

Uncertain Riches
“The Crown of Contentment”

Introduction: Today we begin a two-part series on the stewardship of our resources—how we handle our money.

NOTE: If we don't have the money thing right; we won't have the heart thing right.

For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. Matthew 6:21 NKJV

Why is the subject of stewardship SO important for believers?

1. It is crucial that Christians be taught to trust God NOT their financial resources.

"No one can serve two masters. For you will hate one and love the other; you will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money. Matthew 6:24 NLT"

(ILL) Why Birds Cling to Their Perches

In her book 9 Steps to Financial Freedom, Suze Orman writes about a time when she was in Mexico. There was a merchant who was selling parrots: they weren't in cages, and they didn't fly away. Orman was fascinated by this. She asked the merchant, "Do these birds just love you so much they have no desire to fly away?" He laughed. "No" he said, "I train them to think their perches mean safety and security. When they come to think this, they naturally wrap their claws tightly around the perch and don't want to release it. They keep themselves confined, as if they've forgotten they know how to fly." Was this hard to do? she asked. "With little birds it's very hard, sometimes even impossible," he said. "It's easy with the large birds." In her book, she writes: Suddenly a lightbulb went off in my head. We are just like those poor parrots. We have been taught to clutch our money as tightly as we can, as if our money is the perch of our safety and security. Just like those parrots, we have all forgotten how free we really are—with or without the perch. The more afraid we are, the tighter we hold on, and the more we have trapped ourselves. When she realized this she asked the merchant how he would go about "unteaching" this behavior. "Easy," he said, "You just show them how to release their grip, and then they can fly as free as they want."

2. Because of what God has given us, His expectation is great

But someone who does not know, and then does something wrong, will be punished only lightly. When someone has been given much, much will be required in return; and when someone has been entrusted with much, even more will be required. Luke 12:48 NLT

(ILL) Pitifully Small Donations of the Richest Christians in History

*In his Books & Culture article "A Lot of Lattés," Ron Sider reviews *Passing the Plate: Why American Christians Don't Give Away More Money*, a book "about the pitifully small charitable donations of the richest Christians in history." Sider offers a synopsis of some of the authors' findings:*

If just the "committed Christians" (defined as those who attend church at least a few times a month or profess to be "strong" or "very strong" Christians) would tithe, there would be an extra 46 billion dollars a year available for kingdom work. To make that figure more concrete, the authors suggest dozens of different things that \$46 billion would fund each year: for example, 150,000 new indigenous missionaries; 50,000 additional theological students in the developing world; 5 million more micro loans to poor entrepreneurs; the food, clothing and shelter for all 6,500,000 current refugees in Africa, Asia, and the Middle East; all the money for a global campaign to prevent and treat malaria; resources to sponsor 20 million needy children worldwide. [The conclusion of the authors] is surely right: "Reasonably generous financial giving of ordinary American Christians would generate staggering amounts of money that could literally change the world."

Twenty percent of American Christians (19 percent of Protestants; 28 percent of Catholics) give nothing to the church. Among Protestants, 10 percent of evangelicals, 28 percent of mainliners, 33 percent of fundamentalists, and 40 percent of liberal Protestants give nothing. The vast majority of American Christians give very little—the mean average is 2.9 percent. Only 12 percent of Protestants and 4 percent of Catholics tithe.

A small minority of American Christians give most of the total donated. Twenty percent of all Christians give 86.4 percent of the total. The most generous five percent give well over half (59.6 percent) of all contributions. But higher-income American Christians give less as a percentage of household income than poorer American Christians. In the course of the 20th century, as our personal disposable income quadrupled, the percentage donated by American Christians actually declined.

3. Because when we cling to material possessions, the consequences can be tragic.

(ILL) Ship Stuffed with Gold Sinks Off Wales Coast

On the 25th of October in 1859, the steam clipper Royal Charter rounded the island of Anglesey off the coast of Wales on what was supposed to be the celebratory last evening of its two-month journey from Melbourne to Liverpool. Some 500 men, women, and children were nearly home, many feeling blessed with fortunes worked from Australia's goldfields. Many of the passengers had gold crammed into pockets, hidden in money belts, stuffed into their luggage, and locked up in the strongroom. It was a ship of fabulous wealth.

*After completing 59 days of a 60-day journey, the passengers were toasting each other at the dining table. But then the day's weather suddenly turned murky, the barometer falling. As the Royal Charter neared Anglesey's rocky cliffs, a menacing haze overtook the skies of early evening. No one knows whether the ship's experienced captain, Thomas Taylor, saw these and other telltale signs, but eyewitnesses reported that a battle between ship and storm raged over the next 12 hours. "Confronted with a decision—59 days out from Melbourne on a 60-day voyage, passengers toasting him at the dining table," Moore writes in *The Weather Experiment: The Pioneers Who Sought to See the Future*, "Taylor chose to sail on."*

The decision is one of the most second-guessed in the history of meteorology. It is also one of the most fateful. The Royal Charter bashed onto the rocks, all but 41 of its passengers crushed or drowned, many weighted down by the gold in their pockets.

