

“Abundant Faith, Generous Hearts - Extravagant Gift and Needed Investment”

Scripture: Matthew 13:44-46; Luke 14:27-33

Graphics: heart, harvest

Big Truth: When we have abundant faith in Jesus, because we are convinced of his sacrifice and salvation through the cross, our lives become a sacrifice for Him. Abundant faith leads us to generous hearts - to give our time, talents, gifts, and service. This response requires investment into the life of the faith community, giving more than we get (or so we think), investing in others, and committing to generously give as a response to our abundant faith.

Focus Phrase: I invest in the Kingdom because of the extravagant gift of Jesus.

1. Introduction

- A. You may have heard this one, but it’s a classic: There was a rich man who was quite distressed over the prospect of not being able to take his riches with him when he died. So, before he died, he loaded his briefcase with two gold bars from his private vault and left instructions to have the case locked with the key, handcuffed it to his wrist and the key placed into his grave clothes. His family carried out his orders correctly, to the letter. When he appeared at the pearly gates, he had the briefcase with him, key in hand. St. Peter asked, “What do you have in your suitcase?” Very proudly, the man unlocked the case, opened it and displayed his two gold bars. St. Peter said, “Isn’t that special! You brought pavement.”
- B. There once was a strongman at a circus sideshow who demonstrated his power before large audiences every night. Toward the end of one performance, he squeezed the juice from a lemon between his hands. He said to the onlookers, “I will offer \$200 to anyone here who can squeeze another drop from this lemon. A thin older lady hobbled up the stage. She picked up the lemon and clamped it between her two frail, boney hands. She squeezed. And out came a teaspoon of lemon juice. The strongman was amazed. He paid the woman \$200 but privately asked her, “What is the secret of your strength?” “Practice,” the woman answered. “I have been treasurer of my church for forty-two years!”
- C. OK. OK. One more: Two men were marooned on an Island. One man paced back and forth worried and scared while the other man sat back and was sunning himself. The first man said to the second man, “Aren’t you afraid we are about to die.” “No,” said the second man, “I make \$10,000 a week and tithe faithfully to my church every week. It’s Stewardship Month at my church. My Pastor will find me.”
- D. Over the past few weeks, we’ve been focusing in on **faith** - faith, Jesus said, that can move mountains. Our faith in Jesus’ power gives US the power to forgive, heal, pray, and be humble...just like Jesus.

- E. Forgiveness, healing, praying, and humility are all costly to us, in some ways. But there's another important outworking of faith in our lives.
- F. As we enter into a season of harvest and thanksgiving, our focus shifts to one more response to our faith. **Generosity and Giving.**
- G. Faith in Jesus gives us the **power to give.**
- H. And this isn't just about money. Last week, when we welcomed four new members, they each gave their membership vows. At the same time, the congregation - y'all - also renewed your vows.
- I. And in addition to resisting evil and vowing to be faithful in following Jesus, we all vowed that we would, "...faithfully participate in the ministries of the church through our prayers, our presence, our gifts, and our service."
- J. In a single word, we vow to GIVE. To give our time. To give our prayers. To give our gifts of resources and tithes, and to give service to the work of the kingdom of God right here in our congregation and communities.
- K. So, in one very plainly stated way, this series is about giving...stewardship of our resources that have come from God. In a practical sense, being a healthy and forward-looking church takes the body of believers generously giving.
- L. Yet, it's bigger than that, as we'll see over the next four weeks. Many times, when the pastor and worship team spends time preaching about resources, money, and tithing, we may be tempted to groan a little.
- M. But, I'll tell you a secret. Giving changed my life, literally. Stewardship of the resources that God has given us one of the most exciting and kingdom-focused things we can do as disciples of Jesus. Not only because Jesus is very clear about its importance in our discipleship, but because it has, can, will, and does change your life AND the lives of others...when we generously give.
- N. We've called this series **Abundant Faith, Generous Hearts.** Abundance and generosity go hand-in-hand as we chase after Jesus together.
- O. We're going to keep studying a few of Jesus' parables, specifically about stewardship. I pray this isn't just a series about asking all of us to increase our giving in the months and years ahead. I pray this is a time of growth and blessing, as a generous response to the abundant faith Jesus is growing in you and me.
- P. Let's pray and then we can begin with a parable about extravagant gifts...and then the call for an investment in the kingdom work God is doing.
- Q. PRAY!**
- R. Today we'll start with three parables of Jesus. The first two are super short and the third one is where we'll focus in.

