

When Money Kills

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[0 : 00] Good morning. That was really good. The past several weeks we've been looking through the book of Deuteronomy and we've been seeing that in the book of Deuteronomy God is speaking to his people through Moses and God's word is being used to shape a people for, God's using it to shape a people for himself and he's using it to create a people who will love him and love others.

And we've talked about the fact that when God speaks, it changes his people. And when God speaks, it is big and it is important. And so I want us, before we look at God's word today, to just take a second, each of us individually, to pray and ask God to speak to us today, that we would hear his voice as we look at his word and that he would shape us into the people that he wants us to be during this time.

Father, we pray for this time together today. We pray that you would work in our hearts, that you would work in our lives, that you would shape us into the people that you want us to be. That as we are in this room today, that we would hear your voice and that we would be transformed because of it. And in Jesus' name, amen.

Amen. So I have something I need to confess to you. I have a problem with money. You know, we live in this wealthiest city on earth. We have more Rolls Royces per capita than anywhere on earth. And you know what? That doesn't really bother me that much. I don't usually fall asleep at night dreaming about owning a Rolls Royce. I recognize that's probably not a reality I'm ever going to have. So it doesn't really bother me. But here's the thing that does bother me when it comes to money. I spend a whole bunch of time hanging out with people who have a little bit more money than me. Not billions of dollars more than me, but a little bit more. And because of this, these people are able to take fancier vacations than me, stay at nicer hotels while they're away.

They're able to have nicer furniture and decorations in their apartment than I have. And when we go out for meals, they can eat at a little bit nicer restaurants.

[2 : 31] You know, I can still take vacations. I still have furniture and decorations in my apartment. I can still eat out. But I spend a lot of time with people who can do this a little bit better than I can.

And when I look at them and I compare myself to them, it's easy for me to honestly believe in my heart that I am poor. And that's my problem with money. I spend loads of time comparing myself to people who have a little bit more than me, and it makes me feel like I am poor. However, the objective facts tell me that that is far from true.

795 million people on the planet right now do not get enough nourishment to live a healthy, active lifestyle.

2.5 billion people on the planet don't have access to adequate sanitation. Which means that literally, if you live on the streets in Hong Kong, like on the streets homeless, the fact that you have access to public bathrooms, public showers, and public water fountains means that you're better off than one in three people on Earth when it comes to sanitation.

We live in an incredibly blessed, incredibly prosperous society. And by every objective standard, everyone in this room, including me, is incredibly wealthy.

[3 : 54] I did a little research this week. There's a website called Global Rich List, and it tells you, you type in how much you make, and it will tell you how wealthy you are compared to the average person on the planet.

And I learned something very interesting. Everyone here is incredibly wealthy. If you didn't know this, Hong Kong sort of has two pay scales.

They have the pay scale for domestic helpers and the pay scale for everyone else. The pay scale for domestic helpers is way lower. But if you're here today and making minimum wage as a domestic helper in Hong Kong, according to this website, Global Rich List, you're still in the top 20%

of richest people on Earth by income.

If you're making \$12,000 Hong Kong a month, which from what I understand is fairly normal for a fresh graduate from university, you're in the top 2.5% of richest people on Earth by income, according to this website.

And to get to the top 1%, do you know how much you need to earn? Anyone got a guess? No guesses?

[5 : 08] What? \$50,000? The correct answer, according to this website, to make it to the top 1% of all earners on Earth, you need to make \$16,500 Hong Kong a month.

We are an incredibly wealthy and blessed society and people. Even the poorest person in this room, by an objective standard compared to the rest of the world, is incredibly rich.

I am incredibly rich. And I have this problem, like I said, where I feel like I am not. And I know that for me, I spend far more time comparing myself with a handful of people who have a little bit more than me than I do giving thanks for the fact that I have more than I even need.

If you haven't figured it out today, or figured it out yet, we're talking about money today. And we're looking at, again, like I said, the book of Deuteronomy and Moses' instruction to the Israelites about money.

And what we're going to see is that money is a good gift from God, but it can become a curse if we let it get in the way of us trusting God.

