

GIFTS FOR A KING – PART 1

Matthew 2:1-12 Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judaea in the days of Herod **the king**, behold, there came wise men from the east to Jerusalem, Saying, Where is he that is born **King of the Jews**? for we have seen his star in the east, and are come to worship him. When Herod **the king** had heard these things, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him. And when he had gathered all the chief priests and scribes of the people together, he demanded of them where **Christ** should be born. And they said unto him, In Bethlehem of Judaea: for thus it is written by the prophet, And thou Bethlehem, in the land of Juda, art not the least among the princes of Juda: for out of thee shall come **a Governor, that shall rule** my people Israel. Then Herod, when he had privily called the wise men, enquired of them diligently what time the star appeared. And he sent them to Bethlehem, and said, Go and search diligently for the young child; and when ye have found him, bring me word again, that I may come and worship him also. When they had heard **the king**, they departed; and, lo, the star, which they saw in the east, went before them, till it came and stood over where the young child was. When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceeding great joy. And when they were come into the house, they saw the young child with Mary his mother, and fell down, and worshipped him: and when they had opened their treasures, they presented unto him **gifts; gold, and frankincense, and myrrh**. And being warned of God in a dream that they should not return to Herod, they departed into their own country **another way**.

Just like the wise men, there's a battle to the death between two KINGS in our lives. One king must DIE for the other king to REIGN.

We don't know how many wise men there were, or even where they came from – but we do know the GIFTS that **wise men** give to a KING! The Queen of Sheba brought similar gifts to Solomon (2 Chron. 9:1), and behold, a greater than Solomon is here! (Matthew 12:42)

GOLD was the usual offering presented to kings by their subjects, or those wanting to pay respect. As long ago as 2500 BC, gold was especially prized, and used as a medium of exchange. In both the Old Testament Tabernacle and the Temple, gold was used plentifully, so we see that gold is also associated with worship. And we are told that in the heavenly city we will walk on "streets of gold."

ILLUSTRATION: Stubborn wealthy man who didn't want to part with his wealth, and wouldn't take no for an answer. Finally, God told him he could take one suitcase to Heaven when He died. He filled it with gold, of course. Angel at Heaven's gate: "You brought pavement?!"

I love Christmas, but I don't like crass commercialism. I'm still getting Black Friday ads, and I don't even live in the United States! How many of you are still THRILLED about the Christmas gift you got last year? How many of you even REMEMBER the Christmas gift you got last year?!

"Mall Madness" (that may be an actual medical condition!) discourages the idea of contentment. People are continually bombarded with the message, "**What you have isn't enough**. You need more. A bigger house, a better car, a newer cell phone, a larger salary, whiter teeth, fresher breath, nicer clothes, etc. etc." Materialism is the "Monster of MORE!"

One of the Ten Commandments forbids COVETING. That's an old word that we don't use much any more, but it simply means "the uncontrolled desire to acquire." The Hebrew word "CHAMAD" in that commandment means "to desire something you were never meant to own" – that's why the command specifies not to covet "your neighbour's" possessions. Just because someone else has it doesn't mean that you need it!

Jesus talked about becoming as a child if we want to belong to His kingdom. Have you ever noticed that we ask children, "What do you want to BE when you grow up?" We never ask, "What to you want to GET?" But once we become adults, that's exactly the way we act!

What would you tell the little widow woman in **Mark 12** who gives her last two coins in the offering at church? What would you tell the diligent businessman in **Luke 12** who wants to expand his business so he can live comfortably in the future and retire early? What did Jesus say?

Mark 12:43-44 And he called unto him his disciples, and saith unto them, Verily I say unto you, That this poor widow hath cast more in, than all they which have cast into the treasury: For all they did cast in of their abundance; but she of her want did cast in all that she had, even all her living.

Luke 12:20-21 But God said unto him, Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided? So is he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God.

