

Title: Storage Wars
Text: Matthew 6.19-21
Theme: Investing for eternity
Series: Matthew #35
Prop Stmtnt: The way you use your treasure will direct your heart.

Read Text:

What do you think of when you hear that the sermon is going to be about money? I am aware of the sentiment of some. I hear it too. “All that the church wants is your money.” “All they ever talk about is money.” Is that true? I cannot speak for every church, but that is certainly not the case here. So, why am I talking about it today? I am addressing this issue because Jesus did. I am preaching through the gospel of Matthew. And if Jesus talks about something, and I do not, then what does that mean? That means that I am unwilling to preach to you the entire Bible. This text is in the Bible because we need to hear it. It is not the only text in the Bible, which is why I do not preach on it every Sunday. But, when it comes up in the text, I need to preach it because I need to hear this too. But what is implied in the statement, “All that church wants is your money?”

What is the church? Who or what is it that only wants your money? We are the church. You are the church. And when we give to the church, we are not giving to a secret organization that hides information from us. We are giving to our local church that is organized and led by people that we know, we elect, we talk with, we ask questions of and get answers and information from. We get detailed reports not only of proposed budgets, we get detailed reports of how funds are used to ensure that what was agreed to, was indeed done. This has been our practice for dozens and dozens and dozens of years.

So, where does this idea that all that the church wants is your money come from? I can think of two sources: Stingy people and really bad examples. 1) There are stingy, selfish people who have truly not experienced the grace of God in the gospel and do not understand the concept of stewardship and generous giving. They see the church as a threat to be distrusted instead of as an outpost of the kingdom of God and the family of God. Seriously, if you look for reasons not to give generously to the church, you have some major heart issues between you and God. If giving to the church is not a priority, then God and the gospel are not priorities for you. You do not need a rule, a law, a bill in the mail, a fundraising drive, guilt-inducing arm-twisting or an emotional appeal. You either need some instruction or you need a new heart. But there is another issue. 2) The Prosperity Gospel cult has poisoned the water.¹ I wish that I did not have to bring this up, but it is the elephant in the room. Kenneth Copeland, T.D. Jakes, Joel Osteen, Frederick Price, Creflo Dollar, Kenneth Hagin Jr., Eddie Long, and Joyce Meyer are some of the public proponents of this heresy. “Religious Television” (TBN) is full of this distortion and sadly, this is what much of the evangelical world thinks of American Christianity.

¹ Material for this part of the introduction has been taken, in part, from David Jones and Russell Woodbridge, *Health, Wealth and Happiness*, Kregel Publications, Grand Rapids, MI, 2011.

For example, in Nigeria 96% of those who professed belief in God either completely agreed or mostly agreed that God will grant material riches if one has enough faith. The percentage in India was 82% and 71% in Guatemala. A Christianity Today article said this movement was sweeping Africa because *“American lifestyles have led African believers to equate Christian faith with wealth.”* The media has shown more discernment than many professing Christians by investigating and exposing the fact that (The preachers of LA) the people who are getting rich off of the prosperity theology movement are the prosperity preachers while so many of their followers languish after sending in their “seed of faith” money, and trying to have enough faith so that it will turn into great riches like it did for the preacher. I.e. *“If you give me money, then you will get rich. So I am doing you a favor by letting you give me money.”* I confess that I have reacted to the poison of the prosperity gospel theology by saying very little about money through the years because I am so averse to being associated with the Word of Faith movement. In fact, I have had, and I trust well-meaning people, say from time to time how much they enjoyed the sermon and that I reminded them of Joel Osteen. I seriously wanted to either back to my office and just cry or go on to 12-mile road and step in front of a bus. I felt like a complete and total failure.

So, as much as I would rather not have to do this, I need to, at the outset, address the elephant in the room, so that you can know that when Jesus talked about money, he did NOT say, for example what Joel Osteen is saying. In Joel’s book, “It’s your time” Joel said, *“When **you** say of the Lord you are healthy, you are whole, you are free, you are blessed, you are prosperous – when **you** say it God has promised He will do it. . . . If you are not sharing in His favor, you might want to watch **your** words. Here’s the key: If you don’t unleash **your** words in the right direction, if **you** don’t call in favor, you will not experience those blessings. Nothing happens unless we **speak**. Release your faith with **your words**.”*

It is patently obvious that in the Word of Faith movement, the emphasis has shifted from the authority of God’s Word to the authority of your word. Of course, this is what makes it so appealing. After all, we want to be God. We want to have the authority in ourselves to speak and cause things to happen. The message is clear: God wants to give you good things because as his child, you deserve it. Therefore, speak it and you will cause it to happen.

