



281.890.1900
TheMETonline.org

Jones Road Campus
13000 Jones Road | Houston, TX 77070

Fry Road Campus | Hopper Middle School
7811 Fry Road | Houston, TX 77433

[*Introductory video*: Christmas bells music chimes at a brisk pace to accompany the bold messages which flash on changing backgrounds of bright green and red in time to the beat of the music:]

Christmas is coming

(the focus pans down a long row of stenciled pictures of a Christmas trees)

deck the halls

peace on earth...and all that...good stuff

(stenciled pictures of wrapped gifts multiply until crowding out the words)

Christmas is:

(one by one each word is succeeded by the next to complete the phrase)

family, love, home, joy, wonderful

(**wonderful** remains and these words stack up on top of it one at a time):

cookies, fruitcake, sweaters, crowded malls, this year's iPod, 10 office parties, tacky ornaments, long return lines, credit cards, gifts, gifts, gifts, gifts...

(**gifts** is added uncountable times with increasing speed)

Let's be honest...more stuff

(the word *stuff* is multiplied above and below the word in the sentence)

doesn't make us happy

(again, stenciled pictures of wrapped gifts multiply until crowding out the words)

This Christmas could be different...and not just for you

SPEND LESS

[*When the lights come back up at the video's end, Lead Pastor Sal Sberna begins.*]

Good morning, everybody. How are you? Those of you that are at our *Cypress Campus*, I hope you're blessed as well and those that are joining us by video this morning.

Now we're in the middle of a series—second message of four—called: *The Advent Conspiracy*. What we're trying to do—something very radical—we are trying to do Christmas the way Christmas was meant to be done. We're trying to get to the point where—

- Worshipping Jesus
- Loving each other
- Loving everybody that we can
- Be able to give more of ourselves away

—this week to be able to spend less. It's one thing to say *spend less*; it's quite another to (kind of) dig in and figure out: *How in the world can we really spend less?* By spending less (really) give more to the things that actually count in the kingdom of God.

So, I looked at a couple of reasons this week (kind of) around why we continue to spend more.

1. WHY DO WE CONTINUE TO SPEND MORE?

I think one of the reasons is that we are continually hearing from the people who run our economy. They ought to be fired (by the way). The people that run our economy [want us] to go stimulate the economy—translated means: *spend more money*.

1(A) STIMULATE THE ECONOMY

Because in spending more money, everybody will be able to get more and we'll keep the economy on track. Well, let me share with you how well it looks like we're doing thus far.

Black Friday (I mentioned last week) was this past weekend. So finally the statistics came out early this week and gave a recap for the four-day weekend. I want to read some of those to you. So how well are we doing stimulating the economy?

- The total spending over a 4-day weekend reached a record (are you ready?)—a record now—\$52.4 billion. (Four days). That is an obscene amount of money. That's up 16 percent from last year, which was a mere \$45 billion.
- 226 million—not citizens, not people, we're called consumers went out into the...
 - stores
 - malls
 - highways and byways

The average shopper spent nearly \$400 that 1 day, up from \$365 in 2010.

- Black Friday alone (just on Black Friday) spent 6.6 percent more this year in America than we did last year for a total of \$11.4 billion (billion dollars). That doesn't (like) shock us like it used to, because we're used to hearing words now like *trillions* of dollars:
 - Like borrowing trillions of dollars (or)
 - Owing trillions of dollars

It doesn't really sink in on us (you know): *How big is that amount of money?* Because the more we think less of the big numbers, the more we tend to spend big not really thinking in comparison [that] it's really big.

- Well, according to the World Health Organization and UNICEF: *What amount of money would it take not just to give everybody clean water but everybody sanitation as well?* Because most of the people in the world don't have proper sanitation. They don't have...
 - Proper toilet facilities (and)
 - Clean water to bathe in (to wash in).

So we're just not talking about drinking water, we're talking about proper sanitation as well. According to their estimates, it would take \$11.3 billion or just under a million less than was spent in 1 day on Black Friday.

So what I told you last week that the average American's spending on Christmas, when it's all said and done, it's just 4 days of spending at \$52 billion (just the first 4 days). It wasn't even December when they spent all that money. It is 45 times the amount it would take to give everybody in the world clean water. [That's] just for us to get a grip on how much money that is.

