

Grace to Live – The Power of Money

Matthew 6:19-24 | Sunday, October 14, 2018 | By Brian Brookins

GRACE TO LIVE THE POWER OF MONEY Matthew 6:19-24

“Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

“The eye is the lamp of the body. So, if your eye is healthy, your whole body will be full of light, but if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light in you is darkness, how great is the darkness!

“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.

We are studying the Sermon on the Mount and today we come to the topic of money. We have been seeing how Jesus deals with some very difficult topics. He deals with sex, and lust, and adultery. He deals with our relationship with other people and with enemies. He deals with subjects that connect deeply to us in the area of pride. And today may be the most challenging topic of all, the topic of money.

What’s interesting to me as we begin this study is that Jesus has given us, as his followers, a job description in this message. He has told you that if you are a follower of Jesus, you are the light of the world. You shine the light of Jesus to a world in darkness. I think we sometimes misunderstand what that means.

I was with some pastors recently and one of them told me a true story. He had a neighbor who was a landlord. He owned some houses. One of his tenants was moving out, so he sent his property manager to the house. He said to him, “Listen, these people have not taken good care of the house, so I want you to go in and inspect it. I want you to put a little Post-it sticky note on everything that

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needs to be fixed or changed or cleaned up to tell them what to do.” So the property manager did that. He went all over the house with these little Post-it notes. The landlord also said to him, “I want you to take pictures of where you put the Post-it notes and send them to me.”

I’m not making this up. This is a true story. The landowner gets all the pictures and starts looking at them. He says, “These guys painted the garage door! The garage door is a different color! They are tenants! They can’t paint the garage door!” Then he keeps flipping through the pictures and he is like, “There’s a fireplace there. There’s no fireplace in this house!” The property manager has gone into a stranger’s house. He has gone into the wrong house and put Post-it notes all over: “Clean this up! Fix this! Why is this _____?” Can you imagine coming home from work and there are these nasty notes all over your house?! “Make the bed, will ya?!”

I think sometimes this is the picture that people outside the Church have of us. They want to say, “Who in the world are you and why are you leaving all these nasty notes around my house?” We think being the light of the world is somehow just going around pointing a finger, “Don’t do that. Don’t do that. Don’t do that.” But when Jesus addresses this in the greater context of this message, he is really challenging you to be light, to live out who you are. He is in you and he has done this. It’s a work of grace.

Let me bottom line this for you in terms of today’s message. He is saying your attitude toward money will be a light to other people. I don’t like it. I’m just honest. I don’t like it. I mean, I look at the subjects that we are dealing with like lust and pride and I’m like, “Okay, I need help here. I need help here.” But when I get to money I say, “Lord, I really need help.” I am very tempted to think my security is found in the accumulation of financial resource. I am tempted to think my happiness is directly parallel to and connected to how much money I have. It would be a good time for you to say, “Yes, we understand. We agree. We are the same way. You’re not alone.”

Now, the passage unpacks the power of money for us. Money is likened to a master, a lord. It’s not that money in and of itself is evil, but so powerful that it’s capable of great harm as well as great good. I would say it’s a little bit like the internet or technology. There is great capacity here, but enormous danger, and the potential to be completely enslaved.

A similar image is given in James when James talks about the power of the tongue. The power of it is a little bit sinister in that it’s hidden. We always underestimate the power of our words and we underestimate the power of money. Just piecing together these images...if you are a parent and you

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have younger children, until you teach them how to navigate through the internet, it's reckless to just give them abandoned freedom to that very powerful thing in their lives.

This sermon isn't even on parenting, but let me just talk to parents for a second, because it may be the second hardest thing you ever do. You're thinking, "What is the first?" Well, it comes just before parenting: marital bliss. The challenge many times is having the confidence as a parent to say, "Though I am really flawed, I am going to govern this little one's world. I am going to show enough control on the front end and prepare them so I can completely let go on the back end.

We reverse it. We flip it too often. "They are so beautiful! They are so wonderful!" No, just look at them on the changing table. They are troublemakers from the very beginning. Adorable, wonderful, but they need your...okay that's a whole other sermon. Come back another time and we'll give it to you.

But it's that way with money now. Let's talk about ourselves. Let's not talk about our children. Let's talk about our own lives. We cannot afford to underestimate the power of this in our lives. Just to illustrate this, we are still beginning here, but Jesus really challenges a presupposition that is in many ways the foundation of our entire culture. Jesus said "Take care and be on your guard against all covetousness, (here it is) for one's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions." (Luke 12:15)

Jesus is directly attacking the lie that your life and happiness depend on how much you have. He connects here the idea of greed, of covetousness. In fact, the Message translation states it this way. "Speaking to the people, he went on, 'Take care! Protect yourself against the least bit of greed.'" The nature, the power of it is that when you give in to it and you go with it, it will roll over you. You'll live your life based on a lie, and the result will be bondage.

