

Giving to God's work is investing in eternity

Sermon for Sunday, June 10, 2007 - Bruce Fraser

Scripture: Luke 12:13-21 and others

When I spoke on money a couple of weeks ago, one of the things I mentioned was the importance of putting money aside, saving for the future. Those who were here might remember the Bible verse about the ant: how an ant with a brain the size of a grain of dust knows enough to save for hard times, so it should be plain for us to understand the principle of saving.

What I did *not* say that day was why we save; what is that money for? That is part of the focus today.

Jesus talked a great deal about money and possessions. He knew this was a matter of sensitivity and temptation for us. In Luke's gospel we find someone coming to Jesus with a money problem.

Luke 12:13, New Living Translation:

Someone called from the crowd, "Teacher, please tell my brother to divide our father's estate with me."

We can see right away that this isn't really a money problem at all. It's a relationship problem. Maybe money started it—the two brothers fighting over who would get what, or maybe money is just a symptom of the tension in this family. We don't know from this brief passage.

But we certainly know from experience that if two or more people don't like each other, giving them a pile of money to divide among them is not going to help! As a pastor, I am involved with families when loved ones die. And I'm often involved with them after the funeral, when the time comes to divide up the property.

Before coming here, we lived in Labrador. In the old days, the pastor and the teacher were often the only ones who could read and write, and so the pastor was often named as the executor of the will. Even though that is no longer the case, that tradition has carried on with many families. I remember one in particular.

They argued and fought over what would happen in the funeral service. We had a family meeting and got everything settled; when I got home the phone started ringing, as one or the other wanted to change something. The day after the funeral, we gathered back at the family home. I had made a photocopies of the will and gave a copy to each one. Then I passed around my copy and said, "If you are in agreement with what is in the will, then I want you to sign this paper saying that you agree with it. If you don't, then find yourselves another

executor. I've had enough of this fighting nonsense from you." They all signed. Can you imagine the nightmare if there had been no will, no guidance at all? I've been there, too. It's not pretty.

Friends, I'll just say this: please, make sure you have a will. You will save your family so much pain and hurt if you take just that one step. This is true not just for families that fight; it's a blessing also for families which get along. It helps them so much.

So in the Bible we have these two brothers fighting over their father's property. Instead of solving their dispute, Jesus went to the heart of the matter: lust for money.

Luke 12:14-21, New Living Translation:

Jesus replied, "Friend, who made me a judge over you to decide such things as that?" Then he said, "Beware! Don't be greedy for what you don't have. Real life is not measured by how much we own."

And he gave an illustration: "A rich man had a fertile farm that produced fine crops. In fact, his barns were full to overflowing. So he said, 'I know! I'll tear down my barns and build bigger ones. Then I'll have room enough to store everything. And I'll sit back and say to myself, My friend, you have enough stored away for years to come. Now take it easy! Eat, drink, and be merry!'

"But God said to him, 'You fool! You will die this very night. Then who will get it all?'

"Yes, a person is a fool to store up earthly wealth but not have a rich relationship with God."

Jesus tells a parable, a story with a point. In this story there is a rich farmer—that may strike you as kind of a contradiction, but we'll let it go. The point here is, this man is rich. He has everything he needs. His barns are full and overflowing. Now he has a problem: it's been a good year, and he has even more grain to store, but there is nowhere to put it. So he decides to build new barns, bigger and better than the old ones. He will have plenty of room for everything.

Before this harvest, he was already rich. But it's not enough. Even though he already has more than he needs, he wants still more. He wants to keep it all for himself. Did it ever occur to him to give some of it away? No. There wasn't even a flicker of that thought.

He enjoys thinking about the life he's going to enjoy: "I'll sit back and say to myself, My friend, you have enough stored away for years to come. Now take it easy! Eat, drink, and be merry!" But it is just at that time that he dies. God says to him, "You fool! You will die this very night. Then who will get it all?"

Jesus sums it up: **“Yes, a person is a fool to store up earthly wealth but not have a rich relationship with God.”**

This is the sad story of someone who loved his money and his possessions more than he loved God. He was keeping it all for himself, even though he didn't need half of it. Jesus talks about how foolish it is to store up wealth here on earth, but have little connection with God. The person who lives like this, Jesus calls that person a fool.

So on the one hand, we saw the last time I was here that it is good and responsible to save for the future. But now we see that there needs to be some wisdom in that saving.

First, we need to know **how much is enough**. Set a goal for what you think you need to set aside. If and when you reach that goal, then you should say, “That is enough.” Second, we need to **have a plan for any surplus**. Choose now how you will spread around the blessing which God may bring into your life. Resist the temptation to be a fool and keep it all for yourself.

Now I want to be clear here. I am talking about giving to God's work and giving to people in need above and beyond what we normally give as part of our regular habit. I'm talking about exceptional opportunities to share God's financial blessing. When that time comes, give generously. You might give to your local church, you might give to some Christian organization which is doing work that touches your heart, you might know of a situation where you can help people in need. Whatever it is, learn the pure joy of being generous with your gifts.

I mentioned this is above and beyond our regular offering to God's work. The Bible is quite clear on taking the first part of our income and dedicating it for God's work.

Proverbs 3:9, New International Version:
Honour the Lord with your wealth, with the firstfruits of all your crops.

We set aside the money for our offering to God *first*, before we take money out for all the other things. God's portion comes first, not from the leftovers.

1 Corinthians 16:2, New Century Version:
On the first day of every week, each one of you should put aside money as you have been blessed.

The Scriptures also teach *proportional* giving. Those who earn plenty, give plenty. Those who receive a smaller amount, give a smaller amount. Some people use the “tithe” — meaning one-tenth of their income — as

the guideline for giving. We do that, and have done so ever since we married. We've never been short, God has always provided for our needs.

Peter Marshall was the pastor of a church in New York. One of the men in the congregation years earlier had made a commitment to tithe, but was now looking for a way out. He said to Marshall: “I have a problem. I have been tithing for some years. It wasn't too bad when I was making \$20,000 a year. I could afford to give the \$2,000. But you see, now I am making \$500,000, and there is just no way I can give away \$50,000 a year.”

Marshall reflected on this wealthy man's dilemma but gave no advice. He simply said: “Yes, sir. I see that you do have a problem. I think we ought to pray about it. Is that alright?”

The man agreed, so Dr. Marshall bowed his head and prayed with boldness and authority. “Dear Lord, this man has a problem, and I pray that you will help him. Lord, reduce his salary back to the place where he can afford to tithe.”

The other type of giving we need to be doing is giving to help others. Caring for the poor, the widow, the orphan, the stranger, the oppressed — this is one of the most dominant themes in the entire Bible. Here are some verses on this subject of giving to people in need.

Deuteronomy 15:7, 10, The Message:

When you happen on someone who's in trouble or needs help among your people with whom you live in this land that God, your God, is giving you, don't look the other way pretending you don't see him. Don't keep a tight grip on your purse...

Give freely and spontaneously. Don't have a stingy heart. The way you handle matters like this triggers God, your God's, blessing in everything you do, all your work and ventures.

Romans 12:13, New International Version:

Share with God's people who are in need. Practice hospitality.

Hebrews 13:16, New International Version:

Do not forget to do good and to share with others, for with such sacrifices God is pleased.

The principle here is that the money we have belongs to God. It's not really mine or yours at all. We are just managing it, looking after it for God. Since it's not ours, we have no right to be stingy with it. When you know of a person or a group which has a need, give joyfully and generously.