



JESUS GIVES THROUGH US

Part 11 of Jesus Loves His Church

Pastor Mark Driscoll | September 09, 2012

ARE YOU RICH OR POOR?

So, would you classify yourself as rich or poor? Rich or poor? And if you're rich, would you have certain attitudes toward the poor, like, "They should work. They're killing me. They've got me in a horrible tax bracket. They're lazy. They shouldn't have gotten pregnant. It's their own fault. You know how they are, those poor people."

How about you poor people? Especially those at Mars Hill Ballard, University District, Downtown, and of course Portlandia. Those who are poor, do you have any attitude toward those who are rich? "Yes, they're thieves and crooks, and they rip us off, and we need to tax them more, more lashes for the rich." *Robin Hood* is your favorite book of all time.

And what happens is then, well, you're poor, what's your political party? Democrat. You're rich, you're Republican.

We even have it in the church where we have two theologies. You're poor, you have a poverty theology. "Jesus was poor, I'm poor. Hey, look, I'm like Jesus." Maybe not exactly. Some of you, if you tend to be rich, you tend to gravitate toward a prosperity theology. "Oh, I'm rich because God blessed me. He must love me more than those poor people."

And if you ask the wrong question, you go the wrong direction. And this is part of the acrimony and the hostility, even in an election year cycle like we find ourselves in. It's the rich and the poor, and it's class war, and which is going to win, and which is going to lose.

ARE YOU A GENEROUS PERSON?

Let me ask an entirely different question, a question that is much closer to the Scriptures than political arguments. Are you a generous person? Doesn't matter if you're poor, doesn't matter if you're rich. God cares whether or not you're a giver or a taker, whether you're generous or stingy. And what can happen is we start thinking in a way that is worldly and not biblical. We start thinking it's about rich and poor, it's not about generosity. Are you a generous person or not?

I'll tell you, for me personally, this is one thing I'm very, very grateful for. I grew up in a home that wasn't rich. My ancestors, historically, came from Ireland because of a famine, starving to death, settled in the Midwest. My one grandpa was a diesel mechanic, my other was a red potato farmer; not the richest guys.

My mom and dad moved out to the Northwest so my dad could have work. He was a construction worker. And we had times where things were good; we had times where it was really hard, depending upon what the work was like. My parents never went into debt. My dad worked very, very hard, and we had five kids, and my mom stayed home and learned how to stretch a buck, and we were not rich. We were poor, working-class poor, but generous.

In the neighborhood I grew up in, there were a lot of kids who were first-generation immigrants, and so, you know, their families are just trying to get started, and they're at zero or in a hole. And most of the kids in my neighborhood didn't even have a dad, so a lot of single moms, and a lot of poverty, and a lot of kids who were struggling. Yet, at our home, it was the place the kids would come. So, it was set up that the kids would come to our house and my mom would feed them.

I can still remember shopping for a coat with my mom when I was little at Sears Surplus. Sears is where you go to buy stuff, and then Sears Surplus is where you buy cheaper stuff. So we went to Sears Surplus—I don't even know if it still exists. And I remember my mom getting extra coats. We each were getting a winter coat; she got extra coats. And I said, "Mom, why are we getting extra coats?" She said, "Because there's kids in the neighborhood who don't have a coat, and when they come over, we're going to give them a coat."

I could still remember as well, my dad coached baseball, in part because he was the only dad. He'd never played baseball, but if you're the only dad, you're also the baseball coach. And so my dad was the baseball coach, and I remember my dad would go to thrift stores and second-hand stores in the course of the off-season, and he'd buy used gloves and then we'd keep sort of a stockpile of baseball gloves.

"Hey Dad, why did we do that?" "Well, because, you know, Marky." They both still call me Marky. "You know, Marky." You can't, unless it's Pastor Marky, I guess, but—"Hey, Marky, you know, some of the kids, they don't have gloves, and when they try out for the team what are they gonna—" "Oh yeah, that's true." You're going to be a really bad baseball player, but a really good victim without a baseball glove. You're just going to take one over, and over, and over. So, kids would actually try out for our baseball team and didn't own a baseball glove. So, give them a glove.

Generosity. It doesn't matter if you're poor; doesn't matter if you're rich. It matters if you're generous. If you're a giver and not a taker. If you're someone who is generous and not stingy.

My fear is that even sometimes those of us who are Christians, we could start thinking in a way that is worldly and not biblical. So, if you're at a more affluent place like Mars Hill Orange County, or Mars Hill Bellevue, or Mars Hill Sammamish, or maybe up toward Mars Hill Shoreline, you could start to think that having means is a sign of God's blessing. It

may or may not be. Again, if you're in Portland, or Downtown, or U-District, or Ballard and you're young, and college-aged, and single, and poor, well of course you'd think poor people are closer to God. "I'm poor." Rich people are thinking the same thing.

The truth is it doesn't matter if you're rich or poor, it matters if you know Jesus Christ. That's how you get close to God. And God doesn't care if you're poor or rich. He cares a lot about whether or not you're a generous giver.

And so as we conclude our "Jesus Loves His Church" sermon series, we're going to talk about the fact that Jesus gives through us, and we're going to start by talking about Jesus. We'll be in 2 Corinthians 8-9. And I can't unpack the whole section because it would take too long, so I'm going to pull a few big ideas out of 2 Corinthians 8-9. You can study it for yourself and discuss it with your Community Group.

JESUS IS THE MOST GENEROUS GIVER

And here's the Apostle Paul's first big idea: Jesus is the most generous giver ever. Okay? We start with Jesus. Some of you are like, "Here we go, megachurch pastor going to take my loot. No." You already have both hands out, one on your wallet, the other on your car keys, because you're going to leave. Right? Just hang in there. Before we talk about your loot, we're going to talk about Jesus. Before we talk about you giving anything, I want to talk about you getting something.

