



*Week 2*

# **Generosity Frees us from the Dangers of Money**

**Matthew 13:1-9; 18-23**

## *Sermon Outline*

### **Generosity Frees Us from the Dangers of Money Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23**

- I. If you were here last week, you may remember that we started talking about the incredible generosity of God. And we said that we are most like God when we give.
- A. Today, we are going to see that our generosity directly impacts the way we experience the kingdom of God.
  - B. ILL – Tim Keller – We can't see our own greed
    - 1. In reality, we live in a very consumer driven society
    - 2. ILL – Pastor admits being pushed toward consumerism - Buying a car for JD after Escape was totaled
      - a. That's the way we function in the U.S. We are consumeristic people. We regularly spend money to have someone else cook food for us that is not healthy for us. We regularly spend money to upgrade our phones and outfit our houses. We regularly walk in Walmart to buy a \$5 item and come out with \$40 in junk and then we wonder where our money went.
  - C. God says, "If you want to experience true, radical joy, become generous...because generosity frees you from the dangers of money.
- II. Tell (or read) The Parable of the Sower
- A. Thankfully the disciples were clueless, too and asked Jesus what He was talking about
- III. Let me read the explanation of Jesus (Matthew 13:18-23)
- A. v. 19a – This is about the Kingdom of God (life under the reign of God, producing fruits of the spirit)
  - B. v. 19b – Person 1 – Rejects the idea of Jesus
  - C. v. 21 – Person 2 – Abandons Jesus because of hardships
  - D. v. 22 – Person 3 – Accepts Jesus, but never produces fruit (never experiences the Kingdom)
  - E. v. 23 – Person 4 – Accepts Jesus wholeheartedly
- IV. Amazing thing to me – most church people in America fall under Person 3
- A. Believe in God, have some root, have some life, but no fruit – missing the Kingdom
    - 1. Jesus could have given 1000 reasons for believers missing the Kingdom, but He only gave one – cares of the riches of this world
    - 2. The greatest reason people are missing out on the Kingdom of God in America is because we are obsessed with the riches of this world.
    - 3. We are more obsessed with our cars and homes and bank accounts than we are with our Father.
    - 4. God says, "If you would just trust me with your stuff, you could throw off these thorns that are choking you and experience true life, abundant life, in me.
      - a. **Generosity Frees us from the Dangers of Money**
  - B. ILL – Affluenza
    - 1. Jesus – in His pronouncement of His mission – read Isaiah 61:1-2.
      - a. He came to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and to set the oppressed free.

# generosity

 moving toward life that is truly life

b. Our society as a whole is enslaved to material possessions. And we are missing the kingdom because of our concern for the riches of the world.

2. If you're ready to stop going through the motions...if you're ready to experience the abundant life that Jesus promised, here's how you step into the kingdom

a. Generosity frees us from the dangers of money.

V. Generosity is a call to action. Not just for the good of others, but for our good. Not only are we most like God when we give, but we also most likely to experience life in the kingdom – “life that is truly life (1 Tim. 6:19) – when we adopt a lifestyle of generosity.

A. Let's do more than simply acknowledge God's generosity. Let's join Him in His movement of giving. And let's experience the freedom and joy that God desperately desires for us in the process.

B. Generosity is the key that will open a new door in your life – a life free from the dangers of money.

## *Sermon Manuscript*

If you were with us last week, you may remember that we started a new series that we are simply calling “Generosity.” And as we said last week, this is not about getting money from you. This is not about getting time or volunteer services from you. In fact, this whole series is actually about what God wants for you. It’s a look at the heart of Biblical generosity. And last week, as we began to dive into this incredibly rich subject, we saw that we are most like God when we give. We saw that our generosity should not be based on who’s the nicest to us. We saw that it should not be based on how well others think of us or even how they treat us. Beyond that, we saw that our generosity should not even be based on how well we know the person that we are giving to. Instead, our generosity should be an imitation of God. Our generosity should be based on His character...not on the recipient’s character.