So when we're out there stimulating the economy— Really, how much stimulation does [an] economy really need? I mean, that's a lot of money!

Why do we continue to do this? Well, not only because we're *told* to go out and do this, but I believe even a deeper underlying problem that we have is: *The fastest growing religion in America...*

- *Isn't Christianity*
- *It's not even Islam*

Do you know what it is? Consumerism. Consumerism—it is a religion to us who live in America.

1(B) CONSUMERISM IS THE AMERICAN RELIGION

Because here in America we (really) believe—for the most part—that you can serve God and serve money. Many times we equated...

- Serving God with lots of money
- Serving God—getting anything that we want

And because we're used to consumerism, it even leads us to a place—as believers—that we can tell God whatever we want (because we live in America) and we can get that. The reason we can get it is because: God has given us all this money, why doesn't God intend for us to have those things?

Consumerism is real. It's a real religion. It's a real power that's out there. Every single day that you and I are confronted with:

- Advertisement
- Magazines
- Billboard signs
- Radio
- Satellite radio
- Computer advertising (How many times do you just have to click the button to keep the advertising away?)

Not only that, Christmastime (Christmastime) just being inundated with all of the commercials. Now, they're being mean to Santa Claus during some of this commercialism. Have you seen the lady that's (kind of) drinking all of Santa Claus' milk and eating his cookies, and saying: *Yeah! Yeah! How about that? Huh? Huh?* (I mean) poor Santa Claus can't even get a break anymore!

We're told constantly that this god that's out there:

- Deserves our attention
- Deserves our sacrifice
- Deserves our worship

In fact, God's people have always had this proclivity to idolatry. It's always been a big stumbling block for God's people. In the *Old Testament* they would look around, and they would see people who were worshipping false gods. But they (kind of) liked the benefit of what that false god promised, whether it was:

- Fertility (or)
- The blessing on the ground (or)
- Bringing rain (or)
- Giving [them] material prosperity

They would go and they would adopt these gods, but they wouldn't really leave the true God—so they thought. So side-by-side they would put a...

- Baal (or)
- Asherah (or)
- Whatever the false god might be—maybe it was Molech. They would sacrifice their children to Molech.

But at the same time they would still say: *No, no, no, no! We're really God's people.*

Then finally in the book of *Jeremiah, chapter 2*, God says: *My people have made two big mistakes*

1. *They've left Me—the one and true God.*
2. *They've hewn out for themselves cisterns that can hold no water. [Jeremiah 2:13 (paraphrased)]*

In other words, they left the One Who could provide them the water—the living water that they really want—and they go to false gods. And they make for themselves a cistern to hold the promises of the false gods, but those cisterns leak and they can't hold water.

Consumerism tells us this is a religion because:

- You can transcend above your normal circumstances and feeling in life.
- You can rise above anything that holds you down by buying goods.

It tells us that:

- We can elevate ourselves above our unhappy circumstances.
- We can have pleasure in the midst of our pain if we simply buy the right things.

Take, for example:

- A car (a vehicle): It used to be, a vehicle was a mode of transportation. But (no-no) not any longer. Vehicles now are *status symbols*. Vehicles—you're supposed to [buy to] get by in the world; [but now] you're supposed to get a *thrill* out of driving your car. People are supposed to look at you and go: *You're successful. You drive a (fill-in-the-blank).*
- Clothes used to be for protection and to keep us within social norms. But now clothes are more like: *How does it make you feel? What are you projecting when you buy that?*
 - *When your bag says a certain thing? (or)*
 - *Your label says a certain thing? (or)*
 - *Your cologne is a certain way? (or)*
 - *Where you go and shop says something about you?*

It says: *I am rising above all of the mundane things of this world.* It promises that, but if you consume for any amount of time, you know (and I know) it is a hollow cistern. It does not give us what we are looking for. Because it's not so much the *thing*, but it's the *meaning* behind the thing. The thing desired has a meaning—has a promise—behind it. Whatever the meaning is (whatever it insinuates) we buy into the meaning so that:

- We can be more significant.
- We can rise above.
- We can show everybody:
 - *We are doing well.*
 - *We are being blessed.*
 - *We have these things.*
 - *We must be smart.*

- *We must be doing well because, Look! .*
 - *We drive this.*
 - *We live here.*
 - *We have this stuff.*
 - *My kids wear those things.*

That’s why no kid wants to shop at *Payless [Shoes]*—unless they’re in my house—because what does that say? That says: *You can’t afford something*. Or: *You’re not* (I hate to use this word; it marks me) *cool* (or whatever it is) *because your sneakers or your clothes don’t have something on them*.

