



Possessions and Jesus

We're going to try to cover Jesus and all the New Testament. This is, obviously, where we are new covenant people, and so what we see Jesus saying...now, Jesus is unique in the sense that He's speaking still in old covenant context...He has not died on the cross, but He's ushering in a new covenant. So, it's a little tricky at times, but then in the New Testament, we'll get to us under the new covenant.

The Life of Jesus

So, the life of Jesus. He's from a poor family. We see that His family was kind of the exception, giving more inexpensive offerings there in Luke 2. Surrounded by varied followers - fishermen like James and John - and actually, probably a little more well to do than some other fisherman because they had people who worked with them, hired servants there in Mark 1. Matthew, a tax collector, probably had a lot of money. Then, the rest of them probably ordinary peasants, so varied followers. It's interesting. In the Gospels, we see Jesus attracting poor people and rich people, both-and.

From a poor family with varied followers, he lead an itinerant ministry. Now, this is important. Jesus didn't stay in one place; He traveled. The disciples who were with Him did the same thing. So, He would say things like Luke 9, "*Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head.*" So, that's unique in that they didn't have a place where they were living all the time, like a house. Now, we have evidence that Peter probably still had a house that they would go and stay in, but they had an itinerant ministry with an intentional mission. We talked about Luke 4 already.

Jesus came, and this is how I want to describe His mission. It was a spiritual mission. Primarily, He came to preach good news. He came to preach the gospel. That's what Jesus came to do, but that was a spiritual mission with social ramifications, to address deep needs. He did come to the poor, the captive, the blind, the oppressed, there in Luke 4, and we see Him healing people of disease. We see Him telling blind men they can see, raising dead people to life. So, there's social ramifications of the gospel. Spiritual mission, He's preaching good news, primarily, with social ramifications.

See the universality of Jesus' mission here in Luke 4. Jesus did not come only for local affection; He came for global adoration. This is something we looked at. Jesus came for the stranger, the outcast, not just for the people of Israel, ultimately. Universality of Jesus' mission, and the radicality of Jesus' mercy. "Today is the day of salvation," He said. "Today, that which you longed for in the Old Testament is here. It's fulfilled in your hearing. So, that's the life of Jesus in a nutshell.

The Temptations of Jesus

The temptations of Jesus. Notice as you read through Matthew 4, it's interesting. What you'll find is all of these temptations, at least indirectly if not directly, dealt with possessions. All three temptations involved material possessions, and what we find in what Jesus does in resisting those temptations is that spiritual integrity is more important than material prosperity. Spiritual sustenance is more important than physical sustenance.

There's a warning here from the very beginning of Jesus' ministry, the lure of the world is strong, but what does Jesus do every time He's tempted with the lure of the world? He quotes the Word. The power of God's Word is sufficient. That's why we're spending all of our time thinking about Scripture here, and it might seem even laborious at times, but the best way we can fight materialism in our hearts and in the culture around us is with the Word of God. That's the best way. Spiritual integrity more important than material prosperity.

The Teachings of Jesus

The teachings of Jesus. Now, what we're going to do is we're going to walk through His teachings in two kind of groups. Just His general teachings, His encounters with people, and then His parables we're going to do second. So, we'll start with His general teachings beginning at the Sermon on the Mount. *"Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."* (Matthew 5:3) Jesus is saying blessing is reserved for the utterly destitute. Now, that doesn't necessarily mean physically poor, but the word "poor in spirit" there literally means utterly destitute, those who are destitute for God, theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Matthew 6:1-4, piety should not be paraded. Don't give in order to be seen by others. That doesn't mean it's bad to talk about giving and that sort of thing, but this means the motive of our hearts must never be to give in order to earn the applause of men. Then, in Matthew 6, Jesus talks about prayer and tells us how to pray. Matthew 6:11-12, the Father provides physical provision. We ask God to meet our needs, not our greeds. *"Give us this day our daily bread,"* that's based on - remember, we saw that in the manna from heaven - day-by-day provision of bread. God meets our needs, not our greeds. We don't pray for God to meet our greeds; we pray for God to meet our needs. The Father provides physical provision and then provides spiritual redemption. Food for our stomach and forgiveness of our sins, back-to-back there in Matthew 6:11-12. Now, starting in Matthew 6:19 in the Sermon on the Mount, this is where we see a block. From this point in Matthew 6 to the end of Matthew 6, a block of teaching about possessions that are extremely important.

Two treasuries. Look at Matthew 6:19, *"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."* Notice here, Jesus is not against you storing up treasures. Jesus is not saying to us, "Don't store up treasures." Instead, He's saying to every single one of us in American culture of wealth, "Store up real treasure." We can live for temporal treasures that we cannot keep that moth and rust will destroy. Does that sound like a solid investment plan? Put your treasures where they'll be stolen. No. Jesus is not saying here just that materialism is wrong; He's saying it's ridiculous. Jesus is not saying don't invest. He's saying stop making stupid investments. Invest in that which matters. We can live for eternal treasures that we cannot lose; treasures that will grow and can never be taken away. What's the better investment?

When you think about it this way, realize what Jesus is saying. Generosity is not a huge sacrifice; it's humbly selfish - like store up for yourselves. Jesus is telling us to seek gain for ourselves, and the way we seek gain for ourselves is putting our hope and treasures in heaven. That's what Jim Elliot said, "He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose." That's just smart to avoid materialism. Wesley said, "I value all things only by the price they shall gain in eternity."

This is the picture. We are storing up...Randy Alcorn gives this example in the book he wrote, and I'm going to read it to you.

Imagine you're alive at the end of the Civil War in the United States. You're living in the South, but you're a Northerner. You plan to move back North as soon as the war is over. While in the South, you've accumulated lots of Southern Confederate currency. Now, suppose you know for a fact the North's going to win the war and the end is imminent. What are you going to do with your Confederate money? If you're smart, there's only one answer. You immediately cash in your Confederate currency for US currency, the only money that's going to have value once the war is over. You only keep enough Confederate currency to meet your short-term needs. As believers, we have inside knowledge of a coming change in the worldwide economic situation. The currency of this world will be worthless at our death or Christ's return, both of which are imminent. This knowledge should radically affect our investment strategy. For us to accumulate vast earthly treasures in the face of the inevitable future is equivalent to stockpiling Confederate money; it's not just wrong, it is stupid.

Which treasury are we going to live for, Jesus asks? Two treasures, and He commands us, live for treasures in heaven.

