

Notes for the Ekklēsia Meeting

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Rich Toward God

by Dan Trygg

“Then He said to them, ‘Beware, and be on your guard against every form of greed; for not even when one has an abundance does his life consist of his possessions.’¹⁶ And He told them a parable, saying, ‘The land of a rich man was very productive.’¹⁷ And he began reasoning to himself, saying, ‘What shall I do, since I have no place to store my crops?’”¹⁸ Then he said, “This is what I will do: I will tear down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods.”¹⁹ And I will say to my soul, “Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years to come; take your ease, eat, drink and be merry.””²⁰ But God said to him, “You fool! This very night your soul is required of you; and now who will own what you have prepared?”²¹ So is the man who stores up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God.” Luke 12:15-21

“Sell your possessions and give to charity; make yourselves money belts which do not wear out, an unfailing treasure in heaven, where no thief comes near nor moth destroys.”³⁴ For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” Luke 12:33,34
“Moreover it is required of stewards that they be found trustworthy.” I Corinthians 4:2

This week the Dow Jones Industrial Average briefly crossed the 15,000 points mark. This was unprecedented, and there are varying opinions regarding what it all means. It would seem to be a sign of better times, though some argue that it is only a false, inflated, temporary high. Many people hang on such headlines. Their net worth on paper fluctuates day by day, and they are very conscious of when the market is up or down. Plenty of people lost substantial amounts of money on their investments during the recession. Some have pulled what they had invested out, and now wish they hadn't. Others kept their money right where it was. Some are celebrating, because their investments went up, ...while some are bemoaning the poor performance of their particular portfolio, even in this temporary surge.

It doesn't matter which side of this divide you may be on, or whether you are in the stock market at all, if you are not rich toward God. You may be fabulously wealthy, but be a pauper in regard to your eternal reward. Or, you may be considered to be at, or below, the poverty line, and yet have invested consistently toward the things of God in ways that have received notice before Him. You may be surprised to enter heaven to a “Well done, good and faithful servant” and an eternal inheritance that will surprise you, and everyone who knew you. **Worldly wealth is susceptible to corruption, decay, wear, or fluctuations of value.** It can be lost or stolen. We can invest foolishly, or our savings may dissipate through inflation, or other forces beyond our control. **The bank of heaven is the only place where our investments are safe from all these contingencies.** Jesus expressly says that neither moth nor rust will destroy what is laid up there. Thieves cannot break in and steal *that* treasure, ...and the bank of heaven will never fail or go out of business. It is backed by guarantees much more secure than what the FDIC could ever provide.

To get a clear grasp of how God looks at all of this, we must understand the broader picture of our role as stewards. **The Bible clearly states that God is the creator and the true “owner” of all. It is all His.** “Every beast of the forest is Mine,” He says, “...the cattle on a thousand hills, ... and everything that moves in the field is Mine. ...the world is Mine, and all it contains” (Psa. 50:10-12). “‘The silver is Mine, and the gold is Mine,’ declares the Lord” (Hag.2:8). **Secondly, whatever we have ultimately comes from God.** “It is the blessing of Yahweh that makes people rich...” (Prov. 10:22). “Yahweh makes people poor and makes rich; He brings low, He also exalts. He raises up the poor from the dust; He lifts the needy from the ash heap, to make them sit with princes and inherit a seat of honor” (I Sam. 2:7). “For not from the east, nor from the west, and not from the desert comes lifting up, but it is God who executes judgment, putting down one and lifting up another” (Psa. 75:6-7). “For who differentiated you? What do you have that you did not receive? But if then you received it, why do you boast as if it were not a gift?” (I Cor. 4:7) “Beware lest you say in your heart, ‘My power and the might of my hand have gotten me this wealth.’ You shall remember Yahweh your God, for it is *He* who gives you power to get wealth...” (Deut. 8:17-18). (There are two sides to this verse, two apparently contrasting realities. The one side is that **wealth and prosperity generally does come through work**, “my power and the strength of my hand”. This is not to be ignored. God gave Adam and Eve *work* to perform *in the garden*, even *before* they sinned. They had to till and keep the garden, and gather the food they were to eat. During the time of the exodus, the children of Israel also had to go out and collect the manna that the Lord provided each morning. The fact that God is the Provider does not *preclude* work. **The other side of the coin, however, is that God is the source of all of our blessings.** Our efforts will be empty, and come to nothing, unless He extends His blessing to us.) King David clearly recognized and acknowledged God's ownership and provision to us, as he celebrated the generous response of Israel in their giving to honor God, “Blessed are You, O Yahweh, God of Israel our father, forever and ever.”¹¹ Yours, O Yahweh, is the greatness and the power and the glory and the victory and the majesty, indeed *everything that is in the heavens and the earth is Yours*; Yours is the dominion, O Yahweh, and You exalt Yourself as head over all.¹² *Both riches and honor come from You*, and You rule over all, and in Your hand is power and might; and *it lies in Your hand to make great and to strengthen everyone.*