So, if you followed that last week and still had the audacity to come back and dig further into the subject of generosity, I applaud you. Thanks for pursuing this journey with us. Further, if you have committed not only to being a part of the worship services as we discuss generosity...but you have also committed to spending time each day reading through the Generosity devotional book, doing the missional activities in the book and participating with a Small Group or Sunday School class that is going through this study as well...you get a big, fat gold star right next to your name.

And if today is your first day to join us during this series...well...it’s too late to walk out of the building at this point.

Seriously, I’m excited about this study. This is something that God has been doing in my own life and it’s a unique and fresh way to see what the Bible has to say about money, possessions and giving. This is something that Jesus talked about consistently. He talked about money, possessions and generosity more than almost any other single subject. So, it’s worthy of our time and attention for that reason if no other.

Today, in Week 2, we are going to take another step into the rich truths that the Bible teaches on this subject...and if you stay with me...what I think you will find is that generosity directly impacts the way that we experience the kingdom of God. In other words, the things that we are going to see today hold huge implications for the way that we experience God on an everyday basis.

Pastor Tim Keller tells a story that shows one reason that the subjects of money and generosity are so important to those of us who live in the Western world today. He says;

Some years ago I was doing a seven-part series of talks on the Seven Deadly Sins at a men's breakfast. My wife, Kathy, told me, "I'll bet that the week you deal with greed will be the lowest attendance." She was right. People packed it out for "Lust" and "Wrath" and even for "Pride."

But nobody thinks they are greedy.

As a pastor I've had people come to me and confess that they struggle with almost every kind of sin. Almost. I cannot recall anyone ever coming to me and saying, "I spend too much money on myself. I think my greedy lust for money is harming my family, my soul, and people around me." Greed hides itself from the victim. The money god's modus operandi includes blindness to your own heart. (Timothy Keller, *Counterfeit Gods*. Dutton, 2009, p. 52)

Isn't that the truth? None of us readily confess to being greedy. Now, some of us know that we spend too much money. Some of us feel like we should be more compassionate and more generous toward those in need, but we rarely feel like the word "greedy" describes us. Just like we saw last week...almost none of us think that we are wealthy...and almost none of us think that we are greedy.

We like to think of ourselves as generous and giving. We like to think of ourselves as compassionate and caring. We like to think that we live selflessly rather than selfishly. And many times we do live that way! But, Jesus presents us with warning after warning that greed will sneak up on us. He continually comes back to this subject to say that those who don't pay careful attention to this area of their lives will end up living as consumers rather than givers without even realizing it.

Here's the reality. We live in a consumer driven culture. We live in a culture where virtually everything we see on the TV and basically everything that we ingest from the internet convinces us that there are great reasons to spend more money and consume more goods.

Have you ever stopped to think about the way that we talk about our lives? Every day, we watch television news reports that tell us about the current consumer price index. We read reports of consumer spending and consumer confidence. And if that weren't enough, we judge the health of nations by their Gross Domestic Product (GDP). What that means is that we judge the health of nations by the amount of goods that they distribute and consume.

As we talk about the health of nations, we don't consider the marriage rates or anything related to the family. We don't calculate the benefits of education or health care. When we want to determine if a nation is healthy or not, we don't consider the spiritual aspects of the nation or the total number of volunteer hours that are logged in a year. None of that. All that we really consider as we look at the GDP is the way a nation consumes material goods.

We live in a world that is driven by consumerism. And as a result, it is becoming increasingly difficult to stand up against the messages of materialism and consumerism. It is becoming increasingly easy to fall in line with the rest of society and treat money and things as if they are the real source of joy in life.

We live in a culture where the headwinds of consumerism are blowing hard against us. But, God says the way to step into my kingdom...the way to experience glimpses of heaven here on earth...is to go in the opposite direction. God says – no matter how much you hear this message

of consumerism from the world around you – it will never satisfy you. And the antidote to this whole consumerism problem is to live a life of generosity.

I heard a pastor speaking about this subject recently when he told about his family purchasing a new vehicle. He said that they didn't have much money and certainly didn't have the money to go out and buy a new car. But, his wife's Ford Escape was rear-ended by a larger truck and it had to be totaled.

