

MATTHEW 6:19-21

WHERE HAVE YOU HIDDEN YOUR TREASURE?

“Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”¹

Christian values are always under assault, though never more so than in this present day. Those in the world resist living lives marked by seeking and doing the will of the True and Living God. Moreover, the world about us subtly infiltrates our thinking, gradually transforming our values until we are indistinguishable from those identified as belonging to the world. The pressure seems calculated to compel conformity to the lowest common denominator—socially and culturally.

While I could speak of bold, new cultural attitudes that have become regnant in contemporary society—acceptance of homosexuality as normal, multiple sexual partners even among church members, approval of murder of the unborn for convenience sake and tolerance of raw sexuality as entertainment—it is a more insidious area of assault that concerns me in this message. The question that I present to you today is, “Where have you hidden your treasure?”

If I review the lives of the professed people of God, would I discover that God is the centre of life? Would I find evidence that He is our priority? Christians sometimes profess to be unable to say what they treasure most; however, there is a simple test to discover one’s treasure. Your treasure is the one thing that you would most hate to be without. Your treasure is that which consumes your thoughts—it is where your thoughts turn when you are free to think whatever you wish. That which you treasure is what you speak of most and most ardently. By this criterion, it is difficult, even impossible, to believe that knowledge of the True and Living God is a priority for contemporary Christians.

Should I ask individuals where their moneys are invested, I would undoubtedly receive a variety of responses. Some responses would reveal that the individuals were holding stocks and bonds, T-bills and GICs. Others would speak of the acquisition of collectibles, or tell how they were upgrading their home or purchasing vehicles. I actually have some friends who have defended spending all they have, asserting that the government will provide for them as they age. Such talk is foolish in the extreme; but it is more common than any of us might imagine, I fear. What I seldom hear is talk of investing in the Kingdom of God.

We can defend the purchase of life insurance, knowing that we are responsible to provide for loved ones who survive us. However, few Christians purchase policies that name the congregation or a missionary agency as the beneficiary. We are careful to arrange our financial affairs to ensure that there is continuing income for our family, which is good and proper. However, we seldom give thought to the need for continuing income for the work of God.

Summarising these observations, it is apparent that too often our priority is neither the church we profess to love nor the Head of the church. We cannot say that we love the Kingdom of our Lord if our wealth is invested solely in this dying world. If our worth is defined by what we hold, rather than who we are, we are not in love with God’s Kingdom.

¹ Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from **The Holy Bible: English Standard Version**. Crossway Bibles, a division of Good News Publishers, 2001. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

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Before considering the words of the Master, I do need to address one further point. Sermons addressing how we handle our money are an irritant to many people. Sermons on giving are the stuff of caricature of preachers. The charge is frequently made by outsiders that all the church wants is their money. Let me say very clearly that I do not want anyone's money. Certainly, I do not want to receive money from anyone who is unhappy about giving.

Biblical instruction makes abundantly clear that giving is to be seen as an act of worship [see 2 CORINTHIANS 8:1 ff.; 1 CORINTHIANS 16:1, 2]. Whenever we prepare to receive the gifts of God's people during our worship, I make it a point to discourage giving from those who are unsaved. It is my practise to urge the unsaved to receive the priceless gift of life that is freely given to each one who receives Christ Jesus as Lord [see 1 CORINTHIANS 2:12; 2 CORINTHIANS 9:9]. Based upon Paul's instruction to the Corinthian Christians, I emphasise that those who have no joy in the act of giving should not give, but rather they should take the time to reflect on God's goodness and mercy as others worship through bringing their gifts [cf. 2 CORINTHIANS 9:6, 7].

God has proven Himself generous toward me and my family throughout many years of service. I have been supported through the generosity of God's people for many years. I have not begged for money, nor shall I do so. If God who appointed me to His service is incapable of supplying my need, I will cease to serve Him. However, if He has appointed me to this service, then He is responsible to provide for me; and the means by which God provides is the same as revealed through His Word—the generous gifts of His people [cf. PHILIPPIANS 4:10-20].

