

1 Chronicles 29:1-9 (The Message)

Then David the king addressed the congregation: “My son Solomon was singled out and chosen by God to do this. But he’s young and untested and the work is huge—this is not just a place for people to meet each other, but a house for GOD to meet us. I’ve done my best to get everything together for building this house for my God, all the materials necessary: gold, silver, bronze, iron, lumber, precious and varicolored stones, and building stones—vast stockpiles. Furthermore, because my heart is in this, in addition to and beyond what I have gathered, I’m turning over my personal fortune of gold and silver for making this place of worship for my God: 113 tons of gold—all from Ophir, the best—and 214 tons of silver for covering the walls of the buildings, and for the gold and silver work by craftsmen and artisans. And now, how about you? Who among you is ready and willing to join in the giving?”

Ready and willing, the heads of families, leaders of the tribes of Israel, commanders and captains in the army, stewards of the king’s affairs, stepped forward and gave willingly. They gave 188 tons of gold, 377 tons of silver, 679 tons of bronze, and 3,775 tons of iron. Anyone who had precious jewels put them in the treasury for the building of The Temple of GOD in the custody of Jehiel the Gershonite.

And the people were full of a sense of celebration—all that giving! And all given willingly, freely! King David was exuberant.

Matthew 6:19–34 (NIV2011)

¹⁹“Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moths and vermin destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. ²⁰But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moths and vermin do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. ²¹For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

²²“The eye is the lamp of the body. If your eyes are healthy, your whole body will be full of light. ²³But if your eyes are unhealthy, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light within you is darkness, how great is that darkness!

²⁴“No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money.

²⁵“Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothes?

²⁶Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? ²⁷Can any one of you by worrying add a single hour to your life?

²⁸“And why do you worry about clothes? See how the flowers of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. ²⁹Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. ³⁰If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you—you of little faith? ³¹So do not worry, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ ³²For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. ³³But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. ³⁴Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.

A simple question: Where is our treasure? Where is our heart?

I don’t know about you but I’ve got a lot of stuff. I’ve got boxes that have not been opened in four moves and it’s been a decade and a half since I last moved! I’ve got storage bins packed with . . . well, beats me. I’ve got stuff I’ll never use again. Stuff I never used at all. Why did I really think I needed that Mighty Putty?

You’d think I’d have to rent one of those storage rooms for all this, the kind you see on the slightly frightening A&E show, *Storage Wars*, which is certainly not about the Arts and is only marginally Entertainment. Certainly, in the past twenty years, countless of my fellow

Americans have rented those off-site storage rooms. A couple of years ago, Jon Mooallem took a look at the explosion of storage units¹:

Across America, from 2000 to 2005, upward of 3,000 self-storage facilities went up every year. Somehow, Americans managed to fill that brand-new empty space. In June [2009], Public Storage, the industry's largest chain, reported that its 2,100 facilities in 38 states were, on average, still about 91 percent full. It raises a simple question: where was all that stuff before?

"A lot of it just comes down to the great American propensity toward accumulating stuff," Industry veteran Tom Litton explained. Between 1970 and 2008, real disposable personal income per capita doubled, and by 2008 we were spending nearly all of it — all but 2.7 percent — each year. Meanwhile, the price of much of what we were buying plunged. Even by the early '90s, American families had, on average, twice as many possessions as they did 25 years earlier. By 2005, according to the Boston College sociologist Juliet B. Schor, the average consumer purchased one new piece of clothing every five and a half days.

Further, Mooallem notes that once all stuff goes into the units, it rarely comes out, at least until the latest recession hit:

"Human laziness has always been a big friend of self-storage operators," Derek Naylor, president of the consultant group Storage Marketing Solutions, told me. "Because once they're in, nobody likes to spend all day moving their stuff out of storage. As long as they can afford it, and feel psychologically that they can afford it, they'll leave that stuff in there forever." Now, though, "there are people who are watching their credit-card bills closer than before," he said. "They're really paying attention to the stuff they're storing and realizing that it's probably not worth \$100 a month to keep. So they just get rid of it."