Here's how he says it in 2 Corinthians 8:9. "You know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was—" what? "Rich." Was Jesus rich before he came to the earth? When he lived in heaven forever as God, rich? Yes or no? Oh yes. Like, really, really rich.

Here's the picture of heaven: "Seated on a throne." That's usually an indication. Or how many of you have a chair? Very few of us have a throne. A throne, now that says something. "Where will you be?" "I'll be on my throne." "Well." And he's surrounded by angels who minister to him and worship him, and—wow, that's quite a staff.

Heaven, as well, is described as a place with streets made of what? Gold. You have a lot of loot when you're paving with gold. Amen? "We have so much gold, what do we do?" "I don't know, pave. Pave. Just highways of gold. I don't know, there's just so much! Just pave." I would submit to you, alright, Jesus, right now, in glory, death, burial, resurrection, ascended back into heaven, he's got it pretty good. He's rich. And he was rich in eternity past. He is rich right now, but something happened.

"For your sake, he became," what? "Poor." Really poor. Like, his mom was a junior high kid. He lived in a small town with a couple dozen people. His home was probably the size of a parking stall for a vehicle today. He had no running water. There was only one well in that town, so he and his momma, they'd have to carry the bucket over to the well to bring the water to the house. If he wanted to use the restroom, he had to leave his little house and go use the outdoor restroom. Poor. Really, really poor. His dad was a what? Carpenter. This is the kind of guy who's got a lunchbox and a tool belt and gets paid by the hour. That's his dad.

So, he went from luxury to poverty. He went from glory to humility. He went from being served to serving. He went from seated on a throne to laid in a manger. Now, this is not what you'd expect, right? I mean, right now, the thrust of the earth is to go from poverty to riches. There's no large group of people right now trying to figure out how to have less money, right? There's no, "We're rich but we'd like to be poor. Where can we take the class on how to do that? We'd like to be broke. We'd like to be homeless." I mean, God was homeless.

You start to think about it. "Though he was rich, for our sake he became poor." He humbled himself to come down and to join us. So, the eternal God, the maker of heaven and earth, enters into human history as the God-man Jesus Christ. "So that you by his poverty might become rich." He talks about Jesus coming to identify with us and trading places for us.

Let's talk about him financially, and then let's talk about him spiritually. Yes or no, did Jesus work a job? Yes, he did. And with his money, he tithed and paid taxes. Okay? They taxed God! Okay? Governments are always the same, right? It doesn't matter what government, they're always the same, like, "Hey, there's God! Tax him! Tax him." So, Jesus paid his taxes to the Roman government.

The Roman government was a horrendous government because God's people wanted to live freely to worship God, and yet part of being overtaken by the Roman government was you had to worship their king, their Caesar, as a god. You had to give your money to your enemy. Can you imagine giving your money to your enemy? Yet Jesus, we read in the Bible, he paid his taxes. He paid his taxes.

It says on one occasion he didn't have the money for his taxes. Do you remember this story? It's one of the funniest stories in the Bible. Jesus says, "Oh, well I need you guys—" Tells his disciples, "Go fishing, alright, throw the line in the water, reel in the fish, open the fish's mouth, there'll be a coin in there, in the mouth of the fish. Take the coin and pay my taxes." That's broke, right? That's broke.

How many of you, tax time, you're like, "I don't know, I'm going fishing. Maybe I'll find a fish that swallowed a credit card with no limit and . . . I can pay my taxes." You're broke, right? That's a broke-guy plan. Jesus is broke, homeless, construction worker, getting taxed. So, some of you who are poor, you're like, "I like this Jesus." I know. He comes to identify with us.

In addition, he paid his tithe. He says in places like Matthew 5:17-18, "Don't think I've come to abolish the law. I've come to fulfill it. I obey all the Scriptures." How much was the tithe in the Old Testament? How many of you would say 10 percent? Okay. Some of you raised your hand boldly, some of you think this is a trick question so you're at shoulder length. You're like—in worship, you're like, "I'm not totally Charismatic, but I'm not against the Holy Spirit. I'm going to hang out here in the safe zone. Right here." Okay. That's where some of you are at right now. "I was going to say ten, but—"

Okay, now, tithe literally means a tenth, and in the Old Testament, the beginning of the tithes was 10 percent. In addition, there were feasts, festivals, there was money allocated for the poor, there were certain things that would happen on, let's say, seven-year cycles. If you total it all up, the required minimum, mandatory amount was over 25 percent.

Some of you come here, you're like, "Pastor Mark, are you saying we should tithe? It's 25 percent." Feel free, and pay your taxes, and then you could be like Jesus, because that's what they did to him. Twenty-five percent for ministry and back to the Lord, plus whatever the government imposed upon him.

So, he went from luxury to poverty. That's what he did, financially. What did he do spiritually? Well, here's what Jesus does for us spiritually. We're all sinners by nature and choice,

and as a result, we've accrued a debt to God. God made us to live a certain way and we haven't. All the things that we've done wrong accrue a debt. All the things we've failed to do right accrue a debt. We have a massive debt that we owe to God and Jesus Christ comes. God sends his very best, his only begotten Son, and Jesus comes and he literally pays our debt, our spiritual debt, to God the Father.

He lives a life without any sin. The sin that we commit is not experienced by Jesus, and Jesus goes to the cross and there he substitutes himself. For our sake he who was spiritually rich also became spiritually poor and cursed, and the wrath of God was poured out on the Son of God. And Jesus suffers and dies on the cross in our place for our sins, paying our debt to God, declaring it himself, "It is finished. The debt is paid in full." And Jesus traded places with us.

So here's what this means: Jesus is a giver, not a taker. Jesus is generous, not stingy. One way of seeing all of salvation is that Jesus gives and we receive. Some of you are here and you're not Christians; you're thinking this is a lecture about money. First of all, it's a lecture about Jesus.

