



Promises, Not Promises
Part 3 – Earthly Prosperity vs Peace
Pastor Ted Cunningham

We're in a series right now talking about the promises of God, but also looking at what God did not promise. I don't know if any of you have been listening to this commercial on Ozarks Radio. I've heard it a lot in the last couple of weeks, probably over twenty times. It's about a big-time seminar that's coming to Springfield to teach you how to flip houses. Here's what I know: It's easy and you don't even need to use your own money to get started. So, I recommend we all call and sign up for the seminar. When they ask for our credit card say, "No use yours; we don't want to use ours." But it's so convincing that I thought about signing up for it. The guy is a great speaker, the messages is clear...

How many of you flip houses? It's easy, right? It's super easy. No! It's hard. But the message and the way it's delivered is so convincing. I don't know if you've seen this on infomercials as well. If you want to be honest before this church family today, raise your hand if you've purchased something on an infomercial that you've never used. Okay, all around the room.

The first pastor that I worked for gifted Amy and me a Nordic Track, for our wedding, It was a used Nordic Track because it was his Nordic Track. I think he spent close to \$2,000.00 for this thing. He was honest with me. He said, "I know it's technically used, but it was only used twice." I said, "Tell me about it." He goes, "Well, you know how it is. I was rushing around all day and I went to Wendy's and a I got dinner and I brought it home. I was eating it while watching television and this Nordic Track commercial came on. I started eating slower, I started feeling bad about myself, so I ordered it."

I don't know if you now what the Nordic Track is... it's the ski thing. I need something that requires far less coordination. I got on the thing and it was very difficult. We hauled that thing from Georgia to Texas to back up here and we used that thing three, maybe four times. We could not sell it. We tried to sell it. There were a lot of people who bought it while eating Wendy's is what I quickly found out.

You know flipping houses ain't easy, but when the message is delivered that it's easy, you're like *Oh, I'm in!* It's the same thing with some of the things we buy. It's not that the product is bad, but exercise ain't easy and all God's peoples said... Amen. Let's say it again; it's January. Exercise ain't easy. It takes a lot of work, no matter what you're feeling. But these messages come to us and we're like, *I'm in!*

Today, we're talking about a message that has found its way into the church. Not this church, but a lot of churches and a lot of churches in our community and a lot of churches around the country and around the world. It's a message that grows churches. It's a message that people want to hear.

The message is “God has great blessings for your life. You just need to pray hard, you need to give, you need to claim it, and it will be yours. You just have to ask for it and have enough faith and it will come to you. Believe it and receive it.”

It's a message that grows churches, it's a message that people cling to, but is it a promise of God that you are going to be wealthy upon this earth if you just follow the following formula? Is it a promise of God that if you just do the right things, you're going to end up not just having your needs met, but he is going to bless you abundantly so you can live in nice houses and you can go to the best places? This is a message that when it's spoken, it's spoken by people who are great speakers, by people who are great preachers and teachers, but today we want to look at it.

This has been one of those weeks, I can already see it because I know some of you are still influenced by this message. So, I'm going to ask that you join me in prayer. And we just ask that the Lord's word goes out today and it is received and that many would change errant beliefs that they have, beliefs that have been given to them built on false hope and false teaching.

Father, we today are going to be searching the unfathomable riches of Christ and we want to know the promises that we can claim, but not just know the promises that we claim, but how we claim them and in who we claim them. I just ask for strength as your word goes out today, but also, knowing my tendency, I'm asking for humility in the delivery of this message today. We pray all of this in the good name of Jesus and everyone agreed and said... Amen.

Here's the tension today as we talk about earthly prosperity versus the peace that Christ gives us, the riches that we know we have in Christ. I just want to start by saying if you have placed faith in Jesus, you are blessed. You have every spiritual blessing that has been given to you. And all God's people said... Amen.

Today, this is what we're dealing with: Is earthly prosperity something that was promised? I'll give you the short answer: no. But here's the struggle and the question that we get asked. Some of you may have wrestled with this. **If God loves me and has a wonderful plan for my life, why am I broke?**

This week, our kids were asking us... We were at the dinner table. They were asking us about things that we did when we were first married. “Did you guys go here?” “No, your mom and I didn't go there.” “Did you do this?” “No, we didn't do that.” They asked all these questions and the answer was, “No we didn't do any of that.” And then you could just see it all over their faces like why not? I said, “Well, it's a really simple explanation. We was broke.”