Jesus wants you to be free. Jesus is coming to you in this sermon, the Sermon on the Mount, saying, "I've got a better life for you. I've got freedom for you. I've got joy that will display the hope of Jesus Christ in a dark world." So, are you ready? Let's do it.

I. Money reveals.

Money reveals, verses 19 through 21. Jesus tells us: "Don't lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, where thieves break in and steal, but lay up treasures in heaven, where

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none of that happens.” Here it is: “For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” Your money reveals where your heart is. Where your money goes is often an indication of where your heart is. Ask it in this way: What is really easy for me to spend money on? What if I don’t even think about it? One outfit, two outfits, three outfits? Another pair of shoes? Golf clubs? Computers? The next game controller? You’re like, “I’m sorry I even came today!” Right? I’m not picking on you. It’s not that any of these things are bad, but it’s understanding that often there is a diagnosis waiting for us when we look at what we do with our money.

Jesus tell us that this reveals. In fact, there is a fascinating concept in scripture. Scripture teaches that the temptation of our hearts for all of us, every person here, no exception – the temptation is to find our meaning and purpose and security in something other than God, to find it in something that God made. Scripture teaches that this is at the heart of everything that takes us away from God -- what the Bible calls sin, it calls idolatry. You say, “Idolatry? That seems crazy! Like, idols? Like little carved images?” Well, in its ancient form, that’s exactly what it looked like. And before you dismiss that, it’s not as crazy as you think.

People today have good luck charms. They have good luck bracelets. They have good luck everything. Watch the baseball playoffs that are going on right now. Any baseball fans? You see these guys come out. They get new uniforms and hats and socks every single day, but some guy will have this ratty hat on that’s like five years old. It’s his good luck hat, right? Some players don’t wash their socks, because they’ve never lost in those socks. So they stand up on their own in the corner, but they believe so much in the power of those socks. Right?

Now, here’s what scripture teaches. It teaches us that when we worship something without power, something created, something without real power like God, we’ve now empowered that, and it takes power over our souls, and an exchange takes place. We become like it. Here it is: It’s lifeless.

Psalm 115 says it like this. Let me show you the passage. He talks about idols in this passage. He says, “Those who make them become like them, so do all who trust in them.” In the verses that precede that, he says, “You know, you make this idol. It has a mouth but it can’t speak. It has ears, but it can’t hear. It has hands, but it can’t feel. You make it and you prop it up and you say, ‘God!’ Then next thing you know, you’ve become like it. You’ve become lifeless. It sucks the life right out of you.”

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If you take a good thing like winning a baseball game, or the happiness of your kids, or financial security, and you make it God in your life, it never had the power to be God, but now it rules you. It owns you, and it sucks the life right out of you. The very thing you were believing for -- now you are actually damaging your kids, your marriage, all of those things, because your soul is becoming more and more twisted into the shape of that which you are worshipping. You become like that, what you truly worship. Jesus is telling us here, “So, watch what you treasure, because your heart will take the shape of it. Your heart follows it. It reveals your heart and in the same regard, your heart follows it.

I want to move beyond, now, to the next point. But before I do, let me just offer the help that Jesus gives us in this first area. He helps you by basically insinuating a simple question: “Are you eternal? Are you going to live forever?” If you believe that the answer to that question is yes, then Jesus says, “Just stop and think for a minute. It’s foolish for you to live your entire life for an investment that may pay just in this lifetime. You were made for eternity. Invest in eternity.” “Make a better investment,” is what Jesus is saying.

When I was a sophomore in college in 1980... It’s been a while. Did I hear a wow? Maybe I was a freshman, but I took economics. It’s funny that I remember this, because I remember nothing else that came out of that particular course – a few concepts, maybe. The professor said, “Listen, there’s this new stock called Apple. It’s just being released. It’s a great investment.” I’m literally sitting there saying, “What is a computer? I’ve never seen one. I can’t imagine like, yeah, one day we’re all going to be using computers. Right.” On the morning that Apple went public, if you had bought \$990 worth of Apple stock, it would be worth almost \$500,050 today, not counting dividends. If you reinvested the dividends, you’d be a millionaire, a zillionaire. Don’t quote me on that. Apple was a good investment.

