

“Cantaloupe—Entrusted or Entangled”

Like this shirt? I went to Macy’s, tried it on. It fit. I liked the color, so I took it. I walked out of the store and all of a sudden I heard these alarms going off, alarms. The sales people, and store security, and mall security come after me. I’m like, “What?” Security goes, “What are you doing?” I said, “I’m taking this shirt. I saw it, I liked it, I tried it on, it fits. So I’m walking out with the shirt.”

They said, “You can’t do that.” I said, “Why not? I like it.” They said, “Because you just can’t. That’s stealing.” I said, “You know what? I am sick and tired of Macy’s. Every time I come into this store, all you want is my money. I’m tired of it. In fact this whole mall, all you want is my money.”

You walked into church today. Some of you are like, “All the church wants is my money. That’s all they talk about is my money.” Well, everybody wants your money and you don’t complain. The mall wants your money? Dell wants your money. The car dealership wants your money. The realtor wants your money. Price Cutter wants your money. Wal-Mart already has your money! Our money. Why is that we don’t really complain and do the push back except when it comes to the things of God? That’s a very interesting question, isn’t it?

I’m going to talk about money today. And I acknowledge that people get funny when you talk about money. Have you ever noticed that? Whenever I talk about sex or money, people are like, “Uh Oh, here we go. This makes me nervous.”

So let’s just clear the air. This isn’t about making you feel guilty. So let that go. This isn’t about the church needing your cash. This isn’t about meeting a budget or getting you to fill out a commitment card. If you’re a member of this church, you fill one out, you know that, that’s just part of the deal.

I teach on money throughout the year for a couple of important reasons, first because how we handle our money and possessions affects our souls. Plain and simple. Jesus said one day in Matthew 6:21, **“Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also” (Matthew 6:21, NIV)**. Heart follows treasure. You see, Jesus wants your heart. And he knows that your heart and mine are closely tied to our money and possessions, and where we put those things, that’s where our hearts are going to be.

Jesus talked more about money than he talked about Heaven or Hell. Eighteen of the 38 parables are all about money. Jesus was always talking about money and not because he was into money, he didn’t really own anything. He talked about it so much because he knew how quickly people worship it. He knew how quickly it takes the place of God. He knew how it could tear apart families, and marriages, and people’s souls if it was put in the wrong place in a person’s life. And you probably know what I’m talking about. So we talk about getting a right perspective on money occasionally because it affects our souls.

And we also talk about money because we are on a mission, and if we are to fulfill our part of that mission, we fuel that mission with our money. I have to be reminded regularly, and you have to be reminded regularly, to invest our resources in eternal things instead of just stuff that is here today, and in the city dump tomorrow, or stuff that’s precious to us today, and in a rummage sale tomorrow. We’re on a mission, and we need to be reminded to channel our money into things that really last.

I love what President Pearson of Miami Christian College said once. He stood up at a fundraiser for the college and said this: “People say you are always asking for money. And they are probably right. But let me tell you a personal story. I had a little boy--my firstborn. He was a delight to our hearts, but he was always costing me something. He needed clothing, shoes, food, and had special needs that I gladly provided, for he was my son. Then one day he died. It was an experience that I hope you will never have. He does not cost me a dollar now. Every need is an unfailing sign of life and growth. Body, mind, and soul have their needs and they must be met continually. A ministry that is constantly in need of funds is alive and growing and going somewhere. A dead ministry has no need, and will not bother you.”

We’re on a mission, we are growing and changing lives, and going somewhere, so I’m going to bother you. But what God has to tell us about money and possessions will also bless us! Following God’s guidance on money and possessions brings some serious blessings into our lives. God says, “trust me on this, and then get ready, I’ll open the floodgates of blessings into your life.”

So the questions are: Do you trust God? How do you show your trust? And can God trust you?

To get us thinking, let's take a look at the picture we get in the book of Genesis. In the story of creation we get a glimpse of how we are to handle our money and possessions except in this story it's about fruit. It's the story of creation. God formed his partnership with Adam and Eve. He created Adam and Eve in this environment, Eden. The picture of this place is that it is amazing, beautiful, filled with every good thing. God said, "Enjoy the garden. Have a blast. It's all yours." "But," he said, "there's this one tree I don't want you to mess with. All the others, eat from them, enjoy them, they are as good as it gets. But there's this one tree that's mine. Don't mess with the fruit on the tree in the middle of the garden. It's my tree." God set aside one part, his divine portion.

