



Message Transcript

Material Blindness

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Pastor Jeff:

Our father in heaven, we give you all the glory and all the honor and all the praise that is so due to your name. You and you alone deserve our highest praise. We thank you, Lord, that we get to gather as a group of people to hear your living and active word, believing that every time your word is faithfully and accurately proclaimed that you speak. And so our prayer as a body this morning is speak, Lord, for we are ready to hear.

And so now for all those who have gathered who desire to hear Jesus speak directly to you, who will believe what he says and who will by faith put into practice what he shows you, will you agree with me very loudly this morning by saying the word amen? Amen. A number of years ago I saw a television program that was entitled something like How The Lottery Changed My Life. And I remember watching this show and it was really about people who had won the lottery and how the income they had had changed their life.

And they had a couple of different episodes and some had won just over a million dollars, but there was one I remember that won upwards like seven or \$800 million. And they were following this couple around showing how their life had changed. And I remember while I was watching the television program, I wasn't thinking about the television program. I was doing calculations on my phone. What if I won about \$800 million? How would that be amortized out? Would I take it in one lump sum, or would I take it in payments?

And what would I be making each month? And then I began to get excited and I started to think and I began to visualize as to what I would do. Just so you know, I had a home in Hawaii. I also had one of the beaches of Florida. I had a mountain home, but I had a jet as well so I could get back and forth between all these places really nicely. I was just thinking. And it was about 20 minutes later, I realized I haven't thought about Jesus once in the last 20 minutes. All I have thought about was the accumulation of stuff that would benefit me.

And then I began to laugh, like no wonder I'll never win the lottery. Not that I play, but I'm just saying that's not a good thing necessarily. And there's been studies done that have shown that people who win the lottery and people who in the very same year become paraplegics or quadriplegics, that after a period of three years those who became paraplegics and quadriplegics can actually demonstrate that they're happier than people who have won the lottery. And I know what you're thinking, "Not me. Give me a try."

And that's why we're going to have this message today, because one of the reasons and one of the ways that we need to walk our talk is in how we steward the resources that God's given to us and how we make the most of those things. Because without them, we're trapped. As a matter of fact, I think in preaching this message, I think it would be like a fish teaching other fish, let me tell you about the problems of being wet. We swim in materialism so much, we don't even realize how much what the Bible spells out about materialism actually affects us.

And this is an important teaching for those of us who would say, "I want to walk my talk. I want to be the fullness of everything Jesus wants me to be," then I believe that God has a word for you. So I want to encourage you this morning open your Bibles to James 5. James 5. We're going to read through the first six verses together, and then we'll unpack this. And we'll take a look at four challenges with materialism and how it blinds us to what God actually wants for us in our lives.

Listen to what he says. Come now, you rich, weep and howl for your miseries which are coming upon you. Your riches have rotted and your garments have become moth-eaten. Your gold and your silver have rusted, and their rust will be witness against you and will consume your flesh like fire. It is in these last days that you have stored up your treasure. Behold the pay of the laborers who mowed your fields and which has been withheld by you cries out against you. And the outcry of those who did the harvesting has reached the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth.

You have lived luxuriously on the earth and the life of want and pleasure. You have fattened your hearts in a day of slaughter. You have condemned and put to death the righteous man. He does not resist you. This is one of the more challenging teachings in the entire New Testament. It's a scathing rebuke of those who don't use their resources to the glory of God so much. So is this true that many commentators will say, James is even talking to church people. James is talking to people that are out there because Christians would never act like this.

But in the same way that James has encouraged us in all different areas of life,

he wants us to be aware of the dangers of materialism as well. And the Holy Spirit found it fit to pin these words through the Apostle James to do this. So before we take a look at these four challenges to material blindness and how materialism blinds us, I want to set a framework for us. Because when it comes to talking about money, many of us don't have a framework for what that looks like.

And I just want to tell you this, to preach on this, just so you know, we go through sections of the Bible, this has been planned for a long time. So most people, the first week of December start talking about Jesus is coming. We're talking about materialism. I love preaching at Brave Church because Brave allows me to teach the truths of Jesus. And what better time to teach about materialism than in this season? Amen? Amen.

But I want to talk about wealth, because really the way the Bible spells out wealth is with two different groups of people, rich and poor people and righteous and unrighteous people. And so what I've done is I've just created a little chart for you. You can see up on the screen. And really when it comes to those groups of people, there's really four different groups of people. Now, if you're righteous and you're wealthy, here's what you are, you're a blessing.

Because if you're really depending upon the Lord and you really realize that everything you have is for the Lord and you really want to steward all that you have for him, then guess what you get to be? You get to be a blessing for every single person that you come into contact with. And the Bible doesn't say it's wrong to have wealth. The Bible says it's wrong for wealth to have you. It's not how much you have, it's how

much does it have you. And by the way, it's not about how much it is because we can set our own levels. Just so you know, I'm talking to the rich today.

If you have babysitting money and you make \$200 or \$50, you're rich. Many people in the world live in single bedroom houses for their 10 family members and they don't make that much in a month. So just so you know, when I'm talking to the rich, I'm talking to you. And if you'll steward what you have to the glory of God, you can be a blessing as well. But then there's a group of people that the Bible calls as the righteous poor and there are also a blessing. The righteous poor are blessing.

