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## Through the Needle's Eye

By David Servant

### Chapter Eight

#### The Rest of What Jesus Taught

We've now completed our study of Jesus' major statements regarding stewardship. If you're still reading, you've probably made some very significant stewardship decisions. Yet the flow of the world and most of the church may well be tempting you to wonder if you are out of your mind. Let me assure you that you are not, and this chapter will assure you all the more.

In order to arrive at a balanced understanding of any biblical subject, the devoted student knows he must consider every relevant scripture. In regard to our topic, there are over one hundred scripture passages in the four Gospels that have some relevancy to the subject of money, possessions and stewardship. Thus the reason for this chapter: we want to consider everything Jesus taught on the subject, and I've commented on every relevant passage in the Gospels. You will first need to read the scripture passages that are referenced in order to best understand my commentary.<sup>1</sup>

In many cases, the scriptures we are about to examine will serve to support what we've already learned. In other cases, they will enlighten us to truths that we've not yet considered. In still others, they will bring some gentle balance to our understanding, lest we lean more to one side. It is, of course, possible to make the Bible say anything one wants it to say by isolating scriptures from their context. It never ceases to amaze me how people will justify their greed with one obscure scripture, ignoring everything else God has to say about money.

It is also important to keep in mind that the Bible is a progressive revelation. God did not reveal everything to Adam that He revealed to Paul. Moses did not have the understanding that Jesus did. Even Jesus Himself once told His own disciples that He had more revelation to share with them but would have to share it later because that they were unable to receive it at the time (see John 16:12-13).

If we ignore this fact, we may end up emphasizing early revelation at the expense of ignoring later revelation, and consequently become very unbalanced. In a nutshell, this is the error of the majority of the so-called prosperity preachers. They essentially ignore or twist every scripture relating to money, except those that promise prosperity, the majority of which are found in the Old Testament. Such scriptures, ripped from their biblical context, become a very convenient way for any greedy person to justify his sin.

This is certainly not to say that the Old Testament is somehow unbalanced regarding money, void of any direction regarding godly stewardship. It is in the Old Testament

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<sup>1</sup> This chapter is written so as to serve as a reference for everything Jesus said on stewardship.

that we first find the commandment to love one's neighbor as oneself (see Lev. 19:18), as well as numerous other scriptures that specifically spell out how that is done, in part, by the means of one's money.

In later chapters, we'll consider what the Old Testament and the epistles teach about money, possessions and stewardship. For now, let us examine everything else that Jesus said on the subject, as well as any scripture that is relevant to our topic that is found in the four Gospels.

## **Matthew**

**2:11** The magi demonstrated their authentic belief that baby Jesus was divine by their long journey to see Him, their falling before Him, their worshiping Him, and their opening their treasures to present Him with gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh. *Their faith affected what they did with their possessions.*

It is a matter of speculation as to what became of their gifts. Perhaps the selling of those items is what sustained Mary, Joseph and Jesus during their ensuing flight to, sojourn in, and return from Egypt (see 2:13-21). It is absurd to claim, however, in light of everything else we know about Jesus' adult lifestyle and living standard, that those three gifts made Him rich all His life (see Matt. 8:20; Luke 8:1-3), as some say.

**3:4-12** John the Baptist evidently lived very simply, sustained by a diet of locusts and wild honey, and wearing a garment of camel's hair with a leather belt. It seems quite unlikely that he would have owned much more clothing than that. He told his penitent audience that if they owned two tunics, they should give one to a person who had none in order to validate their professed repentance (see Luke 3:10-11). His instruction to them was nothing more than an application of the second greatest commandment.

If modern professing Christians had been in John's audience, would they have followed his instruction? Or would they have said, as did many then, that John had a demon (see Matt. 11:18)? Jesus, of course, did not need to repent at the preaching of John because He never sinned. He always loved His neighbor as Himself throughout His entire life. Jesus owned only one tunic.

**4:17** Jesus began His ministry by preaching the identical message as John the Baptist (compare with 3:2). Are we to think that what Jesus meant by repentance was different than what John meant? If penitent people had asked Jesus what they must do, would Jesus have answered differently than John, as recorded in Luke 3:10-14? Would He have disagreed with John, one whom He considered to be the greatest man "born of women"? (see Matt. 11:11).

**4:18-22** Peter, Andrew, James and John left everything behind when Jesus called them to follow Him. They would later remind Him of their sacrifice when He told them that it was easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God. He then assured them of future kingdom blessings as well as eternal life (see Matt. 19:23-30).

**5:40** Does this mean that we are not to contest unfair lawsuits that could potentially result in our having to borrow a large sum of money in order to make a payment to our opponent? Beyond that, are we to borrow additional money to give our opponent more than what he wants? No, Jesus was talking in this passage about showing extra mercy when we suffer minor offenses (see 5:38-41).

The Pharisees considered it their holy obligation to take revenge for petty offenses. Their justification was based on a twisted interpretation of a commandment that was meant to insure justice in court for major offenses (such as poking out another person's

eye). In petty offenses, Christ's followers are to be more tolerant and loving than people expect, showing them God's love and shaming them in the process. If someone wants to knock out our teeth, Jesus does not want us to also offer our arm for breaking. He was simply correcting the practice of the Pharisees, who had a zero-tolerance policy regarding any small offense.

**5:42** Followers of Christ should be characterized by their willingness to give and lend. Keep in mind, however, that Jesus was not talking about giving or lending money to people who don't have enough cash this month to make payments on their luxuries purchased with borrowed money. Helping people with pressing, essential needs was more of what He must have had in mind (see 6:1-4).

