

Big Picture

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Preacher: Ray Sweet

[0:00] Well, hey, good morning. My name is Ray Sweet from First Christian Church in Greensburg, Indiana. Hey, as always, you can check us out at FCCGreensburg.com or you can go to the FCC Greensburg Facebook page.

But hey, we're just so thankful that you've tuned in to this audio broadcast. And I just pray that as we get into the Word, that God's Word will most importantly get into us and transform us more and more into the image of Christ.

Now, a local Salvation Army office was a little low on funds one year, and they were trying to reach out to some local businesses for donations. They realized they had never received a donation from the town's most successful lawyer.

So the person in charge of contributions called the attorney and said, Hello, Mr. Cunningham. My name is April from the Salvation Army. The reason for my call is that we are low on funds to help our community this year, and we have some really big needs in front of us.

Congrats on the success of your firm, but our research shows that you haven't given anything back to local charity this year. Would you like to give back to help those in our community?

[1:11] Well, the quick-thinking lawyer fired back at her and said, Well, does your research also show that my mother is dying after a long illness and has medical bills that are several times her yearly income?

Well, kind of embarrassed and feeling kind of bad about this, the rep said, No, I'm sorry, sir, it doesn't. And the lawyer continued. He said, Or that my brother, a disabled veteran, is blind and confined to a wheelchair?

Or that my sister's husband died in a traffic accident, leaving her penniless with three children? The humiliated rep finally said, Sir, I am so sorry.

I had no idea. But once again, he interrupted her, and he said, So, if I didn't give money to any of them, why in the world would I give money to you?

You know, it's hard to believe that we're the last week of this month-long stewardship series called Take God at His Word. Over the last three weeks, we've gotten into the Bible, and we've simply asked the Lord to reveal how we can honor Him in our giving.

[2:16] And today, I want to kind of zoom back out a little bit, and I want us to look at something that this selfish guy in our story didn't see. And that's the big picture. You know, around 20 years ago, I was in college as a freshman and sophomore, and there was an upperclassman during those couple years that I really admired and looked up to.

And when things got really chaotic with school and sports or whatever, He would always tell me just to step back and look at the big picture, because that would make all the difference.

And you know what? He was right. And it's served me well the last couple of decades. So, today, in light of everything that we have, everything that we are, let's look at the big picture straight from the words of our Savior.

So, go ahead. Grab your Bibles for me. Turn to Matthew chapter 28, about two-thirds of the way through your Bible. First book of the New Testament, the book of Matthew chapter 28.

We'll start in verse 19. And if you've been around the church for a little while, you know that this is commonly called the Great Commission. Not the Great Suggestion, the Great Commission.

[3:27] And this is our biblical purpose as the Church of Jesus Christ. Here's what our Savior says. Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.

And surely, I am with you always to the very end of the age. Now, real simple. Our job as Christ followers is to be willing vessels, trusting God, to use us to bring the lost to Christ and help them

grow up in their faith.

Help us grow up in our faith. So, through the Holy Spirit's leading, we need to be a church that is multiplying healthy disciples for Jesus. This is how the Lord chooses to change the world one person at a time.

Through you and through me. In our workplace, at the grocery store, at the gas pump, with your friend, your family, complete strangers that maybe you just met.

And here's a reality that we need to look at today. God uses not just our hearts and our words to others, but He can use our finances and our resources to truly impact this world.

[4 : 43] Now, I don't want to embarrass her, but I feel a little more free to share this since she's leading a team from the church on a mission trip that just left early, early, early this morning heading to Guatemala.

But we have a lady named Shelly in our church, and I've been so impressed with her heart that absolutely beats for mission trips. She's been on so many at this point.

She has led several of our church family on them as well. And she's all about using whatever resources that God has given her to make these happen for herself and for others.

She's very generous, not only with her finances, but also with her time. And the question is, why?

Because she sees the big picture. Her heart beats for more people to know Jesus as Lord and Savior, and she uses her medical background in that to help people in that way, to share the love of God in a very practical way.

So for you note-takers, you can always go to the YouVersion Bible app, Y-O-U-Version. It's absolutely free. It is incredible, put on by a church, or otherwise it would cost money.

[5 : 57] But you can go to the YouVersion Bible app. Go to the bottom right-hand corner. You'll see a menu, those three lines. Go to that. Go to events. Go to First Christian Church, Greensburg, Indiana.

And here's the first thing I want you to see. A faithful steward has a generous heart. A faithful steward has a generous heart.

Charles Spurgeon subbed it up this way. He said, earn all you can, save all you can, and then give all you can. Never try to save out of God's cause.

Such money will canker the rest. Giving to God is no loss. It is putting your substance into the best bank. Giving is true having. As the old gravestone said of the dead man, he says, What I spent I had, what I saved I lost, and what I gave I have.