If you started marriage broke, would you raise your hand? Yeah, we were broke. We had nothing. I just want to encourage all the singles in here. That's a great way to start marriage. Build wealth together. Get out there after it. You will become financially better off. We have research that shows that. You don't have to have a ton of money and have it all figured out. You can start with your parents' hand-me-down mattress. Trust me it works; the dip is already built in. You get in and you roll to the center; that's a good way to start marriage right there. You don't need a bunch of money. Some of you are holding back in life because you're broke.

We're talking today about people who are asking, "Do I have a faith problem?" **Am I broke because I lack faith?** People that go through financial disasters, go through a bankruptcy, they begin to think, *Do I not have enough faith? Did I lack belief?* The reason we're teaching this in this series and the reason that we're preaching this is because we, as a church, have picked up the pieces of people who have bad understanding and bad beliefs about the promises of God. They come and they ask, "Did I lack faith? Did I lack belief?" We tell them it wasn't a lack of faith or the quality of your faith that we're talking about. It wasn't even the object of your faith because you have faith in Jesus. The problem is you stake your faith on a promise God never made.

We're going to see one today that people like to stake their faith on, a promise that wasn't even made to you, a promise that wasn't even made to me; it wasn't made to you about your marriage, it wasn't made to you about your business, it wasn't made to you about an entrepreneurial pursuit, but yet can we claim it?

Now here's where we really get in trouble when we start comparing our lives to the lives of other people. **Why is God blessing them and not me?** We pick up these pieces a lot as well. People are like "I'm a Christian and that guy is not a Christian." You have a similar business with someone in town and you're thinking *I honor the Lord to the best of my abilities in everything – I give, I tithe, I pay my taxes, and I know that guy doesn't do any of that and his business is succeeding far more than mine. Why?* You can begin to look to the Lord to deliver something that he never promised you.

So, just to go to an illustration for a second... I know you've seen this a bunch if you've been at our church. We call it the Us Bus. It's what's driving your life? I use this in marriage and family teaching as well. What's driving your marriage? What's in the driver's seat of your life? Here we always encourage you that, when it comes to the sources of truth, it would be the scripture – it's what God's word says. This series is all about what he said, what he promises and what he does not promise, and that we would know the difference. We want scripture driving.

In the passenger seat, influencing our understanding of the scripture, but not driving the bus, is tradition. That can be what the church fathers said, it can be what denominational leaders teach. And frankly, many people, when it comes to this prosperity teaching that we're looking at today, they have tradition driving the bus.

Some of you may come from a catholic tradition where it's tradition and scripture both in the driver's seat. It's what the Bible said, but it's also what the Pope says about the Bible. There are many Catholics I meet that move scripture over to the passenger seat and they put tradition in the driver's seat. It's what the Pope said, which can even trump what the scripture says.

This is our proposed seating arrangement for you that scripture would be in the driver's seat, tradition in the passenger seat, in the middle seats we have experience – the stories of others, what happens to other people – and reason, the mind's ability to process this. And we can research, and we can study and find other ways. In the back seat is emotion.

The reason we use this bus in marriage counseling is because most of the time when we're working with a couple in crisis, they've taken emotion out of the backseat and they've put it in the driver's seat and it's driving everything about their relationship. We want to help them remove that from the driver's seat.

The reason we show this to you today is because of experience, we can begin to look at other people prospering and think, *Look at what happen to them; why is that not happening to me?* So, what do you do with the stories of other people and the lives other people live and how other people prosper? Here's what we need to learn about stories. Stories are good. How many of you love listening to someone's story? We all love listening to stories. We should listen to them. We should learn from them. We should be inspired by them. We just should not allow their story to become our authority. We should not put it in the driver's seat. The bottom line is this: **Because it happened to someone else doesn't mean God promises it to you.** That we would rest in that.

So, the promise and not promise. **We are not promised financial wealth, but we are promised the riches of Christ and peace in Christ.** Paul wrote this in Ephesians... and today we're going to look at what it means to be resting in the peace of Christ, the riches of Christ. ***3 Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms...*** If you've placed faith in Jesus, you are blessed. And all God's people said... Amen. ***...with every spiritual blessing in Christ.***

I love this: In Ephesians 3, Paul says, ***the unfathomable riches of Christ.*** In the Greek, that unfathomable means search, yes, but you will never get to the bottom of it. Keep searching, keep reading, keep discovering the promises that God has made, the blessings that you have in Christ, the riches that you have in Christ, but you will never get to the bottom of it. That's how deep they are.

