

November 11, 2012
Funding the Great Commission

Funding the Great Commission Part 1
Luke 18:18-27

Opening words:

The mission statement of the Western Reserve United Methodist Church is to develop disciples who reflect Christ's love through worship, fellowship and deed. In other words, we are in the disciple-making business. It is for this reason I refuse to apologize about my newest sermon series, *Funding the Great Commission*. Our personal financials say a great deal about our spiritual maturity. That is why Jesus spoke more about money than any other topic. He knew money affects every corner of our lives.

John Wimber once asked the question, "*I am a fool for Christ, whose fool are you?*" Have you ever felt like a fool when it comes to your personal finances? Today, I will begin a new two part sermon series. In the next two messages we will be looking at seven Biblical stewardship principles. Let me state the obvious. The world and God view money in far different ways. The world tells us money is the key to happiness; God understands happiness comes from our relationships. Money can only buy your basic needs and fund your purpose for living. Have you ever tried to buy happiness? My goal in this sermon series is to help you re-evaluate how you view your finances. As your pastor, I want you to live happier lives! May God give you ears to hear this morning's Gospel lesson, Luke 18:18-27.

Luke 18:18-27

18 A certain ruler asked him, "Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" 19 "Why do you call me good?" Jesus answered. "No one is good—except God alone. 20 You know the commandments: 'You shall not commit adultery, you shall not murder, you shall not steal, you shall not give false testimony, honor your father and mother.'" 21 "All these I have kept since I was a boy," he said. 22 When Jesus heard this, he said to him, "You still lack one thing. Sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me." 23 When he heard this, he became very sad, because he was very wealthy. 24 Jesus looked at him and said, "How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God! 25 Indeed, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God." 26 Those who heard this asked, "Who then can be saved?" 27 Jesus replied, "What is impossible with man is possible with God."

In 1985, Evelyn Adams won the New Jersey Lottery, twice. Her total winnings came to \$5.4 million. Today, her money is gone and she lives in a trailer. Adams said, "*I won the American dream but I lost it, too. It was a very hard fall. It's called rock bottom. Everybody wanted my money. Everybody had their hand out. I never learned one simple word in the English language -- 'No.'* I wish I had the chance to do it all over again. I'd be much smarter about it now." By the way, she didn't just give it away. She also lost one million dollars at the slot machines in Atlantic City.

In 1988, William "Bud" Post won \$16.4 million in the Pennsylvania Lottery but he now lives on his social security. Post said, *"I wish it had never happened. It was a total nightmare."* A former girlfriend successfully sued him for a share of his winnings. His brother was arrested for hiring a hit man to kill him, hoping to inherit a share of the winnings. Other siblings pestered him until he agreed to invest in a car business and a restaurant in Sarasota, Florida. Both businesses failed. Post even spent time in jail for firing a gun over the head of a bill collector. Within a year after winning the lottery, he was \$1 million in debt.

In 1993, Janite Lee won \$18 million in the Missouri Lottery. Lee was generous to a variety of causes, giving to politics, education and the community. But according to published reports, eight years after winning, Lee filed for bankruptcy with only \$700 left in two bank accounts and no cash on hand.

You may not have wasted your lottery winnings but do you feel like a fool when it comes to handling your personal finances? (I do!) The reason is there are so many questions about money. Have you ever asked these questions? How much money do you save to send your children to college? College tuition is always going up. How much money do you save for retirement? How long are you planning on living? How much money do you put into a rainy day fund? How will the raising national debt effect your personal finances? Are inflation and higher taxes in our future? There are so many questions and so few answers.

If you were with us on Monday night then you would have seen the next statement come to life. In the life of the church no topic generates more heated discussion than money. The reason is simple. Every home handles their money differently. Every generation handles their money differently. In the life of the church, we deal with many homes and several generations. Generally speaking, the older you are the more you believe in saving for the future. On cold winter nights you sit in a cold dark house eating boxes of Kraft Macaroni and Cheese. You don't even like it. You eat it for one reason. It is cheap. The goal is to save as much money as possible. In the short run, the plan worked and you did save money. In the long run, the plan failed. Someone went into a nursing home and your life savings was wiped out! Younger generations saw the sacrifice without reward and decided to start living, today. Older generations think younger generations are foolish for not saving; younger generations think older generations are foolish for not living. Listen to what I am about to say. Neither generation is right or wrong. However, they are just different.

Money has always been a complex topic. It is not just true in our time. It has always been true. If you don't believe me then look at the scripture lesson for today. We looked at it several weeks ago. It is one of those stories that is found in each one of the synoptic Gospels, Matthew, Mark and Luke. Each story revolves around a single man. If you combined all three versions of this story you find this seeker to be a rich young ruler. He has everything this world has to offer. He is a young person with money and authority. He has everything, but he is missing the one thing that is not for sale, salvation. He came to Jesus with the question we have all asked, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?" The story makes it clear. His money prevented him from walking with Jesus. His money frustrated his spiritual growth.

Each one of us needs to handle our money in a way that is pleasing God. Is your money frustrating your walk with Jesus? Is your money frustrating your spiritual growth?

I will answer that question for you, "Yes!" This morning I want to look at four Biblical principles about money that you should never forget. These principles may not make you richer but they will make you a little more like Jesus. So if you are ready to begin say, **"Amen!"** I will be quick.

