

# “All In”

1 Kings 19:19-21 <sup>1</sup>

It was the year 1518. As best I can piece together the shards of history, it was in that year that Diego Velázquez, the Spanish Governor of Cuba, put young Hernán Cortés in command of an expedition to explore and secure the interior of Mexico for Spanish colonization. Due to friction between the two men, however, Velázquez revoked Cortés’s authority at the last minute and canceled the expedition.

In February, 1519, though, Cortés ignored the revocation of his authority and went ahead anyway, in an act of open mutiny against the governor. With 11 ships, 500 men, 13 horses, and a few cannon, Cortés made his way west and landed on the Yucatan Peninsula in Mayan territory. In July of that year, in order to ensure the full commitment of his troops to the task at hand, Cortés gave the order to scuttle (sink) the ships so that there was no possibility of abandoning the mission.<sup>2</sup> Once the ships were gone, Cortés and his men were “all in.”

That’s really what Elisha did in this morning’s text. The text reveals that Elisha was either a wealthy man or the son of a wealthy family, because he was plowing with twelve pairs of oxen and numerous field hands, whereas an ordinary farmer would have considered himself fortunate just to have one pair of oxen.

While Elisha was plowing along, the prophet Elijah came up to him and threw his cloak over Elisha’s shoulders, thereby designating him as the prophet who would succeed Elijah as the spiritual leader of Israel. After a brief conversation, Elisha “*took his yoke of oxen and slaughtered them. He burned the plowing equipment to cook the meat and gave it to the people and they ate. Then he set out to follow Elijah and became his servant*” (1 Kings 19:21). Elijah didn’t scuttle his ships, but he did burn his means of livelihood and his route of escape. He was “all in.”

Luke tells us that as Jesus was having dinner at the home of one of the Pharisees, “*a woman in that town who lived a sinful life . . . came there with an alabaster jar of perfume. As she stood behind him at his feet weeping, she began to wet his feet with her tears. Then she wiped them with her hair, kissed them and poured perfume on them*” (Luke 7:37-38). Mark tells us that the woman actually broke her jar in order to empty its contents on Jesus, and that the perfume was worth an entire year’s wages (Mark 14:3-5).

Assuming that the reference to “a sinful life” meant that the woman was a prostitute, Mark Batterson, a well-known pastor down the road in DC, noted that “the alabaster jar represented her past guilt and her future hope. It represented both her professional identity and her financial security. Plain and simple, it was her most precious possession. Breaking that bottle was her way of scuttling the ships.”<sup>3</sup> This extravagant gift meant that she, too, was “all in.”

After making this observation, Mark continued: “We want to spend *eternity* with God. We just don’t want to spend *time* with Him. We stand and stare from a distance, satisfied with

---

<sup>1</sup> A sermon by Dr. David C. Stancil, delivered at the Columbia Baptist Fellowship of Columbia, Maryland on November 16, 2014.

<sup>2</sup> Ross Hassig, *Mexico and the Spanish Conquest* (Longman Group UK Limited, 1994), pp. 53-54. Many accounts say that Cortés burned the ships, but the evidence is that he had them scuttled instead. See also:

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hern%C3%A1n\\_Cort%C3%A9s#Cuba\\_.281511.E2.80.931518.29](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hern%C3%A1n_Cort%C3%A9s#Cuba_.281511.E2.80.931518.29)

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Spanish\\_conquest\\_of\\_the\\_Aztec\\_Empire](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Spanish_conquest_of_the_Aztec_Empire)

[http://www.pbs.org/conquistadors/cortes/cortes\\_d00.html](http://www.pbs.org/conquistadors/cortes/cortes_d00.html)

<sup>3</sup> Mark Batterson, *All In: You are One Decision Away from a Totally Different Life* (Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 2013), p. 64.

superficiality. We Facebook more than we see His face. We text more than we study The Text. And our eyes are not fixed on Jesus. They're fixed on our iPhones and iPads, with the emphasis on "I." **Then we wonder why God feels so distant. We wonder why we're bored with our faith. It's because we're holding out.**

"We want joy without sacrifice. We want character without suffering. We want success without failure. We want gain without pain. We want a testimony without a test. We want it all without going all out for it."<sup>4</sup> **We're not "all in."**

In his recent book, *All In*, Mark asks, "When did we start believing that God wants to send us to safe places to do easy things? That playing it safe is safe? That there is any greater privilege than sacrifice? That *radical* is anything but *normal*? . . . It's time to quit living as if the purpose of life is to arrive safely at death. It's time to go *all in* and *all out* for the *All in All!*"<sup>5</sup>

