

GIVING ETERNALLY + + +

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Well, on January 13th, 2018, it was a beautiful Hawaii morning, which, I mean, come on, almost all are. The sun was shining. The ocean breeze was there when suddenly a few hours later, a service sent out a text message to all the phones in Hawaii that said, quote, ballistic missile inbound for Hawaii. Seek shelter. This is not a drill.

A man was there with his family and at that time had his three kids and they were building sandcastles and all of a sudden the game of building sandcastles turned a little darker. In this moment, frantically trying to find his wife, they did what many others did. They went to the nearest hotel lobby where it's like every nation, tribe, and tongue had gathered and people were praying, people were hugging.

He said that his kids gave their lives to Jesus again, just to be sure. Kind of made sense. If you think back to that timeframe, there was still a lot of murmurs of political interference with the presidential election from 2016. There were sanctions placed on Russia. There was verbal and financial support given to Ukraine. And so this felt really real.

And in the midst of it, he couldn't find his wife. Turns out his wife was in the shower. She'd just gotten off the treadmill and after getting off the treadmill, had conversations with a friend about kitchen renovations. And in the 36 minutes that he couldn't find her between that first text and the second text, he had no idea where she was when the second text came with just two words and it said false alarm.

But think about this, that 36 minutes, which felt like 36 hours, that at that same time, two people in the same family were having very different feelings. By the way, it turns out someone just hit the wrong button, which like maybe we should be more careful about what buttons can do. I don't know if it was like a butt dial or what happened, but we got to be more careful about that.

But she didn't even have her phone on. And one person in the family was face to face with eternity. And the other person in the family just had a nice workout and talked about kitchen updates in the exact same 36 minutes. And I think honestly, that's a lot of how the world works today. That some of us live each day, deeply aware that life is fragile, that eternity is coming.

Whereas others live as if all there is and talk about kitchen upgrades. C.S. Lewis once said that everyone you lock eyes with is headed toward an eternal glory or an eternal horror that you can't even imagine. And so as we jump into today's topic and today's text, I want to start with that opening question. It may be a little bit morbid, but are you living like you know that a missile is coming? Or are you just running on treadmills talking about kitchen stuff?

It's important to think about because when you know what's at stake, I do believe you live differently. You make choices that are different when you understand the full perspective and you start spending

your time and resources and investing in things that matter eternally more than just today. And that's what we're trying to do as a church in this season. So welcome to King of Kings.

By the way, if I didn't say that already, we are in week three of a six week sermon series called Giving Challenge, where we are learning and practicing how to be generous like Jesus. And in this six weeks, we are deeply committed, not just in these six weeks, but if you are a part of King of Kings, we are deeply committed to helping you be a great disciple of Jesus.

We want you to not only believe and hear the words of Jesus, but put them into practice. A great disciple, a disciple, we define it pretty simply, is someone who is in the process of being and doing like their leader. And of course, our leader is Jesus. We want to be with him, be like him and do as he did as much as we possibly can.

And sometimes it's a real tragedy when we get all that heart stuff. When we say, yes, I believe in Jesus and we might have full notebooks, but still wonder why we have empty lives. It's because that stuff that you put in your notebooks and that stuff that you read about in your Bible is meant to be put into practice. And that's where the fulfilling, rewarding life comes of being a disciple.

And so in search of being a well-rounded disciple, we can't bypass the overall topic of money and generosity, greed and giving, even though all of us want to. What do I mean by that? Well, anytime the church talks about money, it's like, oh, here we go again. Here we go again. Church just wants our money. And there's a couple of reasons for this and they're fair, I believe.

In the collective church, at least in our history as a church, there's been significant misuse of funds and abuse of funds. And so a lot of people don't trust the church as an institution because of past performance. We are, many of you know this, a Lutheran church. We are a Lutheran church. And there's a lot of people that have really great intent when they say something like this.

And at the heart of it, I wish it were true as well. But there's a lot of people say, man, I wish we could just be one church and not have anything to do with denominations. There's too many denominations. And I agree. But the problem and why we need denominations is when someone takes this, this thing called the Bible, and they come up with some pretty whack interpretations of it.