Thankfully, the driver who was at fault had a good insurance plan and the insurance company got right on the case. In fact, when all was said and done, the insurance company gave them a few thousand dollars to replace the vehicle.

Initially, this pastor and his wife determined that they were not going to go into debt to get their next vehicle. They also determined that they were going to use some of the insurance proceeds to pay down a credit card. Therefore, they decided to buy an old beater car that would last them a year or two while they got their finances in order.

So, they started looking on Craigslist. They looked at cars that cost about \$1000. And as they looked, they found a few. These cars had 300,000 miles on them. The paint job on these vehicles left something to be desired. The windows – which used to be power windows – no longer went up and down. And the more they looked at \$1000 cars, the more they thought about buying a \$2000 car.

So, they looked at \$2000 cars. And these vehicles were starting to look a little better than the \$1000 variety. They weren't in great shape, but they looked like they would run for several more months.

But, the more they looked at vehicles, the more they started to think “Wouldn't it be nice...” Wouldn't it be nice if we had a little more room for our family? Wouldn't it be nice if we had something a little more reliable? Wouldn't it be nice if this car was more in line with the other cars in our neighborhood?

And before long, this pastor's family ended up spending \$4000 on a Ford Explorer – Eddie Bauer edition. It had a few miles on it...but it also had leather seats, a sunroof and power everything.

Don't get me wrong. \$4000 is not extravagant money to spend on a vehicle. But, it was \$3000 over the budget they had set. And this family experienced what so many of us experience as we stand in the headwinds of a consumer culture. They slowly got dragged from a “beater” vehicle to something more reliable. And from “something more reliable,” they were carried along to “wouldn't it be nice if...” And in the end, they spent four times the amount that they intended to spend.

That's what a consumeristic culture does to us. That's the way we function in the U.S. We regularly spend money to have someone else cook food for us...food that is not even healthy. We regularly spend money to upgrade our phones and outfit our houses. We regularly walk in

Walmart to buy a \$5 item and come out with \$40 in junk and then we wonder where our money went.

And that's why it is so important for us to take a hard look at the subject of generosity. Because generosity is God's plan to get us out of the rat race. Generosity is God's way of putting our lives back in balance. Throughout Scripture, God calls out to us... "If you want to experience true, radical joy, become generous...because generosity frees you from the dangers of money."

Let's look at that in the Bible. I want to look at a story that Jesus told this morning and see how He demonstrates that generosity is critical to the way that we experience God on an everyday basis. Matthew 13 is where we are going to be...but as a way to remind you of this story...let me just tell you what Jesus said and then we'll look at His explanation.

Here's the setting. Jesus goes out to a lake – the Sea of Galilee. And at this point in his ministry, so many people want to be around Jesus for healing and to see that miracles, that a huge crowd gathers by the seashore. So Jesus, having compassion on the people, pushes the boat slightly out into the water...sits down...and begins teaching them. He tells them a story. And the people that have gathered around know that this is going to be a powerful story. They know that it is going to hold some great spiritual truth. So, they get quiet and listen.

Then, Jesus says, "Once there was a farmer who went out to cast seed on his property." You can imagine what this would have looked like. The old farmer may have been wearing his wide brimmed hat and he probably had a pouch or some sort of container to hold his seed.

"As the farmer walked along the way," Jesus said, "he cast his seed along the ground. Some of the seed fell on the pathway and it was quickly eaten up by the birds."

Even though they did not have paved pathways and roads in 1<sup>st</sup> century Israel, they had clearly designated pathways for traveling. And the dirt on these pathways would have been so compacted by all of the foot traffic that there would have been no way for a seed to penetrate that ground. So, it bounces on the ground and about that time, Jesus says, a bird comes and takes it away.

But, Jesus went on. "Some of the seed fell on the rocky soil." If you ever get the chance to go to Israel, you will see that the ground is covered in rocks. In fact, for the farmers of Israel to cultivate a field for planting crops, they have to pull up rocks and small boulders that are littered across almost every inch of the ground. So, when a farmer is ready to begin working a field, you will see a huge pile of rocks at the edge of the field where he uprooted all of them and moved them out of the way. So, rocky ground is very common in Israel.