Having established this basis for the message, I invite your consideration of the words of the Master—words that were spoken as He was seated on the side of a hillock, addressing the vast crowds that followed Him during the days of His flesh. As He instructed those who would please the Father, He spoke of the stewardship of life, for the moneys we give to advance His cause are nothing less than the administration of the grace of God.

A WARNING — “Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal.” Jesus' words in this pericope begin with a warning—an admonition to guard one's heart. Listen again to the startling caution He forcefully delivered: “Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal.”

It is difficult to take this warning seriously when we live in virtual luxury. I realise that most of the people to whom I speak do not think of themselves as wealthy. However, compared to the historical situation for our nation, or compared to the majority of people alive today, we are quite wealthy. Few of us have to worry whether we will have food tomorrow, or whether we will have adequate shelter, or whether we will have transportation. It is true that our desires outstrip our needs, but we actually have little need for the necessities of life.

An unknown author closed a letter he had written with this wise admonition to Christians, “Keep your life free from love of money, and be content with what you have, for he has said, ‘I will never leave you nor forsake you.’ So we can confidently say,

‘The Lord is my helper;
I will not fear;
what can man do to me?’”

[HEBREWS 13:5, 6]

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The acquisition of goods of itself is not sinful; the danger is that those things that we acquire are able insidiously to insinuate themselves into our lives, supplanting the love for Christ that once marked our lives. How else shall we understand this admonition penned by the Apostle to the Gentiles? “Now there is great gain in godliness with contentment, for we brought nothing into the world, and we cannot take anything out of the world. But if we have food and clothing, with these we will be content” [1 TIMOTHY 6:6-8].

Godliness with contentment? There is a concept that will not gain much favour in modern society. You will undoubtedly recall the remainder of Paul’s warning to the pastor of the congregation in Ephesus. “Those who desire to be rich fall into temptation, into a snare, into many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils. It is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs” [1 TIMOTHY 6:9, 10]. The delight that accompanies acquiring goods can, and often does, crowd out love for Christ.

How strangely out-of-step with contemporary views is the Apostle’s assertion: “I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content” [PHILIPPIANS 4:11]. The Word advocates what? Contentment with what is necessary for life? How utterly passé! Thinking like that, much less living within our means, is so antiquated, so unfashionable; it is so yesterday! Such a position is difficult, if not impossible, to sell in our modern world built on the concept of consumerism; restraint has been superseded by conspicuous consumption.

In the 1987 film “Wall Street,” Gordon Gekko, the character played by Michael Douglas addresses the stockholders of the fictional Teldar Paper Company in one memorable scene. That speech has become legendary, if for no other reason than the words enshrine the prevailing attitude of contemporary Americans and Canadians. The address closes with these classic lines: “The point is, ladies and gentleman, that greed, for lack of a better word, is good. Greed is right, greed works. Greed clarifies, cuts through, and captures the essence of the evolutionary spirit. Greed, in all of its forms; greed for life, for money, for love, knowledge has marked the upward surge of mankind. And greed, you mark my words, will not only save Teldar Paper, but that other malfunctioning corporation called the USA.”²

Modern advertising fosters a spirit of greed, creating in us a feeling of loss and of lust, a sense of inadequacy and the desire to acquire, the thought that we can measure the worth of an individual by the size of his wallet. Jesus’ words in our text challenge that distorted view. Many of us grew up in a simpler era. We were taught to repair and reuse. I suppose the old adage held true for many throughout the nation: “We eat what we can, and what we can’t we can.” “Waste not, want not” was an aphorism that reigned in the social consciousness. Times have changed, and we have adapted to the changing times. Now, before it is used up we buy new. It is seemingly mandatory that we spend, going into debt if we cannot afford what we want. Easy credit has made it possible for us to have all we want and more. The attitude has infected entire nations; the citizenry grows soft, demanding more of the intoxicating elixir of easy credit.

We would undoubtedly benefit from hearing the admonition to Timothy concerning wealth. “As for the rich in this present age, charge them not to be haughty, nor to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly provides us with everything to enjoy. They are to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share, thus storing up treasure for themselves as a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of that which is truly life” [1 TIMOTHY 6:17-19].