And so by being a Lutheran, all that tells me is you're looking at this word with a different lens than perhaps others. And the Lutheran lens that we look through, of course, is primarily that we are, the core of Lutheranism is that we are saved not by what we do, but by what Jesus has already done. We cannot be saved by our good works. We cannot earn or deserve heaven, but rather we receive this free gift given to us, this gift of grace.

We don't deserve it. God gave it to us at our worst when we were at our worst, yet he gives it to us. And because of that, we have eternal life. We believe. The Lutheran church started in the late 14, early 1500s. And actually the goal wasn't even to start a new denomination. It was to reform the Catholic church, which in those days was the whole church.

But what happens when the church abuses God's word and that's what was happening in many different respects, people were misusing God's word and God's word was only in the hands of the elite

and those that were leading the church. The printing press was just on the horizon to get the word out to more and more and more.

And so there was a man named Martin Luther, a German monk that was a reformer, not Martin Luther King Jr., though he's also a great reformer and named after this German monk. And Martin Luther particularly saw a problem with misuse of funds and that the Catholic church were selling these things called indulgences. Has anyone heard of indulgences? Cross campuses? Many of us.

And what indulgences were essentially were a get out of purgatory free card or faster. This idea of purgatory that again is not found in here, in these words, is that purgatory is this like in between place when you die that you need to kind of go like a spiritual detention where you've got to kind of burn off the sins that you didn't make right in this world.

And yeah, that's not what scripture teaches. I mean, even go right to the cross where Jesus is hanging and right next to him is a thief on the cross that's got a pretty bad rap sheet that let's be honest, would have to burn off a lot of extra sin. And Jesus didn't say in a few years, I'll see you in paradise. What did he say? Today you'll be with me in paradise.

Our souls are forever at rest and at peace and with Jesus when we pass. And yet there was a real misuse of funds and people were buying these indulgences to help their loved ones get through purgatory faster or like pre-paying for their own. It's wild. And so sometimes you need someone to stand up and say, that's not what's in here. And so there are times that the church can err.

And we've done that collectively around funds. Now I would say one of the banners I'm most proud to carry is being a pastor of King of Kings. Because every time I talk about being a pastor at King of Kings to community and faith-based leaders in Omaha, they're like, man, you are the generous church. You are that church that does it right.

And I'm like, thank you. That's amazing. And that's been practiced through you and through our leadership for decades. Great stewardship. And I want to lean into that. And so that's one of the reasons why we don't like talking about money, because I don't know if I can trust the institution today anymore.

The second reason we don't like talking about money is because of you. You like money. To quote Jim Carrey, you like it a lot. And you don't like it when I talk about things that you like a lot, because it challenges you. And so it'd be easier and more comfortable for me to not talk about this. It'd be easier and more comfortable for you to not be here and go through this six-week series.

That's a lot of talking about money and finance and generosity. But if we are going to be a biblically-based church, we cannot avoid the wealth of information and messaging and practices that Jesus talks about over and over and over. We want to be great disciples. And I've said before, it's not improbable, not unlikely, it's impossible to be a stingy disciple. And so let's talk about it today.

On day two, if you are following through the book, I talk about a story where a Russian missionary visited America and he was asked by a pastor, hey, what's like inconsistent with God's word of Western or American Christianity? In other words, like when we look back a few decades from now, like what might be our blind spot? They're like, oh man, how did we miss that?

And the Russian missionary without hesitation said two words, public storage. He said, you are a certain percentage Catholic, a certain percentage Protestant, but you are a 100% materialistic nation. And all you got to do is look at public storage. This industry is wild. It's grown from 6,000 to 50,000 facilities in 40 years.

It's moving faster than the travel, music, and entertainment industries combined. And this is an industry, by the way, supporting people who over the last seven decades have tripled their average house size. And even with the tripling of the square footage, we have these things called closets that are filled, these things called attics that are filled, these things that are filled called garages that are meant to actually house your cars and stuff, but you put your stuff in it so that we pay a monthly rental storage fee to these storage facilities.

