

Creekside Community Church: "Imitating Jesus"
"Loving God like Jesus Loves God III" Loving God with Our Treasure
December 16, 2012
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This month as we continue to talk about Imitating Jesus, we're focusing on loving God like Jesus loved God. And what we learn from Jesus is that the degree that we love God will be reflected in how we use our time, our talent, our treasure and our thoughts. We've talked about loving God with our time and our talents and this morning I want to consider loving God with our treasure. There are 2,350 verses in the Bible about how to handle our money and possessions. Jesus had far more to say about money than He did about prayer or heaven or hell, or any other single subject. This morning I want to look at two things, 1. Why how we use our money is important to Jesus and 2. How Jesus said to tell if we love God or we love money. Why did Jesus have so much to say about money? Three reasons. First, because money is God's primary rival for our hearts and our love of money can easily replace our love for Him. Second, because a love for money blinds us to what is truly important in life. And third, because a love for money makes us easily susceptible to other temptations.

Now the main reason Jesus talked so much about money is because it so easily captures our heart. Jesus taught that money is God's primary rival for our affections. That's why the bible says that greed is idolatry; because we replace the Creator with His creation; we love the music instead of the Musician, we depend on what God has made instead of on God Himself. And according to the Romans 1, idolatry is the mother of all sins. The behaviors and attitudes we think of as sinful are really just symptoms. Idolatry is the disease. And by far, the most common idol of the first century and the 21st century is money. Look at what Jesus says in Matthew 6:24 *"No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth."* Jesus doesn't say, "You shouldn't serve two masters," He says, "You CANNOT serve two masters." Its not just wrong, its impossible. We can't serve both God and money. Money is neither good nor evil in itself. It's just a means of exchange. But once money becomes more than a method of barter; once money becomes our ticket to power, control, safety and fulfillment, it ceases to be our tool and becomes our god. Jesus says, "Let your life be free of the love of money, being content with what you have, for I will never leave you or forsake you." Money says, "Never stop getting more of me. You never know what might happen." Jesus says, "Give and it will be given to you." Money says, "Hoard me. Take care of number One." Jesus says, "Don't lay up your treasures on earth where moth and rust destroy and thieves break in and steal, but lay up your treasures in heaven where moth and rust don't destroy and thieves don't break in and steal for where your treasure is, there will be your heart also." Money says, "There's a sale Tuesday, and if you don't buy now, you'll really regret it later." God is always speaking to us and money is always speaking to us. And we have to choose who we'll listen to. The Eagles have a line in one of their songs, "God rules except when money or sex is involved." How often does money dictate our choices? How often is the real issue not what's the right thing to do or what does God want me to do, but what can I afford to do? If I've got the money, it must be right to do. If I don't have the money, it must not be right. Whatever controls my decisions is my god. Whatever I put my hopes for my future in is my god. If my faith, hope and joy is in money, then if the economy goes into the tank, I will be devastated. If my faith, hope and joy is in God, I will only be devastated if He fails. And He hasn't failed yet. One reason Jesus was so concerned about money is because while money is not evil in itself, money is the most common idol people worship. That's why Jesus said, "You cannot serve God and wealth."

Here's a second reason Jesus talked so much about money. Money blinds us to what's truly important in life. Today's image of the parent who neglects time with his child to advance his own career is so stereotypical - but that doesn't make it any less true. And years from now, when his child is no longer interested in a relationship, that parent will be asking, "Why did my job seem so much more important than my kid?" Notice what Jesus says in Matthew 6:19-24, the verses immediately preceding Matthew 6:24. *"Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves do not break in or steal; for where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. The eye is the lamp of the body; so then if your eye is clear, your whole body will be full of light. But if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light that is in you is darkness, how great is the darkness! No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he*

will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth.” (Matthew 6:19-24) Jesus talks about two treasures - one on earth and one in heaven; two eyes, a good eye and a bad or blind eye; and two masters, God and wealth. Now we understand the connection between the two treasures and the two masters, but how do the two eyes fit in? I think that in the context of the dangers of money, Jesus is talking about the power of the love of money to blind us to what really matters in life. Let me ask you a question. Do you think your life would be significantly better if you made twice as much as you currently make? “Are you kidding? Absolutely!” Well, Solomon was the world’s richest man. If anyone understood the benefits of wealth, he did. But look at what he writes in Eccles. 5:10-13 *He who loves money will not be satisfied with money, nor he who loves abundance with its income. This too is vanity. When good things increase, those who consume them increase. So what is the advantage to their owners except to look on? The sleep of the working man is pleasant, whether he eats little or much; but the full stomach of the rich man does not allow him to sleep. There is a grievous evil which I have seen under the sun: riches being hoarded by their owner to his hurt.* “ Solomon was richer than anyone living today. And he said, “Take it from me, wealth doesn’t satisfy. The more you make, the faster it goes. The anxiety and pressure which comes with wealth steals your sleep and contentment. Wealth is a cruel master. Your risk of suicide rises as your income rises. When insurance companies predict your life span, years begin to be subtracted once your annual income rises above a certain point. The statistics tell them that wealth is a health risk. The more possessions we have, the more distractions, the more pressure, the more worries we have. Jesus cares about money because He cares about us and know that unless we keep God in the center of our heart, wealth will quickly become a liability instead of an asset. But the love of money blinds us to the liabilities of wealth.

