

**Stingy Father, Generous Father – Blessing People Spiritually
Mathew 6:19-21, Revelation 21: 1-5, 22-25**

Brothers and sisters, as part of learning more about who God is - I was planning to preach on God as Father this morning.

However, as we are hosting our AGM today and looking back at what God has done in Valleyview over the past year and also looking forward at what God's plans for us are in the coming year – I realized that we needed a bit of a refresher on the Blessing Project.

Because the Blessing Project is central to what God has been doing and to what He wants us to focus on in the coming year.

So, this morning's message will still tie into understanding God as Father – but its going to be focused on that aspect of God's Fatherhood where He is generous and loves to bless us.

Like it says in James 1:17 *“Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights...”*

and in Romans 8:32 *“He who did not spare His own Son but gave Him up for us all, how will He not also, along with Him, freely give us all things?”*

Which is why Jesus says in Matthew 7:11 *“If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him!”*

Now I have to confess that when I was growing up – It didn't feel like my father, my parents gave me good gifts. In fact I was often envious of the things that other kids got which I didn't. Can anyone else relate to that??

Now don't get me wrong – I wasn't a deprived child... it's just that my friend's parents didn't to seem mind including good gifts like potato chips, and pop, or Twinkies on the grocery list. And my other friends got to eat out at McDonalds on a regular basis, or they got the latest brand name shoes for school.

And other families would vacation in Florida, or they would go to Disney World...

But we only got pop and chips on our birthdays, and we rarely went out for McDonalds, we got whatever shoes were on sale... and when we went on vacation - we always went to Minnesota – and it wasn't to see the Mall of America – it was to visit our relatives... on the farm!

And when I was a teenager – I was the only one without cable TV, in fact we didn't even own a TV until the winter Olympics came to Calgary, and then we got an old demo modal that some TV store was trying to get throw away...

We didn't even ask about getting a VCR or a video game system. That's what we went over to our friends' houses for. And growing up like this shaped me in two ways.

On one hand, I felt like I was missing out on the plastic pop culture of North America. So when I grew up – I made certain to get all that stuff I thought I missed out on. I ate at

McDonalds as much as I wanted too, I got cable TV, a video game system, I got season passes to Canada's Wonderland.

But on the other hand, as a kid I learned that I didn't really need all that stuff.

So when my daughter – at age 10 – was asking me if she could get a cell phone ... I heard my parents speaking through me as I answered back *"You're only 10, you don't need a cell phone!"* I could hear myself repeating what my parents had said to me. Have you ever caught yourself doing that with your kids?

It's interesting to see how our parents' attitudes about these sorts of things are passed on to us and how they affect the way we parent our children, isn't it?

And that's the whole idea behind a called book "Rich Dad Poor Dad" written back in the late 90's by Robert Kyosaki. The book explores how our attitudes towards possessions – and especially money and success are passed on to our children – by the kinds of comments and choices we make.

And He shows us how they are implicitly picked up by our kids and shape their attitudes about wealth and success.

And Kiyosaki believes that while most people are well educated in reading, writing and arithmetic, they lack a basic understanding of how our current economic system works and the financial smarts to take advantage of it.

The goal of his book is to make people aware that the traditional path to success - of staying in school, studying hard, getting good grades in reading, writing, and arithmetic so you can put them to use in a good job and make good money - doesn't lead to financial success in the current economic system.

He's not trying to say that we shouldn't send our kids to school and have them study hard – but rather that we can't rely on this traditional path to give our children the riches, or financial freedom that could be theirs or ours...

So in Kyosaki's terminology the "dad" who doesn't realize this is the poor dad. The Poor Dad still believes that its possible to be frugal and thrifty and save your way to financial freedom – but his life tells otherwise.

In fact, he struggles all his life worrying about money, making the statement "I can't afford it!"

By comparison, Kyosaki's rich dad understands how the system works and is able to work the system so that money isn't an issue. His different mindset, he doesn't say "I can't afford it," but instead he asks "how can I afford it?"

The Rich Dad doesn't save money – He invests it, he puts it to work so that it grows. He learns about the tax laws so that he is able to take advantage of tax credits and benefits offered by the government.

He is enterprising, outgoing and is willing to take risks, and if they pay off he will gain more wealth - but regardless of how much wealth the rich dad has he is financially free because he

is not controlled by money, but in control of his money and he makes it work for him. Do you see the difference?

Now – at first glance I would think that in my own life my parents were more like the poor dad. They didn't strike me as risk takers or entrepreneurs, or people who were concerned with the ability to generate wealth and financial freedom, and they often told me they couldn't afford certain things.

