

What Is Your Life Worth?

A Sermon by David Barker
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Scripture: Deuteronomy 26:1-11
2 Corinthians 9:12-15
John 3:16

Do you know the fair market value of a horse in 15th century England?

- I don't...but I'm reasonably confident it wasn't worth an entire kingdom
- and yet there's Richard III, in Shakespeare's play of the same name, afoot in the battlefield, virtually alone, the enemy closing in, intoning the immortal words, "A horse, a horse, my kingdom for a horse!"
- Richard's words are a reminder: the *real* value of something is in what someone is willing to pay for it

- on county tax rolls, my home may be worth \$500,000—it isn't, by the way—but if it's a buyer's market and someone is only willing to give me \$400,000, my home is worth \$400,000
- Kelly Blue Book may tell me my car is worth ten grand but if seven is all I can sell it for, seven is what it's worth

A horse...a house...a car...what about a human life?

The Niland family in Tonawanda, New York sent four brothers to fight in World War II

- by D-Day, two of the four brothers were confirmed killed and one was missing presumed killed, leaving one, Fred, known to be somewhere in France
- earlier in the war, in 1942, all five brothers of another family, all deployed on the same ship, were killed when the ship was torpedoed and sunk
- to ensure no family ever again lost all their children, the military no longer deployed all family members to the same place
- and they implemented something they called the Sole Survivor Policy: if all the siblings in a family were killed save one, the one remaining would be sent back home to serve the remainder of the war stateside
- Fred Niland, therefore, had to be found, wherever he was, and sent home
- if you've seen the film *Saving Private Ryan* you know this story because it was based on the experience of the Niland family
 - a squad of eight men, led in the film by Tom Hanks, are sent into the chaos of post-D-Day France to find Niland who, in the film, is named James Ryan
- if you haven't seen the movie, I'm going to ruin the ending for you, but it's in service to a higher calling...

- Private Ryan *is* eventually found, but at the cost of the lives of six of the eight men in the squad, including Hanks' character, Captain Miller
- if the real value of something is in what someone is willing to pay for it, what does it mean to that value when the price they're willing to pay is their own life?
- at the end of the film, an aged James Ryan visits Captain Miller's gravesite with his wife...Ryan stands awhile in front of the cross marking the grave, and then asks his wife: have I been a good man? have I led a good life?

My life has a market value, a book value...numbers on a life insurance policy...bottom lines, assets and liabilities...

- but the real worth of my life is not found in a financial statement or how much money it would take to replace my salary if I die
- the real worth of my life is that Jesus Christ was willing to pay for it with his own
 - you know, there's part of me that doesn't know what to do with that, how to respond to that...I am just sort of awestruck...
 - I'm not fighting in a war, I'm not the only child left in my family
- and yet God so loves me that he gave his only Son for me that if I believe in him I will not perish but have eternal life
 - at some very basic level, that is difficult for me to comprehend, yet the fact I can't quite get my head around it doesn't make it any less true...
 - Jesus gave his life for me, so the issue for me, as, in its way, it was for James Ryan is this: what do I do in response to that?

What God says, as James Ryan surmised, is that if someone thinks your life is worth enough to pay for it with their own, it means you honor that worth by how you choose to live

- you, God says, honor me in how you live...your life has been bought at a price, so live it in ways worthy of the price paid
- foundational to a life for which much has been given, in other words, is our own giving
- and so it is that Moses tells the Israelites: give first to God because of what God has given for you
 - Moses recounts their history throughout the book of Deuteronomy: you have been redeemed, bought at a price...therefore, you give back to God
- and what Moses said to the Israelites, the cross and empty tomb say to you and to me
 - I have been redeemed at a price, and so I give back to God
- the Israelites had some sense of the worth of their lives and, thanks to the Gospel, so do you and I
 - we know the price paid for us...a price that no matter what we give, we cannot match...
 - I can never give to God what God has given for me
 - but God doesn't expect that...didn't expect the Israelites to do that, doesn't expect me, doesn't expect any of us

God's not scrambling to cover hot checks...the promises in the book of Revelation are not contingent on God securing sufficient venture capital...God's will will be done whether or not God ever receives a single penny from me

--because God is more interested in the condition of my heart than the condition of my bank account

--yet one does have a lot to say about the other

"Through the testing of this ministry," Paul writes the church at Corinth, "you glorify God by your obedience to the confession of the gospel of Christ and by the generosity of your sharing with them and with all the others."

--put me to the test, God told the Israelites...show me the condition of your hearts, of your faith...give back to me of what I've given you and see if, as a consequence, you suffer...or see if the blessings come back to you ten-fold...

--it's what God says to us: can you live in obedience to the Gospel you confess and give that others may receive and God's blessings multiply for all?

--so it is that Moses speaks of *first fruits*...give to God first, from the abundance of what you receive rather than from what's left over...

--give to God first *before* you've given for anything else because you have faith there will be enough, rather than giving to God *last* just in case there isn't

--pray, "Give us this day our daily bread" and then, as we said last week, live like you believe it...

--live like you believe it because a God who died for you is not a God who will let you starve

And as much as my living, my giving is about my own heart, my own faith, my own need to respond to what, through the Lord Jesus Christ, God has given me, so too is it about the Kingdom

--it can be no other way: the work of the Kingdom is the work of the church and the church, the body of Christ, is *us*

--the condition of our hearts cannot help but have a bearing on the condition of the Kingdom

December is a month that requires a great deal of giving around the Barker home

--there is Christmas, of course, but there is also Jessica's birthday on the 5th, Terry's birthday on the 17th...my niece's birthday and my other niece's anniversary and, come January 1, my father-in-law's birthday

--and with all the giving comes the inevitable question: what do all these people *need*?

--each year, it seems, it gets harder and harder to think of gifts, not just because, each year gifts get more expensive but because, truth be told, there isn't much any of us really need

--praise be to God, we have what we need

--there are things we *want*...I *want* a new pick-up truck...but, blessed as we are, little that we need

- I remember when I first heard about the Alternative Christmas Gift Market and thinking, *what a terrific idea*
 - rather than spending money yet again on things that might be nice to have but don't really need, we can spend it on things for people who really do have needs...serious, basic needs...and we can honor those we love in the process
- instead of on a tie or a crockpot, money can be spent to provide a goat and, thus, milk for a family in Nicaragua or school books for a child in Namibia
- I remember the first time I received such a gift...a card in an envelope that read, a gift has been given in your name that will enable five children in Zambia to be vaccinated against polio
 - it was one of the most wonderful gifts I've ever received

And so it is with the church

- it is true: God *doesn't* need a penny of my money, yet God still says give to me first of what I give to you
 - why, if God doesn't need it?
- because it isn't really about giving at all...it's about faith and it's about thanksgiving
 - it's about truly believing that God will provide
 - it's about acknowledging that my life was bought at a price...that what my life is worth is the life of the son of God...
 - and if Jesus gave his life for me, giving sacrificially to and for others is the only possible response I can make

And what is true of the church is true of the Kingdom

- God doesn't need a tie or a crockpot, but God's children need milk and they need school books
- giving to the church and the Kingdom because of what Jesus gave me is like buying a gift at the Alternative Christmas Gift Market
 - needs are met, faith is lived, the Lord is honored...and a witness to the truth of the Gospel goes forth
 - is there a greater value to place on a life than that?