

## **Your Treasure: Temporal and Eternal Part 1**

*"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" (Matthew 6:20-21).*

If your attitude about money is not right, even being rich will not satisfy you. Some rich people never feel like they have enough money. Some poor people don't realize they are poor.

What you treasure in life will be evident in the way you live. Worldly riches are uncertain. They can be lost. Those that "fix their hope on the uncertainty of riches" are often very disappointed.

### **The Riches of the Believer – You Never Lose**

The good news is that spiritual, eternal riches cannot be lost. No one can take them from you. In fact, nothing can separate you from the love of God in Jesus.

Read Romans 8:38-39

Spiritual riches start with two things you have total control over: your thoughts and your heart. The Bible combines the two. "For as a man thinks in his heart so is he" (Proverbs 23:7). This often quoted proverb is in the context of a person's attitude about money.

Read Proverbs 23:4-5

Read the following passages and write down what each one says about your attitude toward money:

- Proverbs 16:16
- Proverbs 23
- Proverbs 24:7
- Ecclesiastes 5:10
- Ecclesiastes 5:13-15
- Ecclesiastes 7:14
- Hebrews 13:5

Your attitude and your perspective determine how you handle any given circumstance. Your state of mind is directly related to your character, to who you are as a person. The Bible addresses that part of you as your "heart." One person who loses his financial resources might throw himself out of the window – seemingly no hope in sight. Another in the same circumstance might trust God, ask Him for direction, pick himself up and go on to the next part of his life, knowing this life is so short that it should not be spent in doubt and worry.

### **Erroneous Teaching About Riches**

Unfortunately, there are some preachers who would have you believe if you don't have worldly riches, it is because you don't have enough faith. They make their own fortunes by talking

people into sending them money as "seed faith," making those who do so feel that the only way God is going to bless them financially is to support the preacher's ministry. That is not what the Bible teaches about riches.

## **Priorities**

When possessions become more important than God or people, your perspective on life is backwards. It is God who gives us all things to enjoy. Without Him, we would have nothing. He puts such a value on us as people that He sent His Son to die in our place. That's why, I think, that when Jesus was asked what the greatest commandment is, He replied: "'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.' This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself'" (Matthew 22:37-39). Obeying this commandment enables us to view life the way God intended. Giving Him first place in your life does not rid you of anything. Instead, it enriches you. Those who are truly rich are those who can love – they can receive love and they can give love.

## **Two Parables About Money**

One of Jesus' most well known stories about money is the story of the prodigal son. A young man who so wanted to live on his own and spend money any way he wanted coaxed his inheritance out of his father. What an insult this would be to a father. The son could not wait until after he died to get his portion of his goods. His father consented to this request. The son leaves home and squanders his money in wild living. After it is all gone, he returns home, truly repentant, intending only to ask to be a servant to his father. The father, having been looking for the return of his son since the day he left, saw him from a distance and lovingly took him back in – not as a servant – but as a beloved son.

Jesus clearly intended to communicate to the religious leaders, as well as His disciples, that God the Father is a loving, forgiving God longing for repentance on the part of those who have misused the gifts He has given.

In the very next parable, the meaning is not so easy to discern. Jesus deliberately addresses His disciples before He begins this story although the Pharisees and lawyers are still present. Read Luke 16:1-13.

Wise theologians throughout the ages have disagreed on the meaning of this parable. At first glance, it appears that the dishonest dealings of the manager are being commended, which Jesus would never do. Some commentators even believe that this actually happened and that Jesus was using a real event to teach his disciples an important lesson. Just as Jesus made an important point when he was confronted with the rich young ruler, He used actual events and real encounters to teach His disciples. This encounter with this young man revealed the love that Jesus had for him, but ended with an astonishing statement, "How hard it will be for those who are wealthy to enter the kingdom of God" (Mark 10:23). Since this was counter to everything man had imagined (riches are evidence of God's blessing), His disciples responded with, 'Then who can be saved?' (Mark 10:26). Whether or not this parable is taken from a real event or one of the very creative stories that Jesus used to make His point is not clear.

I can see the possibility that it was real. I write an article for my blog every week. My blog is purpose driven. Called *One Focus*, I usually relate an actual event to make my point although occasionally I may create a story. Whatever the topic is, at the end of the story, I purposely relate it to something in scripture.

Either way, Jesus chose to tell this story. He directed it to His disciples but certainly was aware of the presence of those who did not believe in Him. Since Jesus intentionally included this story, the application is important.

At no point in the story, does he commend the actions of the dishonest manager. In fact, it is after he lost his job and had acted only in his own self-interest to try to protect his future that he is called dishonest by his manager. What led to his firing in the first place could have been ineptness or simple mismanagement of his master's funds and not an intentional act of thievery. Before handing over his account books, however, his dishonest nature took over to preserve his future. His master admired his shrewdness, not his actions. The lesson that Jesus was trying to give to His disciples may have been similar to the one in His parable about the talents (Matthew 25:14-30). The man who was reprimanded by Jesus in the parable of the talents did not steal the money. He simply hid it. He did not do anything with it. In Luke 16:8-13, Jesus gives the moral of the story.

People who are not believers (people of this world) are many times smarter in their dealing with money than Christians (sons of the light). A Christian's standards should be different than the world's. The end result should be to glorify God. However, God is not glorified if His gifts are buried or wealth is used only for living in the present.

His gifts are given for our enjoyment now, but also to bear fruit for Him. Money, just like anything else, can be used for evil. A person's attitude toward it is an indicator of his spiritual state. God intends His children to use it for good and to help people. There will be a day when every one of us will have to give an account to God for how we used His gifts to us, whether they are talents or money. In that way, Christians should be as clever as everyone else.

In the Old Testament, Joseph was a steward of Potiphar's household (Genesis 39:1-6). He managed that household with integrity. Even though he was unjustly accused of betraying Potiphar, in the end, his faithful stewardship resulted in the salvation of the people of promise. When Joseph entered his eternal dwellings, he was able to give a good account of his dealings with the resources God had given him. The money was gone when he died, but the fruit of what he did with it followed him. That's the wealth that will follow us into Heaven.

"Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy." Billy Graham in *The Secret of Happiness* says (recalling the rich young ruler who wanted to follow Jesus, but who, when he was told to sell all and give to the poor, went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions) "that Jesus knew that one of the real tests of our yieldedness to God is our willingness to share with others. If we have no mercy toward others, that is one proof that we have never experienced God's mercy."

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\* This Bible study is excerpted from a chapter of "Money: How to Be Rich Without It and How to Stretch It Using Ten Hints from the Past and the Technology of Today"