Some of you would come and ask, "Well, how does someone become a Christian? What do they do?" No, it's not what they do, it's what he's done. It's not what they give to Jesus, it's what they receive from Jesus. Right, Christians? We come to God not with our hands full, "God, here's all the good things I've done for you." We come with our hands empty, "Jesus, I need you to give to me." Forgiveness of sin, salvation, reconciled relationship with God the Father, the Holy Spirit, eternal life. Jesus is the greatest giver, the most generous giver, in the history of the world. Everyone who is a Christian knows, because they have experienced, that Jesus gives generously.

And just think about it. I mean, one of the things I like to do with the Driscoll kids is I want them to have an attitude of gratitude. And what can happen is even in our prayer life, your prayer life can become exclusively, "God, please give me this, please give me this, please do this, please do that, please give me this, please do that." It's also very important to pray what I like to call thankful prayers. So, sometimes—oftentimes at night or around dinner, I'll ask the kids, "What are you thankful for today? What are you thankful for?" to see where Jesus has been giving.

And some parents will say, "Well, I don't want to spoil my kids." I do. Okay? I do. I just don't want them to act spoiled. There's a difference, right? You can give generously to your kids, you can love them, bless them, ice cream, hugs, I'll throw you in the pool, let's hang out. You can be generous and raise kids who are thankful because they've learned, "Oh, that's a gift, that's a gift, that was nice, thank you, I don't deserve that, that was grace. Oh, and it ultimately all comes from the Lord." It all comes from the Lord and that cultivates an attitude of gratitude.

Start to think about it in this way: what do you have that God has given? Okay, the earth, nice planet, right? Custom-built for you and me, much cooler than the sun, thankfully. It's a great planet. Hey, thanks Lord. Nice Earth. Do you like water? He made it. Do you like sun? He made it. Do you like air? I do. He made it. He made it. Do you like your sins forgiven? That's a gift. You like God's love? That's a gift. You like eternal life? That's a gift. If you're looking forward to the resurrection of the dead, another gift. How about living in the Father's house forever in the place that Jesus built? Gift. How about brothers and sisters in Christ, and the church, or the Scriptures, or a spiritual gift to do ministry? You know what it all is? It's all a gift, Mars Hill.

And the more we understand that Jesus is the most generous giver, we realize we don't give so that he would love us, we give because he does. We don't give to get, we give because we've already received. We have an attitude of gratitude. We say, "We're the children of God and our Dad's a good dad, and Jesus is our big brother, and he gives generously and gladly, and we receive humbly and thankfully so we can also share generously." It's like a dad giving a kid two popsicles and the kid knows, "I'm supposed to give one to my brother." And that's the view of stewardship in the Bible.

And so he talks about it in this way: it's a grace, it's an unmerited gift, it's something we don't deserve, it comes through the Lord Jesus Christ. He was rich and became poor, so it's not about rich and poor. Poor people can be like Jesus, rich people can be like Jesus, because rich and poor, well, Jesus has experienced both. Amen?

So we can set aside all this class warfare, socialism, communism, conflict, set aside a lot of the economic arguments and get back to Jesus, and that's exactly where he takes us. Looking at Jesus giving us his righteousness, giving us his salvation, giving us his sinless life, giving us his substitutionary death, giving us his forgiveness of sin, and what that does, that causes us to receive the good things that Jesus gives, and then have a heart change that compels us to want to share them because that's all worship is. It's mirroring, imaging, reflecting who Jesus is to others.

So, firstly, he talks about Jesus and I would ask you: Do you know Jesus? Have you received his gift of salvation? Have you received his gift of righteousness? Do you understand that he was rich and he became poor so that, spiritually speaking, you can have your debt paid to God, you can be richly blessed by the righteousness of Jesus Christ? Who's happy to receive this gift? It's amazing, isn't it? It's great. And some of you may not understand, this distinguishes Jesus from other religions. Other religions say, "Do this, give this." Jesus says, "I've done it, I give it to you."

GENEROSITY IS MEASURED BY SACRIFICE

So then he moves on to his second point about generosity, that God, through Jesus Christ, is generous to us, and we are to be generous to others. He says it this way. He says that generosity is measured by sacrifice.

Here's how he says it in 2 Corinthians 8:12-14: "For if the readiness is there, it is acceptable according to what a person has, not according to what he does not have." If you make \$50,000 a year, you shouldn't tithe \$100,000 a year. That's what he's saying. "For I do not mean that others should be eased and you burdened, but that as a matter of fairness your abundance at the present time should supply their need, so that their abundance may supply your need, that there may be fairness."

Here's what he's talking about. Some people will always ask, "How much should I give? What percentage of my income should I give back to God through the church?" And they'll go to the Old Testament and say, "10 percent? All the tithes combined, 25 percent?" New Testament, new covenant, grace-centered giving doesn't set an amount, so we don't teach tithing at Mars Hill. We don't. We don't. What we do teach is sacrifice, and that's what the Bible's talking about here.

I'll give you an example. Let's just say we decide everybody gives 25 percent. For the single mother with three kids whose husband just left with his secretary and emptied the bank account, that's going to destroy her whole family. For the person who is very affluent, wealthy, inherited money, has a company, owns, you know, a decent investment portfolio and has

margin, they may not even feel 25 percent.

So what does sacrifice look like for each person? Well, for the mom, it may look like 1 percent and that might be an enormous generosity. For the person who's very affluent, it may be tithing, giving 90 percent and living off of 10 percent. I've actually got an acquaintance who gives 90 percent and lives off of 10 percent. Well, the single mom can't do that.

And what he's talking about is everyone needs to find themselves somewhere on this continuum. So I'd ask you what percentage of income, what percentage of gross—that's what it means by firstfruits—has God the Holy Spirit compelled you to say, "That's where I'm at this year and, you know, if I lose my job and things get bad, I may roll back, if things get good, I may roll forward, but this is where I'm at right now with the percentage of giving that God has appointed to me."

We don't teach a percentage. Instead, what we teach is receiving from Jesus and then prayerfully, carefully considering what he's asking of you, and then we are certainly glad that you would follow through in those obligations and we rejoice in whatever that percentage is.

