

## 1 Sermon, July 17, 2011

Texts: Luke 16:1-13, Psalm 49:16-19

Title: "The Use of Money" Sermon 50 (J Wesley's sermons, reinterpreted)

*"I say unto you, Make unto yourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness; that, when ye fail, they may receive you into the everlasting habitations."* Luke 16:9

1. Parable
2. We ought to gain all we can gain, but not at the expense of life, nor at the expense of our health.
3. Save all you can
4. Give all you can

### 1. Parable

The parable of the dishonest manager, which \_\_\_\_\_ read to us just now, was told not just to the crowds, but to Jesus' closest friends.

Jesus saved the most difficult and uncomfortable parable for those he knew could handle it.

"A certain rich man had a chief operating officer, whom he found guilty of wastefulness. So he said to his manager, "You're fired. But before you go, I want you to update the accounts, and then show them to me.

The manager then cooked the books, in order to receive future favors from those who owed the rich man money. And what did the rich man do when he discovered he'd been cheated? He praised the dishonest steward! He admired how clever the dishonest manager had been!

Jesus adds that "The children of this world are wiser in their generation than the children of light." That is, they make use of money to their best advantage.

The whole parable is about making use of money. Jesus calls money dishonest, and in this parable, the money is dishonest. At least it's made dishonestly.

But even if the money was used in a dishonest way, it can be transformed for good and used for the Kingdom of God.

So, Jesus advised, use money well. Use it to make friends for the Kingdom of God. Be faithful in your use of money, so that you can practice being faithful in even more important ways.

If you are dishonest with money, you will be dishonest with God.

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If you are faithful with money, you will be faithful with God.

This parable is the jumping off point for one of the simplest and clearest of John Wesley's sermons, which he titled "the Use of Money."

John Wesley remarked that it was true that "The *love* of money, is the root of all evil;" but not the money itself. The fault does not lie in the money. It may be used for evil, but it may also be used well. In fact, money can be used for food for the hungry, drink for the thirsty, clothing for the naked: It can give to the traveler a place to lay his head. It may provide a defense for the oppressed, a means of health to the sick, of ease to those who are in pain, and more.

So we Christians should use money well. And John Wesley breaks it down to three simple rules.

2. We ought to gain all we can gain, but not at the expense of life, nor at the expense of our health.

1. The first of these is "Gain all you can." We might say, "Make all you can." This first rule is easy for even the least religious person to understand.

But also clear for Wesley is a warning, that we do not want to make money at the expense of life, or at the expense of our health. John Wesley talked about occupations that deal with arsenic or melting lead, or even those which require sitting in one position for a long time.

I imagine that John Wesley would not look kindly upon iron workers who work on skyscrapers.

Nor should we do work that harms our mind. So we should not work in anything contrary to the law of God. Gambling, theft, obscenity, cheating the law: all of these will harm our minds. If your conscience objects, don't do it.

The last warning is not to engage in money-making that harms our neighbor. Jesus said we are to love our neighbor as ourselves. So anything that pollutes, that causes others to suffer economic loss, that hurts others' minds or bodies or souls is what we should not do.

With these warnings in place, not to hurt self or neighbor in mind, body or soul, we are to "gain all we can." Work hard, use your time well, work smart, treat employees and vendors well, because when they are happy, you will benefit. Let nothing be done by halves, or in a

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careless way. Let nothing in your business be left undone if it can be done by labor or patience.

#### 3. Save all you can

Having gained all you can, the second rule of Christian prudence is, "Save all you can." Don't throw money away in idle expenses, which is just the same as throwing it into the sea. Expend no part of it merely to gratify the desire of the flesh, the desire of the eye, or the pride of life.

You can tell that John Wesley wasn't invited to many parties. He spent little on clothing, ate the simplest foods, had no wasteful hobbies or toys. But John Wesley had a huge appetite for books. He would spend money on a book when he would spend it on nothing else. He read constantly.

So even John Wesley had his weaknesses.

A week ago, Marianne and I got new iPhones. We jumped into the 21<sup>st</sup> century with technology. There are so many things you can do with an iPhone, including video chat and all sorts of games. But it was also something that would store and backup all the phone numbers, addresses, email addresses I have. It also has a calendar that beeps at me when I have an appointment. That helps my sometimes faulty memory.

What would John Wesley say? Did I really save all I could? No. Will it help me to work better and smarter? I think so. I'm not sure where I came out in my money ethics.

Wesley said, "Do not waste any [money] merely in gratifying the desires of the flesh; in procuring the pleasures of sense of whatever kind; particularly, in enlarging the pleasure of tasting. I do not mean, avoid gluttony and drunkenness only: An honest heathen would condemn these. But there is a regular, reputable kind of sensuality, an elegant epicurism, which does not immediately disorder the stomach, nor (sensibly, at least) impair the understanding. And yet (to mention no other effects of it now) it cannot be maintained without considerable expense. Cut off all this expense! Despise delicacy and variety, and be content with what plain nature requires.

Hmmm...

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And here's one that will irritate you: "why should you throw away money upon your children, any more than upon yourself, in delicate food, in bright or costly apparel, in superfluities of any kind? Why should you purchase for them more pride or lust, more vanity, or foolish and hurtful desires? They do not want any more; they have enough already; nature has made ample provision for them: Why should you be at farther expense to increase their temptations and snares, and to pierce them through with more sorrows?"

Do you know the meaning of the word "austerity?" John Wesley certainly did.

#### 4. Give all you can

But John Wesley, thankfully, didn't stop there. He redeemed his three rules for the use of money by talking about generosity.

Whew! It was getting uncomfortable in here!

Gaining all you can and saving all you can really don't do you any good unless you also give all you can. Not to use, is effectually to throw it away. So, don't just make money and save it, *use* it for the Kingdom of God. Give all you can.

You are not here on earth to own things. You are here on earth as a caretaker, a steward, of things that belong to God. You are a steward of your soul, and your body. These are not to be abused, because they are God's. You are given certain abilities and talents, you are a steward of these, to use them for the glory of God.

You are also a steward of the money you make and save.

Wesley writes that, in order to be a good steward of money, first, provide things needful for yourself; food to eat, clothing to put on, whatever nature moderately requires for preserving the body in health and strength. Secondly, provide these for your spouse, your children, or any others who pertain to your household.

If there is a surplus left, then "do good to them that are of the household of faith." (Galatians 6:10) If there be an surplus still, "as you have opportunity, do good to everyone."

In so doing, you "render unto God the things that are God's," not only by what you give to the poor, but also by that which you expend in providing things needful for yourself and your household.

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If you ever have a question about your spending, either on yourself or any part of your family, ask yourself this question: "Am I acting in this, not as a proprietor, but as a steward of my Lord's goods?" If you still have questions, ask "Am I doing this in obedience to his Word?"

Wesley ends his sermon by writing:

"No more sloth! Whatsoever your hand findeth to do, do it with your might! No more waste! Cut off every expense which fashion, caprice, or flesh and blood demand! No more covetousness! But employ whatever God has entrusted you with, in doing good, all possible good, in every possible kind and degree to the household of faith, to all men! This is no small part of "the wisdom of the just." Give all ye have, as well as all ye are, a spiritual sacrifice to Him who withheld not from you his Son, his only Son: So "laying up in store for yourselves a good foundation against the time to come, that ye may attain eternal life!" "

We may find Wesley's language a little extreme, but his rules are as good today as they were 250 years ago.

Thanks be to God! Amen.