

“Money and Possessions part 2” Steve Harden 7/19/20

Tonight is the second message in a short series about thinking rightly about money and possessions. Now last week, we saw that the Bible is certainly not silent about money. In fact, the Bible devotes at least twice as many verses to money and possessions as it does to faith and prayer combined. It's throughout the Scriptures, and in fact, of the recorded words of Jesus, Himself, at least 15% of those have to do with money and possessions. So, I had to ask myself, why is it mentioned so much? Why did God see fit to give so much ink in His word to money and possessions, and I think the answer, at least for me as I look at it, is because there is so much danger to our souls that is involved in wrong thinking about money and possessions and so, He wanted to warn us and He wanted to give us hope and to show us how to think rightly about these things.

Now, there is nothing inherently good or bad about money. It is morally neutral, or amoral. It's not good or bad; it's just a method of exchanging goods, right? So, we can't say, “Oh, money is bad,” or “Oh, money is good!” Having a little seems pretty good, right? But there's nothing inherently bad about money. It's just like dynamite. It can be used for very good things and for very bad things. It's neither good nor bad. It becomes good or bad in our use of it and how we think about it. Randy Alcorn said it this way, he said, “Money is neither a disease, nor a cure. It is what it is, nothing less and nothing more. We may use it well or poorly, either way, how we use money is always of critical importance to our spiritual lives.” So, why is it so important to our spiritual lives? I think it is that connection between the spiritual and the physical and how they come together that makes it so important to us. How you handle your money declares in a very open way what's going on in your heart. If you will, it's a window into the soul.

1 Timothy 6:6-10 shares with us some of the dangers associated with money. This is God's word: “⁶ But godliness with contentment is great gain, ⁷ for we brought nothing into the world, and we cannot take anything out of the world. ⁸ But if we have food and clothing, with these we will be content. ⁹ But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation, into a snare, into many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. ¹⁰ 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.” This is the word of God. Did you pick up on the words and the phrases of danger as I read 1 Timothy 6? Let me re-highlight some of those: “senseless and harmful desires,” “plunge people into ruin and destruction,” the temptation to wander away from the faith and “pierce themselves with many pangs.” You see, so even though there is nothing inherently good or bad about money, there is great danger.

And I think the danger lies in regard to the first commandment. The first commandment says, “You shall have no other gods before me.” The danger is to see money and possessions and replace God on the throne, do you see? The problem is idolatry. Matthew 6 says, “No one 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.” Do you see what Jesus is saying? Money can become a rival god in our hearts. St. Augustine says, “Thou hast made us for Thyself oh God and the heart of man is restless until it finds its rest in Thee.” You see, the longing that God placed in our heart can only be filled with God alone. But because of our wayward natures, our natures that we inherited from Adam, we tend to seek our longing and our fulfillment in the creation versus the Creator. There are a thousand ways that we do that, but one of the main ways

is through the longing for and the looking to money to do what it was never created to do for us. Money will never fill that need, that longing, that God created for Him to fill. To try to use money and possessions to find meaning and purpose and happiness is just foolish. And yet, the inclination of our heart moves in that direction so often.

Matthew 16 says, "So what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his life," I must say, my friends, many have forfeited their lives through service of this idol god of money and possessions. I think we probably all know of broken families who have split and divided their way because of finances. Men and women who have longed for business success and the coffers it comes with. Longing for that which will not satisfy results in dangerous things, horrendous things. Money cannot bring what it was never designed to bring. It cannot bring happiness and fulfillment.

There's no better Old Testament example than Solomon. Solomon had it all. Not only was he wise, but he was rich. He disregarded God's command to the kings of Israel. God prohibited accumulating large quantities of horses, gold, silver and wives, and Solomon blew it. He accumulated all of those things. He had it all and he tried to fill the longing of his heart with these things and we read in Ecclesiastes 5, Solomon, himself said, "he who loves money will not be satisfied with money, nor he who loves wealth with his income. This also is vanity. When goods increase, they increase who eat them and what advantage has the owner but to see them with his own eyes? Vanity of vanities, all is vanity."

We have historical examples in our country as well. Especially those early day industrial magnets that amassed these huge fortunes. One of these men was John D. Rockefeller, he made his money in oil. Rockefeller said, "I have made many millions, but they have brought me no happiness." Vanderbilt of railroad fame said, "The care of 200 million is enough to kill anyone. There is no pleasure in it." John Jacob Astor made his fortune in trading furs and in New York real estate, he was the first millionaire of our country. He said, "I am the most miserable man on earth." You see, his great finances, his money, could not bring him fulfillment and happiness. Henry Ford, "I was happier when doing a mechanic's job." And finally, Andrew Carnegie of steel fame said, "Millionaires seldom smile." Riches cannot bring you happiness. We were created to bring God glory more than anything else. The chief end of man is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever. That is where our fulfillment comes. That is where our happiness is found. Seeking soul fulfillment anywhere else is sinful and foolhardy and it only ends in pain. The inordinate love of money and the fruitless attempt to find meaning outside of God will fail.

