

Don't be a Thief

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[0 : 00] So we've got two Bible passages today that I want you to have. You're going to have your fingers in two different places. The first one is in the Old Testament in Exodus 20, verses 1-17.

And the second one comes in the New Testament in Mark's Gospel, chapter 10, verses 17-22.

Exodus 20, verses 1-17 is a pretty famous word.

These are the words that God pronounces from Mount Sinai. I woke up in the middle of the night on one of the flights going from Atlanta to Qatar.

And when I woke up and I turned on the flight map, I was flying directly over Sinai. I don't know exactly where the mountain is, but I was somewhere above Mount Sinai at some point in this last week.

But this is what God says at Mount Sinai, chapter 20, verse 1. And God spoke all these words. I am the Lord your God who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery.

[1 : 23] You shall have no other gods before me. You shall not make for yourself an image in the form of anything in heaven, above, or on the earth, beneath, or in the waters below. You shall not bow down to them or worship them.

For I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of their parents, to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing love to a thousand generations of those who love me and keep my commandments.

You shall not misuse the name of the Lord your God, for the Lord will not hold anyone guiltless who misuses his name. Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy.

Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God. On it you shall not do any work, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your male or female servant, nor your animals, nor any foreigner residing in your towns.

For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea and all that is in them, but he rested on the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.

[2 : 28] Honor your father and your mother, so that you may live long in the land the Lord your God is giving you. You shall not murder, you shall not commit adultery, you shall not steal, you shall not give false testimony against your neighbor, you shall not covet your neighbor's house, you shall not covet your neighbor's wife or his male or female servant, his ox or donkey or anything that belongs to your neighbor.

I jump forward to Mark's Gospel, chapter 10. And this is Jesus and his encounter with a particularly rich individual.

Verse 17. As Jesus started on his way, a man ran up to him and fell on his knees before him. Good teacher, he asked, what must I do to inherit eternal life?

Why do you call me good? Jesus answered. No one is good except God alone. You know the commandments. You shall not murder, you shall not commit adultery, you shall not steal, you shall not give false testimony, you shall not defraud, honor your father and your mother.

Teacher, he declared, all these I have kept since I was a boy. Jesus looked at him and loved him.

One thing you lack, he said. Go sell everything you have and give to the poor and you will have treasure in heaven.

[3 : 51] Then come and follow me. This is the word of the Lord. Let's pray. Let's ask for God's help as we study together.

Our God, our King, we need you to work in our hearts because we are inundated with words, messages, all day, every day from our upbringing, from the culture around us, from our own hearts. And so it's hard for us to sometimes hear truth in all of that noise. And so this morning as we come to scripture, we want to see truth, we want to know truth and we know that your word is truth.

And so won't you be kind to us in bringing truth to us. Let us feast on it and let us be renewed and strengthened and changed by what we see in the scriptures.

Show us your son and his wonderful life-giving work for us. May he be our portion in all things.

[4 : 59] So bless us now we pray for Christ's sake. Amen. So basically once a year we do a sermon on giving.

I'm pretty sure the treasurer and the finance committee are like, you should do this maybe two or three times a year. Maybe not just once a year. And one of the reasons we've tended to be as a church be a little bit more coy when it comes to the whole subject of giving is the culture, the religious culture of Cape Town that we find ourselves in where some churches you will end up in or some religious institutions you'll end up in.

And you'll hear about giving from start to finish of every single service. And it seems like, well, Christianity or religion is just a money-making scheme. And we've wanted to very much distance ourselves from that.

Yet at the same time we have to speak about giving because giving is in the Bible and it's important for your spiritual growth. To understand giving and to understand what it is that God wants from you and desires from you and how you will actually even benefit from giving.

Now I often feel motivated to teach on this specific subject when I return from a fundraising trip in the U.S. On those trips like the one I've just been on now, I'm not raising money for myself sadly.

