

THE EARTH IS THE LORD'S - The Midas Trap and How to Avoid it - Part four

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SACRIFICIAL GIVING IS GOD'S WAY OF PREVENTING SPIRITUAL ALZHEIMER'S

I still visit my mother almost every week, though she wouldn't know whether I did or didn't. But I'm starting now to see it's not just that she doesn't know *me*. She doesn't really know *herself*. I mean, she knows she exists. She knows her name is Daisy. But she doesn't know where she fits into life. She has no big picture. It's like there was once a pile of photos all in correct sequence and someone just dropped them on the floor. She has picked them up but doesn't know what order they go back in. The faces and ages don't form any meaningful story. She doesn't know where she fits in with the rest. She can't *place* herself properly.

I want to come back to this illustration in a few minutes because it relates surprisingly well to our first text. There are texts in the Bible that tell us what we should *do* - The Sermon on the Mount, the book of James, much of First John, etc. There are other texts that don't spend as much time telling us directly what we should *do*. They tell us *who we are*.

And these are the most important texts though they often feel less weighty and compelling. They are the most important because they supply the right *motive* for our actions. They tell us where a Godly *heart* comes from. Here is one of those great texts:

TEXT NUMBER ONE:

1 Chronicles 29:10-18 - "Therefore David blessed the LORD in the presence of all the assembly. And David said: "Blessed are you, O LORD, the God of Israel our father, forever and ever. [11] Yours, O LORD, is the greatness and the power and the glory and the victory and the majesty, *for all that is in the heavens and in the earth is yours*. Yours is the kingdom, O LORD, and you are exalted as head above all. [12] *Both riches and honor come from you*, and you rule over all. In your hand are power and might, and *in your hand it is to make great and to give strength to all*. [13] And now we thank you, our God, and praise your glorious name. [14] *"But who am I, and what is my people, that we should be able thus to offer willingly? For all things come from you, and of your own have we given you.* [15] *For we are strangers before you and sojourners, as all our fathers were. Our days on the earth are like a shadow, and there is no abiding.* [16] O LORD our God, all this abundance that we have provided for building you a house for your holy name *comes from your hand and is all your own*. [17] *I know, my God, that you test the heart* and have pleasure in uprightness. In the uprightness of my heart I have freely offered all these things, and now I have seen your people, who are present here, offering freely and joyously to you. [18] O LORD, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, our fathers, keep forever such purposes and thoughts in the hearts of your people, and direct their hearts toward you."

Picture David dedicating himself to the construction of the temple. He would soon be off the scene. Solomon was a little inexperienced to take on a project of this size (29:1), so David makes this his last great undertaking for the glory of God.

You can sense the excitement as the people rally around the greatest building project in Israel's history. Just look at the pile of wealth committed to this project:

1 Chronicles 29:2-8 - "So I have provided for the house of my God, so far as I was able, the gold for the things of gold, the silver for the things of silver, and the bronze for the things of bronze, the iron for the things of iron, and wood for the things of wood, besides great quantities of onyx and stones for setting, antimony, colored stones, all sorts of precious stones and marble. [3] Moreover, in addition to all that I have provided for the holy house, I have a treasure of my own of gold and silver, and because of my devotion to the house of my God I give it to the house of my God: [4] 3,000 talents of gold, of the gold of Ophir, and 7,000 talents of refined silver, for overlaying the walls of the house, [5] and for all the work to be done by craftsmen, gold for the things of gold and silver for the things of silver. Who then will offer willingly, consecrating himself today to the LORD? [6] Then the leaders of fathers' houses made their freewill offerings, as did also the leaders of the tribes, the commanders of thousands and of hundreds, and the officers over the king's work. [7] They gave for the service of the house of God 5,000 talents and 10,000 darics of gold, 10,000 talents of silver, 18,000 talents of bronze and 100,000 talents of iron. [8] And whoever had precious stones gave them to the treasury of the house of the LORD, in the care of Jehiel the Gershonite."

We need to have some way of putting meaning into those numbers. Just consider David's *personal* contribution of gold in the amount of **3000 talents**(4). A talent was about **75 pounds**. So that's **225,000 pounds of gold**. As of this sermon preparation gold is valued at roughly **\$1,350 per pound**. So just in gold David gives about **\$30,375,000** in today's dollar value. That's just the gold component of his giving. And the people gave far more on top of that (6-8).

Understandably, it would be very easy for David to bask on the glow of his own generosity. He gave the supplies for the temple out of his own treasury (29:3). And the following verses go on to list the magnitude of that freely given wealth. In proportion to the economy of that day these are some of the largest gifts ever given to the Lord.

