

There's a story of a man who found a magic lamp. He rubbed the lamp and the genie appeared inviting him to make a wish. The man thought for a minute and then he asked for a copy of the stocks and shares page from his newspaper, dated exactly one year into the future. With a puff of smoke, the genie disappeared and there were the stocks and shares page dated exactly one year into the future. The man was delighted because now he could invest his money with certainty, knowing which stocks would rise in value. Then he looked over the page and there was the obituary column, and guess whose name was at the top of the list; his own! Suddenly the stock market seemed less important. For the first time, this man had to look at life from an eternal perspective. Today, I want us to look at our attitude towards money and possessions from an eternal perspective.

In today's society the love of affluence is everywhere. When we ask: I wonder what David is worth? Everyone assumes that we're talking about David's financial worth. When we talk about the bottom line, it's assumed that we're talking money. But for a Christian, the bottom line is about the eternal, the bottom line is where are we going to spend eternity? Jesus said a great deal about money and possessions. In fact, fifteen percent of everything Jesus said, as recorded in the four gospels, relates to the topic of possessions and riches. There are more verses attributed to Jesus about money than about heaven and hell combined. And Jesus' statements about money and possessions are profoundly counter-cultural, both then and today. Let's look at three principles that Jesus proclaimed.

First: God owns everything and we are His money managers. That's not the world's view at all. The typical British attitude is: It's my money, I earned it and I have the right to spend it however I choose.

But listen to God's word. **Psalm 24: *The earth is the Lord's and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it.*** And this word from Deuteronomy 8: **You may say to yourself, 'My power and the strength of my hands have produced this wealth for me.'**

But remember the Lord your God, for it is he who gives you the ability to produce wealth. This means that we own nothing, and everything we have is on loan from God. One day we will be called to give an account of how we used what He gave us to control.

It's similar to a dad taking his son to McDonalds. The son orders a meal with chips but dad's trying to diet so he doesn't order chips. They sit down and begin to eat, and dad reaches over to take a chip from his son, just for a taste. The boy protests: Dad, these are mine! This is absurd when you consider that dad paid for both meals, but the boy referred to it as his own. It's ridiculous that we can become so possessive about our material possessions. Even our next breath is a gift from God's hand. Since God owns everything and will one day call us to account for how we've used what He's given us, it makes sense to manage money God's way.

I have a pension and somewhere in the pension company, there must be a fund manager. I pay for his services and the fund manager would never presume that my money belonged to him, I hope! The fund manager manages my money for me. This should be our attitude toward all our material possessions. Never claim ownership of anything because it all belongs to God. We should never forget that we're using God's assets. Our prime responsibility should not be to accumulate wealth, our prime responsibility is to promote God's Kingdom.

Here's the second treasure principle: We can serve God or greed, but not both. But that's not the world's attitude. After eleven years in ministry, my experience is that most people try to honour God while enjoying using their money, and I certainly fit that description. We're hopeful that we can have both God and whatever money we happen to have.

God has blessed nearly all of us here, in that we don't have a lot of money to distract us from God. But should we be tempted to protect our wealth at the expense of God, then Jesus has this to say: *No one can serve two masters. You cannot serve both God and Money* (Matt 6:24). Some people are chancers and they give lip service to the creed: *In God we trust*, but their hearts trust more in money on which that motto is printed.

Have you ever watched people with metal detectors looking for buried treasure? Their instrument may be useful in locating treasure, but it's not nearly as accurate as the human heart. Our heart will tell us whether our treasure is stashed in heaven or on earth. If the idea of investing the first ten percent of our income in God's Kingdom causes us to shudder, then we probably love possessions more than we trust God. If our ultimate trust is not in God, we will never have enough money to feel secure, not even if we're multi-millionaires.

The great Christian psychiatrist Karl Menninger told about a wealthy client who came to him for therapy. This man earned over a million per year but was still miserable and had attempted suicide. Dr Menninger suggested that he set up a foundation to support good causes across the country. The man said: *That's a great idea, and I would enjoy that. Let me think about it.* But he never did it because his greed and insecurity wouldn't let him give away his money. He died a miserable man. We have to be honest with ourselves; which has the controlling interest in our hearts; God or money?

Here's the third treasure principle: When our hearts belong to Christ, the more we give the happier we are. But that's not the way the world thinks. The world's attitude is this; every pound I give away makes me poorer for I hate to part with my money. The truth is that happiness is not in what we keep, it's in what we give. The Apostle Paul wrote: *God loves a cheerful giver* (2nd Cor. 9:7). When we bring God pleasure through our giving, He sends some of it back to the giver.

This principle is tried and true as long as one's attitude is one of gratitude. But if our attitude is wrong and we only give out of grim duty, then the happiness of giving vanishes. Joyful giving is motivated by an attitude which is shaped by a prayer similar to this: *Lord, when I consider all you have done and are doing in my life, and every time I catch a glimpse of the cross, then my 10% giving is so small and inadequate as a way of saying Thank you. I will keep trying to find other ways to express my gratitude.*

Have we ever considered when our last opportunity may be to declare our gratitude to God? Actually, that moment will come after we die.

It'll be the day when our last will and testament is read. I would like my will to say something like: *My greatest discovery in life has been Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord. He has been the Lord of my life and is my hope for eternity.* I think about the impact those words may have on my grieving family and friends! Then somewhere in my will, there will be something left for the ongoing work of building God's kingdom. I would like my last will and testament to give glory to God, for that in a way, is me continuing to give back to God after I'm gone.

This morning I have challenged us to claim three biblical treasure principles. All three are directly contrary to the world's way of thinking. Let's say these three principles out loud from the screen, and let's think about what we are saying: ***God owns everything and we are his money-managers. We can serve God or money, but not both. When our hearts belong to Christ, the more we give, the happier we are!*** We are a small congregation and giving is important if we feel committed to grow God's kingdom in our community, so please consider your giving in the light of what God has first given us.

Let me close with one of my favourite Charles Allen stories. The late Charles Allen was one of the great Methodist preachers of the 20th Century. His family were poor but they didn't need much in those days.

One Christmas Eve when Charles was about seven years old, his father invited him to ride with him in a horse-drawn wagon to the local town to buy supplies. Just before they got to town Mr. Allen gave Charles a dime, the first dime the boy had ever had. His father told him he could spend it any way he liked. Now back in the 1930s, a dime was a lot of money to a child. Charles could buy a toy or lots of sweets. Charles saw oranges that day for the first time, and he could have bought several of them for a dime. Charles had to meet his father at a particular time and time was running out. So he made his decision, bought the item, put the package in his pocket and ran to the wagon.

On the way home, his father asked him what he'd bought. Charles reached into his pocket, pulled out the package and handed it to his father. He said: *Open it dad.* The package contained a huge red handkerchief.

Charles said: *Dad, I bought you a Christmas present.* When Charles Allen shared that story he added these words: *Over the years I have made lots of money through book sales, and I have bought and given lots of presents. But I don't think any gift-giving has ever brought me as much joy as using my first dime to buy a present for my father who had given me the dime in the first place.*

When we consider that God owns everything, and has loaned us so much, it would be sad if we missed the opportunity of giving our first and best to the One who has given his all for us! May we reconsider our attitude to giving and think about to whom we give. ***Amen***

Matthew 6: 19 to 25 - Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, 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.

‘The eye is the lamp of the body. If your eyes are healthy, your whole body will be full of light. But if your eyes are unhealthy, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light within you is darkness, how great is that darkness!

‘No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money.