The Old Testament tells the story of a day when God's people joyously emptied out their storage units, looking for anything that they could find to help construct the temple. The Chronicler sets forth in some detail what they brought. It is a dramatic tale.

It's worth taking a few minutes to remind ourselves of the reasons why the Israelites were so quick to pony up what they had.

God moves in

When the LORD God freed his people from slavery in Egypt, he led them to Mt. Sinai, the mountain of the LORD, where God had first called Moses. There, God told Moses, "And have them [the Hebrews] make me a sanctuary, so that I may dwell with them" (Exodus 25:8). . . . Dwell with them!!!! . . . Frankly, God's decision to dwell with his people is one of those key biblical themes we hear so often that we've lost any sense of shock at the claim. So let's try to hear with new ears.

God, the creator of the universe and everything in it, is choosing to dwell with some dusty slaves who have run away from one of the greatest kingdoms on earth. God could dwell anywhere in the cosmos and with anyone — yet it is these landless, powerless, oppressed people whom he has chosen. It isn't very hard to understand why the Israelites were seen as weird and at least half-crazy for making such a claim . . . and why they would be seen this way for millennia thereafter.

Now, the Jews weren't so crazy as to think that they had God all to themselves or that they could contain God in any way. But they did believe that God dwelt with them in a way that God did not dwell elsewhere or with other peoples.

So God, in a very real sense, moved in with them. Because the Hebrews were nomads, God gave instructions for building a moveable tent, called a tabernacle, that would be God's dwelling place. In a small portion of the tabernacle, called the Holy of Holies, the Hebrews kept the Ark of the Covenant, which contained the stone tables on which were written the

¹ Mooallems' article, "The Self-Storage Self," was published in the *New York Times*, Sept 9, 2009.

Ten Commandments. It was there that Moses, and later the High Priest, would go to meet with God. It was the place where heaven and earth met.

As the centuries wore on and the people settled into the land of Canaan, they desired to build a proper house for God. Much of the book of Chronicles is focused on the building of this permanent structure, the temple in Jerusalem. It is King David's son, Solomon, who actually undertakes the building of the temple.² In response, the people open their hearts and their purses in joy. The time had come to do right by their guest, and if that won't get the doors of those storage units swung open, nothing will.

Where really is our treasure? Our heart?

In today's passage from his Sermon on the Mount, Jesus talked about storage units. Maybe not in so many words, but we can make the connection. Where our treasure is, there is our heart . . . we can't serve God and money/property.

St. Andrew is a congregation of more than 6,000. I wonder just how much wealth is tied up in our storage bins, our closets, our attics, our garages and so on. How much good could be done with it? How much money raised if it were sold? How useful would it be to those deeply in need? How much money have we spent over the years buying stuff we never even used or used once and set aside?

Mind you . . . I'm as bad as anyone, so I'm certainly not pointing fingers at anyone other than myself. An alien looking at the Israelites carrying their wealth for the building of the temple would grasp immediately where their true treasure was and, hence, where their heart was. If an alien looked at me and my life and my stuff, where would he say that my heart is?

All these things will be given to you

In all this, Jesus points us toward this great truth: the kingdom of God is to be the first priority in our lives and, if so, all else will follow (v. 33). Our energies and passions and devotions are to be poured into the kingdom. In the Greek, "seek" is an imperative, a must do – we are to keep seeking, keep striving. This is not about a hoped-for-someday coming of God's kingdom but about its reality today, for our own lives. D.A. Hagner puts it this way in his commentary on Matthew: "This imperative means that one should make the kingdom the center of one's existence and thus experience the rule of God fully in one's heart." Even this is a bit abstract for me. How do we experience God's rule in our hearts?