I've been all over the world. I've been in one of the worst slums in India. I remember traveling through, stepping over raw sewage to get into a room that was all cement, to have 50 kids in there that loved Jesus, that had the joy of the Lord all over their face, and they didn't have one toy to their name. Not one stuffed animal, not one toy, not one anything. And they were so content and satisfied in the love of Jesus. And guess what? All Christians are a blessing. Do you know why? Because all Christians are depending upon the Lord and all Christians see their life as to be a blessing to others.

So it doesn't matter how much you have, it matters who you're depending on for what you have and how you can be a blessing to others. Even the widow that put in two small copper coins worth less than a penny in the New Testament that was really extorted by the wealthy, when she put in her two small copper coins, Jesus stood up and said, "That's what I'm talking about. I see what she's done. She put in more than

all the others combined because she out of her poverty gave everything she had to live on."

Whether you're poor or whether you're rich, if you're righteous, you are used of the Lord. And then there's another category, there's the unrighteous. There's unrighteous rich and unrighteous poor. If you're unrighteous and you're rich, you know what you are? You're wicked. According to the Bible, you're wicked. And here's why, because you're going to use your resources for who? You. And you're going to do everything for who? You. And everything is about who? You. So however you have resources and whatever you have are going to be spent on you which makes you wicked.

Which means no matter how much you have, it doesn't matter to anybody else around you because your life is centered on who? You. You're wicked. And the Bible says for wicked, there is a day of judgment coming because their God has been the God of this age and they're living for themselves. And then there's the unrighteous poor, and the unrighteous poor are this, they're a victim, because they're not depending upon the Lord and because they don't understand that the Lord is the one who provides and they view the world as the haves and the have-nots.

Because I don't have, then guess what? You owe me. And anybody that walks around as the unrighteous poor, as a victim, that always feels that somebody else needs to take care of them. That's the unrighteous poor. And I've met a lot of poor people that don't need more money. I've met a lot of poor people that need Jesus. I've met a lot of rich people that need Jesus. It doesn't matter who you are, but what

James is addressing is the unrighteous rich and the unrighteous poor.

And if you think about this, if you think about our society and you listen to the people that are crying out or trying to make laws or do all this, what category are they in? They're in the wicked victim category. Wicked people making wicked laws for victims, because that's what the unrighteous do. And this is what the Holy Spirit is telling us can never be.

Because if Jesus Christ is really the center of our life and we've repented of our sins and trusted in him, it doesn't matter what the lot of our life is in terms of the abundance of our accumulation, it matters that we're depending upon the Lord and we see ourselves as a steward of everything that he's given to us. And those are the categories of wealth. So it's not wrong to have, it's wrong to let something have you. And you can have a lot and it doesn't have control of you, and you can have a little and it controls every part of you.

So it's not how much you have, it's how much does it have you. And with that as a framework, I want to get into the text today and talk about four challenges to material blindness. Four challenges to material blindness. And the first challenge is this, material blindness takes no account for the future. Material blindness takes no account for the future. Material blindness, if you're living with the sin of materialism, you're not thinking about the future, you're very shortsighted. Notice what the text says.

Come now. I mean, we just got done preaching about the problem of self-centeredness. I found it humorous last week. Several of you told me, "That was such a

timely message for me." I'm like, yeah, I preach on self-centeredness, it's a timely message every week. It's a timely message for me. This is the application of self-centeredness, how it affects your wealth, how it affects how you steward what you do. And people that are materialistic are blind to the fact that they're not taking account for the future.

They're forgetting that they're just a manager who will one day give an account to God. He says, come now. Let's think about this. You rich, here's what he tells the rich, weep and howl. Weep means to sob like you would be sobbing at a funeral. Howl means to shriek or screech or to cry out because of the pain. Come now, you rich, weep and howl for your miseries which are coming upon you. Here's what God wants us to understand. You're not the owner of anything that you have, you're simply a manager of it.

You are a steward of it. And by the way, one day you will give an accounting to the Lord Jesus Christ for everything that he's ever brought through your hands. Whether it be money or material goods or anything, anything that's passed through you, you will give an accounting to God. And here's his warning. His warning is to those who have clung onto that, who have made that their God, who have said, "I need more stuff and I got to have this," woe to you, because if materialism is your God, there's eternal consequences to that.

You should weep and howl. You should lament and mourn if your whole life is centered on this. That's why even Jesus when he taught said, "What does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul?" If you're only living for this world,

you've missed out on everything. If your only way you're living in this world is to live comfortably here, you've missed out on everything. The world is perishing. If you're trying to get comfortable here, do you not realize that friendship with the world is hatred towards God?

He says, wake up. You're blind to the fact that you're going to give an accounting to God for everything that he's ever brought through your life. This is not a time to nudge your neighbor and say, "Are you listening? We got to go get Joe. He's got to hear this message." This is you. This is what's come through your life. How are you accountable for the very things that God's given to you? How are you going to let him know that when you brought me this, here's what I did with it, to bring you the greatest honor and to serve the most amount of people.

In the greatest sermon that's ever been preached, Jesus said in Matthew 6:24, he says, "No one, no one," that would be me and you and all the disciples that were living in the first century, no one, it's not possible, "No one can serve two masters. For either he will hate the one and love the other, or he'll be devoted to one and despise the other." You cannot serve God and wealth. Who can't? You can't. Who can't? I can't. Who can't? People out there can't. You can't serve both.

You can't give your time, effort, and attention to the accumulation of wealth while at the same time giving your focus to Jesus. You can't serve both. Eventually one's going to win. Which one's going to win? You can't serve God and money. That's Jesus' words. He gave us a stern warning about that. He gave us a stern warning about that.

