

The prosperity gospel has spread its web throughout much of the Christian world. Even some of the churches that proclaim the gospel of grace are telling their parishioners that God wants all believers to be wealthy. They claim it is our right as children of a God who loves us and made everything for our good. They even quote Old Testament passages about godly people prospering. Job was righteous and look how wealthy he turned out to be (Job 42:10<sup>i</sup>). The thought was prevalent in Jesus' day. People thought the priests and Pharisees must be godly because they were so wealthy. But Jesus taught something completely different. It wasn't that Jesus was opposed to wealth, but rather that He clearly saw how it is the main competitor for God's rightful place in our hearts.

*We have heard him in the jolting woe of the Sermon on the Plain ("Woe to you who are rich, for you have already received your comfort," Luke 6:24) and in the pungent Parable of the Rich Fool in Luke 12:13-21. Now Jesus raised the issue again in the successive parables of the dishonest manager (Luke 16:1-13) and the rich man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19-31) and not much later in the account of the rich ruler (Luke 18:18-30), followed by the story of Zacchaeus who gave half his possessions to the poor (Luke 19:1-9). Jesus has indeed spoken on the issue!-Hughes, Kent - Luke, Volume II: That You May Know the Truth. We need to hear His view for our own good.*

<sup>1</sup> *He also said to the disciples, "There was a rich man who had a manager, and charges were brought to him that this man was wasting his possessions. Luke 16:1 Jesus told a story from which He will draw some conclusions about how we use the resources God has given us. The story begins with charges brought against a manager of a wealthy man's assets. We aren't really told if the charges are true or not, and it doesn't really matter when we see Jesus' application. It's as if you had invested with an investment firm and they were charged with misconduct. You would probably take your money and invest it elsewhere.*

<sup>2</sup> *And he called him and said to him, 'What is this that I hear about you? Turn in the account of your management, for you can no longer be manager.' Luke 16:2 "I hear you have been cheating me. Turn in the books! You're fired!" That is tough to hear whether he was cheating or not. Suddenly his world was falling apart. Now with a reputation of cheating it would be unlikely anyone else would hire him for the job. He had to hastily come up with a plan.*

<sup>3</sup> *And the manager said to himself, 'What shall I do, since my master is taking the management away from me? I am not strong enough to dig, and I am ashamed to beg.*

<sup>4</sup> *I have decided what to do, so that when I am removed from management, people may receive me into their houses.'* Luke 16:3,4 The man was a white-collar worker and not physically capable of manual labor. Begging was beneath him. Imagine Martha Stewart on the streets of New York with her hand out. So, he came up with an ingenious idea, an idea that would ingratiate him with many of the people he had done business with.

<sup>5</sup> *So, summoning his master's debtors one by one, he said to the first, 'How much do you owe my master?'* <sup>6</sup> *He said, 'A hundred measures of oil.'* *He said to him, 'Take your bill, and sit down quickly and write fifty.'* <sup>7</sup> *Then he said to another, 'And how much do you owe?'* *He said, 'A hundred measures of wheat.'* *He said to him, 'Take your bill, and write eighty.'* Luke 16:5-7 If we do not understand the culture and how these managers operated, we would think this was just robbery, but there is something else

going on here. Jews were not allowed to charge interest according to the Levitical law (Exodus 22:25<sup>ii</sup>; Leviticus 25:36<sup>iii</sup>). The way around it was to put the interest in the loan amount. If the trade of that product was especially lucrative, the markup could be as much as 100%. So, if you sold a product to someone in the business of trade and they expected a huge return, you might write the bill for twice what they actually received. In the case of the oil, it appears the mark up was 100%. The buyer only received 50 barrels but the bill was for 100.<sup>iv</sup> The difference between the actual amount and the bill was the profit for the rich man, which in this case was the equivalent of the production of 73 mature olive trees!

The rich man can't complain about the change in the bill his manager made as it was legally signed by the manager before he turned in the books. If the rich man complains too much, he'll be caught charging enormous interest, which is contrary to the law.

It looks like the mark up on the wheat was 20%. Debtor after debtor had their bill reduced to the actual amount they borrowed. Now all the profits from resale would be theirs, and they could still do business with the rich man. The manager isn't worried about it. What more can the boss do to the manager? He's already told him he is fired.

Now, when the manager shows up at one of these businessmen's homes, he will be welcomed to the table, for they would all be grateful for the "discount" he gave them. They may even have a low-level white-collar job for him. Very clever! He has secured his future provision and comfort.

<sup>8a</sup> *The master commended the dishonest manager for his shrewdness.* Luke 16:8a Certainly the master did not approve of losing money, but he acknowledged how clever the manager was in looking out for himself.

