

Big BUTS of the Bible
The “But” That Lasts
Forever
March 19, 2017

PRELUDE – From the Day
Worship Songs – From the Day / Called
Me Higher
Prayer – Naomi

Announcements – Video
Feature – Trailer Hitch / Offering

Good morning, everyone.

As Shannon said, today is the day we begin a series that I’m sure will go down in the annals of North Heartland Community Church history ... *Big BUTS of the Bible*.

Hopefully it won’t go *down in flames* but will,

instead, become one of those series where, years later, people say with great fondness, “Remember that time Rick talked about the *Big BUTS of the Bible*? That was so helpful and I really learned a lot.”

And that is my goal because, for me personally, not only have I been fascinated by the BUTS of the Bible – I know that sounded weird – I have also been *encouraged* and sometimes even *challenged* because so often, when the word “but” appears, it tells us that God wants to bring about a positive change in our reality.

Of course, that’s how the word “but” works in everyday life, too. For instance:

- We’ve all seen someone struggling financially ... *but* ... they got a really

good job and things began to turn around.

- Or we know someone who went to the doctor and the diagnosis was really bad ... *but* ... the treatment worked, the prayers worked and they got better.
- And since it's almost baseball season ... who can forget a couple of years ago, when it looked like the Royals' were done for in a playoff game against the Astros ... *but* ... they just "kept the line moving" – single after single after single – until they pulled ahead and won the game and went on to win the World Series.

“But” is a really small word that can make a really big difference.

And in the Bible, whenever that little word shows up, often it does because *God shows up* with wisdom or a plan or an action that changes things. So, my hope is that, during this series, you and I will be encouraged and maybe even challenged as we check out some of those BUTS.

That sounded weird, too.

In any case ... today we're going to talk about the "but" that lasts forever.

And I have to tell you right up front that the implication of this particular "but" is so amazing and mind-blowing that I thought about calling this message *The "But" That's Hard to Believe*.

However, that's the title of the message three weeks from now, so this is "the BUT that lasts forever."

The Nature of Things

The other night, Jetta and I are sitting in our living room. We have the TV on but we're not really watching it. Instead, we both have our faces buried in our laptops, each of us intently searching for something.

- She is looking at websites advertising horses for sale.
- I am looking at Home Depot, Menards and Lowes websites comparing pressure washers.

"Why," you ask?

<pic> Because, in Jetta's case, one day last December, that beautiful horse she bought two years ago ...

... started bucking and threw her off ... which broke her hip ... which meant that we got rid of that horse (you can't own a horse that throws you) ... which means that now, she has no horse ... which is why she is looking at horses for sale.

<pic> In my case, three years ago, we expanded and updated the decking around our house.

As part of that process, I stained the entire thing, which was a huge job but it was worth it because it looked gorgeous – for about a year. It even looked pretty nice last year.

This year, however, it's not looking so gorgeous. The wood is dirty. The stain has

faded. So, it's time to clean it and put on a new coat of stain ... which is why I was looking at pressure washers.

Now, neither of us came to a decision that night but I suspect it won't be long until Jetta finds and buys another horse. And I expect to buy a pressure washer soon – maybe even today or tomorrow – and get working on my deck (and probably my parents' deck, too).

And for a while that new horse and that new pressure washer and the restored deck will be awesome. But one day – probably sooner than we expect or hope – *something will go wrong, for instance, with the horse.*

We know that's true because ...

- The first horse Jetta bought 15 years ago went lame ... and she gave it away.
- The second horse she bought 10 years ago went blind in one eye ... and she gave it away.
- The third horse (the bucking horse she bought two years ago) turned out to also have a physical condition which can't be fixed ... and she basically gave it away.

So, for sure, this next horse will have something bad happen at some point.

And in case some of you are thinking, “Wow, this woman sure has a lot of bad luck with horses” let me tell you that she really doesn't ... because *this is just the nature of things.*

The same kind of decline is going to happen both to my deck and to whatever pressure washer I buy. Oh, I might be able to keep the deck looking great for longer periods of time (assuming I am disciplined about cleaning it each year), but eventually the wood is going to crack or even warp. Or it's going to get termites. Or it might burn. Or something.