But, while I may have thought my Dad was stingy when it came to things like Mc Donald's, junk food, and cable TV and fashion fads, I now realize that it was so He could be extremely generous and invest as much as he could in the Kingdom of Heaven – or as our scripture passage this morning puts it *“store up for yourselves treasures in heaven”*

The reality was that I had a spiritually rich dad – which I'll call a Generous Dad, who knew how to take the material blessings which God had given him and leverage them to produce Spiritual results.

For example, he could see that by being thrifty with other things he could afford to invest in a Christian education for myself and my three sisters - and that investment has paid off in giving us all a strong Christian worldview and faith.

So brothers and sisters we need to ask ourselves - are we stingy or generous when it comes to using what we have to store up treasures in heaven?

And we might not know if we are stingy or generous because we might be ignorant of the fact that we can actually store up our treasure in heaven.

In the same way that Robert Kiyosaki is convinced that people need to overcome their ignorance of how our economic system works so they can profit from it, I'm convinced that we need to overcome our ignorance, or whatever stereotypes we have of “Going out and blessing someone” so that we understand how it is possible to invest materially in order to store up our treasures in heaven, and so that it leads us to pass on our spiritual blessings to others as well.

As you know – Valleyview was given a double donation this time last year, and all of the elders and myself could see this was a very clear indication that God was directing us to continue on with the Blessing Project in 2021.

So we did that, we continued to make \$100 or more for you to go out and bless something with that in Jesus' name. And just like when we ran the project in 2020, we found this project to be challenging for us.

Part of that was because its not natural for us to think about how we can use material blessings and things like money, invest them into people's lives in Jesus' name – to produce spiritual results.

But listen to what Jesus says in Matt 6 this morning – *“Do not store up for yourselves treasures **on earth**, where moths and vermin destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures **in heaven** (Matt 6:19)*

It's interesting to note that Jesus does not confront the practice of storing up wealth... only where we store it.

You see in the ancient world it was common practice for wealthy people to take all their treasure with them to the grave. The ancients believed in the afterlife, and so they stored up their wealth for it and it was buried with them – they enjoyed their riches in this world and they expected to continue to do so in the next.

But that mentality was flawed – not only because it's not true, but as Jesus warns, when we store up treasure on earth *“moth and rust destroy and thieves break in and steal.”* Just think of all the tombs of Egyptian Kings that were looted...

So, even if it was true that your worldly wealth could benefit you in the afterlife – it was at risk of decay, or being stolen, and it wouldn't last. Now, our thinking has changed a bit since Jesus' time.

First - we don't take the afterlife very seriously anymore, and so we've become even more focused on storing up treasure on earth, and many believe that it's the only thing that gives meaning to this life. We say "you can't take it with you when you're gone!" or "you only live once!" Enjoy it while you can.

However, from time to time we come to the realization that our material blessings can be "eaten by moths, destroyed by rust and stolen by thieves" and that they don't seem to give meaning to our lives like we thought they would...

And in reaction to this we take a "low view" of wealth and possession and we attempt to rid ourselves of our desires and attachments to material things - and focus on what really matters - like relationships or people...

But we've made three mistakes friends...

First, we ought to take the afterlife very seriously - Jesus says to us "*store up treasure **in heaven***"

Second, if we take the afterlife or our next life seriously we'll realize that the purpose of material possessions is to invest in the next life - not hoarding them or enjoying them only "on earth"

And third, the solution to the limitations of our material possessions to provide meaning is not to rid ourselves of desire and attachment to material things and become Buddhists... but to learn how to invest them spiritually.

And notice that Jesus doesn't say **pick a different treasure** - a spiritual, immaterial treasure that won't decay. The problem isn't with what you treasure - it's where you are storing it!

Store up your treasure in heaven and you will have something to live off in the next life - guaranteed, and it won't decay or get stolen.

It's like how we invest now - while we're earning income so that when we retire, we will have something to live on. Only

when you store up in heaven there is nothing – not even economic uncertainty caused by inflation can affect it.

We **can** invest in the afterlife because we **can** take it with us when we're gone, we don't live once – we only die once!

The scriptures we read this morning are quite clear that what is coming in the afterlife is this world -- made new once again, this world -- made free of human sin and rebellion.

In the afterlife we live in this restored world, interacting with the creation and worshiping God face to face.

So, friends if you are a follower of Jesus Christ what you are storing up in Heaven is everything that you've ever done for God's glory... including that time you went out to bless someone with \$100 in Jesus' name.

Everything you've ever used to work towards helping others believe in Jesus Christ...

Everything you've ever done to steward and take care of this world and everything you've ever done to prevent sin and evil from affecting how you live and love and work.