If Christ's followers are to lend, they must first have some surplus. What a blessing it is to have God supply more than we need, that we might have some to give or lend.

**6:1-4** Note that Jesus didn't say, "If you give alms," but "When you give alms." He expected His followers to give to the poor and here stressed the importance of doing it with the right motives. The Pharisees sounded trumpets at their public distributions, ostensibly to attract the poor. But God knew their true motives. Followers of Christ should give as secretly as possible.

What exactly is the reward that is promised by Christ to those who secretly give alms? Is it a larger sum of money received while we are still on earth? Perhaps, but Jesus later said that we lay up treasure in heaven by giving to charity, indicating a heavenly reward (see also Luke 14:13-14). If our reward is indeed a larger sum of money received in this life, we then must decide if we want to use that blessing to lay up treasures on earth or heaven, disobeying or obeying Jesus. Our desire to gain more ought to be so we can give more.

**6:11** In this prayer we are taught to pray for our basic need of food. This should fill us with faith that it is always God's will that we have enough food to sustain us. David testified, "I have been young, and now I am old; yet I have not seen the righteous forsaken, or his descendants begging bread" (Ps. 37:25). According to what Christ taught in this prayer, however, we should be content with only one day's supply, our "daily bread." If we possess more, we should consider ourselves as possessing an abundance. There is certainly no hint of greed found in this prayer. Christ's followers are to be content with what they have, even if it is only food and covering (see Phil. 4:11-14; 1 Tim. 6:6-10; Heb. 13:5).

Notice also that we are not to pray, "give *me* this day *my* daily bread," but "give *us* this day *our* daily bread." Our prayer reflects our concern for everyone who is related to our Father. We sincerely desire that all of God's children have their daily bread. How can we pray this prayer without hypocrisy if God has given us more than we need and we don't share it with our brothers who lack daily bread?

**6:19-24** Jesus' commandment not to lay up treasures on earth is just as valid as His commandments forbidding adultery, lust, murder and hatred (see 5:21-30). It can only be ignored if it is twisted and stripped of its obvious meaning, which it has been by many professing Christians. I have fully commented on this passage in Chapter Five.

**6:25-34** This passage again underscores that our real needs consist of nothing more than food and covering, and promises us that God will supply those needs. We should therefore not be concerned about lacking them and devote ourselves foremost to seeking God's kingdom and righteousness. So many fall far short from obeying this commandment. Not only are they not seeking first God's kingdom and righteousness,

but they are seeking to possess much more than what they need. I've also commented on this passage in Chapter Five.

**7:7-11** Practically any time North American preachers mention this passage, they are forced to explain "what Jesus really meant" in light of the fact that we don't receive so much of what we ask for. Yet the fact remains that Jesus declared, "Ask, and it shall be given to you...For every one who asks receives." Could part of the problem be that what we are asking for is not God's will? Unlike the son in Christ's example who asked only for food, our requests are often a reflection of our greed. We want more material riches so we can indulge ourselves.

Did not James warn of this very thing in his epistle that so often parallels the Sermon on the Mount?: "You ask and do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, *so that you may spend it on your pleasures*" (Jas. 4:3, emphasis added; see also 1 John 5:14-15). Jesus promised that the Father would give "what is good to those who ask Him." Would God consider something to be good if it would tether our hearts to this earth, distract us from devotion to Him, fill us with pride, make us more selfish, and ultimately drag us into hell?

**8:20** If Jesus had owned a home, as some prosperity preachers claim, could He have made this statement without lying?

**10:9-10** Jesus did not want His twelve disciples to take any future provision with them when He sent them out to preach and heal. Their needs would be supplied as they arose. Thus, there was no reason for any of the twelve to purchase an extra tunic or pair of sandals before their departure. They needed only one tunic and one pair of sandals. When what they had wore out, God would provide a replacement. They wore the same clothing every day, as do so many hundreds of millions of people today in the developing world. What a different perspective we have concerning our needs in contrast to Jesus, His apostles, and multitudes of people living on the earth today!

**12:1** Elaborately-prepared meals were not always the means God used to meet the nutritional needs of Jesus' disciples. Sometime they enjoyed fresh fruit, or in this case, raw heads of grain. Could you be content with such a meal and eat with thanksgiving?

**13:22** I have fully commented on "the deceitfulness of riches" against which Christ warned in Chapter Six.

**13:44-46** How would Jesus' disciples, who heard Him say that it would be easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter into heaven, and who witnessed His lifestyle of self-denial, have interpreted these two parables? At bare minimum, both parables teach that gaining heaven is worth giving up everything one possesses, because heaven is of infinite value. This being so, are we then to conclude that we must not give up *anything* to gain heaven? Why would Jesus even communicate that gaining heaven was worth sacrificing *everything* if one could gain heaven without giving up anything? Was He only trying to teach those who possessed eternal life that they should value it more than anything else they possess? Or was He again trying to enlighten hell-bound people who, like the rich young ruler and rich fool (see Matt. 19:16-30; Luke 12:16-21), selfishly cling to earthly things, refuse to repent of greed, and esteem earthly riches above true heavenly wealth?

**14:15-21** Is there any example in the Gospels of Jesus providing people with any other material things besides the necessities of food, drink, and money to pay taxes? No, there is not one. God has promised to supply our needs, and Jesus, the "exact representation

of [His Father's] nature" (Heb. 1:3) clearly revealed what our needs actually are. In this case, Jesus actually provided more food than the crowds needed. He gathered the excess, however, and I think it is safe to assume that it was all eventually eaten.