And eventually, the pressure washer will break down and need repairs. Or it might just stop working. Or maybe someone will break into my shed and steal it. Last fall, the KCMO Police arrested a guy who was hiding out on the back porch under one of my decks!

Or maybe someone will steal Jetta's horse. That kind of thing happens, too.

Now, lest you think that the reason I'm telling you all of this is to say "woe is me" or to make you feel sorry for us, let me be very clear that Jetta and I are *extremely* fortunate when it comes to the material and financial blessings of this life. And we know it.

<pic> My purpose is simply to illustrate the reality that every single human being experiences. No one escapes it.

- Things stop working. Things break. Things wear out. Things get stolen.
- So we spend the money to get a new whatever-it-is.
- And then *it* breaks, wears out, or gets stolen.
- Then we spend more money to get

another new whatever-it-is.

- And then *it* breaks, wears out, or gets stolen.

And we repeat this cycle again and again throughout our lives.

It almost seems crazy to keep doing it, except that we know from experience that this is just how it is in the world in which we live. This is reality.

And not just with “things.”

- Even when you get the high-paying job and things change for the better financially, the day will come when you don't have that job and that income. And you won't be able to replace it.

- Even if the disease is cured this time, one day some doctor is going to say, “Sorry, there’s nothing we can do” because (unless your name is Jesus-son-of-Joseph), the mortality rate among human beings is 100%. Every single one of us is going to wear out or break down in some way that is irreversible.

This is just the reality of human existence: *none of the stuff you have is going to last and neither are you.*

Furthermore, as that awesome country song we heard a few minutes ago so eloquently pointed out, even if it does so happen that some of your stuff actually lasts longer than you do, *you can't take it with you when you go.* There's no such thing as a hearse with a trailer hitch.

The Big BUT

Now, if you think that all of this sounds a little discouraging, then you're in good company because ...

It's the never-ending cycle of decline and then death that once led King Solomon of Israel to write:

“Everything is meaningless,” says the Teacher, “completely meaningless!”

What do people get for all their hard work under the sun? Generations come and generations go, but the earth never changes. Ecclesiastes 1:2-4 (NLT)

The sun rises and the sun sets,

then hurries around to rise again.

The wind blows south, and then turns north. Around and around it goes, blowing in circles.

Rivers run into the sea, but the sea is never full. Then the water returns again to the rivers and flows out again to the sea.

Everything is wearisome beyond description ... History merely repeats itself. It has all been done before. Ecclesiastes 1:5-9a (NLT)

Furthermore, he adds ...

I must leave to others everything I have earned. And who can tell whether my successors will be wise or foolish? Yet they will control everything I have gained

*by my skill and hard work under
the sun. How meaningless!*

Ecclesiastes

2:18-19 (NLT)

Then he concludes:

*So I decided there is nothing
better than to enjoy food and
drink and to find satisfaction in
work.*

Ecclesiastes 2:24

(NLT)

... which is not a bad strategy because, as Solomon goes on to state, these are, in fact, blessings from God to be enjoyed. But it isn't a truly satisfying answer because it doesn't change the nature of things. It's just a way to cope with the reality that the cycle of decline will continue forever. None of the stuff we have is going to last and neither are we.

Fortunately, however, as wise as Solomon might have been, he doesn't get the final say on this subject. That belongs to Jesus of Nazareth who, in His famous Sermon on the Mount, speaks into this reality a very small but powerful word that can change everything – *but*.

And the way Jesus does it – the way He speaks the big “but” – is by first agreeing with Solomon (and anyone else who has given a little thought to the reality of the world in which we live) that it really is foolish to expend all of our money and time and energy acquiring things that are not going to last and/or be taken from us in one way or another.

“Don't do it,” He says.