Next two weeks: **The Uncertainty of Riches**

He who trusts in his riches will fall, But the righteous will flourish like foliage. Proverbs 11:28 NKJV

Will you set your eyes on that which is not? For riches certainly make themselves wings; They fly away like an eagle toward heaven. Proverbs 23:5 NKJV

Uncertain Riches—Paul's Term

Command those who are rich in this present age not to be haughty, nor to trust in uncertain riches but in the living God, who gives us richly all things to enjoy. 1 Timothy 6:17 NKJV

CONTEXT:

— Paul had sent Timothy to Ephesus

Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ, by the commandment of God our Savior and the Lord Jesus Christ, our hope, 2 To Timothy, a true son in the faith: Grace, mercy, and peace from God our Father and Jesus Christ our Lord. 3 As I urged you when I went into Macedonia — remain in Ephesus that you may charge some that they teach no other doctrine. 1 Timothy 1:1-3 NKJV

— False teachers of great concern to Paul

Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. 29 For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. 30 Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves. Acts 20:28-30 NKJV

— Those false teachers marked by several qualities

If anyone teaches otherwise and does not consent to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which accords with godliness, 4 he is proud, knowing nothing, but is obsessed with disputes and arguments over words, from which come envy, strife, reviling, evil suspicions, 5 useless wranglings of men of corrupt minds and destitute of the truth, who suppose that godliness is a means of gain. From such withdraw yourself. 1 Timothy 6:3-5 NKJV

(Deny truth, words of Christ, sound doctrine, proud and contentious, peddle the Gospel for gain)

- Not sure how they did this in Ephesus (Paul does not divulge)
- Ephesus was wealthy/spiritual (temple of Diana)
- Silversmith and craftsman—2 main opponents because idols being shutdown
- Simon the magician tried to exploit the Gospel—Samaria

And when Simon saw that through the laying on of the apostles' hands the Holy Spirit was given, he offered them money, 19 saying, "Give me this power also, that anyone on whom I lay hands may receive the Holy Spirit." 20 But Peter said to him, "Your money perish with you, because you thought that the gift of God could be purchased with money! Acts 8:18-20 NKJV

- Greed always an issue in church
- Selling indulgences in the Middle Ages
- Prosperity Gospel part of this issue as well

This is the backdrop to Paul's exhortation to Timothy!

- Tell them not to trust in uncertain riches
- 2 responses to uncertain riches
- Contentment/Generosity

Next Two Weeks

- Crown of Contentment
- Grace of Generosity

Today—Crown of Contentment

I. The Call to Contentment

Now godliness with contentment is great gain. 7 For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. 8 And having food and clothing, with these we shall be content. 1 Timothy 6:6-8 NKJV

QUESTIONS: Does Christianity demand poverty from us?

- Rich Young Ruler

The young man said to Him, "All these things I have kept from my youth. What do I still lack?" 21 Jesus said to him, "If you want to be perfect, go, sell what you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me." 22 But when the young man heard that saying, he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions. Matthew 19:20-22 NKJV

- His teaching

Then Jesus said to His disciples, "Assuredly, I say to you that it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven. 24 And again I say to you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God." 25 When His disciples heard it, they were greatly astonished, saying, "Who then can be saved?" 26 But Jesus looked at them and said to them, "With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible." Matthew 19:23-26 NKJV

- Yet in this teaching he does not plead for poverty
- There is no virtue in being poor

A. Following Jesus pleads that we know that “things have no power to bring happiness.

1. Be content with food and clothing
2. Not destitution

Jim Carrey

What will enough ever be "enough"?

Comedian Jim Carrey [presented a similar struggle](#) at this year's Golden Globes ceremony. Before announcing the nominees for Best Motion Picture in Comedy, he said to Hollywood's elite:

I am two-time Golden Globe Winner, Jim Carrey. You know, when I go to sleep at night, I'm not just a guy going to sleep. I'm two-time Golden Globe winner, Jim Carrey, going to get some well-needed shut-eye. And when I dream, I don't just dream any old dream. No sir. I dream about being three-time Golden Globe winning actor, Jim Carrey. Because then I would be enough. It would finally be true. And I could stop this terrible search for what I know ultimately won't fulfill me.

The actors, dressed to perfection in designer gowns and tuxedos, doubled over in laughter. But as the camera panned their faces, it seemed that his words rang truer than any of Hollywood (or we) are comfortable admitting.

If a Golden Globe (or three) will not satisfy us, what will?

