

13 Laying Up Treasures in Heaven

In the gospels Jesus taught more about money than any other subject, even prayer. The true nature of trusting God is demonstrated in sacrificial giving. Zaccheus (Lk.19) gave up much of his money after believing in Jesus. “Okay, I believe” doesn’t cost anything; faith does. John the Baptist told the crowds to share their clothes and feed the poor, told tax collectors not to over-collect and soldiers not to extort. The elderly widow gave her mite (Mk.12) --everything she had to live on. The Rich Farmer was a fool (Lk. 12). *“For each of us, there must be not only the conversion of the heart and mind but also the conversion of the purse.”*—Martin Luther.

That sounds Law-like! I love the Gospel of it. You never seem to meet a tither who has gone back to being a miser with God. Why? Because God will make your faith grow in tithing. To determinedly give much away is scary, until you see the benefits God replaces it with, feel the trust you have put in Him makes generosity worthwhile. And it makes good business sense. We teach good habits of life—be frugal, save for a rainy day, play life’s game by the rules, stay married, be a joy and inspiration to others. Get control of your money so it doesn’t get control of you. And since we live in mission with God, giving furthers the mission. The stories of His faithfulness to take care of us are dear. “I asked God to show me someone who needed help and He showed me two. My small charity made a difference in their lives.” “I lay in bed worrying about bankruptcy, fell into fitful sleep and woke up thinking to check our insurance. Got a refund of \$2300 after we changed our carrier.” Stories of financial rescue have become known as “A Thank-You, Jesus, Moment” around our congregation. But even when He doesn’t rescue in dollars, there are other blessings and friends who call to help.

“Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth...but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven...For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” Matt. 6:19-21. We’d like that last sentence to read backwards—for our heart to motivate our treasure. But Jesus is saying that our treasure rules us. Money is a medium for exchange and buys goods and services. But it brings along power and control which we are weak to resist. When money talks, Truth and Trust are bound and gagged. Understand that Jesus wasn’t advocating poverty. Paul warned against it in 2Tim 4:3-5. Poverty ain’t piety. God’s ideal is neither great wealth nor abject poverty but something in between that encourages concentration on a walk with God. Jesus walked with both rich and poor, from the poor shepherds and rich magi who came to his birth, to the poor thieves on the cross to the rich man’s tomb at his burial. What Jesus is advocating is an investment in what really lasts, “treasures in heaven.” That is, a close relationship with God, the sharing of our faith, and going where the Spirit wants us to go with our money, time and talents. Failure at that is serious. The rich man in Jesus’ story of Lazarus (Lk. 16:19-31) was not necessarily irreligious or dishonest. He just ignored the beggar, Lazarus. If we could see things from the perspective of God, mankind might look like little children planting a garden. Some plant potatoes, but the greedy and indulgent would try to plant French Fries that won’t grow. Materialism tends to become central, not God. It doesn’t prepare for eternity. *“People who want to get rich fall into temptation ... that plunge men into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is the root of all evil.”* 2 Tim 4:13. Or, as Charles Swindoll notes, “You never see a hearse pulling a UHaul.”

Here’s how to get started with better stewardship. First, find a mission to support; church is often good. Invest your time. It helps to have a mission close where you can see it --your money helps ministry; your work makes it personal. Start proportional giving by stages, upping the amount

you give each year. A few people jump into tithing whole hog. Did that check you wrote look more like a car payment than an offering? Tithing is addictive. At 10%, you pray to use more to make a difference for your Lord. Pray about your gift that God could use it and be aware of possible surprises. Don't fall into the traps of demanding control of the spending or pride. If your gift seems wasted, learn from it, realize you give freely as God gave for you. Celebrate success and thrill over how God has used your stewardship. Think how to harness wealth. When Abraham went up the mountain with his son, the rich man probably grieved that it was all he had, yet God turned it for good. So too, God's Son given for you. Does your retirement plan reduce your dependency on God or open you to His direction? Keep asking , receiving, giving and doing. Too old to work? You can pray and have treasures in eternity.