And we don't have time to go through this today. But if you want to write down Matthew 25:14-30, it's the Parable of the Talents, where God has given a measure of grace to everyone.

And certainly it's not just money, it's gifting. But everything God's run through your hands or every way that he's given you, you're going to give an accounting for your life. And if all you've taken is buried it and say, "Oh, this is mine. This is what I'm depending on," you're going to give an accounting for that someday. Make no mistake about it. What we are preparing for and what we're hearing the Lord teach us this morning about is our eternity, not just our life here and now. It's not just how to live comfortably here and now.

It's not just how to get through this life in a way that is great for you. It's how do you set yourself up for when you meet Jesus face to face that you can hear the words, "Well done, good and faithful servant." Because God, the things that you brought into my life, I recognized I'm not the owner. I was just the manager. Here's what it means. You own a car. You really don't. You're just the manager of that car. You own a house. You don't own a house, you're just the manager of that house.

Everything, your clothing, the books you have, anything in your house, you're not the owner of anything because you're not taking it with you. It'll be here after you pass. You're just a manager of all those things, and God wants us for anything we do have to manage them well for him. Well, I have some things I don't think God would be pleased with. Then you may not want to hold onto him any longer. That's what James is trying to tell us. He's trying to warn us of this danger of materialism.

And it's all over us, I mean, especially at the holidays. Just look around. I mean, every commercial that you will see from now through the holidays and even after is all about what you need and when you need it and how it's so much better than what you have and how you should be dissatisfied until you get this. More what? Stuff. Stuff. It takes no account for the future. And here's what you need to realize, you may not want to be as wealthy as you think you want to be. Because the more you have, the more you're accountable for.

That's what you need to be aware of. The more you have, the more you're accountable for. And that's what Jesus is trying to teach. Material blindness takes no account of the future. This was so prevalent that even in the first century, Jesus wrote a letter to the church in Laodicea. We can read about it in Revelation 3:17, to a church that was resting on its rich laurels. And he said this, because you say, "I am rich and have become wealthy and have need of nothing," and you do not know that you are wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked.

You think you're rich, you think you have it all, but I'm here to tell you, you're wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked. Materialism has a way of blinding us to the things of God and thinking that we're satisfied when we're actually missing out on the deepest satisfaction, which is the mission of the Lord Jesus Christ. Dependence upon him is where you're going to be satisfied. That's why materialism is insatiable. There's not a limit to it. The more you have, the more you want.

The more you have, the more you think you need. I knew it was going to be quiet

in here this morning. I told my wife and daughters they should go shopping yesterday because they wouldn't want to today. Material blindness takes no account of the future. It takes no account of the future. We don't think about it like that. I'm just spending. I'm just doing. I'm just getting. But here's what he said. Everything coming through your hands, you're going to give an accounting to the Lord Jesus Christ for.

Number two is this, material blindness also cherishes the temporary pleasures of accumulation. Material blindness, if you're into materialism, it cherishes or champions the temporal pleasures of accumulation. Well, what's accumulation? Just getting stuff. There's pleasure in getting stuff. I just got to go shopping. I got to get stuff. I got to get on Amazon. I got to get stuff. I need more stuff. Notice what the Lord says. He says, "Your riches have rotted and your garments have become moth-eaten."

Your riches have rotted. Your garments have become moth-eaten. What's he saying? When you accumulate stuff, it tarnishes. It doesn't last very well. Even the things that you think are permanent, gold and silver, they're going to get corroded. They're going to tarnish. And what about these garments? In the 1st century, most people had one garment. That's why Jesus said, if somebody asks you for your tunic, give them your cloak as well. What do you mean? That's all I have.

He's like, yeah, give them everything. That's what his point was. Only the rich had more than one garment. And he was saying, when you have garments and all you do is accumulate garments and they stay in the closet, they get eaten by moths. So what good is it just to accumulate garments? What's the point? And for us, we know that styles change and everything else. I mean, if you have great garments from the 1980s,

you probably don't wear them much anymore because everything changes.

And he's like, why are you accumulating all this stuff? I mean, just think about it. Think about Christmas, what we get stressed about. What do we get stressed about? Money and buying stuff. Well, I love you so much. I love you so much. I'm really, really stressed because I got to buy you more stuff that you don't need, that you won't use, but I got to do it because it's the right thing to do because you need more stuff. It means anybody else like us that when you got married, you didn't have anything at all.

You had no stuff. My in-laws gave us a piece of furniture so we'd have a bed. Somebody else gave us a couch. That's all we had. And now we look around, where did all this stuff come from? It just accumulates. Even if you don't want it to accumulate, it accumulates. People give you stuff, you buy stuff, you purchase stuff, and you don't realize your life is just filled with stuff. And when your life is filled with stuff, you miss out on the mission of Jesus. You're no longer focused on him.

Because sometimes when you get more stuff or you get more valuable stuff, then you got to earn money so that you can protect all that stuff. And you got to get places to put all that stuff, and you got to get insurance for all that stuff. So that if something happens to your stuff, you have money to get more stuff. And if materialism is your thing and you're blind to that, your whole life is centered around stuff. You got to a job so you can get stuff. You work so you can get stuff.

And anytime it's about the temporary pleasures of accumulation, you miss out on the eternal joy of serving the Lord Jesus Christ with incredible purpose. You miss out

on his mission. Jesus did not say go into all the world and collect stuff. He didn't say give people more money so they can go into all the world and collect more stuff. Here's your heart. I mean, think about this for a moment. When you see somebody in need, what's your knee-jerk that they need? That will tell you who your God is.

