

JESUS: BE HUGE**LUKE 6:37-38**

There it was hanging in the youth ministry room at another church – a large banner stretched from one side of the room all the way to the other side. The letters on the banner were enormous, but they effectively communicated the message of the banner itself. It said – simply and provocatively – “Be Huge.” Be what? Be huge! Did you know that’s what God wants us to be and also to experience? He wants us to experience His hugeness which will lead us to become huge spiritually ourselves. He wants us to become big in our love for Him, big in our love for other people, big in our heart for lost people, big in our view of the world, big in our attitude toward those who struggle in life like the poor, the immigrant, the refugee, the oppressed, big in all of our relationships, big in how we use the spiritual gifts and talents He’s entrusted to us, and big in our financial giving to His Kingdom. So, how do we get huge? How do I enlarge and increase the size of my heart, my mind, and my soul?

This is the first of three messages answering a question, “How can you get and keep God’s blessing?” The dictionary defines blessing as some kind of favor or protection usually coming from God Himself. A blessing is something good and beneficial for which you’re grateful - something that brings or results in your well-being. The biblical meaning of the word “blessing” is pretty close to that dictionary meaning. Yes, people can bless each other, but the most important blessings come from God. A blessing is usually some kind of good gift from God to us that makes our lives better in some profound, important way. Today, I want us to look at something Jesus said. He doesn’t use the word “blessing,” but it’s most certainly what He’s talking about. I suggest Jesus revealed in those words how you and I can become huge and stay huge in every area of our lives. You should know, first of all, that...

GOD WANTS ME TO BE HUGE.

Christian pastor and author, A.W. Tozer, once said, “The most important thing about you is what you think about God.” Your perspective on who God is and what He’s like pretty much determines your attitude to life and how you live it. Here’s a sad fact. Many people believe God either dislikes human beings or could care less about us. Probably even more people believe God is irrelevant to your everyday life and mine. But if you’ve ever read the Bible, you know that’s not true. Yes, God hates sin in any and all of its forms, but He loves sinful people which is everyone. That’s precisely why He sent His Son, Jesus, to take our place on the cross and raised Him from the dead so we can rise from the dead one day, too. God is not some remote, aloof Supreme Being off running the universe. He’s not too busy to know about me much less care who I am and how I live my life. The fact is God loves all people deeply and comprehensively. He seeks to invade every aspect of your life and mine in the most positive ways.

Jesus painted a picture in those verses we just read that depicts how your life and mine ought to look if God is brought into every part of it. He described a big life. A blest life. He used images and metaphors that communicated clearly to people in His day, but they’re far less familiar to you and me today. For instance, he pictured blessing as

something that can be pressed down, shaken together, running over, and dumped into your lap. What's that about? Those were agricultural images, so people familiar with farming and farms back in Jesus' day would have more easily understood them.

Pressed down. Olives were a primary crop in Jesus' locale. You press olives to extract their oil for cooking and other uses. The analogy? Jesus says God wants to press out and into your life all of the blessing it's possible to experience. Shaken together and running over. When you pour harvested grain – like wheat or barley - into a cup or a container, you shake it so that it compacts down a bit which means you can put even more into the cup. You keep doing that – pouring it in, shaking it down, and compacting it - until the grain starts to run over and out of the cup. The analogy? God isn't stingy. He wants to pour an abundance of blessing into your life so much so that you have to make room for it. Even then, His blessings kind of run over. You can't contain them all. He wants us to have a big life. He wants us to be huge.

Dumped or poured into your lap. Farmers in Jesus' day often wore these robe-like tunics fastened around your waist with a belt. The design intentionally created a large pocket in the upper half of the robe around a person's chest. Farmers used this big pocket to cart things around from place to place that were too large or unwieldy to carry in one's hands. The analogy? God wants to fill up our lives completely - so much that that our lives just can't hold it all. It just spills out. Do those images make more sense now? Jesus said, "Your gift will return to you in full—pressed down, shaken together to make room for more, running over, and poured into your lap." (Lk. 6:38 NLT)

What does that tell us about God? At another time, Jesus said this about His followers, "The thief's purpose is to steal and kill and destroy. My purpose is to give them a rich and satisfying life." (Jo. 10:10 NLT) Paul, the great Christian leader, wrote, "You know the generous grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. Though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that by his poverty he could make you rich." (2 Cor. 8:9 NLT) God is all about abundance, about fullness, about blessing. God is about largeness, bigness, hugeness. There's nothing limited, restricted, or stingy about God. It's also true that God wants you and me to have a big life. But so often, it's our own sin, selfishness, and smallness of heart and soul that keep us living "its-bitsy" lives rather than huge lives.