[6 : 10] I'm not even actually raising money for our church, for Union Chapel. I'm almost always raising money for many of our current church plants and our student ministry projects that our denomination has on the go right now.

But in the course of that work, one of the things that I get the privilege of is I get to be in and around a lot of really, really generous Christian people. The kinds of people who regularly give away tens of thousands of dollars each year, not rands, dollars each year to Christian ministry.

Wonderfully generous sacrificial people. And just seeing that and seeing how they do that and seeing how they do that so consistently and so freely, it sort of inspires me that God would do that same thing here in our church.

That he would make us generous like that and sacrificial like that. That money would in some ways not have a hold on us, but it would be freely given here for the sake of the kingdom.

And so I always come back from a trip like this wanting to encourage myself and then really wanting to encourage you that I think we can be that church. We might be small, but we can be that church in our own way.

[7 : 27] That God can raise up generous sacrificial giving here. And not just for the sake of this church, that maybe this church gets a bit bigger and we can have air con in the room next door or something like that.

But so that we can support other churches. So that when some of us are even older and grayer than I am and older and grayer than I will be in 40 years time, we can look back at churches all over this city and this country and go, well, we've been able to, by God's grace, have a hand in that.

Through sacrificial giving. Through people coming to know Jesus and being changed through what that money has been able to be used for. And so I want to turn us to that subject this morning, giving.

I'm going to be a little bit provocative and say this. One of the best things that you can do to grow in your giving and to be generous is to not be a thief.

So that's the title of the sermon. Don't be a thief. And hopefully it will become clear why that is the title as we go. So here's where we're going to go. I want to, first of all, just make some very general comments about giving that shouldn't be new to most of you.

[8 : 35] Number two, I want us to define theft. If I'm going to talk about being a thief, I want us to define theft. And then number three, I want us to talk about ways in which we might steal from God.

So here's the first one. Let's talk about the general comments of giving. You read across the sweep of Scripture, you will see that Christians are generally called to give in two places. And this is actually both Old Testament and New Testament.

Two areas. Give to the poor and give to the advancement of the gospel through the church. So it's kind of give to the poor, give to church, mission, and ministry. We're going to be focusing on this one today.

We've done other sermons on giving to the poor and diaconal work and that sort of stuff. We're focusing on this one, giving to church ministry. Twice a year, we have a newcomer's class here at the church. And we, in that class, talk about all the different obligations that we have as members. If we're going to join this church, what is it that are some of our duties, our obligations to each other and to the church? And one of the things we look at is our obligation to give, to use our material wealth to give.

[9 : 32] And so I kind of go through our five commitments. And if you've been here for a long time, you've probably seen these a hundred times. So let me just run through them with you. We say these things about giving.

This is what the New Testament, this is a summary of what the New Testament says about giving. Number one, our giving should be consistent and deliberate.

It should be consistent and deliberate. When Paul, the Apostle Paul, is discussing a particular offering with the church in Corinth, the New Testament, he says this, he gives this instruction.

He says, That's in 1 Corinthians 16.

And so you can kind of see in Paul's thinking there that giving is not haphazard. It's not kind of spur of the moment activity. The giving that the New Testament envisions, and there are several other places you can go, particularly to the Old Testament, but the giving that the New Testament envisions is systematic.

[10 : 36] It's deliberate. There's a conscious decision to set aside a part of your income expressly for the purpose of supporting gospel ministry and the church.

Most of us probably get paid on a monthly basis. And so sort of following that pattern of scripture, I think it would be a wise practice for Christians to budget in their monthly giving.

Sort of at the start, like when you're setting out your budget, don't you say, well, what have I got left? But actually say, this is how much I plan to give every single month. That way you stay consistent. That way you stay deliberate. So that's the first thing.

Second thing is, our giving should be in keeping with our income. So you would have noticed that in that verse that I just read there. Paul instructs each individual to give in accordance with their income.