² Quoted from the Film “Wall Street,” Oliver Stone, Director, 1987,
<http://www.americanrhetoric.com/MovieSpeeches/moviespeechwallstreet.html>

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On one occasion while he was teaching, Jesus was approached with a request that He compel a brother to divide an inheritance. His response must have startled not only the man making the request but all who listened on that day. This is the Master's response to that request. "Man, who made me a judge or arbitrator over you?" And he said to them, 'Take care, and be on your guard against all covetousness, for one's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions.' And he told them a parable, saying, 'The land of a rich man produced plentifully, and he thought to himself, "What shall I do, for I have nowhere to store my crops?" And he said, "I will do this: I will tear down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. And I will say to my soul, Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry.'" But God said to him, "Fool! This night your soul is required of you, and the things you have prepared, whose will they be?" So is the one who lays up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God'" [LUKE 12:14-21].

If we belong to the Kingdom of God, we must realise that our situation here is impermanent. To those who follow Him, the Master urged a balanced perspective. He said, "Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom. Sell your possessions, and give to the needy. Provide yourselves with moneybags that do not grow old, with a treasure in the heavens that does not fail, where no thief approaches and no moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also" [LUKE 12:32-34].

If we will please God, we must be wise administrators of all that He has entrusted to us. Certainly, this entails thoughtful administration of any moneys and of any goods that are entrusted to our oversight. What is frequently overlooked is the stewardship of life. If we are to give generously of our goods to the work of the Kingdom, doesn't it follow that our time is likewise to be generously employed in His work. Rather than selfishly resenting the time that is given to worship, to meeting with the people of God or to waiting in the presence of the Master, we are responsible to ensure that we wisely apportion what is allotted to us. If He is Master, He deserves our best thoughts and our best efforts.

While the warning found in our text is sadly neglected, because we *do* lay up for ourselves treasures on earth, I am equally convinced that we invest our hours foolishly too often. I do believe we should work enthusiastically at the jobs God has permitted us to have. I base this on the admonition, "Whatever you do, do it enthusiastically, as something done for the Lord and not for men, knowing that you will receive the reward of an inheritance from the Lord—you serve the Lord Christ" [COLOSSIANS 3:23, 24].³

Just as we are to see our jobs as opportunity to serve the Master, so the gifts that He has entrusted to us for the benefit of the congregation are to be invested in His people. I have often said, and I say again, when you came to faith in the Son of God, His Spirit took up residence in your life. The Holy Spirit of God lives in each believer; your body is the Temple of God. Moreover, He presented you with gifts that are to be used to build up the Body of Christ. Each Christian is entrusted with divine gifts that are given so that together we could build one another to the praise of God's glory.

Writing the Church of God in Corinth, the Apostle instructs all who are believers, "There are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who empowers them all in everyone. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good." What I want you to note is that there is no such thing as an ungifted Christian. Because you are saved, you are gifted. Moreover, your gift was given for the benefit of all, and not for your own benefit.

³ **The Holy Bible: Holman Christian Standard Version** (Holman Bible Publishers, Nashville, TN 2003)

I note that an individual cannot demand a gift from God; rather, He gifts us as He wills. “All these are empowered by one and the same Spirit, who apportions to each one individually as he wills” [1 CORINTHIANS 12:4-7, 11]. Two significant truths are to be noted, then: as a Christian, *you are gifted for the benefit of others*; and *your gifts were specifically chosen by God because He valued what He entrusted to your oversight*.

These truths are emphasised as Paul continues writing. “God has so composed the body, giving greater honour to the part that lacked it, that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another. If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honoured, all rejoice together” [1 CORINTHIANS 12:24-26]. God composed the Body—He appointed you to serve in the place He desired, equipping you with unique gifts designed to build others in that place. Therefore, together—and only together—will we glorify God through striving for and exhibiting the unity of the Body. Walking in harmony and serving in the unity of the Spirit, we build one another and honour God. Paul concludes with this word: “Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it” [1 CORINTHIANS 12:27].