Here’s a third reason Jesus was so concerned about money. A love of money makes us vulnerable to other temptations. Let’s continue with Matthew 6:25, *“For this reason”* - for what reason? Because no one can serve both God and wealth, *“do not be anxious for your life, as to what you shall eat, or what you shall drink; nor for your body, as to what you shall put on. Is not life more than food and the body than clothing?”* Loving money instead of God produces anxiety. It makes us vulnerable to the temptation to worry. Our problems look bigger than God can handle. As Jesus warns in this passage, we seek the same things those who don’t know God seek. That’s why Paul warns in 1 Tim. 6:10 *For the love of money is a root of all sorts of evil, and some by longing for it have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs.* A Romanian pastor who experienced persecution first hand, has written, “In my experience, 95% of believers who face the test of persecution pass it, while 95% who face the test of prosperity fail it.” God says in Hosea 13:6 *“When I fed them, they were satisfied, And being satisfied, their heart became proud; Therefore they forgot Me.”* That’s why Jesus said, “How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God.” When we love money, we forget God. And when we forget God, we become easy prey to other temptations. Did you know that the more money you have, the more likely it is that you’ll have an affair? 31% of husbands making less than \$30,000 a year are unfaithful to their wives. 70% of husbands making over \$100,000 a year are unfaithful to their wives. Why? Rich men are more attractive than poor men. The love of money makes us vulnerable to pride. That’s why Paul writes in 1 Tim. 6:17 *Instruct those who are rich in this present world not to be conceited or to fix their hope on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly supplies us with all things to enjoy.* The love of money makes us vulnerable to the temptation to cheat and to exploit others. That’s why James writes in James 5:1, 4, *Come now, you rich, weep and howl for your miseries which are coming upon you. Behold, the pay of the laborers who mowed your fields, and which has been withheld by you, cries out against you; and the outcry of those who did the harvesting has reached the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth.* Those who love money more than God experience far more temptations to cut corners and to deceive others in order to preserve their wealth. You’d think those who have the most would be the least inclined to cheat others since they already have so much, but that’s not the case. Money is like a drug and it doesn’t matter how much the addict has, he always wants more. That’s why Jesus talked so much about money. Money itself isn’t evil. It can be very useful in doing good. But it is a lion which must be tamed. Which brings us to our second question. How can I know if I love money more than I love God?

Looking at what Jesus taught about the love of money, I’d like to suggest three questions to ask ourselves. First question: has Christ changed my attitude towards money? Since coming to know Him, can I see a distinct difference in how I view wealth? In Luke 19, Jesus is in the ancient city of Jericho and huge crowds have gathered to catch a glimpse of this famous prophet from Galilee. As Jesus walks under a sycamore tree, He looks up to find Jericho’s local IRS director sitting in the tree, looking down at him. He is a very short man named Zaccheus who