Whenever you and I hear words like "abundance" or "blessing," we often think of money. Just like when we hear the word "giving," we often think of giving money. Now money can be a part of the blessing God wants to give us just like it's a part of giving, but it isn't the whole deal when it comes to God. God's abundance and blessing invades every conceivable area of life and living just as His definition of giving exceeds sharing our money. God wants us to be experience His blessing in every area of life: in our relationship with Him, in how we relate to others like our spouse, our kids, our family members, in our relationships with the people we go to school with or work with or worship with, in our health, and – yes – in our finances as well.

By the same token, He wants us to move into a new, much bigger world in the area of giving like giving up trusting in ourselves, giving up to God all the things in life that are

too big to handle, and – yes – learning how to give our money wisely and generously to His work in this world. When I hear those words Jesus spoke that we read today, I see Him standing before me saying, “I don’t want you to go through life empty-handed. I want you to experience my blessing in all the different parts of your life. I want your life to overflow and be a blessing to others, too. I want you to be huge. I want you to live a great, big, generous life full of Me that then flows out in even more blessing to others.” What Jesus said here points to another life-changing truth.

BEING HUGE IS AN INVITATION TO RECEIVE GOD’S BLESSING.

Jesus said, “Give, and you will receive. Your gift will return to you in full.” (Lk. 6:37-38 NLT) That’s a command that has the sense of keep doing it continually. Don’t just give once, but keep on giving. It’s not a single act, but a lifestyle. What Jesus expressed here some have called The Reciprocal Law of Giving. It’s a simple concept. When you give something, something will come back to you. Interestingly, the opposite is generally true as well. When you don’t give, you don’t get anything back in return. The Bible makes it clear this is how God has created the universe to work, “A man reaps what he sows.” (Gal. 6:7 NIV) When you give, you get. When you hold back, you get nothing in return. It touches all of life.

We’ve all seen the Reciprocal Law of Giving at work in many ways even though I doubt we ever called it that! Here’s a man who has no friends. Why? Because he’s steadfastly refused to be a friend to anyone else. Here’s a woman who has an abundance of friends. Why? Because she has cultivated and practiced being a friend to others. Here’s a man who is rarely honest in his business dealings. Are we surprised if people treat him dishonestly as well? By the same token, here’s another man who is honest and faithful in his work. Is it any mystery why most people treat him with integrity? Here’s a woman who treats others with contempt and unkindness. Is it any wonder why no one likes her? But here’s another woman who is consistently gracious and thoughtful of others. We’re not surprised to find many people who love and admire her, are we? Life starts to work better, life comes together better, life starts to get bigger and eventually gets huge when we welcome, practice and live out giving as a lifestyle in every area of our lives. Live big and you’ll become big. Make up your mind to be huge, start to act hugely, and you’ll become huge.

Notice how Jesus made this approach to life and living about far more than just money although it includes money. What did He say again? “Do not judge others, and you will not be judged. Do not condemn others, or it will all come back against you. Forgive others, and you will be forgiven. Give, and you will receive. Your gift will return to you in full.” (Lk 6:37-38 NLT) It’s interesting to me that right there Jesus touched the core of just about everything that has to do with life – our relationships and our resources. His words challenge us to stretch and grow in areas we might rather shrink in and stagnate. How easy it is for us to judge, condemn, refuse to forgive, and get stingy with our money! Jesus said it’s all interconnected. I wonder if Jesus was implying that people who are quick to judge, quick to condemn, and slow to forgive others don’t give away much money to God or others. Maybe. By the same token, people who are slow

to judge, slow to condemn, and quick to forgive, might be first in line to give to God and others all that they can give. Notice how Jesus connects the growth of our character to our habits and attitudes regarding our finances or our giving. Interesting, huh? When Jesus was thinking of a big life, a huge life, a life full of God's abundant blessing, it involved a new attitude toward people as well as possessions. It's all connected.

