the west. And as you come in the main entrance, the first large courtyard that you would enter was called the Courtyard of the Women.

And it was called this because it was the furthest place within the temple that women were able to go. Into the further courtyards, only men would be allowed. And there were, we're told, 13 of these offering boxes that were shaped like trumpets that were large at the bottom and narrow at the top. And so much like you would go to the zoo and put in your coin and everyone could see what was going on, the same thing would be going on here. And so we understand then why it is that Jesus is able to sit down, as we see in verse 41, and watch how much people are giving.

Remember that we're in Holy Week. It's Passover week. And so there's a tremendous amount of activity in the temple. People are there to see and be seen, to give and be admired.

[7 : 25] It would not surprise us then that there's probably many generous gifts that are happening, and you would know that they were generous by both the sight and the sound. You can watch the person putting in their gift.

You can hear it as it clinks in the bottom of the offering box. And so Jesus decides here to be a people watcher. Verse 41, he sat down opposite the treasury and watched the people putting money into the offering box.

And it's easy for him to tell which gifts are large and which gifts are small. And that all makes sense. It shouldn't surprise us that that's how things are happening.

What does surprise us, what should surprise us, is Jesus' response here. Verse 41, there's many rich people who put in large sums. Perhaps some of them are very proud of this.

Some of them want their coins to be heard as they're hitting the bottom. But there's another sight that Jesus sees. Verse 42, a poor widow came and put in two small copper coins.

[8 : 31] And it's at this point that Jesus turns the tables once again. Verse 43, he calls his disciples to him because he decides this is a time for him to teach another lesson.

He tells them, verse 43, Truly I say to you, this poor widow has put in more than all those who are contributing to the offering box.

Wait, what? How is it that this woman has given more? Everyone has seen she only gave a penny. Jesus' statement here then is meant to be disorienting and confusing and surprising.

It's the opposite of what the disciples would have expected. What they and the culture around them would have valued would have been the amount of money that was given. The key to this passage to Jesus' teaching then comes in verse 44.

He explains it. He uses this word for. We could translate it as because. Because they all contributed out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty has put in everything she had, all she had to live on.

[9 : 44] These people gave a lot in terms of the amount. This woman gave the most in terms of her percentage of income.

Those people gave a lot in terms of the amount on paper. This woman gave more than anyone else in terms of the percentage of her income. She set a record.

She gave 100%. If we were judging things by the percentage and not the amount, we would say she deserves to have her name on the temple. Maybe she should have one of these offering boxes dedicated to her because of the gift that she's given.

Maybe she needs her name to live in perpetuity because Jesus here is valuing what the world overlooks. This is meant to teach us this.

Jesus is not impressed by money. Jesus is not looking for money. Jesus is looking for hearts that are given completely over to him.

[10 : 46] Jesus is looking for hearts that trust fully in him. The disciples, us, the world is tempted to be impressed by abundance of money, by abundance of resources, by large and extraordinary gifts, Jesus is impressed by love and devotion and trust.

What Jesus loves and what the world loves are very different things. In fact, it should not surprise us that love of God and money are intimately connected. Remember Jesus in Matthew 6, verse 21 says, For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. And we're in this section about the heart. It was only a few verses back, verses 29 through 31, where we read that the sum of the law is love of God and love of neighbor.

And so if we're going to talk about loving God and loving our neighbor, we can't avoid this conversation about money. As we look at it then, I want to highlight two things for you. First of all, the danger of abundance.

And second, the joy of dependence. First, the danger of abundance. And next, the joy of dependence. But first, we'll talk about the danger of abundance.

[12 : 12] I have said it before and I'll say it again. Power and money are not bad. They're not wrong. They're just dangerous. The more dangerous something is, the more care and skill it takes to handle without hurting yourself and others.

It's not wrong to have power. In fact, we need powerful people in this world. We need them to do good and wonderful things. We need rich people in this world. We need them to sponsor good and wonderful things.

We also need them to have skill in how they handle that wealth. And so first of all, what I want you to hear me say is, wealth is not bad, it's just dangerous. In fact, wealth is in a sense our natural state, as some have said.