[6 : 25] We're going to have three things we're going to look at. First, the curse that was a blessing. Second, the blessing that could be a curse. And third, our solution, remember the Savior who sets us free.

So we have the curse that was a blessing, the blessing that could be a curse, and remember the Savior who sets us free. First off, the curse that was a blessing.

As the Israelites are receiving the book of Deuteronomy, they're coming out of 40 years wandering in the wilderness, in the desert. This time in the wilderness was given to them as a punishment.

Originally, God set them free from slavery in Egypt, and basically was going to take them straight to the Promised Land with a quick detour to Mount Sinai to give them the law. But the Israelites, when they saw the people of the land, were terrified and said, we can't go in there, we can't fight them, we can't do this.

We're not going to go. And God said, well, the whole point is that you can't do it. You're not supposed to do it. I'm supposed to do it. You're supposed to go anyways. And they said, no, we're not going to do it. We're out.

[7 : 38] And God said, okay, you get 40 years in the wilderness as a punishment for your disobedience and lack of faith. And during this time, God, Moses uses the word humbled the Israelites.

If you look at verses 2 and 3 of today's passage, he says, So this humbling process involved everyone over the age of 20 dying before they went into the Promised Land.

But it also involved God letting the Israelites hunger. Not just like, oh, I missed a meal, but like they were crying out like, God, did you bring us here so that you could kill us because we are so hungry we think we're going to die.

And this time was tough for the Israelites, but it was good for them. Why was it good? Because God brought them to a place where they learned to depend on him because they saw that there was nothing they could do to provide for themselves.

It says that God fed them with this manna that fell down from the sky every day. In verse 4, he talks about how their clothing did not wear out, their feet did not swell. God provided miraculously for his people during this time in ways that they could never have provided for themselves.

[9 : 19] They're sort of like babies. You know, you have a newborn baby. A lot of my friends are reaching the point where they're starting to have babies. And as a baby, you're completely reliant on your parents for everything. And you know, if you have a little like one-year-old or two-year-old baby and it walks up to their parents and says, wow, mom and dad, look how great a life I've provided for myself.

As a parent, you're either going to laugh or cry. Laugh because it's so ridiculous, this idea that my baby would think that it can provide for itself. Or cry because my baby completely does not understand or appreciate everything that I do to provide a life for him or her.

In the same way, Israel was in a place where there was nothing they could do to say, look how great of a life we have provided for ourselves. Because they were utterly, completely dependent on God and they knew it.

The day-to-day life that they lived, they could see their utter reliance on God all the time. Despite what some people in our culture would want us to believe, there are things in life more important than us having lots of money.

And one of the things the Bible says is more important than having money is having this reliance and trust on God. And God used this time in the wilderness to teach the Israelites to rely on him.

[10:43] You know, a couple thousand or maybe 1400 or so years after this, Jesus came. He spent 40 days fasting in the wilderness. And at the end of those 40 days, Satan tempted him.

He said, turn these stones into bread. I know you're hungry. You can do it. You have this power. And Jesus actually did what the Israelites should have done during their time in the wilderness. He learned to rely on God. And he actually used this passage as his response to Satan. He said, man shall not live by bread alone, but man lives by every word that proceeds from the mouth of the Lord.

He refused to use his power to provide for himself. He trusted in God. He fought the temptation to just make it happen for himself. And you know what happens at the end of that story with Jesus in the wilderness?

It says the angels came and ministered to him. God provided for him because he was obedient to God. And in the same way, God's trying to teach the Israelites through the time in the wilderness that he provides for them.

[11:49] God is our provider. And so even though this time in the wilderness was given to the Israelites as a curse, as a punishment for their disobedience and lack of faith, it turned into a blessing because God used it to show them that he provides, that he is the good father that they need.

But the story doesn't end with them in the wilderness. No, the story moves on because God's plan is not for his people to stay in the wilderness forever. He has something more for them, which brings us to the blessing that could be a curse.

See, God has this amazing blessing prepared for his people. If you look in the passage starting in verse 7, it says, The Lord your God is bringing you into a good land, a land of brooks of water, of fountains and springs flowing out in the valleys and the hills.

And he goes on for four verses just describing the goodness of this land. And if you look at it, the words that he uses to describe it, he says it's a good land.