has a reputation as a crook, a cheat, a government official on the take. And so everyone in the crowd is surprised when Jesus says, "Zaccheus, hurry and come down for I'm staying at your house. Zaccheus is thrilled that a famous prophet like Jesus would want to stay at his house and he jumps out of the tree and takes Jesus home with him. But the crowd is shocked. "How can He stay at the tax-collector's house? Doesn't He know who this guy is?" Look at what Zaccheus says. Luke 19:8-9 *Zaccheus stopped and said to the Lord, "Behold, Lord, half of my possessions I will give to the poor, and if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I will give back four times as much."* Something happened to Zach when he experienced love and acceptance from Jesus instead of the condemnation he got from everybody else. Something became more important to Zaccheus than money. And notice how Jesus reacts. "And Jesus said to him, *"Today salvation has come to this house, because he, too, is a son of Abraham."* (He like Abraham is a man of faith.) How did Jesus know Zaccheus had been saved and had become a man of faith? Zaccheus' attitude toward money had changed. Without Jesus even asking, he's promised to give half of what he owns to the poor, and to pay back everyone he's ever cheated 4 times the amount he stole. Now I want to compare this conversation with another conversation Jesus has about money in Luke 18. A young leader - wealthy and devout, asks "What must I do to inherit eternal life?" Jesus gives him the answer any devout Jew would give. "You know the commandments, 'Do not murder, Do not commit adultery, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Do not defraud, Honor your father and mother.'" And the young man replies, "Teacher, I have kept all these things from my youth up." This guy is an eagle scout, a very moral man. Let's start reading at Luke 18:21. "*When Jesus heard this, He said to him, "One thing you lack: go and sell all you possess and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me."* But when he heard these things, he became very sad, for he was extremely rich." Jesus invites this man to become His disciple and gain eternal life. But the young man declines. He wants eternal life. But he wants his wealth more. "And Jesus, looking at him and said, *"How hard it will be for those who are wealthy to enter the kingdom of God! For it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God."* How hard IS it for a camel to go through the eye of a needle? It's impossible, right. And that's not something the disciples expected to hear from Jesus. In Jewish culture, wealth was considered a sign of God's favor. If a man were wealthy, he must be righteous. And on top of that, this guy has kept God's commandments from the time he was a little boy. I'm sure the disciples are thinking, "I'm not as good as this guy." So when Jesus says, "How hard it will be for those who are wealthy to enter the kingdom of God" it's like saying today, "How hard it will be for people like Mother Teresa or Billy Graham to get into heaven." The disciples are thinking, "Then I'm in real trouble. That's why, *"They who heard it said, "Then who can be saved?"* But He said, *"The things that are impossible with people are possible with God."* Jesus says its impossible for us to save ourselves. The young man asked, "What must I do to be saved?" And Jesus replies, "More. More than you're doing. More than you can do. Something only God can do for you." And that's the gospel. We're can't earn eternal life, we can only accept it as a gift. It's not what can I do to inherit eternal life but what has Christ done to make eternal life available to me. Because what is impossible for me is possible for God. So we've got two rich men, Zaccheus and the rich young ruler. One's a crook and one's an upstanding citizen. Both meet Jesus. One man's attitude toward money is changed forever; the other's attitude toward money remains the same. One man is saved and the other is not. But it's not the man we think should be saved. The crook is saved while the moral man is lost. Jesus looks at Zaccheus and says, "He too is a son of Abraham." Jesus looks at the young ruler and says, "How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God." Each man's attitude toward money mirrored his attitude toward God. We're not saved because we choose God over money. We choose God over money because we are saved. That's why the first question to ask yourself is this: has Christ changed my attitude toward money? If Christ has come into my life, He's given me a new heart and if I have to choose between Him and money, I'll choose Him. Like most people, I've always been concerned about money. But once Jesus came into my life, I noticed that pleasing Him became more important to me than money. I couldn't live with myself if I felt like I was not giving what He wanted me to give or if I felt like I was not being entirely honest in all my finances. A clear conscience was worth whatever it cost. How has coming to know Christ impacted the way you use money?

Here's a second question to ask ourselves to see if we love money more than God. Do I see money as a tool or as a goal? In Luke 16:1-14 Jesus again talks about money. "*Now He was also saying to the disciples, "There was a rich man who had a manager, and this manager was reported to him as squandering his possessions.* He's got the new Lexus chariot, the beach house at Capernaum, the luxury box at the Coliseum, all paid for by his boss. But his boss finds out what he's doing. *And he called him and said to him, "What is this I hear about you? Give an accounting of*