The Garden of Eden was a place of incredible wealth. That's where God put Adam and Eve. And poverty, in a certain sense, is a result of sin. It's a result of the fall. So the beginning of the story starts out with great wealth.

And then when we go to the end of the story, in the book of Revelation, we see great wealth again. And Revelation chapter 21 tells us that the street of the city was pure gold.

[13 : 18] So we're coming from wealth. We're going to wealth. The challenge is just how to handle it in the midst of our sin and brokenness between those two places. And the danger, at least one of the dangers, is this.

Money tempts us to believe that we are like God. Money tempts us to believe that we are like God. Remember, one of the themes of the Gospel of Mark is that need is the price of admission. Wealth makes it easy to believe the lie that we have no need.

Wealth makes it easy to believe the lie that we have no need. There's an old joke you may have heard that says, you know, if you meet someone who has a doctorate, they have a PhD in one thing, they are convinced they have a PhD in all things.

You reach a certain level of expertise, and then you begin to overestimate how knowledgeable and skillful you actually are. The same thing is true with wealth. Wealth can make us delusional. [14:27] It can disconnect us from reality and understanding how finite and fragile we actually are. We've had success, right? And so clearly we are an expert in everything.

It is no longer our job to talk. It's other people's job to listen. We're the ones who've made the money. If things don't go the way that you want them to, you are powerful enough and independent enough to take your ball, pick it up, and go home.

Wealth tempts us to believe we're like God. Money allows us, at least for a time, to hold God at a distance.

Back in the summer of 2009, I went with our denomination's missions agency for two months to work at a church in Ireland. And while we were there, we did all sorts of things at this church.

One of the things they sent us out to do was door-to-door evangelism in the neighborhood surrounding this church. Now, let's put aside for a second whatever your thoughts are about door-to-door evangelism, whether it's effective or manipulative or whatever.

[15:38] This is what we were sent to do as college interns. And we proved the same thing that has been said many, many times before. Rich neighborhoods are much less responsive to the gospel than poor neighborhoods.

People with wealth are convinced they do not need God. They don't have material need that blinds them to their spiritual need.

Much easier to get an open door and a conversation with someone who is poor than someone who is rich. There's something about physical and material need that puts us in touch with our spiritual needs.

Now, don't hear what I'm not saying. I am not saying there's something inherently superior spiritually about people who are in poverty. Poverty also comes with its own set of temptations. So wealth has temptations. Poverty has temptations. This morning, Jesus is talking about the danger of wealth, and so we are going to talk about that as well. What this teaches us is that the poor are drawn to say, give us this day our daily bread in a way the rich are not.

[16:52] The poor pray, give us this day our daily bread in a way the rich are not. So that helps us understand Jesus' explanation in verse 44.

These rich people, what did they do? Why are they not the ones commended by Jesus? It's because they gave out of their abundance. They had way more than they needed.

There are many biblical principles when it comes to money. The principle that this passage highlights is the one of sacrificial giving. What is this widow doing as a model?

It is an example. She is giving beyond, perhaps, what someone would judge to be appropriate. She's making a sacrifice. And what lies behind that principle of sacrificial giving is what we already talked about in our confession of faith.

This fundamental core, rock-bottom belief that God will provide. And so what Jesus is telling us about these rich people is this wasn't a sacrifice for them.

[18:06] In other words, the more money you make, the easier it is to tithe and hold God at a distance. Say you make a million dollars a year.

You tithe on that. You give \$100,000 away. Wow, that's a lot of money. Also, you're not going to go hungry. You can still indulge in all sorts of experiences and pleasures and events.

It is easier, the richer you are, to give money to God and it's simply be checking a box. It is easier, the more money you have, to give large amounts, and this is the kicker, and still trust in yourself.

The richer you are, the easier it is to give large amounts and still trust in yourself. And so this passage especially highlights for us, it teaches us the danger of wealth.

That the more you have, the easier it is for you to stiff-arm God and say, I'll check the box spiritually. I'll give the money, but I will not give you my heart.