Let's talk about money for just a moment. After all, I do think Jesus was talking about our financial giving in the verses we read. And the Bible also says, "But since you excel in everything—in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in complete earnestness and in the love we have kindled in you—see that you also excel in this grace of giving." (2 Cor. 8:7 NLT) In fact, we're going to be touching on money and giving in this series of three messages on how to get and keep God's blessing. Money is not all of life, but life and money are indeed connected. Learning how to excel in my financial giving is part of living a big, huge life before God. Jesus implied that in the verses we read. Money relates to every part of life. How we handle money reveals our deepest attitudes and beliefs. How you handle money reveals a lot about how you also handle many other aspects of life and living – other people, relationships, for example.

Jesus said, "Wherever your treasure is, there the desires of your heart will also be." (Lk. 12:34 NLT) Suppose you buy stock in General Motors. What happens next? You suddenly develop interest in GM. You check the stock market. You see a magazine article about GM and read every word, even though a month ago you would have passed right over it. But suppose you're giving to help African children with AIDS. When you see an article on the subject, you're hooked. If you're sending money to plant churches in India and an earthquake hits India, you watch the news and fervently pray. Do you wish you cared more about eternal things? Then reallocate some of your money, maybe most of your money, from temporary things to eternal things. Put your resources, your assets, your money and possessions, your time, talents, and energy into the things of God. Watch what happens. Your heart will follow your treasure. It's what Jesus said. Money leads; hearts follow.

Every time you and I deal with money we are handling "life" in one sense. Like it or not, life and money are completely integrated. I'm not saying money is the ultimate value of life – of course not! I'm just saying you can't separate money from life. And you certainly can't separate money – how you use it and how you give it - from a relationship with God either. You can't separate giving money from being big – being huge – spiritually either. It's all connected.

Here's the question you and I need to answer: are we submitting all the issues of life – including my money and my giving to God's work in this world – to the Lord Jesus for His approval? There's hardly a more primary or foundational issue in our lives than money. And right here Jesus said in a resounding way, "Give! Give from what God has given you! Become a giver across the board and see what God does with it! Give and then watch how I will cause blessing – some of it spiritual, some of it relational, some of it experiential, some of it financial - to flow back toward you abundantly. Make up your mind to be a huge blessing and then watch how I bless you!" Here's something else.

THE BLESSINGS FROM BEING HUGE ARE DETERMINED BY ME.

The Reciprocal Law of Giving. “Give, and you will receive. Your gift will return to you in full.” (Lk. 6:37-38 NLT) But at the end of v. 38, Jesus added this statement, “The amount you give will determine the amount you get back.” (Lk. 6:38 NLT) Paul expressed it this way, “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.” (2 Cor. 9:6 NLT) You could call that the Law of Self-Administered Return. What’s that? To a very great extent, you and I are the ones who determine if and how we are blest. If I give a cup of love, I can expect a cup of love in return. If I give a quart of kindness, I can expect a quart of kindness in return. If I give a gallon of compassion, I can expect a gallon of compassion in return. If I give a ton of generosity, I can expect a ton of generosity in return. It’s kind of like turning on the water faucet on the side of my house in order to water my grass – something I’ve done a whole lot more of here lately! If I give that faucet just one turn, I get just a trickle of water coming out of the hose. But if I turn it on full blast, watch out! Who determines the amount of water? I do.

When it comes to giving our money to the Lord, He doesn’t necessarily bless us back with literal dollars and cents. That’s one of the many mistakes those TV “health and wealth” false prophets make. God defines His blessings much more broadly than we do. God can bless generous, sacrificial financial givers to His Kingdom in a wide variety of ways and often He does it in other ways than making them wealthy. Many of God’s blessings are far better than material possessions. But stop and understand what Jesus said here. We are the ones who determine if God’s blessing flows toward us or not. Interestingly, Jesus put the key to blessing in your hands and mine. If you truly live a big, huge life before God, you can expect God to be big and huge with you. If you decide to live stingy and limited before God, don’t be surprised if God seems a bit stingy and limited in how He blesses your life. It’s the Law of Self-Administered Return.