And we have 50,000 in our nation and America owns 90% of them in the world. Got an unhealthy relationship with our stuff. So do you, do you have an unhealthy relationship with your stuff? Believe it or not, this is kind of interesting. Jesus isn't silent on the topic of self-storage. He was once asked a question that sparked a story, and I think his answer is going to kind of be surprising to you.

Found in Luke chapter 12, verse 13 is where we're starting. You can follow along on the screens, or if you brought the word in person, feel free to turn there. Someone in the crowd said to him, teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me. Jesus replied, man, who appointed me to be a judge or an arbiter between you?

Then he said to them, let's say these words together. Watch out. Be on your guard against all kinds of greed. Life does not consist in an abundance of possessions. And he told them this parable, this story, said the ground of a certain rich man yielded an abundant harvest. And he thought to himself, what shall I do? I've got no place to store my crops.

Then he said, this is what I'll do. I will tear down my barns and I'll build bigger ones. And there I'll store my surplus grain. And I will say to myself, self, you have plenty of grain laid up for many years. So take life easy, eat, drink, and be merry.

But God said to him, you, what you fool, this very night, your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you prepared for yourself? This is how it will be with whoever stores up things for themselves, but is not rich toward God.

Interesting. Jesus doesn't like talk about storing more stuff as like right and wrong. He uses the Greek word aphron, which means fool, stupid, ignorant, unbelieving. Yeah. It's not, you're not even getting it. It's right or wrong. You're saying you're stupid if you do that.

And this is his main message is that fools live more for today than for eternity. And he uses that sort of strong stern language, but, but what happens here is amazing in this story. And it shows us a lot. You see a myth that we're going to bust even in greater detail later in this series that maybe you've heard, if you've grown up in the church enough, the myth is that the thing Jesus talked about most is money.

That's actually not true. Now he did talk about it a lot and it's very important and we need wisdom when it comes to finance. The thing that Jesus talked about far and away more than anything else is

this thing called the kingdom of heaven. And many times, by the way, when he talks about money, as is the case that I just read to you, the money is the object to the subject, which is the kingdom of heaven.

He's using money as a tool to tell you about the main point, to remind you that you are only here for a timestamped period and your life here in this world is far more like a two night hotel stop on the way to heaven, which is your home. And fools invest in making their hotel room really awesome at the expense of their eternal home.

Fools start buying a lot of stuff for their hotel where they're only staying for a couple of nights that they've got to leave with them because they can't get it through TSA security on the way home. And that's a, Jesus's words, stupid thing to do. And he's reminding you that everything in this world, including you, has an expiration date.

Sometimes that's pretty easy to see. Some things are stamped with, you know, it expires on this. I always find it interesting, by the way, the really obscure foods that like have like an expiration date of like 12 years from now to the minute. I'm like, that's weird. So like, and the next minute, is it not good? Is it okay? The only thing, food that doesn't expire, I think is Twinkies, which I'm not saying, I don't know what that means. Probably not good.

It bothers me though, when I buy an avocado and cut into it and two hours later it's brown and mushy. I'm like, why? Why Lord? It's a great thing, but it's even the stuff that we buy though, everything that we buy, like it decays, it rots, it gets destroyed, it gets rust or dust. These things aren't built to last and I actually think that the new stuff, though it's shiny and impressive, have you noticed it doesn't last as long as the stuff of old?

Like my parents still have the microwave in our home, in their home, that they bought when they got married and it's working 48, I think, years later. Now they have other microwaves and they've been through like three or four other ones in the last like 15 years. Even these fridges, man, they look really impressive. But don't you know a fridge now only lasts about 10 years? I miss, do you miss the good old days with Sears?

Now we got Temu and Sheen and all this other stuff that's got tariffs and weird stuff. Anyway, stuff spoils. American countertops need to get upgraded. People have an expiration date. The average American man, your expiration date is 75 years. If you're a woman, you get 80. Congratulations. Give or take. We don't know. The Lord giveth and taketh. But the end is coming. And are you living more for now than for eternity?