So since we rise above all of the things that are holding us down, it tells us basically that we can be reborn in the midst of our circumstances by simply buying something. Buying into the lie behind the something that says: *You can be better if you...*

- *Buy*
- *Wear*
- *Eat*
- *Live*
- *Do*
- *Smell*

...like this. So consumerism is a religion. That’s why we spend more. It is *the* number one religion in America.

Secondly, there is a constant (a consistent) sense of dissatisfaction any time that we get caught up in the religion of consumerism.

1(C) CONSISTENT SENSE OF DISSATISFACTION

In fact, consumerism demands. In order for it to keep working, that *Religion of Consumerism* can never satisfy. Because if it does—guess what happens?—you quit (what?) consuming! You say: *I’m satisfied. (I’m satisfied.) I’m content*.

That’s why the Apostle Paul says: “Godliness with contentment is” what? “great gain.” [1 Timothy 6:6 (KJV, NKJV, NIV)] The very thing that the people of the world are looking for can be ours, because the people of the world say: *I never can be content. I just can’t get enough*.

In fact, when doing the research for this, a spending research center was quoting somebody—some expert in retail and consuming—and they said: *Retailers have to get people back in the stores and back online after this weekend*. In other words, something’s got to happen when you went out there on Black Friday weekend and you purchased and you got. But something had to be dissatisfying enough that you had to go back and get more. It’s like an addiction.

- You can never eat enough when you have an eating disorder.
- You can never drink enough when you’re an alcoholic.
- You can never do enough drugs when you’re a drug addict.
- You can never have enough forms and kinds of sex when you’re a sexual addict.
- When you’re a consumer (and you’re addicted to consuming) no amount of consuming can ever satisfy.

Kristi and I have a budget. We save all year long for Christmas. *What are we going to spend on Christmas? Here's what we're going to spend.* We take cash money, and we go and buy what we're going to spend. So we were in this one store (it was *Kohl's*). I understood what it meant to be dissatisfied with what I had when I left that store. Because anything that smells new and looks new—I don't care how cheap it is or how long it'll last—it always makes you feel like: *I need that.* Trust me.

- I don't *need* another pair of shoes.
- I don't *need* another pair of pants (other than to lose some weight and fit into the ones that I have).
- I don't *need* more shirts.
- I don't *need* anything...really.

I *want*, though, because when I go to those stores I just feel like no matter what I bought, that there was still more in there calling my name. That I wasn't going to be satisfied until I had:

- that color
- those socks
- that underwear
- that cologne

and whatever else it was that was screaming at me: *You don't have meaning until you have me!*

Do you ever feel like that when you go to the mall and you buy something? (Or is it just me? I'm the only weirdo?) It's American consumerism. (You know) you don't want a new car until you get in your buddy's new car or you see a new car. *Oh, man! I need to have that!* We're always dissatisfied. I've never met a salesman (honestly) that would say: *When you buy this, this is the last one you'll ever buy.* Because if you did, [whispering] they'd be out of business. Whatever it is, [it] is designed to make a big/giant hole inside of us.

So on Christmas morning when all the wrappers are done (all the you know):

- You're just out of breath.
- You're laying on the couch.
- It's finally happened.
- Everybody's looking at their stuff.

Why does it feel like it went by too quickly, and it wasn't what you expected? It's because consumerism cannot deliver what it promises. (Because) it's not the stuff that we need. It's not something that we can buy.

We begin to understand what we need and what consumerism tells us: *If we buy, we can get.* Money can't buy that one thing. That one thing is God. But even consumerism says to us: *You can even treat Jesus like a product.* A lot of people have done it: *Well (you know), I tried Jesus for awhile and...*

- *I want my money back.*
- *It just didn't quite work.*
- *Didn't give me exactly what I thought I was being promised.*
- *Didn't end up like these other people over here.*

So I'm going to return Jesus, and I'm going to find myself another god. That's the danger of consumerism being a religion: constant sense of dissatisfaction.