Is it they need prayer? Is it they need the gospel? Is it they need encouragement, or is it they need some more money? What's your God? I mean, it's pretty telling when you see somebody. What do they need? Sometimes poor people don't need more money. Sometimes poor people are poor because they've made horrible choices and that's why they're poor. And giving them more money is not going to help them. It's only going to exacerbate the problem. Sometimes what poor people need is more of Jesus.

Sometimes rich people, what they need is more of Jesus, to center on him. And this is why Jesus says so clearly to us in the Sermon on the Mount, greatest sermon ever preached. He says this just before what I read you in Matthew 6:19, "Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal.

For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also." What you treasure is what you worship. And if you're worshipping the accumulation of stuff and that's your treasure, then that is your worship. That's what he's saying. That's Jesus' word. That's what he's talking to us. Don't store it up. Don't store it up. I mean, there's that parable in Luke 12 about the guy that was accumulating all this stuff. So he's like, "I know what

I'm going to do, I'm going to build more barns because I got all this stuff. I got to put them in barns."

And Jesus is like, "You fool! Your life is going to be demanded of you this very evening. Why did you spend your whole life gaining stuff to store it up in barns?" And you know what it's like for those of you that had relatives or whatever that are older that have passed and you have to go through their house and go through all their stuff and you're like, "Why do they keep any of this stuff?" I realize the things that are valuable to me, my kids are going to look at it for three seconds and say, "Why didn't dad throw this stuff away? Doesn't mean anything to us."

But that's what we get, and we tend to be the kind of people that think there's something better out there if we just store up and accumulate things. It reminds me of the story that I heard about a fisherman in a Third World country, and every day he would wake up about the time the sun came up. He would go fishing at about 7:00 in the morning and fish by himself for three hours. He really loved that. He'd catch a few fish. About 10:00 he'd come into the market, he would sell his fish.

He would get enough money where he could go and buy lunch and dinner, and he'd bring the lunch home for his family. He'd have lunch with his wife, and then he'd take a siesta in the afternoon. His kids would come home in the evening and they'd eat dinner together. They'd hang out all night and just talk. And then he would go to bed and he would get up and do the same thing every day. And one day there was this Harvard MBA that was watching what was going on. He's like, this is crazy.

I can help this guy. And so he told the fishermen, he said, "Listen, you know what? You should take somebody else fishing with you." And he said, "Well, why is that?" He goes, "Because you could catch twice as many fish." He said, "Well, what good with that do?" He goes, "Well, then you could sell more fish and you can make more money." He said, "Well, what good would that do?" He's like, "Well, over time you could buy a bigger boat and you could take more fishermen out there with you. And then over time you might even be able to get a few boats and have a fleet."

He goes, "Well, what good would that do?" He goes, "Well, you'd make so much more money." He goes, "Well, what good would that do?" He goes, "Well, one day if you have enough money, then you could retire." He goes, "Well, then what would I do?" He goes, "Well, then you could get up in the morning anytime you want. You can go fishing by yourself. You could come home and have lunch with your wife, take a siesta. And then in the evening hang out with your family and have good meaningful time."

And the fishermen is scratching his head like, "What do you mean? I'm doing that right now." That's the lie of materialism. The lie of materialism is there's something better out there if I accumulate stuff that I got to keep working for and we miss out on the most important things God has. That's what he's saying. Don't be about the temporary pleasures of accumulation. Be about being in the mission of the Lord Jesus Christ and serve him with great purpose. That's what he wants us to do.

Don't cherish the temporary and don't substitute the eternal joy of living on mission for Jesus. There's great joy. And here's the way I hear it in church sometimes.

I'll hear men say something like this, "I know God's calling me to do this, and one day when I get enough money then," or I hear young people say, "I know God wants me to do this. And as soon as I get enough money, then I'll do that, or soon as I finish school, soon as I, soon as I." Now, there's nothing wrong with preparing yourself for the mission God has for you.

I get that. But sometimes what people are saying is, I've designed my life this way. And as soon as my life looks like this and I have all this extra time, then I'll go do that for God. And I'll tell you this, on the authority of God's word, you'll always be saying that until the day you meet Jesus. Because what you're really saying is, "I'm responsible for my material wealth. I'm responsible for getting done what I need," rather than what the Bible says God will supply all of your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus.

If you're about his mission, he'll always supply what you need. He may not supply everything you want, he may not supply it in the way that you want or how you want it, but he'll give you everything that you need in order to accomplish his mission and live on purpose with him. That's what he wants from every single Christian. So don't get hindered by material blindness. Don't get hindered by the things that say, "I need more pleasure. I need more pleasure." And isn't it true?

You remember as a little kid, I remember as a little kid, prior to the days of the internet, we'd have the JC Penny catalog or the Sears catalog. I sit down there and go through every page and page number and write down my Christmas list, Walter Payton jersey, all this kind of stuff. My Christmas list was like four pages, and I would go over

it with my parents so they knew everything I wanted. And if they would've bought everything for me, which they didn't, it still wouldn't have been enough because I would've wanted more the next year, more the next year.

And no matter what we get that we think is going to be satisfying, there's always something more. There's always the next thing. That's why we call it a starter house, because there's always another house. That's why it's a small car, because then we get a bigger car. I mean, this has more bells and whistles so we can get this computer, but this one has this, this, and this. And we got to have more. We got to have more. We got to have more. That's cherishing the temporary pleasures of this world and the accumulation of goods rather than living with the eternal joy of serving Jesus Christ.