And in context here, he's talking about different churches. So in the context of 2 Corinthians 8–9, there was a church in Jerusalem, and that's kind of where everything got started and where Christianity exploded in the Day of Pentecost, and then from there, it kind of became headquarters if we can use that language, and the churches and church plants went out from Jerusalem. Jerusalem was kind of like our Mars Hill Ballard. Mars Hill Ballard was kind of Mars Hill 1.0 and it sent out all the early church plants and missionaries, and so much got done out of Mars Hill Ballard.

What happened then, over time, is that an economic downturn—they call it a famine—hit Jerusalem, and they were really struggling. And that church, financially, not because of any sin but because of circumstance, went into a major decline cycle. So, some of the churches it had helped start, like the church in Macedonia that was spiritually connected like a branch on a trunk, they started giving back to help the church of Jerusalem, and they were a poor church. It says out of their exceeding poverty came exceeding generosity.

This affects—and I need you to understand this—our economic model at Mars Hill Church. We are one church in fourteen locations. We are planning, by the grace of God, to open at least five more in the next twelve to eighteen months. We're spread across four states. Some of our churches are in very affluent areas; some of them are very poor areas. Some of the areas, it's intact families with husbands and wives; others, it's single moms who are struggling to get by. Some of our locations, it's all singles; others, it's a ton of college students.

And their income level and their giving level will vary, so what we do is we establish our staffing matrix and our budget, not based upon what each local church gives, but by how many people they have. Because what we don't want are churches in affluent areas to have huge staffs and then churches in impoverished areas to have no staff, because we're all one family, which means if one of the kids has a little extra, they share with the kid who doesn't have much. And I need you to have not a consumer's heart, but a parent's heart toward the church.

I think one of the more grievous conversations I've had in recent months as we're out visiting the churches and meeting with leaders and people—I won't name the person or the church, the Mars Hill location, but it was sad. After we explained this, someone came up who was a leader in the church, an unpaid leader in the church, and said, "I don't care about the other Mars Hill churches." That's like a brother saying, "I don't care about my sisters." Okay, then there's a heart problem.

I said, "You don't care?" He said, "No." I said, "Do you care about this church?" He said, "I don't care about that church." I said, "That's the church that planted you. All the original money that got this thing started, the entire core group that started this thing, actually pretty much all your elders leading this church, they all came from there, and you don't care?"

I said, "What about a place like Rainier Valley where we're meeting on the grounds of the Union Gospel Mission, and next door is the nice transitional housing for women who have had some very hard life circumstances, and their children are living with them, and there's no fathers in sight? We start a student ministry there and it becomes our biggest student ministry immediately, and none of those kids have a dad. Do you not care about them? You live in a nice suburban home, you got a wife, you got kids, you know, you got a couple-car garage. Your life is okay. What you're saying is, 'I don't care about those single moms and their kids in our church because they live in a different zip code than me.'" Wow. Okay, this is a heart problem.

I said, "Well, why do you not love them?" He said, "Well, I don't even know them." I said, "Do you even love the people in the other services at our church?" He said, "No, I go to a morning service. I don't care about the people at the evening service." Wow. Wow.

I want you to have a paternal heart, a heart like a mom and a dad looking at all the kids saying, "I love all the kids and I want to take care of all the kids, and those kids who have more and they're like the big brothers and sisters, I want them to look after the little brothers and sisters." Amen?

Mars Hill, we're a church family, and so if you're in a more affluent Mars Hill church, a Bellevue, a Sammamish, a Shoreline, you may wonder, "We give our money. How come we don't get to spend it all?" Well, some of it's going to help new churches just like somebody spent to get yours started. Some of the money's going to help other churches as they're really struggling because it's a lot of college students, or it's single moms, or it's in an impoverished area. Otherwise, we'd never go reach poor people because it wouldn't make any economic sense. As it is, we believe that rich and poor need Jesus. We believe Jesus loves rich and poor. Amen?

And that's what he's talking about here. He's talking about, "It's a matter of fairness, that your abundance at the present time should supply their need, so that their abundance may supply your need, that there may be fairness." What he's saying is maybe one of these churches in Mars Hill is struggling right now, so another church that's thriving can help them and then over time, it's going to reverse. Then this church becomes strong and they're able to help this church that is struggling.

What's sacrifice look like for you? I've shared this many times. I'll give you a little indicator here, culturally. More than one in four American Protestants give \$0 a year. Okay? Number two, the median annual giving for a Christian is \$200 a year, just over ½ percent of after-tax income. That's not a lot, right? Two hundred dollars a year? Five percent of Christians give about 60 percent of all contributions. So, hope those guys don't get sick. We've got a real problem. So, if you look at this, what you will see is that many Christians worship their wealth, they don't worship with their wealth.

And immediately, you're going to think, "Yeah, that's right, rich people need to give more." Maybe, but everybody needs to consider what it is that God has appointed for them and then be good stewards with that.

And let me say this, you've always got an excuse. You're a college student, you got a great excuse, right? "I'm a college student." Grace and I got married in college and we started

giving to our church at that time. There are two kinds of broke I always say: broke and college broke. Right? If you're in college, you've got a built-in excuse.

But then you graduate and you're single. What's your excuse now? "Well, I'm selfish. Isn't that what singleness is for? I've not had nice things, I've been in college. I need to go get new clothes, new car, new place to live. I'm going to spend some money on me, disposable time and income." Sometimes the most selfish people are single people.

Then you get married. What's your excuse now? "Well, now we're married. Now we've got to buy a house. Now we've got to try and start a family. Now we've got to pay off our college debt. Now we've got to pay off her credit card debt, you know? We have to get caught up."

Well, then you get pregnant. "Oh, well, now we're going to have to downsize our income. Now we've got to get a bigger car. We've got to get a bigger place to live. Kids are expensive." Right? Have you noticed that? They cost money. Girls, statistically, cost more than boys. We all saw that coming. They cost money.