“Do not store up for yourselves

*treasures on earth, where moths
and vermin destroy, and where
thieves break in and steal.”*

It really is crazy, Jesus is saying, to live that way. It really is crazy to spend everything you earn on material things – whether they are for necessities or for pleasure – because none of it is going to last; or it’s going to be taken from you either by a thief or by death.

BUT, He goes on to say, you don’t have to. Even though it appears that the only option available is to try and make the best of whatever comes to you (“eat, drink and be merry for tomorrow we die”), it’s really not.

*“Do not store up for yourselves
treasures on earth, where moths
and vermin destroy, and where
thieves break in and steal.”*

BUT, Jesus says ...

Store up for yourselves treasures in Heaven where moths and vermin do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal.” *Matthew*
6:19-20 (NIV)

In this one little word – through this big BUT – Jesus is revealing to us an alternative strategy that can overcome the reality of decline and death.

Specifically, instead of spending all of our financial resources in the way most people naturally do (which leads to all of it winding up in the dust bin of history – and quite literally), we can actually use our financial resources in a way that transfers them into the spiritual realm ...

... which is why I said earlier that today's big "but" is so amazing and mind-blowing that I thought about calling this message *The BUT That's Hard to Believe*. What Jesus is talking about here is so far out as to be almost incomprehensible and inconceivable.

But this *is* what He is saying.

You and I could spend all of our financial resources to obtain treasures in this life. BUT we could also spend some to obtain treasures in the next.ii

In spite of all appearances, there's more than one option available to us. So, let's talk about it for a bit.

The Other Option

And let me begin by pointing out that his

sermon is not the only time Jesus mentions this option. For instance, the Gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke all record an incident where a very wealthy man comes to Jesus with questions about the life to come.

At one point in the conversation, Jesus says to him:

“Go and sell all your possessions and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.”

Mark 10:21 (NLT)

In other words, “friend, you’ve spent your whole life storing up treasure for yourself on earth” – and by the way, I think it’s important to note that when you read this story, it never says that Jesus condemns him for that. Jesus never says to him (or any other rich person) “you’re such a terrible

person because of all the wealth you have.”

Instead Jesus says, “You want to know about the life to come? The spiritual and physical reality that will one day become your reality? OK, I’ll tell you. Here’s the deal: *You’ve spent your whole life storing up treasures for yourself on earth but that will be of no value to you then.* If you want to have riches in *that* reality, you need to do something different than what you’re doing.”

And in this case, that something was to give to those who were less fortunate.

The Gospel writers tells us that the man is stunned by what Jesus says and he walks away. But apparently, the disciples are observing and listening because we read that, in the discussion that follows, Peter

says to Jesus, “we’ve given up everything to follow you. What will we get?”

And you can understand why Peter asks this question because he and the other disciples didn’t *give to the poor*. They gave to *the cause* – to the spread of the Gospel.

And in response, Jesus says:

“Truly I tell you, at the renewal of all things, when the Son of Man sits on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.

And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or fields for my sake will receive a hundred times as much

and will inherit eternal life.”
Matthew 19:28-29 (NIV)

“Boys and girls,” Jesus was saying, “everything you have given is all coming back to you ... and then some.”

And then, in a slightly different way, Jesus restates the principle of the big “but” we’re looking at today.

“But many who are first will be last, and many who are last will be first.”

Matthew 19:30 (NIV)

In other words, “there are many of my followers who have only piled up treasures for themselves and their loved ones in this life. And right now they’re near the top in terms of money and possessions. *But,*” Jesus says, “In the life to come, they’re going to be poor.”

“And there are many who have given up treasures in this life – they’ve reduced the size of their pile by giving to the advancement of the Gospel. They’ve moved downward on the scale of money and possessions right now. *But,*” Jesus says, “They’re going to be rich in the next.”

Now, again, as I said earlier, this idea that we can spend the financial resources of this life to obtain treasures in the next (or not) is a mind-blowing concept for a lot of people; even for people who have been Christians for a long time.

In fact, in my experience over the years as a pastor, people who are Christians tend to

have *the most difficulty* with this principle. That's because we have *three huge misconceptions* in our minds, which I think come from the combination of our cultural perspective on generosity and bad theology.