I have observed the same thing in the East. I was involved in a business deal when the other party was going to take 100% of the profit and cut me out. I found a way to legally retain what I had labored for and leave the other party with what they had asked for. I thought they would be mad at me, but instead, they commended me like this rich man did with his manager. I asked about these strange ethics of which I was unfamiliar, and the local people explained to me that it was normal to respect shrewdness in business. Again, we can see that Jesus' illustrations were right out of everyday life so that people could relate to them.

*For the sons of this world are more shrewd in dealing with their own generation than the sons of light.* Luke 16:8b Then Jesus took a sudden turn and applied it to the listeners. Sons of this world are shrewd in using what they have in looking out for themselves. Sons of light should be just as resourceful to use their resources to point others to Jesus. How urgent are we to bring glory to our Master as we deal with the world around us? How quick are we to look for opportunities to invest the gifts He has given us for His glory? **Are we as desperate to see God's kingdom advance as the manager was to look out for himself?** The manager was that eager to secure his temporal comfort. How eager are we to invest in eternal souls?

<sup>9</sup> *And I tell you, make friends for yourselves by means of unrighteous wealth, so that when it fails they may receive you into the eternal dwellings.* Luke 16:9 Jesus is teaching that we should use wealth to invest in eternal souls. Through sharing our assets given to us by God we gain opportunities to tell them why we don't cling to our money like the world does (1 Timothy 6:17-19<sup>v</sup>). We are willing to part with it when we see a

genuine need because God loves them. And then we leverage it by watching for the Holy Spirit to direct our conversations to lead the person to receive the same grace of which we've received (1 Corinthians 9:22<sup>vi</sup>). We share our hope and our testimony that the person might be saved. Then, if they die before us, they will be among the welcome committee that greets us on our arrival into our eternal dwelling (Hebrews 12:1<sup>vii</sup>). Whenever you help someone be sure to let them know it's because God loves them. Leave them with a Gospel of John or a tract or share your testimony of how God changed you.

One time a man asked me for help to buy some gas. I put some gas in his car and as we parted I told him I was doing it because God loves him. I did some errands and when I got back to the office, he was there waiting for me. He wanted to know why I said that. To make the story brief, I'll just say that the truck he was driving was stolen. He confessed his sins, prayed to receive Jesus, and returned to the city he came from to turn himself in to the face justice for his crime. One phrase at the leading of the Holy Spirit was used by God to turn his life around.

Some of the people who welcome you home to heaven will be people you never met. You give so generously to missions and the benevolent fund that it affects countless people all over the world. We try to select missions that have the most influence in bringing God's Word to those who never heard, such as the unreached Muslims who the message from the radio tower in Guinea Bissau. Your giving helps orphans in third world countries. And right her in uptown Sedona the Gospels of John and the sermons on the street go out every week. How many people read them and change the direction of their lives? We only know of few, but how many have been affected that we never heard from? I don't think we can really grasp how much these efforts affect seeking souls. It doesn't take as much urgent thought as the man in the story, but it does reveal our heart of love for God who first loved us and for His desire than none perish (2 Peter 3:9<sup>viii</sup>). Yet, we cannot let our giving of finances be the end all. We need to invite people into our lives, our homes, sharing our time and personal space. **If it doesn't cost us, it doesn't mean much to us (2 Samuel 24:24<sup>ix</sup>).**

You may think it strange, but I have a list of people whose lives I have invested in and some who invested in my life and are now in heaven. I love them still, and I'm looking forward to seeing them welcome me home. Just recalling their faces brings joy to my heart. And there are those I've never met but who write to say how the devotions on-line have changed their lives. Won't it be a joy to hear the stories firsthand when we get there? I think we'll all be surprised when we see the little investments that we made reaped such big rewards (Psalm 126:6<sup>x</sup>).

In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus encouraged us to lay up our treasures in heaven and not on the earth, for the treasures here can rust and deteriorate and will eventually be left behind. But those treasures we lay up in heaven are secured for us there and last forever (Matthew 6:19,20<sup>xi</sup>). The best of those treasures are lives you invested in.

*<sup>10</sup> "One who is faithful in a very little is also faithful in much, and one who is dishonest in a very little is also dishonest in much. <sup>11</sup> If then you have not been faithful in the unrighteous wealth, who will entrust to you the true riches?" Luke 16:10, 11* Jesus gave us another maxim. God entrusts us with a little before He gives us more. If we use the physical things that we have faithfully, then He can entrust us with spiritual riches. Though the subject in the passage is money, it is true of our talents, time, opportunities,

and every good gift as well. When things get tight financially, we should check to see if we have been faithful with what was already given to us. If we don't feel we have enough time, we might check to see how we invested our time in the past.

Our faithful use of the material realm precedes God entrusting us with the true riches, which includes spiritual gifts, insight into God's Word, souls to teach, and opportunities to make a difference in lives. Just as the tongue reveals what is in the heart (Luke 6:45<sup>xii</sup>), so the use of physical gifts reveals whether we are ready to be entrusted with spiritual riches. It is a training ground. It's an area where we can take stock of our own spiritual growth. Someone has said the last part of a man to be converted is his wallet. The conversion of the wallet is followed by true spiritual riches.