So we don't all give the same amount. Now, you would ask, well, how much of my income exactly should I give? And there's a lot of debate about how New Testament believers should apply the principle that you find in the Old Testament, the principle of a tithe, giving 10% of your income.

[11 : 50] Regardless of where you kind of find yourself landing on that specific debate, I do think that at the very least, in principal form, it serves as a really good rule of thumb.

If you're looking for where to start. If you're saying, well, what number should I be looking for in keeping with my income? I'm not 10%. This is in the Bible. There's a good pattern for this. Seems like a reasonable place to go. So that's the second thing.

Third thing, our giving should be generous and sacrificial. So while 10% might be a really good guideline, I think Scripture pushes us beyond that and says, okay, don't just think about where the cutoff mark is.

Be exceedingly generous and sacrificial in your giving. In 2 Corinthians 9, Paul says this. He says, remember, whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously.

You see, because there's a sense in which Christian giving can really have no limit on it because we have been loved without limit by our exceedingly generous God.

[13 : 04] And so I would say, don't ask, what is the least amount that I can give and still be biblical? I still qualify? Ask instead, how can I give more?

How can I figure out ways of giving more? So that's the third thing, the sacrificial and generous nature of giving. Fourth thing, our giving should not be under compulsion.

Rather, it should flow from joy. So Paul goes on in that same passage in Corinthians, and he says, each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.

So we as the church, we're never going to bully you into giving. We're never going to send the elders to your house and ask for your tithe. We're never going to ask for you to submit your bank statement so that we can see that you're actually giving 10% or not.

In fact, we prefer you to do your giving as anonymously as possible. The giving, though, that Jesus Christ is after is giving that comes from the heart, not from compulsion.

[14:14] A heart that's feasting on joy, the joy of the gospel. Really, what Jesus wants is this. He wants you to have an experience of joy when that debit order goes off at the end of the month, and the money goes out of your account.

The money that you know you could be using for an overseas trip or saving up for an overseas trip, and it's going off to the church. He wants you to have a thrill of joy in your heart when that happens. That's the fourth thing.

Fifth thing. Our giving should be sustained by the gospel. It can be hard to manufacture that joy in the economic climate we live in, in the expensive area we live in here in the city bowl.

And so how do we get that joy? We turn to the gospel of our Savior. That's what Paul does when he's trying to encourage giving. In a church, it actually has quite a high level of poverty.

He says this. He says, You know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you, through his poverty, might become rich.

[15:33] See, friends, the gospel, the central message of the Christian faith, is really about how Christ impoverished himself, his death on the cross, in order to enrich you.

Salvation. Eternal life with God. And to the extent that you see that gospel, that you understand that gospel, that you savor that gospel truth, you will begin to be filled up with that inexpressible joy.

That's the default disposition of the Christian who understands the grace of Jesus. And so Christ is looking for the sort of giving that comes from that gospel joy.

So those are the five things. Those five things should not be new to you. Hopefully, if you've been around for a while, that's what drives our sort of theology of giving. But for various reasons, our theology often doesn't translate into consistent, sacrificial, generous, joy-filled giving.

One of the reasons for that, and this is where we'll spend the rest of our time this morning, one of the reasons for that is because we're thieves. And so I want to try and help you and me to not be a thief.

[16:53] And the first thing we need to do then is obviously define theft in this context. So this is where the Ten Commandments come in. Chapter 20 of the book of Exodus, verse 15, the eighth commandment that you see there is, you shall not steal.

In Hebrew, it's actually just two words. No, steal. Don't do it. It's pretty clear what it's saying. Don't take stuff.

Don't steal stuff. And I suppose our minds immediately go to things like shoplifting or housebreaking when we hear a command like that, or maybe in a country like ours, living in the days of state capture and tender fraud, we think also about sort of white-collar crime.

So for us, the commandment is pretty simple. As Christians, we should have no part in overt theft anywhere on that spectrum, from the kid who takes chocolate from the store to the high-powered businessman running a dodgy pyramid scheme.