Man, that is good stuff right there. You know, a bit of years ago, another well-known preacher named W.A. Criswell used to preach from Matthew chapter 6. And he would always end this sermon with these words.

[7 : 02] Old John Raskus put \$300 in the collection plate when it passed. And he said softly, I'll see you in heaven. Those around him said, oh man, old John's getting senile.

He says he's going to see that \$300 in heaven. Now he may meet his maker over there, but he certainly won't meet his money. Now the church treasurer used some of that \$300 to pay the electric bill.

He gave some of it to the preacher to buy gasoline to go visit people. Some went to the ministerial students and some to the mission field. Early one morning, John Raskus died in his sleep as an old man.

On the first Lord's Day in glory, he walked down the streets of gold. And a young fella came running up to him and said, Thank you, Brother John. I was cold and lonely. And it was a dark night.

I saw the light of your church. And just to get out of the dark and the cold, I went in. And while I was there, I prayed the darkness left my soul. And I found Jesus.

[8 : 01] Another came up to him and said, Hey, the preacher came to the filling station. As I filled his tank, you can tell this was years ago. As I filled his tank, he told me about Jesus. And I gave my heart to the Lord.

And I faithfully served my church. Next, John met several grateful people who said, Hey, I want to thank you for those students that you helped. They preached the good news to my family.

And we found the Lord. Next, he came to some people who looked a little differently than he did.

And they said, Thank you, Brother, for sending us the gospel across the sea by giving to missions.

Finally, old John came to Hallelujah Square. And he turned to an angel. And he said, I feel sorry for you, angels. You have never known what it is to be saved by the blood of Jesus, my Lord.

And then he thought a minute, and he added to that, And you don't know what it is to transform the possessions of earth into the treasures of heaven. And to be honest with you, that's why, that's exactly why it's such a joy as a Christian to put that tithe and those offerings in the plate each week. [9 : 06] Because we know that he is using it to impact this world for the kingdom of God. That's the big picture. And listen, there's no doubt that a good portion of our offering every week is going to go to practical things, such as taking care and maintaining our facilities, paying salaries, getting all the supplies we need to do ministry.

Those things are good because they are helping to grow the kingdom. But let me tell you about an area that I'm probably the most proud of. And when I say proud, it's not this arrogant, look at us, we're the bomb.com type of thing, okay?

It's more of a, wow, I am humbled, God, that you are so good. And we want to be faithful to take you at your word.

We always want to give faithfully. And this is what I'm proud of. Back to support missions right here in Decatur County, spreading throughout our state and our nation, and all the way to the ends of the earth, just like we're commanded to do.

And in 2023 alone, we were privileged to give around \$120,000 back to missions, counting Giveaway Sunday.

[10 : 19] And I don't have time to go in detail about all the missions that we support, but let me just name a few of those. We support Mahoning Valley Christian Service Camp in Rush County, who probably ministers to around 1,000 students, maybe more every summer.

Quite a few, even being baptized into Christ, others making commitments to go into ministry. Just an awesome camp. My wife grew up there, impacted her life in big ways, and we are blessed as a church to send a lot of kids there and to support the camp.

Another mission we support on the campus of Ball State is CRU. It used to be called Campus Crusades for Christ. It's just called CRU now. And this is where a lady named Bridget, who is from Greensburg, born and raised, does a great job ministering to college students who then go back to all different places, even around the world, to share the gospel with others.

One of the newer missions that we are supporting is a young married couple who I actually was able to meet in the church that I was at in Tennessee before coming here. And just a wonderful couple.

They were in Bible college at the time. Wonderful couple who loves the Lord. And they just this past year got to Japan to start as missionaries spreading the gospel.

[11 : 42] I'm even a big fan of the Speranza House, who are helping so many ladies to grow past their addictions and discover true life in Christ. You know, a few years back, our elders got together, and they said, you know what, we can do better in the percentage of our giving that we give back to missions at home, across our country, and around the world.

We can do better, and we're going to trust God's leading in this. Took a huge step of faith. And so we've begun this kind of stair-step approach where we are upping that giving every year, taking some big jumps to be a healthy church in this area.

And I love 1 Timothy 6, starting here in verse 17, where the Apostle Paul puts it this way. He says, Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth. And by the way, that's you and me both. We're rich compared to the rest of the world. He says, Which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment.

Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share. In this way, they will lay up treasure for themselves as a firm foundation for the coming age, so that they may take hold of the life that is truly life.

[13 : 05] Now here's a good example of that. Truett Cathy, the man who founded Chick-fil-A, who I believe invented the chicken sandwich, passed away back in 2014.