So as I'm challenging you to be generous and think about giving in a different way, I'm also at the same time asking you to trade a world way or a world idea for a Jesus way. And so this week, as we're looking to give an eternal gift that makes a difference for eternity, I'm also asking you to trade this idea of ownership, which I got to go own everything and I got to build my kingdom and I got to build it, build it, build it, and I'll build it bigger if I need to tear it down and build bigger.

Trade that idea and that feeling that always is never enough and trade it instead for this thing called stewardship, where God is the owner and your role is to be a great steward and to reflect the heart of the owner, to do the things that the owner would do in the couple nights that you're here in this world.

Jesus' point and my point, let me say it loudly again, it's not that you should not have nice things. It's not that you should never get a kitchen upgrade, but his point is, if the things of this world pull your heart more and you start thinking more about now, like this is forever and you lose sight that the kingdom of heaven is forever, then we need a relational change with your stuff and with your finance.

It's all throughout scripture where Jesus talks about eternal life. It's even in the most popular Bible verse that is known today, which is John 3, what? 16. Let's read these words together. For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish, but have eternal life.

I love this verse because it pairs also generosity with eternity, right? For God so what? Loved the world that he gave his one and only son and Jesus so loved you that he gave his very life and the father and son so love you that they gave you together the gift of the Holy Spirit.

But at the end of it, it says why? So that those who believe would have eternal life. Eternal life is what it's all about. There's an eternity coming is what it's all about. Don't settle for living and making your hotel really nice for two nights when you got a home that's waiting for you in heaven.

And I see this pull in so many ways. Let me give you one stat because I'm a stat guy and that's the only sound I'll give you today. You're welcome. If you don't like stats, Ryan Burge is a social scientist. And today in America, there are 63% of Americans that believe in Jesus. Awesome. But only 33% of Americans very much believe in an afterlife.

What sort of infantile faith do we have in this nation? That means three out of 10 people that you live with, work with, play with, that you go to school with that are in your neighborhoods. They say, I believe in Jesus and yet they neglect to know the central teaching of Jesus Christ doesn't make sense.

And more and more are believing this and we're getting more and more desensitized into this. In fact, I think that today's version of eat, drink, and be merry is popularized in a new hashtag, which is YOLO. You've heard that, right? You only live once and could be used in a good way, like to think that, cool, my life matters then.

But that's not how people use that. They use that hashtag to promote reckless spending. Anybody remember GameStop? That's where that thing really took off. You only live once is promoting reckless spending, eat, drink, and be merry. I'll give it all today because I don't even know if I got tomorrow.

And I've been really trying to popularize a new hashtag and it hasn't been successful. And it's your fault because I told you this before. And it's hashtag YOLT. Biblically and in the words of Jesus, the truth is what? You actually live twice now for a couple of nights and in heaven forever.

And if you're living like this is all there is, you are missing the point of eternity entirely. The thing that Jesus came to talk about. You do only get one earthly life right now, and it's hard. We have to admit that as humans, 100% of our existence has been this. What our eyes can see, what we can taste, what we can touch, what we can feel, what we can smell.

And so the challenge between now and when either Christ returns or when your last day is called is for you to remember that this, this, we're just here for a couple of nights. And the amazing piece is that with that truth, what you do on these couple of nights can make an eternal difference.

Mentioned this verse earlier, the misquoted verse, 1 Timothy 6.10, which says, for money is a root of all kinds of evil. That's the misquote. The real verses for the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. And what Paul is talking about is echoing what Jesus talks about all the time, and it's the sense that money, you can use it good, bad, neutral, it's amoral, but money has the power to pull you towards good or bad.

And actually the end of that verse for the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil actually talks about there are people that are so eager for it that it's pulled them away from the faith. It has that effect. And I started thinking, well, if the love of money is the root of all kinds of evil, I wonder if the opposite is true of that as well. That's kind of fun to think about, right?

For the love of generosity, is that a root of all kinds of good? And I really believe it is. And I want to talk about why it's good. And I want to use the Michael Scott of the office framework of the win, win, win. He talks about win, win, win. It's a win for everybody. When generosity happens, the first win, hopefully you experienced that this week is that you experience happiness and joy.