Then the account takes a strange turn. As this mass of gifts piles up and the people begin to drool over the greatness of King David's wealth, David begins to worship the Lord. Everything changes as he starts thinking deeply about God. His words must have made everybody stop and think about their ownership of material things:

1 Chronicles 29:14 - "But who am I, and what is my people, that we should be able thus to offer willingly? For all things come from you, and of your own have we given you."

Notice the insights in this single verse:

First, there's the issue of what our role is as we live our days on this earth - "Who am I and what is my people....?" It's always good to stop and ask who we are and what we are doing. Before David would allow himself to gloat over the greatness of his philanthropy he reminds himself and all the people that they stand only as humble servants before the greatness of God's majesty. And he doesn't just say this once. He repeats it in **verse 15** - "For we are strangers before you and sojourners, as all our fathers were. Our days on the earth are like a shadow, and there is no abiding."

The NASB actually has the word "**tenants**" - "...and we are tenants before you." Everyone knows what a **tenant** is. He's a **renter**, not an **owner**. Not only that, David reminds these people that they only **rent life** on this earth for a little while. They have as much permanence here as a **shadow**. This should keep tenants from making plans that are too long range on this earth. How much money should you invest in improving a house you don't own? And one which you will be leaving very quickly?

We're short-term **tenants**. Without this understanding we quickly develop **spiritual alzheimer's**. Remember my opening story of my mom. We won't fit our lives into the proper grand scheme. We will miss how we are supposed to function in the big picture. We won't know what our lives are supposed to be about. We will exist without a grand "**why**" behind our beings.

Second, David is thankful that he has so much to give - "But who am I, and what is my people, that we should be able thus to offer willingly?(14). Most people are thankful when they **receive** gifts. We teach small children to say "thank you" when they are objects of another's kindness. But here, David turns the tables. He leads the people in a humble act of thanksgiving because **God has enabled them to give so much** to the temple building fund.

And that leads to the **third lesson** in **verse 14**:

Third, all the wealth is God's - "...For all things come from you, and of your own have we given you." David reminds the people we really don't **give** to the Lord. We only **return** to the Lord what He has first entrusted for our brief stewardship. When I say **all wealth** belongs to the Lord, I don't just mean the **tithe**, or some other **portion** decided by the giver. I mean everything - **absolutely everything** - belongs to the Lord.

Now here we come to one of those grand Biblical concepts that we church-goers all nod our heads to and put on plaques on our walls but not one of us actually believes. Look at David for just a minute. It's one thing to piously pray those words in some isolated devotional moment. But these are the words of a man who has just given **30 million** dollars to his house of worship.

"I didn't give anything. And even what I still hold in the treasury isn't mine. I never gave a nickle of anything to the Creator of all." And my question is **where does that understanding come from? What kind of cardio produces such a God pumping heart?**

First, we must be trained to see reality as it actually is. Really **seeing** properly escapes most people. It's not easy. You can't just **glance** at something as important as **life**. Proper **seeing** takes **time** and **training**.

Have you even **seen** one of those abstract picture-in-pictures? It looks like there's nothing there but some abstract design until you stare at it for a while. You never see what's there if you just rush by while thinking about something else. No. You have to **stop** and you have to **stare**. You have to look at what appears **immediately** knowing all the while there's **something else more important behind it all**. You have to look with **intention**. You have to look **knowing you're missing something bigger**.

And what we find in David's profound prayer in our text is a first glance at your life will always leave the impression we are **owners**. That's what seems obvious on the surface. You work. You get paid. You spend as you choose. You buy. You save. You insure. You invest. You make a will. It all has the **appearance** of ownership.

But stop and stare. Keep looking at the picture. Keep pondering God's provision of life and breath and every single atom that composes all the matter on planet earth - **including** the earth itself. Then stare at the fact that in 50 years - a very **quick** 50 years - the vast majority of us will be gone. Don't just **glance** at that. **Stare** at it. Look **right through to the back of the meaning of it**. Every bank account will change hands. Every insurance policy paid out. And not to you. Every investment passed on. Every material thing you **owned** will become instantly **unowned** by you. And God will still be the author and taker of life. It will still be true that, **"....the earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof."**

Here are the Bible's financial headlines:

Haggai 2:8 - "The silver is mine, and the gold is mine, declares the LORD of hosts."

Psalms 24:1 - "The earth is the LORD's and the fullness thereof, the world **and those who dwell therein...**"

Psalms 50:10-12 - "For every beast of the forest is mine, the cattle on a thousand hills. [11] I know all the birds of the hills, and all that moves in the field is mine. [12] **"If I were hungry, I would not tell you, for the world and its fullness are mine."**

Seeing all material reality as it **is** rather than how it **appears in the packaging of this age** - that's the first important step. No one will understand the **meaning** of his or her life, and no one will understand the **divine calling - the purpose** - of material possessions until this **way of seeing is learned**.