I want us to spend a little bit of time with a verse that I know many of you have claimed. Many in our church have claimed this as their verse for the year. I want us to understand what to do with this verse and how to understand what God meant when he said it and what God meant when he promised it to his people.

The verse is Jeremiah 29: 11. It's right up there with Philippians 4: 13 - ***I can do all this through him who gives me strength.*** Some of you've got this on a mug. Some of you will put this on Facebook and you will claim it as a promise from God for the new business that you are starting. You'll put it on social media and claim it for the job that you're going into. You'll be like, *this is exactly what God meant when he says, the plans he has for me. These are it right here.*

But you have to understand if you minister to people at all, if you spend any time getting into the lives of other people, typically ministering to people at Woodland Hills Family Church means we get them at rock bottom. We get them after they have lost the job. We get them after the marriage dissolved or is dissolving. We get them after they've filed bankruptcy, or they are in the middle of a foreclosure. We get people who have claimed this verse and now they're saying, "Why didn't God come through for me? I prayed this every day. I read this every day. I claimed this as my verse."

First and foremost, I tell you this is not a promise God made to you; it's not a promise God made to me. It's a promise, in context, that God made to the exiles in Babylon. Does that mean we can't claim it? No. Can we claim it? Yes. We can claim it as a promise, but we have to learn how to claim it and what we can hold onto

Here is the verse in Jeremiah 29. **11 "For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future."** And you know what? For a lot of Christians, this means the exact opposite of what they think it means. I really want to encourage you that if this is your verse... We've gone to this verse before. Read Verse 10, which we are going to read in a second. But I even encourage you to go back and read the whole chapter; it would be better to read the whole book, so you get the context of Jeremiah 29: 11.

I'm just going to read Verse 10. Actually, I'm going to read another couple of verses too because a lot of questions came out of this after the first service. Before Verse 11, this is the text of the letter that the Prophet Jeremiah sent from Jerusalem to the surviving elders who are in exile. We think Nebuchadnezzar took them there, but before we get to Verse 10, I can even read Verse 4 where the God who promises to the exiles in Babylon, "I have plans for you that will prosper you and not harm you, plans to give you a hope and a future," is the one who carried them into exile.

Can you worship God when he is offering you a promise and guaranteeing you something and can you worship him when he takes you into it; takes you into the opposite of what you planned?

10 This is what the Lord says: "When seventy years are completed for Babylon, I will come to you and fulfill my good promise to bring you back to this place. This is not a promise for you and me to claim that God is going to bring immediate relief to our suffering. That's not a promise. It's not a promise that God is going to bring immediate healing to your disease or to your cancer. It's not a promise that you're going to open the doors of your business and immediately be blessed and have more customers and clients and finances than you can imagine. They are in exile. And he says in seventy years... We have to change our thinking from days, weeks, and months to years. Again, this isn't a promise, but I'm just going to apply it this way just for example. This is purely for illustration.

I'm 45 years old. Seventy years from now, I'll be 115, which means I probably won't be here. And guess what? Whatever I'm dealing with right now will no longer be an issue. What ever sickness... I'll be completely healed seventy years from now. I'll have no struggle at all. Some of you are like, *This is so depressing*. This is the truth from the Word of God. And it's why I memorized the words from the time I first heard them. Lois Evans, Tony Evans wife, at her funeral... When her son preached, he said, "I prayed for the healing to come to my mom. I wanted healing for my mom. The Lord only has two answers for me with that prayer and the answers are the exact same. "Either your mother will live or she will live. Either she will be healed or she will be healed. Either she will be with family or she will be with family. Either she will be well taken care of or she will be well taken care of."

Follower or Jesus, that's what you and I are to hold to. That's the eternal perspective we're to hold to. For some of you, you're life is falling apart because you're holding to the promise of God... It wasn't

even made to you, but we're going to talk in a second how you can claim it. You're holding to it and you're thinking it's going to come next week. What if it doesn't?

A couple of things. Should you pray for it? Should you pray for healing? Absolutely. And I'll join you in that prayer. And if it is the Lord's will, you will be healed. But the promise I can make for you today is you will ultimately be healed. Those who are in Christ, you will ultimately be healed. Should we pray for it? Yes. Does God, going back to the experience part or the story, bring that healing automatically to some? Absolutely.

I was thinking about it this week when David Nasser, my friend at Liberty who spoke here last summer, was doing a worship service and a young lady was in a car accident and on a ventilator. David came out in the middle of worship and said she wasn't doing well and that things were not looking good for her. He said, "We don't know if she's going to make it; let's pray." They had a guest worship leader and they prayed. The entire student body of Liberty comes forward and they're praying and praying and praying and during that worship set, she came to and the ventilator was removed and the place rejoiced. But, Christians, I need you to hear this. Will you rejoice when the ventilator is not removed?