I did not simply run down a rabbit trail to get away from the thrust of Jesus’ words. Rather, I am pointing out a significant truth that is often neglected. If we are to be administrators of the moneys and goods entrusted to us, and if we are to administer our hours so that we do not stint on time spent in the presence of the Living God, we are also responsible to administer the gifts entrusted to us by God’s Spirit. We are responsible to build one another in this most Holy Faith. We are responsible to seek opportunity to build, encourage and console God’s Holy people [see 1 CORINTHIANS 14:3].

The warning Jesus issued in our text brings us up short precisely because we do attempt to lay up treasures on earth. What is less immediately obvious is the transformation of God’s people as they are co-opted by the world in which they live. Let me point to one area of change that is apparent when we analyse the data. Only a generation past, the evangelical churches were aggressively evangelistic and ardently missionary minded. Every church could speak of missionaries raised up from within the congregation and the commitment to the field. There was a sense of eagerness to train people to advance the Faith; and the sense of call weighed heavily upon the churches. The missionaries that went to foreign fields anticipated investing a lifetime in winning the lost, discipling those coming to Faith and advancing the cause of Christ.

Today, short-term missions predominate; and a major reason for this change is that the people of God are jealous for their time. However, they are not jealous because they seek more time in the presence of God or because they are eager to get on with the work of the Kingdom, they seek recreation. It is a frequent complaint that God’s people are tired. They cannot participate in the work of the congregation because they are working so hard, or they are unable to assist fellow believers because they really need time for themselves. I have heard worship teams whine that they can’t do two services a week because it takes too much energy. I have heard grumbling because church members can’t get to the restaurant in timely fashion because the worship service takes too long. These are complaints that betray a restlessness of soul. There will be no rest for the people of God until they rest in Christ the Lord.

Perhaps you will recall these words from the author of the Letter to Hebrew Christians. “There remains therefore a rest for the people of God. For he who has entered His rest has himself also ceased from his works as God *did* from His.” The author then encourages readers, “Let us therefore be diligent to enter that rest” [HEBREWS 4:9-11a].⁴ The rest we seek is found in service to Christ the King; and our service is a stewardship of life.

⁴ The New King James Version (Thomas Nelson, Nashville, TN 1982)

AN INVITATION — “Lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal.” Jesus did warn against investing in that which is impermanent, but He also invited us to invest in that which is eternal. I have named three commodities over which we are to be administrators, noting the way in which we can misuse them. Now, I want us to think of how we can wisely administer these same commodities.

Let’s think of them in the reverse order to which they were first presented. Thus, we will not consider our spiritual gifts. I established that God gifted you if you are a Christian. I daresay that the gift you received is unique in as much as it was given by God for the specific employment within the assembly wherein He placed you. Though others may have similar gifts within the congregation where God has placed you, you may be certain that you are valuable because God gifted you in order that you might perform a particular job. The gifts we have received not be identical—they will be as diverse as the need within the assembly.

I have said on other occasions, and I stress in this message, that the congregation is the Body of Christ. Pause and let that sink in for a moment. This is the Body of Christ. The Apostle is not focused on a great, amorphous universal entity; he is writing the Corinthians to encourage them to look at what God is doing among them. Christ is the Head; together we comprise the Body. Listen as Paul states the issue. “The body does not consist of one member but of many... God arranged the members in the Body, each one of them, as He chose. If all were a single member, where would the Body be? As it is, there are many parts, yet one Body” [1 CORINTHIANS 12:14, 18-20]. The truth of this point becomes obvious as he makes the application in a few verses, “If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honoured, all rejoice together” [1 CORINTHIANS 12:26]. Then, he clinches this understanding when he states, “Now you are the Body of Christ and individually members of it” [1 CORINTHIANS 12:27].

When I build the assembly where God placed me, I am building for eternity. Christ is honoured. God is glorified. The Body is strengthened. When the Body of Christ functions as it should, we are taught that outsiders are convicted because they witness the Spirit of God at work among us and see Christ revealed through our united labour. This is the intent of the instruction, “If all prophesy, and an unbeliever or outsider enters, he is convicted by all, he is called to account by all, the secrets of his heart are disclosed, and so, falling on his face, he will worship God and declare that God is really among you” [1 CORINTHIANS 14:24, 25].