¹³ Now therefore, our God, we thank You, and praise Your glorious name. ¹⁴ But who am I, and who are my people that we should be able to offer as generously as this? For *all things come from You, and from Your hand we have given to You.* ¹⁵ For we are sojourners before You, and *tenants*, as all our fathers were; our days on the earth are like a shadow, and there is no hope. ¹⁶ O Yahweh, our God, all this abundance that we have provided ... is from *Your* hand, and *all is Yours*” (I Chron. 29:10-16). **Third, we are stewards, ones responsible to God to manage what He gives us according to His desire.** This is such an important concept! What we have is *not* ours. We are only tenants. We ourselves are not even our own. We have been bought with a price (I Cor. 6:20). We are to live to honor God by our lives. In our 21st century American culture, this is very foreign to our way of thinking. According to the world system, *we* are the consumers. It is all about *us*, ...what *we* want, ...what interests *us*, or gives *us* pleasure. That is totally opposite of the true nature of reality. *We are not* at the center of the universe. God is! He has entrusted us with abilities, time, health, resources, opportunities, but they are to be used according to *His* will, not according to *our* whims, *our* fantasies, *our* planning or simply for *our* pleasure. The word for “steward” or “manager” is from the Greek words for “law” and “house”. ***A steward is literally one who oversees and carries out the “law of the house”.*** ***The steward is to operate according to the interests and principles of the owner.*** God has a way of doing things, He has values and practices He has told us are important to Him, instructions He has given regarding what He wants His stewards to do with what is His. ***God entrusts us with His resources, so that we could use them to accomplish His will.*** ***That is the primary objective of what stewardship is all about.*** **Fourth, we will be held responsible for what we do with what God has given to us.** A key aspect of stewardship is that *there will be an accounting* for what we have done with what has been entrusted to us. If we selfishly abuse our privileges, ...if we forget the Master, and use His resources in ways that are selfish, wasteful, unproductive or inconsistent with His character and instructions, *we will be held accountable.* As Paul says, “It is *required* of stewards that they be found trustworthy.” **God will measure our faithfulness by how well we utilize and invest the resources He gives to us in accordance with His revealed will and purpose.**

Jesus warns us to be on guard against any form of greed. No matter how much we have, **our life is more than our possessions.** He goes on to tell the story of a man who was living the American dream. He had a bumper crop, and harvested so much that there was not even room enough to contain it all. So, he decided to tear down his barns, and build new ones. Then, he could retire, and live a life of ease. Unfortunately for him, he was going to die *that night.* His life was over. So much for his self-centered retirement plan! Not only did he not live to enjoy the fruits of his labor, but someone else would inherit them. *Jesus called him a fool.* His vision was so short-sighted. He had worked, saved and planned, only to come up empty. Not only did he die prematurely, but **he had not laid up anything that would benefit him in eternity. He was not “rich toward God”. He had only stored up treasure for himself. When you measure his life by being a steward for God, he really was a failure. He had lived for himself, not for God.** He had not *customarily given* to support the work of God, or to express the heart of God throughout his life. *Even in his abundance,* when he had a bumper crop, *he gave no more to God.* Serving God or others was not even a consideration for him. *What about his estate?* Was *that* dedicated to God’s work? No, he had not even planned to honor God after his death. He had *taken* the resources God entrusted to him, and *misused* them.

So, what would a wise man, a good steward, look like? Revivalist preacher John Wesley commented that **we ought to earn all we can,** by hard work, integrity and advancement; **save all we can,** by living frugally and wisely, setting aside for future contingencies; **and give all we can,** both by planned, regular giving, personal sacrifices, and dedicating our resources to God. **We are to make the best use of God’s resources, in order to accomplish the most we can for Him.** Again, we are to live to serve *God.* We are to follow *God’s plan* for financial management, not the world’s plan. **When we leave this life, we will take nothing with us.** Our time to invest toward things of God will be over. We should desire to come as close as we can *to have invested the most possible toward Kingdom work, to have made plans to care for the basic needs of those who are dependent upon us, and that the rest should be dedicated to the things of God.* We don’t want poor planning to mean that the resources God has entrusted to us will fall under the control of people who will *not* use them for His glory.

How do we become “rich toward God”?

- (1.) Give regularly** – The Bible teaches that we ought to honor the Lord with the *first* portion of what we receive (Prov. 3:9,10). In the OT, God taught that His people were to give a tenth to support His ministry workers (Num.18; Mal. 3:7-12). We could start there. Paul advocated to set aside what you can *each week* for ministry work (I Cor. 16:1,2).
- (2.) Give generously** – II Cor. 9:6-13. **(3.) Give proportionately** – II Cor. 8:9-15; Lk. 12:48; 16:10-12 – We are to give according to what God has made available to us. **(4.) Give cheerfully and in love** – II Cor. 9:7; I Cor. 13:3.
- (5.) Give where God has revealed His heart** – to Christian workers (Gal. 6:6-8; 3 Jn. 1:3-8; I Cor. 9:14); to help the poor (Gal. 2:10; Rom. 15:25-27); and for special projects that honor God (Ex. 25:1-9; I Chron. 29:1-5).