We have this example in Job. After his oxen and donkeys were fallen to the sword, his sheep burned up, and servants gone, they took camels, his sons and Daughters were dead.... And Job 1: 22-23 - **20 At this, Job got up and tore his robe and shaved his head. Then he fell to the ground in worship 21 and said: "Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked I will depart. The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away; may the name of the Lord be praised."** Follower, when you understand the eternal purposes of God, it will create in you a desire to worship no matter the outcome. **22 In all this, Job did not sin by charging God with wrongdoing.**

Then how do I claim Jeremiah 29? I want you to see in this text. The promise of God is ultimately you will be delivered from this. The promise of God is "I will be with you through it." The promise of God is "I will enable you with everything you need to make it through this." You can rest in that.

I want to share with you just two thoughts, one from Russell Moore and one from Pastor John Piper, in regard to Jeremiah 29: 11 to help us grasp how we claim, as a follower of Christ, as a Gentile, that promise today? Because yes, you can claim it and here's how.

...Jeremiah 29:11 must be read in the context of the whole Book of Jeremiah, and the Book of Jeremiah must be read in the context of Israel's story. But then all of Jeremiah and all of Israel's story must be read in the context of God's purposes in Jesus Christ. All the promises of God "find their yes in him" (2 Cor. 1:20). If we are in Christ, then all the horrors of judgment warned about in the prophets have fallen on us, in the cross, where we were united to Christ as he bore the curse of the law (Gal. 3:13). And, if we are in Christ, then all of the blessings promised to Abraham's offspring are now ours, since we are united to the heir of all those promises (Gal. 3:14-29). – Russell Moore

We can claim Jeremiah 20: 11 through Christ Jesus. He is our hope. He is our future. He is the one in which we can claim the unfathomable riches of Christ.

Pastor John Piper puts it this way. *Christians can claim to this (Jer 29:11) and they do it because of Christ. That promise was spoken by God through Jeremiah. Explicitly, it says, "to the exiles in Babylon." If you start reading at the beginning of the chapter, they are in Babylon. Seventy years is going to pass...*

You and I like to think in terms of weeks or months and it's hard to get Christians to think in terms of centuries, like eternity.

...but a hope and a future is coming for them. And we Christians, we Gentiles, especially, go to it and we love it because it holds out the prospect of not destruction for us but life and a hope and joy in the future.

What Pastor John Piper is saying is Jesus is your hope, Jesus is your joy, Jesus is your life, and Jesus is your future. For I know the plans I have for you... And in Jesus you can rest in them. This is why the series after this one is simply called *Jesus Is*. And leading up to Easter, *Jesus is life, Jesus is hope*. As we get towards Easter, *Jesus is alive*. And all God's people said... Amen.

Proverbs 30 says, ***8 Remove far from me falsehood and lying; give me neither poverty nor riches... I want to talk about this because when we read something in scripture we can go way over here to this extreme and way over there to that extreme. feed me with the food that is needful for me...***

Now we'll look at these two extremes because the both of them are bad and they lead us down a bad path. ***9 lest I be full and deny you and say, "Who is the Lord?"*** So when you become rich, when you become wealthy, there is the tendency, not the guarantee, but there is the temptation to begin to look at all you have and go, "Look what I did. Look how skilled I am. Look how smart I am. Look how I was able to build networks and do business." We looked at this attitude in James 4 last week. "Look at how good I am at all of this..." And you can forget who enabled you to do it all. Do as we learned in Colossians 3: 23, ***As you do your work, do it as unto the Lord.***

I love that movie that James Stewart is in, *Shenandoah*. If you've ever seen it... Don't do it now. I always hate giving clips because I see people get out their phones and look for it. It's online. It's a 22 second clip and it's his prayer of the Thanksgiving meal. He's at this big farm table on their farm. The table is full of food and he just prays this prayer. I don't have it memorized, but the prayer goes something like "Lord, we thank you for this food that we earned. We did all the work. We planted the seed. We harvested it. We took care of it." He goes on and on and everything is me, me, me and I, I, I. "I did this, I did this, I did this." The very last part of the prayer is "And, Lord, we thank you for the food we are about to eat." It's someone who forgot. That's what happens when we have much. We have that temptation to think it was on us.

