

# “The Sermon on the Amount”

---

29 October 2023

Pastor Steve Ramer

## **Scripture: Selections from Mark, 2 Corinthians, and 1 Timothy**

*Luke 16:13 “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.”*

*Mark 12:41-44. 41 Jesus sat down opposite the place where the offerings were put and watched the crowd putting their money into the temple treasury. Many rich people threw in large amounts. 42 But a poor widow came and put in two very small copper coins, worth only a few cents.*

*43 Calling his disciples to him, Jesus said, “Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put more into the treasury than all the others. 44 They all gave out of their wealth; but she, out of her poverty, put in everything—all she had to live on.”*

*2 Corinthians 9:6-11. 6 The point is this: the one who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and the one who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. 7 Each of you must give as you have made up your mind, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. 8 And God is able to provide you with every blessing in abundance, so that by always having enough of everything, you may share abundantly in every good work.*

*1 Timothy 6:10*

*10 For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, and in their eagerness to be rich some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pains.*

## **Sermon**

Welcome this morning to my annual stewardship sermon or as our beloved Dan Leatherman titled it, “The Sermon on the Amount!”

I want to talk about money this morning. Scary, I know, but it is Halloween in a couple of days! Specifically I want to talk about your money - perhaps even more scary. Allow me to simply "cut to the chase." Not only do we really NEED your money, but little ole FCMF wants more of it!

But talking about money, depending upon the circumstances, can be difficult - so let's try a slightly different tactic. Let's start by taking a couple deep breaths, stretching out our arms, and shaking them, rolling our necks and shoulders – releasing any tensions we might be feeling.

Now sing along with me...

*Money, money, money, money (money)*

*Money, money, money, money (money)*

*Money, money, money, money (money)*

*Money, money, money, money (money)*

*Some people got to have it, yeah, yeah*

*Some people really need it, yeah*

*Listen to me y'all, do things, do things, do things bad things with it*

*Well, you wanna do things, do things, do things, good things with it, yeah*

Just a few lines from, “For the Love of Money” by the O’Jays and the repetition hopefully should reduce some anxiety.

For our scriptures this morning I chose several verses that can hopefully guide us as we talk about sharing our resources to fund the ministry of our fellowship. Or as the O’Jays say, “do things, do things, do things, good things with it, yeah!”

In the example of the poor widow, Jesus reverses a common assumption that the amount of the gift is what matters most. Instead, Jesus focuses on the giver, specifically her willingness to, as he said, “put in everything—all she had to live on!” That, according to Jesus, is what matters most! Of course the wealthy can give “bigger checks” because it is only a fraction of what they have to live on. Additionally, it is a reminder that God wants more than just our money, God wants it all, all of us! Our time, our focus, our talents.

Paul, in 2 Corinthians 9, adds that “God loves a cheerful giver.” So, alternatively, I guess, this would mean that God doesn’t want us to be a fearful giver, or a guilty giver, nor an exhausted or reluctant giver as well? Now the dictionary defines cheerful as “full of good spirits: MERRY, UNGRUDGING, as in cheerful obedience or conducive to cheer: likely to dispel gloom or worry.”

“Cheerfulness” is also contagious and not limited to only one part of our lives, but it can permeate throughout us and then eventually then spread to others around us. You can’t even say the word without smiling a bit. Say it: chee-er - ful - ness. See you’re all smiling!

So not only does God want it all and for us to be “merry” about it, God also wants us to be generous. Throughout scripture we are warned about the danger of accumulating too much money or too many things. Because, as the O’Jays tell us, some people, “do things, do things, do things - bad things with it!”

In fact, the Bible has far more to say about the dangers of wealth accumulation than say things like sex, drugs, gay marriage or gender transition combined. Money can corrupt the soul and its antidote is generosity. Giving it away brings wholeness and joy to others, as well as it reminds us of just how generous God is with us. Our main task then is to gratefully receive God’s abundance and to then be good stewards by sharing them with others.

