Weekly Reflection – Joyful and Generous Giving

As I have been studying and preparing to talk about giving, I noticed that when Jesus taught about money, possessions, and giving He doesn't emphasize an amount or a percentage that Christians must give. Jesus does what we see Him doing throughout His teaching, He goes past the external act and into the heart.

Once Jesus references the tithe (10 percent), that's in Matthew 23:23: ***"Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint and dill and cumin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faithfulness. These you ought to have done, without neglecting the others. You blind guides, straining out a gnat and swallowing a camel!"*** This one time He refers to the Old Testament minimum of giving a tenth of your income, endorses it, and then calls for a way of looking at life and money way more radical than the mere tithe. "You tithe even your spices," he said to the Pharisees. "That's right. You should. But you have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faithfulness" He pushes past the act and into the heart.

The way Jesus teaches us about giving, money, and possessions is by teaching us some truth that is meant to set our hearts free to be joyful and generous givers of our money and possessions. I want us to see two truths that Jesus teaches that are meant to free our hearts to be cheerful givers. One this week and God willing one next week. Both truths are taught in Matthew 6 as well as many other passages throughout the Word of God. First, set your heart free to joyful and generous giving by remembering the eternal reward. Second, set your heart free to joyful and generous giving by overcoming anxiety in your life.

Matthew 6:1-4, 19-24

Set your heart free to joyful and generous giving by remembering the eternal reward.

You may be asking, "Isn't it unspiritual and selfish to talk about eternal reward as motivation to give?" I don't think you can understand what Jesus is saying in Matthew 6 if you tell yourself it's wrong to value rewards and treasures. You must believe it is right to want to do what Jesus tells you to do; to give in such a way that God sees the giving and rewards you and store up treasures for yourself in Heaven. Scripture has many passages in which God promises rewards for our faithfulness to Him. If it were wrong to want them, Christ wouldn't seemingly offer rewards as motivation. Rewards are God's idea, not ours.

- ***"But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your giving may be in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you." Matthew 6:3-4 ESV***

"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 [redacted]

Just to be clear, the rewards and treasure we are looking forward to must be heavenly reward and treasure, not rewards here on earth, not getting recognized or paid back here on earth. I really believe that it glorifies God when we are motivated to give by His promise that He will reward us in Heaven.

Many people argue against being motivated to love by the promises of reward. I see Jesus and the apostles motivate love all the time by encouraging us to pursue our own greater happiness. Can that be love? How is this not just using other people for our own selfish ends? Didn't Paul say, '***Love seeks not its own' in 1 Corinthians 13:5?" And in 1 Corinthians 10:24, "Let no one seek his own good, but the good of his neighbor."***

I think that this is one of the important questions that can be asked in the Christian life. We really need to settle it, whether it's right to be motivated by the promises of joy in God's presence that He offers us for sacrifice in this world. This is absolutely huge. The Bible is full of commands to love people, at cost to ourselves. We are often called to make great sacrifices in this world, even risking our lives or intentionally laying them down for others. If what I'm proposing is true and the Bible does offer us motivations, incentives, and help to do this by promising that there will be great reward because of it and we think it is ethically inferior to be motivated that way, then we are going to turn away from the very strength that God offers us in the cause of love. So that is serious.

"He said also to the man who had invited him, "When you give a dinner or a banquet, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or rich neighbors, lest they also invite you in return and you be repaid. But when you give a feast, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you. For <u>you will be repaid at the resurrection of the just</u>."" ***(Luke 14:12-14 ESV)*** Jesus didn't add that last promise for nothing. It begins with the word "for" or "because." You will be blessed in making sacrifices in this world to love others because you will be repaid at the resurrection of the just. He intends for that to be a motivation, an incentive, a strengthening. We are not seeking payback here on the earth. That is the whole point. It is costly to love others. It is thankless, many times, to love others. The payback is later at the resurrection of the just.

I read several scholars who say the opposite. I will give you one concrete example. And he says this, "The promise of reward for this kind of life is there as a fact. You don't live this way for the sake of the reward. If you do that, you are not living in the new way, but the old selfish way." Now, I believe that is simply wrong. If that scholar were right, we would have to work to keep the promise out of our minds so that it wouldn't contaminate our motivation. Pretend you didn't hear the promise.

But Jesus tells us to do just the opposite in Acts 20:35. Paul is talking to the elders and he quotes Jesus; he says this: ***"We must help the weak and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he himself said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'"*** Now, that scholar would say, "No, you shouldn't be constantly remembering that as you try to do good to people. 'Don't remember that it is more blessed.' You should forget that. Keep that out of your mind, because, yes, it is true, but it is going to contaminate your motivation if you keep remembering it." So, I am going to go with Jesus here and not that scholar. Remember, remember, it is more blessed to give than to receive. Keep the blessing in mind.