Materialism blinds us to that. It takes no account for the future. It cherishes the temporary pleasures of accumulation. Number three, it does this, it heightens an appetite for greed. Material blindness heightens and appetite for greed. Notice what he goes on to say. He says, "Your gold and your silver have rusted and their rust will be a witness against you and will consume your flesh like fire. It is in the last days that you have stored up your treasure." Now, what are the last days?

It's been very clear from this pulpit, the last days are after Jesus' death, burial, and resurrection, when he rose from the dead, the last days begun. He's ascended into heaven. He's coming back. We are in the last days. I believe we are closer to the end of the last days, and we're certainly closer to the end of time than we were yesterday. And we don't know exactly when that's going to be, but Jesus said when it is. He said

it's going to be soon. And he said, in these last days, when you have an opportunity to go out and make disciples, you've decided to accumulate riches for yourself.

You've decided to be greedy. You've said, "Just a little more." I think it was John D. Rockefeller when asked the question one time, how much is enough, he said, "Just a little more." I mean, no matter how much you have, you always think though, "If I just had a little more." They did a study a number of years ago from people that made between 30,000 and \$150,000 a year, how much more would it take for them to really be satisfied.

And whether they made 30 or 40 or 50 or whatever, all the way up to 150, the general consensus was if they made just \$11,000 more a year, they'd be totally fine for the rest of their lives. I think about it like this. In a 12-month calendar year, if somebody said to you, "Hey, I'll give you an extra month's bonus," yeah, that'd feel really good. I mean, that'd probably all I need. Why? Because it's just a little more. Whatever, I just need a little more. Because no matter how much I have, I need just a little more.

And the more I get, the more I realize I can do. And the more I realize I can do, the more I need to go do the things. And that's the danger of materialism. It blinds us to the fact that without even knowing it, we're going after things rather than pursuing Jesus and depending upon him. He goes on to say it like this. He says, "They're going to be a witness against you." Your accumulation of stuff is a witness against you. Think about all the stuff you have that you don't even know that you have, or all the stuff that you have that you don't take any account for.

That's going to be your witness when you get to see Jesus of, yeah, I just accumulated stuff. He's like, "What good did it serve me? How did it bring me glory? How did it advance my kingdom?" I don't know, but it was stuff and it felt really good to have that stuff. That's what he's talking about. It's going to bear witness against you. Notice what he says in verse four, think about how greed works.

Behold the pay of the laborers who mowed your field and which has been withheld by you cries out against you, and the outcry of those who did the harvesting has reached the ears of the Lord of the Sabbath. What's he saying? He's like, when you're greedy, you'll do whatever it takes to get what you need, whether it's extorting your workers or not taking care of people, or here's the way it points out, you'll use other people to get what you want. If you're unrighteous, if you're materialistic, you will use others to get what you want.

You won't see your job as a place of serving as unto the Lord. You'll see your job as a place of getting what I need so I can do what I want. If you're a boss, you'll see others not as employees that God's entrusted you, that you're supposed to serve, you'll see them as a means to help you get what you want. To yourself, you won't see your neighbors as people that you can serve to be a witness of the gospel of Jesus Christ. You'll see your neighbors as people who you might be able to get something from so they can help you in your service.

That's what material blindness does. Materialism blinds us to the fact that we're really greedy and we're really about ourselves. And unlike the '80s movie Wall Street

and Gordon Gekko, greed is not good. Greed's insidious. It captivates every single one of our hearts. Every message that we see in the world is all about us and how we can get and gain and accomplish more for ourselves. And while I'm here, let me just say this, since you're letting me meddle at Christmastime, I'll meddle some more, credit card debt.

Credit card debt is a sign that materialism is your God. I'm not talking about using a credit card and paying it off at the end of the month because you have the resources to do that. I'm talking about mounting credit card debt. Because when you have mounting credit card debt, then here's what your life centers around, your life centers around waking up in the morning so that you can go serve your God, to pay off your God, the owner at American Express and Visa and MasterCard, because I have to pay them because that's my God.

And I got to pay them off and I need this stuff that I can't afford so that I can go work to serve them. That's credit card debt. I think there's good debt. This is not a message on everything there is to know about money, but I think there's good things. If you have a mortgage on a home that can gain in value, there's some different ways to use money and leverage it and grow. That's fine. But I'm talking about where you're waking up every month and you got school debt and you got card debt and you got house debt and you bought all this furniture you can't afford.

That's not a blessing, that's a curse. You're not free to be everything you need to be for Jesus because you can't be because there's no way you could be because your life is going to be centered around paying off your debt. Jesus didn't put you on this

world to pay off your debt. Jesus Christ came and paid our debt so that you could be free to live for him. Amen? That's the gospel. Now, I know in a church of our size there's several of you that are in debt and you're like, "Oh, what do I do? What do I do?"

Go find a financial planner that can help you get out of debt, and getting out of debt is living righteously and making good decisions and not spending more than you make and downsizing and getting this debt rolling and paid off because you can be free. I mean, take a look at the debt that you pay every single month and what if somebody is just going to write you a check for that amount? That's what it's like to be free from debt. Material blindness says, "Well, credit card's okay. Debt's okay. I mean, every commercial says it's okay."