**15:3-9** Here we learn that obeying the fifth commandment, when it is rightly interpreted, could mean giving money to support one's elderly parents. Thus, five of the Ten Commandments can be said to have something to do with money and possessions.

The first commandment, having no other gods before God, is certainly applicable to money and possessions when we consider what Jesus said about the impossibility of serving God and mammon. Money can be one's god.

The fourth commandment, keeping the Sabbath, obviously regulates one's profiting through labor on one day of the week.

And the eighth and tenth commandments that forbid stealing and coveting one's neighbor's property teaches us our proper relationship to material things that belong to others.

All this being so, how foolish we must be to think that the topic of money, possessions and stewardship is of little importance to God. May we not ignore God's clear commandments regarding these things, lest He also say of us: "This people honors Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me. But in vain do they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the precepts of men" (15:8-9).

**15:32-39** Again Jesus supplied people's basic needs. If every man present was married and had just two children with him, Jesus fed at least 16,000 people. No need to worry if He can take care of you!

**16:5-12** Jesus here reminds His disciples, men of little faith, that they don't have to fear going without bread. He can and will supply their need for food, as proven by two recent miracles.

**16:24-27** Obviously, Jesus was talking about salvation and damnation here. Why else would He use such expressions as, "save his life," "loses his life for My sake," "find his life," "gains the whole world, and forfeits his soul"? Why else would He warn that everyone will be recompensed according to his deeds when He returns? This being so, does "denying ourselves" and "losing our lives for Jesus' sake" affect what we do with our money and possessions? Does "gaining the whole world," which guarantees that one forfeits his soul, have anything to do with money and possessions? If Jesus is going to repay us according to our deeds, do those deeds include what we've done with the money He has entrusted to us? Obviously, the answer to all these questions is *yes*.

**17:24-27** Here is another miracle of provision for someone's basic needs, a tax from which Peter was not exempt.

**18:1-4** If the greatest in the kingdom of heaven is the one who humbles himself the most, we ought to be striving to become as humble as possible. What is humility? It is, in part, thinking of others as being more important than ourselves (see Phil. 2:3). Humble people serve others, putting their needs first. Proud people consider themselves to be more important than others. Their own needs selfishly come first. Jesus set the greatest example of humility. Although He was God, He humbled himself to die on the cross, considering that our salvation was more important than His comfort (see Phil. 2:5-8). If we view others as being more important than ourselves, will that affect what we do with our money and time? Certainly.

**19:16-30** I have fully commented on the rich young ruler in Chapters Two and Three.

**21:12-13** To say that Jesus was upset would be an understatement. What provoked Him to such a degree? God intended that the temple would be a place where His people would pray, prayer being an expression of their devotion to Him. However, the main activity around the temple was an expression of devotion to money. It was the perfect business location for the moneychangers and dove sellers, who apparently were not all honest in their dealings. Profits, not prayers, were on their minds.

Does one have to be selling something at Jerusalem's temple before considering if this passage has any personal application? No. When making money supersedes our devotion to God, even if our earnings are honest, we are guilty of serving mammon.

**21:22** If we are to pray believing, we must have some promise from God so that we know His will, otherwise it is impossible to pray with assurance of one's prayer being answered. For example, it would be impossible to pray with faith that Jesus will return tomorrow or that adultery won't be a sin during the first weekend in November. Yet many make this error when they attempt to "believe God" for more personal luxuries. How can one have faith to possess more earthly treasures when Jesus commanded us not to lay up treasures for ourselves on earth? *It is absolutely impossible to have faith for earthly treasures.* A greedy person may pray with hope for such things, but he cannot pray with faith for them. As I mentioned when commenting on Matthew 7:7-11, James plainly told us why God doesn't answer such prayers: "You ask and do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, *so that you may spend it on your pleasures*" (Jas. 4:3, emphasis added). On the other hand, we know it is God's will for us to spread the gospel to the whole world, as well as feed the hungry and clothe the naked. Thus we can ask in faith that He will provide for us so we can do those things.

In light of this, it is interesting that prosperity preachers are always trying to convince everyone of how much faith they have by the abundance of their possessions. In reality, they show what little faith they have. If their faith were really so great, they would give everything away and trust God to supply their daily needs.

**22:15-22** We learn here it is God's will that we pay our rightful share of taxes, so we can trust that He will help us to do it. Jesus also affirmed that just as we have financial obligations to our governments, so we also have financial obligations to God.

**22:35-40** It is amazing that this profound statement by Jesus is so rarely esteemed and emphasized. Jesus told us that God's total will for us is embodied in just two commandments. Jesus came and died for all the times we disobeyed these commandments, and He lives in us now to enable us to obey these commandments. If a person loves God with all his heart and his neighbor as himself, will it have any affect on what he does with his money and possessions? It most assuredly will!

**23:10-11** To be a servant of all should obviously be the aspiration of every follower of Christ. If one is a servant, will it have any affect on what he does with his money and possessions? Of course.

**23:14** To "devour widow's houses" must be some reference to the scribes and Pharisees' practice of taking financial advantage of poor widows, who are often trusting and gullible, thus easy prey. Under the "pretense of making long prayers," that is, under a guise of love and spirituality, these wolves in sheep's clothing were somehow able to coerce donations from those who could least afford to part with them. Their houses were "devoured," leaving them with nothing. Jesus severely condemned them for their greed. They blatantly disregarded the second greatest commandment.

**23:16-17** Why are we not surprised that the scribes and Pharisees, lovers of money (see Luke 16:14), valued the gold in the temple above the temple itself? This is just one more indication that they were servants of mammon.