And Jesus says, "In these rocky places, there wasn't much soil. So, the seed sprang up quickly, but as soon as the sun came out, the plant was scorched and it withered."

"Then, some of the seed fell among the thorns." This seed put down roots and actually started to grow. "But, soon," Jesus says, "the thorns choked out the plant."

Finally, as Jesus taught the crowd, He said, “And finally some of the seed fell on good soil where it grew and produced a crop – a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown.” And He concluded by saying “He who has ears, let him hear.” In other words, Jesus finished this story by saying that there was an important spiritual lesson in the story. In essence, He said, “Pay attention. Listen. And learn from the story of story of the seeds.”

I don’t know about you, but if I heard that story for the first time, I would think that Jesus was a little bit off His rocker. I would think that something was missing here.

Think about it. He essentially says, “Seed was thrown on the ground. Some of it fell on good soil and grew. Other seed fell on poor ground and didn’t grow.” Then, He finishes by saying this is an important spiritual lesson.

If I was among that crowd and was hearing this story for the first time, I would have thought...”Doesn’t everybody know that? Doesn’t it just make sense that some seed will grow and some seed will fail? Doesn’t it make sense that some soil is good and some is not meant for planting? How is this so important to me spiritually?”

Thankfully, the disciples were slow like me. They eventually get Jesus away from the crowds and they say, “Jesus...we don’t get it. What was the huge lesson in the parable of the sower?”

So, Jesus broke it down for them.

Let’s read His explanation together. In Matthew 13, let’s start reading in verse 18 and we’ll go through verse 23.

He said, “Listen then to what the parable of the sower means: When anyone hears the message about the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what was sown in their heart. This is the seed sown along the path.”

Let’s stop there for just a second because Jesus is showing us some important stuff in these verses. First of all, did you hear what He said about this parable? He said that this is a “message about the kingdom.” In other words, He is saying that the parable we are looking at is a parable that tells us what the kingdom of God is like. It tells us how to properly relate to God and how to experience some aspect of heaven here on earth. So keep that in mind. This is a kingdom parable.

But, after He mentions that this is a kingdom story, He tells us that there are a few different ways that people will respond to the message of God and to the message of God’s kingdom. And in the verse that we just read, He identifies the first way that people will respond to the message.

He essentially says, “There are some people that will hear the message of God and they will immediately reject what they are hearing.” Some people – and we probably all know a few people who think like this – but some people are simply not going to listen to a message about God. As soon as God is mentioned, they will look at you and give you the, “Are you kidding me?” look. They will say things like, “Are you really telling me that you think there is a huge



being out there somewhere...who you cannot see...and you cannot hear...but you think he really exists?"

You know these people. I know these people. They simply refuse to believe in a living, loving God. And that's the first way that Jesus says some people will respond to the message of the kingdom of God...with utter disbelief.

But, Jesus goes on. He continues explaining the parable in verse 20.

"The seed falling on rocky ground refers to someone who hears the word and at once receives it with joy. But since they have no root, they last only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, they quickly fall away."

This is the second way that people are going to respond to the message of Jesus. They are going to hear it and initially respond with joy, but fall away as soon as trouble or persecution arises.

So, in the second group of people, you are going to find those that say, "I believe in God. I believe there had to be something bigger than me that created all of this." After all, in Romans and in other places, the Bible tells us that God is revealed in creation. He is seen through the things that He crafted in the created world.

So, these people look at the world and say, "Yeah...I think there really is a God out there." But, as soon as they take the next step with the Gospel, they start to back away. They start hearing statements that Jesus makes like, "Anyone who wants to follow me must take up his cross daily," and they think, "This is not what I signed up for." They hear that following Jesus demands that we die to ourselves and take up His ways. And when they hear that they think, "This is too much. I'm not ready for all of that. I just want to hang out with my belief that there is a God and leave it at that."

As soon as persecution or hardships arise, this group steps away from their claim to follow Jesus.

Then, Jesus mentions a third way that people will respond to the message of God. We are going to come back to this one in a minute, so let me just read the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> ways that Jesus mentions in this story.