Teenagers, I need a credit card. Don't give your teenagers a credit card. Stupid. Pay cash. Pay for what you can do. Don't buy more than you can. Spend less than you make. It's simple concepts of spiritual disciplines so I can stay focused on the things of Jesus. It's interesting to me that the number of people that feel called to the mission field that are in debt or called to ministry that are in debt, and then the first thing they want when they get into ministry is, I need you to pay for my ministry.

You're disqualified from serving the Lord if you're in debt. Period. You shouldn't. You should go get a job and pay off your debt. Okay, enough said there. All right, material blindness heightens an appetite for greed where we say, how much is enough, and we're constantly saying, "Just a little more. Just a little more. As long as I had a

little more, then I'm fine." And then this fourth one, this fourth one, material blindness creates an insensitivity to injustice. Insensitivity to injustice. Verse five says, "You've lived luxuriously on the earth and led a life of want and pleasures."

There's certain places that will teach that God wants you to be rich. God wants you to have everything you want to have. God wants you to enjoy your life to the full. God wants. God wants. God did not put you on this earth so that you can enjoy yourself. God puts you on this earth so you could depend upon him to serve others. And whether God fills your bank account bigger or fills your account small, whatever he chooses, he's going to give you enough to accomplish what God wants you to accomplish.

And you're depending upon him and you're seeing your resources as a way to be a blessing to others. But when you live a life of want and pleasure and luxury, what you're saying is, "No, no, no, no, no. You don't understand. My Christianity is about me. I believe Jesus died and now he can stay over there until I die because I'll go to heaven someday. But everything I get is about me and I want to live this way, and I want to have this house, and I want to have this life." That's called prosperity gospel, which is really no gospel at all. It's damning.

The Gospel of Jesus Christ is that he paid for all of our sins and rose from the dead, and it's repenting of our sins and coming to Christ so that we can truly live for him. And whatever God brings our way, we see it as a blessing and we honor him with that and we serve others with it. But when you live a life of luxury and want and pleasure, you have fattened your hearts in a day of slaughter. When you live

materialistically in this life, you are setting yourself up for judgment in the next.

Again, let me be clear, there's nothing wrong with making money. There's nothing wrong with having lots of it. The question is how much does it have of you? And if it has you and it will have you if you don't have some things in place, which we'll talk about here at the end, it's dangerous. We're talking about danger here. I mean, as your pastor, I would tell you if you're married, don't hang out with a person of the opposite sex that's not your spouse because there's danger lights that will go off.

I would tell you as your pastor, if you struggle with addictions or alcohol, don't go to the bars and clubs and hang out with people like that. It's dangerous. I would tell you as your pastor who lives in America, materialism is dangerous. Don't flirt with it. Don't play around with it. Don't say, "Well, it won't affect me." It totally will affect you. And just so I can say this because I talk to a lot of young guys and young guys will say stuff like this like I used to say, "I just want to make a lot of money because one day I want to bless the Lord. I want to be a millionaire so I can just give the Lord a lot of money."

Let me tell you a couple of things. Number one, the Lord doesn't need your money. And number two, if that's really your calling, then be generous to them now. Well, I don't have that much now. That's why you got to be generous. Because if you're faithful with little, you'll be faithful with much. If you're not faithful with little, you won't be faithful with much. I mean, start being generous now. Generosity is an act of the heart. If you're generous with a little and then more comes, you'll still be more generous.

Don't wait until you get to a place where you start being generous. You can't. It's

harder and harder the more you go on if you don't start habits when you're young. And by the way, young people, I'm talking to you. I'm talking to you who work part-time jobs. I'm talking to you who do babysitting. I'm talking to you who make \$50, \$500, \$100, whatever. I.

If you get into a place where you're like, "Okay, God gets paid first. I'm going to steward my resources towards him. I'm going to be content in what I have. I don't need to go out and buy everything. I'm going to let things sit," you will create disciplines that no matter where you are, no matter how that bank account grows, you'll have the right disciplines in your life to still honor the Lord. And that's what he's talking about here. How do you bring the Lord the most honor for what you want?

How do you live on mission for him? Because when you don't, it creates an insensitivity to injustice. Notice verse six, you have condemned and put to death the righteous man. He does not resist you. Here's what you're blind to when you're materialistic. You're blind to people that are truly needy. You're blind to people that could truly use your help. You're blind to people because you don't see them because you're spending your day thinking about who? You and your business and your future and your job and your education.

You miss out on all the needs that are all around you. Now, I don't need to make a large argument here, but let's just say for the sake of argument, the most important ministry that ever happened was the Lord Jesus Christ. Out of any human being that ever lived, the God man Jesus had the most important mission on the planet. And yet if you study his life, he had time for everybody. I mean, no bigger mission than being

God and dying on the cross for the sins of the world. And yet he leads a Samaritan woman to Christ and then waits for her to go get the entire village.

And what does he do? Spends a couple of days there. Hey, Jesus, they're all looking all over for you. What are you doing? Yeah, I know. I mean, Jesus, they wanted to take him and make him king after he fed the 5,000. No, I got to go spend time with my dad. He saw all the needs of the world. He had time for all the needs of the world, blind people, crippled people, hurting people, wealthy people, religious people, poor people. Who did Jesus have time for? All of them. Why?

Because he was depending upon his father and he was stewarding everything the father was pouring through his hands to bless the world. If he's really our example, then why wouldn't we do the same? And for many of us, it's because materialism is our God where we look at a place out there or we designed a future out there that gives us everything that we want and everything that we need. And once we step into it, then we would say, "Jesus, once I get there, I'm yours." Here's the funny thing, you'll never get there because it's insatiable.

