

The story is told about a man who wanted to come to the United States during the time of the European Immigration. He got together all the money he had, got a ticket on a steamship and got ready for his trip. Because he had heard that meals on the ship were expensive, he bought enough crackers and cheese to eat on the trip. Of course you know what happened. The damp salt air made the crackers soft. His cheese got hard or rancid. He didn't know what to do until a steward walked by carrying a tray of delicious smelling food. The smell got to him; so the man counted his money and asked the steward how much a meal cost. The steward asked, "Do you have a ticket for the ship?" "Yes," the man said. "The steward said, "The meals are included, sir."

How many people are living as crackers and cheese Christians, willing to settle for something without realizing the feast that God has in store for them? God is very generous. James 1:17 (NLT) tells us, **"Whatever is good and perfect comes down to us from God our Father."** Romans 8:32 reads, **"Since he did not spare even his own Son but gave him up for us all, won't he also give us everything else?"** God also provides for all of our needs. Jesus said, **"That is why I tell you not to worry about everyday life—whether you have enough food and drink, or enough clothes to wear. Isn't life more than food, and your body more than clothing? Look at the birds. They don't plant or harvest or store food in barns, for your heavenly Father feeds them. And aren't you far more valuable to him than they are?"** (Matthew 6:25-26 NLT) He tells us to bring all of our needs to Him and He will help us. We don't have to settle for a crackers and cheese.

But that doesn't change the fact that money is a big thing for us. It was for people at the time of Christ and it still is today. Money is Jesus #2 topic in the Gospels. The only thing He talked more about was the Kingdom of God. So it should come as no surprise that Jesus' enemies tried to trap him with a money question. They asked Jesus about paying taxes to the Romans. Jesus' response was simple, "Show me the money!" Then he asked whose picture was on the coin. When they said, Caesar's, Jesus said, **"Give to Caesar what belongs to Caesar, and give to God what belongs to God."** (Matthew 22:21 NLT) With these words Jesus taught his disciples and his opponents that loyalty to God is more important than our allegiance to the state. He also tells us that money is to be used, that it is a resource He gives for good.

Money can have a very powerful hold on our lives. 1 Timothy 6:10 (NLT) tells us, **"For the love of money is the root of all kinds of evil."** The love of money had a strangle hold on a man by the name of Zacchaeus. He was a tax collector who had made himself very rich by overtaxing his fellow citizens. But when Jesus entered into Zacchaeus life, everything changed. Instead of hoarding money for himself, he began to give it away. Some people complained about Jesus' being in Zacchaeus house, but not Zacchaeus. He said, **"I will give half my wealth to the poor,**

Lord, and if I have cheated people on their taxes, I will give them back four times as much!” (Luke 19:8 NLT)

Susie Scott Krabacher is a real life “Zacchaeus.” Susie Scott was a *Playboy* centerfold in the early 1980’s who spent ten years working for the magazine, enjoying her celebrity status. After her first failed marriage, she married Joe Krabacher and settled down to enjoy a life of comfortable wealth in Colorado. About 15 years ago she saw a documentary on orphans in Mongolia and felt she should do something to help. A friend suggested that she should consider Haiti because it was poorer and closer. Susie traveled to Haiti, caught a taxi to where “the poor people are,” and spent the night with a family of 17. She learned 1st hand what real poverty was like. Susie later told reporters, “I was reborn that day.” She completely committed her life to Jesus Christ. She established the Mercy and Sharing Foundation to aid the people of Haiti. Susie and her husband have personally given \$750,000 of their own money to the schools, orphanages, hospital and prenatal clinic that have been created. Like Zacchaeus, Susie Scott Krabacher’s life has been transformed by Christ. God transforms our lives through the work of the Holy Spirit.

I tell people who feel depressed or discouraged that they need to stop their navel gazing, that they need to take their eyes off their own problems and start helping someone else. Our lives are better when we help others. As Joe Krabacher tells his wife, “Don’t be careful. Be courageous.”

So let me ask you, “What’s in your wallet?” Jesus said, **“Wherever your treasure is, there the desires of your heart will also be.”** (Matthew 6:21 NLT) The things we do with our time, our abilities and our money says a lot about us. What are you investing your time, your abilities and your money in? Take a look at the quarter on the screen. What do you see? There are two things that jump out at me. They are the words “Liberty” and “In God We Trust.” We have the liberty to trust God. We also have the liberty to be generous with the gifts that God gives us. The offerings that we bring are an expression of our thanks to God, our trust in Him and our love for Him.

Today is our “Commitment Sunday.” In a couple of minutes you will be given the opportunity to place your commitment card and service sheets in the offering basket. Let me remind you of what we read earlier in 2 Corinthians 9:6-7 (NLT), **“Remember this—a farmer who plants only a few seeds will get a small crop. But the one who plants generously will get a generous crop. You must each decide in your heart how much to give. And don’t give reluctantly or in response to pressure. “For God loves a person who gives cheerfully.”**

God is generous with us so that we can be generous in return. We have been blessed by God to pass His blessings onto others. Think about that as you place your commitment card in the offering basket today. What does the way you use your money say about you? Amen.