**Topic: God’s School on Money**

OT Reading: Psalm 24

NT Reading: 2 Corinthians 9:6-14

Gospel: Matthew 5:25-34

School was always fun for me. Growing up in Flagstaff, Arizona I remember walking to school in the snow and sometimes walking through the forest always with the smell of ponderosa pines in my nose. I had a tough time sitting still in school, still do, but I enjoyed being with friends, recess, working in the library and running the projector. Some of the teachers I remember very well others are kind of faded. One of the most significant pieces of school for me was learning how to write. I enjoyed starting with a blank piece of paper and a silly idea and spinning a story out of that idea. While I don’t remember all the lessons I learned in school, I was formed by those people, lessons and experiences.

In our lives as disciples we are formed as well. We may not remember every word of every sermon we have heard. We may not remember every thought of every Bible Study we have been a part of. We may not remember every insight, every experience, but we are formed through that walking with Jesus. Jesus forms us in the school of life and living. He forms us and if he doesn’t, then something else will. Other words, other insights, other experiences will.

The world’s school on the issue of money and finance can be summed up in one word. More! I want more! I need more! I’m owed more! More! More! More! This value pervades all the lessons on money that are in the popular culture. Every commercial reminds us that if we bought more items, we’d have more prestige that would lead to more good feelings about self. If we had more things, or at least more things than those around us, then our lives would be more fulfilling, more meaningful and more joyful.

That lesson on money has left us destitute in more ways than one. Actually this lesson from the world has left us more tired and worn out. The endless pursuit of dollars and things they can buy have worn us out. Instead of having energy for the things of life that truly matter, we wear ourselves out with worry and anxiety, because we extend ourselves or overextend ourselves in the pursuit of more. For some the desire of more leads to physical symptoms of depression, ulcers, hyper tension and many other physical ailments. The pursuit of more has left us bankrupt.

Even more it’s hard to change. For many people the pursuit of more has led to what seems like insurmountable debt for families. Charging a vacation, a boat, an education has brought families to the breaking point because the more has led them only to less. Less security, less connectedness and less contentment tear at husbands and wives. So we need a different lesson. We need to completely remake our thinking on money and stuff and God’s school of finance helps us do such a thing.

**[Expert here.]**

God’s teaching on money is to think very clearly about our role in creating wealth and stuff. Psalm 24 teaches us that ***“the earth is the Lord’s, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it; for he founded it upon the seas and established it upon the waters.”*** [Psalm 24:1-2] God creates, God owns, God gives, God makes. Everything that there ever was, is and ever will be is God’s. We don’t create a thing; we manage what God has already created. Our bodies and minds are created by God. Our experiences are generated by God. These work together to create unique skills and contexts in which we put them to use and make a living. The burden of creating wealth is lifted, and exchanged with the God given responsibility to manage our lives wisely and prudently. The first lesson is to back off a bit, all this stuff isn’t yours in the first place, God made it, you manage it.

The second part of the lesson is counter intuitive, and it’s the Godly secret to contentment. The lesson is this, living generously makes you rich. I learned to tithe [that is give a minimum of 10% of my gross income away.] Gifts are one thing. Gifts are points in time. A tithe is a lifestyle and an understanding about how God provides and blesses our lives. In 1989 and 1990 I served at a church in Southern Illinois. That church was fantastic, but I was their first pastoral intern in quite some time. In their haste they had not read the agreement for my internship completely. I was paid $600 every two weeks. My wife was working in St. Louis at the time and her income was a little more than that. With rent and everything else we were at a deficit every month. We had a red Buick that we were driving and a clunking in the floor board meant only one thing, the transmission was going out. Barb and I had no savings and were barely scraping by. I remember calling my mother and asking her for a $1000 to help fix the car. She asked me if I had been faithful in my giving and I had to ashamedly reply no. Mom replied, once you get that figured out, and then call me and we can talk. From that Sunday on, we have been tithers. Interesting how God has provided so much, and so much more even when we have given away a 1/10 of our income. It’s the most counter intuitive thing in the world, that by giving away you become rich. Perhaps it’s the rippling effect of Paul’s lesson from 2 Corinthians 9:6-8, “Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously. Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will about in every good work.”

**[Testimony]**

So many people watching this lesson can finish this line, “for God so loved the world that he…” God gave. Out of his love he gave. From his heart he gave. From his family he gave. Our God is not a cheap, miserly God. He is not a hoarder. He is, as a function of his nature, a giving God. He didn’t hold back his Son Jesus, what would ever lead us to believe that he would withhold those things we need?

I’m constantly amazed by the amount of pain that goes on regarding money and finance in our lives. Paul writes to Timothy, “But Godliness with contentment is great gain, for we brought nothing into this world and we shall certainly bring nothing out.” [1 Timothy 6:6-7] Contentment is illusive in a more more more mentality, it is impossible. We never get enough, ever, and that leads us away from contentment. But God desires us to have a sense of contentment with our lives and to live lives that reflect his generous spirit. Go deep in your life to find contentment and here’s a few ideas to get you thinking.

Pray before every meal. Don’t be silly about it. “Rub a dub dub, thanks for the grub, “ is hardly a Christian prayer. Acknowledge the Lord’s provision in your life with a simple prayer before you eat. In our family we pray before every meal, even in a restaurant or at a friend’s home, with “Come Lord Jesus, be our guest, and let these gifts, to us be blessed, Amen” Simple, short and an acknowledgement of God’s provision and demonstration of gratitude. Gratitude drives contentment.

Give something away off the top of your income not a leftover piece. For so many of us we give from what we have leftover. It’s almost like a tip to the Lord. If we have a five dollar bill, we give a five dollar bill, if we have a twenty dollar bill we give it. But what if you took a more intentional and holistic view of your money? What if you gave a percentage of your income away rather than what you had left over? Would you be willing to take God at his word and have confidence him to provide and bless what you give away? Would you be willing to make an investment in the things of the Lord Jesus as much as you invest in your consumption? Give first and best to the Lord and you won’t be disappointed.

Finally, for a sense of contentment focus on what you have and not what you don’t have. Take an inventory not only of your credits and debits, of your cash flow and your bills. Even more look at your relationships. Look at your children. Look at your whole life and acknowledge that God has provided for you marvelously. A focus on what we have drives contentment. Some of the best days of our marriage were when we had very little in the way of stuff, but had a contentment that kept us tightly tied together. Maybe this wouldn’t be a bad exercise for your whole family to participate in as you eat together.

This last year we had a preacher join us and he talked about a disease called “affluenza”. He described “affluenza” as buying things you don’t need, with money you don’t have, to impress people you don’t like.” The school of our culture has made the disease of “affluenza” an epidemic. God’s lesson and the desire of his heart for you and me are reflected in Matthew 6, “So do not worry, saying, ‘what shall we eat or what shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ For the pagans run after these things and your heavenly father knows that you need them. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.” [Matthew 6:31-34]

Find a sense of gratitude and use that gratitude to fuel a generous lifestyle and the anxiety you feel will give way in reliance on the Lord Jesus.