No part in any of that. Now, we could just stop there and say, well, that's what it means. The problem is that as human beings, we are very, very sophisticated thieves. We have all sorts of ways of justifying theft to our own consciences and to others.

[18:08] The Westminster Divines, the group of theologians who got together in the 1600s to put together the Westminster Confession and the larger and the shorter Catechism, they were clearly not naive about the craftiness of sinful humanity.

And so when they scripted what they said are the prohibitions that are entailed in the Eighth Commandment, when they were doing that in the larger Catechism, when they were putting it together, they're pretty comprehensive.

And they backed all of their stuff up with footnotes of where these commandments are played out in other parts of Scripture. So listen to what they say. This is question 142 of the larger Catechism.

Almost all the Protestant Catechisms that you get from that era have an extended treatment of the Ten Commandments. Christians believe that one of the foundational things you needed to understand was to understand really how the Ten Commandments forms your moral framework for the world.

But this is what they say in question 142. What are the sins forbidden in the Eighth Commandment? And the answer they give is not just no steal. The answer they give is, the sins forbidden in the Eighth Commandment besides the neglect of the duties required are the following.

[19 : 17] Theft, robbery, kidnapping, and slave catching, and receiving anything that is stolen. Fraudulent dealing, false weights and measures, and moving the marks of property boundaries.

Injustice and unfaithfulness in contracts or in matters of trust. Oppression, extortion, taking advantage of the poor by charging them interest on loans.

Bribery, harassing lawsuits, unjust detainments, and unjust removal of people from their land.

Hoarding commodities to enhance the price. Unlawful callings, and all other unjust or sinful ways of taking or withholding from our neighbor what belongs to him or enriching ourselves.

We are incredibly sophisticated in our thievery. And so we need to think through theft in a very comprehensive way, like the divines did, and really like the Bible does.

But theft is not just taking what's not yours. In a biblical framework, it's also not giving what is yours at the appropriate time.

[20 : 31] If you ever set out to do sort of a deep study of the Ten Commandments, and particularly how they play out in the rest of the Bible, you'll quickly discover that Scripture is not just concerned with the prohibition, but also with what positive obedience to the command would look like.

So in those 17th century catechisms, the commandments are always discussed in terms of prohibitions, what's forbidden, and duties. What we ought to do positively in light of the command. And that's not just because these 17th century theologians want to just keep piling on laws. They put the duties of the command out there because of the pattern that they saw in Scripture, the pattern that they see in Scripture, the pattern that they see in Jesus, particularly as He engages with the commands.

So think about the interaction we just read about. Let's look at that again. That's in Mark 10. Let's just read it again. Verse 17. As Jesus started on His way, a man ran up to Him and fell on his knees before Him.

Good teacher, He asked, what must I do to inherit eternal life? Why do you call me good? Jesus answered. No one is good except God alone. You know the commandments.

[21 : 49] You shall not murder. You shall not commit adultery. You shall not steal. You shall not give false testimony. You shall not defraud, honor your father and your mother. And teacher, He declared, all these I've kept since I was a boy.

Jesus looked at him and loved him. One thing you lack, He said. Go sell everything you have and give to the poor and you will have treasure in heaven. And then come follow me.

At this the man's face fell. He went away sad because he had great wealth. So Jesus lists the commands from the Ten Commandments, from the moral law.

And included in that list is, well, that command that we just looked at, don't steal. And the guy says, well, I've kept that commandment since I was a kid.

I've kept that commandment. I didn't stick my hand in the cookie jar. I've kept the commandment.

So on the prohibition side, He is good. He's not a shoplifter. He doesn't rip off His customers.

[22 : 47] He's not cheating sars in any way. Then Jesus says, oh, but you lack something. Sell what you have and give generously to the poor.

And that completely kills the conversation. Because this man is exceedingly, exceedingly wealthy and he is evidently unwilling to part with his money. Now there are a bunch of different things that we learn from this particular encounter.