There are a lot of facets to this one little part of the story. But I want to focus on the facet of trust. Eve and Adam are tempted. They've got every good thing around them. More than enough. But they are tempted to take fruit from the one tree that God said to stay away from. Well, the evil one slithered up to Eve and said, "Why don't you eat from the fruit of that tree." God's divine portion. Genesis 3:6, **"When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it" (Genesis 3:6, NIV).**

Then Eve got Adam and he ate some. They ate the divine portion and because they ate the divine portion, what happened? We're told later that they were cursed. They chose to be cursed. I thought that was fascinating.

This is teaching us that God always claims something for himself, a divine portion. And it's interesting because God doesn't **need** that portion for himself. God doesn't need it. It seems pretty clear that God uses that as a test of trust. God formed his partnership with Adam and Eve and tested the trust. It would be like if Bill Gates came up to you, and said, "Hey, I like you. You know what? I want to do something for you. I want to do this deal with you and here's what I want to do. I will give you 90% of Microsoft, 90%. Just give me 10% back. That's my portion." Would you take that deal? Would anyone here refuse that? I'd be like, "Bill!" We'd all be turning somersaults!

Well, that's the kind of deal, the kind of partnership that God had with Adam and Eve. God says, "I have made you. Everything is a gift from me. Let's be in partnership. All this is your, but as a test, I claim this one portion, so don't mess with it. Trust me."

But Eve and Adam chose to go against the grain. They chose to sin. They ate the divine portion. And it's very interesting if you unpack Genesis 3:6. They were tempted by the lust of the flesh, (it was good for food), the lust of the eye (it looked good), and the lust pride (you can become like God). It's interesting that Adam and Eve were tempted with the divine portion even when they had so much more! They were entrusted, then they became entangled. They chose the curse. God always claims a divine portion to test us. God has entrusted us, and many of become entangled.

Let's look at our spiritual ancestor, Joshua. Joshua was put in charge of conquering the Promised Land. There were 10 cities and God said to Joshua, "The first city, when you take it over, everything in it is my portion." Joshua said, "God, you bet, I'll bring it." They conquer that city and Joshua collects all the gold and silver and stuff in it and brings it to the house of worship. It was a test of trust. Would the people get entangled in the stuff, or could they be entrusted with more? Would they trust that God would fulfill his word and 9 other cities would be theirs, or would they get entangled with the stuff in the first city, the stuff that was pleasing to the eye, and pleasing to the flesh, and take God's portion, and be cursed? It was a test of trust. Would they get entangled or be entrusted? Everything is going great until a guy named Achan kept some for himself, he hid it away, and because of that, the whole deal was cursed.

God's test of trust hasn't changed. Will we get entangled or can we be entrusted with more? The first fruits of our lives, the first tenth of our income, that's God's portion. And just like Joshua, we're supposed to bring it to our local house of worship.

I was doing a spot on TV last week with Gary Bandy and Tiffany Alaniz and right after I did my spot a financial advisor was on. He was talking about investing and a few guidelines about how to do it. I believe in investing and saving, that's a part of good stewardship. What I didn't agree with was the number one thing on the list in investing was, "Pay yourself first." In other words, make saving for yourself your top priority. Set that

part aside first. Again, I believe in saving, but paying yourself first means you're getting confused on who the first fruits belong to. God's been crystal clear about this. If we're clear on who the first tenth belongs to, and we act on that, we'll be blessed. But if go Achan, if we do what Eve and Adam did, we're cursed. Ouch!

Way too many people who are Christ-followers are consuming God's portion. Forgetting. Using God's portion for other things. Take a look at this video... **"God's Pie"**

"Dude, he brought the pie!" Eating God's portion is a great way to get spiritual indigestion. It's a test of trust. Do you trust God at his word? His word says, **"Will a person rob God? Yet you rob me. But you ask, 'How do we rob you?' In tithes and offerings. You are under a curse-- the whole nation of you-- 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 you will not have room enough for it' (Malachi 3:8-10).** That's God's promise. Do you trust God at his word?

