

Losing to Gain

By Glenn Brumbaugh

How much is enough? What do I give? Is having money bad?

How should I view wealth as a follower of Jesus?

If these questions sound familiar, they should.

The subject of wealth, and the privilege that goes with it is as old as the gospel itself.

And it's been a subject of debate all that time as well.

As in first century Palestine, we still live in a world

that depends on money to provide for our wants and needs.

And like that ancient culture, our status in our society is often based, in part,

on how successful we are at accumulating wealth

and the benefits that go with that.

The question is, is that God's intention?

Are we in tune with the Divine plan

when we prosper and accumulate wealth and the finer things of life,

the goods and services that seem to enhance our experience?

Well, to start out with, let's take a look at our terminology.

When we use the term "goods," what comes to mind.

For most of us, it would probably be all the stuff we buy

with the money we acquire:

the TV, the furnishings, our clothes,

and everything else we fill our home with.

It's interesting that the origin of the word "goods" is the plural of good,
which is the noun form created from the identical adjective.

It has its origins in Old English.

That original meaning was "benevolent or kind, or of God."

From there, over the centuries, the meaning evolved
into something of quality,

until the 17th century where it had evolved

into the meaning we use today as a commodity.

Reflecting on what good really means

is where we find Jesus in our Gospel reading this morning.

He's approached by someone in the crowd who addresses him as "good rabbi,
(or teacher).

The average person wouldn't think twice about being addressed by "good"
but Jesus intentionally makes the point that only God is good.

That certainly adds a new dimension to our examination of that term.

The Bible as a whole makes clear that the blessings we receive in life come from God.

Therefore, so do the "goods" we value as well.

Jesus takes us back to the origin of that term.

Good and God go together.

So do we value goods because they satisfy our needs and cravings,
or because they come from God?

Jesus is setting the tone for the discussion that follows.

This young man has received many blessings, and has evidently lived a pious life,

as far as following the laws of the Torah is concerned.

One could argue that he was rewarded for his efforts by his material gains.

And his contemporaries in the Jewish faith
would have the same impression.

The standard Jewish theology on the subject was

that if you were living an upright, pious life,
you would be successful in your endeavors and rewarded.

Unfortunately, if you were poor, or sick, or needy,
the common wisdom was you must be wicked in some way,
and being cursed by God.

The young man proudly attests to his upstanding ethics,

and Jesus applauds him on his efforts.

He asks Jesus what must he do to inherit eternal life.

It's interesting that he uses the term "inherit" instead of get or obtain?

To inherit something implies relationship or kinship to someone.

It's not something we can voluntarily seek.

Inheritance is a benefit given to us,
usually for being part of a family in some fashion,
or having a close relationship with another.

Which gives Jesus the opening to put what's required in a relational perspective,

when he tells him to sell what he has and give the money to the poor.

As he so often does in Mark's Gospel, Jesus

shifts the focus from heaven at the end of time
to the Kin-dom of God here and now.

He shifts the man's focus from his own salvation
to being a part of something bigger, God's family,
part of the kin-dom.

And being an heir of God implies that his blessings come from God,
and should be used for God.

There is the contrast of the sense of belonging that comes
from being a part of God's Kin-dom here and now,
a sense of kinship, history, and responsibility
versus the worldly concept of wealth
as a path to self-focused power and privilege,
disconnected from God.

But Jesus makes it about the love that is the foundation of the Kin-dom.

The scripture tells us that Jesus loved this man.

The implication is that he cared and wanted him
to choose the right path that not only ensured his place
in the hereafter,
but more importantly, his place in God's family here and now.

Love is of God, and God is love.

To be open to participate in that Divine love,
he needed to unload the burden and restriction of wealth
that kept him from truly participating in the Kin-dom of God.

Wealth has become where his heart lies, not God.

When given the opportunity to step into the realm of God drawing near,
he steps away.

Jesus indicates to the disciples that our attachment to all that wealth provides
keeps us from the Kin-dom.

The Kin-dom is about living love.

It's about a God who gives us blessings to share, not to horde.

It's about a Creator that has designed a world of finite resources and blessings
for us to be stewards of.

In a finite system, when some have much,
others too often don't have enough.

God's kin-dom plan depends on relationship and kinship with each other
to share our blessings with each other.

Jesus reinforces this when he tells the disciples that by giving everything up for
God,
they will be blessed a hundredfold.

That's what the Kin-dom is all about.

By giving away our blessings, we are able to receive new blessings.

This new family they're joining isn't built on the world's values
of those with the most toys win. It's upside down from that.

Those who love and show that love through action are rewarded
by being part of a community that ensures the needs of all are met.

The lowest among them have the highest priority.

What about us?

Are we like the young rich man,

unable to let go of the temporary security and fleeting pleasures

the excess wealth of this world provides?

Unfortunately, the world hasn't changed much since this episode with Jesus.

We still have those who have much, and those who have not enough;

those with the power, and those who suffer under that power.

As Amos reminds us, God's concern is always with justice

and those who suffer from injustice.

We can choose the life that Jesus presents, sharing our excess with others,

or holding onto that which we don't need,

and allowing others to suffer the consequences of our choice to hold onto wealth.

I'd like to share a movie clip that illustrates pretty starkly

the potential outcome of our choices, not only for others,

but the regret and shame we ourselves must face.

It's an excerpt from the final scene of the movie Schindler's List.

If you're not familiar with it,

it's the story of a German industrialist

who saved 1200 Jews from the gas chamber

by employing them as slave labor in his factory.

He kept them safe largely through bribing SS and other German officials.

I will warn you it's bit emotional.

VIDEO : Shindler's List "[Just one more person](#)"

In a world today in which the those at the top have more and more of the resources,
it is more important than ever that we join in the kin-dom work of God
and share what we can with our brothers and sisters in need.

The alternative for us is to ride a camel through some pretty difficult terrain
and not reach our destination.

The result for those without can be catastrophic.

Being successful and earning a good salary is not a sin.

When we do not share our blessings with others to the fullest extent we can,
is when we work against God's plans for us.

I pray as we leave today, we give thought to how we view our resources,
those extras that we hold on to, and how we may be a blessing to others. Amen.