[19:33] Because I still have too much. They gave out of their abundance. As you dig into teaching on giving within the church, you'll hear this statement that may surprise you, which is that the tithe is a great starting point for giving.

When I say the tithe, I mean the biblical teaching that we give 10% of what we make back to God and his church. You might think, the beginning, what do you mean? Like, I'm struggling just to give away this 10%.

Jesus is saying here, essentially, the principle is, the richer you are, the more important it is for you to give more of that away. Giving out of abundance makes it easy to stay far away from God, to give your money but keep your heart.

We don't just have those who give out of abundance, though. We also have this woman who gives out of poverty. She shows us the joy of dependence. This widow is close to God and trusts God. Why is it she's able to give away all that she has? Well, I would imagine that she's a devoted Israelite, that she's familiar with the scriptures of the Old Testament.

[20 : 55] And I wouldn't be surprised if in her mind as she does this, she has the words of Psalm 23 running through her. The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want. She believes that and trusts that in a way that the rich do not.

Money doesn't have power over this woman. She's free in a way that the rich are not. She trusts God in a way they do not.

She's not in love with money. She's not afraid of it. It comes and it goes. She knows that her security and her power and her future belong to God, not her bank account.

She knows that her future, her security, her foundation belong to God and not her bank account. And there's an irony here.

Remember, I told you she is in the court of the women and it's called that because she can't go any further into the temple. This is as close as she can get to God's presence.

[22 : 02] Who did we look at last week? The religious leaders who were hypocrites and cared about money, not about God. Those religious leaders can go further into the temple than she can, but this woman is actually closer to God.

They're the ones who have access to the temple. She's the one who's given God her heart. It's not religious show or pomp that shows our relationship to God or measures our heart.

She's farther from the temple. She's closer to God. And it's not an accident that she appears right after. We've talked about religious hypocrisy.

She's meant to be an indictment, a condemnation of those leaders. Jesus is most enthusiastic here over the smallest gift because it shows the largest heart. Jesus is most enthusiastic over the smallest gift because it shows the largest heart.

It is insignificant in its amount. It is record-setting in where she finds her trust. The world applauds raw numbers.

[23 : 24] Jesus is looking for that Deuteronomy 6, verse 5 sort of commitment to love the Lord your God with all your heart and without your soul and with all your might.

And she wins on that account. She has joy. We can easily imagine that those with abundance lack. She has trust that those with abundance lack. She has confidence and hope that those with abundance can only dream of. The theologian Jim Carrey says this, I hope everybody could get rich and famous and will have everything they ever dreamed of so they will know that it's not the answer.

So we've seen the danger of abundance, the joy of dependence. Where does that leave us here this morning?

Jesus doesn't give a command here. He doesn't say to his disciples, go and do likewise. If we look throughout the rest of the scriptures, there's no demand, no requirement that we give up 100% of the money we have.

[24 : 37] In fact, some people think that Jesus may be hyperbolic in his teaching here. So we're not meant to necessarily imitate this woman woodenly or slavishly. We are, however, meant to imitate her in principle.

And the principle, as I mentioned before, is a principle of sacrificial giving, giving that reflects that our heart belongs to God, giving that shows that our confidence and trust is in God more than anything and anyone else.

There's a quote from C.S. Lewis that we've run before in the worship guide where he says it's hard to determine how much someone should actually give. But we do know this, we should give so much that we give up some of the luxuries and pleasures of the world around us.

That's how we know our hope is in God and not money. Billy Graham said this, So your homework for today is this, examine your hearts.

What does your checkbook reveal about your desires and your longings and your loves? What does your checkbook show about your heart?

[25 : 56] What does your spending reveal? And by the way, no matter what's there, hard to get off the hook. There's a quote on the back of your worship guide where Tim Keller makes this point that there's multiple ways you can use money as an idol.

Some people use money as an idol in their spending. They spend their money so that they can make themselves more beautiful and have access to social circles and influence. And that shows the idols of their heart.