The only thing you won't bring with you is your sinful nature and the sickness and disease and suffering which have resulted from our Sin affecting the good creation.

So "taking it with us" or "storing up treasure in heaven" is all about what we do with the material blessings and wealth that God that gives us now.

And, if we can see how this is possible with material blessings, brothers and sisters, how much more will it occur when we are using our spiritual blessings?!

Brothers and sisters, the Lord has funded us with money three times to do the Blessing Project, first in 2018, then in 2020 and in 2021 – but why has He done this?

Well, obviously there have been people who have been blessed as a result, and even though \$100 is just a drop in the bucket materially speaking – we don't know the full effect this will have in their lives spiritually.

But what about for us? Is this something we've done a few times and it's made us feel good, it's challenged us and stretched us – but the money is all gone now and so its over and done and that's all God wanted to do??

No – brothers and sisters – that's not in keeping with what we know about God, especially as it ties into who He is as a generous Father, who keeps on giving.

It would be shortsighted indeed for us to think that the Lord has not provided for the Blessing project this year. It's true that He has not given us money...

But brothers and sisters, as Paul tells us in Ephesians 1:3 *“the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.”*

Brothers and sisters, if we have learned how material blessings can be stored up in heaven... if we have learned how to use material blessings to bless other spiritually...

Does that not prepare us to build on that, and learn from that in order to go out and also bless people in Jesus' name with spiritual blessings?

Everything that we needed to learn about blessing others with material blessings, every obstacle or hurdle that we needed to overcome in order to GO OUT and be faithful in giving away that money... its all applicable to blessing people spiritually.

God's been preparing us to take this next step as a church and a congregation.

Not because you can't produce spiritual results from material blessings – no, but because we don't really understand how valuable and significant spiritual blessings are.

But we get the value and significance of money – and how giving someone \$100 is giving them something helpful and valuable. We understand that.

So if we get that brothers and sisters, how much more valuable and helpful is it to additionally give people spiritual blessings!

And the truth is that pretty much anyone can bless someone else with material blessings – there are lots of charities out there and lots of charitable people... you don't need to be a Christian, a follower of Jesus to give money away to help others out.

(which is why I stressed so much that when we did we were to do so in Jesus' name)

But who else is able to give out the spiritual blessings that are given in Jesus Christ apart from His followers, His Body, His church?? No one – because no one else has these spiritual blessings outside of Jesus Christ.

And that is what God is calling us to do with the Blessing Project now – He is shifting it from blessing people with money, to blessing people with spiritual blessings.

And everything that we learned about looking for opportunities, taking initiative, approaching someone and talking to them, overcoming fears, anxieties, obstacles, so that we complete a blessing project – is the same...

We're just going to be giving away spiritual blessings instead of money, and we can still give away money too – in Jesus' name, we don't need to stop helping people with that need.

But we need to realize that we can do so much more for them by passing on spiritual blessings, with the Spirit of generosity that characterized God as Father.

Part of what God has shown us in the Blessing Project thus far is how limited \$100 is in addressing the needs and challenges and issues that people are facing right? I hope the Holy Spirit has used this to stir up a desire of wanting to be able to do

more to help people than just give them money – because we’ve been given the spiritual resources to do this brothers and sisters.

Now we’ll get into a bit more of the details on how we can do this together in the coming year, and what exactly are some of the spiritual blessings we can give away...

But let me close of this message by reading the best example of this that I know of in scripture from Acts 3:1-10. Listen...

One day Peter and John were going up to the temple at the time of prayer—at three in the afternoon. ² Now a man who was lame from birth was being carried to the temple gate called Beautiful, where he was put every day to beg from those going into the temple courts. ³ When he saw Peter and John about to enter, he asked them for money. ⁴ Peter looked straight at him, as did John. Then Peter said, “Look at us!” ⁵ So the man gave them his attention, expecting to get something from them.

⁶ Then Peter said, “Silver or gold I do not have, but what I do have I give you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk.” ⁷ Taking him by the right hand, he helped him up, and instantly the man’s feet and ankles became strong. ⁸ He jumped to his feet and began to walk. Then he went with them into the temple courts, walking and jumping, and praising God. ⁹ When all the people saw him walking and praising God, ¹⁰ they recognized him as the same man who used to sit begging at the temple gate called Beautiful, and they were filled with wonder and amazement at what had happened to him.

Brothers and sisters, God has given us ALL spiritual riches, spiritual blessing in Jesus Christ, It is His desire and will and command to us – that we continue on blessing people... spiritually.

May we be found faithful in our obedience. Amen.