So, what did Paul mean when he said, Love ***"does not seek its own,"*** and "***Let no one seek his own good, but the good of his neighbor."*** He did not mean that love should find no pleasure in or look for any pleasure from the act of love. He meant, don't look for that reward by using people for material gain or advancement or gain in this world. He didn't mean, ignore the promise of great reward in heaven. And the reason we know this from 1 Corinthians 13, not just from the words of Jesus, but from the very context, two verses earlier Paul says, ***"If I give away all I have, and if I deliver up my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing" (1 Corinthians 13:3)***. I gain nothing. The whole argument is you would be a fool to live in a way that gains nothing. And that is the exact point. The simple meaning of all these texts is that Christians should not seek their own private, limited pleasures. That we should not please ourselves with material comforts at the expense of love. We should join Jesus on the road of suffering, and giving, and simplicity. But not begrudgingly or out of sheer duty, not with grumbling. No, we should join the Lord on the road of love because of the joy that is set before us; because God loves cheerful givers; because it is more blessed to give than to receive; because suffering with Christ is greater wealth than the fleeting pleasures of Egypt; because if we lose our lives for His sake, we gain them forever.

"He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain that which he cannot lose." (Jim Elliot) There is nothing morally inferior about looking for reward for our behavior, provided that the reward is ultimately more of Christ as the supreme joy of our souls. Maybe you're thinking we should give out of gratitude. Ok, so you give motivated by what God has already given you. How different is that then giving motivated by what He is going to give you? Is it really wrong to be motivated to give because you want

more of Jesus and His eternal rewards? It is right. It is a great honor to Christ to be motivated by a desire for more of Him that comes through loving people.

So, my conclusion is never forget, but always remember, that it is more blessed to give than to receive. Your reward will be great in heaven. No matter the cost of love here, you will be repaid at the resurrection of the just, and a great and wonderful part of that reward will be that, in loving people like this, you will win many of them to join you in enjoying the reward. ***"And all who believed were together and had all things in common. And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved." (Acts 2:44-47 ESV)***

Jesus is trying to free us up to radically give for the sake of the advancement of His Kingdom, free us up to give our lives, money, resources, time, and our very breath for the purpose of helping more and more people know and believe in Jesus. And one very primary way He sees fit to free us up is by reminding us over and over again of the reward we will get.

Lay Up Treasures in Heaven

"Lay up treasures in heaven." What does this mean? Are you doing it? Jesus says to do it. Are we? ***"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." (Matthew 6:19-20 ESV)*** Evidently, there are two ways to live; you can live with a view to accumulating valuable things on earth, or you can live with a view to accumulating valuable things in heaven. Jesus says the mark of a Christian is that their eyes are on heaven, and they measure all their behavior by what effect it will have on heaven.

And something else is clear; laying up treasures in heaven and laying up treasures on earth cannot coexist. You have to choose between them. You can't say, "Well, how about both?" That's the point of 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."*** Either you are mastered by money and therefore ignore God or try to make Him a servant for your money, or you are mastered by God and make money a servant of the Kingdom.

But let's be more specific. If Jesus means "devote your life to accumulating treasure in heaven," what is the main thing He has in mind that we should do now? It seems from the context that it is giving rather than accumulating. If laying up treasures in heaven is the opposite of laying up treasures on earth, then probably laying up treasures in heaven means not laying up treasures on earth but giving them away in ways that magnify the worth of Jesus.

There are several other teachings of Jesus that confirm this meaning; laying up treasures in heaven is giving money and possessions away for Christ's sake rather than accumulating it. For example, ***"Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom. Sell your possessions, and give to the needy. Provide yourselves with moneybags that do not grow old, with a treasure in the heavens that does not fail, where no thief approaches and no moth destroys." (Luke 12:32-33 ESV)*** Here Jesus explains how you "provide yourselves with moneybags that do not grow old" and how you "provide yourselves with treasure in the heavens that does not fail," namely, "Sell your possessions and give to the needy." That's how you do it. In other words, possessions on earth are not for accumulating; they are for distributing in ways that Christ is honored and our joy in heaven is increased. When we give,

especially when we give so generously that we have to sell something to have anything to give, we show that Christ is our treasure and that we love others more than we love our own security and comfort.

"For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." Matthew 6:21 ESV

To know where our heart is we just need to find our treasure. How do we know what we treasure? Check your calendar or your screen time. Where are you using your time? Check your bank account. Where are you using your money? Evaluate your mind. What are you thinking about? There's a good chance if we answer these questions honestly that we will find where our heart is.