

“Investing Wisely”

2 Corinthians 9:6-15 • Malachi 3:6-12

First Presbyterian Church, Corpus Christi, TX

Rev. Charles S. Blackshear • November 17, 2019

There are two topics that people tend to get uncomfortable discussing in church – money and politics. That’s because they are both subjects that are very personal and that people tend to have strong opinions about. Well I want to assure you that this morning we are *not* going to talk about politics.

A church was having a building fund campaign and as part of that campaign the finance committee decided to identify some members of the church that they thought could make a significant contribution. There was one man who was very wealthy but had never really contributed much to the church, so the committee went to see him. They discussed the plans and the program and then they said that considering his financial situation they were sure that he would like to make a contribution.

The man sat back and pondered for a moment and then said, “I see. You have it all figured out, do you? Well in your research about me did you learn that my mother is a widow and only receives Social Security to survive?” The committee members said, “no, we weren’t aware.” The man continued, “and did you know that I have a brother who was paralyzed in a car wreck and can never work to support his wife and children?” They said, “no, we didn’t know that either.” “And did you find out that I have a sister whose husband left her with five children to feed and no way to support them?”

The finance committee members were quite embarrassed and said, “we’re so sorry. We had no idea.” At this point the man stood up and said (loudly), “If I don’t give *them* any of my money what makes you think I would give some to you?”

Money can be a tricky subject to talk about in church. And yet, Jesus talked more about how we handle our money than any other topic. Of Jesus’ thirty eight parables, twelve deal with the right or wrong use of money. One out of every six verses in Matthew, Mark, and Luke is

on the subject of money. That means He talked more about money than about love or forgiveness or heaven. So if we are going to be faithful to the Bible, *we* have to talk about money.

A couple of years ago, we as a congregation came together and wrote down our core values, those things that make us who we are as a church. One of our core values is generosity. Here’s what you came up with: “We value generosity. We believe that we honor God by offering ourselves fully to Him. We recognize that everything we have – our money, time, and abilities – is a gift from God, entrusted to us to use generously for His glory. By giving and serving generously we are ‘storing up treasures in heaven.’” The question is, does that describe you?

There are basically two ways of looking at money and time. The first way could be called the world’s way. This way says that money is simply math. I can count how much I earn and how much I spend and as long as I spend less than I earn then I have some left over to save or to give away. If I look at my money this way, then giving means I have less. Giving is then seen the same way as spending. If I have ten dollars and I give away one, that leaves me with nine dollars. If I have a hundred dollars and I give away ten, then that leaves me with ninety dollars. If I have a thousand dollars and I give away a hundred dollars, I’m left with nine hundred. But now a hundred dollars is a lot of money. I start to think of all the things I could do with a hundred dollars. Maybe I shouldn’t give away this money. Maybe I can’t afford to give away this money. If I give it away I might not have enough. So I grasp it tighter. Fear and anxiety begin to creep into my thoughts. And those are not fruits of the Spirit. The same thing applies to our time.

But there’s another way of looking at your giving. Jesus said, “give, and it will be given to you. Good measure, pressed down, shaken

together, running over, will be put into your lap. For with the measure you use it will be measured back to you.” In today’s passage from 2 Corinthians, Paul says, “whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully.” What if we realized that our giving to God is more like investing? Actually, it’s more like managing someone else’s investments.

If you look at what the Bible says about money, you will discover that your money, your resources, actually belong to God. This begins with creation. God created the whole universe and so He owns everything in it. Verse 10 of our Corinthians passage is clear about this. “He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food *will* supply and multiply your seed for sowing.” God has entrusted some of His resources to you with a purpose. So what is his purpose in blessing you with resources? This passage shows us two purposes. The first is in verse 10, to “increase the harvest of your righteousness.” To put it another way, you will grow to be more like Christ. One of God’s purposes with money is to give you an opportunity to grow in faith, to trust Him. Money is not really about money, it’s about trust. Who are you going to trust to provide—yourself or God?