Then we constantly deal with something that Alan Greenspan [former Chairman of the Federal Reserve of the United States] has called *infectious greed*.

1(D) INFECTIOUS GREED

Listen to what Jesus said:

"Watch out! {Here's what Jesus is warning: *Danger, Will Robinson! Danger! Watch out!* Beware, not just of greed—} Be on your guard against {What?} all kinds of greed; a man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions."

Luke 12:15 (NIV, 1984 edition)

But is that not the case in our culture? (That) you are judged by the quality and the quantity of whatever it is that you possess? And that is an indication of how the god of our culture—consumerism—has blessed your life? But yet—

- I know families
- I know individuals
- I know people

who are sitting in the midst of big, empty houses that they have bought...

- Filled with the latest and greatest stuff
- Whose families are fractured or have walked out on them

because the god of consumerism cannot deliver on its promises. Jesus—what He said was right: "You cannot serve [both] God and Money." [*Matthew 6:24, Luke 16:13 (NIV)*]

Alan Greenspan says:

An infectious greed seemed to grip much of our business community. It is not that humans have become any more greedy than in generations past. It is that the avenues to express greed had grown so enormously.

Alan Greenspan, Chairman, *Federal Reserve Board's semiannual monetary policy report to the Congress*, testimony before the Committee on Banking, Housing, and Urban Affairs, U.S. Senate July 16, 2002

Capitalism isn't the problem. It's capitalism that is wed to unbridled-western-individualism and drivenness-to-have-everything that equates to greed. If we're not careful, we usually get what we want. Whatever you're greedy in, doesn't it have a price at the end? (You know) there are problems all over the world. The problems are just different based upon our societies or based upon (really) our wealth—when you look at it.

I love what Ralph Winter, the founder of *Frontier Mission Fellowship*, said (he said):

The underdeveloped societies suffer from one set of diseases: tuberculosis, malnutrition, pneumonia, parasites, typhoid, cholera, typhus, etc. Affluent America has virtually invented a whole new set of diseases: obesity, arteriosclerosis, heart disease, strokes, lung cancer, {*sexually-transmitted*}

[venereal] diseases, cirrhosis of the liver, drug addiction {and} alcoholism....In saving ourselves {from the woes of poverty} we have nearly lost ourselves.

Ralph Winter, "Reconsecration to a Wartime, not a Peacetime, Lifestyle," in *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement: A Reader*, 2nd edition, eds. Ralph D. Winter and Stephen C. Hawthorne (Pasadena, Ca.: William Carey Library, 1999), Chapter 126, page 723

So our challenge (as believers) this Christmas season—that we're trying to do something radically different at Christmas and radically good for our God and the people around the world—is to balance our desires with the needs in our community and the needs around our world. So, Christmas shopping becomes less about...

- What others want
- My entertainment
- What I want

...and it becomes about: What is really needed? (What is really needed?) Those are some of the reasons, as I look around our culture, that I think we spend more—why we do that.

But what are some of the reasons that we should spend less?

2. WHY SHOULD WE SPEND LESS?

Now, when I spend less, that's an arbitrary statement. Isn't it? How much is less?

- Less than last year?
- Less than my neighbors?
- Less than my parents spent? (You know.)
- Less than what my other neighbors [spent]?
- Less than the people in my same income bracket are using?
- Less than that standard that you just quoted—that what people spent over Christmas last year. (You told us that. How much was that?)

I can spend less than that. Is that really the mark that we are shooting for?

Sometimes there's a line that is really blurred between excessiveness and simplicity. But here's what I know for sure: Everybody in this room (myself included)—everybody—we all have far more than we'll ever need right now. If you didn't get anything for Christmas, are you going to die? But realize:

- There are people who, if they don't get food, they will die.
- There are children, because they don't have clean water, they will die.
- There are people—that we support right now—that will not have a Christmas. They'll get no Christmas presents; but they will...
 - Eat
 - Have clean water
 - A place to sleep

...and with that they are excited. They won't even have a tree or put up any decorations.

There is not a one of us in this room—there’s not a majority of Americans (99.9 percent of them)—if they didn’t get anything for Christmas (other than...or anything, period) they would not die and their life would be no worse off and no better off because of it.

How many of any one thing do we really need? So you get another shirt or a tie or socks or whatever—do you really need it? I mean *need*. Want, yeah. I’ve got everything I need and probably everything I ever would want, but I still want more. That’s what we have to overcome.