God wants you to live in the good land. It's a land of brooks of water, which is a good contrast to the desert they've been living in for the past 40 years. It's a land of wheat and barley and vines and fig trees and pomegranates, olive trees and honey.

[13:08] There is so much food here. You're not going to have to rely on bread to fall out of the sky every day because the land grows its own food.

And not only that, but you're going to eat without scarcity. You're going to be able to eat not just enough to survive, but you're going to be able to eat until you're full in this land. Isn't that going to be amazing?

He says you're going to be able to dig metals out of the hills so that you can work with it. You're going to eat and be full. You're going to bless the Lord your God for the good land that he has given you.

Moses says this land is going to be good. God is going to provide it for you. And there's something very important that we should learn from this, and that is that money and material blessings are not bad.

They're good gifts from God for his people. God, in this passage, wants his people to experience the abundance that he is giving them in this new land.

[14:09] He's actually brought them through this difficult process so that he can bless them in this new land. As a good father, he delights in giving good gifts to his children.

And like we said already, if you're here today, by any objective worldly standard, we are wealthy people. Like I said, I don't feel like this is true for me a lot of the time, but it is true.

We are a wealthy people. God has blessed us. He's given us food to eat, clothes to wear, a roof over our heads, adequate sanitation. Yeah, some of us might be more wealthy than others, but we

are all wealthy people.

And our wealth is a gift from God. And we don't need to feel guilty about the fact that we're wealthy, unless maybe if we've earned that wealth through illegal or immoral means.

But God delights in blessing his people. Having stuff, having money is not a bad thing in and of itself.

[15:17] However, having wealth and abundance brings danger. And that's what Moses is warning the people of in this passage.

He finishes describing the amazing good land that God's going to give to his people. And then the first words in verse 11 are, take care. God is giving you this wonderful, abundant, great new land. Be careful. Because this new land is going to bring temptations with it to rely on yourself that you have never had in the wilderness.

You know, if the time in the wilderness was the time of infancy for the Israelites, the time in the promised land maybe could be compared to a time of adolescence. In my home, my parents provided for us.

They would make us do chores because we're part of the family. And as part of the family, we had to contribute to the family. And when I got to be a teenager, I felt like, you know, I'm doing chores.

[16:25] I'm contributing to my family's prosperity. I deserve to be compensated for what I'm doing for my family. And so I told my parents, you know, my friends all get allowances for the chores that they do.

I'm contributing to our family. I should get an allowance for the chores that I do. My parents explained to me that I really didn't want that to be the case because if they did that, they would start charging me rent and charge me for the food that they fed me.

And I said, no, no, no, no. You don't understand. I contribute to this family. I deserve to get paid for the work that I do. And that led to a big argument.

That's another story for another time that I lost very badly. But it's that attitude that I had is one that Moses said the Israelites could very easily fall into.

Where even though we're in this place of utter dependence on someone else, we believe this lie that we are the ones providing for ourselves and that we are the ones who are worthy of receiving everything that we have.

[17:38] And that's why, just like me, as an ignorant teenager, Israel, in this land of prosperity and blessing, was going to face a temptation to become self-reliant.

This land, this blessing that God was giving them, was a good gift. But it brought with us danger. And for God's people, for us, a lot of times, the times when we are successful, are actually the most dangerous times for us.

Because in the times when everything is going crazy, we recognize our utter dependence on God. God, I was reminded of that this morning. We had a handful of kids' teachers downstairs call in sick very last minute.

We were scrambling to try and find teachers. And I just reached this point where I was like, there's nothing I can do on my own to fix this situation. God, please help. And he did. He provided all the teachers that we needed for this morning.

And it was this time of everything's going crazy. I need to rely on God. And God came through. But when everything is going right, I have a tendency to believe that I can do it on my own power, by my own strength.

[18:54] When things are going well, I believe that I am responsible for them going well. When my life feels like it's in order, I believe that it's in order because I have done the right things.

I have made the right decisions to get me to where I am today. And the reality is, I am utterly dependent on God for everything. Yeah, I worked hard in school to get through and get a job. But the reality is, I had no control over whether I would be born into a family where I would even have access to school as a little kid. I had no control over whether I'd be born with disabilities that would keep me from being able to do a job.

