

“CLIMBING HIGHER (#2): FACING THE YETI”

(Luke 12:15-21)

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[McKendree U.M.C.; 10-14-18]

[PROP NEEDED: Video "*The Wild Man of the Snows*"]

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1. Read Text (NRSV): Luke 12:15-21 and Pray.
2. **[WATCH VIDEO: "*The Wild Man of the Snows*" (0:54)]**

A--"*The Wild Man of the Snows*," the "*Abominable Snowman*," "*Meh-Teh*," the "*Yeti*" -- all names for a mysterious creature of the Himalayan mountains who's legend persists to this day in spite of the *lack* of any concrete evidence proving its existence. ¹
(*The movie Smallfoot was even released just 2 weekends ago about a young Yeti who gets his world turned upside down when he discovers humans for the 1st X!* ²)

B--But whether or not the "*Yeti*" *actually* exists, the *idea* of it haunts the minds of many potential climbers of Mt. Everest.

C--What's more, of course, is that even if this creature *doesn't* exist *in reality*, there *ARE* nevertheless many "*Yeti*"-like obstacles, challenges, and fears that do, *in fact*, threaten the journey of any Himalayan mountain climber --...

D--...Things like tiredness, hypothermia, dehydration, oxygen deprivation, and starvation that fill climbers with fear and doubt --tempting some to give up, and others not to even begin climbing in the first place.

3. Well, last week we began a sermon series called "Climbing Higher", in which we're talking about the importance of growing and "taking the next step" in our understanding and practice of Christian Stewardship as followers of Jesus.

A--And today, I want to talk about all the "*Yeti*"s that (like the "*Yeti*" of the Himalayas) can threaten *our* progress as we "climb higher" in our personal stewardship journeys w/God.

1--Think of these as mindsets and excuses that fill us with fear, doubt & hesitation, causing some of us to give up, & others not to take a stewardship journey at all!

2--In Verse 15 of today's scripture from Luke 12, Jesus talks about these as being "*all kinds of greed*" -- e.g., a mindset which tempts us to think that contentment in life can be found in the accumulation of *things* -- ...

3--...And he then goes on to warn against the practice of this mindset by telling what's come to be known as the "*Parable of the Rich Fool*," which ends with the man being held accountable in *death* for his use of possessions in *life*, and in Jesus warning in Verse 20 "*So it is with those who store up treasures for themselves but are not rich toward God.*"

B--So with Jesus' caution in mind, **what are some of the "Yeti" attitudes that you and I often face** when we set out to take a journey in Christian stewardship? (i.e., the excuses we sometimes give for thinking we "can't" grow/"Climb Higher" in our generosity?)

C--Well, there's a lot of them I could talk about, but for the sake of time, let me just briefly highlight four.

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4. First of all, sometimes I'll hear people say, "*Preacher, **the church shouldn't talk about money**. Instead, it should stick to 'spiritual' subjects like prayer, love, and forgiveness.*"

A--Well, while that request sounds reasonable *on the surface*, if we examine the Bible carefully, we'll find that there is, in fact, no more "spiritual" subject throughout it than that of the stewardship (or proper use) of money and possessions -- nearly 2400 verses deal with this issue in one form or another. ³

1--In the Old Testament, for instance, the giving of the "Tithe" back to God (the first, best 10% of our labor/income, often called "*first fruits*") is one of the oldest and most sacred parts of the original Hebrew covenant between God & His people.