What are we telling our children during Christmas?

- Are we telling them money equates our love?
- Are we telling them that this is all about what we want?

This is all about your desires—your wants. You make that list. We’ll just send it out to Santa Claus and grandparents and everybody else. Do you know what? Boy, I’ll tell you what, if you’ve been a good boy or girl, you’re going to get all those things. Let me tell you, we are setting them up for failure. We’re setting them up for them to really believe: I should get everything that I want. No limits! Simply because I want it, I get it.

I was reading some experts this week. They were saying [about] us as parents: If we buy gifts for our kids that stretch our own budgets, we’re only hurting our own families and the bills cause financial hardships and stress in January. They go on to say (that):

Money is an abstract concept for young people, which can contribute to an “I want it all” approach to holidays. Studies have shown their brains don’t develop {*and I would have stopped right there, but they go on:* their brains don’t develop} enough to deal with such concepts until they’re in their early 20s....

Jayne O’Donnell, “A great gift for kids is a lesson in finances,” *USA TODAY*, November 30, 2011, crediting financial literacy expert Susan Beacham

- Are you sitting down with your kids and saying?—*Hey, here’s our budget. How much of this are we going to give for Big Give this year?*
- Are you letting your kids experience the joy of giving, some of what was going to be spent on them, and allow them to set a limit and say?—*But I want to give this to Jesus.*

Then you’re training your kids. Then you’re teaching them there is something more to money and the blessings of God besides spending it on ourselves.

This year (my daughter Kelcie and my wife Kristi) when Kelcie was home for Thanksgiving, she was going to make—instead of spending money on buying gifts for her friends, she made them. She bought wax, little jars (at *Hobby Lobby*, I guess) and some wicks and decorated them and made candles. You could tell they’re homemade. But you can actually also tell that somebody put some thought process behind it—some heart—and made something that took more than just money, but...

- time
- thought

- a beautiful little handwritten card that went with them

That (really) says: *Hey, you're my friend and on this Christmas I want to give you this so most of my money can go to the Big Give offering.* That's a nice gift when someone takes time to do that.

So why should we spend less? (Number one:)

2(A) WE SERVE CHRIST NOT CONSUMERISM

Here's the bottom line, guys: We are followers of Jesus Christ. He saved us. He gives us everything that we need and even more than we need. He Himself said:

"No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money. {Period!}

Matthew 6:24 (NIV, 1984 edition)

So who are we supporting and who are we worshipping this Christmas?

- The god of our culture: consumerism? (or)
- The true God of our souls—the One Who has redeemed us—Jesus Christ?

How do we know that we really worship Him and we really do belong to Him?

- We're obeying Him.
- We are serving Him.

Not just with our words but with everything that is in us, because everything in us has become, from Him, a gift to us to be used by Him.

- Are we going to be like the wise men who came and they worshipped Christ? (or)
- Are we going to stop and just worship Herod and the world system?
- Are we going to be like the shepherds and give our presence (ourselves) to Christ and be like the wise men and give our presents (our gifts to Christ) so that those around the world will be able to hear the Gospel and to be taken care of?

We serve Jesus. That should be enough. We serve Christ.

But I also believe when we do what's right in this Christmas season and we spend less in order to give more, we replace infectious greed with irrational generosity.

2(B) TO REPLACE INFECTIOUS GREED WITH IRRATIONAL GENEROSITY

Irrational—in other words—it doesn't make sense to do that.

For anyone looking at your Christmas list at what you're going to spend and then what you're going to give, they say: *Do you know what? That just doesn't make sense to me.*

- *Haven't you seen all the sales?*
- *Don't your kids want this?*
- *What about your husband and wife?*

- *Aren't they going to feel like you didn't think about them and you didn't love them? Because look how much you gave to people you don't even know compared to the people that you know. That's irrational.*

But the only way (the only way) to break the grip of money, possessions and greed is to give stuff away. If that shocks you, guess whose grip you're in? Listen to what *2 Corinthians 9, verses 8-10* says:

God can pour on the blessings in astonishing ways so that you're ready for anything and everything...
2 Corinthians 9:8 (The Message)

In other words, everything that we need—everything God wants to do through us—He's blessed us with it right now.