**23:23-26** When we combine Matthew and Luke's versions (see Luke 11:42) in order to know every word Christ said here, we come up with, "And yet [you] disregard the weightier provisions of the law: justice, mercy, faithfulness and the love of God." Justice, mercy and faithfulness are simply facets of loving one's neighbor. "The love of God" speaks for itself. Thus, once again, Jesus is emphasizing what is truly important. The weightier provisions of the law are loving God and one's neighbor. Isn't it obvious that one may scrupulously tithe, but still be guilty of laying up treasures on earth? Likewise, an ardent tither may love money, not love his neighbor as himself, live in self-indulgence (see 23:25) and not love God as He should be loved. What message is found here for those whose Christianity consists of little more than going to church on Sunday and faithfully tithing out of their abundance? Why is tithing emphasized so much of the time in so many churches at the neglect of what is most important?

**25:14-46** I have fully commented on this passage in Chapter Seven. The question every person who reads this passage should ask him/herself is this: If I was to die at this moment and find myself at the sheep and goats' judgment, would I be counted among the sheep or the goats? Perhaps more sobering is the fact that our love for Jesus is revealed by our love for His family, expressed by meeting their pressing needs. It is amazing that millions of people claim to love Jesus, but sacrifice nothing to feed and clothe His impoverished believers. They are completely deceived.

**26:6-13** Mark tells us that the value of this woman's ointment was equivalent to about three hundred days' wages for a common laborer (see Mark 14:3-4). To bring it into some perspective, imagine a perfume worth fourteen months of your labor, working five days a week for fifty weeks each year. It was "very costly" (26:7) indeed.

The woman who poured it on Christ may have been wealthy herself to be able to afford such ointment, or she may have received it as a gift, perhaps by inheritance. Regardless, it was without any doubt, an earthly treasure, and as one who obviously loved Christ, she wanted to lay up treasure in heaven and show her love for Him.

Had she poured her perfume upon anyone other than Jesus, the disciples would have had a valid complaint. But she realized, as they should have, that Jesus was of greater importance and value than all the people of the world combined, as He was God in the flesh. Beyond that, there would always be opportunities to help the poor, but only a short time to express her great love for Him. We must, however, give the disciples credit for at least attempting to follow Jesus' commandments regarding good stewardship. Their criticisms of this woman indicate that they cared for the poor, just as He had taught them. Their fault was that they didn't rightly value Jesus.

**26:14-16** There is no need to speculate about Judas' reason for betraying Jesus. He had no higher motive than the love of money. Amazingly, Judas had heard Jesus say everything we have considered in this book so far, but perhaps was tired of a life of self-denial. Mammon, the god who competes for the hearts of people more than any other false god, enticed and deceived him.

Was Judas' character tainted even from the beginning of his relationship with Jesus? Perhaps it was. We know that Judas periodically stole from the corporate moneybox, at least near the close of Jesus' ministry (see John 12:6). Jesus once announced that one among the twelve was a devil (see John 6:70). Yet Judas had preached the gospel, healed the sick, cast out demons and fed the five thousand, just as much as the other eleven. When Jesus announced at the Last Supper that He would be betrayed by one of the

twelve, no one suspected Judas (see Matt. 26:22; Luke 22:23; John 13:22). Thus it seems possible that mammon gradually enticed him. If so, what a sobering warning to us of the powerful seduction of riches! Even one who literally lives with Jesus is not beyond its temptation. If he yields and does not repent, it can also be rightfully said of him, "It would have been good for that man if he had not been born" (26:24).

Judas' fundamental fatal flaw was yielding to the temptation to gain wealth at the expense of obedience to Christ. One is guilty of that same sin, to a lesser degree, whenever he gains or uses money in a way that is contrary to God's will. When he does, he is serving mammon, allowing it to direct his life rather than God.

**27:57-60** Joseph of Arimathea is another example of a wealthy man who became "a disciple of Jesus" (27:57). Keep in mind that biblical disciples are those who met Jesus' requirements for discipleship, one of which is giving up all of one's possessions (see Luke 14:33). We don't know what Joseph did with the rest of his possessions, but his sincere devotion to Jesus is revealed in this passage as he gave his own tomb for the burial of Jesus' body.

**28:11-15** Here is one more obvious example of people who served mammon rather than God. The chief priests did not use money according to God's will, and the Roman soldiers took money against God's will. Anyone who knowingly gains or uses money in a way that is contrary to God's will is serving mammon, because money, not God, is directing his life.

**28:18-20** Jesus wanted His disciples to make disciples of their own, teaching them to obey everything He had commanded them, including everything he commanded concerning money, possessions and stewardship. This they did, as is so clearly revealed in the epistles and the book of Acts. Why aren't spiritual leaders doing this today? In fact, why are so many spiritual leaders teaching what contradicts what Jesus taught regarding wealth? Why are so many living in luxury? Why are so many teaching wealthy, self-indulgent people that God loves them and thus wants them to be even more wealthy and self-indulgent? We have just surveyed Matthew's entire Gospel for relevant scriptures about money, possessions and stewardship. Where is the modern prosperity doctrine found in Christ's teachings? We have read scores of scriptures that contradict not only the prosperity gospel, but that also condemn standard American evangelical doctrine as well as the normal American lifestyle. Who will dare say in North America that it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven?

## **Mark**

There is essentially nothing regarding stewardship in Mark's Gospel that isn't also included in Matthew's Gospel. I have, therefore, only given the corresponding references.