- S. God has given us an extravagant gift - faith in Him. We're called to make an investment in the kingdom of God, through the church, so that God can increase His work in our lives for Him.
- T. Write this down: **I invest in the Kingdom because of the extravagant gift of Jesus.**
- U. Let's start in Matthew chapter 13, starting in verse 44...what is this extravagant gift we've received?

2. Scripture

A. READ Matthew 13:44-46

- i. You may have heard these two very short parables before. They aren't very difficult to interpret. Jesus told his disciples that the Kingdom of God - the realm of God for the people that made up the faithful followers of Jesus in every place they find themselves - THAT kingdom is of incredible value. These parables are a little outrageous.
- ii. This kingdom has outlandish value - like a buried treasure that you'd be willing to sell everything to secure by buying the land under which it's buried. Or a pearl that's worth more than all your other pearls combined... and you sell THOSE to buy that ONE pearl.
- iii. Yet, we know that the Kingdom of God is not something we can buy with gold or silver or 'benjamins'. Jesus already paid every single penny of the cost of the Kingdom of God to be established on earth and in heaven. SO THAT (and here's the really good part) SO THAT God could give the Kingdom to you as a gift. Free gift. "Here. Have the Kingdom and every benefit that comes for those IN IT as citizens."
- iv. But is the uncountable value of the gift of the Kingdom the only lesson of these two tiny parables?
- v. No way, right? What about this idea of the **investment** the two people in the parable were willing to make IN the Kingdom...because they knew how valuable it is? They were willing to sell everything...EVERYTHING!
- vi. And remember, they were willing to sell everything for a GIFT...something they didn't HAVE to pay for, but something that they wanted to invest in.
- vii. Turn with me to Luke chapter 14, starting in verse 27...

B. READ Luke 14:27-33

- i. These two pseudo-parables are under the heading The Cost of Discipleship.
- ii. And, really, they're two open-ended, but rhetorical questions from Jesus that automatically elicit the response, "No one!"
 - a. Who would start to build a tower and not make sure he/she had the money needed to complete it? No one, of course!

- b. Or who, when waging war against another army, wouldn't sit down and see how many soldiers I have compared to the other army? No one!
 - c. There's a cost to building a tower. There's a cost to waging a war. And, if you aren't willing to count the cost and invest in those things, or a buried treasure or a pearl of great value, OR AN EVERLASTING KINGDOM of GOD, then not only will you not be an investor, but you won't receive the gift.
 - d. Said more plainly, if you aren't willing, Jesus said, to invest in the Kingdom - which is a free gift from God to you - with your prayers, your presence, your gifts, and your service, then you can't be a disciple.
 - e. Jesus wasn't looking for a huge following of people that could make it under the limbo stick set at 6' high. Jesus was looking for those who were willing to give everything to invest in this once-in-a-universe Kingdom that is not only valuable, but everlasting. And not only to you, but to the world.
- C. Jesus asks, "Are you willing to make the investment? For yourself? Your family? Your community?" And this isn't simply about giving money to the church and its ministries. This is about investing your life - every aspect of it - in the Kingdom of God, because of faith in Jesus, by supporting the ministries of the church SO THAT the WORK of the Kingdom being done here can increase inside and outside the church.