I had no control over whether I'd be born into one of those families where 795 million people in the world lack adequate nutrition. All of these things were things that were completely outside my control that God provided for me.

Each of us is completely dependent on God for everything in our lives. I mean, you can think of this, even we can take an extreme example of someone like LeBron James.

[20 : 10] Right? He worked hard. He has won NBA championships. He, if you don't know the story, he grew up in the Cleveland area. He got drafted by his hometown team, went away, played for another team, won a couple championships, and then came back to play for Cleveland and said, my goal is to win a championship for my city.

And in his second year, back with the Cavaliers in Cleveland, they won the championship. And if you listen to his interview after winning the championship, do you know what word you hear over and over and over again?

I. I worked hard. I came back. We did this. Lots of emphasis on him. And you know what? From an earthly perspective, yes, he did work hard.

But think about the numerous things that had to work together in his life that were completely dependent on God for him to be able to have that opportunity in the first place.

If he was born with a deformed leg or a deformed arm, he would not have been an NBA championship. If he was born five foot six, none of us would have ever heard his name before.

[21 : 22] And even the things that seem to be negatives that are these barriers and obstacles that he had to overcome probably are things that in the end helped to shape him into who he is today.

He had a rough childhood. He probably felt this need to fight and overcome and prove himself by becoming great at basketball that he wouldn't have had if he had this comfortable childhood.

All of these factors in his life are things outside of his control that are completely dependent on God. And each of us here today, however successful we are, are completely dependent on God for everything.

For the fact that our heart is still pumping from one moment to the next, we are dependent on God. For the fact that our company is staying afloat, we are dependent on God.

For the fact that our brains are still working and we can still do our job from a mental capacity, we are dependent on God. And we have little to no control over so many of these things.

[22 : 23] And we feel like we do. But at the end of the day, all of us are dependent on God for all of these things. And the times when we are successful are times of great temptation because when everything is working together properly, it's easy to believe that it's working together properly because of us and to stop trusting in God.

And that's why this blessing, this good blessing that God was giving to his people had a great danger attached to it. Moses is saying, God wants to bless you as you go into this land, but take care.

Be careful. Because the blessing can very easily become a curse if we let ourselves believe if we let ourselves believe that we are the ones who gave this blessing to ourselves and lose sight of the fact that we are utterly dependent on God for everything.

So what's the solution? How do we take care? How do we avoid falling into this trap of believing that we are self-sufficient and that we can do it on our own? The solution is, remember the Savior who sets us free.

Remember the Savior who sets us free. Moses tells the Israelites right here, the simple solution is remember.

[23 : 56] Remember. We've mentioned before, the words remember and do not forget occur over and over and over again in the book of Deuteronomy. The Israelites are supposed to remember what God has done in the past so that they will be shaped by that moving into the future.

And the combination of words remember and do not forget actually occur more times in this chapter, chapter eight, than in any other chapter in the book of Deuteronomy. Moses very clearly wants the Israelites to remember, remember, do not forget what God has done for you.

When I hear this word remember, I think of the picture that immediately comes to mind is like second grade spelling tests. You sit there and you spell through the word in your mind over and over and over until it's stuck there so you can remember it so that when you get into class and the teacher says, you need to spell math, you can write down M-A-T-H because in America we don't put an S on the end because we do it properly.

And you remember how to spell these words, but it's just a simple fact that's in your mind that doesn't impact the way that you live at all. That's not the kind of remembering that Moses is talking about here.

He's talking about a more relational kind of remembering. It's like if you have an old friend. You've been through a lot together. You have a history together. Now you live in different cities, but your

friend is coming to your city for a couple days.

[25 : 31] And you have the opportunity to hang out with this friend and catch up with them and you totally blow them off. Maybe in your mind you still remember your friendship.

You can recount the details of what's happened between the two of you. But in a very real sense, you've forgotten that relationship because you've forgotten the importance that it had in your life and the way that it shaped you.

This is a type of remembering and forgetting that actually carries some weight with it because it shapes who we are and who we become.