And then all of a sudden, you know, oh, now your kids get older, so their stuff gets more expensive and your house needs to get bigger. "Oh, now they're driving. Oh, now they're going to college. Oh, now we've got to help them with college." And you know what, you can have an excuse from the time you're in college to the time your kids are in college. You say, "Well, I was going to but I just never got there."

And it's not about the percentage. It's not about the amount. It's about whether or not you understand Jesus is a generous giver, and out of the joy of being a receiver, you want to be a means by which he gives to others. That's the issue.

JESUS CARES ABOUT STEWARDSHIP

Now, I know exactly what's going to happen at this point. You're going to start thinking, because there's a little attorney that lives in each of us trying to defend all of our evil. Okay? This little attorney is now whispering in your ear, "Well, I bet you they're not good stewards. You could give—they're a megachurch. I bet you he flew here on a jet with his seven wives and they carried him in on a throne." Okay?

So, the next question is if Jesus is a generous giver and good steward, and you are aspiring to be a generous giver and a good steward, are you giving Jesus' resources to a church that's a generous giver and a good steward? It's not just enough to give. You've got to make sure that what you're giving to is actually stewarding the resources well.

That's fair, right? I mean, some of you would have questions. You're like, "Well, what do you guys do with the money? You know, do the kids count it? Like, where's the accounting department? What do we—you know, what do we do?" That's a fair question, and Paul brings it up, and here's what he has to say. He says Jesus cares about stewardship.

He says it this way, in 2 Corinthians 8:20–21: "We take this course so that no one should blame us about this generous gift that is being administered by us." There's the stewardship issue. Paul's saying, "You've given this generous gift. We're the administrators, we're the stewards, we're the ones who receive the gift and then we want to wisely, humbly, in a way that is godly, take care of the resources that have been entrusted to our care."

"For we aim at what is honorable not only in the Lord's sight but also in the sight of man." So, when it comes to a church or a ministry, receiving tithes, offerings, gifts from God's people, it's really important that, number one, the way that the resources are stewarded is pleasing in the Lord Jesus' sight, that Jesus would look and say, "That's okay. That's pretty good right there. You know, I'm encouraged by that," and in the sight of man, meaning you obey the law, right? There's nothing worse than a pastor doing prison ministry from the inside because of tax evasion, right? There's nothing worse than that. And so it's not just—it has to be that Jesus says that things are taken care of well and that the government agrees. That the government agrees.

So, here's what I'm going to do at this point. I'm going to talk a little bit about how we steward our resources, and this is important. On more than eight hundred occasions, the Bible talks about wealth, finances, possessions, tithing, and stewardship. Twenty-five percent of Jesus' parables or more are about stewardship, what somebody did with something that they received. So, it's super, super important. And I'll answer some of the general questions that come up.

First of all, people ask, "Well, who oversees the finances at the church?" Well, there is a finance team of elders and deacons. It's a team of eight. Their tasks are broken down into income, expenses, purchasing, and then financial reporting.

Overseeing that team is Pastor Sutton Turner, your executive pastor. He's got an MBA from a little school called Harvard and he has been the CEO of companies upwards of fifteen hundred employees, managing billions of dollars of assets, okay? He felt called of God to take a significant pay decrease. He was actually working for a royal family, now he's just working for the King of kings. He has decided to take a significant discount in his income to come and serve at Mars Hill Church, and so he has built the finance team.

Now, working with him, under him is your CFO, Kerry Dodd, B.A. in business with an emphasis in accounting from the University of Washington, ten years working for Deloitte and Touche, a very well-known national accounting firm, three years experience as the CFO of another large church. He and his wife moved back to the area. She is, in fact, from the Puget Sound area.

The other members on this team, the six of them, they all have degrees in business, at least a B.A., and in addition, they all have experience in human resources, or accounting, or whatever their specialization might be in the workforce for large, successful, for-profit companies. Okay, so that's the essence of the finance team. You know, none of us pastors can sign a check, none of us are present when the offering is counted, none of that.

The way this works, as well, some of you will ask, "What about the collection of the finances?" Well, we say the easiest way to give is to go online to MarsHill.com and click under give and give online. But for those of you who mail your check in during the week, or you give cash or a check on Sunday, you ask, "Well, what happens to that?"

Well, first of all, it's collected, and it's collected by teams of people that we do a background check on because we don't want, you know, criminals collecting our offering. And they'll take the offering and count it immediately, and it's always a team, and that team is never a couple, like Bonnie and Clyde. Okay? So, we never let a couple count the offering. And then we take the offering, and it is, in fact, deposited.

And then some of you will ask, "Well, how do we know that the money is well spent?" Well, first of all, we don't hand out a lot of credit cards. I mean, you can imagine in your family

if you gave credit cards to all the kids and said, "I trust you. If you feel like you need it, go for it." You'd be like, "That's a lot of Xbox and they're swimming in Mountain Dew." You know? So, we don't hand out a lot of credit cards, and for any purchase, I think it requires two levels of approval. So, someone can't just go buy something. They need oversight and supervision so that it can be cleared.

Also, the way it works is we have a purchasing department. So, with fourteen churches and growing, not only do we want to ensure that we're only spending the money that is necessary, but that we're getting the best deal. How many of you are like my wife and if you can get a deal, that's a happy day? Full price? You're like, "No." It becomes a personal mission, like, "I'm going to find the best price." I married that girl, okay? There's a whole bunch of reasons I love her. That's one. She's always looking for a deal.

The church needs to behave just like your personal budget. If we need something, then the requisition is made, and if it's approved by the finance department, they will go shopping for the best deal, lowest price, because the church should conduct itself like you do, get the best deal.

