

TITLE: "Money and Eternal Life"

TEXT: Luke 12:13-21 (NT p. 74)

¹³Someone in the crowd said to [Jesus], "Teacher, tell my brother to divide the family inheritance with me." ¹⁴But [Jesus] said to him, "Friend, who set me to be a judge or arbitrator over you?" ¹⁵And [Jesus] said to them, "Take care! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; for one's life does not consist in the abundance of possessions."

¹⁶Then [Jesus] told them a parable: "The land of a rich man produced abundantly. ¹⁷And he thought to himself, 'What should I do, for I have no place to store my crops?' ¹⁸Then he said, 'I will do this: I will pull down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. ¹⁹And I will say to my soul, 'Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry.'

²⁰But God said to him, 'You fool! This very night your life is being demanded of you. And the things you have prepared, whose will they be?' ²¹So it is with those who store up treasures for themselves but are not rich toward God."

Introduction – The relationship between us and our finances

Another excerpt from the *Burt and I* series.

"I went into Rockland for supplies a few weeks ago and one of them little Salvation Army girls come right up to me and said, 'Sir, could you give a little somethin' to the Lord?' I asked her, 'How old are you?' She said, 'Nineteen.'

I said, "I'm 97. ...And I'll be passin' on before you will, won't I?" 'Yes,' she said.

'And I'll be meetin' the Lord before you will, won't I?' 'Yes,' she said.

"Well then my dear,' I said, 'I think I'll just give it to him myself.'"

This is a nice little story, but it is NOT theologically sound. Why? Because when we meet Jesus, and some day we WILL come face to face with the Lord, Jesus is going to ask us how we DID spend our money. So this morning I thought I would preach on what the Lord says about the relationship between our finances and our eternal life.

1. Greed

In the text, a man asked Jesus to tell his brother to share the family inheritance with him. According to Jewish tradition, the eldest brother inherited the bulk of the family estate and younger brothers received a decreasing amount of the small percentage that was left. This man wanted Jesus to help him get more of the money.

Jesus immediately warned the crowd to watch out, to be on their guard, against all kinds of greed. Nowadays, when we hear the word greed, we imagine people who hoard money while those around them suffer because they lack the basic necessities of life. But that is not what Jesus means. By greed, Jesus means the tendency to seek SECURITY in money and the things money can buy.

By this definition, I am a greedy person. I don't have financial security, I'm not sure anyone does these days, but my desire for financial security is a sin I regularly confess to the Lord. Why? Because God wants me, and you, to trust Jesus, not our finances.

Please don't misunderstand me. God KNOWS we need money. But Jesus says, "Seek FIRST the kingdom of God and GOD'S righteousness and THEN all the things you need will be added to as well." THAT is the point of the parable. The rich fool, who tore down his old barns to build bigger ones, was so concerned with his FINANCIAL security that he lost his ETERNAL security. Jesus doesn't want that to happen to you, or to me.

2. Where is your heart?

That is why Jesus says this (Matthew 6:19-21):

¹⁹"Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal; ²⁰but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal. ²¹For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."

How do we store up treasure in heaven? By loving and worshiping God, by supporting the work God is doing here on earth and by helping those in need.

Let me read you a story. I found it in the *Heroes for Today* section of *Reader's Digest*, way back in April 1991. It was written by Dave Hunter.

The young woman sat sobbing in a corner booth. Two girls, perhaps four and five years old, watched their mother tensely.

As a patrolman with the Knox County, Tennessee, Sheriff's Department, I had been dispatched to check on the family after someone called, concerned about the woman's weeping. A flash of fear crossed the older child's eyes as I approached. "Daddy left us," she blurted. "He just put our stuff out of the car while we was in the bathroom."

"Is that so little lady?" I said. "I want you two to climb on those stools over there and order something to eat."

Reluctantly they crossed to the stools. I signaled the waitress to take their order.

"Now what's the problem?" I asked the woman.

"Just what my girl said," she replied, wiping her eyes with the back of her hand. "My husband's not cruel—just at the end of his rope. We're flat broke, and he figured we'd get more help alone than if he stayed."

"Do you have family?"

"The nearest is in Chicago."

We sat there discussing agencies that could help her. When the waitress brought hot dogs and French fries for the little girls, I went to the counter and took out my wallet.

"The boss says no charge," the waitress said. "We know what's going on."