Now, there is a kernel of truth in that, though it is distorted. God is love. God does have the power to bless his children and he loves to be generous to them. But never, ever, ever does God promise material blessings and riches for all of his children on the earth now. But God does promise something that is infinitely better and that is Himself! Rev. 2.9 (to the church of Smyrna) “I know your tribulation and your poverty (but you are rich). . .” Compare that with the church at Laodicea that says “I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing.” (Rev. 3.17) The “good news” of the prosperity gospel is no different than the bad news of this world.

Chart	Means	Goal
- World view	Human effort alone (work, education) -	Wealth, Health, Success ...
- Prosp. Theo	Faith (what you speak)	Wealth, Health, Success ...
- Bib Theo	Work (from and unto God) – Resources -	Advancement of Kingdom

World view – “depend on self to get” (faith in my effort gets me what I want)

Prosperity view – “use God to get” (faith in my faith gets me what I want)

Biblical view – “depend on God to be able to give” (faith-driven work rewards me with resources that I am responsible to manage in order to advance the gospel)

Human nature desires to be successful, healthy and wealthy because we want to have something that we can trust instead of God. In the prosperity gospel, our sufficiency is not in Christ, it is in what Christ gives us here and now. Prosperity theology depends upon testimonies and experiences in order to validate the message. And since theological discernment is not a hallmark of the American church, so many people are vulnerable to the appeal. They are told, just keep on believing, your miracle is about to happen, like the old lady at the casino who is so fearful to leave her slot machine because she is “so close to winning” that she puts in her last dollar and soils her clothes. There are many Christians who are taken in by this false message. And many of them, in a desire to experience God, to know God, blindly follow what they are told and in good faith, they give all sorts of things away, and yet, unlike the pastor and the televised testimonies they do not get rich. In the process, the Word of God gets twisted into a rabbit’s foot for becoming successful or rich and that is a betrayal of God, the gospel and the people who listen.

But, Jesus did talk about money. And he does in his first publicly recorded sermon. He has already dumbfounded his audience by explaining to them that life, the way God intended it to be, is radically different from what they had been told. Let me explain this way. Let’s play the game, “Guess the religious label.” Italians are generally known as – what? Roman Catholic. Norwegians are generally known as –what? Lutheran? Irish are generally known as – what? Roman Catholic. Arabs are generally known as – what? Muslim. Jews are generally known as – what? Jewish (Judaism). People from Georgia or Tennessee are generally known as what? – Baptist. Now, in many of these cases, the religious affiliation is not personal, it is cultural. In other words, many of the people have very little idea of the actual teachings and beliefs of the religion. They practice, to some degree some of the customs and traditions, but most people do not really believe from the heart the teachings of the label they associate with because they simply do not know. To be Mexican means to be Roman Catholic. It is not that every Mexican, or Italian, or Irishman, or Polish person understands that Roman Catholicism actually is, all they know is that this is what they are. During last year’s Mission Fest, we focused our time on seeking a greater understanding of the Islam religion. One of the things that we noted is that most of the Muslims in our area do not know their own religion. Well, guess what? Neither did the Jews in the time of Christ and neither do many people who today, profess to be Christians. They think that it is a label you get from your family, it is part of your ethnic heritage, it is a system for some traditions and some good teachings for life. And

here comes Jesus and he blows the whole thing up! Why? Because if you are going to follow him, I mean really follow him, then you have to embrace him from the heart. You have to know (intellectually grasp), personalize it, and trust it (him).

And in his teaching he takes us deep. Following Christ is no casual commitment. And when it comes to money, Jesus does not set up a system where he sends you religious dues once a quarter or once a month, so that you can mail it in, do your duty and be done with it. He makes us think. He asks tough questions and makes it very clear that God is not willing to settle for some little religious activity from you once a week or so. God is so glorious that he rightfully wants your entire life. He is so committed to your joy that he demands that you love him with your heart, and soul and mind and body. He wants all of you from the inside out. So, when he talks about money he recognizes that for most of us, money is very tempting to trust because money promises us what only God can ultimately give; security, identity and happiness. So, when you hear Jesus talk about money, he is pointing out that money is in competition for your heart.