And so you know as well, as soon as our bill comes in, we have a practice of immediately paying our vendors, because there's nothing worse than, "Yeah, I sold something to Mars Hill and they didn't pay me, and they quoted a verse about not suing, but I think they're very suspicious people, those Mars Hill people." So, if we do business with you, our goal is as soon as you send the invoice, we send the check because we want to have a good reputation with our vendors and with those that we purchase from.

Then the question often gets asked, "Well, what about salaries?" I'll say a couple of things on this. Just like your profession if you're in the workforce, there are national job descriptions and then pay ranges and scales for certain levels of responsibility. Everybody gets a job description. We do twice a year annual 360 performance reviews. People are weighted according to their responsibility and duties, and then this national scale is used to set the pay scale. And we tend not to be anywhere near the top. We're not at the bottom. We're somewhere in that reasonable middle as a general rule, and the salaries and the salary ranges are not set by the paid employees.

So, unpaid leaders in the church and unpaid leaders outside of the church oversee the establishing of the salaries of the employees. So, it's not like somebody is a pastor at one of the churches and sets their own salary. You could go to jail for that. It's illegal. So, part of this is not only acceptable in the eyes of God, but also acceptable in the eyes of government.

And what this means practically as well, we tend to have a very small staff. If you include, I don't know, thirty-some services a Sunday, fourteen locations, five residents getting ready to be sent out to plant, plus the Resurgence and everything else we're doing, the fact that we only have 136 employees is very, very, very small. I was meeting with pastors of somewhat larger churches recently. One had 750 employees, the other had 800, okay? One of the churches owns 500 acres of real estate. We call that Seattle. Like—so, for us, we tend to use very small square footage for the number of people, and we tend to have a very, very, very small staff for the size of our church.

So, you need to know, your Community Group leaders, your Redemption Group leaders, your ushers, your greeters, those helping your kids, those in the band, whatever you're enjoying, it's probably someone who's giving of their time generously. So, could you do this? When you see them, could you just look them in the eye and say thank you? Say thank you and join them by giving generously of some of your time. But we tend to have a very, very lean staff.

And then also, some of you will ask about external accountability, and this is important. I'll explain the external accountability for you. We have a nationally reputable, perhaps the most reputable, not-for-profit CPA firm, and every year we pay them to do a full audit. They go through all of our policies, procedures, salaries. They go through all of our expenses and books. They do a full audit on Mars Hill Church, and then they give us a report card, and every year we've gotten an A+, and we praise God for that.

In addition, then, we are finalizing our application to the Evangelical Christian Financial Accountability Association. It's like the Good Housekeeping Seal of Approval to also provide all of our finances for outside oversight. And in addition to that, we have an external board of leaders, godly people, some of them pastors in other churches, that also have access to our finances and all of our reporting, just to make sure that we have internal and external, we have Christian and non-Christian oversight and accountability.

And we also have contracts with the banks for certain real estate that we own, and the banks give us additional requirements, like you have to keep this much in cash reserve, you have to keep your finances at this kind of level so that we don't default on any of our loans.

So, between the banks, the internal and external controls, the external audit, and now joining another accountability organization, it's our way of saying, "By the grace of God, we are good stewards, and if you are a good steward who gives generously, we want to be, and are, by the grace of God, good stewards stewarding wisely."

I think it's fair to ask those kind of questions. I really do. I really do, and so I'm glad to answer them. But that's what he says. It's a generous gift, it's a grace, and it needs to be stewarded well.

GOD LOVES A CHEERFUL GIVER

Now, here's the last big idea. God loves a cheerful giver. How many of you, when you pay your bills, you're like "Yes! Bill day! Yes! Whoo! The bills!" Just smiling, singing, dancing, clicking your heels, for some of us without getting off the ground, but you're excited. How many of you are excited to pay your bills? One of you. You need to be drug tested. There's no reason to be excited paying your bills. No reason.

But here's what he says. When it comes to giving to the church and the cause of Jesus, he says something that's a little unexpected. "The point is this: whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will reap bountifully." Part of it's financially. And God's not promising to make you rich, but God is looking for good stewards. Jesus says if you are trustworthy with a little, he can give you more. The context there is finances. If God's given to you and you've blown it, why in the world would he give you more to blow? He's looking for good stewards.

And it's not just return on financial investment, it's return spiritually on a financial investment, meaning if God gives to you, he wants you to pay your bills, and love your family, and also give generously to help the gospel go forward.

"Each one must give as he has decided in his heart." So some of you are like, "How much should I give?" I don't know, ask Jesus. I don't know if it's 1 percent or 99 percent. I don't know. Whatever's sacrificial for you and he tells you, that's great with us.

“Not reluctantly or under compulsion.” It’s not about guilt, it’s about gladness. It’s not having to give, it’s getting to give, and it’s celebrating. “Everything I have belongs to Jesus. He gives so much to me, now I get to share with others.”

“For God,” what, “a cheerful giver”? “God loves a cheerful giver.” So, when we take our offering at Mars Hill, I want you to know, it shouldn’t feel like it’s tax day, right? It shouldn’t feel like we’re in the cubicle of some auditor at the IRS.

It’s cheerful because, number one, it’s recognizing Jesus is a giver. I get salvation, I get eternal life, I get friendship with God, I get the Scriptures, I get the Holy Spirit, I get the resurrection of the dead. Wow! Oh, in addition, all my possessions are from the Lord. Jesus’ brother James says it this way: “Every good and perfect gift comes down from God.” And then as we give, we’re saying, “Thanks, Lord, that I get to keep so much. Thanks, Lord, that I get to be part of what you’re doing. Thanks, Lord, that I get to see. I get to see others blessed.” So, as we give, it should really be a cheerful thing, a glad thing.

It’s like on Christmas. I’ve said it before, but do you get happiest when you open all your presents or when you watch someone you love open the present you gave them. It’s always better to watch them open their present. That’s why Christmas is always this argument: “Open your present!” “No, you open yours.” “No, you go first.” “No, you go first.” Right? Because you’re so excited to see them open your gift, and they’re so excited to see you open their gift, and that’s a cheerful giver. Friends, nobody’s happier than Jesus Christ. No one’s given as much as Jesus, and if giving makes you cheerful, Jesus is the happiest person there’s ever been. He gives cheerfully.