B. Following Jesus pleads that we concentrate on the things which are permanent, not temporary.

For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. 1 Timothy 6:7 NKJV

1. Born penniless and naked and will die the same way—entry and exit are identical.
2. Only 2 things we can take to God (ourselves and our relationship to Him)

(ILL) Someone asked a minister—“how much did she have?” His response, “she left everything.” Wealth is traveling luggage.

(ILL) Commitment to Simple Lifestyle

The Evangelical Commitment to Simple Lifestyle -March 1980 (Lausanne Committee on World Evangelization)

We resolve to renounce waste and oppose extravagance in personal living, clothing and housing, travel and church buildings. We also accept the distinction between necessities and luxuries, creative hobbies and empty status symbols, modesty and vanity, occasional celebrations and normal routine, and between the service of God and slavery to fashion. Where to draw the line requires conscientious thought and decisions by us, together with members of our family.

II. The Enemy of Contentment—Covetousness

A. Many examples of covetousness in Scripture that have had devastating results.

1. Adam and Eve
2. Achan
3. Judas
4. Ananias and Sapphira

B. Progressive downfalls of coveting wealth

But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and harmful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition. 1 Timothy 6:9 NKJV

Mention 3

1. Fall into temptation and a snare (materialism/moral compromise)

(ILL) Many ministers

2. Many foolish and harmful lusts (like drugs, want more all of the time)

Scopenhaver—“*gold is like sea water, the more one drinks, the thirstier one becomes.*”

3. Drown in distraction (sinking and drowning) what good if your save the whole world but lose your own soul?

C. The destruction that comes when we love money

For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows. 1 Timothy 6:10 NKJV

1. All kinds of evil (greed—selfishness—cheating—fraud—robbing—hatred—murder)
2. Paul stays—stray from faith and pierced themselves

D. Two-edged sword of money

1. Can do much good/can do much evil
2. Can meet my selfish desires/can meet the needs of many others
3. Can be the way to final destruction/or help someone find the path of life

E. Special dangers of money

1. A thirst which is insatiable
2. Founded on illusion
 - a. Provides security
 - b. Then want, desire, and lust after
3. Can make one selfish (competition)
4. Ends not in security but worry and anxiety
5. May lead to wrong ways of getting money

Covetousness is the enemy of Contentment

III. The Crown of Contentment

v. 5 “They suppose that godliness is a means to gain.” (Describes the false teacher)

- A. Godliness that leads to contentment is gain
- B. Contentment= “contained”

1. A favorite virtue of stoics and Greek philosophers
2. “autarkeia”—contained within—self-sufficient
3. Paul turned that to “Christ-sufficiency”

But I rejoiced in the Lord greatly that now at last your care for me has flourished again; though you surely did care, but you lacked opportunity. 11 Not that I speak in regard to need, for I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content: 12 I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound. Everywhere and in all things I have learned both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. 13 I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me. Philippians 4:10-13 NKJV

To them God willed to make known what are the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles: which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. Colossians 1:27 NKJV

C. Learning the secret of contentment brings great blessings

1. Not gripped by worry or anxiety
2. Not given to comparison
3. Enables me to seize/enjoy the moment (not busy looking down the road)
4. Peace
5. Not plagued by disappointment
6. Stays my focus on the eternal treasure
7. Relationships are healthier
8. Learn God's faithfulness more and more
9. Get to enjoy giving

(ILL) Shakespeare's 3rd part of Henry VI—a King wandering into a country—unknown land

- Meets two gatekeepers—who are you?
- I am a King!
- But if thou be a king, where is your crown?

“My crown is in my heart, not on my head. Not designed with diamonds and Indian stones, not to be seen; my crown is called content. A crown it is that kings seldom enjoy.”

Conclusion: Contentment: A crown it is that Christians seldom enjoy

- **Christ in me—hope of glory—contained**

(ILL) Farmer Teaches a Lesson on Contentment

My wife's father is a Kansas farmer. He's spent a lifetime raising wheat, corn, milo, beef, and along the way some sheep and chickens. One morning while I followed him around the farm, we talked about the differences between city living and a rural lifestyle.

"Most city folks I know expect each year to be better than the last," he said. "They think it's normal to get an annual raise, to earn more this year than you did last year. As a farmer, I have good years and bad years. It all depends on rain at the right time, dry days for harvest, and no damaging storms. Some years we have more; some years we have less."

It was one of those indelible moments of stunning clarity. And that "law of the harvest"—some years being fat and others being lean—applies to much more than agriculture. Growing in spiritual maturity requires gratefully accepting the "seasons of more" and the "seasons of less" that God weaves into specific areas of our lives—our friendships, marriage, career, finances, ministry, and spiritual growth.

Marshall Shelley, editor of Leadership Journal, Leadership Weekly (11-30-10)