But there are also people who take all their money and they save it up. It just gets larger and larger and larger. And Keller points out, hey, they're actually spending their money on something as well. It's not that that one person has an idol and the other doesn't. It's that the second person loves security more than anything else. In fact, he tells the story of a pastor at his church sitting down to counsel a couple in their marriage and the financial struggles they're having.

And the husband is very frustrated because his wife is constantly spending money and he sees himself as superior because all he does is save. And the pastor finally says to him, do you see that you love security more than anything else?

[27 : 07] That money is actually an idol for you too. It's not that your wife has a problem and you don't. It's that both of you worship things other than Jesus. And he said at that point, there was a breakthrough in their marriage and they will be able to begin to resolve their financial disagreements.

And so examine your heart. What does your checkbook say about your love and your longings? It's been pointed out before that money serves as a thermostat.

It measures the heat of our hearts. It shows the temperature of our hearts. But it can also function, sorry, as a thermometer. The thermometer measures our heart.

But it can also function as a thermostat. It can change the temperature of our heart. Remember Matthew 6, 21, where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. That can work in two ways. You can look at your treasure now and see where your longings and desires are. But you can also make new decisions about your money and change the location of your heart.

[28 : 13] You determine with every expenditure where your heart is going to live. The kiosk at the beginning of the zoo, it illustrates one thing.

It shows us what it's like to have a public display of giving like happens in the temple. It also shows us another thing. Every coin is a vote for a certain kind of animal.

Every time you spend money, you are voting for where your heart's longings and desires will live. Every time you spend money, you are voting for what's going to have control of your heart.

And so really the self-examination comes in two parts. Where is your heart now? Where do you want it to be? Giving is the thermometer.

Shows you where you are. It's the thermostat. Can take you where you want to be. Now I mentioned before the question of how the widow is able to do this while the religious leaders are not.

[29 : 21] And it's not stated explicitly here, but the principle that lies behind this type of giving is this unshakable trust in God.

It's this unshakable belief that Psalm 23 is actually true. That you actually shall not want. That the Lord does lead you to green pastures and beside still waters.

It's the function of Jesus as the good shepherd. In other words, do you want to have childlike faith? Do you want your heart to love and long for what is good and true?

Money shows your heart. Your heart follows money. And so as we think about Jesus and his relationship to our money, the answer is not simply that we are generous because we want to do good things or be good people.

That's the answer of the world. The answer of Christianity is instead what we already confessed in faith this morning. He watches over me in such a way that not a hair can fall from my head without the will of my Father in heaven.

[30 : 33] The more you believe that, the more generous you'll be able to be. It's not until you believe that, that you'll be able to give, not out of your abundance, but out of poverty.

In his book, *Great Expectations*, Charles Dickens tells us the story of a boy named Pip. Pip is an orphan boy who is living with relatives. Pip's very poor, as you can imagine, but he has a crush on this girl, classic, who is wealthy.

And he imagines that if he just had enough money, he could be with her. Well, lo and behold, shortly into the story, he comes into a vast fortune from an anonymous donor. And so he begins to make these preparations. This donor wants to train him and disciple him to be truly a rich gentleman. And so his next step is to head off to London so he can begin his new life. The only challenge is that in doing this, he leaves his family that he loves and who loves him far behind. The day that he finds out about his fortune, as evening draws on in this family's house, he begins to contemplate what's next for him, leaving his family behind, who he loves and trusts. [31 : 53] And so Pip sits down in this chair and begins to think about what his future holds. And he says this, he was feeling very sorrowful and strange that this first night of my bright fortunes should be the loneliest I had ever known.

Brothers and sisters, we can be close to money or we can be close to God.

We cannot be close to both. In fact, that's what Jesus tells us. Matthew 6, verse 24, No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other.

You cannot serve God and money. Let's pray. Our Father in heaven, we thank you that like a good father, you instruct us and direct us, even when it is hard and it's challenging.

We ask more than anything else, not that you would first change our giving, but that you would change our hearts, that we would trust in you, that we would believe that not a hair can fall from our heads without the will of our Father in heaven.

[33 : 17] That that belief would change our life and our minds and our hearts and our giving. We ask these things in Jesus' name. Amen. I invite you to stand for our closing hymn.