I cannot believe Paul engages in mere hyperbole when he says to the Thessalonian saints, “What is our hope or joy or crown of boasting before our Lord Jesus at His coming? Is it not you? For you are our glory and joy” [1 THESSALONIANS 2:19, 20]. He speaks in the same vein when he speaks of the Philippian Christians as his “joy and crown” [see PHILIPPIANS 4:1]. My investment in you is yielding a return for eternity. When I strengthen you, I am stronger. Likewise, when you strengthen me, we all benefit. As we invest our gifts in each other, the Body of Christ is strengthened and we are being prepared for eternity.

When we thus employ our gifts to strengthen the Body of Christ, we are laying up treasures in heaven. Too many professed Christians holding attitudes akin to a man with whom I spoke this past week. No church meets his criterion for purity, so he withholds his fellowship from all churches. He phoned me seeking encouragement in starting a congregation. I could not encourage him—not because he is ungifted or incapable, but because he has no respect for the Body of Christ. He was squandering the gifts God had entrusted to him, consuming them on himself rather than blessing the assembly. Rather than being attractive to outsiders, his attitude discouraged them from seeking Christ. He is making no investment in heaven at this point.

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I trust you are not wasting the gifts God has entrusted to you by wasting them on yourself. Among us are some with gifts of serving (helping, administering, faith), gifts of speaking (testifying, teaching, preaching) and perhaps even some with sign gifts. All are to be employed specifically in building one another. Similarly, I urge each one among us to consider how we are investing our hours.

You are given a treasure each day—a treasure consisting of 86,400 seconds, 1440 minutes. We tend to think in terms of hours, but it is the minutes and seconds that are frittered away. Of course, the seconds are cumulative and build to hours and ultimately days. How we spend the time God gives us determines whether we are investing in eternity or merely wasting the gift of time He entrusts to us. I understand that each of us requires time to for rest. There is a portion of each day that is spent in eating, usually sharing a meal with family or friends. There are also demands upon our time by work as we perform the duties for which we are responsible. These minutes and hours are necessary.

However, each choice we make concerning how we use the time given must either glorify God or be consumed on activities that inconsequential and even meaningless in terms of eternity. I acknowledge the need for recreation. I understand that we must turn aside to refresh the body from time-to-time. However, with the growth of leisure time in our lives, we invest more time in recreation than we do in service to Christ. We spend more time pursuing our hobbies than we do in spending time with Christ. We are more familiar with the cast of the newest shows on television than we are with the peoples named in the Word.

There is an urgency to accomplish the work of God. Listen to the urging of the Apostles. Peter challenges our use of time when he writes, “Since therefore Christ suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves with the same way of thinking, for whoever has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin, so as to live for the rest of the time in the flesh no longer for human passions but for the will of God. For the time that is past suffices for doing what the Gentiles want to do, living in sensuality, passions, drunkenness, orgies, drinking parties, and lawless idolatry. With respect to this they are surprised when you do not join them in the same flood of debauchery, and they malign you; but they will give account to him who is ready to judge the living and the dead. For this is why the gospel was preached even to those who are dead, that though judged in the flesh the way people are, they might live in the spirit the way God does.

“The end of all things is at hand; therefore be self-controlled and sober-minded for the sake of your prayers. Above all, keep loving one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins. Show hospitality to one another without grumbling. As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God’s varied grace: whoever speaks, as one who speaks oracles of God; whoever serves, as one who serves by the strength that God supplies—in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ. To him belong glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen” [1 PETER 4:1-11]. Consider how you use your time is the message Peter delivers to believers.

Likewise, Paul cautions believers in his encyclical we know as Ephesians, “Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, making the best use of the time, because the days are evil. Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is. And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit, addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart, giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ [EPHESIANS 5:15-21]. Weigh the investment of the moments God entrusts to you is the message Paul delivers.