**2:23** See my comments on Matt. 12:1.

**4:19** I have fully commented on "the deceitfulness of riches" against which Christ warned in Chapter Six.

**6:7-9** See my comments on Matt. 10:9-10.

**6:33-44** See my comments on Matt. 14:15-21.



**7:9-13** See my comments on Matt. 15:3-9.

**8:1-9** See my comments on Matt. 15:32-39.

**8:13-21** See my comments on Matt. 16:5-12.

**8:34-38** See my comments on Matt. 16:24-27.

**9:33-35** See my comments on Matt. 18:1-4.

**10:17-31** I have fully commented on the rich, young ruler in Chapters Two and Three.

**10:42-45** See my comments on Matt. 23:10-11.

**11:15-17** See my comments on Matt. 21:12-13.

**11:24** See my comments on Matt. 21:22.

**12:17** See my comments on Matt. 22:15-22.

**12:28-34** See my comments on Matt. 22:35-40.

**12:41-44** I have made mention of this story in Chapter Four. Jesus' reaction to those who give out of their surplus is no different today.

**14:3-9** See my comments on Matt. 26:6-13.

**14:10-11** See my comments on Matt. 26:14-16.

## **Luke**

**1:53** This Spirit-inspired utterance from a humble bond slave is a revelation of God's justice. God delights in righting wrongs, and the hungry are so often the victims of the wrongs of others, particularly the rich. But at times in the past, God has judged the unrepentant rich by forcing them to beg just like the hungry poor they previously ignored.

This verse is not only historically true (at least to some degree), but is prophetically true as well. Although not everyone has reaped what he's sown in this life, without exception, every person will be repaid according to his or her deeds in the next life, believers and unbelievers (see Matt. 16:27; Rom. 2:6-10). The greedy rich who never repent of ignoring the starving poor can never enter heaven, or else God would be unjust. The only thing that could make a greedy person imagine that he will enter heaven is a false gospel. The truth is, Jesus died, not just to forgive us of our selfishness, but to deliver us from it for the rest of our lives and throughout eternity.

**2:22-24** From these verses, we certainly don't get the impression that Jesus' parents were wealthy at this point in their lives. Mary and Joseph gave the offering that was required of poor parents, being unable to afford a lamb (see Lev. 12:6-8).

**3:7-18** As I mentioned in an earlier chapter, practically every specific thing that John told his convicted audience to do to validate their repentance involved money. Clearly, John wanted his hearers to realize that, unless they repented of greed and produced the fruit to prove it, hell was their eternal home. I'm afraid that many modern professing

Christians, if they heard John preaching “the gospel,” as Luke calls it (3:18), would call him legalistic, unbalanced, harsh, or extreme (see also my comments on Matt. 3:4-12).

**4:18** When the Holy Spirit descended upon Jesus, He was anointed to preach the gospel specifically to the poor, as Isaiah had foretold. The reason Jesus didn’t target the wealthy is not because God didn’t love them. In fact, some wealthy people repented and were saved under Jesus’ ministry. Jesus primarily targeted the poor for a number of possible reasons.

Perhaps first because it is so difficult for the rich to be saved—as difficult as it is for a camel to go through the eye of a needle (to quote an authority on the subject). The rich rarely repent of their greed. Why target the least receptive group?

Perhaps second, because of God’s justice. The poor so often get the short end of the stick, and the God of love hates injustice.

And perhaps third, because of God’s great compassion toward the marginalized citizens of the world, as Jesus’ constant ministry to the sick, to the demonized, to the hungry, to women and children, and to the poor so abundantly demonstrated. James wrote that “God choose the poor of this world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom” (Jas. 2:5; see also 1 Cor. 1:26-29).

Some prosperity preachers have a standard rhetoric that revolves around this verse. It goes as follows: “Jesus said He was anointed to preach the gospel to the poor! So what is good news to the poor man? That’s simple: ‘Poor man, you don’t have to be poor any more!’” At which point the wealthy and greedy crowd wildly applauds.

Of course, we never find Jesus preaching such a gospel. Jesus also preached good news to the Pharisees, tax collectors and prostitutes. Shall we determine what Christ’s message was to them based on what they would have liked to hear? “Hey prostitutes, you can keep your profession and still go to heaven!” I’m sure prostitutes would have given Him a standing ovation.

It is indeed true, however, that those who repent of their sin (including the sin of greed) and become His followers need not worry about food or clothing. Now that’s good news to believers who are truly poor.

**5:4-11** It is often pointed out by prosperity preachers how Jesus blessed Peter’s business with abundance. These same people, however, rarely point out that Peter left all those fish on the beach (along with everything else) to start following Jesus, which of course was Jesus’ original intention.

May I also ask: As Peter and his companions frantically worked to get every fish they could into their boats to the point of sinking them, all under the calm and holy gaze of Jesus, what was going through their minds? Could Peter suddenly have realized that his actions revealed his heart? Could he have realized that his frantic attempt to fill the boats to the point of sinking was a revelation of his greed? That he was only thinking of profits while he was standing in the midst of a miracle, and that his excitement was wrongly directed at the fish instead of the Miracle Worker? Could that have been why he then fell at Jesus’ feet saying, “Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord!”?

Even if not, the fact remains that as soon as Peter decided to become a disciple of Jesus, he “left everything and followed Him” (5:11). His priorities all changed with his repentance. His focus was no longer fish, but fishing for men. How do you suppose Jesus would have reacted if Peter had announced that he was seeking speaking engagements for his new message, “Secrets for Divine Prosperity”?

**5:27-32** Like Peter, Andrew, James and John, Matthew also left everything behind at his workplace when Jesus called him. There was nothing more important than following Jesus. Matthew immediately began using what he possessed to serve the Lord, hosting a large banquet in Jesus’ honor as a means of introducing his corrupt associates to Him.