⁹ As one psalmist puts it, He throws caution to the winds, giving to the needy in reckless abandon. His right-living, right-giving ways never run out, {they} never wear out. {Listen!} ¹⁰ This most generous God who gives seed to the farmer that becomes bread for your meals is more than extravagant with you....
2 Corinthians 9:9-10a (The Message)

I want to tell you, I feel in my life what you should feel in your life; that when it comes to God giving me everything that He has given to me, that I would have to say *that's irrational generosity*. Why would anybody want to give me that much?—because they love me and they care for me.

Not only that, my Heavenly Father wants me to share with others. He has given me so much. *I'm ready at any occasion and for any need to be able to give to that need* is what the apostle Paul is saying. I love *verse 11*:

You will be made rich in every way {—Why?—} so that you can be generous on every occasion, and through us your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God.
2 Corinthians 9:11 (NIV, 1984 edition)

Here's what he's saying: *We've got so much not to spend it on ourselves, but to spend less on ourselves and more on what really matters*. There will be people around the world that'll be thanking God and giving God praise, because we did right this Christmas with the money that God has given us.

I love this quote from C.S. Lewis. (Then we need to hasten on toward the end. I think too much turkey has made us dull of hearing this morning or at least...is it hot in here or is it just me?) Listen to what C.S. Lewis says (now listen to this quote):

I do not believe that one should settle how much we ought to give.
Clive Staples Lewis, *Mere Christianity*,
HarperCollins, 2001, page 86

In other words, he's saying this: *I don't believe someone saying I'm going to give x-percent and that's it. Or I'm only going to give to these things.* He says: *You should never put a limit on your giving* (is what he's saying).

I am afraid the only safe rule is to give more than we can spare. In other words, if our expenditure on comforts, luxuries, amusements, etc., is up to the standard common among those with the same income as our own, we are probably giving away too little.

Clive Staples Lewis, *Mere Christianity*,
HarperCollins, 2001, page 86

In other words—you make \$30, \$50, \$80, \$100, \$1 million a year—if your standard of...

- living
- entertainment
- everything

...is up to the same standard as everybody else who doesn't know Christ in that same income level, C.S. Lewis is saying: *We're probably not giving enough.* Listen. This is my favorite quote here:

If our charities do not pinch or hamper us, I should say they are too small.

Clive Staples Lewis, *Mere Christianity*,
HarperCollins, 2001, page 86

What does *pinch* mean?

Remember I told you last Sunday (if you were here), I ate so much I had to go through four pairs of pants until I found one that fit Sunday morning? Do you know what *pinch* was? Pinch was what my belly was feeling against that button—pinched! I had no room to turn. If I had to bend down to pick up something, you would have heard: *Rrrrip!* It would have been gone. Why?—there was no wiggle room inside those pants. None!

Here's what he is saying: *Do our charities—are they so generous that we have no wiggle room for ourselves?* That's an opposite thought, isn't it? Listen to what he goes on to say:

There ought to be things we should like to do and cannot do because our charities expenditure excludes them.

Clive Staples Lewis, *Mere Christianity*,
HarperCollins, 2001, page 86

Now listen. Here's what he's saying: *Rather than...*

- *We're going to get whatever we want*
- *Do whatever we want whenever we want*

...and anything left over—part of what's left over, we're going to give a little bit to charity. Here's what C.S. Lewis is saying (he's saying): *We're going to give so much to charity that there are some things we're not going to be able to do, because we are being pinched by our generosity.*

Now, this Christmas, is there something you are not going to be able to do because you're going to give so much to the *Big Give* to make a difference around the world? If so—guess what?—you're being pinched. That's a good thing. It's a good thing to be pinched.

Do you think God was pinched—that He felt pinched—in His generosity toward us? I think He did. When He gave us His Son (the very life of His Son)—

- He watched His Son (and)
- Indeed even was there at the death of His Son (and)

—it pleased Him to do that. The Bible says: It pleased Him to watch His Son die for our sake. Do you not think that pinched Him a little bit?—I think so. Wow! What a difference that kind of generosity has made in our lives.

To give to what really matters is why we give less on what really doesn't matter.