So, you say, "Okay Steve, I get it, I understand. How can I know if I struggle with this? How can I know? What questions can I ask?" Let me suggest five questions that you can ask yourself to know, "Okay, do I have an idolatry problem when it comes to money and possessions?" The first question is not really a sentence, I suppose, but it will always begin with: "If only..." If only I could get that raise, then I'd be set and happy. If only I could get that job that I really, really want, then I will be happy and fulfilled. If I could get that new car or boat or house, then I will be happy and satisfied. You fill in the blank. If only... If our thinking toward money is unhealthy, there will never ever be enough. We will always want just a little bit more. Back in my farming days, I observed that, you know, farmers really weren't greedy. They didn't want to own the whole county. They just wanted the land next to them. You figure that one out. It will never be enough. So, the first question you can ask yourselves is "What do I have in my heart that I say, if only I had...this... I will be fulfilled.

The second question is what do you think of most? What do you yearn for most? Where's your heart? One way to figure out where your heart is, is to ask what is the very first thing you

think of in the morning or the last thing you think of when you go to sleep at night? Is it about money and possessions? If it is in regard to money, then perhaps there's an issue there.

The third question is do you struggle with worry over financial security? In Matthew 6, Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, He says, "25 Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing?" 26 Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? 27 And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life? 28 And why are you anxious about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin, 29 yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. 30 But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? 31 Therefore do not be anxious, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' 32 For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. 33 But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you. 34 "Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble." Do you struggle with worry over the future and security for tomorrow? Or another question is where do you find your security? Is it in your bank balance or is it in God's provision?

The fourth question: do you struggle with greed? Now there's two ways greed shows up. You could be overly possessive, being selfish with what you have and slow to share with another, that is a form of greediness, being overly possessive. But the second way it shows up is to covet. You long for what someone else has. You want what they have, you long for and are preoccupied with having what God has not given to you. You have a passion to possess that which is not yours. Do you struggle with greed?

Number five, are you struggling in your relationships? Now this one might not seem quite as straight forward as the rest of them, but nevertheless, it is true. Often, the love of money will put a great strain on relationships. In James 4, beginning in verse 1, James writes, "1 What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you? 2 You desire and do not have, so you murder. You covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel. You do not have, because you do not ask. 3 You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions." You see, God created us to love people and to use things, but far too often we love things and we use people. Are you struggling in your relationships? Could it be that there is an issue regarding money and possessions?

I suppose that the fundamental question then is where do you look for meaning and purpose in your life? Where is it that you look? Where do you seek to find your greatest happiness and joy? I return to this often, and I've shared it with you before, to what I believe is the most vivid picture in the Scriptures of turning somewhere else other than God for purpose and meaning and it's found in Jeremiah 2:13, just a little verse here that speaks so vividly to the issue. Jeremiah writes, "for my people have committed two evils: they have forsaken me, the fountain of living waters, and hewed out cisterns for themselves, broken cisterns that can hold no water." The picture is so vivid for me. There is a thirsty man who is dying for satisfaction, who is longing for satisfaction, and on his right side is a fountain of living water, springing up, cold and clear. All he has to do is to plunge his face into the fountain and he gets his thirst quenched. It's plentiful, it's abundant, it's coming forth, never ending. But instead of looking to this fountain of living water that would never, ever end and quenching his thirst here, instead he turns his back

on the living water and he gets down on his hands and knees and he starts clawing a hole, a cistern, a hole that is big enough to catch rain water so that it will pool, although muddy and stagnant, so that he might quench his thirst on the muddy water of his own making, of his own finding and seeks to find fulfillment and the quench of his thirst there instead of in the fountain of living water.

My friends, that is a picture of you and me when we try to find our purpose and meaning and happiness anywhere other than in God. It's not for God's own sake that He says, "You shall have no other gods before me," it's for our sake! He's saying, 'Don't turn to the cisterns!' Whether that's money and possessions or sex or relationships or whatever it might be, don't look there! Look to Me for that soul satisfaction! That is where meaning and purpose lie. When we look anywhere else, we will be disappointed. Can we be honest enough with ourselves to say, 'I look elsewhere at times'? I look to financial security; I look to that next job, or if only... can we be honest with ourselves and say that we don't have this all nailed down? I'm not wanting you to beat yourself up and I'm not wanting to beat myself up because we fail here.

What I want to do is to turn your attention to the Savior. He came, He died to purchase our pardon for all our sin of seeking life in things other than God, Himself. That's why He died. But not only did He die to purchase our pardon, not only did He die to pay the penalty before God for our sins, He died so that we might have transformed hearts, so that little by little He could change us so that we do indeed look to Him for our hope and our joy and our happiness and for purpose and meaning. Even now, He is at work within those who follow Him. He is at work transforming our hearts and turning them away from the broken cisterns to Him, where He knows life and purpose and meaning dwell. Look to Him. Trust Him. If I hit any chords or any pain point tonight from the word of God, just be honest with Him and say, "God, yeah that's me. Will you forgive me? Just forgive me. I seek your grace and Your mercy. Will you continue to transform my heart to turn away from the broken cisterns and let me plunge my face into the never-ending mercy and grace of our Savior." I long for that for myself and for you. Now next week, Lord willing, we're going to see how to fight this tendency to look over here at the broken cisterns and how to long for and seek to find the joy that God provides for us. For now, let's pray.

Father in heaven, when we look at this, we see that we so often look elsewhere to find our joy, to find meaning and purpose, and often we seek that through money and possessions. Would you break that addiction for us? Would you break the hold that financial security has on us and may we look to you, the fountain of living water, and will you create those springs of living water deep within us that we might overflow in love and grace and mercy, not only for You, but for our fellow man. I pray this in the name of Jesus, Amen.