Last week, you were challenged to give a gift that just brings happiness. And so I've loved hearing the stories of people that some people are giving anonymous envelopes of cash, which is pretty sweet to people that they love, uh, teenagers giving \$20 bills to those he meets that are in need. People are paying for someone's meal and giving extra tips when they're out. And I just think all of that's awesome.

And I know the recipient has joy receiving it, but I hope you've experienced that fulfillment and that joy too. I read last week that science shares with us that, that when you give to charity or to God's causes in our case, that that has the same happiness effect level boost than it does to double your income every year. And one is far easier than the other by the way.

And so I hope you've experienced happiness. You get that win right now, but secondly, you get a second wind. Do you know what it is? You get eternal rewards. It's wild. There are 40 times in the, not in the whole Bible, in the words of Jesus that Jesus talks about heavenly or eternal rewards. Now it's super hard to fathom, so not many people talk about it or preach about it, but it's everywhere.

In fact, our theme verse for the series, you remember what it is for where guys, Miller apparently is our slow campus. I know Fremont Northwest Omaha crushed it. It's 11 words, okay? Memorize it for where your treasure is because right, the treasure there, your heart will be also because treasure leads our heart.

It's kind of the main point of the whole sermon series, whatever. Anyway, the two verses right before it, let's not lose sight of it. I'm sorry for being angry at you, says Jesus's words. Don't store up for yourselves treasures on earth where moths and vermin destroy and where thieves break in and steal, but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven that the moths and vermin and the robbers can't get.

If you're looking, it's kind of wild. There's great investment in saving advice, like in Proverbs, but if you're looking for investment advice from Jesus, this is the only investment advice Jesus gives is to invest in eternity. Treasure space, he talks about when you do that, it'll have a 30, 60 or hundred fold return on investment.

And he uses different words, but it's all throughout. He uses eternal rewards, heavenly rewards. He talks about repayment. He talks about being great in the kingdom of God, ruling and reigning with him. These heavenly rewards are everywhere in the words of Jesus. And I like the way Randy Alcorn summarizes like the power that your money can have.

He says, you can't take it with you, but you can send it on ahead. And it's hard to fathom what those rewards look like and mean. And so maybe it's, but it's fun to think about. And the scripture talks about how do we get those rewards? By doing the works that Jesus put us here to do.

And so it's a win because you experience happiness now, you get eternal rewards later. I think day 19 goes further into that if you're interested, but third win is actually not about you. You thought this sermon was about you, didn't you? Didn't you? I didn't have that in the manuscript, but it's about, do you know that the things that you do and the works that you put into practice in this world actually can help somebody else with their heavenly home?

Martin Luther, remember was that great reformer that said, you cannot and will not ever be saved by your good works only by the grace of God. But once you are saved and the Holy Spirit is inside of you, you have a call to be the light in this world.

So Luther said it this way, God does not need your good works, but your neighbor does. Jesus said, you are the light of the world and through what you do, others can see your good works and glorify God, the Father in heaven. The way I like to say it very simply is you cannot save yourself, but you can help save somebody else.

You can help someone else experience an eternity with God. And that's what happens when you do good works, which generosity is included in one of the most bright shining ways we can be the light of Jesus is in a world and especially a nation that is so consumed with goods and materials and greed. Light of generosity shines through really well.

So I want to challenge you this week to give eternally. And what I mean by that is to be generous towards an eternal cause, to stand up and say, my two nights here are important, but they're just two nights and a blip on the radar and what I do matters and what I give matters.

My favorite book that I read in preparation for this series outside of the Bible is a book called True Riches. It's by two Harvard business men, John Cortinez and Gregory Balmer. And they did this massive project and interviewed hundreds of Harvard business graduates that are incredibly successful in this world and found that real joy came from generosity.

In addition to that, they looked at everything God said about what it looks like to be generous. And it's a real short, easy read if you want to go further after giving challenge or in the middle of it. But one of the things that I think is important as we talk about being a steward and not an owner, I think like job

responsibility one, like that first line under that job description of steward would be understand the owner's heart.

That way you know how to steward what the owner has. And when Cortinez and Balmer went through scripture, and I would agree with this, that they said that God's heart beats really for three ways that is so visibly clear in scripture. Not saying it can't be outside of these three, but if you want to know your heart aligns with God's, here's three ways that we know that generosity works in scripture.