God Owns It All!

As you handle your personal finances never forget God owns it all. Haggai 2:8 says, "*The silver is mine and the gold is mine, declares the LORD Almighty.*" Psalm 50:9-10 is quoting God. It says, "*I have no need of a bull from your stall or of goats from your pens, for every animal of the forest is mine, and the cattle on a thousand hills.*" Both scriptures make the same point. God owns it all! The things you own are only on loan. Did you know the largest structures in the world for four thousand years were the pyramids? The Great Pyramid of Giza is the only one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World that still remains. It was originally built of 1.3 million limestone blocks and is considered a masterpiece. However, did you know pyramids were not just built in Egypt? Pyramids have been found around the world. They have been found in the Sudan, Nigeria, Greece, Spain, China, South America and North America. However, they were all built for the same reason. They were massive graves of important people. Their pyramids were filled with their possessions so they would be comfortable and protected in the afterlife. Have you ever noticed there are no Christian pyramids? The reason is simple. The faith teaches us that we can't take it with us. On the moment you die you are suddenly separated from your possessions. The rich and the poor stand on level ground before God. All you have is on loan from God; as you handle your personal finances never forget that God owns it all. And all of God's people said, **"Amen!"**

God Makes It Happen!

As you handle your personal finances never forget God makes it happen. Deuteronomy 8:18 says, "*But remember the LORD your God, for it is he who gives you the ability to produce wealth, and so confirms his covenant, which he swore to your forefathers, as it is today.*" God makes it happen.

One of my personal highlights of this year was going to Haiti. I was only there about a week but I think about that experience every day. I find myself praying for the organization that hosted us. I pray for the missionaries, who cared for us. I pray for the Haitian people, who exist on a low level. However, most of all I pray for the children, who accepted us. Their future is not bright. They live in a country with a long list of nothings. They have no public education. They have no health care. They have no electricity or clean water. They have no jobs. The unemployment rate in Haiti is 80%. The average Haitian makes about \$2.50 a day. They have no hope and no possibilities of a prosperous future. Two hurricanes have passed through Haiti since I left in July. I know what they are doing today. It is the same thing they do every day. They are playing in the dirt and the mud. When they grow up the only thing they will pray for is survival. They have nothing! Have you ever wondered why you were born in America? It is by the grace of God that we were born in the United States. America is still a land of opportunity. You could have been born in Haiti just trying to survive. You could have been born in Russia without two legs or two healthy arms. You could have been born in Romania without love. You could have been born in Africa with flies walking on your head. You could have been born in China and never experienced freedom. I have many questions about the faith. One of my questions is why was I born in America at this time?

If you consider yourself successful at any level thank God. He has given you and me the resources to be successful. We did nothing to earn this opportunity. Your life in America is a great gift. As you handle your personal finances never forget that God makes it happen. And all of God's people said, **"Amen!"**

In Matthew 25 we find the parable of the talents. Do you remember the story? A land owner decided to travel so he entrusted some of his possessions to his servants. It sounds odd to our ears but it actually happened in the days of Jesus. In order for the story to make sense you must know a talent isn't a form of currency. It is a unit of measure, like pounds and ounces. What you were weighing altered the value. If you are weighing gold it is one amount. If you are weighing copper it is another amount. Jesus does not specify what is being weighed but told us one servant got five talents. One servant got two talents. One servant got one talent. The more talented got more; the less talented got less. When he returned he looked at his investment. Those who did something got rewarded. The individual that did nothing received punishment. That famous story teaches us two things you should never forget when you are handling your money.

God Trusts Us To Be Faithful!

First, God trusts us to be faithful. The land owner trusted the servants to do something in his absence. He expected them to be self-motivated. His absence did not signal one big coffee break. God expects us to be self-motivated. Is your life one big coffee break, void of any Christian service? God expects us to use all of our resources (time, talents and financial resources) to make a difference for him in this world. After all, we are Christ's ambassadors in the world. And all of God's people said, **"Amen!"**

God Holds Us Accountable In The End!

Second, the parable of the talents teaches us that God holds us accountable in the end. The entire parable is a parable of judgment. Through the eyes of God, what do you have to show for your time in the world?

In 1977, Ken Proxmire was a machinist when he won \$1 million in the Michigan lottery. He moved to California and went into the car business with his brothers. Within five years, he had filed for bankruptcy. *"He was just a poor boy who got lucky and wanted to take care of everybody,"* explains Ken's son Rick. *"It was a hell of a good ride for three or four years, but now he lives more simply. There's no more talk of owning a helicopter or riding in limos. We're just everyday folk. Dad's now back to work as a machinist,"* says his son.

We are not much different from Ken Proxmire. We are just everyday folk. We are doing the best we can but sometimes we make a few mistakes. Sometimes we make a few mistakes with our personal finances. If you want to be a fool for Christ then there are four things you should never forget as you handle your personal finances:

- 1. God owns it all!**
- 2. God makes it happen!**
- 3. God trusts us to be faithful!**
- 4. God holds us accountable in the end!**

John Wimber once asked the question, *"I am a fool for Christ, whose fool are you?"* And all of God's people said, **"Amen!"**