Moses is saying, don't blow off God. Don't ignore the history that you have together. remember him like you would remember an old friend when they come to visit you in town.

It's a relational remembering. And he says that this is important for your life, for your spiritual health. So this raises the important question, what is it that makes us forget?

[26 : 40] If remembering is so important and we're supposed to not forget, what is it that causes us to forget in the first place? Well, obviously, we're talking about money today. But money isn't really the answer, I don't think.

No one wants money simply for the sake of having money. We want money for the things that it can give us. Money makes us feel secure. Money makes us feel powerful.

Money makes us feel self-sufficient. We want these things and we grasp after money because we think that money can give us these other things that we want.

And again, money in and of itself is not a bad thing. The wealth that all of us have is a gift from God. The prosperity that the Israelites were going to have in the new land was a gift from God.

The problem is that wealth brings a temptation to believe that we are self-sufficient and don't need God. And when we give in to this temptation, we forget God, we forget what he has done for us, and we rely on ourselves instead because we believe that we're the ones who have done this all for ourselves.

[27 : 55] So how do we keep ourselves from forgetting, keep ourselves from relying on ourselves? Moses gives the simple solution, remember. Which you're like, well, duh.

Obviously, the solution to not forgetting is remembering. What are we supposed to remember?

We're supposed to remember God's salvation. Moses, he's here.

He's describing the new land that they're going into. He says, take care to not forget the Lord. And then, in the middle of verse 14, he jumps in and narrates everything that God has done to rescue them from slavery and bring them into this good land.

He says, in the middle of verse 14, he brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. He led you through the great and terrifying wilderness with its fiery serpents and scorpions and thirsty ground where there was no water and brought you water out of the flinty rock.

He fed you in the wilderness with manna that your fathers did not know that he might humble you and test you to do you good in the end. He goes through and he narrates for them everything that God has done for them to rescue them, to shape them into a people for himself.

[29 : 12] That is what they are supposed to remember. If you don't know this, the Exodus story from Egypt is the great salvation story of the Old Testament.

It's a time when God took his people who were slaves and rescued them and made them into a people for himself. And Moses points the people back to this and says, if you remember what God has done for you in the past, it will help you fight the temptation to rely on yourself in the future.

And the same is true for us today. Except we have an even greater salvation story that we can look back upon. another story of a time when God took his people who were slaves and rescued them to shape them into a people for himself.

Only with us, it wasn't slavery, physical slavery in Egypt. The Bible tells us that each of us, as God's creation, owed allegiance and obedience to God and each of us rebelled.

Each of us committed treason on a cosmic level and as a punishment for that, we became slaves to our sin, our rebellion.

[30 : 29] We deserved death. And that to rescue us from our slavery, God sent his son, Jesus, God in human flesh, to come to the earth, to set us free from our slavery at great cost to himself, at the cost of his own life.

He bore the consequences that we owed so that God could shape us into a people for himself. We remember the Savior, remember this great salvation.

I love, in 2 Corinthians chapter 8, verse 9, the Apostle Paul sort of ties together what Jesus has done in rescuing us from our sin and the discussion of money into one. and he says, for you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor so that you by his poverty might become rich. You know, when it comes to material possessions, I so often feel this need to grab on to everything that I can get and just hold on to it as tightly as I can. And I hold on to it with a grasped fist so that no one can get it from me.

[31 : 47] And what Paul says is that Jesus was rich. Jesus had everything. And Jesus came and instead of grasping it and holding on to it, he held his hand out and said, here, it's yours.

Take it. He became poor so that we might become rich. He held his wealth with an open hand so that we could prosper through his generosity.

And the Bible tells us that the proper response to that, to that love that he has shown us, is that now instead of us grasping on to all of the wealth that we can get, we grasp on to Jesus as tightly as we can.

And the thing about grasping on to Jesus as tightly as you can is that you can't grasp on to Jesus as tightly as possible and grasp on to money as tightly as possible at the same time. If you're grasping on to Jesus as tightly as possible, you're going to hold your money with an open hand.

But we can do this because he showed us there's something more important than having all the money. That relationship with him is far more valuable than what's in our bank account.