So, let's talk about those for a bit. And as we go through them, see if any represent *your* thinking.

Misconception #1. Generosity is supposed to be altruistic (which means “disinterested and selfless concern for the well-being of others”).

All of our lives we've heard it said “you're not supposed to *give* in order to *get* something. You're supposed to give because you *don't* get something. That's the kind of giving that really counts.” So, the idea that we could personally benefit in some tangible

way by giving to the poor? That just doesn't seem right.

And if it *is* somehow true that generosity does tangibly benefit me in the life to come, well, that shouldn't be my motivation. After all, God wants us to do right just because it *is* right, not because it has any benefit to us. Right?

Wrong. Totally.

This is an example of how we allow our cultural biases to override what God has clearly stated in the scripture. Again and again, God tells us that doing right will produce a harvest of blessing at some appointed time in the future. Right always comes with a reward. And what God says about being generous is just one example.

... which is why the Apostle Paul writing to his protégé in the ministry, Timothy ...

... gave him this instruction about the rich people in his congregation:

Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share. In this way they will lay up treasure for themselves as a firm foundation for the coming age, so that they may take hold of the life that is truly life.

1 Timothy 6:17-19 (NIV)

That's not altruism. Paul's not telling them to give out of a "disinterested and selfless concern for the well-being of others."

He's also not telling them to give expecting that those towards whom they are generous

will give back. That, Paul says, is God's role in the process. *God is the one who will give back.* And to give with that expectation is not out of line. At some point, God always rewards those who do what He asks.

Ok, that's the first misconception. The second is even more challenging because this one is based on bad theology or, maybe, incomplete theology (which is a result of bad or incomplete preaching and teaching on the part of pastors, including me).

The misconception is that ...

Misconception #2. Heaven is all about grace.

Now, just to be clear, when I say "Heaven"

I'm *not* talking about being somewhere as a disembodied spirit floating around on a cloud with a harp. And I'm *not* talking about the state of "being one with God" in some sort of eternal worship service.

Instead, I'm referring to the coming age, the renewal of all things – when Jesus returns and those who have believed in Him are raised to life in a new physical body in a restored world in which sin and death have no part. That's the Heaven that believers-in-Jesus are promised and look forward to.

And by the word "grace," I mean receiving something from God that we cannot earn and do not deserve – such as *the privilege of getting to participate in Heaven*: living forever on the renewed and restored Earth in a renewed and restored body that never gets

sick or dies.

That privilege – our salvation – is most definitely the result of grace. As the Apostle Paul clearly states in his letter to the first-century Church at Ephesus, “It is by grace you are saved through faith. It’s the gift of God and not a result of anything you do – your works.”

And many pastors and teachers (including me) go to great lengths to emphasize this truth because so many people think that getting into Heaven is about their “works” – or all the good things they do. “Do enough,” most people believe, “and you get in.”

But that’s simply not true. Getting in isn’t about how good we are. It’s about how good Jesus is and how He took our place on the

cross as the atonement for our sin.

Unfortunately, this strong emphasis has led many believers to conclude that Heaven must be all about grace. But it's not.

Instead, the truth is that ...

***Getting in to Heaven is all about grace.
What we experience once there is
about works.***

What we experience there is dependent on whatever treasure we've stored up by our actions in this life (which is why Jesus tells us about it).

See, a lot of Christians think that when Heaven comes to Earth, everyone is going to have the exact same level of experience. Everyone is going to be equal. But that's not

the reality that's communicated over and over in the teaching of Jesus and his apostles. Instead, the clear vision is that each believer is going to be rewarded for what we did regarding the people and causes God loves.

And we've already heard some of that this morning but I want to show you one more example which I think is the most vivid of all. It's found in the letter Paul wrote to the Christians at Corinth.

He begins by saying ...

No one can lay any foundation other than the one we already have—Jesus Christ.

In other words, Jesus is the base. His work and our faith in his work is what “gets us in.”