None of us can enthrone the true King unless in the process we dethrone our other "kings." If Christ is not Lord over our money and possessions, then he is not our Lord – period. In **Luke 19**, Jesus gauged Zacchaeus' spiritual condition by his WILLINGNESS to part with his money; In **Matthew 19**, He gauged the rich young ruler's spiritual condition by his UNWILLINGNESS to part with his money. There's an undeniable connection, so Jesus calls us to take action that breaks our bondage to money and possessions and frees us to live under His Lordship.

Our handling of money is a litmus test of our true character – as an individual, as families, as leaders, and as a church. Our stewardship of our money and possessions becomes the story of our lives. And that is true of people in all ages – but don't you think it would have a special application to those of us who live in a time and place of unparalleled affluence? Who live in a society enjoying comforts and conveniences that King Solomon could have only dreamed of? Who live in a country where the "poverty level" exceeds the average standard of living of nearly every other society in human history, past or present?

Shopping (!) has become our most popular weekday out-of-home entertainment. In North America, there are 16.5 square feet of mall space for every man, woman and child. And materialism continues to whisper, "If you only had this thing or this person, you'd finally be happy." It's the lie that blinds us to the fact that we were made for only one person (Jesus) and one place (Heaven). Materialism is not simply wrong – it is STUPID. It's a bad investment of your time, talent and treasure.

Matthew 16:26 For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?

This is exactly why the Bible devotes twice as many verses to MONEY (2350 of them) as to "faith" and "prayer" combined (500 each). Why did Jesus say more about MONEY than He did about "Heaven" and "Hell" combined? Why did the Savior spend 15% of His recorded words on MONEY? Why are 1 out of every 10 verses in the Gospels about MONEY? Why did Jesus devote 16 out of His 38 parables to MONEY? Why did He say more about MONEY than any other subject? Because money and possessions (called "mammon" in the Bible) have the greatest potential to replace the Lordship of Jesus in your life!

Matthew 6:24 No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. **Ye cannot serve God and mammon.**

Matthew 6:19-21 Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal: **For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.**

Illustration: If you have foreign currency and you're leaving that country, you exchange it for the currency of home and keep just enough for short-term needs. You never want to have "extra" when you arrive home!

What you do with your resources in this life is your autobiography, and it will go into eternity unedited. So little choices have great significance!

Luke 16:10-11 He that is faithful in that which is least is faithful also in much: and he that is unjust in the least is unjust also in much. If therefore ye have not been faithful in the unrighteous mammon, who will commit to your trust the true riches?

1 Timothy 6:6-10 But godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. And having food and raiment let us be therewith content. But they that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.

There was not just one tithe for Israel, but three. One tithe supported the priests and Levites, another provided for times of worship (feasts) in the house of God, and a third tithe supported orphans, widows and the poor. This third tithe was collected only every third year, so this amounted to an average "tithe" of 23% per year. And that's just the Old Testament! **TITHING (10%) IS A MINIMUM STANDARD, NOT A MAXIMUM GOAL.**

God's people don't PAY their tithe (and they certainly don't GIVE their tithe!) – they REPAY the tithe to God, at His request! This is why the Bible speaks of "bringing, taking, presenting, paying" – not "giving" their tithe. And then the Bible emphasizes "freewill offerings" – voluntary contributions beyond the tithe. Those constitute "GIVING" in Scripture. A disciple doesn't ask, "How much can I keep?" but, "How much more can I give?" Young believers will take their cues from our materialistic society unless mature believers pass on a vision for giving.

Unless people give systematically, they rarely give substantially.

Three levels of giving – less than our ability (96% of Christians), according to our ability (3%), and beyond our ability (less than 1%). Giving beyond our ability is giving when the numbers don't add up, giving when the bottom line says we shouldn't, giving beyond our means, giving despite risk, and giving away our necessities, not just our luxuries.

GIVING is not just about donating MONEY, it's about conquering the king named MAMMON. That means we give, not just our TREASURE, but TIME and TALENT. And if you are a "high capacity" person in any of those areas, you are robbing God and His church if you are not a giver!

2 Corinthians 8:5 And this they did, not as we hoped, but first gave their own selves to the Lord, and unto us by the will of God.