Jesus considered Matthew's invitation to be an opportunity to call more sinners to repentance, and Matthew hoped his friends would yield.

**6:1** See my comments on Matt. 12:1.

**6:20-26** This passage either begins Luke's summary of the Sermon on the Mount, recorded more fully in Matthew 5-7, or more likely is an account of another of Jesus' sermons in which the content was very similar to His Sermon on the Mount. Regardless, Jesus here clearly contrasts heaven's view of people with the world's view. Which people are to be pitied, and which ones are to be envied? God's view is the exact opposite of the world's. The world envies those who are rich, comfortable, well fed, laughing, and popular. But Jesus warned that their happiness is only temporary. They will ultimately be very uncomfortable, hungry and hated, as they weep and gnash their teeth in hell.

Contrasted with them are those who had decided to follow Jesus, His disciples, to whom He was speaking (see 6:20). Although they are hated and ostracized now, one day they will be living forever in a perfect society of perfect love. Although they are poor in material things, they are spiritually rich and will one day be walking on streets of gold (see Rev. 21:21). Although they are not well fed, they will one day dine at the marriage feast of the Lamb (see Rev. 19:9). Although they sometimes weep, one day their God will wipe away every tear (see Rev. 21:4), and they will enter into the eternal joy of their Master (see Matt. 25:21).

And why might Christ's disciples weep? Because following Christ means loving God and neighbor, which means inevitable sorrow. Friends are lost, relationships broken, families are divided and persecution is endured. Beyond this, Christians weep because they care, weeping with those who weep (see Rom. 12:15). And like Paul, they carry "great sorrow and unceasing grief" (Rom. 9:2) in their hearts for those who are still in darkness.

**6:29** See my comments on Matt. 5:40.

**6:30** See my comments on Matt. 5:42.

**6:31-35** Jesus wants to put an end to selfish lending, which always expects something in return. Unselfish lending would include lending without charging interest, as well as loaning money or goods without making a mental debit against the borrower's account for future reference.

The Old Testament condemned *usury*, which was not the sin of charging exorbitant interest as it is thought today, but the sin of charging *any* interest to a countryman facing pressing needs (see Ex. 22:25; Lev. 25:35-37; Deut. 15:7-11; 23:19-20). Here Jesus extends the Old Testament prohibition against usury to include loans made even to one's enemies, at the same time commanding such unheard of acts of kindness.<sup>2</sup>

In order to lend, one must first have something to lend. Thus, this commandment indicates that Jesus was not advocating destitution for His followers. Of the first believers it is recorded that "not one of them claimed that anything belonging to him was his own; but all things were common property to them" (Acts 4:32). This is another way of saying that they very generously lent to each other. Some must have owned contemporary conveniences, such as plows, oil presses, work animals and so on.

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<sup>2</sup> Jesus, would not, of course, be commanding His followers to lend their money to enemies whose purpose in borrowing was some evil design. Loans made to enemies who were facing pressing needs was more of what He must have had in mind.

Good stewardship is characterized by owning only what one needs, giving away what one doesn't need, and lending what one doesn't always need. For example, one who owns a larger home than he needs is able to lend a room to someone who has no home of his own.

**6:38** This is not a “formula for obtaining divine wealth,” as some want us to believe, because that would stand in contradiction to everything else Jesus said in this sermon about unselfish love (not to mention the entire tenure of Scripture). Giving to get is pure hypocrisy, nothing more than selfishness under the guise of love. Rather, this promise is an assurance that we need never fear impoverishing ourselves by our giving to others, because God will abundantly return our kindness. As Paul would later echo to the Corinthian Christians when he admonished them to give generously to the poor, promising them a bountiful return: “And God is able to make all grace abound to you, that always having all sufficiency in everything, you may have an abundance *for every good deed*” (2 Cor. 9:8, emphasis added). Notice Paul assumed that the generous Corinthians, once blessed with their return, would want to use their God-given abundance for more good deeds. Those who are motivated to give because of love for God and neighbor will naturally want to continue to lay up treasures in heaven with what God abundantly repays them.

**7:2-10** Because salvation has always been offered by grace and received by a living faith (see Rom 4:1-17), it only seems reasonable to conclude that this Gentile Centurion was a saved man. Jesus declared that He had not found such great faith in Israel. His faith was evidenced by his humility (considering himself unworthy for Jesus to visit his house), his great respect for Jesus, his testimony concerning Jesus' authority, and the Jews' testimony about him. “He loves our nation” (7:5), they said, indicating a very unusual relationship between these Jews and a soldier who worked for the hated occupying power. Obedience to the second greatest commandment is a primary identifying mark of God's true people (see Luke 6:35; John 13:35; 1 John 3:14).

This centurion's living faith in God was also evidenced by the use of his money. He must have been quite generous, as the Jews gave him the credit for building their synagogue (see 7:5). This man lived his faith and others could see it. He loved God and neighbor.

**7:24-25** Sadly, what Jesus said here is not true in our day. “Those who are splendidly clothed and live in luxury” are no longer found only in royal palaces—they are often found in church pulpits. Clearly, Jesus was contrasting a true man of God with those who lived in luxury. *Splendidly clothed men who live in luxury can't preach the true gospel, because their selfish lives testify that they don't believe it themselves.* Jesus considered that John was the greatest man who had ever lived (see 7:28).

**8:1-3** Here we gain a glimpse of how God provided for the needs of Jesus and His band of twelve. Those who had been touched by His grace were interested in seeing Him succeed at His mission. Their faith was manifested by their self-denial.

