

STEWARDSHIP IN LIGHT OF ETERNITY – LESSON 3 (INVESTING IN HEAVEN)

COLOSSIANS 3:1-3; 1 CORINTHIANS 4:2; MATTHEW 6:19-33

REVIEW:

Over the past few weeks we have been talking about stewardship. Of course, when we talk about stewardship, we are talking about being faithful stewards of our time, our talents, and our treasures. As believers, redeemed by the blood of Christ (1 Peter 1:18-19) we belong to HIM (1 Corinthians 6:20) and all that we do should bring HIM glory (1 Corinthians 10:31). As Children of God, if we could get hold of this concept of biblical stewardship in light of eternity it could, should and no doubt, would transform our lives! **Jonathon Edwards**, the great Puritan preacher, often spoke of heaven. He said:

It becomes us to spend this life only as a journey toward heaven ... to which we should subordinate all other concerns of life. Why should we labor for or set our hearts on anything else, but that which is our proper end and true happiness?

In one of his resolutions he wrote: *"I am resolved, to endeavor to obtain for myself as much happiness, in the other world, as I possibly can."*

Two weeks ago, we considered the following points:

1. As believers we are redeemed by the blood of Christ (1 Peter 1:18-19)
2. As believers we belong to HIM (1 Corinthians 6:15-20)
3. As believers all that we do should bring HIM glory (1 Corinthians 10:31).
4. As believers we are to be faithful stewards of all that He has entrusted into our care (1 Corinthians 4:2)
 - This would include our time (Ephesians 5:17) and our talents (Matthew 5:14-30)

Last week we looked at Matthew 6 and what our Lord said about investing into heaven

1. In Matthew 6:19 we find these words, *"Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth ..."*
2. In Matthew 6:20 we find these words, *"But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven ..."*
3. In Matthew 6:21 we find these words, *"For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also."*
4. In Matthew 6:24 we find these words, *"No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon."*
5. In Matthew 6:33 we find these words, *"But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you."*

John Wesley used his own life as an example: "I gain all I can" in profitable labor; "I save all I can" by frugal living; and "by giving all I can I am effectually secured from 'laying up treasures on earth.'" These were no idle boasts: as Wesley's royalty earnings grew, his self-imposed annual personal budget stayed at 30 pounds, until 98% of his income was given away. He lived up his promise that "If I leave behind me ten pounds.... You and all mankind bear witness against me that "I lived and died a thief and a robber." (Harvey p. 78, 79)

There is probably nothing that has more taken our eyes off of heaven and heaven's cause than our comfort in this materialistic nation!

Studies have shown over and over again that the more a man makes the less he gives. This is not only true of his treasures, but also of his time and his talents. How often do you see wealthy people, even in the church, giving their time and their talents to the cause of Christ?

It seems as if we are still following a cycle that has been evident throughout the ages.

- The first generation – Committed
- The second generation – Compromising (small compromises)
- The third generation – Confused

A few concluding thoughts:

- 1. If we are going to be good stewards of our time, our talents and our treasures we are going to have to committed to obeying the Bible (Joshua 1:7-9; Psalm 1:1-3; Matthew 7:24-27; II Timothy 3:15-17)**
- 2. If we are going to be good stewards of our time, our talents and our treasures we are going to have to “let go” of a few things (Hebrews 12:1-2)**
- 3. If we are going to be good stewards of our time, our talents and our treasures we are going to have to rearrange our priorities for living (Ephesians 5:16-17)**
 - **God**
 - **Family**
 - **Work**
 - **Recreation (this should be way down the list)**

****I highly recommend that teachers read “The Decline of our Anabaptist Forefathers” in class**

(See next page)

The Decline of Our Anabaptist Forefathers

By the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony," these men (the Swiss Anabaptists of the 16th century) relentlessly spread the Word of truth throughout a hungry society, and repentant sinners joined their ranks by the thousands. However, they also incurred the wrath of the governing authorities of the day, and horrible persecution broke out. Thousands upon thousands of these believers were slaughtered in the most gruesome ways imaginable. In response, the survivors began to flee from city to city and from country to country, always carrying with them this radical message of the kingdom of God.

This revival soon spread to the country of Holland, where another group of Anabaptists began to form called the Mennonites. They also preached the Gospel faithfully and experienced the same rapid growth as multitudes one by one humbly bowed the knee and surrendered themselves to the Lordship of Jesus Christ. But they also faced intense persecution. At one point, all criminals, including murderers, in the country were offered freedom, a pardon from the Emperor, and one hundred guilders if they could off the Anabaptist preacher Menno Simons into the hands of the torturers and executioners.

*Eventually, however, the persecution ended, and these Dutch Mennonites began to gain acceptance as upstanding members of society. Their outstanding growth continued for a time, so that by the late 1600s there were approximately 160,000 of them living in Holland. This wonderful time of peace, together with a strong work ethic and a frugal lifestyle, led these Anabaptists into a time of great prosperity. Many of them were soon ranking among the wealthiest members of society and wielding great influence in the social and political realms. **BY ALL APPEARANCES, GOD WAS POURING OUT HIS BLESSINGS ON HIS CHURCH AS NEVER BEFORE.** The years of hardship were over, and success, it seemed, had finally arrived.*

*But in the midst of this peace and prosperity something strange began to happen. Instead of the amazing growth these Anabaptists had experienced in the early years, their numbers began to decline drastically. **Instead of pulling people in from the world around them and making disciples of Jesus, it seemed that they had all that they could do just to keep their own children in the faith.** This trend continued until, within a period of about 100 years, their numbers had shrunk from 160,000 to fewer than 28,000.*

What was it that went wrong? What caused the sudden powerlessness in this group of Christians called the Mennonites? In what way were the Dutch Mennonites of the 1600s different from their Swiss brethren of the 1500s? If you had asked a young Mennonite minister in the year 1680 to describe the differences between the beliefs of his church and the beliefs of the Swiss Brethren 150 years earlier, I can imagine that his answer would have gone something like this: 'Well, doctrinally we believe everything pretty much the same as they did. Practically, however, we certainly do some things differently than they.'

The answer to this question finally comes down to our definition of the word 'doctrine.' We humans have a tendency to simply change our vocabulary as our culture changes. When the practical outworking of a particular teaching becomes unpopular, we simply stop labeling it as 'doctrine. Thus, we can continue to glibly say that 'our doctrine has not changed. In truth, there were doctrinal differences between these two groups. The early Swiss Brethren had both taught and practiced the doctrine of non-accumulation. The 17th -century Dutch Mennonites seemingly didn't teach or practice it.

-Roger Hertzler, Through the Eye of a Needle

On July 25, 1659, Thielman J. van Braght wrote an introduction to his book, Martyrs Mirror. In this introduction he warned his people, the Dutch Mennonites, that the danger they were facing from prosperity and worldliness was far greater than the danger their fathers had faced from martyrdom.