No matter how much money you think in your head right now, "If I made this much money a year, it'd be totally enough," it's not enough. It's probably 20 times that by the time you hit it. No matter where you go. You think I'm wrong. If your boss gives you a raise this year, tell him, "This is the last raise I ever want. Next year, you know what? Feel free to let me go backwards. I'm so content. Won't happen." As soon as you get a raise, you'll realize that takes care of this. There's always more that you can

have, and it creates an insensitivity to injustice.

I'm not talking about social justice. I'm talking about biblical justice. I'm talking about those that have been mistreated or hurting. It's been unfair to them. They truly need a hand. They truly need help. They truly need encouragement. They truly need some resources, and we walk right by them and pretend, "Yeah, I don't have any need for that." Most of you today that are listening to my message are not wondering how am I going to have enough nourishment to make it to tomorrow?

Most of you that are listening to the message are not wondering, how am I going to find a warm place to sleep tonight so I'm not out on the streets? But not everybody's thinking that today. Some people are saying, how can I eat? And some people are saying, how am I not going to freeze to death tonight? But when you're into materialism, we don't have time to take care of that. Work starts Monday. School starts Monday. I got stuff going on, and you're not on my calendar. That's what happens when materialism is what drives us.

And again, God is not saying it's wrong to prepare. God's not saying it's wrong to save. Jesus talked more about money than about any other topic that he talked about because he knew this, where your treasure is, there will your heart be also. What's tied to your heart is what you're going to worship. That's why James gives us this scathing rebuke of these four things. That when materialism is your God, materialism blinds you to taking no account for your future, not realizing you're going to give an account to God for everything.

It cherishes temporary pleasures of accumulation rather than being on mission for the Lord. It heightens an appetite for greed. It creates an insensitivity to injustices that we see in the world, and the church can't meet those needs because we're too busy accumulating wealth. Now, if you've heard this, I've been preparing it all week. I promise you, you feel conviction in some way. I mean, if you listen to this message, you're like, "This doesn't even apply to me. I'm doing great," praise God for you, because there's a pull on all of us to go in one of these directions at least. So what's he showing you?

See, I wanted to end this message by telling you, if this is where you're feeling pulled, Jesus has given us the cure in his word. He's given us an application for an abundant life, and I'll share them with you. He tells us to be abundantly content and generous. Be abundantly content and generous. If you don't want to go down this pathway, just be abundantly content and be abundantly generous. Contentment means I'm fine with where I'm at. If nothing else gets added to where I'm at, totally fine.

Bible says, I think it's 1 Timothy 6:6, godliness with contentment is great gain. Be content. As I was praying this week while I was preparing the message, I really felt like the Lord downloaded something into my heart. Because one of the ways that you're content is this, you're thankful for everything you have. Every penny you have, every dollar you have, everything you own, God's the one that's the source behind any resource that gave that to you. If you're given a gift by a person, that was God giving the gift through that person to you.

Everything you have is his. Are you thankful for everything you have? I was in my office at home and I was thinking about if I had to go around and touch every single thing in my life and tell God I was thankful for it, and if I didn't tell God I was thankful for it, he'd take it away. And every day I got up, I had to do that or God would take it away. And I'm not talking about, "Oh Lord, I'm thankful for my books," I'm saying there's 2,000 of those guys I have to go through individually and touch each book and thank God for that.

Every car I have, every room in my house, every painting, every picture, every article of clothing that I have I got to touch and say, "God, I'm really, really thankful for this." I mean, if God would take away everything that you weren't thankful for today, how many of you would want to give away three-fourths of your stuff? I'm not really even that thankful for it. It just has accumulated.

Contentment means I'm thankful for everything that I have. And oh, by the way, when you have stuff that you're not using, do you know chances are somebody's out there praying to God for the very thing that's sitting in your garage or closet that they can't get? That one day is going to be judgment on you because why? They're praying for a table. You had a table. They were praying for chairs. You had chairs. They were praying for clothing. You had clothing. But you stored it all up.

And I'm not here to be a commercial for every place you can give stuff, but there's several places in our culture that will take your goods, repurpose them, and use them for people that are genuinely in need. And when you rid yourself of that, you can

be truly thankful for what you have and be content. Content. Here's what contentment is, contentment is an open hand When God brings gifts, man, thank you, Lord. This is yours. How do I best glorify you with this? How do I best bless other people with this?

My house, my car, my clothing, this is yours, Lord. How do I bless you with it? And how do I bless others with it? That's contentment. Greediness is a closed fist. Lord, thanks for this. It's mine. It's my possession. I'm insuring it. I'm holding it. It's mine. It's mine. It's mine. Maybe they can borrow it sometime, but not without my permi... That's greed. Blessing. You can give it, you can take it away. It's yours. It doesn't matter how much passes through. And by the way, the more content you are, the more will pass through your hands.

That's a blessing right here. Buying something you can't afford is a curse. Because what? You got to do everything you can to hold onto that. You got to work harder. You got to pay more. It's not a blessing, it's a curse. This is a blessing. Lord, thanks for this. I'm able to afford this. I'm able to do that. Man, this is your blessing on my life. That's contentment. Thank God for everything and then use every material thing you have and steward it all for the glory of God. That's contentment.

Number two is generosity. Be abundantly generous. Abundant means lavish. Remember the woman in Matthew 26 when Jesus was getting ready to get crucified? She took a jar of perfume, an alabaster jar of perfume, that would've cost a year's worth of wages and dumped it all over Jesus. She poured it all over his feet. Disciples are watching this. They're like, what a waste. She wasted all this. This could have been given to the poor. And what's Jesus say? The poor you'll always have with you.