**9:1-3** See my comments on Matt. 10:9-10.

**9:12-17** See my comments on Matt. 14:15-21.

**9:23-26** See my comments on Matt. 16:24-27.

**9:46-48** See my comments on Matt. 18:1-4.

**9:58** See my comments on Matt. 8:20.

**10:1-8** As when He sent out the twelve, Jesus allowed the seventy to take no future provision with them when He sent them to evangelize. As Christ's ambassadors, they were required to demonstrate faith, contentment with little, and humility to receive food and lodging from those who received their message.

**10:30-37** The scribes and Pharisees apparently defined the word *neighbor* as being anyone who loved them (see Matt. 5:43-47). Thus, one fulfilled the second greatest commandment by loving one's friends, which meant one could and should hate his enemies. In this parable, however, Jesus revealed from God's perspective who one's neighbors are. They include members of other ethnic groups, strangers, and even our enemies. Scripture tells us that Samaritans and Jews in Jesus' day hated each other (see Luke 9:51-55; John 4:9).

Jesus also defined the word *love* in this parable. It involves meeting the pressing needs of other people in trouble, and our responsibility is based upon our knowledge of their needs and the resources we have to meet those needs. Love may require the sacrifice of time and money. How are we any different from the priest and Levite in this story if we close our hearts to starving, dying people? If there are so many hundreds of millions of Christians in the world today, why is anybody on earth starving? Are we loving our neighbors as ourselves? Finally, is it not safe to assume that two zealous tithers walked by before the Samaritan arrived on the scene of the crime?

**11:3** See my comments on Matt. 6:11.

**11:9-13** See my comments on Matt. 7:7-11.

**11:42** See my comments on Matt. 23:23-26.

**12:13-34** All of Chapter One of this book was devoted to this portion of Luke's Gospel. While some modern preachers are telling us to believe God for more possessions, Jesus told His followers to sell what they didn't need and give the proceeds to charity! Can you see that many modern preachers are telling people the exact opposite of what Christ said? They are telling their followers not to follow Christ.

**14:12-14** Too much of our kindness extends no further than our own family or circle of friends, something that Jesus said amounts to nothing. Even the Gentiles do that much (see Matt. 5:46-47). Beyond that, our acts of kindness are often nothing more than subtle acts of selfishness, done in order to make the beneficiary feel obligated to reciprocate. We wine and dine potential clients in hopes of future profits.

God, however, expects us to use our resources to serve those who cannot repay us, the marginalized people of the world. By so doing, we are laying up treasures in heaven, something that is not accomplished when we serve those who reciprocate. Are you using a portion of your resources to serve the poor, crippled, lame and blind (particularly, but not exclusively, those who are believers), people who, in the developing world, are often forced to depend on the generosity of others for their survival?

**14:16-24** A preoccupation with their newly-acquired possessions kept the first two people from accepting the gracious dinner invitation. What fools! Their earthly focus blinded them to potential heavenly joy. The poor, crippled, blind and lame face no such temptation, and in that sense are blessed.

**14:25-35** The notion that one can be a believer in Christ, securely saved, but not be a disciple of Christ, is a modern theory that cannot be supported by Scripture. Those who claim that Jesus' requirements for discipleship here stand in contradiction to "salvation by grace through faith" do not understand the nature of true grace or true faith. God's grace instructs us to "deny ungodliness and worldly desires and to live sensibly, righteously and godly in the present age" (Tit. 2:12). The grace He offers says, "I don't condemn you, so go and sin no more." It does not say, "I don't condemn you, so you may continue to live in sin." Likewise, true faith obeys (see Gal. 5:6; Jas. 2:14-26; 1 John 2:3). Those who don't meet the requirements listed here to be Christ's disciples are not true believers in Him. They are not saved.

Not only must we love Jesus more than any other person (see 14:26), obediently following Him as we deny ourselves (see 14:27), but we must also "give up all [our] own possessions" (14:33). How we fool ourselves when we imagine that we fulfill this requirement by a supposed *mental* relinquishment that results in no *actual* relinquishment. If there is no actual relinquishment, neither has there been any mental relinquishment. How would the government react if you told them that you had *mentally* paid your taxes? How would the tax auditor respond if you said, "I'm holding my tax money loosely, and I don't consider that money to be mine any longer, even though it is still in my bank account"?

**16:1-31** I have fully discussed this portion of Scripture in Chapter Four.

**18:18-30** I have fully discussed the story of the rich ruler in Chapters Two and Three. What American pastor would remain employed if he told a rich man seeking salvation what Jesus told this man? Very few. Thus, Jesus Christ, whom Scripture calls the *Good Shepherd* (John 10:14), the *Great Shepherd* (Heb. 13:20) and the *Chief Shepherd* (1 Pet. 5:4), would not be employed as a shepherd in most churches because He apparently doesn't understand the truth about salvation. He believes that greedy people must repent in order to be saved.

**19:1-10** I've already discussed the repentance and salvation of Zaccheus in Chapter Three. When Zaccheus repented of greed, salvation came. Why is it that so many today suppose that it is not necessary to repent of greed in order to be saved? The New Testament declares that no greedy person will inherit eternal life (see 1 Cor. 6:10; Eph. 5:3-6).

Note that Zaccheus repented of both forms of his greed. No longer would he make money by taking advantage of others, and no longer would he neglect the poor.

Here is a thought-provoking question: What if Zaccheus had continued to defraud people but gave all his profits to the poor? Would God have approved? An amazing phenomenon is the philanthropist who gains his money by disobeying the golden rule. Yet people applaud him for his great generosity, ignoring the fact that all he gives he has gained by selfishly exploiting other people to enrich himself! Moreover, what he donates to charity actually requires no self-denial on his part, because he continues to live in luxury. Although the world may applaud such people, in God's eyes they are hypocrites of the worst sort, greedy people who pretend to be caring.

