



One Page Sermon

By Pastor Robb McCoy

November 12, 2023

Our Money Story: Release

Recap of sermon from November 12, 2023

Scripture: Deuteronomy 15:1-11 and Matthew 19:16-22

The Federal Reserve Bank of New York released new data on debt in America. According to a USA Today story from November 13, 2023, "Total household debt rose to an average of \$17.06 trillion in the second quarter of 2023, with credit card balances alone reaching a high of \$1.03 trillion"

Figures like this make Deuteronomy 15:1-11 feel like a quaint relic of an ancient past. There is no way that a modern economy could handle debt cancellation every seven years. It is hard to even fathom what would happen if we practiced what God commands in the Torah. This should prove two things: one, no one is a Biblical literalist; and two, our money story does not align with God's.

God's plan for money is that it should never be used to exploit or enslave people. The concept of debt cancellation was to prevent extreme discrepancies in wealth. God calls for compassion, generosity, and a system that keeps God's plan was a society where the poor were not dehumanized but instead were treated with compassion.

When Jesus met the rich young man who wanted to have eternal life, they agreed on all the basics of living a good life. Follow the commandments, don't hurt people, don't cheat people, etc. Then Jesus took it a step farther, because that's what Jesus did. Over and over in the Gospel of Matthew Jesus takes the Law and goes a step farther. He is not as much interested in the letter of the Law as he is the heart of the Law.

For instance, the Law limited retributive violence with the concept of "an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth." This was designed to limit violence—to keep the punishment commensurate with the crime. There is a tendency in society (ancient and today) to over-punish people to keep crime low. This concept however, does not align with God's will for justice. Jesus took the law that limited violence and went a step farther. Instead of an eye for an eye, he called to "turn the other cheek," thus ending the violence completely. He wanted to release everyone from the cycles of violence that never seem to end.

Similarly, when the rich young man came to ask for eternal life, Jesus took the law's concept of limited wealth and took it a step farther, "Sell your possessions and give it to the poor."

This was a total release from the grip that money has on the young man's life (and remember that in Luke, Jesus gives the same command to all his disciples). Deuteronomy called for a release of debt for all people to help create a more just society.

Jesus goes a step farther and calls for us to release our grip on possessions to gain eternal life. Remember, eternal life isn't just living forever in heaven. Eternal life is depth, meaning, and purpose in *this* life. What Jesus wants is for us to release our grip on the things that we believe will give us meaning. He is taking the concept laid out in Deuteronomy (one that we have largely ignored as a people) and pushed it even farther. So what do we do? What do we —people living in an economy dominated by debt and surrounded by possessions we have not yet sold—do to gain eternal life?

Practice release. Release our need to consume. Release our grudges. Release our need to be liked, revered, or esteemed. Release our old notions of human worth based on wealth. Release perverse ideas of the prosperity gospel that say wealth is a sign of God's favor. Embrace compassion, kindness, and generosity. Embrace simplicity and community. We can practice release in our society, our church, and our hearts and then understand what it means to have eternal life.



Finding Release, by Lauren Wright Pittman, inspired by Matthew 19:16-22

Next Week: REIMAGINE

Leviticus 19:9-10, 25:8-13 & Mark 12:38-44