It's what saves us and brings us into the Kingdom of God both in the here and now and also in the life to come.

But then Paul says ...

Anyone who builds on that foundation ...

Whoa, wait a minute! There's more than just getting in? Yep.

Anyone who builds on that foundation may use a variety of materials—gold, silver, jewels, wood, hay, or straw.

But on the judgment day, fire will reveal what kind of work each builder has done. The fire will show if a person's work has any value.

If the work survives, that builder will receive a reward. But if the work is burned up, the builder will suffer great loss. The builder will be saved, but like someone barely escaping through a wall of flames. 1 Corinthians 3:11-15 (NLT)

Paul's point is that you and I, if we are believers in Jesus, we're going to get in. But we are building something for the next life by what we do in this life and, specifically (if Jesus is telling us the truth – and I think He is), *we are building something by what we give.*

As pastor and author Randy Alcorn puts it, “Our eternal experiences are presently being forged in the crucible of this life. Even if [we] cannot yet comprehend how, the fact remains that what [we] do with [our] money and possessions here and now will

significantly affect [our] eternal experience in heaven.”

Bottom line, our *belief* in Jesus determines our eternal destination: *where* we will be. But our *behavior* is what determines our eternal rewards: *what we will have* there.ⁱⁱⁱ

Ok, here’s the final misconception. And it’s really, really strong. It runs really, really deep in a lot of Christians.

It goes like this: “when it comes to money and giving and all that, you have to put what Jesus says in context. And the context is that ...”

Misconception #3. Jesus is more interested in the heart than the wallet.

And we think that because, in our current culture, it's all about what we feel and not necessarily what we say or do.

And we take that bias and we combine it with some of the things Jesus said about hypocrites who made a big show of saying and doing the right things for everyone to see but, on the inside, really didn't care all that much for God and his agenda in this world.

And since we don't want to be "those people" we think "yeah, Jesus talked about money a lot but you've got to put it in context. It's more important how you *feel* about God; that you love God; that your heart is with Him."

But, in reality, Jesus said the exact opposite is true! In the very next sentence after He gives the big BUT statement we're talking about today ...

He says this:

Wherever your treasure is, there the desires of your heart will also be. Matthew 6:21 (NLT)

In other words, *where the wallet goes is where the heart will go*. That's what Jesus was saying. That's what Jesus was teaching. Not the other way around.

A better way to think of it is that Jesus' concern for your heart and mine is what led Him to so frequently talk about our wallets and purses. He understood the connection. He understood that what we do with money

- specifically, our generosity or lack thereof
- has consequences that reach all the way into eternity.

Getting Practical

So, just to sum up what we've talked about to this point ...

- Jesus says that you and I *could* spend all of our financial resources to obtain treasures in this life (which we all know is dumb because none of it will last and we can't take it with us when we go).
- BUT, He says, we could also spend some of it to obtain treasures in the next and we do that through generosity - through giving.

And that's a little hard for us to accept because ...

- We tend believe that generosity is supposed to be altruistic ... so we shouldn't give with an expectation of receiving anything in return.
- We tend believe that Heaven is all about grace ... so it doesn't matter what we do with our money in the here and now.
- We tend believe that Jesus is more interested in the heart than the wallet ... so we don't need to worry too much about all the stuff he said about money.

Just curious – do any of those ideas represent what you believe?

If so, I hope that maybe what you've heard to this point will lead you to change your thinking to align with what Jesus is telling us. And then, more importantly, I hope you will change what you actually *do* in this area ... which is what I want to talk about in the brief time I have left this morning.

How can we use our money in this life in a way that obtains treasure for us in the next?

I want to share with you three practical principles but, again, as I do, remember that getting to participate in that life is about grace not works. What we're talking about is about *how to build on the foundation*, which is Jesus and what He did for us.

1. Give in support of the three “Ps” – the poor, the priests and the place of

worship.

When you step back and look at the big picture of the Bible, it's pretty amazing. These three "causes" (so to speak) come up again and again.

From the Old Testament to the New, we see God encouraging his people to use their financial resources ...