The other side of it isn't good either because in poverty, we can fall to this. Proverbs 30: 9 - ***or lest I be poor and steal and profane the name of my God.***

Crown Financial, a very trusted organization and ministry, helping believers handle their finances, talk about these two extremes. Here's their definition of the Prosperity Gospel: *"The Prosperity Gospel teaches that you can command God... You can instruct him; you can tell him. Just name it. This is what I want. ...to prosper you financially, that when you give you can expect a larger financial increase in return,*

and that your spendings can be extravagant and carefree. Because that's the point. God is blessing you and you should be able to have these blessings. And when people see what you have, they'll know this is a man or woman who is truly blessed of the Lord. *This is in contradiction to the many scriptural warnings against greed, selfishness, coveting, idolatry, and the love of money.*

The church tends to focus on this message when we're preaching against false teaching and false gospels, but there is also, on the other side, to the other extreme, the Poverty Gospel. Some people fall to this. And you can even hear the tone. Even if a believer isn't saying it, you hear the tone in what they're saying. *"The Poverty Gospel claims that money and possessions are evil, that rich people are greedy and sinful, that being poor makes you more righteous in God's eyes, and that spending brings guilt and condemnation."*

Crown says it this way and I love how they put it. *"The Bible never condemns wealth and neither should we. The Bible never upholds poverty as the pathway to righteousness, nor should we."*

Proverbs 22: 2 reads, ***2 Rich and poor have this in common: The Lord is the Maker of them all.***

Let's look then if faith is not what's driving this and people are like "My faith was there and yet I am still struggling to pay the bills. I'm still a month to month person." Again, some of you are like, "You need to get into some of the reasons that bring wealth." And Proverbs talks about that: You work hard. When you're slothful, when you're lazy, when you sleep in, when you turn on your bed, you're not out there making money. We covered that in August. We did a whole series on finances. Today, we're talking about the promises and how our faith relates to that.

As we close out, here are a few, true tests of your faith. The true test of your faith is **stewardship, not ownership**. You are called to be a steward of what God has given you. You are called to be a manager, not an owner. And where we believers get in trouble is when we start thinking we're owners and we start thinking *this is mine. God gave this to me for me.*

In 2 Corinthians 9, we read this idea... Sometimes people go to this to say this is exactly what's being taught here. You give and you're going to receive. You give and God is going to bless you. But we are going to see what the object of this text is and we're going to see that the point of being blessed abundantly is not to bring great wealth to you so that you can become an owner. The point of being blessed, according to Paul in 2 Corinthians, is that you will be a blessing to other people. That he can use you, work through you to help others, to bless others, to provide for others. **The idea here is giving, not accumulating.**

2 Corinthians 9 – ***6 Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously. 7 Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion...*** We hope you never feel that at Woodland Hills Family Church. We hope you never feel like... We don't want you giving reluctantly. We want you to be a cheerful giver, ***...for God loves a cheerful giver.*** Circle that in your Bible. That is the anchor of this text, being a cheerful giver, giving because you know God is using you to bless others.

He goes on to say, ***8 And God is able to bless you abundantly, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need...*** Provided to you by the Lord. You'll have everything you'll need. I think it's important to understand here because sometimes we live by this idea: "Man, I want to be a generous person; I just don't have the money to do it." God doesn't expect you to give a bunch of money if you don't have a bunch of money. It's proportionate. Give out of what you have.

We can offer this idea that when I... We do it all the time. "Man, if I had a million dollars... Do you know what good I would do with a million dollars?" God is not considering that. He wants you to be a cheerful giver with what you have right now. Make the most of it right now. We've got songs. I love this song. "Money can't buy happiness, but it can buy me a boat. It can buy me a truck to pull it. It can buy me a Yeti 110 iced down with Dr. Peppers." We can get money and we can think *I just need money. My life will be better once I have...* And we can begin to fall into that attitude with giving. Whether you have little or much, be a cheerful giver, knowing who the source of your life is and knowing who the source of giving is. ***...you will abound in every good work.***

So, it's not about ownership, it's about a stewardship, and it's about faithfulness, not accumulation. **It's about being faithful with what you have.**

We read in 1 Corinthians 4: 2, ***Now it is required that those who have been given a trust must prove faithful.*** Will you be faithful with what you have? Will you make the most of what you have? Sometimes you'll turn on TV preaching and you'll hear the thousand dollars. Sometimes proportional preaching and teaching doesn't make budgets. I'm just thinking of all the people who are watching that show and they don't have a thousand dollars in the bank, nor have they ever had a thousand dollars in the bank. It's that song I told you we were trying to get Larry Gatlin to give us and he gave it to us. There's a line in that song, *Mostly Fair Winds*, that I love. Larry Gatlin sings, "I've got more money in my pocket than my dad ever had in the bank." I don't know why that line sticks out to me the most. And yet, for most of you, that would be true. Whether you have a lot in your pocket or nothing in your pocket. Whether you have nothing in the bank, you were a cheerful giver and generous with what you had.