Here is the big idea: Your heart will follow your treasure (21). You put your heart into what you put your treasure in. So, if you put your treasure in (invest in) something that is going to blow up, you are going to cause yourself great grief. SO, Jesus says (19)

1. **Do NOT make bad investments!** (19)

This is a command. This is an urgent command. It has the force of saying, “Stop treasuring treasure.” Treasuring treasure is the idea of putting our affection and attention on something. Jesus is saying that...

A. **We make bad investments by hoarding things.**

The picture is of the person who is laying up treasure for the purpose of seeing how much he or she can accumulate. It is like having a financial goal, without having a reason to use the finances. We hear about the stories of hoarders on TV. We look at the failure of people to curb their greed in buying stuff and we see that what they “own” in reality owns them, controls them and in time destroys them.

Do you know that we are nation of hoarders? Seriously, since the 1970’s one of the most lucrative business has been the ownership of storage facilities. You can earn way more rental income per square foot owning storage facilities than owning apartment buildings. Now, we do not live in the wealthiest portion of the country. But even here, in the immediate vicinity of our church building there are 30 storage unit facilities with an average of 4-600 units each. That means there are 15,000 storage units just around here. And people use these because we have so much stuff that it overwhelms us. First it goes into the basement, then it goes into the garage and then it goes into the storage unit. Combine that with the fact that our homes tend to dislocate, our families are often in chaos and transition, we are restless and generally make career changes and you have a recipe for a lot of leftover stuff. And there it sits; the evidence of a life that accumulates stuff that it cannot even use. Hoarding is not a sickness; it is a sin. What is going to

happen to all of that stuff? It is going to be sold at a garage sale or given away to the Salvation Army. Eventually it will all burn up.

Hoarding is not simply about stuff. It is also about money. Saving money can be responsible if you are saving for a God-honoring purpose. Saving money can also be idolatry. Do you remember the parable of the talents that Jesus told in Matthew 25? Three men (stewards) were given money to manage by the Owner. The first manager was given five talents; the second was given two talents and third was given one talent. What did the last guy do? He buried it. Now, how do tend to interpret that? Well, if you have a good voice you should join the choir, otherwise you are burying your talent. – Right? By the way, Nathan would love for you to join the choir. But singing in the choir is NOT the point of Matthew 25. Hoarding the resources of the King is the point. “Playing it safe is the most dangerous thing you can do.” You really in the ultimate sense cannot own money. If you try to own money you will end up serving it. Money is entrusted to you to manage and you are to invest it for the owner.

B. We make bad investments by investing in what we will lose.

Jesus identifies three threats to hoarding money; moths, rust and thieves. Moths eat at things such as clothes, blankets, and tapestries. In the 1st century world it was really difficult for the average person to protect their money. Why did the one steward bury the talent? Because that it was you did with your money. You tried to hide it. But, if you hid money in your back yard, you might have a neighbor who would wait until you would leave for a trip and go and try to dig up your treasure. Others would hide their money in the walls of their home. The word for thief in the Greek language is literally “mud-digger” or “wall-digger”. So, some people would convert their money into gold that they would have woven into their clothes. That way they could not only keep their wealth on them, but it would show off their wealth too. But, moths can make a mess out of clothes. So can rust.

Here Jesus is pointing out that coinage and commodities are subject to deteriorating, disease and infestation. In fact, just about anything that we think is safe is not ultimately safe. When I was born, my grandfather invested \$100 in a mutual fund for me. I am now 53, do you have any idea what that is worth? Nothing, when I was about 12, the company was discovered to be corrupt and the entire thing went into foreclosure and the officials went to prison. Bernie Madoff made that clear when his fraudulent investment company was exposed and thousands of investors lost millions of dollars.

Seriously, what do you have that is really safe? Some of you have a pension fund with the city of Detroit. The rest of us, guess what the sign says in our bank? “Deposits are backed by the full faith and credit of the United States Government.” Do you know what Jesus is saying? “You better have something better than that, because it not going to last.”