your management, for you can no longer be manager.' The manager said to himself, 'What shall I do, since my master is taking the management away from me? I am not strong enough to dig; I am ashamed to beg. I know what I shall do, so that when I am removed from the management people will welcome me into their homes.' And he summoned each one of his master's debtors, and he began saying to the first, 'How much do you owe my master?' And he said, 'A hundred measures of oil.' And he said to him, 'Take your bill, and sit down quickly and write fifty.' Then he said to another, 'And how much do you owe?' And he said, 'A hundred measures of wheat.' He said to him, 'Take your bill, and write eighty.' The manager knows he's going to get fired. And so in the short time he has left, he makes appointments with all of his employer's creditors, and reduces the amount each one owes his boss. Why does he do that? So that when he loses his job, he'll have people who owe him a favor. He uses his boss' resources to ensure his own future. Now comes the strangest twist in Jesus' story. *And his master praised the unrighteous manager because he had acted shrewdly; for the sons of this age are more shrewd in relation to their own kind than the sons of light.* In spite of being cheated again, his boss is impressed by his manager's resourcefulness. And Jesus says that there is a lesson here for us, *"And I say to you, make friends for yourselves by means of the wealth of unrighteousness, so that when it fails, they will receive you into the eternal dwellings. He who is faithful in a very little thing is faithful also in much; and he who is unrighteous in a very little thing is unrighteous also in much. Therefore if you have not been faithful in the use of unrighteous wealth, who will entrust the true riches to you? And if you have not been faithful in the use of that which is another's, who will give you that which is your own? No servant can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth."* This is a story about the wise use of money, something Jesus says the people of this world are often better at than the children of God. And the lesson Jesus wants His disciples to grasp here is that just as the accountant used his boss' money to prepare for his own future, so we should be using the money God entrusts to us to prepare for our future. Just like the accountant used his boss' money to make friends for himself, we're to use the money God has entrusted to us to make friends in heaven, to bring people to Christ. Money isn't an evil to be avoided. That's the mistake of Poverty Theology, that you can't be spiritual unless you are poor. Nor is money a god to be worshiped. That's the mistake of Prosperity Theology, the idea that God's blessings are always financial; if you're not wealthy, something is wrong with your faith. Jesus taught that money is simply a tool to be used, something God entrusts to us just like He entrusts our personality, our gifts, our interests and our opportunities to be used in the pursuit of His interests in this world. Will there be people in heaven because of the way you used your money? Maybe you supported a missionary and when you get to heaven, you meet people from another culture and ethnicity who thank you for making it possible for them to be there. Or maybe you'll see a couple of guys there you used to take to A's games, just so you could build a friendship and share the gospel. Or maybe you'll meet people from your neighborhood because your house was the one where the door was always open and there was always an extra plate set for dinner. The second question to ask ourselves to see if we love money more than God, do I see money as a tool or as a goal? Am I investing my money in bringing people to Christ?

Here's a third question to ask ourselves to see if we love money more than God; simply, am I generous? Do I love to give? Let's look at one more conversation Jesus has about money. In Luke 21, Jesus and his disciples are sitting in the great hall of the temple, observing the wealthy dropping their contributions into the collection boxes. *And He looked up and saw the rich putting their gifts into the treasury. And He saw a poor widow putting in two small copper coins. And He said, "Truly I say to you, this poor widow put in more than all of them; for they all out of their surplus put into the offering; but she out of her poverty put in all that she had to live on."* Did you notice how interested Jesus is in how much people are giving? That should make us a little uncomfortable. Because we think what we do with our money is our business and nobody else's, right? Apparently our money is God's business. He's watching to see what we'll do with it because how we spend our money reveals our heart. Jesus doesn't seem to be impressed with the large donations the wealthy are making. But when a poor widow drops two pennies in the box, Jesus gets excited. He turns to His disciples, "Did you see that? That was the biggest contribution of the day. Everybody else gave only what they were comfortable in giving but that lady gave everything she had to live on." Now, if you saw that woman giving away all the money she has to live on, what would you say to her? I'd say, "Ma'am, you don't need to do that. The temple is doing fine. You need to take care of yourself." But Jesus says, "Do you see how much that woman loves God? How much she trusts Him? That's fantastic!" Two pennies meant more to Jesus than the huge gifts the rich gave. It wasn't the size of the gift, it was the size of the heart which gave it. When was the last time you were intentionally generous? The more we

understand how generous God is to us, the more generous we will be to others. It all depends on how we view God and how we view money. If my hope is in God, I love to give because I know that Jesus promises, "Give and it will be given to you." If I see money as a tool, I love to use it for God's purpose. That's why God entrusted the money to me. Generosity, like faith, is like a muscle. The more we exercise it, the stronger it becomes. Generosity is really just opportunistic giving. It goes beyond regular tithing and planned giving to taking advantage of the opportunity to give whenever we have it. There's a delight in giving, in being able to be generous. I really believe that along with a humble spirit, a generous spirit is critical to being used by God. Because Jesus is generous. Paul says that though Christ was rich, He became poor for our sake that we might become rich in Him. We look forward to going to heaven one day, but Jesus left the joy and security of heaven to come to earth to search for us; to become a human and live in our corrupt, evil world, to live the life we were meant to live and failed so that God would credit His righteousness to us when we put our faith in Him, to die the death we deserved to die so that God can pardon all who believe in Him, and then to rise from the dead and defeat death in our behalf so we can go to heaven with Him.

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