2(C) TO GIVE MORE TO WHAT REALLY MATTERS

This is what Jesus—when He talks about His great parable (you need to go back and read it in *Luke 16*)—but here's the big teaching point that Jesus came up with. You ready? In *Luke, chapter 16, verses 8 and 9*:

⁸ "The master commended the dishonest manager because he had acted shrewdly. For the people of this world are more shrewd in dealing with their own kind than are the people of light. ⁹ I tell you, use worldly wealth to gain friends [for yourselves], so that when it is gone, you will be welcomed into eternal dwellings.

Luke 16:8-9 (NIV)

You know the story of the dishonest dude. He ripped off his master. He knew his master was coming back, so he got with the people that owed his master something [and] cut them a deal. They all loved him, because he was shrewd. So when he lost his job, they took him in.

Now here's what Jesus says: *So when your worldly wealthy is gone*—what does that mean? Jesus is saying: *It's going to be gone*. You're not going to have this forever; but if you invest it shrewdly and wisely—relationally—Jesus does say this (Jesus does say): *If you do that correctly when you don't have it anymore, you're going to have it forever because you've invested it and given it in the right place. You have done what matters with your money and your time while you're down here.* Do you know what matters?—people matter.

If you were here a couple of years ago, we had some houses or a part of a house out there in foyer. How many of y'all remember that? We said: *We're going to build those for orphans*. Well, we have. Your giving did that. In fact, we're at the place now where we actually have eight orphans living in one of those homes and we have five that are going up. We named the place: Mashah—the Mashah Children's Village. We didn't even want to call it an orphanage. It's not institutional. There's actually a mother living inside of the first orphan's home that we built. Now you're going to get ready to see the story of the first orphan that got on that piece of property, because some of you really did think a couple of years ago and last year: *Hey, we really do need to give to what matters*. Because you did—guess what?—we did what matters.

So I want you to turn your attention to the screens that are behind me. You're going to see the story of Moses, the first abandoned child that we have taken in. Telling the story is going to be Pastor Mathias who will be here next Sunday with us. Let's watch the story.

[*Pastor Mathias Sserugo (Director, Mashah Children's Village in Jinja, Uganda) is shown telling the story and narrating the video portions of various activities and people being ministered to:*]

We were doing a medical treatment/clinic at the property and people were coming in in floods. One of the people that came, she put the baby under the bus. And she went away to another point to get some shoes for herself. One of the ladies on the team saw a baby under the bus in front of the tires. They looked for the mother or whoever was in charge—no one was aware. We thought someone had just abandoned this baby there. So they took this baby out, and this baby was in bad shape. I looked at the baby, and it was like at any moment this baby was going to die.

They spotted the lady who had brought the child and they said: *Hey, here's the lady who brought the child.* She told us his name, Moses, and she told us about the history of the child. Moses is a sixth child. His mother abandons children. Three of her children had died. Yes, she could starve them to death. She wouldn't mind. And she said she had no interest in that child. And she signed documents saying: *Whoever wants Moses can take Moses. I am not interested.*

All along we're thinking: *Moses—since Moses was found on this property, we would rather take him in and be kid #1 for Mashah Children's Village.*

The missionaries decided that we would take the child to the hospital, and we did that immediately. It was from there that he went to the Nutrition Center. He recovered. He started smiling. And one time I visited him, he was crawling. He was doing good. Because the Nutrition Center has to have them for a period, they discharged him from there.

We visited with him in the village. The feeding there was not all that good. It was like he was going back to where he had been. We decided to bring him in here to give him good care. He is responding real good. He has an appetite. He eats everything. He can afford to smile. He is good. He is doing good.

Moses means: *drawn out.* When we came up with this village named Mashah, which is *drawn out*, we see it as a divine connection. It brings in all the meaning that this village is here for. This Moses comes in as a tip of the iceberg. Many, many more people are going to be drawn out from their situations and poverty and bad living to this village. And they will be nurtured, treated, educated and they will come out great men and great women just like Moses of the Bible.

[As lilting piano music accompanies a pause in the action, the following scripture is superimposed on the video with the Masha Children's Village in the background. As the final paragraph of the scripture displays, the scene switches to show the village mother holding and playing with the now-healthy-baby Moses:]

³⁴ "Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. ³⁵ For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, ³⁶ I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.'

³⁷ "Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? ³⁸ When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? ³⁹ When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?'

⁴⁰ "And the King will say, 'I tell you the truth, when you did it to one of the least of these my brothers and sisters, you were doing it to me!'