Next to sensuality, love of money has caused the greatest number of failures of spiritual leaders. I would guess the same is probably true in marriages. Whether there is a justification in the mind of the leader or not, failure in this area nullifies their right to serve. In fact, the letter to the Corinthians tells us we should not associate with the greedy or sexually immoral person who calls himself a brother in Christ (2 Corinthians 5:11<sup>xiii</sup>). Our use of money reveals our priorities and spiritual condition.

*<sup>12</sup> And if you have not been faithful in that which is another's, who will give you that which is your own?* Luke 16:12 If someone borrows something of yours and abuses it so that it comes back in need of repair, why would you have a desire to give them the thing? It would just be quickly ruined--a wasted gift. Every good thing we have comes from God (James 1:17<sup>xiv</sup>). Will He give us more if we either neglect to use it or if we abuse it? I think of this verse when learning a spiritual truth or memorizing a verse. If I do not share that truth or that verse, why should God give me more. I have enough to share already. If I don't share what I learn there is no need to give me more. This is one reason it is so important to share testimonies (Psalm 66:16<sup>xv</sup>). Give and it will be given to you (Luke 6:38<sup>xvi</sup>). Sow and you will reap (Galatians 6:7<sup>xvii</sup>).

*<sup>13</sup> No servant can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money.*" Luke 16:13 Jesus declared that we cannot serve both God and money. Only one can be master in our hearts. There can be no compromise between the two. If our priority is serving money, it means we think it can provide what only God can truly provide: security, our real needs, happiness, and fulfillment. But money can't buy those things! Ask the super-wealthy. They will tell you they need just a little more, because the more you get the more you think you need. It's a vicious cycle unless God is Master. Only He can truly provide what our hearts hunger for (Matthew 5:6<sup>xviii</sup>). It is His love, and in His love all other needs are met to our spiritual satisfaction. It's not that we won't have unmet desires, but even those desires we learn to joyfully submit to His will (Psalm 37:4<sup>xix</sup>).

Those who always serve themselves should not be expected to truly serve others. Don't be surprised when they fail in their promises. It is foolish to hope that is the case. What a person loves, is what they are faithful to. If it is self they love, don't expect anything of them. If it is money, they will be after yours. If we love anything to a greater extent than our love for God, we cannot truly serve God. He must be first. If money is first, we cannot truly serve God. As Jesus said in chapter 14, we must count the cost if we would be a disciple (Luke 14:28<sup>xx</sup>). Decide if He is first.

We who are in Christ live in the tension between providing for our families, being that ant that faithfully stores for winter (Proverbs 6:6<sup>xxi</sup>) and giving to the many places we

see needs. We do have responsibilities to both. The world is free of this tension, for when self is god you have no qualms about selfishness. But we often struggle between the two responsibilities. The fact that you do is evidence of your faith. There is no easy answer other than learning to hear the still small voice of the Holy Spirit (Isaiah 30:21<sup>xxii</sup>). Learn to follow His lead. He will prompt us to give or not to give. There is a danger though in hearing our own thoughts and thinking they are the Lord. If we always hear to not give, that should be a warning that we are not hearing correctly.

The Apostle Paul implies that the Holy Spirit can help us determine in our hearts what to give (2 Corinthians 9:7<sup>xxiii</sup>). Tithing is a minimum that was the rule even before the law was given (Hebrews 7:2<sup>xxiv</sup>). But whatever we determine to give it should be with a cheerful heart, for God loves a cheerful giver.

One of the greatest spiritual dangers of our national prosperity is the love of money. But on the other hand, it has been used by many to advance the gospel around the world. I'm sure there are many other churches and individuals who carefully give to places they see it doing the most good. Americans have financed so many efforts such as Wycliffe Bible translations, Bible colleges in third world countries, orphanages that teach the children the Word of God, career training for widows, buying women out of the sex slave market, and many other wonderful works. In our own congregations there are people in need who are unable to work because of illness. Instead of blaming the government and insurance companies for not helping, you stepped up and helped our fellow believers with the recent fundraiser.

Remember it is not money that is evil but the love of it (1 Timothy 6:10<sup>xxv</sup>). If we can remember that where our treasure is there will our heart also be, it will help us to keep God on the throne of our hearts. Love for Him can be the motivation in how we use the resources we have been given.

People in the third world say all Americans are rich. They are right for the most part. We have more than any culture has ever possessed in wealth and goods. Let us not grow complacent in our abundance but always be shrewd managers seeking ways to leverage our wealth to not only provide the needs for our families, but equally to advance the kingdom of God. Let us have the desperation of that fired manager but not for comfort but for God's kingdom.