3. Application

- A. Randy Alcorn wrote this: "What's the biggest misconception Christians have about giving? That when we give money away to a church or ministry, or to help the needy, it's gone. While we hope others will benefit from it, we're quite sure we won't. We think we're divesting ourselves of money, disassociating from it. Once it leaves our hands, we imagine, it has no connection to us, no future implications relevant to our lives. We couldn't be more wrong. What we think we own will be rudely taken from us—some of it before we die, and anything that's left the moment we die. But now is our window of opportunity not to divest ourselves of money but to invest it in heaven. We don't have to have everything taken from us. We can give it before disaster or death strike. Now's our chance to give what we can't keep to gain what we can't lose. We are God's money managers. He wants us to invest his money in his kingdom. He tells us he's keeping track of every cup of cold water we give the needy in his name. He promises us he will reward us in heaven because we help the poor and needy who cannot pay us back for what we do for them. We can buy up shares in God's kingdom. We can invest in eternity." Randy Alcorn, *The Law of Rewards: Giving what you can't*

keep to gain what you can't lose, Tyndale Momentum, 2003.

B. So how do you make a kingdom investment in the extravagant gift that is Jesus and His church?

i. First, **Count the cost and know the value.**

- a. You wouldn't invest in anything through the stock market without first knowing what the stock was worth.
- b. You wouldn't buy a new hunting rifle or an SUV or a house without knowing everything you can find out about the value of it.
- c. Maybe the first question is: "What's the value of the church to you?" Or even bigger is, "What's the value of the Kingdom of God to you?"
- d. Is the value of the church strictly what you get from what the church does? Or is the value of the church calculated in how Jesus is using people of the church to change the world - to make disciples?
- e. It makes a difference because if the value of the church is what you get FROM the church, then its value will be limited to the people that are part of it. If the value is kingdom-focused, and Jesus is at the center of its worth, then its value will be limitless and its reach will be eternal.
- f. Count the cost and know the value.

ii. Then, **Take inventory of what YOU have.**

- a. God has given you many things - resources, spiritual gifts, time, talents, relationships, leadership, grace and mercy, a home base for ministry.
- b. What are you willing to invest in the work of the Kingdom right here, right now? Of all the things God has given you, are you willing to give them - not to a church so that you can get back, but to a movement that will impact the lives of those whom you reach out to in Jesus' name?
- c. What do you have that Jesus wants to use for His kingdom work? What are you willing to invest - release - for the sake of the Gospel of Jesus? Time? Prayer? Spiritual gifts? Monetary resources?
- d. Take inventory of what you have. Remember that it ALL came from God in the first place.

iii. Then, when you've counted the cost and inventoried what you have to give, **Go all in.**

- a. Every spiritual gift for God's glory and to build up the church. Every resource you have. Every block of time or way to serve using your hands and feet. Every penny that God is leading you to share. Every spare moment mopping the floor, working at a job, or spending time to focus on Jesus and His kingdom.
- b. Going all in doesn't automatically mean that you'll be poor, overworked, and blistered. It means that you know the value of the Kingdom and

you're willing to do what it takes to serve God through the church in whatever ways He asks.

- c. I said at the beginning that giving changed my life. That's why I'm here today, willingly (most days). I said, "God use what you want to use for your glory." He chose my career. He chose my spouse and family. He chose my money. He chose my house. He even chose my guitar. AND my spiritual gifts of leadership and administration. All for His glory.
- d. Let's **go all in together** and just wait and see what God does with it all! All because we believe that Jesus is who He says He is and the church is God's best plan for the salvation of the world.
- e. Invest in the Kingdom because of the extravagant gift of Jesus.

4. Conclusion

- A. God is giving us abundant faith in Him. And He is giving us generous hearts.
- B. This week, take inventory of all that you have...and all that you're willing to give to God for His use. I pray you find it's one and the same list.
- C. Next week - we'll ask, "When we go all in by giving our prayers, presence, gifts, and service, **what's in it for me?**" What have you done for me lately, God?
- D. Let's pray...
- E. **PRAY!**