The Bible I'm holding was my first leather Bible. My parents gave it to me when I was thirteen, more than fifty years ago. Even as a teen, I wrote these words in the front of this Bible:

- From George W. Truett: "To find God's will is life's greatest discovery. To know God's will is life's greatest knowledge. To do God's will is life's greatest achievement."
- From Dwight L. Moody: "The world has yet to see a man fully committed to the will of God, and by His grace I'll be that man."
- From George MacDonald: "It is a man's business to do the will of God. It is God's business to take care of that man. And therefore a man should never be afraid of anything."

Now I can't say that I've achieved those aspirations, but they still inspire me. With Paul, I can still say, "*One thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus*" (Philippians 3:13-14). **How about you? Are you "All In"?**

Here's a quick way to tell, and it's uncomfortably accurate. All you have to do to find out whether you're "all in" with God is to look at your calendar and look at your bank statement. The biblical standards are 1/7<sup>th</sup> of your waking hours spent in worship and spiritual and relational pursuits and 1/10<sup>th</sup> of your income brought "into God's storehouse." Anything less than that is not "All In."

Now I know that's asking a lot. But I am not the one who asks. It is the Lord our God. And these standards are stated repeatedly across the pages of God's Word.

The truth of the matter is that God doesn't need either our time or our money. God's purposes will be achieved, whether you and I are on the team or not. But God wants us to spend one-seventh of our time in rest, worship, and spiritual pursuits because God loves us deeply, and God knows that we desperately need these things. And God wants us to invest one-tenth of our income in Kingdom causes because God knows that it is frighteningly easy for us to become possessed by our possessions. These requirements are for our own good.

The truth of the matter is that most of us spend most of our lives accumulating the wrong things. We mistakenly think that the more we give away, the less we'll have. But in God's upside-

---

<sup>4</sup> Batterson, p. 77.

<sup>5</sup> Batterson, pp. 13-14.

down economy, we ultimately lose whatever we keep and we ultimately keep whatever we lose for the cause of Christ (Luke 9:23-25).

Jesus told us in no uncertain terms not to worry about what we have to eat or drink or about what we have to wear, “*for the pagans run after these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. **But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well***” (Matthew 6:32-33). But here’s the deal: if we give God only the stale left-overs of our time, talent, and treasure, it can’t possibly be the case that we’re “seeking first His kingdom.”

The pre-Christmas shopping ads are already telling us that we just *have* to have “the next big thing.” Now you know that I really do like my techno-toys, but the idea that that getting something we don’t have will make us happy is just a Big Lie that couldn’t be farther from the truth.

If the possession of things really brought happiness and contentment, then this would be the happiest and most contented age in history, for never before has there been such material well-being as there is in Western civilization today. But rather than contentment, we have ended up as one of the most anxious and dissatisfied ages in history instead.

For those of us who follow Jesus, if the goal of our lives is to develop the character of Christ—and it is—and if that character is well-expressed by what we call “the fruit of the Spirit”—and it is—then the materialism encouraged by our culture develops the very *opposites* of this fruit in our lives. Instead of LOVE, we become suspicious and hateful. Instead of JOY, we experience envy and heartache. Instead of PEACE, we are consumed with feverish unrest.

Instead of PATIENCE, we are impatient. Instead of KINDNESS, we find ourselves being cynical and unkind. Instead of GOODNESS, we become miserly. Instead of FAITHFULNESS, we become willing to break any commitment if it gets us more stuff. Instead of GENTLENESS, we become more and more cruel. And instead of SELF-CONTROL, we become more and more interested in self-indulgence. It’s not a happy picture, is it?

When you and I think about material things, including money itself, we do well to ask ourselves three questions: (1) **How did I get it?** (Legally? Justly? Exploitatively?); (2) **What am I doing with it?** (Am I buying things I don’t need with money I don’t have to impress people I don’t know, or am I making a real difference in people’s lives for the cause of Christ?); (3) **What is it doing to me?** (Does the evidence indicate that the Fruit of the Spirit or their opposites are growing in my heart?)<sup>6</sup>

The point to remember here is that **God wants us to have treasure**, but the wealth of this world is quick to deceive us into eternal poverty. “*Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth,*” Jesus said, “*where moths and vermin destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moths and vermin do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also*” (Matthew 6:19-21).