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Consider one additional passage in this matter. To the Romans, Paul has written, “You know the time, that the hour has come for you to wake from sleep. For salvation is nearer to us now than when we first believed. The night is far gone; the day is at hand. So then let us cast off the works of darkness and put on the armour of light. Let us walk properly as in the daytime, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and sensuality, not in quarrelling and jealousy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires” [ROMANS 13:11-14].

Perhaps we don’t think of the use of our spiritual gifts or the employment of our time as investment in eternity, but the Word of God makes it clear that we either invest these commodities of life or waste them on ourselves. Obviously, moneys represent an opportunity for us to either squander what God has given or invest it wisely. I do believe we should be wise about investing our moneys to provide for our families; but I am cautioning that if you trust the world system to provide security, you are leaning on a broken reed. If you are amassing wealth without looking toward eternity, you are acting very foolish.

According to a recent report,⁵ the Institute of International Finance, a group representing 420 of the world’s largest banks and finance houses, has issued a call for a one-world global currency. The IIF is encouraging a return to the G-20 commitment to utilise International Monetary Fund special drawing rights to create an international one-world currency alternative to the U.S. dollar as a new standard of foreign-exchange reserves. At the same time, a United Nations report issued in July, 2010, called for the replacement of the United States dollar as the standard for holding foreign-exchange reserves in international trade with a new one-world currency issued by the International Monetary Fund. If you are banking on security in this world, you are investing in a false economy.

Wealth is a tool. Money will either bless or curse; the impact will be determined by our view of what we have. I suppose there is a grain of wisdom in the cynical words that have been spoken of money: “Money is only something you need in case you don’t die tomorrow.”⁶ Nevertheless, your wealth will either testify of your commitment to Christ or testify of your love of self. How awesome are the words James penned concerning wealth. The brother of our Lord writes, “Come now, you rich, weep and howl for the miseries that are coming upon you. Your riches have rotted and your garments are moth-eaten. Your gold and silver have corroded, and their corrosion will be evidence against you and will eat your flesh like fire. You have laid up treasure in the last days.” Then, with one final, stunning image of condemnation he charges, “You have lived on the earth in luxury and in self-indulgence. You have fattened your hearts in a day of slaughter” [JAMES 5:1-3, 5].

The use of our wealth reveals what we truly value. Protestations of love for the Master’s work means nothing if we fail to support that work with our wealth. Avowing that we want to honour the Master has no meaning if we spend more of our earnings on our own pleasures than on advancing His Kingdom.

Each Christian is responsible to give generously in support of the work that God has laid on their heart. I don’t deny that there are many worthy causes that merit the prayerful support of God’s people. However, the first great cause that should receive our support is the congregation wherein God has placed us. Surely, we are obliged to underwrite that particular work to ensure the continuation of that work and to glorify Him who is Head of the Body.

⁵ “420 banks demand 1-world currency,” WorldNetDaily, October 10, 2010 (<http://www.wnd.com/index.php?fa=PAGE.view&pageId=213953>)

⁶ “Wall Street,” op. cit.

A REASON — “Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” In the brief moments remaining, I must point out that Jesus provided the reason we should invest in heaven, rather than investing in earth alone. Some seem always to suppose that the preacher wants their wealth. Let me put your mind at ease. I do not want your wealth. I certainly made more when I worked in the field of medical research than I have ever made as a church planter and pastor. As the Apostle has said, “I seek not what is yours but you. For children are not obligated to save up for their parents, but parents for their children. I will most gladly spend and be spent for your souls [2 CORINTHIANS 12:14b, 15a].

Before the Lord God, I testify that my desire is “to present you as a pure virgin to Christ” [see 2 CORINTHIANS 11:2]. Without apology, I urge each one listening to consider the focus of his or her heart. Does God’s glory occupy your thoughts as you distribute your moneys, as you invest your time, and as you employ the gifts that He has entrusted to you? Would an audit of the way you use your time demonstrate that God is a priority? Or would it become apparent that your personal ease of life is the priority of life? Would an inventory of the use of your spiritual gifts demonstrate that you pursue Christ’s honour? Or would it prove that you are prostituting the gifts of the Spirit, consuming them on your own pleasure? Likewise, does the manner in which you invest your moneys reveal that God’s glory is uppermost in your mind? Or does it demonstrate an unhealthy preoccupation with your personal comfort?