[33 : 08] he sets us free to be generous with what we have. He sets us free to love the people around us by letting go of his wealth so that we can become wealthy, not so that we can stockpile that wealth, but so that we can be generous with our wealth in the same way that he was generous with his.

So what does this look like in real life? Well, first, if you're here today and you are not a Christian, the first step is recognizing the Savior and what he has done for you.

Recognizing that although we are rebels against God, that God sent his son to rescue us to pay the price for our rebellion against him, that he became poor so that we might become rich.

And the way to receive that gift is through trusting in him and placing our faith in him to rescue us. If you're here today and you are a Christian, it's about holding our money with an open hand because we're holding on to Christ as tightly as we can.

Remember, everyone in this room is wealthy. I'm not talking to people above a certain income level. All of us have earthly wealth. And I think so often, like Chris said, we in the church talk about how we should be generous and give, especially to the church, and then don't talk about what else we should do with the rest of our money.

[34 : 39] And it's so easy to just say, this is my stuff, you don't worry about it because it's mine to worry about. But what this passage teaches us is that everything we have is a gift from God.

Like Chris said earlier, we are stewards, he is the true owner. And so yes, generosity, giving to the church is important because it allows us to do stuff to reach out to the people around us and to do ministry.

But, what about the rest of it that doesn't go in the offering plate? How do we have an attitude this week that says, everything I have in my bank account and in my house is a gift from God to be used for him?

You know, the Bible does say providing for our families is something God wants us to do. Using your money to provide for your family is a good thing. Using your money to make your spouse feel valued is a good thing.

But then what else? What if we used our money to invite another family over for dinner and cook them a meal so we could get to know them and find out how we can do a better job loving the people around us?

[35 : 50] Whether it's people from church or people from our apartment building or from our work. Just using our resources to help build relationships so that we can know how we can love the people around us.

Even for those of us who don't have lots of disposable income, cooking a meal for two extra people is not that expensive. And what if we said, we're going to use the resources that God has given us to invest in building relationships this week so that we can be light and salt for God and his kingdom?

What if we just went into conversations with eyes and ears looking for the needs around us and a heart that says, I want to use what God has blessed me with to be part of helping people with the needs that they have.

I think even that small attitude change would be a huge step towards recognizing that what we have is a gift from God not for ourselves. and at the end of the day, whether or not we use our resources to love others is a reflection of whether we truly believe these resources are from God or whether we believe they're from ourselves.

If we believe that they're from God, we can be generous with them because just as he has provided for us in the past, he will continue to provide in the future. If we believe that our resources are completely from us and our self-sufficient hard work, we're going to stockpile them because we never know when our luck's going to run out and when we're going to need them in the future.

[37 : 30] So the curse can be a blessing. Poverty can be a blessing if it draws us to God. The blessing can be a curse. Prosperity and riches, although a good gift from God, can be dangerous if they draw us away from him.

At the end of the day, the question isn't about how much money we have in our bank account but about who we are relying on. Are we relying on ourselves to provide for ourselves and take care of ourselves?

Or are we relying on the Savior who gave up his riches and became poor so that we might become rich and calls us to do the same for the others around us?

We're going to close in prayer in just a minute, but before we do that, I want us to just take one minute to reflect and think, this coming week, what's one tangible way that you can use the resources that you have to demonstrate a reliance on God rather than on yourself?

In this coming week, what's one tangible way that you can use the resources you have to demonstrate a reliance on God rather than reliance on yourself? God, I confess that so often when it comes to money, I feel the need to hoard and stockpile personally because I don't rely on you.

[39 : 09] I confess that I feel poor even though you have blessed me with so much and that I don't give you the thanks that you deserve for the blessings that you have given me.

God, I pray that we as a people would be people who remember you, people who remember the things that you have done for us and remember the importance of our relationship with you, that as we remember that it would make us generous, that as we remember that it would help shape us into a people who love you and love others, that you would help us to be a community of people who shows the world around you through our actions the amazing love that you have for us and that lives would be transformed because of our generosity.

I pray that you would protect us from relying on ourselves and help us to have a constant reliance on you to provide for us and care for us. We thank you that you're good.

We thank you that you love us. In Jesus' name, amen.