2--And need I remind us that the rite of *Circumcision* reminded God's people that they were not their own, but belonged to God -- today, *Baptism* is the Christian equivalent of that for both men *and* women, but reminds us of the same thing: who we are & what we *have* belongs to another (God); We are merely *stewards*

3--And if you haven't already, you will hear me say time and again that in the New Testament, stewardship of money and possessions was arguably THE favorite topic of Jesus himself -- 15% of all Jesus' recorded words deal w/this, including 1 out of every 3 parables; meaning that he talked about *stewardship* more than he talked about prayer, love and forgiveness combined! ⁴

B--So, if Jesus spent this much time & effort trying to help people understand the integral connection between money, possessions and *spirituality*, then I would think it should be okay for His *church* to talk about it at least 4-5 Sundays a year (out of 52)! ⁵

5. A second "Yeti" attitude we often face is the one in which we're tempted to say (or think) "**I can't really afford to grow my giving -- to Tithe or even grow towards it.**"

A--Maybe we think that because we're on fixed income, or have a high mortgage, are paying off college/student loans, or just have a lot of debt in general.

B--Yet, I'll be honest: I've never seen or even heard of someone whose faithful generosity (or tithing) to God through His church caused them financial difficulty.

1--In fact, quite the opposite is usually the case: Don't ask me how, but when we're faithful to God in giving back to Him, He always seems to provide for our needs

2--My wife and I have been faithful givers (tithers, actually) to God's church since we got married 29 years ago. There have been times when we were tight on funds, wondering how we were going to pay all of our bills. But through it all, we made a choice to continue to give and tithe, and as a result God blessed us with just what we needed to make it -- and I am naive enough to believe that the two (*our* giving and *God's* provision) went hand in hand!

3--Someone once asked a tithing Christian, "*How is it that you give away so much, and yet always have so much left over?*" He replied, "*I suppose it's because when I shovel it out, God shovels it in; and He has a bigger shovel than I do!*"

C--The reality, you see, is that you and I really can't afford *not* to grow in our generosity!

6. A third "Yeti" attitude is "**I give my time and talents, INSTEAD OF my finances.**"

A--And on the surface, that sounds great -- we're all supposed to give our time and talents as *part* of biblical stewardship.

B--But Malachi 3:8 tells the story of people of faith who were doing all kinds of *good deeds* (i.e., time & talents), but were neglecting to be generous with their *financial* resources (their "grain"), and refers to that neglect as "*robbing God.*"

C--It's a not so subtle reminder, in other words, that (unless we *don't have* a job) our service *for* God should *not* take the place of our financial generosity, but instead is to be *in addition* to it -- which is why in our U.M. membership vows we promise to support the work of Christ through our "*prayers, presence, gifts, service, and witness.*"

4. A final "Yeti" attitude I often hear today is "**I don't want to be tied down or legalistic about my faith, but to free to give as God's Spirit leads.**"

A--Again, on the surface it sounds good. But if you think about it, it's *not* very logical: after all, we don't wait for the Spirit to "lead us" to do *trivial* tasks like brushing our teeth, taking a shower, or combing our hair; so, why should we treat the vitally *important* task of giving to God any differently?

B--You see, setting a generosity goal like Tithing or some other % towards or beyond it is NOT being *legalistic* -- it's merely being *disciplined* / *having a plan* (we'll talk more next week about ideas for these kinds of plans). ⁶

5. Now, there are other excuses and justifications I've heard Christians give for *why* they "can't" grow in financial generosity (and you can read these in the endnotes of my sermon transcript) ⁷ -- the four I've shared today are certainly among the most common.

A--But in the end, that's really all they are... excuses for *not* doing what God invites, and (in fact) calls us to do.

B--And, like the "Yeti" of the Himalayan mountains, the dangers and challenges that these excuses present are, in fact, more *imagined* than *real*.

C--In a 1991 interview Edmund Hillary (one of the first to set foot on top of Mt. Everest) said, *"I believe that if someone starts out on a challenging activity, completely confident that they're going to succeed, why bother starting? It's not much of a challenge. I think it's much better to start out on something that you're not at all sure that you can do. If you overcome & you manage to defeat the obstacles, the satisfaction is so much greater."* ⁸

6. Well, if that's true for mountain climbing, then surely it's also true for journeys of faith.

A--You see, when you and I learn to become "*rich towards God*" (as Verse 20 says) -- that is: to *trust God* more than we *fear the unknown* -- ...