A true test of our faith is in contentment, not wealth. You read this over and over again in scripture. It's about being content. In Philippians 4, Paul writes this. ***12 I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry...*** There are people in here that have lived through both seasons in life. You've been well fed, and you didn't know where the next meal was coming from. ***...whether living in plenty or in want.***

It's why Paul gives the warning to young Timothy, in 1 Timothy 6, as he's preaching and teaching and leading people. ***6 But godliness with contentment is great gain. 7 For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it.*** We read this in Job, and we read this here, but it sounds like something your parents told you all the time. ***8 But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that. 9 Those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction.*** That's why commercials that appeal to people eager to get rich, they say it's easy, won't take much, you don't even need to use your money.

I'm sitting there going, "Okay I like it, just do it, and then send me that check." **10 For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil.** Again, it's not money, it's not the stuff, it's the love of it, it's the pursuit of it that gets us in trouble as we're eager for that more than we are the riches of Christ. **Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs.**

In 2 Corinthian 6, Paul say it this way and I love it. **10 ...having nothing, and yet possessing everything.**

One Christian pastor puts it this way. "Jesus plus nothing equals everything."

Billy Graham was asked about the Prosperity Gospel and I just loved his answer. It was a formal question that was sent into him. The reader asked, "Does God want everyone to be rich? I heard someone on TV claim that this is what the Bible teaches, but I wonder if it's true. We struggle every month just to pay our bills and yet my husband and I have always tried to put God first in our lives."

Here was Billy Graham's answer: *"No, the Bible doesn't promise that everyone who follows Jesus will become wealthy (nor does it promise that we'll always be free of sickness)." Which is where we started this series with Travis a few weeks ago. "Nor is money to be the most important thing in our lives, even if God does entrust it to us. The Bible says, "If riches increase..." There is nothing wrong with your riches increasing. "...do not set your heart on them" (Ps. 62:10).*

"After all, Jesus wasn't rich, nor were His first disciples—not at all. In fact, the only disciple who really cared about money was Judas, whose greed and unbelief caused him to betray Jesus for 30 pieces of silver. Repeatedly the Bible warns us against being consumed by money, or placing it first in our lives instead of Christ. Jesus said, "No one can serve two masters. ... You cannot serve both God and money" (Matt. 6:24).

"But when we know Christ, we are rich—not necessarily with this world's goods, but with spiritual riches! Think of it a moment. Can anything this world offers be greater than God's forgiveness for your sin? Can anything be greater than Christ's presence with us every day? Can anything be greater than the privilege of prayer, or being part of Christ's family or being used to bless others?"

"Thank God every day for His blessings, and make it your goal to put Christ first in your lives. Most of all, thank Him that when we know Christ, we have 'an incorruptible and undefiled inheritance that can never perish, spoil, or fade away ... kept in heaven for you" (1 Pet. 1:4).

I'm going to invite you to stand we are going to read this and pray as you stand. Psalm 73: 25-26, **25 Whom have I in heaven but you? And earth has nothing I desire besides you. 26 My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.** And all God's people said... Amen.

Father, in the name of Jesus, I thank you for the unfathomable riches that we have in Christ Jesus that we would search them out, that we would study them, that we would learn and grow from them and know that we can never exhaust the well of those riches. Thank you for those.

I pray for the one right now going through the bankruptcy, going through the foreclosure, going through the divorce, going through a job loss, going through a financial stress of just this season in Branson, that they would anchor their souls to the promises that you offer us, that they would anchor their faith in Christ alone, that they would rest in Christ, that they would pray for their finances, that they would work hard for their finances, that they would get up every morning even without a job and go looking for a job, that they would not be slothful, that they would be good stewards with not just the money that you've given them, but with the time and energy and the health that they have.

For those sick among us, we pray for their healing that if it is the Lord's will that they will be healed, knowing that ultimately those who are in Christ Jesus will be healed, and for that we are grateful and we rest in that today.

May our perspective be eternal and not temporal. May we focus on Christ as the source of our life. It's in the name of Jesus that we pray it. Amen