Now why does God want me to trust? It's all about love. He wants the best for me. John 3 says it so well, **"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him" (John 3:16-17, NIV).**

God loves you and me and he wants to bless us. Proverbs 16 says, **"Whoever gives heed to instruction prospers, and blessed is the one who trusts in the LORD" (Proverbs 16:20).** Trust and blessing are woven together. What does it mean to be blessed? To be blessed means to be on the receiving end of the tangible and intangible favor of God. Intangible blessings are things like forgiveness, grace, salvation, hope, freedom. Tangible blessings are things like a job, money, possessions. Blessed is the man or the woman who does what? Trusts in the Lord.

It's important for us to acknowledge that in God's economy, matter matters. We're blessed tangibly and intangibly, so we're called to trust God with the tangibles and intangibles. It isn't just about the intangibles. Matter matters.

Look at it this way: How many people are married in here? You're married. All right. Is it enough to look at your spouse and say, "I love you?" It's good, very good to tell your spouse you love him or her. That's nice. That's romantic. But is it enough? Of course not? Your wife, your husband, wants you to back it up. When you tell her, "I love you," she likes that, it's important to say it, but she's also thinking, "You say you love me, now show me! Your words are wonderful, but show me."

That's what God's saying. It's all about love here. God's saying, "Adam and Eve, I love you. I'm crazy about you. This is my portion. You say you love me. Cool. Show me you love me by your discipline, by your trust in me, by how you handle the treasure test."

You probably wonder what these cantaloupes are up here, don't you? Who likes cantaloupe? Okay. These cantaloupes represent our tangible resources, our money. We all have cantaloupes. Some of us have just a few, some of us have bunches (bananas come in bunches, what do cantaloupes come in? Herds?)

Anyway we have this matter, these resources, this money, our blessings, the challenge is to trust God and make sure that he gets his portion, that we don't eat it. If we trust God at his word, and give him his portion, 10%, then the rest becomes more than enough. It's the test of trust. But way too often, instead of bringing God's portion, a lot of us eat it! We consume the tithe! Like Adam and Eve. We get caught up in the lust of the flesh, the pride of life, the lust of the eyes.

I look at my life and I am so blessed! It's truly amazing. I'm talking about the tangible and intangible blessings. I don't deserve the blessings; I didn't earn the blessings, but they're there. Why? I have a hunch that it's this. For 14 years, Janet and I have given God his portion. We did it when we didn't have much at all, we've done it as our income has gone up and down and up again. We've tithed.

I've been blessed for 14 years, like wow, why am I so blessed? I think I figured it out [cutting open cantaloupe] Look what is inside the cantaloupe. Seeds! This thing is just packed with seeds. So, literally, I am sowing a ton of seed when I bring God his portion. I am bringing the first fruit of my gain to God. I've been doing this for 14 years. We had to reprioritize our lives, but as soon as we put the tithe in God's hands it seems like it came right back. I'm putting a cantaloupe in his hands. And over the years God took that tithe

and used the seeds within to make other growth happen in the kingdom, in the lives of others and in my life. Blessings, tangible and intangible blessings! That's what God does.

Some of you are going, "Man, why don't I have a life full of blessing? Why don't I have a life full of joy? Why do I feel cursed?" It goes back to the cantaloupe, dude. It's all about the cantaloupe. Are you giving God his portion, or consuming for yourself and throwing the seeds away?

I look at Saint Paul's. In the 13 years I've been here we've done some amazing things together. It's amazing what God's doing here through people who are giving God his portion. Do a quick view of Saint Paul's—here and at the Salvage Yard, the children's ministries and facilities, the Zone for Youth, our recovery ministries, the classes, courses, the missions here and our village in Nicaragua. All that is a result of people giving God from what God has given them. You're sitting around with some people who have taken part in this thing, who have brought the tithe, who have given over and above the tithe and given offerings to make it possible. In fact, many of you would not know Jesus Christ personally if these people hadn't brought the cantaloupe and then been generous with their offerings.

So, don't eat the tithe, Eve. Don't let the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life mess you up. If you're not tithing, put God to the test. It may seem like it's a sacrifice to start if you're not tithing yet, but it's not really a sacrifice, because it will come back, because the floodgates of heaven will open up. That's God's promise. So what are you going to do with your cantaloupe? I say trust. And for today that is the Good News. In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen

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