But one of the things at least that we learn is that for Jesus, keeping the command, thou shalt not steal, also has a positive expression in give generously to the poor.

You see that in Jesus' thinking? He's like, I don't just want you to not do this. I want you to do something. There's a duty attached to the command. And again, that duty is there not because Jesus is a legalist and he wants all sorts of self-righteous, moralistic followers coming after him. The duty is there because of love. The text says Jesus looked at him and loved him and then he explains the duty.

[24 : 02] The duties of the commands are invitations to actually step into love as a person. Love for your neighbor. Love for your fellow human being. Jesus is inviting you into love.

If we just focused on the prohibitions, then Christians would be relatively good at keeping the peace. We wouldn't murder people. We wouldn't steal people's spouses.

We wouldn't take their stuff. We'd keep the peace. But we wouldn't have a proactive love ethic to our world and to each other.

we'd be like that neighbor who keeps his house clean and is very tidy, his verge is trimmed, his walls are always painted, he never plays loud music, he never parks his car in front of your driveway, his dog doesn't even bark.

He keeps the peace all the time. But he never keeps an eye on your house when you're away. He's never going to invite you over for a bride, he's never going to greet you in the morning. He's just not the kind of neighbor who's going to go out of his way to assist you in your time of need.

[25 : 16] If we only focus on the prohibitions of the law, we become that neighbor. That's who we become. And for the Christian, stopping at keeping the peace is not enough.

And you say, well, why is that? Well, because our Lord and our Savior didn't stop there. That same chapter in Mark's Gospel, chapter 10, Jesus says this to his disciples, he says, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all for even the Son of Man, he's referring to himself, did not come to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many.

In the Gospel, Jesus goes out of his way to serve us, to give us forgiveness, to forgive us of sins, eternal life. He is proactive towards us.

And you say, well, how exactly does he serve us? Well, he gives his life as a ransom. That is, he pays a price. He incurs a cost in order to serve us.

You can keep the commandments I don't do this, I don't do this, I don't do this, but the way of Christ, friends, is I do do this. I do do this.

[26 : 38] I do do this. Why? Well, because Christ has done this for me. I can now serve other people at cost to myself because of Christ's costly service to me in the Gospel.

So here's where the Westminster Divines went with the next question in the larger Catechism. Question 141. What are the duties required in the Eighth Commandment?

This is the positive side. The duties required in the Eighth Commandment are the following. Truth, faithfulness, and justice in contracts and commerce between people. Paying everyone what they are due.

Restitution of goods unlawfully detained from the right owners of it. Giving and lending freely according to our abilities and the necessities of others. Moderation in our judgments, wills, and affections concerning worldly goods.

A prudent care and effort to get, keep, use, and dispose those things which are necessary and convenient for our physical needs and suitable to our condition. A lawful calling and diligence in it.

[27 : 46] Frugality. Avoiding unnecessary lawsuits, pledges of security or similar legal entanglements. And an effort by all just and lawful means to procure, preserve, and further the wealth and outward estate of others as much as our own.

I think you can kind of summarize all of that with two words. Generosity and justice. Generosity and justice. Christianity has within it this impulse to promote the cause of God and improve the estate of others.

That's what we do. Love God and love your neighbors as yourselves. That's what Jesus says. Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit rather in humility value others above yourselves not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of others.

That's what the apostle Paul says in Philippians. That is the default disposition of the Christian. And so in a world of godlessness and in a world of injustice in a world of people who are ruthlessly building their own personal empires the Christian comes and asks not how do I multiply and make the most of my material wealth for my own benefit the Christian asks how do I make the most of my material wealth for the benefit of the kingdom and for others.

And so there's a sense in which you break the eighth commandment and become a thief when you don't have that disposition towards your material wealth and your means.

[29 : 30] God owns everything friends. Don't be fooled about who really owns things. God owns everything. Psalm 50 I have no need of a bull from your stall or of goats from your pens for every animal of the forest is mine and the cattle of a thousand hills.