In parentheses, you won't always have me with you. She was lavish with me. And when you're lavish with me, that's not a waste. When you're lavish with Jesus, that's not a waste. The world will say it's a waste, but it's not a waste to be lavish with Jesus, to be overtly generous with Jesus. So how can you be lavish with Jesus? Let me give you a couple ways you can be lavish with Jesus. One, if you're not doing this already, tithe. Tithe. What's tithe? It's 10%. Young people, listen to me because I'm talking to you.

If you made more than \$10 last year, I'm talking to you. Get in habits when you're young. You make \$10, take \$1 and give it to the Lord and thank him for it, and thank him that you have another nine that you can do whatever you want with. But Lord, you get my first fruits. You get my best. Then look for other ways to take that \$9 and find ways to bless other people with it. And what you will find is when you're generous with God and you're generous with other people, he will supply more so that you can be generous with God and generous with other people.

It's habits that you can create. Pastor Jeff's making us tithe. I'm not making you do anything. I mean, people around here are always like, "How do we give here? We don't even know how to give." Because after COVID, we stopped passing offering baskets. We used to make a big deal because God loves a cheerful giver. We'd say It's time for the offering, everybody would cheer. It's awesome to give. Because when you give, here's what you're saying, "Lord, I have the ability to give you this.

And Lord, I know I have a lot coming up this month, and I don't know how it's

going to work, but I praise God that you do. And it's a step of faith to trust you this way. And I know you'll provide. And my eyes are going to stay on you because I'm giving this to you and this is my way of saying I trust you." So start there and then go over above and beyond. So that when you hear opportunities like kingdom advancement and starting in middle school and high school, you're able to say, "I'm in on that too. How can I be generous to that?"

Or you see needs of your friends. I can be generous to that, because it's not my money. It's not my bank account. It's not my income. It's God's. He just called me to be a manager and I want him to be pleased with the way in which I steward it for his glory. Give generously. Give generously. It's interesting, in 2 Corinthians 8-9, we read a couple truths. 2 Corinthians 8, it talks about what Jesus did. 2 Corinthians 8, it talks about his ministry to this earth. 2 Corinthians 8:9 says, for you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ that though he was rich.

How rich was he? He owns it all. He had it all. That though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor. So that through his poverty, through his poverty, we might become rich. He just gave it all away so that we could experience him. How would we live any different? He paid a debt we couldn't pay so that we could experience the fullness of his grace. How should we live any differently? If God's blessed you in any way, it's to depend more upon him and it's to serve others even better.

And if we had time today, we could go through 2 Corinthians 9:6-11. I say this, he who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. Each one must do what he's purposed in his own heart, not grudgingly

or under compulsion. For God loves a cheerful giver and God is able to make all grace abound to you so that always having all sufficiency in everything, you may have an abundance for every good deed. Sow generously, you reap generously.

I'm not saying give God \$100, he'll give you \$1,000. I'm not saying that. I'm saying if you want to be generous to the Lord and you want to be generous to others, God will resupply what you give so that you can be generous to him and generous to others, so you can be more dependent upon him and more dependent upon another. And no matter where you are, you can grow in your contentment. And no matter where you are, you can grow in your generosity and being lavish.

You could do it in such a way that the world would look at you and say, "That's stupid." And it would be if Jesus Christ hadn't have died for my sins and rose from the dead, and it would be if he wasn't coming back and I wasn't giving an account to him, and it would be if I didn't care about the lost in the world that I want to see one to Christ. All this would be.

But because I love Jesus, and because I know I'm going to give an account to him, and because I don't want to get distracted by materialism and I want to stay focused on the gospel, and I want to have eternal joy in my heart until I meet him, my money is not my money. My money is his money. I'm his steward. I'm his manager, and I want to do the best for his glory so that the gospel can be propagated, that I can be more dependent upon him, and I can have better joy in my life.

Amen? Amen. Amen. Would you stand with me as we close? I'm telling you, it's

an honor to preach it Brave because you're one of the few groups of people that during the first week of December I could preach this message and you'd receive it. In a season where materialism is bursting at the seams to say, "Now, let's redirect our cause. Let's redirect our lives. Let's give more to Jesus." Would you pray with me? Lord, we give you all the glory on honor and praise for who you are.

And God, we ask you in these moments as we're here that you would do a work in our heart. If you're here today and you never trusted Jesus as your personal Lord and Savior, here's what you can understand. Jesus, I know I'm a sinner and I'm in need of your grace. Lord, I repent of my sin and I place my faith and trust in you. And for those of you who have done that, that Jesus is the Lord of your life and you're feeling convicted, here's my prayer for you, that you'd put into practice what he shows you.

Maybe it's being generous with some stuff that's lying around. Maybe it's getting rid of some stuff that's lying around. Maybe it's not spending more than you make. Maybe it's being more generous to the things of God in a lavish way. Whatever he's put on your heart, it's for you, and he's showing you these things because of his great love for you because he wants to grow in you and he wants to make more of your heart his home. God, we long to breathe the air of heaven one day.

Lord, we long to see you face to face. Lord, may we all see you and meet you and hear you say, "Well done, good and faithful servant." Lord, none of us have done this perfectly, but may we grow in it increasingly for your glory. We give you all the glory, honor, and praise in Jesus' name, amen and amen. Can we give God some praise this morning?