Giving Digs Up Our Root Idols

A couple ways that giving becomes cheerful practically. Number one, giving digs up our root idols. Now, we tend to have surface idols like comfort, or security, or status. “If I drive that car, wear those clothes, and their name is on my underwear, that says something about me as a person. That’s says something. I am not Fruit of the Loom. I am not.” Right?

And so what happens is we tend to establish our identity by our possessions. What do you wear? What do you drive? Oh, that says something. And when we give, it really attacks that root idol. “Wow! Do I think that what I drive and what I wear makes me someone better than the righteousness of God in Jesus Christ?”

Comfort. “Man, I would give, but then I would not have as much, and I’d have to make some sacrifices, and I—oh wow, my idol of comfort’s been exposed through my giving.”

Or security. “I don’t really need all that money, but I set it off to the side, because if I ever do need it, then I can lean on it instead of Jesus and I’ll be fine.”

And so as we see giving dig up our root idols, there’s cheerfulness in it. Like, “I didn’t even know that was there.” How many of you have felt this where, even in lending someone something—you give them keys to your car, you let them use your house. “Go ahead and use this.” All of a sudden, you get a little anxiety. “I hope they don’t dent it. I hope they don’t scratch it. I hope it comes back. Did I do the right thing? “Wait. Hey, hey, hey! Come back!”

Giving exposes some of your root idols you didn’t even know were there ‘til you gave. And there’s cheer in going, “Okay. I didn’t know that was there. I didn’t know that was a problem. Now I see it. Thank you, Jesus. I needed to know this. This is a good thing.”

Giving to See Lives Changed Is Amazing

Number two, giving to see lives changed is amazing. Mars Hill Church, what we are experiencing is the grace of God. I’m continually overwhelmed at the generosity of Jesus. Like, when we started, we started with a dozen people, now we’ve got over twelve thousand. You know, when we started, the first three years, I didn’t get a salary. I worked for free. I always say I was good for nothing, you know? And what happened in that time, as well, our first year, our total budget was \$90,000 American dollars for a church. And what God has done is amazing. And all the people that are meeting Jesus, it’s amazing.

I had a woman recently so excited that her husband got saved at Mars Hill and baptized, she almost killed me with joy. She ran up, “My husband, Pastor Mark, he got saved! He got baptized!” She went to give me a hug but she got my neck. She kind of—you know? And it’s thick, but it can only endure so much. And she is—I feel like I’m in an MMA fight with a Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu black belt who has me in a chokehold. Literally, I’m short of breath and she’s jumping up and down. “It’s so wonderful!” I was like “Ah!” You know? Like, I can’t die being choked out by a woman in my own church. What would that do for my reputation?

But she was so excited, because you know what? Her husband met Jesus, got baptized, is praying with her, reading the Bible with her and the kids. You know what it’s like for her every night? She goes in and there’s her husband praying over her kids. She’s wanted this for years.

As you give generously and you see Jesus do ministry and you get to be a part of it, it’s amazing. There’s money that we all spend, you look back, you’re like, “That was not a good use of money.” Giving to the cause of Jesus, that’s always a good use.

Giving Is for God’s Glory and Our Good

And thirdly, giving is for God’s glory and it’s also for our good. Now, some of you are going to hear this sermon, you’ll be like, “Yep. I know how this works. You want me to give, and now we’re in a fight, and you’re trying to coerce me to be a giver.” Here’s the truth: our God is a good Dad. All his commands are for his glory and our good. Both. Both.

How many of you are parents, right? You make rules for your kids. You make rules that, truth be told, they make your life better, but they save your children’s life. “No bottle rockets in the house. No, you can’t drive, you’re three.” “Oh, you’re restricting my freedom. You’re robbing me of joy.” “No, I’m saving your life. These rules are for your good.”

When God tells us to do something, he is not a mean-spirited Father who is imposing his terrible will on reluctant children. He’s a loving Dad who always knows what’s best and invites his kids to live in freedom and joy with him. When God invites us to give, he is inviting us to learn a lesson that changes our whole life.

Because you know what? If you learn to be a glad receiver and a generous giver, you’ll be a better friend, because you can let your friends love you and you can love them. You can give financially, emotionally, mentally, verbally. You can give. If you learn how to receive from God and give, you’re going to be a better spouse. Amen? You’re going to be a better spouse. You’re going to give time, energy, money, love, encouragement, truth, affection to your spouse. You’re going to be a better parent. Those who learn to give, they’re better

parents. They're better grandparents.

See, giving is not just that God would get the money out of our pockets but that he'd get the idols out of our heart, and that he would allow us to share in his joy as we give to others. All of life is about giving, and as we learn the giving lesson, it transforms all of our relationships.

I'll close with a story. It happened last night. My son, Calvin, is ten, which is an awesome age, and he somehow found the perfect coffee mug. It's the right size, the right temperature. It's big enough that I can get my huge oven mitt of a hand into the handle and I like his coffee mug, but there's only one. And so it's his coffee mug, not mine. Occasionally I would steal it, which is a sin, but I really liked his coffee mug.

So, on our way home last night, Calvin says, "Hey Dad, when we get home can we have a cup of decaf together?" "Yeah, we can. That's a great idea, Calvin." So he comes upstairs, I'm watching the Mariners game, and he has two cups of coffee, and the mugs are identical. I said, "Calvin, that's a mug just like yours."

Calvin says, basically, "I know, I was looking online. It was hard to find, but I found one and I ordered it. I've been waiting for it. Now we've got the exact same mug, Dad." We clinked glasses and we had a cup of decaf. Calvin had been waiting to give me that mug so we could have a cup of decaf together, and what do you think was on his face? He was smiling because God what? Loves a what? A cheerful giver.