Everything belongs to God and yet in his providence he gives you a little corner of his wealth to steward to look after and when we steward that towards his kingdom purposes and the well-being of our neighbor that's when we stop being thieves.

now final point here stealing from God how do we steal from God? At the end of the Old Testament very end of the Old Testament the first half of your Bible the nation of Israel return from being away

from their land in exile and they return to rebuild the ruins of their land that God promised to them in his covenant promises violating that covenant breaking the covenant breaking the Ten Commandments and all the stipulations of the Ten Commandments over and over again violating the covenant is what got Israel exiled in the first place this is the reason why they got kicked out of the land but here they are back in the land and they've got a second chance to renew that covenant and to live consistently with the covenant but sadly things very quickly go back to the way that they were they go back to their covenant breaking ways nothing seems to have changed in Malachi which is the very last book the last prophetic book of the Old Testament

God turns now to these repetitive covenant breakers and he says you stole from me you broke the Eighth Commandment and the people will take offense how did we rob you God tell us how exactly did we rob you here's what God says in Malachi 3 in tithes and offerings you are under a curse your whole nation because you are robbing me bring the whole tithe into the storehouse that there may be food in my house test me in this says the Lord Almighty and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that there will not be room enough to store it so God says you want to know how you rob me you know how I know that you're robbing me tithes and offerings you're not bringing your whole tithe to me now you could read that and say what exactly is going on here is this God being a little bit petty a little bit pedantic you didn't bring me the full 10% you only brought me 8.72% bring me the whole 10% surely God is not about that that sort of detail doesn't he want all of life devotion that comes from the heart not just like 10% and I would say to you yes

God wants your all and at one level he could care less about percentages he wants all of your life all of your worship all of your devotion and so why then demand the tithe well think about it this way think about our previous point that we ought to be generous loving God and loving our fellow human being with our material wealth all in obedience to the 8th commandment I could try and stand here and paint a very compelling picture of what that would look like for the ordinary Christian how you could do that I could give you all the practical ways in which you could do that and live this life of radical biblical generosity but how how would you quantify your performance in that area as in how would you know that you're being generous enough sacrificial enough there's no line there's no marker you can look at and go if I just get over this line then I have fulfilled the duties required in the 8th commandment there's no marker like that there's so many variables in your life in everybody's life everybody's sitting here your skills your health your energy your life circumstances the opportunities available to you the education you received it would be impossible for me to create a formula from all of that taking all those variables into account that could calculate your faithfulness to that commandment but a tithe is different it's very precise 10% of your income 10% of your income goes to

[34 : 31] God now as I said at the beginning there's some debate about how the Old Testament tithe applies exactly to New Testament believers I think it's worth noting that Jesus and the apostles never really seem to overturn the tithe principle in the New Testament the same way they seem to do with some other ceremonial and civil laws in fact they add to the basic principle of a tithe the idea of giving sacrificially in response to Christ's sacrificial giving of himself for us so the New Testament pushes you even beyond that pushes the Christian hey don't don't look at the bottom number don't look at the tithe and peg your giving there and then say well look I'm done now I've done my duty tick instead just start there start at the 10% and ask how can I give more how can I be more sacrificial how can I be more generous with what the Lord has given me but what the tithe is the tithe is a litmus test it's a defined marker it's a sample of the whole and that's exactly what God is on about in