"The seed falling among the thorns refers to someone who hears the word, but the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth choke the word, making it unfruitful. But the seed falling on good soil refers to someone who hears the word and understands it. This is the one who produces a crop, yielding a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown."

So, with the fourth response, Jesus notes that there will be a group of people that hear the Word of God and dive in head first. These people will walk in faith. They will live lives that imitate the ways of Jesus. They will love God deeply and love their neighbors practically. And as a result, Jesus says that this group of people produces a "fruit" with their lives.

We could talk about what this fruit entails, but for the sake of time, let's just acknowledge that they experience the Fruit of the Spirit that Paul talks about in Galatians 5 and their lives are continually moving further and further into the experience of God's kingdom on earth.

But, let's back up for just a second. Did you hear what Jesus said about the 3<sup>rd</sup> group of people and how they will respond to the message of God? He said, "The seed falling among the thorns refers to someone who hears the word, but the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth choke the word, making it unfruitful."

Think about that. Jesus says that these people have life. They put down roots. They grow. And since Jesus is talking about spiritual matters here, it seems safe to say that these people put down spiritual roots and see some spiritual growth. They believe in God. They join a church; they participate in some things that are good for the community. They teach their children to pray before meals and they are generally "good" people. But, in spite of the fact that they have some spiritual life...something in their lives chokes them out so that they do not produce fruit. Something chokes them out so that they do not experience the kingdom of God in the way that they really should experience the kingdom.

Here's the amazing thing to me. Probably 85% of the people in churches across the U.S. today represent the 3<sup>rd</sup> group. They do the right things. They believe the right things. They are good and decent people. But, they are going through the motions. They are carrying out the spiritual routines that they feel they are supposed to carry out. And their lives are void of spiritual fruit!

These people leave the church building wondering, "Is this really all there is to the life of a Christian? Am I really experiencing the 'abundant' life that Jesus talked about?" They wonder these things and they walk out of the building...but they rarely encounter God again until they return to the church building the following week.

85% of the people that sit in the pews of our churches are going through all of the Christian routines...because they do have some spiritual life...but they are not experiencing the fruit of God's kingdom in any noticeable way. And that's true whether you are involved in a church in New York or California or anywhere in between.

So, Jesus says that there is a segment of people who will have some spiritual life, but they will not experience the fruit of living in God's kingdom. And He could have given any number of reasons for the lack of spiritual fruit. He could have listed 1000 reasons that this group is missing out on the kingdom of God. He could have said that they were unfruitful because they were liars. He could have said that adultery and sexual promiscuity was causing them to miss the kingdom. He could have identified anger, bitterness and an unwillingness to forgive others as the problem. But, He only identified one issue.

Did you hear what He said? Did you catch the one thing that He identified here? In verse 22, Jesus says, "The seed falling among the thorns refers to someone who hears the word, but the *worries of this life* and *the deceitfulness of wealth* choke the word, making it unfruitful."

The worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth. The only thing He identified in this story that was making the believers live unfruitful lives was their concerns about the material stuff of this world.

Guys, we live in a consumer culture. We live in a culture that is more driven by wealth and material possessions than any other culture in the history of humanity. We live in a country that sets its Dream as having a home of our own and being financially successful in our careers. And we fall in with the culture of consumerism on a weekly basis.

2000 years ago, Jesus told a simple story with a profound message: Be careful about the way you think of and handle your material stuff, because if you're not, it will choke the life out of you. Be careful about the way you handle your money, because if you're not, it can cause you to miss out on the fruit of the kingdom of God.

The greatest reason people are missing out on the Kingdom of God in America is because we are obsessed with the riches of this world. We are more obsessed with our cars and homes and bank accounts than we are with our Father. We are content with the "amount of God" we have, but we are not content with the amount of stuff that we have.

And I truly believe that God is saying to us, "If you would just trust me with your stuff, you could throw off these thorns that are choking you and experience true life, abundant life, in me. If you would just trust me with your finances, you could find out that I own it all and I am a loving Father. If you would just trust me with your things, you would quickly learn that I can provide you with both material goods and the life that is truly life."

One of the reasons that we are going through this series on generosity...one of the reasons that this subject is so important throughout the course of Scripture...is that God wants us to understand the power of money to either keep us out of ... or propel us into the kingdom of God.

