

*Mary Craig Ministries, Inc.*

*Series: "The Kingdom of God"*



*Message: "Jesus on Embracing Jubilee"*

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We've been talking about wealth and loyalty. In the stories of the rich young ruler and Zacchaeus we have more about wealth. For the rich young ruler, he must let go of his possessions because they are ruling his life. This guy is asking about inheriting eternal life, not receiving it. Jesus is saying to him that wealth has captured his heart and claimed his allegiance. Jesus invites him to "Come, follow Me." This is a call to discipleship. This is a call going beyond initial salvation and entering the kingdom. This is about allegiance, priorities, loyalties, and loves. Jesus is showing him that for all his good intentions, the man would forfeit eternal life rather than sell his possessions. Jesus will find your heart allegiance and ask you to put it on the altar of sacrifice. If you want Jesus, truly want Him, it may cost you everything.

The rich young ruler refused. Well, who then can be saved? It's impossible for mortal men but possible for God (Luke 18:27). Disciples who are supposed to "see" can be blind to the truth. Jesus heals a blind man who gets it. And then we have Zacchaeus. Luke 19. Zacchaeus was rich because he was the chief tax "farmer" of the district, a tax boss. Jews collected taxes for the Romans and often used force and cheated. They were said to contaminate, so you wouldn't want to eat or associate with them. Zacchaeus' name means "the righteous."

Zacchaeus wanted to see Jesus and goes to great lengths to make that happen. He humiliates himself to do it. Jesus says he is going to come to Zacchaeus' house that very day. Not only that, Jesus is going to eat with him. To society, Jesus was deliberately contaminating Himself. Zacchaeus, however, chooses to embrace Jubilee and practice it. He declares his repentance (Luke 19:8). A change of heart hit his pocketbook. (Luke 19:9, 10) Repentance in someone's life will show up in their social life, in their economic choices; in all of their choices.

Jesus also notices the widow who gives out of her poverty (Mark 12:41-44). Just before, Jesus had condemned those **"who devour widows' houses and for the sake of appearance make long prayers. They will receive the greater condemnation."** (Mark 12:40) A widow was an outcast with no inheritance rights. Inheritance went to the oldest son, and if no son, to a brother of the deceased husband who might marry the widow. Widows, like other women, had no role in public or religious life. Widows wore black clothing to signal their plight. In spite of her social situation, this widow gave, out of her lack.

Jesus looks at the proportion of the giving, not the amount. Thus the poor who tithe and go beyond the tithe into offerings may give more in God's eyes than the rich who give 5% and no offerings.

Jesus is talking about attachments, allegiance, priorities, what we value to store up for ourselves, the things we choose to surround ourselves with, the things we are giving our lives for.

The KOG is one where we have grace rather than greed, compassion rather than competition, giving rather than taking, other-orientation rather than self-orientation, sharing rather than hoarding, generosity rather than consumption.

The bottom line is, what truly satisfies? Are we satisfied with all that God has for us in Jesus? It's about Source—the Source of Life, the Source of satisfaction, and the Source of destiny. It's about who is Lord.

God's rule in the lives of believers is key as to Jesus' economic and social messages. The nearness of God's reign and God's love for us is to transform our behavior. We have been forgiven; we forgive. God has been good to us; we do not fret. God owns everything; we are no longer beggars, strangers, slaves, or debtors. We are sons. Instead of consuming everything in sight, there is generous giving. Wealth must bow to Jesus, not the other way around.

Must we always get the best price? Leave room for others to make a reasonable profit. Must we charge the highest price for things? Leave room for others to get a good deal.

We must remember that deprivation is relative and the sense of deprivation is also relative. The issue is what satisfies. How much does it take? Paul says that contentment is learned in Philippians 4. Godliness with contentment is great gain.

Then there is the matter of image. Do other people determine who we are? "I am what I think you think I am." Is that true? The Word of God defines us. Must we have the latest in fashion, electronics, cars, etc.? Rather than conspicuous consumption, Jesus draws us to inconspicuous service—caring for others, not just the destitute, but family members, animals, the environment, whatever God calls us to serving Him. We are accountable for our personal obedience to our knowledge of the gospel, which pretty much sums up the parable of the talents.