B--...Then we'll discover His presence with us every step as we "*Climb Higher*" in our relationship with Him, both equipping us and giving us courage to "*Face the Yeti*"s of our lives.

7. [PRAYER]

ENDNOTES:

¹ True to what was shared in the video you just saw, Hillary and Norgay really *did* see unexplained, ape-like footprints in the snow during their famous 1953 climb up Mt Everest. Other "evidence" to "prove" the Yeti's existence has been produced, as well, including a supposed skull of the creature, hair, "eye witness" accounts, and other items. However, to date, no conclusive, scientific proof has been shared "proving" the beast's existence. Most scientists believe such sightings are mis-identification of a rare (but real) kind of bear that exists in the Himalayan mountains. For more information, read the article on the "Yeti" in wikipedia at en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yeti .

² Released September 28, 2018, "Smallfoot" is about a friendly young Yeti named *Migo* whose world gets turned upside down when he discovers something that he didn't know existed -- a human. He soon faces banishment from his snowy home when the rest of the villagers refuse to believe his fantastic tale. Hoping to prove them wrong, *Migo* embarks on an epic journey to find the mysterious creature that can put him back in good graces with his simple community.

³ To be precise, 2350 verses of the Bible (out of 31,240 total, or about 8%) deal with the issue of stewardship of money and possessions.

⁴ 16 of 38 parables of Jesus are stewardship focused. One out of every seven verses of the Synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark and Luke) are about stewardship. Only the "kingdom of God" is given more attention by Jesus than this.

⁵ It's true that Jesus wasn't a fund-raiser. But he dealt with money matters so much because he understood that in the eyes of God, how we handle our money *matters!* Read Matthew 6:21.

⁶ Remember, for example, that far from being a legalistic *requirement*, the Bible says that Tithing (giving 10%) is merely *a starting point* for good financial management -- in the New Testament, Jesus *presumes* the Tithe as a *beginning*, but then goes on to challenge his followers to give *sacrificially* by giving *as much as possible!* (Read, for example, the story of the "Widow's Mite" (Mark 12:41-44) who gave not just a "tithe" but "*everything she had*").

⁷ For example, in addition to the four already shared, some people give the following as additional excuses/rationalizations for not giving or growing in their giving:

(#5) "***The church doesn't need my money.***" This is entirely true! The church *doesn't* need our money. God always has a way of ensuring the work of His kingdom with or without our money. But this excuse ignores the fundamental fact that while our financial gifts *do* help God's church carry out His work in our community and world, those gifts are first and foremost given is NOT to the *church* (a human organization) but to *God*. As I once heard it explained, "*Christian stewardship is not about need of the church to receive, but the need of the giver to give*" (Herb Miller).

(#6) "***I give to other non-profits INSTEAD OF my church.***" I addressed this last week when I reminded us that the Bible teaches that the first tenth of our financial gifts (the "Tithe") is to be given to God through His community of faith -- nowhere in scripture does it illustrate the Tithe being given anywhere else. It does teach that amounts *over and above* the Tithe can be given to other non-profit ministries and organizations that glorify God through their work, but that the Tithe belongs to (and through) God's church.

(#7) "***I don't agree with how my money is used.***" Join the crowd! Again, though, unlike giving to secular organizations and charities, when Christians give money to the church, we're not really giving *to our church*, but instead are more accurately giving *to God through* it. True, the church receives it on God's *behalf* and should use it in ways that glorify Him (and mark my words: God will hold churches and leaders accountable when they misuse financial gifts that have been entrusted to their care). But none of this changes the fact that *we're* not called to give generously because we like or dislike a preacher, or a ministry, or a budget item, but *because we love God*.

⁸ Hillary, interview cited from the "Academy of Achievement" website at www.achievement.org/autodoc/printmember/hil0int-1.