He was faithful to his church in giving, as well as being a Sunday school teacher for more than 40 years. But on top of that, he funded and operated nine foster homes.

He provided over \$410,000 college scholarships, as well as funding a summer camp for more than 1,000 children each year.

That would be a large bill to make that happen. And one of the Christian principles that he instilled in these children was the value of giving back to God generously.

He would tell them, money's nice to have, as long as you've got it in your hand and not in your heart. See, the Lord is calling us to be a part of this big picture, to be faithful and generous stewards of every material possession we have, to be faithful managers of everything that belongs to God. [14:15] And what a privilege. Man, what a privilege it is to partner with the God of the universe and see lives transformed for Jesus. What a privilege it is to be a faithful steward with a generous heart.

Now, here's the second thing that I want you to see. A faithful steward has servants' hands. A generous heart and then servants' hands.

You know, the truth is that being a good manager for God is so much bigger than our money and our stuff. God also calls us to give back to Him with our time and with our service.

And one example of this that I love is found in Matthew chapter 20. Here you have brothers, James and John, two of Jesus' disciples. And for some reason, their mommy, get that, their mommy comes up to Jesus and asks if her sons can sit on his right and on his left in heaven.

When he comes into the kingdom. In other words, what they wanted was, they wanted to be known as the greatest men to ever live. They wanted the two best seats in the house.

[15:21] Complete pride. Jesus calls that out. Complete pride issue going on here. And when the other ten disciples find out about this, they're about ready to wring their necks because I think they're jealous they didn't think about it too, right?

But Jesus sits them all down and He sets them straight during a time of teaching. Here's what He says in Matthew chapter 20, starting in verse 25. Jesus called them together and said, You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lorded over them and their high officials exercised authority over them.

Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant. And whoever wants to be first must be your slave. Just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve and give His life as a ransom for many.

Now, the big picture is that God wants to use us. Us. Little old you. Little old me. He wants to use us to fulfill the Great Commission.

Doesn't matter how much money you have, how much money you give, how much money you make. If the hands aren't there to serve, then you're missing out. And I'll just be 100% real with you here.

[16:34] This quote by Steve Campbell just rocks my world and I love this quote. It says, Salvation is free, but serving Christ will cost you.

Listen, ministry is messy. Ministry, let me say it again. It deserves it. Ministry is messy. Because we live in a world that has real life struggles and problems. And sometimes I think we have the tendency as people to think that God can't use someone like me.

I'm too bad for God to ever use me. I've been here. I've been there. I've done this. I've said this. I've blah, blah, blah. Whatever it is, I hear people all the time say, well, I don't have any gifts or God won't use me.

And listen, in the words of one of my professors in college, man, that's hogwash, okay? Just this week, I heard a story that may change your mind here. Back in 1972, NASA launched the exploratory space probe named Pioneer 10.

Its primary mission was to reach Jupiter, photograph the planet and its moons, and beam data to Earth about Jupiter's magnetic field, its radiation belt, and its atmosphere.

[17:43] Well, at the time, this was a pretty bold adventure, okay? Because no satellite had gone past Mars. However, Pioneer 10 accomplished its mission and so much more.

Swinging past the giant planet in November of 1973, Jupiter's immense gravity hurled it at a higher rate of speed toward the edge of the solar system.

At 1 billion miles from the sun, Pioneer 10 passed Saturn. At around 2 billion miles, it passed Uranus. Neptune at nearly 3 billion. Pluto at almost 4.

And by 1997, this satellite that was only supposed to last 3 years was 25 years old and 6 billion miles away from the sun.

And even though it was so far away from Earth, it continued to beam back radio signals. But probably the most remarkable thing is that those signals emanated from an 8-watt transmitter.

[18:43] Yes, an 8-watt transmitter, which radiates as much power as a nightlight in your bedroom, okay? So this satellite that could was absolutely not qualified to do what it did.

And you know what? In our strength, we aren't either. But here's the cool thing. If we're willing to let our lives be used in service to God, he will do some awesome things.

Because he definitely has more than 8 watts behind him, okay? Our God is awesome in power. He is omnipotent. He is amazing. And we can trust his strength.

So a generous heart, servants' hands. And then third, a faithful steward has a life-giving tongue. A life-giving tongue. Man, this is a tough one.

You know, when I think of stewardship, I rarely think of speech. I don't think of, oh, I need to be a good steward of my tongue. I've never heard someone preach on stewardship and talk about the words that come out of their mouth.

[19 : 43] But isn't our tongue a huge part of who we are? Isn't it by our words that we are most often defined? You know, back in 1825, there was a man who was sentenced to be hanged because of his part in an uprising against the Russian czar Nicholas I.

But you know, the odd thing is that as they were hanging this man, the rope broke and he fell to the ground. The man popped up pretty quickly and yelled out to the crowd, In Russia, they don't even know how to do anything right.

