

BELPRES CHURCH

Mine?

Mark 12:38-44

Speaker: Scott Dudley

Disclaimer: This transcript was computer generated and may contain errors.

Well, hello to those of you who are here in the room and those of you joining online, thank you so, so much for being here. This fall my wife and I went to Mexico City, which it's a wonderful place, by the way, I really, really liked it. And one day we rented a car to go outside the city, and on our way back we got pulled over by a traffic officer. Apparently I hadn't used a turn signal to make a lane change, so he gave us a ticket and said we had to pay it at the payment office. Well, it was a Saturday. The office wasn't open until Monday and we were flying out the next day. So I did my best to explain that in my bad broken Spanish. And he said, "Oh, well then, you can just pay me." Oh, I see what's going on here.

And I get it, bribes are the way things are done in lots of countries in the world, but we didn't have enough cash and you can't exactly charge that sort of thing. Again, I said in my broken Spanish, "No, I mucho," which I think is close to we don't have enough, but I don't know, I might've said the cabbage is pink for all I know. Christina was holding the cash, so the officer, he reached his hand into the car and said, "I'll just take what you have. She immediately clutched the money to her chest and said really loudly, "No, it's mine." I think she scared him because he went away and we didn't have to pay a thing. So, well done, Christina. You just remember that from now on.

Now when someone tries to take something from you, that reaction, that makes sense, right? No, it's mine. But when I saw it, I thought, "Well, now there's a spiritual metaphor," because when you're a pastor, everything is a spiritual metaphor. We all clutch something with an it's mine attitude. For me it's time. It's time, like it's mine, don't ask for it. Some people do it with money, it's mine. Some people do it with their hearts, they don't let people into their heart, they just hold it really close to them and don't let others in. But if we cling too closely to our time or our hearts, we'll miss out on depth of relationship. If we cling too closely to money we'll be dominated by worry about it. And

that's part of why we're doing this sermon series called Transform, about how we become transformed to be like Jesus and have Jesus' joy, His courage, His hope, and change the world for the better.

And for 2000 years, there are some practices that have been proven to make us like Jesus and give us His hope, joy, and courage. And one of those practices is generosity, with our money for sure but also with our time and with our hearts. And if you're relatively new here at Bell Pres, just to let you know we don't talk about money very often. We don't do all sermons on money very often. In fact, it's been a couple of years, so we don't talk about this very often, but you just came on a really good day. And I know when pastors talk about money, like boom, the defenses just go up. And maybe it feels a little bit like that traffic officer, the church reaching into your life, I'll just take what you've got. And then there's feelings of guilt and obligation and duty. And honestly, honestly, I know it's suspicious, but honestly, that's not why we're preaching this and that's not what's on my heart.

These practices are not meant to be legalistic, burdensome obligations. They have a 2000 year track record of setting people free and of making people like Jesus, filled more with His courage and His hope and His love and His peace. That's why we're doing it. It leads to greater joy. That's why we're preaching it. And it's for everyone. Even students, like if you've got money, time, heart, this is for you. Jesus isn't after our money, he's after our heart. And we see that in the story from Mark 12.

Jesus said, "Watch out for the teachers of the law. They like to walk around in flowing robes and be greeted with respect in the marketplace and have the places of honor at banquets. They devour widows' houses and for a show make lengthy prayers." Jesus sat down opposite the place where the offerings were put. Many rich people threw in large amounts, but a poor widow came and put in two very small copper coins worth only a few cents. Jesus said, "Truly, I tell you, this poor widow has put more into the treasury than all the others. They all gave out of their wealth, but she out of her poverty put in everything, all she had to live on."

And in the original Greek, the word that's used for live on in the original Greek is bios and it means life, like in the word biology. And what it's saying is she gave her whole life, and I'll refer back to that later on. And these two stories are told back to back and they're linked by the word widow. So in the first story the political, cultural and religious elite, the A-list celebrities have lots of money, but they exploit widows who at the time tended to be very poor. And that leads immediately into a story about a poor widow who gives everything she has, her whole life to God. And even though the elite gave larger amounts of money, the widow is more generous because she gave sacrificially. And these two stories come side by side as a comparison and they kind of put a question to us, whose heart would you rather have? Who would rather be like, the widow or the elite?

You're in a church. What's the right answer? The widow, right? Okay, that's your church answer. What's your real answer? Maybe it's, well, can I live like the elite but have the widow's heart? Can I do that? Well, in another passage, Jesus says this, "Do store up for yourselves treasures on earth where moths destroy and where thieves and the IRS break in and steal," it's in the original Greek, conveniently the day before tax day, right there. "But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven for where your treasure is, there your heart will also be." In other words, our hearts follow what we give our time and our energy and our money to. So if I give a lot of money and energy into physical appearance, then my heart is going to be in my vanity and I'm going to be shaped by that. If we give a lot of time and money to earn people's approval, then my heart is going to be in other people's opinion of me and I'll live and die by that.

Now it is fine to have a lot of money. There is nothing in the Bible that says being wealthy is wrong. It is fine to have a lot of money. You can do a lot of good with a lot of money. But if we aren't generous, it will shape our hearts in negative ways. Because see, Jesus wants our heart, but money also wants our heart. I've told you before about my former church, which was in a very affluent neighborhood, and we'd get complaints sometimes from the neighbors about people walking on the sidewalks to go to our church. One woman would say, "Every Sunday people are walking on the sidewalk to your church and I have no peace all day because of it." Seriously? People walking to church freaks you out? Presbyterians, for heaven's sake, we're not the most rowdy bunch.

But that's what happens if we live our whole lives only for our comfort and our happiness and that of our kids, maybe give a few dollars here or there but it's not sacrificial, it shrinks our world down to me and mine. And when your world is small, everything in it feels big and pretty soon Presbyterians freak you out. And you do not want to be that person, that's bondage. And that's one of the reasons Jesus talks about money more than any other subject. Jesus talked about money more than any other subject. One third of what He said had to do with money, because our hearts follow where we put our money, which is why God commands generosity throughout the Bible. The Old Testament standard was to give 10% to the faith community you're part of to support the work of the temple and support the priests.

It was called a tithe and here are just a few verses where it's commanded in the Bible. Just a couple, and many of you know about tithing and others of you don't know about tithing and some of you're trying not to know about tithing. The New Testament comes along and it ups the ante and says giving should be sacrificial as it was for this widow. It should affect our lifestyle. And right now some of you're like can we go back to the Old Testament 10% thing? So for my wife and me at our income level, we give 10% to this church, and then over and above that we give to other Christian organizations that we care about. But only we give the first 10% here. And many of you tithe. Well done, well done. Sacrificial living is part of being a disciple of Jesus. You're doing that. So well done if you're tithing and thank you.

And this isn't just about funding the church. Yes, that's part of it, of course. And as you know, like most nonprofits, because charitable giving is down 25% across the country, something's going on in our culture to make that happen, that's happening to all nonprofits and we're no exception. We've had to cut some positions, we've had to cut some salaries because we're having some issues, and I'll update you all on that tomorrow at Vision Night. But the real issue here, the bigger issue and the reason we're preaching this, is our hearts. Where our treasure is, our heart will also be. Our hearts follow our money. So the question is, where do you want your heart to be? Where do you want your heart to be? So I'll answer for myself and maybe for you too, I want my heart to be with God.

And when I am sacrificially generous, it draws me closer to God because I've made Him my financial manager. And so I'm having to have conversations with Him about what to do with the money he's given me. And yes, it is his money. It's not mine. Yeah, yeah, yeah, we all worked hard for our money, but who gave us the talents and the skills that allowed us to work hard for that money? Who put us here and now rather than 13th century serfs in France? Because then you could have worked as hard as you wanted and you still wouldn't have gotten anywhere. None of that was our call. That was God's call. And one of the reasons I would never stop giving sacrificially is I have experienced that it gets me closer to God and reminds me of everything he's given me, which helps me with gratitude and without gratitude there can be no joy. Without gratitude, there can be no joy.

I also see God provide for me, which helps me know that he's real, which builds my trust in him, which draws me closer to him. I want my heart to be with God. Second, I want my heart to be with you. I want my heart to be with the people in this church. We are not a perfect church. No church is a perfect church because every church has people. But good things happen here. Good things happen here. And we're a bit of a unicorn. As I've said before, I can't think of another traditional Presbyterian, contemporary, American, African, Pentecostal, Chinese church. That's just not a thing. But that's a thing here. That's a thing here, we are trying to do something that is very, very hard and very, very beautiful, that God is doing here.

So when a pastor from our staff visits a dying person and their family and brings Jesus' comfort, if you give here you've made that happen and you're connected to those people and you're blessing them and they're blessing you. When parents drop their kids off for kids' night in and get a much-needed date night to strengthen their marriage or time by themselves, if they're a single parent, and their kid feels loved here and gets excited about Jesus, if you give here you make that happen. You're providing staff that can do those things that can make that happen for those families. You're connected to them and they're blessing you and you're blessing them. When somebody going through a health crisis or a divorce or anxiety, depression, loss of a job, finds hope and courage in our

worship services, if you give here you make that happen and you're connected to them and you're blessing them and they're blessing you. I want to be connected to you.

I want to be part of that, not because I'm a pastor here, but because I really believe in this congregation. I believe what God is doing here. This is the church I would choose if I wasn't a pastor. And I want to be connected to you. I want to feel a part of you. I want to feel together in community. And then third, I want my heart to be with Jesus' rescue mission to the world. I don't want my world and my heart so small that Presbyterians freak me out because that'd be tough in my job. I don't want my heart and my world to be that small. I want my heart to be with Jesus' rescue mission to this world. There are kids in Rwanda and Congo who are not dying because of this church. If you give here you're saving lives and you're connected to them.

There are families getting out of poverty here and around the world because of the ministries we support. If you give here, you're making that happen. There are refugees being resettled and experiencing Jesus' love. If you give here you make that happen and you're connected to them. Jesus' mission is to put this world right, poverty healed, families brought back together again, conflict resolved. Put me in the game, coach. I want to be part of that because it's bigger. If every American Christian tithed, most don't, most give maybe 2%, 3%, if every American Christian tithed and if every church used the money the way this church uses the money, we would eliminate global poverty if every Christian just obeyed this one command. And when we're generous, our hearts are with God, His people and His rescue mission. And when our hearts are there, it at the same time means our hearts are less in other places.

When we are generous our hearts are less anxious about money because I have seen God provide over and over and over, and that lets me know He is real and it helps me trust him, which decreases anxiety about money. And then the second place, when I'm generous, my heart is less in the endless itinerary of desire because trying to fulfill every desire is not fulfilling because there is no ceiling on desire. Some of you maybe have heard me talk about one of my favorite stories about my parents when my mom and dad were at a dinner party and my dad noticed an extra steak on the serving plate next to him. And even though he'd already eaten his steak, he thought, "Well, if no one wants it, I'll eat this one too." So he did. And then the person next to him who'd been talking to someone this whole time suddenly said, "Where's my steak?" It wasn't a serving plate. My dad took this guy's steak off of his plate and ate this guy's steak.

The next morning he said to my mom, "It's terminal." And she said, "What's terminal?" He said, "My eating, it's terminal." Our desire to acquire is terminal. We always want one more steak. No sooner do you get through with the kitchen remodel that was going to make your life complete and then darn it, the neighbor's got new furniture and now I want new furniture. I did not know I wanted it until I saw that they had it, but they have now I want. It's endless. But when I'm generous, the desire to acquire diminishes because

there are some things I can't buy, only to discover I didn't need them in the first place to be happy. And that's freedom. A while back, a man from this church told me that he and his wife didn't use to give sacrificially, they just kept getting more stuff and the kids kept expecting bigger toys, more exotic vacations, and they got less grateful along the way and they'd spend all of their time with their stuff because that's where most of their money was going to.

But then they started to give sacrificially to the point that it affected their lifestyle. And at first it was hard and the kids didn't like it and they complained. But now they say their kids are more grateful, their kids and they are more grateful. The whole family is less desiring to acquire all the time. They actually end up spending more time together because they don't have all this other stuff that they're distracted by. And they actually like each other better because they started giving sacrificially, all kinds of freedom came because their hearts wasn't with their stuff, their hearts were with God, His people, and His mission in the world.

And it's not just being generous with our money, it's everything. It's generous with our time, letting people be part of our lives. Yes, there are boundaries, but also letting people in. Generous in how we treat each other, especially in an election year. Can we be generous with one another in our disagreements and in our differences and by how we love each other through that? So, action steps for this week. First, practice generosity. And I know there's all kinds of reasons that we don't want to. There's all kinds of reasons that it seems almost impossible. We don't want to do it is one of them. Maybe like a story some of you maybe have heard about a boy whose mother gave him two quarters and she said, "One is for you and one is to give to Jesus." And then on his way to church he dropped one of the quarters and it rolled into the drain. And he said, "Oh, bummer, Jesus. There goes your quarter."

We sometimes just don't want to do this. But back to that question, where do you want your heart to be? Where do you want your heart to be? And here at Bell Pres, we make a big difference in a lot of people's lives, and the resources you give are overseen by a group of elders who are not on the church payroll, there's no conflict of interest, to ensure that what you give is actually used to change people's lives. And if everyone in this church tithed, our budget would be 30, \$40 million, and we have a long history here of not spending all the money on ourselves, but on other people to set them free and to help them. And man, if everyone tithed, oh my goodness, oh my goodness, the difference we could make, the difference we could make. And part of sacrificial giving is releasing control of our investment.

Because if I only give to my favorite causes, those matter but if I only give there and not really to the church, in a way I'm still hanging onto my money. It's an extension of my control. It's an extension of my will. It is natural that love inspires us to give to what we care about. But it's supernatural when giving inspires us to love. Because where our

treasure is, there our heart will follow. And my sermon review team this week strongly encouraged me not to try to cajole you into giving, which mostly I've been doing. They said, "Just stand there and say it's a command. Just do it." And if it sounds like I'm hiding behind them it's because I am, but I also agree with them. This is a command not to make us miserable, but to set us free. So tithe. Give 10% weekly or monthly if you can but if you can't because of the way your income works, annually.

In fact, try it for four months. Try it for four months. What can you live without for four months so that you can tithe? And if at the end of four months you haven't seen God provide or you don't discover you can be content on less or you don't experience Jesus just a little bit more, well then stop. And right now our finance people are having a heart attack. No, no, no, no, the budget. I don't care because I think you probably won't stop, because I've never met a tither yet who hasn't said it's nothing but a blessing because it sets us free in so many ways. And if you are in a really difficult financial situation right now and maybe you can only give a dollar like this poor widow in the story, well, to Jesus that's a million dollars. And please, please let us know so that we can support you and care for you and pray for you because we do that here too.

And then second action step, get baptized on April 28 and be here that day. Just a few weeks from now. We'll be baptizing all ages, kids through grandparents. And the reason this is an action step is this whole series of these practices, they're not meant to be legalistic obligations. That's not the point. The point is to be transformed to become like Jesus. And that's part of what baptism is about. And maybe you've been baptized before, but you're in a different place in your life and in your faith, and you want to mark that and you want to say, "Jesus, I'm at a place where I want to go deeper into you and I want to be transformed by you," well then, that's April 28. We won't rebaptize you because there's no expiration date on baptism, but can reaffirm it and it will look similar, but it's a different statement.

It's a way of saying, "Jesus, this is a new place for me, I'm in." And if you haven't been baptized, same thing. And you can sign up on our website or call the church and leave a message or talk to one of us after the service. And if you're not going to be baptized, well then be here. Be here to worship and encourage the people who are. I heard a pastor talk about how his church fired him, not because of some scandal or anything huge. The church was actually doing pretty well. There was just a group of people who didn't like kind of how he preached and they didn't like a couple of the decisions he made so they lobbied to get him fired and the elders agreed. On behalf of the staff here at this church, thank you that you don't behave this way as a congregation.

But it happens sometimes. I've actually known a couple people. They didn't do anything really terrible. They just got fired. The church got rid of them. And this pastor felt like he didn't deserve it. It wasn't fair. He felt rejected. And eventually he went on to lead another church in a different city, but he still had a lot of hurt and anger and resentment,

and it made it hard for him to open his heart to his new church because he didn't want to be hurt again. Well, then one day he was reading the place in the Bible where Jesus says where your treasure is there your heart will also be. And he knew what Jesus was telling him to do and he obeyed. So in addition to giving 10% to his new church that he was leading, he also started writing checks to his former church that had fired him.

And as he put his treasure there, over time... not instantly, but over time... the anger and the hurt and the bitterness began to fade. And eventually he got to the point where he could genuinely say he wanted not just his former church to thrive, he even wanted the people who had fired him to thrive, because his treasure was there and so his heart was also there. Sometimes we are motivated to give because we love something and other times giving is the way we become more loving. He obeyed God and was generous even when it was hard, even where he had been burned. And in the process he was set free from that bitterness and he became more like Jesus, more courage to lead, more hope in the future, more peace of mind and more joy.

And that's the bottom line. When we practice generosity, we are practicing being like Jesus. And see, in the story we read about the widow, in that story Jesus is the poor widow. Jesus is the poor widow. He left the riches of heaven to come here and He gave His life, His bios, He died for us, for you and me to set us free. He became poor so that we could become rich. There's no one like Jesus. There is no one like Jesus willing to die for you and me, who pursues us because He loves us relentlessly. He never gives up. He has not left me though I have often left Him. There was no one like Jesus. And He has been so generous with me and with us. And when we practice generosity, we practice being like Him with more of His hope, more of His joy, and healing the world through His power and in His name.

And that is just a freer, bigger life. So Jesus, thank you that you ask us to do hard things because they lead to good things. And so Lord, shape our hearts, mold our hearts. In our giving help us to experience you so that our hearts expand, so that our world gets bigger. Holy Spirit, this is hard for us to do so help us do it. And then when we do, experience you and encounter your love and see the world change through your power. Lord, we want to be a part of it. So help us do it. In your name, Jesus. Amen.

Discussion Questions:

Read this week's scripture(s) & answer the below questions with your friends, family, or All In small group.

Opening Question: Looking back to last week's sermon and scripture... How did you live differently or practice what we talked about in your life this week? What did you do and how did it go?

Scripture Reflection Questions: Read this week's scripture together and discuss the following (note: we use the same scripture reflection questions each week so that we can practice using the same tools over time as we examine different scriptures):

- What do we learn about God (e.g., traits, personality, what matters, priorities) in this passage?
- What do we learn about people, and ourselves in particular, this week?

Sermon Reflection Questions: Reflecting on this week's sermon, discuss the following:

- How do the two stories in Mark 12:38-44 relate to each other. Why do they come back to back?
- From these verses how do you think Jesus would fill in the sentence: Money is ____? From which verses do you get your answer?
- How do you practice generosity with your money, time, heart, and other forms of generosity you can think of?

Closing Question and Application: Given what we've discussed together today, how might God want you to apply these learnings to your life or in the life of your community this next week? Who might you share this with?

Closing group prayer: Spend a few minutes together in your group sharing prayer requests and then praying together for each other. Thank God for the time together, the conversation shared, the other people in the group, and for encouragement in the week ahead.