Two truths, where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. Here are the two truths: number one, our use of money demonstrates where our heart is. You want to know where your heart is? Look at your checkbook and look at your budget. Our money does not lie. This is humbling. Our money demonstrates where our heart is, and our use of money determines where our heart goes. Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. Money leads, hearts follow. People say, "I want more of a heart for missions." Put your money in missions. You want a heart for the lost and the poor? Put your money towards the lost and the poor. You will not have a heart for the lost and poor if you keep buying more and greater gadgets and stuff; it won't happen. Money leads, hearts follow.

Right after this Jesus talks about two perspectives. "*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 within you is darkness, how great is that darkness!*" (Matthew 6:22-23) Two options here when it comes to perspective, how we see. Shortsighted: eyes focused on the things of earth. Concerned with where you and others are going to be a few years from now. That's how the world lives. You get the next gadget, so you can get ahead of the next guy. Financial counselors say, "You need to plan ahead so you know where you're going to be 20, 30, 40, 50 years from now." I want to propose to you that that kind of counsel is shortsighted. It's absolutely shortsighted. It's shortsighted to live for the day when we will be 60 or 70 or 80 years old with our money. There's a different perspective, and it's farsighted: eyes focused on treasure in eternity. The concern is not where we or others are going to be a few years from now, but the concern is where we and others are going to be a few million years from now.

We don't need to plan for what's going to happen 30 years from now; we need to plan for what's going to happen 30 million years from now, and spend our money accordingly. Choose investments carefully; which one is the greater return 30 million years from now, and spend on that. You get a nice car, a nicer car. So, you have a simple car and you say, "Well, for this much more I can get a nicer car here." Then, you look at that money, maybe it's 5 or \$10,000 extra, and you think, "Or I could invest in a church planter in India who will go into an unreached people group to share the gospel." What's going to have an effect on 30 million years from now? This is a no-brainer all of a sudden; it is a no-brainer. This changes our perspective, what we do.

Right after talking about eyes and sight, Jesus says, *"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."* (Matthew 6:24) Two masters...notice Jesus did not say, "You should not serve God and money." He said, "You cannot serve both God and money, it's impossible." The choice is there. Money on the throne and a life wasted in the pursuit of wealth on earth. Or God on the throne, a life invested in the pursuit of wealth in heaven.

So, from there Jesus goes on and He talks about not worrying, don't be anxious about your life, and this is where we see sometimes our seeking after stuff is not just a greedy desire for more. It's a manifestation of insecurity in our hearts. Jesus says, *"Seek the kingdom of Christ."* Earthly treasures multiply anxiety. When you put your money in the stock market, your hope rises and falls on the stock market. When you put your money in stuff, your security rises and falls on stuff. Don't do that. That is a miserable way to live. Put your hope in God. Seek Him, His kingdom. Earthly treasures multiply anxiety; eternal treasures guarantee security. This is where it's good. You get this expounded on over in Luke 12 where Jesus is saying the same things, but I want you to listen to what He says over there. *"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."* Now, Jesus just said sell your possessions, give to the needy - bold command - but I want you to notice what He says right before that, *"Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom."* That verse right there, that's the key to this whole picture tonight, I think. It is the key to overcoming materialism; it is the key to letting go of our things; it is the key to obeying God even when we have hard commands like sell your possessions and give to the poor. The key is we don't need to be afraid, because our Father's good pleasure is to give us the kingdom.

Follow with me here. Trust the love of Christ. Jesus, right before He gives us the command, He says, *"You have a shepherd who protects you."* You're a little flock. He cares for you. He shepherds you. You have a Father who delights in you. Your Father is pleased to give to you. If we are children of a Father, then what do we have as children? We have an inheritance that our Father delights to give to us. You have a Shepherd who protects you, a Father who delights in you, and you have a King who provides for you. The Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom. In light of the kingdom that He promises to give you, in light of the inheritance he delights in giving you, in light of the care He provides for you, sell your possessions and give to the poor. You have no reason to fear. That's good news, trust the love of Christ. OK, back here to the Sermon on the Mount, Matthew 7:12. *"Whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them."* Meet other's needs like you meet your own needs. That's a bold teaching. Where do you begin to apply that? That's huge.

Now, we move on from the Sermon on the Mount, other teachings of Jesus. Luke 6, woes upon the rich. We're not going to read through all these passages; you'll be able to go back and hopefully look through some of these, but Jesus prophesies the great reversal here. He is reminding them that the way things look on earth right now, it's going to look a lot different in eternity. In eternity, many will find themselves in an opposite condition from their situation on earth. That's humbling, isn't it? That should at least cause us pause. In the top five percent of the world's wealthy, that should cause us pause.

Prophesies great reversal; He promises great reward. Followers of Christ are willing to endure present hardship in order to experience future glory. He's speaking, He's encouraging those who are going through hardship, and He's saying, "Trust in me. Trust in me." You get to Luke 11, *"But give as alms those things that are within, and behold, everything is clean for you. But woe to you Pharisees! For you tithe mint and rue and every herb, and neglect justice and the love of God. These you ought to have done, without*

neglecting the others." He's talking to people who are tithing, but they're missing the point. He says we give a tithe as God's Word commands, so it's good. You should...He says...you ought to give a tithe. Now, it's interesting. This is one of, really the only time, there's a parallel over in the book of Matthew where Jesus mentions the tithe. He doesn't command the tithe here; Jesus never commands that we should tithe. He does say you ought to have tithed; it's almost like implied, but He doesn't command it.

We give a tithe as God's Word commands, and then He says we live with love that God's justice compels. The point is to give to those who are in need with a heart that desires to give. Now, we're going to come back to that when we talk about tithing, so just hold onto that. Luke 14:25-33, some of the most shocking verses. Large crowds following Jesus, He turns around to them and says, "If you're going to come after me you need to hate your mom and dad, brother and sister, wife and kids," and He just lost most people at "Hello." Like, that's not a good opening line. Imagine following an obscure religious teacher, and Him turning around to you and saying, "If you're going to follow me, you need to hate your mom and dad, wife and kids," and the next statement, "If you're going to follow after me, you need to deny yourself, take up your cross, and follow me. Pick up an instrument of torture and follow me." Imagine following an obscure religious teacher in our day today, and Him turning around and saying, "If you're going to follow me you need to pick up your electric chair and follow me." That's weird.

As if that's not enough, you get to the end of this passage, verse 33, "*Any one of you who does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple.*" Give up everything you have, pick up an instrument of torture, hate your mom and dad, wife and kids. Like, that's a lot different than admit, believe, confess, and pray the prayer, just saying. It wasn't near as effective, they all turned away. What does that mean? Some people say, "Well, that's discipleship. This is for mature followers." This was His intro.

Jesus requires superior love. We are to love Him in a way that makes our closest relationships in this world look like hate in comparison. Superior love, in comparison to Christ we hate the people we love. In comparison, it's relative there. It's not a command to hate mom and dad, wife and kids, and that's huge. We have this idea that obedience to Christ; it's like this begrudging thing. "Oh, I know I need to give, or I know I need to read my Bible, or I know I need to pray." That's not Christianity. Like, I don't come home and give my wife a big hug and kiss, and she'd say, "Well, what was that for?" "Well, it says on page 45 of my marriage manual that I'm supposed to do that when I get here." That doesn't work. There's no affection in that. Christianity is not begrudging obedience; it is superior affection for Christ. It is desire for Him. Superior love, this changes our perspective, and this is the beauty. This is the beauty. Now, when we relate to wife and children, mom and dad, we relate to them properly because they are not superior in our affections. Christ is superior in our affections, which frees us to love them the way they need to be loved. Not to idolize them, but to love them properly; to love them as Christ loves them.

Now, we're looking at Ephesians 5. It's all coming together. It makes sense. Jesus requires superior love. Jesus requires exclusive loyalty, exclusive loyalty. Take up a cross, through the cross of Christ we die to the life we live. We die to our lives. We are dead men and women. This changes our priorities, and He uses two illustrations in that passage. We are workers constructing a building. He's warning against a hasty emotional decision to follow Him. He says, "Count the cost. Count the cost like you would before you build a building," and we're warriors fighting a battle, and that's big. Like in wartime, we ask the question, "What can I do to help the cause?" Everything is devoted to the cause. In peacetime, we

say, "How can we be more comfortable? How can we have more fun?" What kind of Christianity are we living in, wartime or peacetime?

Jesus requires total loss. Renounce all that you have. Give up everything you have. For the cause of Christ, we give up everything we have. This changes our possessions. Now, not every single disciple of Jesus and not every single follower of Christ in the New Testament gave up all their property and all their possessions. We already talked about Peter. He still had property. They still had possessions. Some did give up everything, but the picture is it is all renounced; it is all given over to Christ. Now, I want to be careful, because when I use language here like, "Jesus requires this," "Jesus requires that," I want to remind you...this is why that first part was so important...that's not saying that these are conditions we have to meet in order to be accepted by Jesus. That's not what this is saying at all.

Instead, what this is saying is that when we realize who Jesus is and His authority over us...Jesus is Lord and He does require...if Jesus requires or Jesus demands things from us or rubs us wrong, there's probably an issue with our understanding of Jesus' lordship. When we realize Jesus has all authority in heaven and on earth, then the fact that He requires things of us makes good sense, and expects us to do things, but it's not conditions that we have to meet. It's Jesus' absolute authority over us. Don't forget...we talked about it earlier...God gives what He demands. He enables this. It's grace, so just keep that in mind.

Mark 8:34-37, you look at this, there are economic terms all over this passage. *"If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's will save it. For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul? For what can a man give in return for his soul?"* What is Jesus saying? He's saying we do not live for gratification in this world. We do not live for this world. We live for gain in the world to come. If we save our physical lives here at the expense of our spiritual well being, we will ultimately lose both, but if we lose our lives here following after Christ and proclaiming the gospel, we will preserve our lives for all of eternity. Let's choose the latter.

Then, you come to Mark 10:17-31, the story of the rich young ruler. Rich, young, influential ruler coming up to Jesus. If anybody needs to be in, this guy needs to be in. Think of all he can do for the kingdom. He comes up, and he asks, "What must I do to inherit eternal life?" He's an eager seeker. I mean bow your head and close your eyes and sign the card, and this guy is on the circuit like that. Instead, Jesus doesn't have some of the methods that we have today, and so he has the gall to look at him and say, "Sell everything you have and give it to the poor." The classic example of letting the big fish get away. Guy turns around because he had great wealth, Mark 10 says.

Now, when we come to this passage we have to be careful. There are two errors here that oftentimes we universalize this passage. We say, "Well, Jesus tells everyone to give away everything they have to the poor." That's not what this is saying. We've talked about that. It's not what Jesus says to every follower of His, but at the same time, and that can kind of cause us to breathe a sigh of relief, but the second error is to minimize this, because if this passage teaches us anything, it teaches us that Jesus does tell some people to sell everything they have and give it to the poor. I love what one writer said, "That Jesus did not command all his followers to sell all their possessions gives comfort only to the kind of people to whom he would issue that command." People say the point of this story is that Christ is supposed to be the center of our affections, and for this man it was money. For other people, it's other things, and so the only point really is that we're supposed to let go of the idols in our heart. That interpretation is unquestionably true and utterly inadequate. It's true, yes, that's the point, but this speaks to possessions, and we've got to see

ourselves here. We're rich, and this text is showing us the powerful relationship between one's spiritual condition and one's riches.

What does this passage teach us? Jesus' call to salvation demands total surrender. That's what He's calling this man to, total surrender. Salvation not a matter of external reformation. You look at this passage, Jesus says, "Obey the commandments. Sell your possessions." What Jesus is doing, and what He does like in the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5, this guy thought, "I can do this. I can make it into the kingdom by what I do." So, what Jesus does is He takes the bar to an entirely new level.

So, what He does all throughout is He shows that the young man can't do this on his own. Salvation is not a matter of external reformation; salvation ultimately is a matter of internal transformation. He's got to be conquered by a superior affection for Christ and trust in Christ that would enable him to do that. That's got to happen on the inside, and the whole passage hinged on how he viewed Christ. He comes up, he says, "Good teacher." Jesus is not merely a respectable teacher; Jesus is the sovereign Lord. This is huge for us. Jesus does not intend to be one voice among many in how we use our possessions. He intends to be Lord over how we use our possessions. Sovereign Lord, demands total surrender. Jesus calls us to give sacrificially because He loves us. Mark 10:21 says, "Jesus looked at him and loved him." Jesus loves rich people enough to tell them the truth. When Jesus tells us hard things, He doesn't tell us these things because He doesn't like us. He tells us these things because He loves us.

Jesus gives commands, not considerations. Five commands in that passage, five commands. As followers of Christ, we do not consider options. As followers of Christ, we obey. Some people look at this passage and say, "Well, what Jesus was saying was that this man needed to be willing to sell his possessions." The only problem with that interpretation is it's not true. If that's what He meant, then He would've said, "You need to be willing." He said, "Sell your possessions," and by that He meant in the Greek, "Sell your possessions." That New Testament language just comes in, and it's very helpful.

Jesus does not want to strip us of our pleasure; He wants to satisfy us with His treasure. I love this, "Go, sell everything you have, give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven." He's not calling him away from treasure. He's calling him to treasure. It's what we've already seen in Matthew 6. He's not saying don't care about treasure. He's saying start caring about real treasure. Do we want unpredictable investments or do we want inexhaustible savings?

Love of possessions will ultimately and inevitably rob us of the joy for which we have been created. This man's face fell. He went away sad because he had great wealth. That's the only time in Mark when someone called by Jesus to Himself refuses. Why did he walk away? Because his eyes were blind; he didn't see the depth of his need. His face was sad. He had such eagerness when he came up to Jesus, and he walks away from the joy. Isn't it tragic? He's walking away from the only one who can bring him the joy he longs for, clinging to his stuff because he thinks it will do it for him. His hands were full. He went away sad because he had great wealth.

Four more here. We desperately need to realize the deadly nature of our possessions. Jesus turns around and says to His disciples, "How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God!" It's hard. This was shocking to the disciples, and it's shocking to us. We are used to recognizing wealth as a blessing. The question is, "Are we willing to realize that wealth is often a barrier?" It's hard for the rich; we are rich. It is hard to enter the kingdom of God from this zip code in Birmingham, Alabama. It's hard.

Salvation is utterly impossible for any and every person apart from the grace of God. He goes on to elaborate then, "It's impossible for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven. It's easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God." Now, that verse is often misinterpreted as well. People say, "Well, there's a gate leading into the city called the eye of the needle, and in order for a camel to get through the gate the camel had to get down and take the load off the camel, bring it to its knees and squeeze through." The only problem with that one is it's not true. So, there's no record of that kind of gate, at least not until like the 9th century. Some say even the 19th century. Trying to do that misses the point.

The point is you can't do it. It's impossible. Not "It's hard, and you have to get down on your knees." It's impossible. Salvation, utterly impossible for any and every person apart from the grace of God. You don't do anything to earn salvation. God gives salvation to us. This is so important. God does not sell us salvation. God does not trade us salvation. God is not looking for what you have to bring to the table because you have nothing to bring to the table. He gives us salvation. God gives salvation to us, and God enables sacrifice in us. Only God could so radically change a man's heart that he would sell his possessions, give to the poor, and follow after Christ. That's what he needed; he needed a change of his heart. Only God can do this. Only God can do this in our lives. Only God can do this in our churches. We need God to do this. We can't manufacture this.

Two more from this passage. Jesus frees us from our bondage to ourselves and our stuff. Peter turns, and he says, "We've left everything to follow you." There's a freedom there. We're free to go wherever He calls, and give whatever He asks. That's where we want to be, isn't it? Free to go wherever God calls us. Free to give whatever God asks us to give.

Finally, Jesus unites His people together to enjoy and encourage one another as they abandon themselves to Him. He says, "There is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or lands for my sake and the gospel who will not receive a hundredfold. Now, in this time, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands with persecutions, and in the age to come, eternal life." When you give yourself radically to Jesus...follow this...the church no longer seems like an abstract idea. Maybe you lose your family because you follow after Jesus, but you gain brothers and sisters and mothers. You'll notice fathers are not mentioned, because we have one Father. You're getting a whole family, and the church is that family. Sacrifice no longer seems like an appropriate term. I love this. To those who say, "I give away everything," Jesus says, "You get a hundred times as much." That's gain. This world no longer seems like an adequate home, not just in this age, but in the age to come, eternal life.

In Luke, this story is followed by Zacchaeus. Jesus comes into his house. Zacchaeus stood and said, "*Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor. And if I've defrauded anyone of anything, I restore it fourfold.*" Jesus said to him, "That's a good idea, Zacchaeus. That's a great example, Zacchaeus. Are you sure that's what you want to do?" No, Jesus said, and this is startling, "*Today salvation has come to this house.*" Wow! The basis of salvation: divine grace, an encounter with the Son of Man, who came to seek and save those who were lost. The fruit of salvation is just generosity. Justice and generosity. Following up right on the heels of the rich young ruler, intentionally, in the book of Luke; giving it away.

All right, next, the story in Mark 14. Oh, this story...a woman comes with an alabaster flask of ointment of pure nard, very costly, pours it over Jesus' head. Some said, "Why was the ointment wasted like this, for this ointment could have been sold for more than 300 denarii and given to the poor." They scolded her, but Jesus said,

Leave her alone. Why do you trouble her? She has done a beautiful thing to me. For you will always have the poor with you, and whenever you want you can do good for them. But you will not always have me. She has done what she could; she has anointed my body beforehand for burial. And truly I say to you, wherever the gospel is proclaimed in the whole world, what she has done will be told in memory of her.

Unfortunately, the classic proof text for indulging in possessions and ignoring the poor. I've had this quoted to me on so many different occasions from people when I'm talking about giving to the poor, and they say, "Well, it's not that important. I mean Jesus Himself said you'll always have the poor among you." As if, "Oh, OK, well, they'll always be starving, so let them starve." Not only is that absurd logic, but it totally misses the point of this text. Jesus is not devaluing social justice. When He says, "You can help the poor any time you want," the implication is you need to help the poor any time you want. You need to be doing that regularly. Jesus is doing that all throughout the gospels. He's not devaluing social justice; He's condemning self-righteous judgmentalism. He rebukes those who are accusing this woman not because they were concerned for the poor, but because they were showing self-righteousness and asserting themselves over her. This is a unique occasion in redemptive history that warrants a lavish gift. When Jesus is about to go to the cross, for someone to offer this expensive offering, that makes sense. That doesn't become a standard for total extravagance in the Western world now. The normal practice of redemptive history includes consistent generosity. The thing this passage teaches is that Jesus is pleased with an extravagant gift right before He goes to the cross, and He normally expects people to care for the poor. That's what this passage teaches.

You've got Deuteronomy 15:11. "*There will never cease to be poor in the land,*" but don't forget, when we saw this earlier, right after that He said, "So, open your hand wide to your brother, to the needy and the poor in your land." OK, next one, Mark 11, cleansing of the Temple. The Temple is designed to display God's purity. That's clear. God desires for His purity and His holiness to be displayed in the Temple, and so Jesus turning the tables over as they were making profit, He's showing us that God does not intend worship for worldly gain. He quotes from Jeremiah 7 talking about this is not a den of robbers. This is not worship for worldly gain.

Not just that, the Temple is designed, not just to display God's purity, but to reflect God's purpose. God does intend worship for worldwide glory. Here's the deal, when He says my house shall be called a house of prayer for all nations we focus on the first part. We say, "So, we're supposed to...when we get together...we're supposed to pray." That's not the point. Isaiah 56:6-7 is a prophecy about how the nations will come to the Temple to worship. The way the Temple was set up, you had this outer court, the court of the Gentiles. You had an inner court where only Jewish people could go. You had a sign that said, "Gentiles don't come any further." Then, you had in the center the Holy of Holies, and as you progressed toward the center, less and less people could come, right? Where did they set up all these tables? In the Holy of Holies? Certainly not. In the inner court? Certainly not. In the outer court, the court where the who were? The Gentiles. The place that was designated for the nations to come and encounter the glory of God, they had set up as a market. They had disregarded the purpose of God and said, "Let the nations go to hell." That's what He was turning tables over for, because they missed the point of worship, and they abused it with their possessions.

Next passage, Mark 12, asking about the taxes, and basically, they thought they were trapping Jesus when they asked Him these questions about the taxes. To say, "Yes, you should pay taxes," would be to show allegiance to Rome; to say "No" would be rebellion and

cause for punishment. So, He affirms the paying of taxes, says, "Give your taxes to your government. Let me see the coin. Caesar's on it? Well, it's Caesar's. Give your taxes to your government," but at the same time, your lives belong to God. Government is not sovereign, Caesar's not sovereign, God is sovereign. So, you may give your taxes to your government, but you give your trust to your God. Give your taxes to your government and give your trust to your God.

Mark 12, this is the fascinating story. Put yourself in the role of this woman's financial counselor. She's got two coins left. She says, "I think I'm going to go give it all." "Well, that's sweet, but let's think about this. God wants you to eat, and God wants you to take care of yourself, and you've already suffered enough. God understands. Hold onto your two coins." Jesus looks at her, this is intimidating enough, to see Jesus watching what's going on here. Watching every detail as people put coins in here, knowing every single detail of the money we spend. He sees her put these two, her last two coins in there, and commends her for it. What is that about? Jesus commends sacrificial giving beyond our ability to give. This is not saying that every widow is supposed to give away everything they have; we don't need to universalize this. Jesus is commending sacrificial giving, and He's showing us the sacrifice is measured more by relative risk than by actual amount. Well, you say, "What do you mean?" It's not that she put the most money in the offering, is it? It's monetarily two copper coins, but her sacrifice was far, far greater. Genuineness is measured more by self-denying humility than by self-promoting piety. That's when you look at the context; the picture is He's contrasting what she had done with what the religious leaders did.

The Parables of Jesus

OK, now the parables of Jesus. Almost a third of Jesus' parables deal directly with money and possessions. Sometimes, I mean oftentimes, Jesus uses money to illustrate a proper understanding of the kingdom. It's an illustration, but then shows us how a proper understanding of the kingdom transforms our use of money.

So, you have a parable of two debtors. Jesus celebrates with sinners, and Jesus cares for outcasts. So, He's attracting, again, the rich and the poor. Celebrates with sinners, cares for outcasts. Parable of the seed among thorns. The seed rises up and the deceitfulness of riches and the desires for things enter in and choke out the Word. Listen to this: possessions can keep people out of the kingdom of God. The parable of the hidden treasure and fine pearl, love this. Man walking in a field, stumbles upon a treasure. It's worth more than everything he has or will ever have put together, so what does he do? He leaves it. He goes and sells everything, people say, "You're nuts! Why are you selling everything?" He says, "I'm going to buy that field over there." They say, "Why are you going to buy that field?" He says, "I've got a hunch." He smiles, and he walks away. They think he's crazy, but inside he knows he's found something worth losing everything for. We have found Someone worth losing everything for, that's the point. He found something worth losing everything for. We have found Someone worth losing everything for. Christ is our treasure. Abandoning possessions for Christ is not a sacrifice. Abandoning possessions for Christ is smart.

Parable of the Good Samaritan. This is not just a story about helping other people. This is a story about needing a new heart, needing a new heart. The reality is what Jesus does in telling this story is exposing this teacher of the law who's asking the question that there's a problem in his heart. He's trying to justify who he should give to. He needs a new heart; the heart of mercy. See the love God requires, this is Matthew 22:37-40. See the love God requires. Love Him with all your heart, soul, mind and body. Undivided love for God, unselfish love for others. Love your neighbor as yourself. Think about that. Have you ever done that for somebody? What this Samaritan did in caring for this needy man on the road,

have you ever cared for somebody like that? Have you ever worked to get everything they need, without question, providing for everything they need? I bet you have, for yourself. Jesus says you're supposed to love others the same way. That's strong.

See the love God requires; embrace the love God offers. Don't miss it. The point in the story is we need to realize our own poverty. This guy thought he could justify himself. You need to realize he needed...if he had realized at the very beginning, when Jesus said, "The law says love your neighbor as yourself; do this and you will live." If he had said, "But I can't do that. I need help to do that," then that would've changed the whole conversation.

We need to see our poverty and receive His mercy. Christ has loved us like this. Before we can show the kind of mercy we see in Luke 10 to others, we need to receive that kind of mercy from God. Then, we're free to give the love God desires; His love compels us. His love compels us. Love for God results in love for others. We are not motivated to care for the poor by guilt. If we know what we ought to do and we feel guilty, that's not enough. That's the Levite and the priest as they were walking by. They knew what they ought to do. We are motivated to care for the poor by the gospel; by the fact that God has saved us when we were in need. When we realize that we were utterly destitute for Him, and He drew us up out of the pit, it makes sense for us to now see someone in the pit and draw them up. His love is comprehensive; mercy does not restrict who is loved. Mercy does not restrict how much one is loved. It's comprehensive, and His love is costly. Mercy from God takes great risks. The Samaritan, as he cared for this man, mercy from God involves great sacrifice, and mercy from God leads to great reward. It leads to great reward.

That totally did no justice to the parable of the Good Samaritan. Parable of the rich fool – land of a rich man produced plentifully. He thought to himself, "What shall I do? I have nowhere to store my crops." He said, *"I'll do this: I'll tear down my barns and build larger ones. There I'll store up all my grains and my goods, and I will say to my soul, 'Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years. Relax. Eat, drink, be merry.'"* The American dream in action. God said to him, *"Fool, this night your soul is required of you, and the things you have prepared, whose will they be?"* So is the one who lays up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God. The man is covetous, desiring more and more and more and more. The man is consumed with acquiring more and more possessions. He's greedy. The man is self-centered. Six times you see that first person pronoun "I." "I'll do this, I'll get this, I'll get this." He hoarded possessions for himself. He hoarded possessions for himself, and he held possessions from God. Man-centered in his possessions, not God-centered, and his soul was required of him. The man is self-condemning, not because he's rich. He's not condemned by Christ because he's rich, but because he's idolatrous, because his life demonstrated a love for possessions. Covetousness is idolatry, we're going to see that over and over again. Covetousness is idolatry, and it destroys and damns our souls.

The parable of the great banquet. Go out and invite people. People are too busy, and so they turn away, and so He invites the least expected. The kingdom belongs to the least expected. The kingdom belongs to the least attached. Those three men who were invited said, "I've married a wife; therefore, I can't come." "I have five yoke of oxen, and I've got to go examine them." "I bought a field; I must go out and see it." Those aren't bad things. A wife is not a bad thing. Field, not a bad thing; five yoke of oxen, not a bad thing, but with good things that we attach ourselves to, it is possible to be so focused on earthly treasures, good earthly treasures, that you forsake eternal treasure. Good things can keep you from the kingdom of God.

The parable of the dishonest manager. This one is all over the board when you look at commentaries on Luke 16. It's basically lauding shrewd management, but that's not the

point. One primary conclusion here when you read Luke 16, use earthly possessions to accomplish eternal purposes. Jesus is lauding the use of earthly possessions to accomplish eternal purposes. When it comes to our money, we can serve money and use God for our own means, or we can serve God and use money to accomplish His mission. Money makes a great servant but a horrible master.

Three points to consider here, because He goes on to then talk about how one who is faithful in very little will also be faithful in much. One who is dishonest in a very little is dishonest in much, and so on. Our faithfulness with small tasks shows our fitfulness for large tasks. We're continually being tested in the small things, brothers and sisters. This debunks all of our "if-onlys." "If only I had more money, I'd give more to the poor." If you don't give to the poor sacrificially with a little bit of money, then you're not going to give to the poor sacrificially with a lot of money. Our treatment of material resources demonstrates our trustworthiness with spiritual riches. Our stewardship of another's treasure reflects our own responsibility with our own talents. The real trustworthiness of someone is what they do with someone else's resources. That's the whole point. We've been entrusted with resources from God.

Parable of the rich man and Lazarus. Rich man, wealth, enjoying all that he has, and the poor man sitting out at his gates getting the scraps from the rich man. They both die. The rich man goes to hell; the poor man, Lazarus, goes to heaven. The rich man in hell is begging, "Let me be just cooled off a little bit." "No, there's a bridge that divides you from hell and heaven and you cannot ever cross that." He begs for them to go and then tell his brothers about this, and Abraham says, "No. Even if they saw someone rise from the dead, they rejected the Word of God, just like you have." So, the root cause here, unbelief. The rich man lacked faith in God, that's key. He had rejected the Word of God. He had lacked faith in God, and that's where the whole story ends up.

There's a divine contrast in this story. God responds to the needs of the poor with compassion. Lazarus' name literally means, "One whom God helps." It's the only time a name is given to somebody in one of these parables. Now, this doesn't mean that just because somebody is poor means they go to heaven. Obviously, that is not true, but the picture is God responding to the needs of the poor with compassion, and God responding to those who neglect the poor with condemnation. It's not saying the rich go to hell, but it is saying those who don't trust in God, and as a result, neglect the poor, they receive condemnation. Remember, the core issue is lack of faith in God and the eternal consequence: if in our unbelief...that's the key, that's where it flows from, faith or lack of faith. Lack of faith, if in our unbelief we indulge ourselves and neglect the poor, earth will be our heaven. This guy had the good life on earth. Earth will be our heaven, and eternity will be our hell. God help us to hear this warning. At the beginning of this story, rich man enjoying all the treasures, Lazarus sitting with sores all over his body scraping by. At the beginning of the story, who would you rather be? At the end of the story, who would you rather be? It's a humbling question.

A clear choice: are we going to continue in hollow religion that neglects the poor? He's saying this to religious leaders who are justifying their use of money and their indulgence in money. This is big. Caring for the poor is not an optional extra in salvation. It's not an optional extra. Caring for the poor is necessary evidence of salvation. Unbelief leads to neglect of the poor; belief leads to care for the poor. Caring for the poor is not what saves us, remember that, not what saves us, but the fruit of belief. So, what does this parable call us to do? Turn in honest repentance, trust God, and care for the poor. Hear the Word humbly. Hear it, receive the Word, and obey the Word quickly. The parable of the rich man and Lazarus.

The parable of the talents is next. Master entrusted his servants with talents, and he goes away and he comes back, and some of the servants have invested them, and they've grown. Then, one guy has just sat on it and done nothing with it. It's been safe, but he gets back, and he's proud to show the master. The master says, "Cast the worthless servant into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth." So, not a good day for that servant.

Clearly the message of the parable is that we will be responsible for the time, talents, and treasures God entrusts to us. We will be responsible for the time, talents, and treasures God entrusts to us, and we must be ready for the Master's return. Will we be found sitting on our treasure for our sake, brothers and sisters, or will we be found spreading our treasure for His sake?

Final one, it's really not a parable, the debate, sheep and the goats. Matthew 25, you remember the picture. He says to the righteous, those who have been made right with God, this flows from them. It's not them earning salvation. "*When I was hungry you gave me something to eat; when I was thirsty you gave me something to drink; when I was sick and in prison you came and visited me. Therefore, you receive the inheritance from my Father.*" Then, He says to those who had not done those things in their unrighteousness, "Because you did not feed the poor and bring drink to the thirsty and clothes and visit the needy, then you are cast into darkness." The righteous turn their attention to Christ by serving the material needs of His people. One of the startling things of this passage is that Christ identifies Himself with His people and says, "When you do something for the people of God who are in need, you do something for Christ." The righteous turn their attention to Christ, and by serving the material needs of His people, they go to heaven.

I love this. Spurgeon said, "They fed the hungry, clothed the naked, visited the sick. Why? For Christ's sake, because it was the sweetest thing in the world to do anything for Jesus. They did it because they delighted to do it because they could not help doing it because their new nature impelled them to do it." It's good. On the other hand, the unrighteous turned away from Christ by ignoring the material needs of His people. They go to hell. Not even because they did anything deliberately wrong to the poor, but they ignored the poor.

Possessions and the New Testament People of God

The Book of Acts

Possessions in the New Testament people of God, starting in Acts and moving through the Letters. When we look in Acts, is the church setting precedent? In other words, we're supposed to do everything exactly like the early church did? Or is the church showing principles? Are there truths that underlie these stories that we're supposed to believe and follow? Consider a both-and approach. Maybe everything in the book of Acts is not intended to be normative, like it must happen this way. There are some unique things that are happening in the book of Acts.

At the same time, we are seeing the purity of New Testament community in a way that we want some of the things that we see here, and we are definitely seeing truths underneath it. Acts 2:42-47, in the middle it says, "*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.*" That is not a communist economy. This is not communism. Not communist economy. This is a faith community marked by visible unity and voluntary generosity. That's the thing, this was not forced. This was not everybody put

in the common pot, and we're going to regulate how this is happening and force it upon you, coerce it upon you. This is visible unity with voluntary generosity; it's a great picture.

Then, right after that, Acts 3, is they care for this man who was lame from birth outside the Temple. A spiritual mission; they're doing exactly what Jesus did. A spiritual mission. They proclaim the gospel with social ramifications. The man is healed. Spiritual and physical both present there.

Then, you get to Acts 4. Listen to this, Acts 4:32,

Now the full number of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one said that any of the things that belonged to him was his own, but they had everything in common. And with great power the apostles were giving their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all.

Listen to this statement, "*There was not a needy person among them, for as many as were owners of lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold and laid it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need. And Joseph is an example of that.*"

I love this. They selflessly shared their possessions while they boldly proclaimed the gospel, both-and. This was not social justice without the gospel; this was deep care with gospel, driven by the gospel, and they sacrificially cared for one another. No one was needy. Yes! What Deuteronomy 15:4 had said, "*There will be no poor among you,*" at least for a small glimpse in the early church, this was reality. No needy among them. Encouragement was evident in Barnabas.

Now, we see a totally different picture at the beginning of Acts 5. Ananias and Sapphira, who basically embezzle, swindle money. They valued spiritual appearance more than spiritual authenticity. They tried to put pretense where it looked like they were giving when that was not true. Ananias and Sapphira contrasted with Barnabas: simulated holiness for sacrificial kindness. Oh, God, give us a church culture that is not simulating holiness but is marked by sacrificial kindness! They lacked genuine fear before God. They lied to the Holy Spirit, to God. Fear deception. Tremble at the prospect of trying to deceive God. Fear distrust. Tremble at the prospect of distrusting God. Fear disobedience. Tremble at the prospect of disobeying God. Ananias and Sapphira are struck down dead. That will hurt your church attendance the next week.

Acts 6, widows are in need. They need deacons to rise up to help the widows. The community of faith cares for members. There is a responsibility the community of faith has to care for one another. No follower of Christ should be in need or want. That's what elicited the need for this. The community of faith cares for members and then appoints leaders. These deacons who do this. That's Acts 6.

Then, you get to Acts 8, Simon the magician. Some have called Simon the father of Christian materialism. When he saw the Holy Spirit, this dude saw dollar signs. "Look, if I had this power, look at all the money I could make." The point of Acts 8:18-23 and surrounding Simon, God is not a means of financial gain. God is not a means of financial gain. Beware! Beware the danger of misdirected motives. Simon was doing this for himself. Whose name are we living for? Beware the danger of misunderstood power. Spiritual power is not about money and miracles. It's about prayer and proclamation. Beware the danger of

misplaced faith. Basically, Peter confronts Simon and says, "Your heart is in the wrong place completely." Where is your heart?

Additional observations in Acts: an increasing number of Christians possess wealth as you move throughout Acts. You see people who have successful trades. You see people who are hosting churches in their homes. There are some people who have wealth. They were recognized, a church in Acts, recognized for their generosity. We see them giving, full of good works, acts of charity, giving generously.

Recognized for generosity, they were known for their hospitality. You see them sharing homes with one another. You also see, if you keep moving on, an increasing tension between the church and the materialistic culture around the church, increasing tension. Paul delivers a Philippian slave girl from demon possession, and they're thrown in jail because they are disturbing the city. Then in Acts 19, Ephesian Christians start burning their magical scrolls. Some scholars estimate this is about \$6 million in today's economy, just sold there.

Wouldn't it be awesome if the gospel had that kind of effect on the pornographic industry in our day? People being saved and their hearts being changed, and billions of dollars spent on that, it was all burned instead of being indulged in by people in the church. God, do that! It's huge, but it was causing problems. The gospel will create problems in a materialistic culture for the advancement of the materialism. Increasing poverty in Jerusalem...this is another trend we see...necessitated a sacrificial offering from churches in other areas. There was a major need in Jerusalem that we're going to see reflected in these letters that we're about to go through.

James

All right, James. In a nutshell, probably the first Christian letter or sermon that gives an extensive treatment to poverty and possessions. We see wealth and poverty mentioned. James 1:9-11 talks about how earthly riches are temporary, "*Grass withers, flowers fall...the rich man fades away in the midst of his pursuits.*" James 1:27, "*Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world.*"

The church is marked by sacrificial care for those in need, and by clear separation from the ways of the world. Doesn't look like the world, which leads right into James 2 where he confronts favoritism and the fact that they were showing favoritism to the wealthy, and he says, "No! No!" This is basically an outline of that whole passage. We're captivated by the glory of Christ. We see...knowing who Christ is...we see His supremacy over the wealthy. We don't need to honor the wealthy because they're rich in money. We honor Christ. He's rich in glory.

We see His supremacy over the wealthy, and we remember His sacrifice for the needy. Christ became poor so we might become rich, so why are we exalting the wealthy in our meetings together, church? This is what James is saying. Captivated by the glory of Christ, gripped by the grace of Christ, so we remember Christ reverses our status in this world. Those who are poor in spirit and neglected in this world will one day be rich in spirit and glorified in the world to come, and Christ transforms our standards in this world. We live differently.

We don't look at other people by the same standards we did before. We've been brought up by Christ; devoted to the law of Christ. He just attacks favoritism. Favoritism disrespects man, disrespects man and dishonors God. Then, He talks about how mercy triumphs over judgment when we're cognizant of the judgment of Christ. Our words will be judged, and

our deeds will be judged. That's the end of that passage right there. Our words will be judged, our deeds will be judged, and we're a reflection of the mercy of Christ. As we have received mercy, so we extend mercy. We extend mercy. If we do not extend mercy, we demonstrate that we have not received mercy. As we have received mercy, so we extend that which we have received. If we're not extending mercy, then we're showing that we've not received mercy. We extend mercy. If we do not extend mercy, we demonstrate that we have not received mercy.

James 2:14-19. We've talked about this some already when we were talking about the gospel. Faith in our hearts is evident in the fruit of our lives. You can't say, "Go, I wish you well, keep warm and well fed," to those who are in need and say you have faith. That kind of faith is dead. People who claim to be Christians but fail to help poverty stricken fellow believers are in fact not saved. Now, again that's not saying you need to help poverty stricken fellow believers in order to be saved. It's saying your faith is dead if you look at poverty stricken fellow believers and you do nothing. That's not New Testament faith.

Acts of mercy are not means to salvation. We're not saved by what we do. James makes that clear. Acts of mercy are necessary evidence of salvation; a natural overflow. Evidence of our salvation, just like we've talked about. Tim Keller said, "Mercy to the full range of human needs is such an essential mark of a Christian that it can be used as a test of true faith. Mercy is not optional or in addition to being a Christian; rather, a life poured out in deeds of mercy is the sign of genuine faith."

Ultimately, deedless faith is useless faith. Deedless faith is useless faith. Faith that does not act is not faith at all. Faith is not mere intellectual assent. "The demons believe in God," James says. It's not mere intellectual assent. Faith is not simply an emotional response. Faith involves willful obedience. Faith acts. Faith acts.

Go to James 4:13-17. We can become so consumed with the material realm that we become blind to spiritual realities. What we need to see...what James is talking about...he says, "Today or tomorrow, we're going to such-and such town, spend a year there, trade and make a profit, but you don't know what tomorrow will bring. You don't know that." God is sovereign over our life and death, and God is sovereign over our activities and our accomplishments. Do not think next year the market will be better. You don't know that. You don't even know if you'll be here next year. God's sovereign over these things.

Then, you get to James 5:1-6, and it is a scathing confrontation, and it's unbelieving rich here in James 5. Unbelievers who are rich. God is coming to judge the sinful. "*Weep and howl for the miseries that are coming upon you.*" That is not seeker sensitive. "*Your riches have rotted and your garments are moth-eaten.*" Judge the sinful for hoarding wealth, for hoarding wealth. The treasures on earth are going to bring about their torment in eternity. Their possessions were accumulating while people were dying. Hoarding wealth for living in self-indulgence. He says, "You're gorging on food. You're like a cow about to go to the slaughter." They were overfed and unconcerned. God, may that not be so in us, your people! They would be judged for condemning men. Oppression of others will lead to their own damnation. God was coming to judge the sinful, and then he says to the believers there in James 5, "But be patient, believers. God is coming to deliver the faithful, particularly those who are poor and struggling." God is coming to deliver the faithful. So, that's James.

Paul

Then, we get to Paul. Think about Paul for a minute. All right, Paul before Christ: prosperity. Most likely, he had means, highest of education, great family. Paul after Christ: suffering. Everything changed. Stoned, beaten with rods, 40 lashes minus one, danger at sea, danger

from false brothers, danger in the wilderness, danger from his own people, danger from Gentiles, danger, danger. Before Christ, prosperity; after Christ, suffering.

So, look at his letters. Galatians 2:10: "*remember the poor.*" We're just going to look at all the times where Paul mentions the possessions. Amidst theological controversy, which is what Paul is addressing in Galatians, there was no debate concerning the need to help the poor. Then, you get to Galatians 6:1-10. Some people believe this whole passage is a reference to possessions, and I don't know if the whole thing is. I'm not sure if I've bought into that completely, but there are implications here.

Four enemies of spiritual community: self-centeredness, pride basically. Self-righteousness: this is what was underlying the issues in Galatia. Self-righteousness, self-sufficiency, and then self-esteem, always concerned about asserting themselves. What Paul does is he gives them five essentials to combat that. Confront one another in your sin, comfort one another in your struggles. Those don't really have to do as much with possessions. Then, share your resources generously. He says share. He uses the Greek word "*koinonia*" that's used for fellowship in the New Testament, talks about sharing with one another. Sow your resources eternally. Sow, you'll reap what you sow; you'll reap what you sow, so sow wisely. Then, spend your resources selflessly, especially...Galatians 6 says...especially for the household of faith. Especially for the sake of the church. So, that's the picture we see in Galatians.

1 and 2 Thessalonians. There are a lot of people in Thessalonica who were not working. They were talking all the time about the second coming of Christ, so some of them had quit their jobs, and so Paul writes a letter to them and says, "Get a job." That's 2 Thessalonians. What Paul is saying to them is avoid idle people; avoid people who aren't working, just sitting around doing nothing. Avoid idle people. Work for your possessions. Get a job. There are a lot of other things there as well.

1 Corinthians. This was a trouble-filled church and likely only had a small number of people who had means, who had wealth. The implication is that those people who did have a lot were causing a lot of the conflict in the picture here in 1 Corinthians. 1 Corinthians 4:8-13, Paul contrasts their leader's prosperity with his poverty, and Paul says, "You're living in ease while the rest of us are fighting a battle out here." In this disparity, Paul asserts his credibility. Some of the leaders there were trying to undermine his credibility, and so he is, in part, asserting his credibility here. You get to 1 Corinthians 5. That's the passage where you've got a sexually immoral man that is in need of church discipline, most likely a wealthy man, most commentators think. What's interesting - listen to this. Listen to this. Right in this passage, 1 Corinthians 5. "*I am writing to you not to associate with anyone who bears the name of a brother if he is guilty of sexual immorality or greed.*" The church must discipline in situations of sexual immorality, and the church must discipline in situations of material greed. That's profound. What does that look like? The Christian must repent or be cast out of the church. Repent or miss out on the kingdom. Serious stuff.

You get to 1 Corinthians 9. This is where Paul talks about whether or not leaders should be paid for what they do in the church, particularly teachers of the Word. Paul asserts the leaders who sow spiritual blessings in the church should reap material blessings from the church. It's kind of tough to talk about this without sounding a little self-serving here at Brook Hills, but the interesting thing was Paul yielded this privilege in Corinth because he believed that was better for the gospel. Paul wanted to be unattached. He wanted to make sure it was clear that he was not attached to anyone in that they were paying him to say this or that. Paul wanted to be above reproach, and so in Corinth, he didn't do this everywhere, but in Corinth he said, "I'm not going to take these material resources."

Then, you get to 1 Corinthians 11. You've got to go back and look at this passage in light of the ramifications it has for possessions, because what was happening is rich people were coming into the gathering of the church, and they were getting drunk and isolating poor people over here. Then, they were celebrating with all their stuff, poor people over here, and then they would celebrate the Lord's Supper. Taking the Lord's Supper, Paul says, necessitates concern for the Lord's body, the church. You've got gluttons and drunkards, hungry and impoverished. To partake of the Lord's Supper while ignoring the poor misses the point. Paul says, "You drink your judgment, and you risk your life." That's huge that we should consider how we are showing concern for the needy before we take the Lord's Supper, and if we are ignoring or neglecting the poor, then we are missing the point of the Lord's Supper.

1 Corinthians 13, "If I give away all I have and deliver my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing." Apart from Christ's love, giving away everything you have is meaningless. That doesn't mean don't give away everything, that means love. 1 Corinthians 16:1-4 talks about a weekly offering that was taken for the impoverished church in Jerusalem.

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