My friend, when you die, your heirs are going to wonder what you’ve left behind, but the angel who bends over your dying form will be asking about what you’ve sent on ahead. **Money talks. What do you want yours to say?**

---

<sup>6</sup> Philip Yancy, “A Surefire Investment,” [www.christianitytoday.com/ct](http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct) (2.3.09).

As I hope you can see, this question of being “All In” is not really a question about money at all. It’s a question about our hearts, about our love for God and about the level of our commitment to God’s Kingdom. But what we do with our money is an extremely accurate indicator of the condition of our hearts and of what we really, really love.

As I noted in this week’s *Laptop*, the number of our days is uncertain for us all. We tend to think that life and death are linear; that is, that death is out in front of us, and most likely at some distance. The truth is, though, that we live our lives alongside the boundary of eternity. Only a heartbeat separates us from that boundary, and however young and healthy or wealthy and important we may be, we are never, ever far from the edge.

Now the awareness of the nearness and the inevitability of death is actually a very helpful thing. The gift death offers us an urgency that exposes the superficiality of many—maybe most—of the concerns on which we spend our precious allotment of days. The awareness of death can propel us to get on with “A Life that Matters” before the night falls.

You and I are wise to live well in the present, for today and its opportunities will not come again. If we pour our highest and best energies chiefly into stockpiling for the future, we may forever miss the gifts God intended to give us in the here-and-now. If we dedicate our lives only to preparation for our material future, we’re not likely to experience “A Life that Matters” and “Relationships that Last.”

Ethicist Ron Sider has calculated that if just the “committed Christians” in America were tithers—gave the biblical standard of 10% of income to Kingdom causes—there would be *an additional \$46 billion available every single year* for Kingdom work. That would be enough to:

- Fund 150,000 new indigenous missionaries;
- Train 50,000 additional theological students in the developing world;
- Make 5 million more micro loans to poor entrepreneurs;
- Provide all the money for a global campaign to prevent and treat malaria;
- Provide the resources to sponsor 20 million needy children worldwide; and
- Provide the food, clothing and shelter for all the refugees in the world.

The obvious point here is that **if we ordinary American Christians managed God’s resources as God intends for us to do, we would generate staggering amounts of money that could literally change the world.**<sup>7</sup>

Well, I’m nearly done. I’ll end with two pictures and a prayer. The man in this first picture *almost* learned to walk at a rehab center that *almost* got built by people who *almost* gave money. How good is *almost* giving? About as good as *almost* walking.

The second picture is of Jack Thomas. Today someone *almost* brought Jack something to eat. Someone *almost* brought him to a shelter. And someone else *almost* brought him a warm blanket. . . . And Jack Thomas? He *almost* made it through the night.<sup>8</sup>

My friends, it’s time for us to stop living as though the goal of life is to arrive safely at death. **There comes a moment when it’s time to go “All In.”** There comes a moment when it’s time to scuttle the ships, burn the plows, and break the alabaster box. It’s time to quit playing life

---

<sup>7</sup> Ron Sider, “A Lot of Lattés,” *Books & Culture* (November/December 2008).

<sup>8</sup> [www.youtube.com](http://www.youtube.com). There are many examples similar to these from the Ad Council’s “Don’t Almost Give” campaigns.

“not to lose” and time to start living the adventure for which we were created. A ship in the harbor is safe, but that’s not what ships are for.<sup>9</sup>

Finally, let me share a prayer attributed Sir Francis Drake (1577) that ties a knot in what I’ve been trying to communicate this morning:

Disturb us, Lord, when we are too well pleased with ourselves,  
When our dreams have come true because we have dreamed too little,  
When we arrived safely because we sailed too close to the shore.  
Disturb us, Lord, when with the abundance of the things we possess  
We have lost our thirst for the waters of life;  
Having fallen in love with life, we have ceased to dream of eternity  
And in our efforts to build a new earth,  
We have allowed our vision of the new Heaven to dim.  
Disturb us, Lord, to dare more boldly,  
To venture on wider seas where storms will show your mastery;  
Where losing sight of land, we shall find the stars.  
We ask You to push back the horizons of our hopes;  
And to push us into the future in strength, courage, hope, and love.<sup>10</sup>

---

<sup>9</sup> Attributed to John Shedd (1850-1926).

<sup>10</sup> [http://www.goodreads.com/author/quotes/699166.Francis\\_Drake](http://www.goodreads.com/author/quotes/699166.Francis_Drake)