## Questions

- 1 What was the manager's emergency?
- 2 What did he do about it?
- 3 Why was it clever?
- 4 When did the subject shift to application?
- 5 What tool did Jesus tell us to use to make friends?
- 6 Why should we do that?
- 7 Who will greet you when you get to heaven?
- 8 What does Jesus tell us about our treasures?
- 9 How can we obtain true riches?
- 10 What is the financial tension Christians live with?
- 11 How has the wealth of our nation been used positively?

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<sup>i</sup> **Job 42:10 (ESV)**

<sup>10</sup> And the LORD restored the fortunes of Job, when he had prayed for his friends. And the LORD gave Job twice as much as he had before.

<sup>ii</sup> **Exodus 22:25 (ESV)**

<sup>25</sup> “If you lend money to any of my people with you who is poor, you shall not be like a moneylender to him, and you shall not exact interest from him.

<sup>iii</sup> **Leviticus 25:36 (ESV)**

<sup>36</sup> Take no interest from him or profit, but fear your God, that your brother may live beside you.

<sup>iv</sup> Joseph A. Fitzmeyer, *The Gospel of Luke Vol 2*, p. 110f from Preaching the Word - Luke, Volume II: That You May Know the Truth.

<sup>v</sup> **1 Timothy 6:17-19 (ESV)**

<sup>17</sup> As for the rich in this present age, charge them not to be haughty, nor to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly provides us with everything to enjoy.

<sup>18</sup> They are to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share,

<sup>19</sup> thus storing up treasure for themselves as a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of that which is truly life.

<sup>vi</sup> **1 Corinthians 9:22 (ESV)**

<sup>22</sup> To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all people, that by all means I might save some.

<sup>vii</sup> **Hebrews 12:1 (ESV)**

<sup>1</sup> Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us,

<sup>viii</sup> **2 Peter 3:9 (ESV)**

<sup>9</sup> The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance.

<sup>ix</sup> **2 Samuel 24:24 (ESV)**

<sup>24</sup> But the king said to Araunah, “No, but I will buy it from you for a price. I will not offer burnt offerings to the LORD my God that cost me nothing.” So David bought the threshing floor and the oxen for fifty shekels of silver.

<sup>x</sup> **Psalms 126:6 (ESV)**

<sup>6</sup> He who goes out weeping, bearing the seed for sowing, shall come home with shouts of joy, bringing his sheaves with him.

<sup>xi</sup> **Matthew 6:19-20 (ESV)**

<sup>19</sup> “Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, <sup>20</sup> but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal.

<sup>xii</sup> **Luke 6:45 (ESV)**

<sup>45</sup> The good person out of the good treasure of his heart produces good, and the evil person out of his evil treasure produces evil, for out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks.

<sup>xiii</sup> **1 Corinthians 5:11 (ESV)**

<sup>11</sup> But now I am writing to you not to associate with anyone who bears the name of brother if he is guilty of sexual immorality or greed, or is an idolater, reviler, drunkard, or swindler—not even to eat with such a one.

<sup>xiv</sup> **James 1:17 (ESV)**

<sup>17</sup> Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change.

<sup>xv</sup> **Psalms 66:16 (ESV)**

<sup>16</sup> Come and hear, all you who fear God, and I will tell what he has done for my soul.

<sup>xvi</sup> **Luke 6:38 (ESV)**

<sup>38</sup> 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.”

<sup>xvii</sup> **Galatians 6:7 (ESV)**

<sup>7</sup> Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap.

<sup>xviii</sup> **Matthew 5:6 (ESV)**

<sup>6</sup> “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.

<sup>xix</sup> **Psalms 37:4 (ESV)**

<sup>4</sup> Delight yourself in the LORD, and he will give you the desires of your heart.

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<sup>xx</sup> **Luke 14:28 (ESV)**

<sup>28</sup> For which of you, desiring to build a tower, does not first sit down and count the cost, whether he has enough to complete it?

<sup>xxi</sup> **Proverbs 6:6 (ESV)**

<sup>6</sup> Go to the ant, O sluggard; consider her ways, and be wise.

<sup>xxii</sup> **Isaiah 30:21 (ESV)**

<sup>21</sup> And your ears shall hear a word behind you, saying, "This is the way, walk in it," when you turn to the right or when you turn to the left.

<sup>xxiii</sup> **2 Corinthians 9:7 (ESV)**

<sup>7</sup> Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.

<sup>xxiv</sup> **Hebrews 7:2 (ESV)**

<sup>2</sup> and to him Abraham apportioned a tenth part of everything. He is first, by translation of his name, king of righteousness, and then he is also king of Salem, that is, king of peace.

<sup>xxv</sup> **1 Timothy 6:10 (ESV)**

<sup>10</sup> For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils. It is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs.