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Commitment Sunday

Seek First the Kingdom
Matthew 6:24-33

"No one can serve two masters; for a slave will either hate the one and love the other, or be devoted to the one and despise the other. ***You cannot serve God and wealth****.* ***25*** *"Therefore I tell you,* ***do not worry*** *about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing?*
26 *Look at the birds of the air; they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they?* ***27*** *And can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life?*
28 *And why do you worry about clothing?* ***Consider the lilies of the field****, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin,* ***29*** *yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these.* ***30*** *But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you—you of little faith?* ***31 Therefore do not worry****, saying, "What will we eat?' or "What will we drink?' or "What will we wear?'*
32 *For it is the Gentiles who strive for all these things; and indeed your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things.*
33 But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.

Most of us would say that ***we DON'T serve money, we serve God.***
So how does this speak to us?

Well, here again Jesus is talking about MONEY,
In the same sentences as WORRY.
We all know the connection between money and worry, right?
It's like saying don't stare at that pink elephant—
suddenly that's ALL you can see!
When we're focused on dollars---we also focus on worry about dollars!

So Jesus gives us a ***COMMAND--DO NOT WORRY***—
And he tells us ***WHY***—
because God cares for us even more than the birds and the lilies.

We need to hear this, right?
Isn't there ***ALWAYS something to worry about?***

So Jesus lovingly says: *Therefore **do not worry**, saying, "What will we eat?' or "What will we drink?' or "What will we wear?' **32** For it is the Gentiles who strive for all these things; and indeed your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. **33** But **seek first the kingdom of God** and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.*

So, how do we ACTUALLY SEEK the kingdom, and let go of worry?
We need another focus.
So, Jesus gives us something to do ***INSTEAD*** of worry.
He gives us a ***CHOICE to make:***
We can worry, ***OR*** seek the kingdom of God.

And WHAT IS GOD'S KINGDOM?
Jesus preached about it more than anything else, over 119 times in the gospels!
In many ways the kingdom of God is the ***OPPOSITE of the world***.
It's ***who God is***, and ***what God is doing***.
It's ***God's way of life***,
where ***mercy, love, grace, and forgiveness*** reign.

It's a place WE ENTER when we repent of our sins,
and start seeing life from God's perspective.
It's a place of ***abundance and generosity***.
God's Kingdom is ***where we learn*** to make GENEROSITY A HABIT!

Jesus tells DOZENS OF STORIES about the kingdom.
He compares it to a tiny **mustard seed** that grows into a huge tree.
Or a little bit of **yeast** that leavens all the flour,
Or a **treasure** in a field, worth everything.

In Matthew 25 Jesus tells a parable about TALENTS,
To describe the kingdom.
He tells of a master who entrusts his three servants with great sums of money,
And the first two are rewarded with ***joy*** for investing and using theirs.

In other words, God's kingdom is based on ABUNDANCE--
but it's also something we ***CHOOSE***.

The word kingdom in Greek, is *basileia*, An ***empire subject to a king***….
So, the kingdom of God is where ***God is in control (not us).***

Which means, we ***CAN'T SERVE BOTH*** money and God.
We have to choose.
And one way we do that, is by ***GIVING—not just a little—but generously.***
See, in God's kingdom, there is always more than enough,
So we ***CAN GIVE, IN JOY!***

The WORLD is ruled by money, and built on SCARCITY.
We are bombarded with messages about not having enough…
Not enough time, money, house, car, clothes, toys, face cream…you name it.
If you land here as an alien, and watch our media,
You'd think we don't have enough of anything!

The world lives on THE FEAR OF SCARCITY,
God's kingdom lives on the JOY OF ABUNDANCE,
So: WHICH world do we want to live in?

The kingdom of God definitely has THE BETTER MATH.
In the world, there is only so much to go around----Everything is limited.
Like when you order something online and it says in red
"only 4 more in stock—order today!".
Or the commercial says 'this is only for the first 20 customers who call in now!'
(I've always wondered, how do they know you're calling NOW?)
In the world, when we give something away—we have LESS.

But in God's kingdom,
When we ***give, we have MORE---because blessings always multiply.***

Which is a lot like LOVE, right?
Think of people you love.
If you love one person, then another, and another,
does your love get split in half and then again?
No—your ***love actually MULTIPLIES***, doesn't it?

The kingdom of God is like THAT!
It's ***overflowing*** with love, mercy, grace, and forgiveness.
When Jesus says seek first the kingdom of God,
He is telling us to ***focus on THAT way of life---***

where ***generosity*** is our calling, and ***blessings abound***!

