

Your Treasure Temporal and Eternal Part 2*

Betrayed by Greed

For thirty pieces of silver, Judas betrayed Jesus. He had already revealed his love for money. "Why was this fragrant oil not sold for three hundred denarii and given to the poor?' This he said, not that he cared for the poor, but because he was a thief, and had the money box; and he used to take what was put in it" (John 12:5-6). Judas had an advantage few people had. He walked with God in the flesh. He observed the Son of God as He performed miracles and loved the unlovable. All the while, Judas did not get it. Even the observance of all that Jesus was and did was not enough to rid Judas of his own love for money.

Just as he was preparing to betray Jesus, Satan entered into him. Satan can only go where he finds a willing vessel. The entrance into the life of Judas was through his greed. When he finally realized what he had done, he tried to return the blood money to the chief priests and elders. They refused it. Judas threw what he thought he wanted (the coins) on the ground and realized it was too late for him. He killed himself. The treasure he so desired bought a burial place for strangers. The name of Judas is now synonymous with greed and betrayal.

Beginning of the Christian Church

After Jesus' resurrection, the church learned an important lesson about possessions. With the coming of the Holy Spirit, believers were so united they stayed together for the teaching of the apostles, for meals, and for worship. As their hearts were changed by the transforming power of the Spirit of the resurrected Lord, they sold their possessions and shared with one another. This was a time like never before nor has there been a time exactly like this since. Others were observing their unity, listening to their testimony. Thousands were being saved. Men who had walked and talked with Jesus in the flesh could share His teachings from memory. They had been with Him. Their love for Jesus overshadowed everything else – even their possessions.

The Church Tested by Greed

A husband and wife, Ananias and Sapphira, wanted to be a part of this remarkable experience, but their hearts were not right. They also sold a possession and brought the proceeds to the apostles for distribution. Unlike the other followers, though, they decided to keep back a portion for themselves, pretending to contribute the entire proceeds to the cause. The Holy Spirit revealed their deception to Peter who immediately confronted them with their lie. Ananias and Sapphira died on the spot. Peter made it clear that the sin was the lie – not the keeping of a portion of the proceeds. "While it remained was it not your own? And after it was sold, was it not in your own control? Why have you conceived this thing in your heart? You have not lied to men but to God" (Acts 5:4). The lie was the sin, but the sin originated in their love of their possessions. Like Judas, that was their downfall.

Paul: A Man Rich in Faith

Saul was a man with many advantages in his life. Not only did he have financial resources and the best education available, he was accepted both in Roman and Jewish circles. Saul's

dedication to his faith caused him to lead an effort to eliminate followers of Christ. However, when he finally met Jesus and recognized Him as God, his life was forever transformed. Upon accepting Jesus' offer of salvation and His call on his life, he had a new name, a new life and a new goal. Paul, the apostle, made an about face and never looked back. Everything was new – even his attitude about his standing in society and his possessions. Paul gave up the advantages of status and worldly riches when he became a disciple of Christ. What he gained was greater than what he lost. Read Philippians 3:7-8.

Paul's heart and mind, given to God, enabled him to be content no matter what his circumstances. See Philippians 4:12-13. Paul, the great apostle, made a tremendous impact upon the world. Christians through the ages have grown as disciples because of his example. His life (as recorded in Acts) and his letters (that comprise much of the New Testament) have become guidelines for Christian living. Incredibly, he was able to honestly encourage others to imitate him just as he also imitated Christ. Who among us could make such a statement?

Unlike Judas, Ananias and Sapphira, Paul made his choice for eternal riches. To him, the choice was clear. God deserves love and loyalty.

Poverty and Riches

Poverty is a harsh reality. It does not discriminate. It touches old and young, male and female and people of every nationality. God's word never says, nor even insinuates, that people are poor because of a lack of faith. In fact, some such as the widow who gave her all (Luke 21:2-3) are strongly commended. The poor are never degraded as a lesser part of society. Jesus said the poor would always be with us. The Bible gives many guidelines about helping the poor.

In times of economic downturn, many who used to help those in poverty find themselves in dire circumstances and in need of help themselves. Periods like the Great Depression and the Great Recession are times for a severe reality check. The health and wealth philosophy so prominent in churches and media has missed a vital point. Monetary riches are not guaranteed to anyone. God does provide for His own. Sometimes the provision is the ability to watch Him work in hard times. Sometimes He wants us to be the means of provision for someone else.

Having riches is not proof that God has blessed you. Read the following passages and list some of the ways God blesses His own.

- Psalms 2:12b
- Psalms 28:6
- Matthew 6:24

God does not forbid riches. He created all things for us to enjoy. Some biblical men of faith, such as Abraham, Hezekiah, Job, David, and Joseph of Arimathea had great riches. Some blessed by God with riches have been given the spiritual gift of generosity serving Him through their stewardship of what He has given them.

One biblical character's attitude toward money was radically transformed when he met Jesus. Having obtained his wealth as a tax collector, Zaccheus' encounter with Jesus made him pledge to give half of his possessions to the poor and repay anyone he had cheated by returning four times the amount. What Zaccheus decided to do with his money was proof that

his conversion was real. Read Jesus' commendation of him in Luke 19:9.

Other great people of faith, such as John the Baptist, many of the Lord's disciples and the widow who gave her mite did not have the benefit of great material resources. Jesus, rather than condemning the poor or accusing them of little faith, joined them.

Stewardship

"How we handle money is an outside indicator of an inside spiritual condition." – Larry Burkett

In the parable of the talents, Jesus said that the man who buried his talent was unfaithful. He was immobilized because of his inappropriate fear of the master who gave him the talent to invest. He should at least have gained interest on the money that his master had entrusted to him. That is a principle of spiritual stewardship. God does own everything. He does entrust some of what He owns to us for a time. Recognizing that fact gives one the ability to release material goods when they disappear. It also helps put our thinking in the right place – on the things that really count. God is looking for a return on His investment.

That principle of spiritual stewardship is more far reaching than money. When God talks about sowing and reaping, He makes the application to every aspect of our lives: spiritual, physical, mental as well as financial. He judges us on how we use what resources we have to honor Him. Read and discuss Luke 6:10-11 and Psalm 49:6-7.

Looking for your best investment opportunity? Invest your life in seeking God's face and His glory. This is the only investment you can be sure of. When you share the good news of the gospel with others, you reap eternal rewards. The richest gift anyone has ever received came directly from God in His Son Jesus.

The gift of salvation through Jesus, resulting in an eternal relationship with God, is of more value than anything the world has to offer. Jesus' parables of the Kingdom – especially the parable of the treasure in the field and the parable of the pearl of great price (Matthew 13:44—46) – emphasize the value of this relationship. No treasure on earth can be compared to being part of the family of God.

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* This Bible study is excerpted 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"