Two clarifications. First, becoming huge in our financial giving is never about the actual sum of our giving but rather the spirit behind our giving. Do you remember the story about Jesus and the poor widow who made an offering of her last two pennies? He said she actually gave far more in God’s eyes than the rich men dropping in bags of gold. How is that possible? Because she literally gave everything she had financially to the Lord while the rich men gave what they could easily afford to give. When it comes to financial giving, being huge in God’s eyes is a matter of the spirit not the sum.

Albert Lexie was a shoe-shine man. He died last year. For some 30 years, Albert set up shop in Pittsburgh’s Children Hospital and knocked the dirt off other people’s shoes. He buffed, he polished. And he charged a mere \$5 for his labor. Often, a satisfied customer left a tip. Most gave an extra dollar, some gave two. Once, during the Christmas season, a doctor gave him \$50 for shining one pair of shoes. But big tips like that were few and far between. And people just don’t care about the condition of their shoes like they used to. Albert was a relic left over from another era, a different world. But when Albert shined his last shoe and put away his shoe-shine kit for good, he left

behind an incredible legacy. Since the day he shined his first pair of shoes, Albert had donated more than a third of his earnings to the Children's Hospital Free Care Fund, which helps parents who can't afford to pay for their sick children's medical costs. In addition, Albert had also given the hospital every tip he has ever received. Every single tip. But Albert was just a shoe-shine man. How much could there be to give? According to the hospital administration, he gave just over \$200,000 over 30 years. How much? \$200,000. That's what professional athletes give, not shoe-shine men. Even small amounts, given faithfully, add up to a powerful legacy.

Two, being a sacrificial, generous giver to the Lord's work in this world has nothing to do with earning God's favor or deserving His grace. Yes, this is a very important area of growth and maturity for followers of Jesus, but it has nothing to do with whether we'll be in Heaven for all eternity. But it does have a whole lot to do with experiencing the abundant life – the blest life – God wants us to live here on Earth. God never suggested He'll love us more if we open the faucet wider, but He does suggest we'll love more. We'll love Him more and love other people more. We become bigger people, greater people, and better people.

These two laws we've discussed today bring God's power and promises into direct contact with our choices and responsibilities. His power and our choice to be huge and to live huge come together as partners. God is ready and willing! God promises that when we become givers – when we decide to be huge and live huge – this enormous reservoir of His blessing starts to flow toward us. And what God gives is far more than you or I could ever imagine or contain. The Bible says, "Now all glory to God, who is able, through his mighty power at work within us, to accomplish infinitely more than we might ask or think." (Eph. 3:20 NLT) But – don't forget - we decide how open the faucet will be and in so doing we determine how much of God's blessing flows in our direction.

In September 2013, a man in Brazil developed what doctors called "pathological generosity." In an article published in the journal *Neuroscience*, doctors described the strange case of a 49-year-old man identified as "Mr. A" who had a remarkable personality change after suffering a stroke. His physicians said that after the stroke affected the subcortical regions of the man's brain he suddenly had an "excessive and persistent" urge to help others. He wouldn't stop giving money and gifts to people he barely knew. According to his wife, he would buy candy, soda, and food for kids he met on the street. He also quit his job as a manager of a large corporation. When asked by researchers if he wanted to return to his job, Mr. A. claimed that he "saw death from close up" and he wanted to "be in high spirits" for the rest of his life. Mr. A. was put on medication for depression, which he said cured his depression but his "pathological generosity" remained unchanged.

"Pathological generosity." Interesting phrase, isn't it? As followers of Jesus, you and I are called to be huge. We're called to live this big, generous life full of God's goodness and love. We're called to take the blessings God has given to us and turn them into ways to bless others. And that just opens the door for even more of God's blessings to flow into our lives. So, be huge!