Number one, we know that God loves when we serve the poor. From Old Testament all the way to the end, God's heart beats for the brokenhearted, those in need, those oppressed. He says, whatever you do for the least of these, you do it for me. So when our dollars go to serve and help the poor, God's heart beats for saving the lost.

God says, I desire all people to be saved. And so anytime we share the word of God, evangelism, or the Bible gets translated in a new language that opens up a new community that never heard it, God's heart beats for that. And God's heart beats for strengthening believers, especially through the church.

Jesus is the one that instituted the church, and when he comes back on that final day, it says that he will be the groom and the church will be his bride, the bride, the wife of Jesus. Like Jesus so loves the church because the church is where disciples get strengthened.

And so we can see tangibly that if you want to use your dollars for a heart that beats like God's, it beats for the poor, the lost, and his church. I'm not saying that it's wrong to give to other things like libraries and universities and secular things. I think if the Lord calls you to do that, do that, but maybe not at the expense of what we know God's heart beats for.

You give eternally to win, win, win, and your heart begins to align more with God's. So my challenge is for you to think about what's an eternal gift that you can make this week. One of the ways, again, all these weeks, I'm not saying just do what I say. What I'm saying is ask the Lord what it looks like to be generous and be obedient to what he puts on your heart.

But one of the ways we have decided as a church to be generous really in all three facets is through our partnership with Children's Hope Chest. A couple of years ago, we launched a 10-year partnership that through this organization will work towards sustainability. It's a real helping without hurting model with an exit strategy a decade later, knowing that we would have built up some physical integral things, but also built up the spiritual lives.

We send mission teams once or twice a year there, and it's really been an amazing partnership. And one of the aspects of Children's Hope Chest is children's sponsorship. And we have a goal to sponsor 126 kids. Right now, we have 98 sponsored in 28 openings.

Two years ago, my family of four decided we want to sponsor four kids, one for each of us. This is my guy, Christopher Josue. He was seven. Now he's nine, and I love getting the updates, and I just, he looks so fun. I've seen him in some videos before, the big old smile, big old cheeks. I want to squeeze him, but I think that's against the sponsor-sponsee relationship. But one day I'll meet him, and it'll be awesome to know that I've made a small, very small difference in his life through my generosity, which honestly, can I be real with you? I haven't even felt.

It's not been a sacrifice, but I get so much joy knowing that I can do this for Christopher. And so maybe today, and we'll hear a little bit more in just a moment about what it might look like for you to sponsor one of those 28 kids. I think it'd be pretty awesome, at the end of today at least, if all 28 kids were spoken for and were helped.

Because what you do today matters, and you can help someone's eternity, and you're just here for a couple of nights. And for whatever reason, if we were to compare, maybe not everybody, but for a lot of us, we're living in five-star hotels when we got some kids living in one-star hotels for these two nights, and we can help them.

And I do believe that as we're generous, you can get marble or granite, or I looked up, I guess quartz is like the best countertops. You can have that in this world, and eventually that'll decay, and you'll need to replace those. But I started thinking, what would it look like to have great kitchen countertops in heaven? Because revelation allows us to glimpse on that side of the clouds.

And do you know what it says the streets of heaven are made with? Gold. And so I like to think about the equivalent of gold as pavement. Can you imagine what the equivalent of granite, or marble, or quartz might be? And I'll have that forever, and you'll have that forever. Heaven is our home. We're here for a couple of nights. We actually live twice. The kingdom is coming. Eternity is for you.

What you do on these couple nights matters. People need you. Your neighbor needs you. These kids need you. Life's not about you. It's not about building bigger barns. It's not about having as much stuff as you can get. It's morbid to think about, but the missile's coming. Let's do something.

Lord, that's my prayer today, is that all of us at every campus would hear your words loud and clear, and that we would respond accordingly. Not out of compulsion, but because we're so grateful for the gift you've given to us. Help us to reexamine our lives and to live as stewards, and reflect your heart. Thank you that you first gave. We love you. It's in your name we pray, and together the church says, amen.