Finally, if you are a pastor, how would you respond if a wealthy person told you what Zaccheus told Jesus? Would you caution that wealthy person against becoming too extreme in his zeal? Would you tell him that fourfold restitution to those he defrauded was going a bit too far, because God has forgiven him? Would you suggest the money could be better used for the building fund?

**19:45-46** See my comments on Matt. 21:12-13.

**20:20-26** See my comments on Matt. 22:15-22.

**20:46-47** See my comments on Matt. 23:14.

**21:1-4** See my comments on Mark 12:41-44.

**22:3-6** See my comments on Matt. 26:14-16.

**22:24-27** See my comments on Matt. 18:1-4.

## **John**

**2:1-11** Jesus again provided basic needs, in this case drink for thirsty people. There is no record of Him providing anything other than food, drink and taxes.

**2:14-17** See my comments on Matt. 21:12-13.

**4:5-8** Have you ever considered the fact that Jesus lived His entire earthly life in what we would consider an undeveloped nation? His disciples had gone to buy food, not in a supermarket, but in a marketplace like you would find today in any village in the developing world. Moreover, Jesus drank water from wells. He never once turned on a faucet or stood under a shower in a bathroom. He never washed His clothing in a washing machine. He never opened the door of a refrigerator. He never drove a car or even a bicycle for that matter. Not once did He listen to a radio, speak to someone over a phone, cook a meal on a stove, or preach through a public address system. He never watched a television show, turned on an electric lamp, or cooled off in front of an air conditioner or electric fan. He never owned a lawnmower, a lawn chair, a wristwatch, or even a pair of sunglasses. He didn't have a closet full of clothing. How could He have been happy?

**6:5-14** See my comments on Matt. 14:15-21.

**12:3-8** When we compare the specific details of Mary's anointing of Jesus with the anointing by an unnamed woman mentioned in all three Synoptic Gospels, it seems they are not the same incident (see Matt. 26:6-13; Mark 14:3-9; Luke 7:37-39). In this case, John highlights the hypocrisy, deception, thievery and greed of Judas, who under the pretense of concern for the poor, complained about the waste. Yet Judas actually stole from the treasury that which was meant for the poor, and we are just like him when we selfishly use for ourselves what God intends that we use for the poor. Is the money that God has entrusted to us any different than the money in Jesus' treasury?

**13:27-29** Here we gain insight concerning the treasury of Jesus and His disciples. It was most commonly used for their essential needs, such as food, and to supply the essential needs of the poor. Jesus always loved His neighbor as Himself. Thus, meeting their needs was a priority. Is it not our goal to become like Him? Is that not God's goal for us? (see Rom. 8:29; Phil. 3:12).

**13:34-35** This was, indeed, a new commandment, heretofore unheard. Christ's disciples are to love each other by a new standard. They are not just to love each other as themselves (as the second greatest commandment enjoins), but as He has loved them. They are not to view one another as being equal to themselves, but as being more important than themselves (see Phil. 2:3), just as Jesus did. Jesus elaborated on this theme a short time later in 15:12-14: "This is My commandment, that you love one

another, just as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends. You are My friends, if you do what I command you.”

Jesus loved His friends, whom He defined as those who do what He commands, by laying down His life for them. So His disciples are to love one another by laying down their lives for one another. John reiterated this thought in his first epistle: “We know love by this, that He laid down His life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren” (1 John 3:16).

Does such a laying down of one’s life have anything to do with what one does with his money and possessions? John thought so, and continued in the very next verse, “But whoever has the world’s goods, and beholds his brother in need and closes his heart against him, how does the love of God abide in him?” (1 John 3:17). Clearly then, one who has the ability to meet the pressing needs of one of Christ’s disciples but “closes his heart against him,” does not obey Jesus’ new commandment and does not distinguish himself with the identifying mark of Christ’s true disciples, as Jesus said in 13:35.

**14:15** In this statement, Jesus was not excluding His commandments regarding money, possessions and stewardship. Our stewardship is a measure of our love for Him.

**14:21-24** What Jesus said here is not a promise of special bonuses for Christians who love Jesus, bonuses that will not be enjoyed by those heaven-bound Christians who don’t love Jesus. Rather, Jesus was talking about the benefits of being saved. All true believers love and obey Jesus (see John 3:36; 1 Cor. 16:22). Both Father and Son make their abode in every true Christian by the indwelling Spirit (see Rom. 8:9). Thus we once again see the correlation between faith and works, belief and behavior. Those who are truly born again love Jesus and are characterized by obedience to His commandments, including His commandments regarding money, possessions and stewardship.

**15:12-14** See my comments on John 13:34-35.

**19:23-24** From the information found here, some prosperity preachers have attempted to prove that Jesus was wealthy, because only wealthy people supposedly could afford a seamless inner garment! It is utterly amazing what significance can be found in the biblical text if one wants to prove what contradicts numerous other scriptures. Can you imagine presenting such evidence in court to prove that someone was wealthy?

With the completion of this eighth chapter, we have now studied everything that Jesus taught and lived concerning money, possessions and stewardship. Have we found evidence in any of the four Gospels that Jesus wants us to trust Him to prosper us even more so we can live in greater self-indulgence and ignore the poor multitudes and those who have never heard the gospel? No, we have found that Christ taught and lived the exact opposite. The essence of following Him is self-denial, yet millions of professing Christians have embraced a theology of selfishness that is nothing more than greed sanctified by a few out-of-context scriptures.