The kingdom of God is exactly what the words say: it is the place where God is king, where God rules. Thus, experiencing the rule of God in our hearts is a bit like this. I am a citizen of the United States. I try as best as I can to live according to the laws of the U.S. If I move to another country, even a lawless country, I can still choose to hold the laws of the U.S. in my heart, to be governed by them even though I am no longer in the U.S. Thus, even though we live in a world that is plagued by tragedy, violence, illness, materialism, and selfishness we can choose to live according to God's law. In other words, we are to keep striving to live according to God's moral will, for that is true righteousness. The Sermon on the Mount is an extended block of Jesus' teachings about the nature of God's will for our lives, about what it means to be righteous, to do right in God's sight.

Needs and wants

Jesus says if we strive first for God's kingdom, then "all these things will be given to you as well." What sorts of things? What we eat. What we drink. What we wear. (v. 31). Though I doubt that Jesus had in mind a diet of bread and water and trousers made of sackcloth, I

²This is roughly 1000 years before Jesus. This temple would stand until it was destroyed by the Babylonians in 587/86 BC. Keeping in mind today's passage from Chronicles (probably written about 350-400 years before Jesus) may help you to grasp the despair of the Jews at the loss of the temple built by Solomon. Think about this: What would the destruction of God's house at the hands of an enemy say to a Jew? What message would be heard?

also suspect he wasn't speaking of dinner at a four-star restaurant, Moët-Chandon, and designer clothes.

We have a way of making "wants" into seeming "needs." To an extent, this is a good thing. Increasing standards of living have resulted in numerous benefits for millions of people. But, still, we seem to chase an unreachable goal. No matter how far along we get, we just redefine the target further away. Somebody always has a bigger house or a more luxurious car. George Will wrote, a need "is defined in contemporary America as a 48-hour-old want," leading to "a blurring of needs and wants." The result is what he calls the "tyranny of the unnecessary."³ The result is a nation overflowing with off-site storage facilities.

If we are going to find our way to the life God desire us, a life filled with generosity and genuine caring, we have to begin by recognizing that our own desires are misplaced. Too often, we seek the things of this world, whether it be stuff or status, rather than the things of God. Our journey must begin with the transformation of our minds and hearts, our desires and dreams. By the grace of God, such transformation can be ours.

"Disciples are marked out clearly by their attitude to money."

In his commentary, *The Message of Matthew*, Michael Green takes a frank look at today's passage from Jesus' Sermon on the Mount.

The worldliness that we are called to avoid can take a religious or a secular form. And so we differ from those who are not Christians both in our devotional life, which Jesus has dealt with in the first half of the chapter, and also in our ambitions. These are disclosed principally in two ways: 'What do we really value?' and 'What do we worry about?' It is to these twin areas of money and worry that Jesus now turns, as he seeks to show with embarrassing directness what it means to be a citizen of the kingdom.

Verses 19–24 are all about money. Jesus is unambiguous on this subject, which many preachers dare not face. '*You cannot serve both God and Money*' (v. 24). Money is literally 'Mammon', who seems to have been the Carthaginian god of wealth. You cannot have divided loyalties in this matter. God has to come first, and money a poor second. Jesus is specific, too, about the sorts of things that grab our spending power. He warns against giving priority to items such as clothes, which will wear out and are so readily perishable. He warns against overvaluing precious metals, which rust can spoil. He warns against putting our treasure where it can be stolen. Wise people, the true children of the kingdom, put their treasure where they cannot lose it, where it will never wear out, and where it can never be eroded. Their treasure is in heaven. It is safe with the Father.

Verses 22–23 have a general application: the eye is the window to the soul. You can often tell how things are with people by the message relayed through their eyes. Jealousy, prejudice, resentment, greed, lust—these are like films that can creep over the eye and distort the vision. All this is true. But the particular application of this image is to money. And it is not without significance that the words *good* (literally 'single') and *bad* often have a financial nuance in the Greek language. 'Single' means generous, open-hearted, warm. 'Bad' means miserly, niggardly. So it would seem that Jesus is developing his theme about money. Not only is it important to have your treasure in the right place; it is also vital to approach life with a generous, warm appraisal of other people. There are few things so distorting as an ungenerous, mean and critical spirit.