Here's the amazing thing that Scripture teaches us over and over again. The way you handle money can cause you to miss out on the kingdom of God...BUT, generosity frees us from the dangers of money. Generosity frees us from the thorns of life that so easily choke us out. Generosity is God's antidote to the struggle with money.

In a popular PBS documentary called *Affluenza*, this struggle with consumerism is developed into a one hour program. In one particular scene from that film, they open with a look at car commercials from the 1950s. The narrator says, "Are you old enough to remember the '50's—that golden age of prosperity following the Second World War?" Scenes of a prosperous family in the 1950s are shown as the narrator continues: "We felt richer then than we do now. The famous book at the time was *America: The Affluent Society*." New York psychologist Paul Wachtel comments: "[That book's] title would be laughable today. People would reject it. Even though we have actually in terms of gross national product more than twice as much. Everybody's home has got twice as much stuff in it."

A number of scenes compare homes from the 1950s with modern homes. The narrator says, "Back in 1958, only 4 percent of American homes had dishwashers. Now more than half do.

Less than 1 percent had color television. Now it's 97 percent. There were no microwaves, DVD players, or personal computers."

The owner of a big house with a four-car garage comments: "A four-car garage is [for] storage. We never have enough storage. You never have enough garages."

The narrator continues: "Never enough. So much stuff. So little space, even though the average new house has grown larger every decade. Now many new homes have three-car garages. Nearly 900 square feet of garage space alone, which is about the size of an entire home in the 1950s."

Ford commercials from the 1950s are compared with footage of modern cars. The narrator says, "In that gilded new world, hardly any new cars had air conditioning. Today more than 90 percent do. Economy cars offer more features now than luxury cars did then." Modern sport utility vehicles are shown. "Today's hottest selling cars are gas hungry, expensive sport utility vehicles." A car salesman says, "To a lot of people, it's a status symbol. They are willing to spend \$30,000 to \$50,000."

A 1950s Chevrolet commercial is shown while the narrator says, "Just as they did in the '50's, new cars help us keep up with the Joneses. But these days we find it more appealing to fly. We fly 25 times as much as we did then." (*Affluenza* (Bullfrog Films, 1997), produced by John de Graaf and Vivia Boe; submitted by Jerry De Luca.)

Long before there were microwave ovens, DVD players and iPhones, God warned us about living affluent lives and gave us a way to be free of the dangers of money.

Early in His earthly ministry, Jesus went into a synagogue and read from a scroll. He was very intentional about what He read, because these verses were the defining verses of His earthly mission. Here's what He read...

The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is on me,  
because the Lord has anointed me  
to proclaim good news to the poor.  
He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted,  
to proclaim freedom for the captives  
and release from darkness for the prisoners,  
to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor

That is the mission of Jesus. He came to proclaim good news to the poor, bind up the brokenhearted and to proclaim freedom for the captives.

His mission is still the same in our world today because our society as a whole is enslaved to material possessions. We are missing the kingdom because of our concern for the riches of the world. But, Jesus has proclaimed the way out. Jesus has proclaimed that generosity can free us from the dangers of money.



If you're ready to stop going through the motions...if you're ready to experience the abundant life that Jesus promised, here's how you step into the kingdom...become radically generous. Throw away your giving chart and start listening to the voice of God as He calls you to live generosity. Study the ways of Jesus and start to imitate His generous lifestyle. Because generosity frees us from the dangers of money.

Guys, this parable serves as a call to action. We can't just let this pass by us without doing anything. This is a call to action for our own good...not just for the good of others, but it is a call to action for our own good. Because not only are we most like God when we give, but we are also most likely to experience life in the kingdom – the “life that is truly life” (1 Timothy 6:19) – when we adopt a lifestyle of generosity.

Let's do something more that give mental acknowledgement to this. Let's join God in His generosity and in His movement of giving. And let's experience the freedom and joy that God so desperately desires for us in the process.

Generosity is the key that can open a new door in our lives – a new door to lives free from the dangers of money. That's God's way. And that's God's generosity plan.