Jesus is saying: “Make an eternal investment.” His reasoning is not just that it’s going to pay better. It is: You actually have no security putting your hope in anything other than Jesus Christ. Jesus will never fail you. He is your hope, so he calls us to this eternal perspective. I’ll say more about that a little later. Let’s go on to the second point, and that is this:

II. Money blinds.

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Money blinds, verses 22 and 23. “The eye is the lamp of the body, so if the eye is healthy, your whole body is full of light. If your eye is bad, your whole body is full of darkness. If then the light in you is darkness, how great is the darkness?” That may seem like a confusing image to you. It’s a little parable that Jesus gives. If you have your Bible open, Jesus does this twice in the sermon. He gives you instruction about something, then he gives a parable of the eye. He does the same thing in chapter 7 where he tells us in relationships not to judge others lest we be judged. Then he gives a parable of the eye. He says don’t try to get the speck out of your brother’s eye and ignore the log in your own eye. It’s a very powerful image. He’s doing the same thing here in this section of scripture. The image is really not as complicated as it sounds when we read it.

You walk into a room. There is light in the room, and that light helps you navigate around the room. It helps you find your way. Jesus is saying, “If your eyes are dark, if they are not taking in the light, how great is the darkness in your life?” In other words, if I come into a room and instead of light helping me see, I just see more darkness, I’m in big trouble. Because my problem cannot be solved by more light. I’m deceived. This is the hidden power of money in your life. It has the potential to deceive you and to blind you to what’s happening in your heart.

So, you could hear this message and light could be coming forth through an imperfect vessel, but through the scripture, and you just have defenses built up, one after the other: “No, that’s not true, that’s not true. No, he is denying the reality.”

Listen, let me explain something. I pray for money. I pray for God to provide. I teach my kids: “You’ve got to work, pray, give, and spend properly.” Four parts, not in that order, necessarily. I use a baseball diamond. I say there are four parts to financial health. You need all four. First base is work. You don’t get on base until you start making money. So they come: “I want to get this.” “Are you on base yet? Are you working? I’m working, you’re not. I’m in the game, you’re not.” I don’t actually say that to them, but it makes me sound tough in the moment. You can only get to second base if you spend less than what you make at first base. You’ll be out by the time you get to second if you spend more than you are getting at first base.

The object of baseball is to score a run. Isn’t this great? You’re getting a parenting, marriage, financial health, and money sermon all in one! Okay, stay with me. You get to third base and you really have the opportunity for transformation. It’s the most neglected part of our financial health -- it’s prayer. So, I pray a lot about finances. I pray for God to give money. I pray to be out of debt. I

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pray for this church to be blessed. I'm trying to illustrate through this overview that this is not in any way intended to be anti-money. It is a part of our lives.

But here's the interesting thing. The real goal is to get home, is to give; it's not to accumulate. In fact, this is a fascinating verse, packed full of truth. In Ephesians 4:28, where Paul is teaching them to think and to live the Christian life, he says, "Don't steal any longer. Those of you who have stolen, don't steal. Instead, work with your own hands so that you'll have something to give."

The moral objection to stealing is it's the opposite of the goal of our lives, to live an overflow of God's generosity, because he is always putting so much into us. The more liberal and generous and free, the happier we are, and the more God says, "I'm going to trust them with more and more and more." That's where the prosperity gospel takes a tidbit of truth, but then perverts into something that's not good. It's really clever. Think about it. If I come here and say, "Listen, if you want to be happy and you want to get rich, give to me. It's really simple. Just give to me." It's clever, and evil. Right?

But there is this place where giving is the cure, practically, for the grip that money can get on our hearts. I'll show you some verses here in a minute, but let me just say that we are trying to live in a place of freedom, enjoying the joy of generosity. Advertisement for next week's sermon: If you are grabbing ahold of that truth, you should be thinking, "But wait, wait! Will I have enough?" Anxiety and fear start to rise up in our hearts. What about: "Will I have enough?" That's the next topic that Jesus deals with in the Sermon on the Mount. We will get there.

What I want you to see right here is really helpful -- these eye parables. This is my statement to help you grab ahold of this. The eye is a metaphor for how you perceive things based on what you value, based on what you treasure. If you are just so in love with money and what it can get for you, then you are going to see this sermon and everything around you according to what you value. In other words, you get what you want. You see what you want to see.

It's just so genius, the way Jesus uses these two little parables in these chapters to say you've got to step back and look at the treasure of your heart, because it's affecting how you see everything. It reveals the priorities of the loves of our lives. I have more on this point, but I don't have time to make it. I'm going to go on to the last one:

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III. Money enslaves.

Money enslaves, verse 24. Now Jesus just flat out tells us: “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.” He presents money here as a potential master. You and I will serve money and what it can buy for us if we allow it to become the devotion of our hearts.

We will keep a job that we hate for money. We will hurt other people for money. We will take shortcuts, lie, and steal for money. If this becomes the master of our lives, we will misrepresent, we will compromise our souls for money. We will hurt our children in angry outbursts for money, because deep down we have believed that this is the key to life.

Jesus wants to offer us freedom. He says, “I want you to have true joy. I want you to have amazing security and freedom.” I told you I would show you this passage. Let me just show you the parallel in Luke, where Jesus is recorded as saying, “Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom.”