I hope you had a chance to look over the proposed budget for 2023 that Denise sent out yesterday. But in case you didn't, let me highlight a few things. First, the Elders are proposing to spend more than \$94k next year which is nearly a \$20k increase from this year! And as always, I continue to be the largest line item in the budget at more than one-third of the expenses.

But one could argue that most of the remaining expenses are needed to enhance our outreach to our houseless neighbors. From utilities, maintenance, to Renee's salary, and the buying laundry soap and toilet paper, those are all caused by our outreach efforts. Those are also the areas that account for the most significant increases in next year's budget.

To pay for all this, the Elders are asking all of us to increase our pledges for 2024 by at least 10% as well raising another \$17K through grants and fundraisers. Quite ambitious I must admit But we did receive a very generous and unexpected \$20,000 gift from Ten Thousand Villages this fall that we can use for next year And of course, we have Martha and Denise on the task of writing and winning grants for us. Maybe some of you have fundraising ideas to put into the pot? Efforts that must also, I think, be merry, ungrudging, and cheerful.

Over the past few years, the number of folks experiencing homeless has exploded all across the nation. This has also been our experience here in Ft Collins. The homelessness pandemic is outstripping the meager resources being provided by social service organizations, religious institutions, and all levels of government combined.

Prior to COVID, experts said that we, as a nation, were already about 800,000 housing units shy of what we needed after decades of failure to build enough. Add to this the spread of more deadly drugs like fentanyl and the importation of cheaper meth, our current crisis is only likely to get worse before it gets any better.

Sadly, local governments and citizens across the country are actually becoming more punitive in their reactions rather than seeking creative and humane solutions. Of course, we here at FCMF cannot solve this crisis alone, but we do find ourselves in a very unique space, both literally and figuratively. Literally, we are open and available with a warm place for the homeless to spend a couple of hours or a night or two in a safe place, to hang out on our patio, or to get a hot shower, clean clothes food, and friendship — and this indeed has a profound impact on the lives of others; in fact, we actually save lives. But all of these seemingly "little" things do lead to even more. Simple acts of kindness do build genuine relationships. And these relationships have changed our lives as well. And that, my friends, is what true community is all about!

For instance, there was a time when JD used to spend most of his days sleeping and doing God knows what in Renee's car back in the parking lot. JD still spends a lot of time in Renee's car, but now he's driving folks to medical appointments, parole and probation meetings, the food bank, to rehab. Demetrius used to seemingly only be interested in being a knucklehead, but this week he begins training to become a peer counselor for those dealing with substance abuse. Scary, I know, that they would let him do that, but we know he'll be great! And then there is

Alec who is slowly building his own landscaping empire. You can find him on the internet at Nextdoor.

There are also others who you guys never meet who come here for a few months, find some stability and then get a job, or into rehab, or sober living, and move on with their lives. Or how about the recent family with five chihuahua's who were in crisis? We were able to house them until they got back on their feet.

Our little building has been housing so many other folks and is full of so many other stories of those who are also working hard to begin a new chapter in their lives. We are making a difference and we keep on going, not because we are special, but because we have built relationships with the folks who need a little bit of our help!

We do not have much of those, "O mighty dollars!" as the O'Jays call them, and we do have a run-down old building. But somehow we manage to "do good things, good things, good things with it, yeah!"

We pastors often share lots of stories with each other about our respective congregations. And most of those stories are not all that good. But as I listen to other pastors share about their church finances, I am always struck by just how we are different. We always seemed to make our way, doing so much with so little, and doing it all with such warm and truly generous hearts as well as wallets.

Each one's situation is of course different, and some of us cannot give more, while others of us perhaps can go above and beyond even that which is being suggested. But keep in mind, whatever the amount, whether it be money, time, or prayers give it all to God generously and cheerfully.

***Steve Ramer***

Pastor Fort Collins Mennonite Fellowship

300 E. Oak St.

Ft. Collins, CO 80524

(970) 412-7510