"Officer, excuse me." A big man in jeans, T-shirt and baseball cap stood by the counter. I noticed the normal buzz of conversation was absent; the patrons, mostly long-distance truck drivers, sat staring in our direction. "Here," he said, extending a handful of bills. "We passed the hat. There ought to be enough to get the woman and her girls started on their way."

"I'm sure she'll appreciate it," I said. "Can I tell her your name?"

“Nope.” He raised his hands and backed away. “Tell her it was from folks with families of their own.”

There was enough to buy bus tickets to Chicago and food along the way.

When you give to our church, you pay for the heat, light, electricity and storage for the Kitchen Cupboard and the Weekend Backpack Program, which helps poor people like this lady and her children. You also pay for the facility and the staff so that our church can share the good news about Jesus Christ, pass on our faith to our children, support our wonderful Youth Group and help needy people all around the world through our mission programs. ...Thank you.

3. Rewards

Jesus often mentions that those who give will be rewarded. Here's an example from the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 6:3-4): “When you give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your alms may be done in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.”

I don't know who gives, or how much anyone gives to our church. Neither do any of the people who receive the help we offer. But the Lord knows. And I thank each and every one of you for all you do to keep this wonderful church family chugging along for the Lord. And Jesus says that someday, God is going to reward you for all you are doing.

I want to talk about rewards for a minute. Here's an excerpt from the book *Companion of St. Francis and St. Anthony* by Phillip Kelly:

As a Franciscan Brother stationed in new Jersey [in the mid 60s], I was working with Puerto Rican migrant workers who had come to pick tomatoes for Campbell's Soup, vegetables for Bird's Eye, and just about every blueberry you have ever eaten. Many of these workers brought their families. Everyone's dream was to earn enough to build a house back on the island.

This was my first year with the community, but it was going to be Walter Jansen's last. He was retiring after 40 years with the canning company; for the past 25 he had been the factory foreman. How he loved the people he worked with! And they loved him.

It was Walter who told me about the “Trip to the Island” tradition. Every December, the 200 Puerto Rican families in the parish would gather, and each family would place five dollars in a pot—about a day’s pay for a fruit picker back then—and write the family name on a slip of paper. Then someone would be blindfolded and draw the name of the family that would go home for two glorious weeks on the island.

“Why don’t you come to the drawing?” Walter suggested to me. “I’ll introduce you to everyone.” ...I can still see the paper streamers strung from the rafters under the tin roof. I can still smell the *pasteles*, hear the music. On the walls were travel posters of Puerto Rico, and people took Walter and me around to point out their town on a map. Wasn’t theirs the most beautiful spot of all?

By three o’clock each family had parted with five dollars. But before the drawing, the announcer called Walter up and presented him with a plaque commemorating his service and expressing their gratitude for his years of care and friendship. Everyone applauded like mad. Then I was asked to draw the name of the lucky family.

On went the blindfold, and I was led to the drum. I reached in, sorted out a handful of entries, and finally settled on one. ...I took off the blindfold and read the slip of paper: “Walter Jansen!”

The cheers were deafening. Everyone surrounded him, congratulating him, hugging him. While the commotion continued down on the floor, I casually reached into the drum and drew out a handful of slips. Each one, in different handwriting, carried the same name—Walter Jansen.

You see, he loved others and expected no reward yet love was returned to him. That is the reward Jesus offers in this lifetime and that is why he said to his disciples:

“Truly I tell you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields, for my sake and for the sake of the good news, who will not receive a hundredfold now in this age—houses, brothers and sisters, mothers and children, and fields with persecutions—and in the age to come eternal life. But many who are first will be last, and the last will be first.”

If we love God and love others, then we will get MORE of God’s love and we will get MORE people to love and we will get MORE people to love us. And we call those people ...our church family.

Conclusion – Our eternal reward

In the same way, the reward we receive from Jesus after we die will not be one that people who love money will want. So, what will that reward be? ...When Jesus comes again, and he WILL come again,

[Jesus, the King, will say] “Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited. [Then they will answer, “When did we do these things for you?] And Jesus the King will answer, ‘Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.’ ...So come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.”

If we love God and love others, then when we die, we will get MORE of God’s love and we will get countless MORE people to love and we will get countless MORE people to love us. And we will call these people ...our heavenly family. And our life with them will go on forever and ever and ever.

Amen.