Matthew 25:34-40

[At the video's end Pastor Sal resumes:]

- I don't think you could get any more least of the "least of these" than that little baby...
 - Starving to death
 - Abandoned by his prostitute mother
 - Stuck under the wheel of a bus to be run over and killed...than that little baby Moses.
- I don't think that it's a coincidence that on that Nile River...
 - Where you helped purchase that property
 - Where Mashah Village is being built named after Moses to *draw out*...that the first baby that God led us...
 - to put
 - to be protected
 - nurtured...inside of that village, his name is Moses.
- I can't think of a better Christmas gift that we can give—than what we do—around the world and that is one (literally) of thousands (thousands) of stories that can happen when we're able to spend less and give more for all the right reasons.

I want to ask us to pray together at our *Cypress Campus* and right here at our *Jones Road Campus*. Just ask God:

- *Lord, (can we sit down with our families?—and just say:) Look what we could do if we did less for ourselves, how much more we could do for the people around the world.*
- *Could we sit down with our children and say?—I know you've got a list and we would like to give you all those things, but we just don't think it would be right to get all of those things. Could you pick out one or two that you want and would you be willing to give to Jesus—to the other little Moseses around the world—that part of your Christmas?*
 - Don't you think that [would] bless our kids as they honored God and learned what it meant to have so much that you're able to do something with it for the people who have nothing?—Nothing! (Nothing!)—not even food or a parent to care for them. Nothing.
 - Don't you think your kids would (not) respond to that and grow closer to God because of that?
- *Could we (kind of) pinch ourselves this year and pray? God, can You pinch us?—so that there're some things we'd like to do (and we would want to do) but we can't do, because we want to be extravagant and we want to be irrational in our giving to those who have nothing this year. Just pinch us, Lord.*
- For once can we feel pinched about not getting something or not having something?—so that somebody wouldn't have to be feeling pinched by not having...
 - Food
 - Medical treatment
 - Someone to care for him (or)
 - Not ever hearing the Gospel

So let's pray toward that end. Let's join together in prayer.

Our Father, it is so difficult to live in this land of plenty and live as a child of God who serves a King and a kingdom that cannot be seen with physical eyes, only spiritual eyes. Yet when we watched that video, we see the power of Your kingdom right there, Lord. We see the power of being generous with what You've given us and how it makes us feel in knowing that when one day when we get to heaven—even if we're never able to travel across to Africa—we're going to see Moses one day. We're going to be glad that we gave, and he's going to be excited that we gave. Most of all, You're going to be pleased that we gave.

So, God, I pray for us as a church. God, help us—please. We want to do right, but our flesh is always against us in the world system that we live in. So we just ask You for mercy today. Help us to rearrange our priorities—so that we can feel pinched in the things we want to do, but extravagant incomprehensibly so—in our generosity to those who need it the most this year in the *Big Give*. May we give—and grant us the ability to give—more than we've ever given before.

But do you know what?—all the giving in the world can't save anybody. If you're here this morning and you need Christ as your Savior, there's a gift already given for you, it's called the life of Jesus Who died on the cross for you. If you've never given your life to Christ, I pray right now that you would pray this prayer (along with me), and it goes like this:

Dear God, I need Jesus. I need to be forgiven. I need the greatest gift ever given. I receive Jesus Christ as my Lord and my Savior this morning.

Father, as we get ready to wrap up this service and Pastor Larry [Stege, *Adult Bible Studies and Life Groups*] comes up, speak to all of our families—every individual here—so that we might be irrationally generous this year. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Lead Pastor: Dr. Sal Sberna

The MET
Metropolitan Baptist Church
13000 Jones Rd
Houston, TX 77070

Sermon Transcript Ministry
resource@TheMETonline.org

¹⁹ ...I couldn't just walk away from a vision like that! I became an obedient believer on the spot. ²⁰ I started preaching this life-change—this radical turn to God and everything it meant in everyday life—right there...and from there to the whole world.

Acts 26:19b-20 (The Message)

Legend:

(**words in parentheses**) = spoken by the preacher *but unnecessary* to the core sentence idea

[**words in square brackets**] = additional explanation for clarity *not spoken* by the preacher

{**words in curly brackets within indented quote**} = spoken explanation *not part of the quote*