They can't even make a good rope. Well, the thing he didn't know was that when an accident of this sort happened, it usually resulted in them just letting the person go free.

So a messenger was sent to the czar to see what he wanted to do. And Nicholas I asked the question, Well, did the man say anything when he fell to the ground? And they said, Sire, he said that in Russia, we don't even know how to make a rope.

And that's when the czar said, Well, we're going to prove him wrong. And they did. Now, I know this was an extreme example there, but you know, out of our mouths flow life or death.

[20 : 51] Life or death. I can't tell you how many times I've said something and it's like, Wow, that should not have come out, right? You're probably the same. And in Ephesians chapter 4, verse 29, the Apostle Paul puts it like this.

Through the Holy Spirit, he says, Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen.

And I want to be the first person to say that I struggle with this probably way more than I do giving or serving. In fact, I can think of probably five things I said this week that were absolutely dumb and just not honoring to God.

And that's where we've got to grow. That's where we've all got to walk away from the worldly things like gossip and slander and harsh criticisms that deep down are really just our insecurities trying to lift us up over someone else.

And every day as we get down on our knees in prayer, before we start that day, we've got to ask the Lord to guide these tongues. Help us to be good stewards of everything that comes out of my mouth because we as Christians have an amazing opportunity to give life and to lead people to Jesus by the things that we say.

[22 : 12] Henry N. Ferguson actually put it this way. It's kind of a cool perspective here if you think about it. He said, If someone paid you ten cents for every kind word you said about people and collected five cents for every unkind word, would you be rich or would you be poor?

Man, that's convicted right there. But here's the big picture. We have an amazing opportunity to further the kingdom of God, to do His work on this earth.

But it's going to take everything that we are. It's going to take every one of us being faithful with the resources God has blessed us with and trusted to us as His managers.

It's going to take all of us being loyal with our time and our talents that God has given us. And it's going to take you and me both allowing the Holy Spirit to guide our tongues, our words.

And listen, I don't claim to see into the future, but over the last five and a half years that my family has been here at FCC, I have prayed many, many times for God to take us beyond ourselves, our own man-made plans and ideas about church, and take us beyond that and do things that can only be explained by the Lord's handiwork.

[23 : 33] And I'm excited to see. I am excited to see where God is going to take us as we get on our knees in prayer and we surrender all that we have and all that we are to Him.

And so, church, I only have one last thing to say to you in this series. Let's take God at His word, and you will be blessed.

Let's pray. Heavenly Father, thank you so much for this series that we have gone through together as the body of Christ.

We always want to preach the whole counsel of your word. And while this can be a topic that a lot of people clam up on, that a lot of people get real quiet and kind of shut down, the reality is that giving also reflects a heart.

A heart that should be a heart of worship will always be a heart that is faithful in giving back the way that your word calls us to. And so while this can be a tough subject to talk about, we don't shy away from it.

[24 : 38] We want to honor you, and we want to realize that where our treasure is, there our heart will be also. So, Father, every area of our life, our words, our time management, how we serve you, everything about our life, we just ask that you will take it, that you will help us to excel in every area of our faith, including our giving.

So thank you for just speaking truth over us, and may we be faithful to you in everything. Jesus, thank you for dying on the cross to give us hope.

And we pray all this in your precious name. Amen and amen. I want to just share the simple gospel message with you today.

And it goes just something like this. God could see that we had sinned against him, and that one sin separates us from a perfect heavenly father.

And so loving us, desiring a relationship with us, desiring that no one should perish in eternal hell, but be in heaven with him, God sent his son, Jesus.

[25 : 59] God in the flesh came to this earth, lived a perfect sinless life, went to the cross, God's perfect plan, carried out by unfaithful men.

God went to the cross, was nailed to that cross, and gave his life to take our place, to be a substitute for us, to take our sins that we've committed, that deserve eternal punishment, to take them upon his shoulders, so that he could carry that burden, and be that sacrificial lamb for us.

And then, three days later, he rose from the grave to conquer death, and offer life to you and me both. And when we come to this realization, that that is the most powerful good news in all the world, and we surrender our lives to Christ, he will come in, he will forgive, he will start the process of transformation through the Holy Spirit, that lives inside of every child of God, and he will use our lives in ways that, honestly, will just blow you away.

And so today, if you'd like to talk about surrendering your life to Jesus, please give us a call, 812-663-8488, First Christian Church, Greensburg, Indiana.

My name is Ray Sweet, I'm the lead pastor, 812-663-8488, or, you can just go ahead and email me, at ray at fccgreensburg.com.

[27 : 35] Hey, thank you so much for tuning in today, I pray God's richest blessings on your life. Thank you.