God delights in you experiencing his complete reign and rule and power and freedom. Then he says this: “Sell your possessions, and give to the needy. Provide yourselves with money bags that do not grow old, with a treasure in the heavens that does not fail, where no thief approaches and no moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”

Jesus gives us this picture of radical generosity to pull us this way to financial freedom, to freedom from the way that this can just grip our lives. I’m not insinuating that you take this verse as your entire understanding of what the Bible has to say about money, but if you go to the doctor with a terminal disease, the cure he offers you is going to be rather radical. Jesus is saying, “If you want to declare war on this, then move your treasure to a different place.”

One of the challenges in speaking about giving to a congregation is that scripture tells us to begin our giving in and through the local church. Sometimes that’s been terribly abused by pastors, and for that I apologize. I’m not saying I’ve never been guilty of that, but there’s a place where I think it’s right for me to just say the plain simple truth: A beginning step for you in terms of saying, “Okay, how do I recognize the power of money and how do I live in freedom?” It begins with giving. Scripture talks all over the place about tithing, about giving 10% of your increase -- Old Testament and New Testament. Scripture doesn’t say that’s the whole of our giving. That’s the beginning place. That’s where we start.

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I would tell you if you feel that I'm manipulating you now, I don't know. I don't want to do that and I would say it's not about giving. It's about what's in your heart. I would tell you to go home and fast and pray and let God deal with what's in your heart. But there's a danger for some, myself included. We've been walking with God a long time. We've settled that. We've said, "Listen, that's bottom line." I'm kidding myself if I say everything I have belongs to God and I am unwilling to give God the first 10%. But then I want to stop right there. God, you've got your 10%. I've got my 90%. No, no, no, don't be squeezing on my 90, right? I've got six kids! And an amazing wife!

I would tell you there's not a lot of joy – money will still hold your heart. We want to be free. It's not about the 10%. It's not about the 90. It's about the Lord. It's about our hearts and him, right? Yeah.

So, let me see if I can make some connections to close this in the next 30 or 45 minutes. I don't want to be a Christian that leaves nasty notes all over people's houses. But I do want to be a Christian that when my friends and neighbors and associates see me, when my kids see me talking about money, they see a hope that is eternal. They see, "Wow, there is something here, where there is nothing about my dad or my neighbor or my friend that tells me life is about the accumulation of stuff, it's about money. There's something, there's a freedom there."

I believe that that is just one of the ways that our light shines in a dark place. Listen, I know we are at the end here. I want you to hear this, because this may be the most important thing I can say to you. This is really a powerful force. You cannot overcome this by just determining to give or to do better or to get your life in order financially. All those things are good. You need Jesus. You need grace. Here's the image I'll give you.

When my son was a little boy we went up to the St. Johns River where my dad lived, and there was an alligator. My dad said, "We're going to kill this alligator." My son was like, "Are you kidding me? I don't even think that's legal." And it wasn't legal. But my dad is with the Lord now. If you want to arrest him, go find him in heaven. He shot this alligator. Then they went out in a boat to retrieve the carcass, because now they've got to get rid of the evidence. This is not in any way to be copied. This is not an example that you should follow.

Well, they get the alligator in the boat and then -- it's alive! They have the gun, so my son wants to shoot the alligator again. My dad was like, "Don't shoot it! You'll shoot a hole in the boat!" So now

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it's them and an oar against an alligator. That's the way money is, right? You think it's dead -- the power of it. It just won't die. It just won't die.

"God, I'm anxious!" Getting more will not solve the problem. My financial investor is here. I'm going to be really fascinated to hear what he thinks about this sermon, but he plans my retirement and he gives me assignments to do. When he tells me about the principle of inflation, he goes, "Okay, Brian, you think you need this amount of money to live, but you need to know that that's not the same amount as that amount today, because inflation every year at 2-3%, boom, boom, boom, by then, you know...\$25,000 will only be worth \$12,000." I'm like, "Man, that's just not fair!" And this is my response: "I've gotta get more. I've gotta get more! I've gotta get more!!!" Getting more will not get you free. Then, you know what? You'll die, and you'll stand before God.

Jesus says to you, "I'm greater in power than all of that." And here's the twist: Jesus treasures you. Jesus left the treasure of heaven, the glory, the splendor, the comfort of heaven, took on human flesh, became a man, lived as a servant and died on a cross to pay the penalty for your sin because he treasures you. The love of Christ works in our lives in two ways. Number one: Just that love, that security, that acceptance transforms our hearts. But, number two: When you get Jesus' love, you get all of Jesus. He has conquered sin and death! He reigns! He is Lord of all! It is good when Jesus is in the boat. That's where Jesus is going. He is saying, "Do the right thing, but just trust me." That's the message of scripture. Trust in him and he will set you free. Amen?