Jesus says it this way: "It's more blessed to give than" what? "Receive." Jesus says, "I want you to be blessed. I want you to be cheerful. Learn to be a giver." And givers make the best worshipers, givers make the best parents, givers make the best grandparents, givers make the best friends, givers make the best spouses. I don't care if you're rich or poor, Mars Hill. Are you generous?

That being said, you're welcome! We're going to collect our offering now. You're welcome! Okay? Because God loves a what? Yeah, you can cheer for the offering. Okay, we're going to collect our offering. I'll have the financial stewards come forward, we're going to collect our offering. If you're not a Christian, don't give. Receive Jesus Christ, amen? It all starts with receiving. If you are a Christian, give generously. We love you. Give cheerfully.

MARS HILL SUMMER UPDATE

And as you're giving of your offerings, let me share some things with you that should make you cheerful. Okay? So, here we go. Here's a little update. Mars Hill summer update. We just installed ten new elders, pastors. Many of them—all of them, I think, may be unpaid. That means we have 61 current pastors and 61 in process, most of them volunteers. Good news or bad news? Good news! We now have as many pastors as most churches have people. That's awesome. That's a lot of people who love you.

This summer alone, 425 baptisms. Good or bad? That's good. That's great. So far this year, we've had 980, and in the last twelve months, 1,400 people have been baptized at our Mars Hill churches. That's awesome.

Ultimately, church is about God and his people, but like every family, you need a home. Some of our churches are homeless, others are outgrowing their space, so I'll give you a little real estate update. Downtown Seattle is officially entering a new building downtown. I'll show you the inside. Look at that. Yeah. So, we're renting this facility. This is the oldest church in Seattle. It was founded by the founding mothers and fathers of the city, and we are so privileged that we get to have services there. Mars Hill Downtown with Pastor Tim has been running five services, and this will allow them great growth potential right in the heart of downtown.

And when we started Mars Hill, this was the least churchd region, least churchd city in the United States of America. It no longer is. Portland is, so pray for Pastor Tim in Portland. He's got his work cut out for him as well. So, we praise God for that, and they're trying to raise \$2 million to get it all set up so that we can use that space and have it ready to go.

In addition, this is a facility we are trying to get up in Everett. It's the Washington National Guard Armory. Somebody asked, "Are you taking over the armory?" No, but that would be epic. This is an old, basic military base complete with gun safes in the basement. It's totally Mars Hill. It has an awesome high ceiling as you can see, and pray, as we're trying to raise \$2.5 million to outfit this wonderful facility in the heart of downtown Everett, and from there, push out church plants to the north end.

In addition, we are, Lord willing, planting here in Tacoma, out of Mars Hill Federal Way. This building is near the hospital. It became available very inexpensively. These older churches get registered as landmarks so you can't change them or tear them down, so they're the cheapest real estate we could find. There's the inside. Cool, old, awesome, epic, downtown Tacoma church. Good, right? Very good.

This is Mars Hill Orange County. Mars Hill Orange County has been homeless like Jesus. We were forced to leave our theatre, and God provided this academy. It's a Christian school, they'll be moving on September 16 when we start the Book of Esther. It has five to six hundred seats. It's great for kids. It's an elementary school, playground. It's half the rent of what we're currently paying, so imagine that. God really provided. For those—yeah, you can clap for a discount if you want. And for those of you that were praying, God answered your prayer. Praise God. Thank you for praying.

And a couple last things. How to pray for your church? We just started Re:Train, which is our school, and it's accredited by multiple seminaries, 127 students, that's the highest attendance ever. We've got five new lead pastor residents getting ready to start Mars Hill Renton, Mars Hill Kirkland, Mars Hill Tacoma, we're going to launch, Lord willing, Mars Hill Atlanta, and others. We've got the National Conference coming up October 9–10 in California with Rick Warren, Greg Laurie, Craig Groeschel, LeCrae.

And coming up too, starting in September, we're going to go through the Book of Esther. Nobody goes through the Book of Esther because it's crazy. This gal lives downtown in a condo, she only hangs out at the spa and the gym, she's got a dirty, rich old boyfriend, she wins *The Bachelor*, she's always drinking cosmos, laying around in her swimsuit. Next thing you know, she gets saved, is a type of Christ, and saves a nation. It's awesome, okay? It's an awesome story.

For those of you who didn't like Real Marriage because you're single, this is a story, not just about a single person, but a single woman living in a major, urban, secular center, breaking all the commandments until she meets Jesus. She's a total Mars Hill gal. It's going to be awesome. Okay? So, we're going to go through the Book of Esther coming up in September.

And here's the financial update for the summer. June, 49 percent of adults gave anything. The average was \$41.59 per adult, per Sunday or weekend. In July, that went from 49 percent

to 43 percent. It went from \$41 to \$29, so June was a good month, July was a hard month. We need to bring in \$35 per adult per Sunday to make budget, and so we're asking you and the Lord to be generous and to allow us to continue moving forward as we head toward the fall. Are you guys excited with what's going on? It's great. And if you missed it, you can give online, MarsHill.com, you can e-mail if you have questions, giving@MarsHill.com, and of course, you can give on Sundays. I'm going to go ahead and pray, and we're going to sing.

Father God, we thank you that you gave your Son, Jesus Christ. Jesus, we thank you for giving up luxury to come in poverty, giving up glory to come in humility, to get off a throne to come in a manger. Lord Jesus, we thank you that you've paid our debt of sin through your death in our place on the cross. We thank you that salvation is a gift that we receive. We thank you that in receiving your great gift, we're changed to be generous givers who are cheerful and joyful, because we've received and now we want to share. Help us, Lord God, to learn this lesson of giving, not just financially, but also spiritually and emotionally and verbally. That we would give, not so that you would love us, but because you do. Not so that we would get, but because we have already received so much. Jesus, you are a great giver. I pray that we would be faithful stewards in Jesus' good name. Amen.

Note: This sermon transcript has been edited for readability.