- To care for the less fortunate in this world, i.e. the poor.
- To provide an income for those who lead the communities of faith and work to spread the Gospel (in the OT, the priests and in the New, pastors and other staff members) so they can devote their primary vocational energy

to the growth and development of that community.

- To build and maintain the places where the community gathers to worship and learn. In the OT, that was the Temple and synagogues. In the New they met in homes but eventually, as the communities grew, they invested in property and buildings.

So, if you want to invest in your eternity, then give to those people and those causes.

2. Give based on what you have (in proportion to your income and wealth) not what you don't have.

If you make a lot and have a lot you should give a lot. You should spend less on yourself, maybe even save less for yourself so you can

give more to the three Ps. And if you don't make a lot or have a lot you should give less. That's the principle.

Practically speaking, for most people that means setting a percentage that requires you to make some kind of sacrifice. If you're young or just starting out in giving, you should probably shoot for one or two or three percent with the goal of raising that over time as your income grows.

If you're older or you're more mature in your faith you probably ought to be getting near to or exceeding the 10% mark - especially if you're able to buy horses and pressure washers and play a lot of golf like some people I know. Some of us, based on our income and wealth probably should be near 20% or 30% or maybe even 50%.

Now, whenever I talk about this issue, there's always the question of "what if my spouse isn't a Christian (or they're not mature in their faith) and doesn't want to do this?"

The answer is don't try to make them. Don't demand that someone who is not a Christian act like a Christian. Instead, you personally follow this same principle: *give based on what you have not what you don't have.*

- If you have an allowance, give based on that.
- If you earn your own money and get to spend it as you wish, give based on that.
- If you don't have either of those options, then don't give.

But whatever you do, don't make this a wedge issue between you and your spouse. For your reward in Heaven is based on what you have to work with not what you don't have.

Final piece of advice ...

3. Give regularly and give first (before any other expenditures).

Whenever I talk about this, people almost always say, "wow, Rick, this is so clear and I really am going to do this."

And they start out by putting a percentage in the plate every time they are in church but then they miss a few weeks and they stop. Or they don't prioritize it and they wind up with too much month at the end of the money and they don't give.

This is why you need to have a plan and a mechanism. And it just so happens that we have one of those here at NHCC. You can go to our app or our website and setup a recurring online donation that comes out every week or every other week or every month. That's what Jetta and I do.

That way it gets built into your budget. And you really do it.

In addition, it just so happens that right now we have a great way to get involved in supporting the third "P" – the place; our place; this facility.

We're calling it the Guest Experience Project

Ladell mentioned this last Sunday. Want to

make our facility great especially for newcomers.

8 projects:

- Check-in computers for AL (to minimize wait time)
- Mother's room upgrade
- Family bathroom upgrade
- Repainting AL and our entryway ...
PLUS MORE.

Goal of \$44K by Easter Sunday.

Details at the display table in the commons.
Letter this week from me with explanation.

I always have to say at this point: you don't have to give thru NHCC but give somewhere. Your experience in the life to come is

dependent on it.

Well, friends, there you have it. The big BUT of the Bible for today, the BUT that lasts forever.

“Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moths and vermin destroy, and where thieves break in and steal.”

BUT, Jesus says ...

Store up for yourselves treasures in Heaven where moths and vermin do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal.” Matthew
6:19-20 (NIV)

Let's pray together.

Thanks for the bigger picture: this life is
fleeting, temporary

You have called us higher, deeper not to
condemn us but to make us happy and
complete.

We can invest in eternity

<Prayer>

Feature – My Own Little World

CLOSING COMMENTS

1. Men's Breakfast signup

Endnotes

ⁱ I'm referring to the song Trailer Hitch by Kristian Bush which our band performed just before the message.

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- ii <http://www.desiringgod.org/messages/dont-be-anxious-lay-up-treasure-in-heaven-part-1>
- iii See <http://www.epm.org/resources/2014/Jun/18/do-you-think-loss-rewards-heaven-will-be-permanent/>