Hence the conclusion: you cannot be devoted to God if you are devoted to money and the things money will buy (24). They are rival affections. Money, the ancients came to see, is like sea-water. The more you drink of it the thirstier you get. . . . There are few areas where the standards of the world have so invaded the church as in this area of money. Christian giving is frequently at an abysmal standard, and when it rises to 10% or so, there is often the implicit or explicit assumption that God will bless you in financial terms for what you give. It is very convenient to forget that the preacher of this Sermon was penniless and remained that way until devotion to God drove him to a cross of wood. He practised what he preached. He did not try to serve God and Money. William Barclay makes an interesting point. 'Mammon' has a Hebrew root which means 'entrust'. Mammon was the wealth people entrusted to bankers to keep safe for them. But as the years went on, Mammon came to mean not that which is entrusted but that in which people put their trust. God entrusted us with all we have. It is the supreme treason to prize the gift above the donor. This generation is accountable at this point. Things that have been entrusted to us by God to support us have become, in effect, our god. Disciples are marked out clearly by their attitude to money.

Questions for Discussion and Reflection

The following questions are taken from the booklet 40 Day Spiritual Journey to a More Generous Life that our church is using during this series. I hope you'll pick up a copy and read the devotions daily.

1. As a child, what was one of your earliest or most vivid recollections about giving money to God OR what do you recall about your parent's practices and attitudes about giving to God?
2. Who is the most financially generous person you know?
3. How old were you when the idea of tithing (giving 10% of your income) came into your conscious thoughts?
4. If you do not faithfully give 10% or more of your income to the Lord's work, what do you think are the real reasons you're holding back from doing this?
5. If you do faithfully give 10% or more of your income to the Lord's work, how old were you and what were the financial circumstances in your life when you first started tithing?
6. If you do faithfully give 10% or more of your income to the Lord's work, what are the values and benefits you've seen by faithfully doing this?

Daily Bible Readings

Before reading each passage, take a few minutes to get a sense of the context. Your study bible should help. Jot down a few questions that come to mind from your reading of the passage.

<p>Monday, Deuteronomy 8:11-18 Listen to God and thrive. Ignore God and suffer.</p>	<p>Tuesday, 1 Kings 17:10-15 God can deliver great abundance.</p>
<p>Wednesday, Matthew 25:14-30 The parable of the bags of gold</p>	<p>Thursday, Mark 12:41-44 The widow's offering</p>
<p>Friday, Colossians 3:17-24 When we serve one another, it is Jesus who we are truly serving.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Weekly Joys and Concerns</p>

Connecting the Dots: Genesis to Revelation **An Introduction to the Bible**

Beginning Monday, October 22, Scott Engle will teach a four-week-long church-wide Bible study on Monday evenings. We will meet in the renovated Wesley Hall from 7:00 to 8:30.

This will be an introduction to the Bible and the over-arching biblical story.

There will even be “can’t-miss” music to start our evening!

Everyone who attends will receive a free copy of the 62-page *Connecting the Dots* book.

The series will be suitable for youth and adults.

Childcare available – make reservations at www.standrewumc.org

Scott Engle’s Weekday Bible Classes

Join us whenever you can. Each week’s lesson stands in its own.

This is very “drop-in.” Bring something to eat if you like. Bring a study Bible.

On occasion Scott has to cancel class, so if you are coming for the first time, you can check www.scottengle.org to make sure the class is meeting.

Tuesday Lunchtime Class – now studying Genesis

Meets from 11:45 to 1:00 in **Piro Hall** on Tuesdays (a new room).

Monday Evening Class – now studying Revelation

Meets from 7:00 to 8:15 in Piro Hall on Monday evenings.

Scott’s 11:00 Sunday Class in Festival Hall

This is a large, lecture-oriented class open to all ages.

The class is often led by Dr. Scott Engle and is organized into series.

Scott is teaching the current series:

Talking about Jesus with Scoffers, Skeptics, and the Indifferent.

Scott’s Weekly Bible Studies are available at www.standrewumc.org. Just go to “worship” and then “sermons.” You’ll find the study with each week’s recorded sermon. There is also a complete archive of the studies at www.scottengle.org.

Sermon Notes
