

St. Matthew 13:44

Dear Friends in Christ,

Two sisters were on the way home from shopping when one said to the other, "I forgot to buy my lottery tickets for the Saturday night drawing." She suggested that they stop at a certain place so she could buy her tickets. The other sister replied, "Why don't we save some time? I'll drive by and you can just throw the money out the window."

Did you hear the one about the three couples who were discussing the difficulties of family budgets? One husband said, "I really don't want a lot of money. I just wish we could afford to live the way we're living now."

And I understand it was Bill Fitch, former NBA Coach, who said, "I'm independently wealthy. I have enough money to last me the rest of my life - provided I die tomorrow."

I know there are many with very legitimate financial conflicts, but that doesn't alter the fact that wasted money and living beyond means are commonplace. This morning . . .

TWO QUESTIONS AND A PLEA

I. A Question?

I have four settings from Scripture to consider with you. You are very familiar with them. Nothing new. But, then, what is?

First, the parable of the Rich Fool. Here was a man who sought the riches of this world. He said, "I will do this: I will tear down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. And I will say to my soul, 'Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry.'" (Lk. 12:18-19) And then came that eternal, soul shattering judgment: "But God said to him, 'Fool! This night your soul is required of you... So is the one who lays up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God (that is, such a one is also a fool).'" (vv. 20,21) Simple and clear words.

Secondly, there's Jesus' account of the rich man and Lazarus. Many see it as a parable, though Luke does not reference it as such. I see it as an actual event. There are others who see it the same way.

In the account we're told, "The poor man (Lazarus) died and was carried by the angels to Abraham's side (heaven)." The rich man, who ate "sumptuously" every day, evidently would not feed Lazarus with what fell from his table. Lazarus entered eternal life because he was a child of God through faith. The rich man, we're told, "was buried, and in Hades, being in torment...saw Abraham far off at Lazarus side." (Lk. 16:23) And then came his cry: "...send Lazarus to dip the end of his finger in water and cool my tongue, for I am in anguish in this flame." (v. 24)

The response to the request is very clear: "But Abraham said, 'Child, remember that you in your lifetime received your good things, and Lazarus in like manner bad things; but now he is comforted here, and you are in anguish.'" (v. 25) Carefully note the answer to the request for a drop of water to relieve the agony - the answer to a request for one drop of water in the setting of eternity. One drop. Never! Forever!

Thirdly, I want to recall Jesus' words concerning the Judgment: "The Son of Man will send his angels, and they will gather out of his kingdom all causes of sin and all lawbreakers, and throw them into the fiery furnace. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth." (Matt. 13:41,42) You will also recall that he refers to "that place" as "outer darkness" (Matt. 25:30) and "eternal punishment". (Matt. 25:46)

Here's the first question: Is what we gain from this world ever - for one moment of thought - ever worth God calling us fools; finding ourselves in a place where we can't get a drop of water for comfort; finding ourselves forever "wailing and gnashing teeth" in a "fiery furnace" and, at the same time, confined to "the outer darkness"? I would guess the answer is an obvious "no"!

II. An Example.

I have one more setting for you. It's the account of Jesus' confrontation with a man named Zacchaeus. St. Luke's account states of Zacchaeus, "He was a chief tax collector and was rich." (Lk. 19:2b) You'll recall the words, "he was seeking to see who Jesus was, but on account of the crowd he could not, because he was small in stature." (v. 3) He climbed a tree to see Jesus. And then came that most wonderful moment of confrontation: "And when Jesus came to the place, he looked up and said to him, 'Zacchaeus, hurry and come down, for I must stay in your house today.'" (v. 5) Can you imagine that? Zacchaeus had never met Jesus until that moment, yet Jesus knew him.

As far as the other people who were there to see Jesus were concerned, Zacchaeus was an outcast; specifically, a tax collector and rich because he had exploited others. You remember that the people grumbled against Jesus saying, "He (Jesus) has gone in to be the guest of a man who is a sinner." (v. 7)

And look what happened: "And Zacchaeus stood and said to the Lord, "Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor. And if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I restore it fourfold." (v. 8) Zacchaeus was brought to faith. He saw his sin. Repented. He was assured of forgiveness and eternal life. Jesus knew him because Jesus is the Word of God made flesh, and the Word of God says:

Even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. (Chose us before the creation to be His.) In love he predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will...In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace...(Eph. 1:4-7).

The fact was this: the authority and riches Zacchaeus possessed were not worth what He received from Jesus, as Jesus said: "Today salvation has come to this house, since he is also a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost." (Lk. 19:9,10)

III. The Text.

The world is a treacherous lover, brothers and sisters. It can pull us away from our walk with Jesus. It mocks and scoffs at the love of God in Christ. The apostate church insists that God wants us to be in tune with this world's ways and thinking.

The words the Holy Spirit gave John must - must! - rule our hearts and minds:

Do not love the world or the things in the world (this is the *agape* love - the love that will sacrifice everything necessary). If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world - the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and the pride of life - is not from the Father but is from the world. And the world is passing away (it's all going to go away!) along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever. (1 John 2:15-17)

And what is the will of God? That we believe that Jesus Christ is the One who has purchased the forgiveness of our sin and given us the gift of eternal life. And though still sinful, we are forgiven - constantly. **Here's the second question** for this day of stewardship: How will we respond to that? Our text:

The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and covered up. Then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field. (Matt. 13:44)

Peter describes that treasure as “a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead...an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you.” (I Peter 1:3,4)

It really isn't that difficult, is it? Stewardship is doing everything to safeguard, support and serve the gift of eternal life that God has given us through Jesus Christ - **the treasure**. It greatly involves the support we give here, in this church; first and foremost, the Lord's church. This church where we have the Word and Sacraments without compromise - where we care for individuals and families going through troubled times - where we can prepare men to shepherd a flock - where we have supported our teens for faith building and strengthening Higher Things conferences - where we have consistently supported spreading and maintaining the truth of God's Word - where we seriously prepare everyone, regardless of age, for that moment when we are called out of this world.

Again, the text: “The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and covered up. Then in his joy he goes out and sells all that he has and buys that field.” Each one of us is that **man**. Each one of us is a steward of the treasure. And so, **the plea**: God bless our support.

Amen.

Pastor Bill Abbott

STEWARDSHIP

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II. An Example.

III. The Text.

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