

*28One of the scribes came near and heard them disputing with one another, and seeing that he answered them well, he asked him, "Which commandment is the first of all?" 29Jesus answered, "The first is, 'Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one; 30you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.' 31The second is this, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these." 32Then the scribe said to him, "You are right, Teacher; you have truly said that 'he is one, and besides him there is no other'; 33and 'to love him with all the heart, and with all the understanding, and with all the strength,' and 'to love one's neighbor as oneself,'—this is much more important than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices." 34When Jesus saw that he answered wisely, he said to him, "You are not far from the kingdom of God." After that no one dared to ask him any question.*

Money.

What can you buy with money? A shiny black car with leather interior, comfortable, spacious, maneuvering down the road like a cat. With a stereo that will knock your socks off. Money can buy it.

Money will buy the finest seats at the stadium or Jacob's Field, or the Gund, or at Severence Hall.

Money will buy food that tastes like a dream, rich sauce, tender steak, color everywhere on the plate, waiters attentive to your every need.

Money will buy medical care – enough money and they will put you in a special wing at the Cleveland Clinic that I wandered into by mistake one day.

Money can buy beautiful things – furnishings for your home, paintings, handwoven rugs, crystal chandeliers.

Money can buy trips to the other side of the world, or an island in out in Lake Erie. Pay enough money and you will see things few people have ever seen in places few have ever been.

But God does not have a single thing for sale.

God's love, Jesus, forgiveness, eternal life, air you breath, health, family – they are all free. God's blessings are all gifts to you – no amount of money can buy what God gives for nothing.

And yet.....Jesus talked about money more than he talked about most anything else.

“What is the god that Americans worship,” I ask the class. Every one of you knows the answer the class gives me – money.

*A scribe asked Jesus, “Which commandment is first of all?”*

*Jesus answered, “The first is you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength. The second is this, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”*

A few weeks ago we heard about a man who thought he was doing pretty well with loving God and loving his neighbor. But when Jesus invited him to sell everything that he had and to give the money to the poor and to come follow Jesus he went away sad.

Money. Why would you ever give any of it away? When it can mean so much to you, gain so much for you, why would you let money go? The money you let go of will not buy you any trips to Cancun. Nor pay for the prescription drugs that will extend your life on this earth. If that man had taken up Jesus’ invitation the money would have been gone – forever – all that he would have had left was Jesus.

Think about it this way: Sometimes the most important thing that a person can do is to let go.

The nursery school student has a whole world waiting for him if he will let go of mom. Friends, learning, toys, freedom all waiting for him but he must let go. As precious as mom is to him – she is not his life. His life begins when he lets go.

What happens when you let go of some money? Maybe you will learn to trust in God a little more. Maybe you will find that when your arms are not wrapped up in money that they are free for neighbors. Maybe when you let go of some money you will find that you can give away some time as well, busy time given to God in prayer, or given to strangers who are lonely.

Be sure of this: The Father who sent his Son to die on the cross for you makes a lot better God than all the wealth in the world. For money will demand your time and your devotion, it will claim your attention, and give you fears and abandon you when death comes.

But the Father of Jesus will never leave you but will cling to you through every trial and bring you through death and into eternal life.

Money – it can be a good gift from God but it makes a mean and nasty god.

Practice letting go.