The second reason God blesses you with resources is for you to bless others. In verse 8 Paul says, “God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that having all sufficiency in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work.” When you are faithful with your money, God promises to provide everything you need. Notice it doesn’t say you will get everything you *want*. But you will get what you need with enough to be able to help others. Verse 11 says it this way: “You will be *enriched* in every way to be *generous* in every way.” That’s a bold claim. Somebody should do some research to see if it’s true.

Actually, somebody has. Christian Smith, a sociologist at Notre Dame, has done extensive research on the science of generosity. He studied 2,000 people to see how generosity

affected other areas of life and he published the results in a book called, *The Paradox of Generosity*. What he found is that people who are generous with their money and time and relationships (any of that sound familiar?) are happier, healthier, and more resilient than their less generous counterparts. The people in the study who were generous were significantly less likely to experience depression or anxiety.

Not only that, but he discovered that people who were generous ended up better off financially. “By grasping onto what we currently have,” Smith writes, “we lose out on better goods that we might have gained. In holding onto what we possess, we diminish its long-term value to us. By always protecting ourselves against future uncertainties and misfortunes, we are affected in ways that make us more anxious about uncertainties and vulnerable to future misfortunes. In short, by failing to care for others, we do not properly take care of ourselves.”

Why is that? Smith says, “Practicing generosity requires and reinforces the perception of living in a world of abundance and blessing, which itself also increases happiness and health.” It turns out that the reality of the universe is that whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully.” As Presbyterians, I think we often get a little uncomfortable with verses like this one. It seems to say that the more we give, the more we’ll get from God. This is the kind of message that often gets a preacher his own TV show. But in a sense, that is exactly what this verse means. Even John Calvin, in his commentary on this passage said, “The Lord counts whatever is given to the poor as given to Himself and so repays it later with large interest.” In case you think he’s talking only about spiritual rewards, he goes on to say, “Not only in heaven does God reward the well-doing of the godly, but in this world as well.” Paul is sharing with us God’s promise that whatever we give to Him is actually an investment that will turn out to our own advantage.

Give and it will be given to you. God is serious about your giving. In fact, it's the only time He ever says, "test me." In our Old Testament reading from Malachi 3 God says, "Bring the full tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. And thereby *put me to the test*, says the LORD of hosts, if I will not open the windows of heaven for you and pour down for you a blessing until there is no more need." It's like God's saying, "90% of your income with my blessing is way more than 100% of your income without my blessing."

That brings us to the last thing I want to talk about which is how you know how much you should give. Should I tithe? Is that before taxes or after taxes? The first thing to understand comes in verse 7: "Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver." How much should you give? You should give enough to make you happy. Second, verse 8 says, "God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that you will have everything you need to give generously." In other words, your giving should be tied to your understanding of what God has done for you.

The third principal in giving is that it should be a sacrifice. As Paul says in verse 6, "whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully." This is obviously a farming metaphor. The idea is that if you don't plant your seed you won't have a crop to harvest. If you don't give generously to God you limit your

experience of Him working through you. Years ago when I had my business we struggled with how much to give to the church. Each year we came up with a dollar amount and we usually tried to increase it a little bit if we thought we could. One year that was particularly challenging financially we finally decided that we were going to tithe. We would give God the first ten percent of whatever we earned that week, trusting him to provide what we needed. And he has.

So I want to challenge each of you. When you think about giving to the work of God through your church, think about the four P's of giving. First is *priority* giving. God wants the first portion of what you earn as a way of showing you trust him for the rest. Second is *proportional* giving as a percent of your income instead of a dollar amount. Jesus praised the widow who gave a penny because she gave it sacrificially. Third is *progressive* giving, meaning you work toward increasing your giving each year, and fourth is *promptings* from the Holy Spirit where you give specifically to needs that God makes you aware of.

So remember that when you give to God's work you are investing in His kingdom. But most of all, remember that whatever you decide to give, it's God who has enabled you to do so and so give cheerfully with thanksgiving to God for his inexpressible gift, which is your relationship with Jesus. Invest wisely.

Amen.