Malachi he's saying to Israel if you can't even give me 10% how are you ever going to give your whole life to me if you can't do that much how can I possibly trust you when you say I worship you when you sing that worship song and you lift your arms and worship all the time you go I love you Lord you're my life you're my everything how can I trust you when you don't even give 10% it's precisely because you're not giving 10% God says Malachi that I know that you're not giving me everything and therefore you're robbing me I made you I breathed life into you I created this world that you live in and on top of that I redeemed you from the mess that you created of your life and of this world I bought you at an unimaginable price and yet through your sin through your continual covenant breaking you steal from me over and over and over again and I know this because you can't even take your selfish pause of that 10% friends we're all thieves we're all thieves since the

garden we have been thieves there's

Adam and Eve in paradise beautiful paradise they have everything that they need everything has been set up for them to have blissful contentment that is why it is called paradise but they want to take the one thing that God keeps for himself the knowledge of good and evil so they steal it Eve reaches up and she steals the fruit from the tree and Adam her accomplice he doesn't stop her he just goes along he joins right in and that thievery destroys paradise our ongoing thievery perpetuates that original sin over and over and over again and so we continually destroy paradise we are thieves and so what hope is there for us I'll tell you what my hope is

Luke 23 New Testament we find Jesus having conversation with a man he's a broken man he's a man who's at the very very end of himself and to this very broken very desperate man Jesus speaks these words of comfort he says truly I tell you today you will be with me in paradise now do you know who that man was right he was the thief so he was a thief and you know where that conversation took place it took place on the cross moments before Jesus' death after a life of stealing the thief hanging there in agony looks over at this man that's hanging next to him and he realizes something strange is going on here because this is what the thief thinks the thief thinks I'm paying for my sins I'm getting what I deserve but this man he's done nothing wrong he's done absolutely nothing wrong this man is not a thief he's not a criminal he's a king and so he turns to Jesus and with his final little bit of strength he says Jesus remember me when you come into your kingdom and the king bleeding broken suffering king he turns to the thief and he says truly I tell you today you will be with me in paradise friends we have decimated paradise we've stripped every last piece of fruit off of the tree in our greed in our selfishness in our hunger for power we have stolen from God again and again and again and yet in his incalculable grace and mercy and at immense cost to himself the death of his son he turns to us and he says come back into paradise come back into paradise how do you overcome greed and selfishness in your own life how do you give generously and sacrificially how do you keep the eighth commandment in a very full and comprehensive way or you gaze with the eyes of your heart upon the crucified king who momentarily gave up his treasure in order to make you his treasure that's what you do this is the bottom line friends we don't have to steal we don't we don't have to steal because we have it all already that's the point of christianity if you are not giving generously and sacrificially it's probably because deep down you don't really believe that you don't really believe that you have everything in christ already you don't really believe that he's purchased you at immeasurable cost and given you the gift that surpasses all gifts and that now you're rich rich beyond your wildest dreams now already that's the gospel of grace and so friends I say run to

[41 : 38] Jesus this morning be like that thief realize that if you're honest you are at the end of yourself that you have spent a life in thievery turn to Jesus and say remember me Lord remember me he will he will save you and he will fill you with riches beyond anything that you can imagine both in this life and in the life to come and then be generous respond in joy and generosity sacrificial generosity take your wealth give it to God let him use it to bring that same gospel grace that you have received into the lives of other people that's how we stop being thieves together let's pray to that end father help us to see the treasure that is Christ this morning we find it so so very easy to see treasure in all sorts of other places and for the treasure that is the gospel to be diminished in our eyes and I just pray that you would reverse that experience for each one of us that the riches of Christ would just would shine and glow more every single day we'd grow in our appreciation of what it is that we have in the grace of Jesus and we would be less interested in the other shiny objects available to us in this world they wouldn't hold our intrigue because our eyes are so fixated on the great treasure of the gospel and so because of that Lord then make us generous may that free us up to be generous to say what you have given us whether it's a lot or a little we use it for your purposes we use it for your kingdoms and we reap and sow abundantly not sparingly make us a generous church make us generous people Lord and I pray for any person who may be sitting here this morning who doesn't know the richness of the gospel who hasn't had that encounter with Jesus Christ where they have turned away from their sin and trusted in him for their salvation I pray that they would do that this morning that you would bring them to faith Lord have mercy upon them we pray have mercy upon us as a church we ask this all for Christ's sake in his glory Amen Amen