2. You must make good investments. (20)

Treasure the treasure that is in heaven. God has entrusted you with resources for you to manage in a way that reflects his priorities. In other words, Invest in what cannot be ruined and in what cannot be stolen. Invest in that which is eternally valuable. Invest in that which is forever. So, what is forever? Well, obviously the kingdom of God is. That is why Jesus says in v.33 that we are to make the kingdom of God our #1 priority. But, what is the kingdom of God? It is both the King and the dom (the domain), the people and the realm that is under the reign of the king. We are to invest our resources into the people, the message, the mission and the means of the kingdom. Pursuing and advancing the kingdom of God on earth is synonymous with laying up treasure in heaven. Pursuing and advancing the kingdom of God on earth is the living out of the prayer, “Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.” So, let me ask you this. What is the primary means that God has established to advance his kingdom? In the OT, it was the nation of Israel. Now, it is the church. The local church is simply a local outpost of the kingdom of God. That is why pursuing the health and growth of this church, and the planting of new churches and revitalizing (re-planting) struggling churches is critical to our mission. It is absolutely vital to our calling as the people of God. This is why we give away money to support missionaries. They are establishing, supporting or revitalizing outposts for the kingdom of God around the world. Should you do more? Can you do more? I cannot answer that for you. Cathi and I have to ask ourselves this question: “Does the way that we use our resources now, draw our hearts to treasure the kingdom of God?”

So, what does that look like? You may have an opportunity to work a lot of overtime. The overtime will enable you (you think) to buy things for your kids and give more money to the church, right? Well, there is more to the story than that. Do your kids need the stuff, or do they need you? Does your church need a few more dollars, or do they need you to be dad who is engaged in the training, forming, shaping, instructing of your family? Do you see what I mean? If we are successful at work but a failure at home, we have really missed the entire point. Our work is not the main thing. Our main job is our homes and our church. We go to “work” in order to support what really matters. That is why there are going to be many times when you choose not to work at work so that you can work at home. This means that when you are home, be home. Be all in. Being home is rather pointless if you are hidden away on your computer, or watching TV all the time. Your children are forever. Your children have souls that live forever. They are worth investing in. They need you and they need the gospel. They need their parents to have a healthy marriage. They need a healthy church. Investing in your marriage is an investment in the kingdom. Investing in your children (that is giving them what they need) is a way to seek first the kingdom. Investing in your church is a way to seek first the kingdom. And why is where you invest so important? Because where you put your treasure is where your heart will go. Therefore...

3. **Put your treasure where your heart belongs.** (21)

We have this twisted idea about our feelings and passions. We treat them as if our feelings are the true “us” and that we have no real control over them and that if we are

going to be “true to ourselves” or if we are going to be “authentic” then we have to do whatever our heart tells us.

So, you tell your son that he needs to go get a job and stop mooching off you and he says that he really is not passionate about working. Going to work, like you, would stifle his creativity and frustrate his spontaneity. Or, you say to your spouse, “I really do not have feelings for you anymore. I don’t know, I think the spark sort of died. Sorry, I just can’t be honest with myself and pretend anymore.” What is going on in both of these scenes? The person is confusing feelings with responsibilities. If I don’t feel like doing it, then I am not responsible to do it. That is absurd. Jesus says that where you put your treasure, your heart will follow. The husband that “fell out of love” with his wife, did not fall out of love. He stopped investing in her. The kid who does not feel like working is not excused for being a fool and a sluggard. What we invest in, our hearts will follow.

So, “does the way you use your treasure now, draw your heart to treasure the kingdom of God?” What are you most invested in? Let me wrap it up with this.

A great investment produces a good return for a long period of time. The greatest investment that was ever made was the investment of Christ for us. Christ invested his entire life, even to the point of death on the cross, in order to secure us as his bride. Christ was the investment. His people (bride) were the return and the dividend is the glory of God – forever. Because he made the ultimate investment, he secured the ultimate return. Christ’s investment guarantees the dividend, forever. He simply calls us to follow. That is why you and I cannot lose when you invest in the kingdom. It does not mean that you will be rich now. It means that you get it. It means that you understand that we have temporarily been entrusted with temporary things in order to help change people forever. Everything else will be gone.