Remember where we are. I said the question I wanted answered was **where did David get this God-pumping heart?** And **first**, we've examined the art of **learning to see what really is instead of what merely appears**. But there is something else we need to consider:

Second, we need the outward demonstration that the faith we profess isn't make-believe and our walk with Jesus isn't hypocritical. This is why Jesus lovingly linked authentic discipleship with the giving of our money. This only **appears** unfairly demanding to those who don't grasp Jesus' true motive.

TEXT NUMBER TWO:

Luke 14:33 - "So therefore, any one of you who does not **renounce all that he has** cannot be my disciple." Notice, not **be willing** to renounce - but actually **renounce**. Here's how the NASB translates - "So then, none of you can be My disciple who does not **give up all his own possessions.**"

Again, not **be willing** to give up, but actually **give up**.

There is nothing in the teaching of Jesus that we are, **in our hearts**, to give up our possessions - that as long as we don't **love money in our hearts** we are out of danger and meeting our Lord's requirement.

This is the common misunderstanding of Jesus' words in **Matthew 6:21** - "....for where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." What Jesus means is the exact opposite of **"as long as I don't love money in my heart I'll be just fine spiritually."** What Jesus means is what I do with my money **reveals the state of my heart**. Only what I actually **do** with my wealth **proves whether or not I love money in my heart**. My **words** don't count. Only my **giving** does.

But here's the most important part. This means Jesus' call for my money isn't to cheat me of joy. It's to liberate my heart. He is out to **save** me when He calls for my money. And that is not just a pastor's opinion. Look at what James says about this issue of authentic faith:

TEXT NUMBER THREE:

James 2:14-17 - "What use is it, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but he has no works? **Can that faith save him?** [15] If a brother or sister is without clothing and in need of daily food, [16] and one of you says to them, "Go in peace, be warmed and be filled," and yet you do not give them what is necessary for their body, what use is that? [17] Even so faith, if it has no works, is dead, being by itself."

I want to wrap up around these thoughts. It's never easy for anyone to examine the parts of our being that are the most tender to touch. There's reason Jesus linked our **treasure** with our **hearts**. It's not easy for creatures with a fair measure of self alive and well to consider that we will be more filled with joy **obeying** God than **keeping our money**. It's not easy to **preach** about money either. There are better ways for pastors to be well-liked.

All of this means we tend to grow up favouring the more **spiritual** aspects of the Bible's teaching than the demanding **material** ones. The idea gradually grows - pretty much unchallenged - that even if I'm not quite honest in honoring God with my money I'm still committed to honoring Him in all the other **religious** areas like Bible Study, prayer, involvement in church, living a good moral life for an example to unbelievers. I even raise my hands when we worship. Sometimes I even come to church Sunday night! So it more than balances out this one part that is too deeply rooted in my heart to deal with without a great deal of personal pain and re-adjustment.

And that's why we need these closing words from the Apostle James. Merely **professed faith** - even in just **one area** - isn't just **useless**. It's **debilitating**. It nullifies what would have been living expressions of faith in **other** areas.

This is obviously what has James so concerned as he poses his challenging question in **James 2:14** - "**What use is it, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but he has no works? Can that faith save him?**" And the area destroying the **saving value** of this religious person's faith is directly tied to the giving of material wealth. Coincidence? And notice that James doesn't even take into consideration all the **other** areas where this individual may have been diligent in his religious devotion. They didn't count apart from this.

"But Pastor Don, James is talking about giving to the **needy**. He's not talking about money put in the **offering plate**." And if that's so - if the failure to obey the command about giving to other **people** actually keeps faith from having its **saving effect** - how much **more** debilitating is it to fail to obey the Lord about giving to **Him**?

I close with one sentence just spoken that has great potential to be mis-understood. Here's what I just said: "**Notice that James doesn't even take into consideration all the other areas where this individual may have been diligent in his religious devotion. They didn't count apart from this.**"

Is that true? Does one area of failure undo everything else about my salvation? And I believe the statement **is** true as long as it's properly understood. None of us follows with inward perfection. My redemption isn't **complete** in **any** area of my life. But my redemption must **extend** to **every** part of my life with my full care and intention of obedience. I will not get to heaven **refusing** obedience in **any** area of my life. But this is not the same as **failure** to obey perfectly.

And, in His love and mercy, Jesus my Lord has made His Lordship specific and observable in one of the most obvious areas of my life. God uses my **money** to reveal my **heart**. This is His way of making my need for ongoing repentance obvious and specific. And it keeps the rest of my soul fruitful as well.