We must remember that our behavior does indeed make a difference. Romans 12-general evil is overcome by specific acts of good. Five signs of kingdom giving:

1. Giving that targets genuine need.
2. Giving that is not only individual, but also a collective expression of love from the community.
3. Not taking as much as possible from others is also a form of giving. Not taking funds in the first place, even funds that may be rightfully ours, is a form of giving. E.g., my dentist who cut the bill by 10%.
4. Giving that is thoughtful, orderly, and humane means going beyond Christmas baskets and responding to pictures of starving children. We must give gladly, generously, graciously, and under the guidance of the Holy Spirit and according to what we have purposed in our hearts to give. We call it "grace giving." 2 Corinthians 8, 9.
5. Giving that is motivated by God's love. Giving cannot only be that of meeting physical needs; we must also give the gospel to all creation, always being ready with an answer for the hope within us. This means giving ourselves as living sacrifices. Romans 12:1, 2.

The social glory of the Pharisees brought scathing rebuke from Jesus. The Pharisees offered their sacrifices on the altar of social status. What counted was how their piety appeared to others. They were after appearing pious. Matthew 6:1; Matthew 23:5-7; Luke 11:43; 20:46, 47; Mark 12:40. Luke 16:14, 15. Luke calls these folks lovers of money who justify themselves before others. James picks up this theme in talking about rich and poor and people catering to the rich. We see this today.

John 12:42, 43 – Some of the authorities who believed in Jesus were afraid to admit it because **"they loved human glory more than the glory that comes from God."** Matthew 23:28. Jesus said the scribes and Pharisees were like filthy cups which appear clean on the outside but were not clean on the inside.

The Pharisees were sincere in their own eyes. The issue was what they were sincere about. To Jesus it was all talk, preaching and interpreting the Law, not obedience to the truth. Mt. 23:3. Jesus says they remembered trivia but forgot justice, mercy, and faith. They observed pious regulations but foreclosed on widows' houses. (Luke 20:47; Mark 12:40). They thwarted the law of love by pushing the elderly into poverty (Mark 7:9-12). There was all this sweet God-talk and good intentions but no walking in truth.

Jesus condemns their arrogance. They were proud in their careful observance of religious dogma. They weren't crying out to God in despair like some publican. The tax collector pounded his chest. Repentance for him would mean leaving his profession and starting over, repaying people, only it's too much. In the parable of the Pharisee and publican, the Pharisee represents the sacred role of ritual devotion whereas the publican symbolizes those who are not even on the grid of holiness. The Pharisee comes in pride into the temple. The tax collector comes in humility and stays at the edge of the temple plaza. The publican has come empty. The Pharisee finds no salvation, even on the high sacred temple. God accepts the sacrifice of a broken and contrite heart while the arrogant Pharisee misses the blessing.

Jesus said the Pharisees locked people out of the KOG. Ceremonial religion not only accents ritual; it also creates a gap between insiders and outsiders. We must guard against an exclusive spirit that shuns newcomers and mocks their ignorance of the true God and His Word.

Jesus accepted sinners. He welcomed the outcast, swindlers, and adulterers. So called "sinners" were deprived of civil rights. They could not hold office or serve as a witness in court. Sinners included tax collectors, shepherds, peddlers, tanners, pigeon racers, and others in tarnished jobs. Feasts were a big deal in the day and Jesus offers love in table fellowship in homes of sinners. Repentant sinners feast inside with the prophets while some religious leaders might find themselves outside the banquet doors, too busy you know, stubborn. Tax collectors and prostitutes are going into the KOG ahead of some of those Pharisees (Mt. 21:31). Jesus doesn't want pretense. He wants truth in the inward parts, in the core of our being.

The Pharisees worked very hard to apply the Torah to everyday life and they get left behind. Jesus says that their enthusiasm is misplaced; it is for ceremonial piety and not for God's law of love. They are fighting hard to maintain a religion and missing the main points. They are proud and arrogant and don't see it. So they want to kill Jesus, except that they regarded Jesus as a prophet. Mt. 21:45, 46; Mark 12:12; Luke 20:19.

The KOG broke into history with the Incarnation of Jesus Christ. The Crucifixion really happened as Christ died to pay the penalty for sin in order to bring reconciliation with God through the forgiveness of sin. Jesus was buried and rose again on the third day, ascended into heaven, and sits on the right hand of God the Father Almighty. He's coming again in power and great glory. No one comes to the Father but by/through Him.

Lives even now are transformed as people repent and believe in Jesus, believe Jesus, and believe what Jesus believes. One by one people rejoice in the Lord, their Savior. To the extent that we embrace Jubilee, we walk in truth, walk in the Light, walk by faith, walk in wisdom, walk worthy of the Lord, walk in integrity, and walk in love, led and empowered by the Holy Spirit. Amen.

*But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus*

*Christ our Savior, so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life. Titus 3:4-7 ESV*

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*I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God. Romans 12:1, 2 KJV*

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