In the Old Testament book of ***Hosea 10:12:*** it says:
'Plant the good seeds of righteousness, and you will harvest a ***CROP OF LOVE.***
Isn't that what the world needs?
Isn't it what the church needs?

I mean, LETTING GO OF WORRY AND SCARCITY is not just for us as individuals, it's also for our CHURCHES.
Both LPC and FPC have walked through tough times in the past,
Where there was a lot of worry.
Where the church often lived in that scarcity mindset---
That we don't have enough,
So we can't really be super generous.
I mean, churches get scared about money just like people do!

But NONE OF THAT IS OF GOD!
God makes a way, where there is ***no way!***
God tells us to give, when we think we cannot give!
Because God is the one who brings us what we need.
Enough----More than enough, enough to share.

Ideally, CHURCHES give away at least a tithe, or 10%, towards mission.
Towards meeting needs in the church, the community, and the world.
Some congregations grow that to way more,
Some give away dollar for dollar—talk about making a difference!
But all of that requires ***MAKING GENEROSITY A HABIT.***
It means using our time, talent, and treasure
for something bigger than ourselves.

Recently, you've heard STORIES OF LIVES CHANGED by generosity,
of people finding help and hope through YOUR giving!
That's what being a Christian is all about.
It's not just about our salvation—it's about seeking the kingdom,
And helping God's will to be done,
"On earth as it is in heaven"!

How DO WE SEEK THE KINGDOM of God?
We GIVE, generously---just like our generous God!
We make ***generosity a habit***-- for ALL of our time, talent, and money.

And when we do, blessings OVERFLOW—and OUR MATH no longer applies.

Now, is this a PROSPERITY message? Or some kind of FORMULA?
Because you can find that in some churches, unfortunately.
Like give now---and God will *put money back* in your pocket!
But, nowhere does Jesus say that when we give, we get rich.
Jesus says that God will provide what we NEED.
Not everything we WANT.

But OUR GIVING ALWAYS CHANGES LIVES.
It helps those without to have what they need.
This is the way God works---*through us!*
When we are satisfied with LESS, others can have MORE.
When we live with less, others can SIMPLY LIVE.
This is what it means to be the hands and feet of Jesus!

The ancient Greek philosopher Epicletus once said:
Contentment comes not so much from great wealth as from FEW WANTS.
Paul wisely said the same thing:
*Of course, there is great gain in godliness combined with **CONTENTMENT**;*
we brought nothing into the world, so we can take nothing out of it;
but if we have food and clothing, we will be content with these…

It's like the spiritual seeker,
who interrupted his busy life to spend a few days in a monastery.
"I hope your stay is a blessed one,"
said the monk who showed the visitor to his cell.
*"If you need anything, let us know, we'll teach you **how to LIVE WITHOUT IT."***
Philip Yancey, "What 147 Elk Taught Me About Prayer," Christianity Today (March 2006).

Imagine that!
Seeking the kingdom brings freedom from TOO MANY 'WANTS'!
Which applies to churches too!
We need priorities based on what we need—***to do God's work.***
If we are spending, it should be based on our mission, our priorities,
Where God is leading us.
Like a new elevator—it's not just for convenience,
It's so EVERYONE—has physical access to everything in this place.

When Jesus spoke about MONEY (his 2nd most popular topic),
he always talked about our ***need to GIVE,***
To make '***eternal purses'*** instead of treasures on earth.
He spoke about ***giving generously and sacrificially***,
like the poor widow who gave her last two coins.
He spoke about ***sharing***, not hoarding.
About giving to God ***what belongs to God***—which is everything!

When we MAKE GENEROSITY A HABIT,
We are seeking God's kingdom,
We are choosing to ***trust God***, and to follow God.

So--Who will YOU serve? Who will we serve as a church?
The world? ourselves? And all the WORRY that comes with that?
OR ***God, and the JOY*** that comes with that!

Today, we are invited to bring ***pledges for next year***.
WHY DO WE DO THIS?
It's one simple way we exercise our FAITH in God's provision,
And our desire to seek God's way of life.
It's NOT about the church budget or keeping lights on,
It's a personal decision and promise to God,
It's really a leap of faith and trust.

We make these promises,
not because we know what the future holds,
but because we know ***WHO HOLDS*** OUR FUTURE!

Friends, hear the ***GOOD NEWS*** of the Gospel
Anything we ***want***…we can learn to live without,
And anything we ***need***…***God can provide***.
May we seek the kingdom of God,
By making ***generosity a habit*** of our hearts.
Because that is the way to ***true life, and true joy!***
And for that gift, all God's people can say together, Amen.