

# The Promise Principle

## *Pocketbook Principles of Jesus:*

Luke 6:38

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When we began this series on the *Pocketbook Principles of Jesus*, we shared that Jesus spent more of his adult life as a businessman than as an itinerant preacher. For at least a dozen years, Jesus either apprenticed or ran the family carpentry business making estimates, purchasing materials and collecting payments. When Jesus became itinerant, he continued to depend upon God's provision in response to his work.

Jesus was not idle; nor was he pitching people for money. This doesn't mean, however, that he always had money. From the crucifixion account we learn that some women cared for his needs (Matthew 27:55, Mark 15:41). We are not told how these women cared for Jesus' need, but they may have given him money. We do know that Judas both kept the money bag for Jesus and the disciples' needs and pilfered from it (John 12:6). We also know that when Jesus was questioned about paying temple tax, he had no money. The tax for Jesus and Peter was paid after Peter took a coin from the mouth of a fish. Finally, when Mary dumped about \$70,000 (the average household wage in northwest Rochester) worth of perfume on, Judas had enough. He then agreed to betray Jesus. Judas had focused much more on money than Jesus. Jesus was pleased with the woman's generosity even if one year's household income disappeared.

Jesus' perspective is so different. Once Jesus sat in the temple and watched people give.

***A poor widow came and dropped in two pennies. He called his disciples to him and said, "I assure you, this poor widow has given more than all the others have given. For they gave a tiny part of their surplus, but she, poor as she is, has given everything she has." (Mark 12:42-44, NLT)***

Do you know what that says to me? Don't ever feel guilty about the amount you give. If you give little because you have little, you may be giving more to God's mission than anyone else. In Jesus' economy you may be the greatest contributor making the biggest impact on the kingdom in some way. Jesus did not say these things lightly.

A second clue to Jesus' perspective is how he handled a rich man worried about eternal life. The man was a slave to money. Jesus told him to sell everything, give it to the poor and come follow him. Jesus did not tell him to give the money to Jesus' ministry. Jesus was not out to benefit from this man's money. He was out to help him embrace his heavenly Father. Jesus' source of provision was the heavenly Father, and he expected provision as he obeyed his Father.

Have any of you noticed that we preachers tend to violate Jesus' method? Do you know what time of year we generally talk about stewardship or money management? We talk about it when we are raising money for the church, when we are doing a financial campaign? Doesn't that make what we say seem self-serving? You don't know how many times I've experienced the ire of people who think that all we church leaders are after is money. Was Jesus after the rich man's money? He would receive no benefit from the man giving it to the poor. Jesus was focused on his eternal life. That is why I'm taking time today when our budget is already set and there is no pressure of a financial campaign to visit with you about giving. Your giving is not about Bethany. It is first and foremost about your soul. Your giving is about who is your God.

We preachers violate this principle ourselves when we put on our shoulders the burden of raising money for God's work. Jesus didn't raise money. He obeyed his Father and the Father provided. He taught about money. He taught about giving. He taught about the Father's provision. He challenged people to decide with their pocketbook and time who they would serve because that is what His Father was showing him to do. I'm to do that, and I'm to share with

you opportunities to give and make an impact with your life. However, my role is not to raise money. It is to obey the Father, and the Father's role is to provide. If we as church leaders don't believe and act on that ourselves, then, regardless of what we say, we serve money and we teach you to serve money.

To understand Jesus, we must realize that he was not an idealist. He was not somebody in love with an idea. He was fully in love with you and me. Although he was visionary, he was not a dreamer. His feet were more firmly planted on the ground than ours. He saw truth when others were swept away by illusion. When the rich man decided that he could not part with his money, he also decided that his money rather than God was his security; and Jesus spoke:

***It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God.*** (Luke 18:25, NIV)

When the disciples heard this, they were unhinged. "Who then can be saved?" they asked; and Peter whined, "***We have left all we had to follow you.***" Jesus responded:

***No one who has left home or wife or brothers or parents or children for the sake of the kingdom of God will fail to receive many times as much in this age and, in the age to come, eternal life.*** (Luke 18:29-30, NIV)

Jesus told his followers that God would materially and relationally reward their sacrifices for the kingdom. God honors his children. He blesses their generosity. He blesses their devotion. Indeed, Jesus said:

***Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.*** (Luke 6:38, NIV)

Jesus says that our generosity will both be returned and multiplied in the return. God rewards generosity with the measuring cups we use. Jesus didn't even talk about who you give to or what the motive is. Some give for tax breaks, some give because of a vision, and some give out of compassion. Whatever the motive, God promises to reward generosity.

Are you confidently acting on that? Interestingly, when Jesus talked about giving, he said little about the tithe. Tithing is the practice of economic partnership with God that is commanded and commended in the Old Testament. In tithing people return a tenth of their income to God. I think Jesus talked so little about it because many tithers returned their tenth and then became slaves to money with the 90 percent they kept. That seemed to be the case with the rich man and with many other religious leaders.

The tithe was commanded of all Israelites, rich and poor. It appears from the Scriptures that God wanted to prove himself to them. The tithe was a test to see if God was faithful. The tithe came with a promise so the people could evaluate. The tithe did not relieve the people from their work; instead, it brought blessing on the work. It also reminded people that they were managers or trustees of God's earth.

If you tithe, if you return a tenth of your income to God, you've embraced a simple promise for both the poor and rich. God will reward your faith. The rich still must watch their hearts and make sure their treasure and heart are in the kingdom of God. However, all of you can experience the reality of God's blessing. Don't you want that?

Each week a team at Bethany prays that God will bless financially those who tithe with such distinction, that others will be able to see and experience the truth of God's provision. The greatest beneficiary of a tithe is the one who tithes. Tithing provided me a tangible way to experience God's faithfulness to his promises. I'm now a witness. God has multiplied in return what Diane and I gave him. Now we enjoy being generous beyond the tithe. We have not been insulated from every hardship, but we have found God faithful at all times; and we know the joy of trusting a faithful and generous God and of being recipients of his promised blessings. Has tithing made a difference in your life? Is it time to go beyond the tithe?