I want us to think of an incident that occurred during Jesus’ ministry in Palestine. You will find the account in both Mark’s Gospel and in the Gospel of Luke. However, I want to look at the account Mark provides of a time when the people were bringing gifts to the Temple. [Jesus] “sat down opposite the treasury and watched the people putting money into the offering box. Many rich people put in large sums. And a poor widow came and put in two small copper coins, which make a penny. And he called his disciples to him and said to them, ‘Truly, I say to you, this poor widow has put in more than all those who are contributing to the offering box. For they all contributed out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty has put in everything she had, all she had to live on’” [MARK 12:41-44].

Jesus looked on the heart of this woman and saw something wonderful. He drew a comparison between her and those who were bringing considerable gifts. Jesus had just been engaged in verbal sparring with the religious leaders. It seems that they were the ones he first observed bringing their gifts. The contrast between them and this woman is striking. They were rich; she was impoverished. They were educated in the Law; she was uneducated in the Law. They were men; she was a woman. On the surface, they were to be praised.

However, only a short time before this particular incident the Master had charged these same religious leaders with stealing from God and from men. Entering the Temple precincts, Jesus observed the tables of the moneychangers and the trade in pigeons. These were services provided for travellers coming to the Temple to worship to ensure that they would be able to secure the necessary accoutrements for worship—at a price. Jesus charged, “Is it not written, ‘My house shall be called a house of prayer for all nations?’ But you have made it a den of robbers” [MARK 11:17]. He said this because they had commercialised the worship of God. Tragically, they had reduced worship to a financial boon for them.

This poor widow evidenced incredible faith when she gave all that she had. Her gift consisted of two lepta—the smallest and least valuable coins in circulation. They were worth 1/128th of a denarius, or about six minutes of an average daily wage. Therefore, the wealthy religious leaders did not demonstrate dependence on God as they gave, but she did.

WHERE HAVE YOU HIDDEN YOUR TREASURE?

I do want to make one observation for the benefit of anyone who depreciates giving to their congregation because they believe it to be imperfect. My words should confront those who imagine they will punish the church, or compel the church, through withholding their gifts. Temple worship at the time Jesus observed this widow's giving was corrupt. The high priest was dishonest and unspiritual. The religious elite were more concerned about politics than about God's glory. Religion was seen as a means to advance oneself. Nevertheless, Christ commended this poor widow, implying that her gift was given to God and not to the corrupt religious leaders. Let that sink in!

I don't mean to imply that we are not responsible for where we give our gifts—we are! We are responsible to ensure that the institutions we support are doing the work of God, that they are handling the gifts honestly and ethically. However, we must not succumb to the thought that because the congregation does not meet my standard that it is not doing the work of God.

“Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” This is the basis for our discouragement to those who imagine we seek their moneys when they have no faith in Christ. Your first and great need is to be born from above. If you have no heart for God, you have no business even considering giving. Giving is an act of worship, and you cannot worship Him if you refuse to receive Him as Master over your life. God loves you; and He sent His Son to die because of your sinful condition. The Good News is that Jesus did not stay dead. He broke the bonds of death, rising from the tomb. He has ascended into Heaven where He is seated at the right hand of the Father.

Now, we call all who are willing and who are drawn by the Spirit to believe the message of life. God offers the forgiveness of sin, acceptance and peace with Him. This is the call of God, “If you confess with your mouth, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ believing in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you shall be saved. It is with the heart that one believes and is made right with the Father, and with the mouth that one confesses and is saved.” That passage concludes with this invitation, “Everyone who calls on the Name of the Lord shall be saved” **[ROMANS 10:9, 10, 13].**⁷

I pray your heart is centred on God and His glory. Your stewardship of life reveals whether this is true, or merely an unsubstantiated claim. May God encourage us and bring glory to His Name through each Christian. Amen.

⁷ Author's free translation