

Where Your Treasure Is  
 (or, “Are YOU the Reason That  
 OAPC Is Financially Lacking?”)  
 Matthew 6:19-34 (NRSV)  
 May 25, 2008 – Memorial Day  
 Oakland Avenue Church – Rock Hill  
 James T. Richardson

**MATTHEW 6:19-34 (NRSV)**

(Note: Jesus is speaking in what we have come to call “The Sermon on the Mount”)

- 19 *Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal;*
- 20 *but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven where neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal.*
- 21 *For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.*
- 22 *The eye is the lamp of the body. So, if your eye is healthy, your whole body will be full of light;*
- 23 *but if your eye is unhealthy, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light to you is darkness, how great is the darkness!*
- 24 *No one can serve two masters; for a slave will either hate the one and love the other, or be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth.*
- 25 *Therefore, I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, or about your body, what you will wear. 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 can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life?*
- 28 *And why do you worry 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 clothed like one of these.*
- 30 *But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you---you of little faith?*
- 31 *Therefore, do not worry, saying, “What will we eat?” or “What will we drink?” or “What will we wear?”*
- 32 *For it is the Gentiles who strive for all these things; and indeed your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things.*
- 33 *But strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.*
- 34 *So do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring worries of its own. Today’s trouble is enough for today.*

Thirty-something years ago, when I was the young Pastor of the Tims Memorial Presbyterian Church in Lutz, Florida, I preached on this passage of Scripture.

I had one woman tell me that she was going to quit coming to church because I always preached about money.

One of our Elders told me that we had some visitors that Sunday who told him that they would not be back because the Preacher had preached about money.

I got a letter concerning our budget from a man who was extremely angry that the Session was proposing to give me a cost-of-living adjustment for the year [even though it was a promise that had been made to me when I had accepted the Call to Tims Memorial].

To be quite honest with you, even though Jesus talked a great deal about money, I have always felt anxious whenever a passage of Scripture brought the subject up. In all of my anxiety about money and preaching, I did run across one light moment in a Charles Schulz PEANUTS cartoon. Charlie Brown is watching television and in walks his little sister, Sally:

SALLY: I've decided something.....I've decided to be a nurse when I grow up.....

CHARLIE BROWN: How did you happen to decide that?

SALLY: I like white shoes!

Which is my way of saying that I did not become a Minister because I like the financial remuneration or because I like to preach about money. I became a Minister because I felt that it was God's will for me to become a Minister to help lead Christ's Church in proclaiming to people everywhere

that there is a God;  
that God loves us;  
that there is forgiveness of sin;  
that there is Good News which overpowers the bad;  
that we can understand it all because of Jesus Christ.

And because it takes money for the church to make that kind of proclamation, I am here this morning to mirror Jesus and talk about you and your money.

The late Dr. Roy O. McClain, onetime Pastor of the First Baptist Church in Atlanta, said that one of the major sins of the church is **“Praying Without Paying.”**

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the German Lutheran Pastor, hanged by Adolph Hitler at the close of the 2nd World War, said the same thing another way when he wrote of those of us who expect **“cheap” grace**. In his book, The Cost of Discipleship, Dietrich Bonhoeffer says that Christianity calls for total commitment to God, and that is not “cheap;” it is **costly**. In fact, it cost Bonhoeffer his life!

Would you agree with the old mountain saying that “no person is committed to God until his pocketbook is committed to God”?

Did you ever notice that there is more written in the Bible about *stewardship of possessions* than about anything else other than salvation?

In the Bible, the essence of faith is summed up in the verb “**to give.**”

**“For God so loved the world that He gave....”**

not that He lent,  
not that He borrowed,  
not that He promised,  
but that He **gave.**

And the Son whom He gave is the same Jesus who speaks to us this morning in what we have come to call “The Sermon on the Mount.” Perhaps what Jesus says can be summed up in his first words in today’s passage:

**“Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth...”**

...which some say was Jesus’ way of paraphrasing, or up-dating, or translating that ancient LAW of the Jewish people which said: **“You shall have no other gods before me.”**

**“Treasures on earth”** Jesus tells us, are things that moth and rust can consume. I knew a man whose pride and joy, whose treasure on earth, was his appearance. He always looked as if he had just stepped out of a Brooks Brothers advertisement. I am sure that he must have worn a suit of clothes more than once, but I was never aware of it. He was ALWAYS immaculately dressed. One day he fell over dead. And his wife gave his clothes to the Salvation Army.

**“Treasures on earth”** Jesus tells us, are things that thieves can break in and steal. One time I served on a Jury in a criminal court which found a man guilty of 24 counts of “breaking and entering” and “grand larceny.” He broke into 12 different rooms of a motel on three different occasions and stole 12 Motorola color Quasar televisions sets. The doors were locked and the TVs were bolted to the walls, and he did it in broad daylight.

Jesus said: “Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal...”

Now, that is the negative approach. It sounds very much like the “Shall nots” of the 10 Commandments. And Jesus is too good a teacher to leave this on a negative note.

Rather, he continues into the positive:

“...but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven where neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal.”

Now, for Jesus’ Jewish listeners, the term “treasure in heaven” made sense, because from their earliest years they had been taught that *a deed of kindness done on earth* was like “treasure in heaven.” And yet, the main point of what Jesus was saying is really caught up in the words which follow: ***“For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.”***

The gospel writer Luke tells us of another occasion on which Jesus was speaking on the same subject, and he told a story that is put into clear, southeastern United States English by the Baptist Greek scholar, Clarence Jordan. Listen as I read it to you:

***A certain rich fellow’s farm produced well. And he held a meeting with himself and he said, “What shall I do? I don’t have room enough to store my crops.” Then he said, “Here’s what I’ll do: I’ll tear down my old barns and build some bigger ones in which I’ll store all my wheat and produce. And I will say to myself, ‘Self, you’ve got enough stuff stashed away to do you a long time. Recline, dine, wine, and shine!’”***

***But God said to him, “You nitwit, at this very moment your goods are putting the screws on your soul. All these things you’ve grubbed for, to whom shall they really belong?” That’s the way that it is with a man who piles up stuff for himself without giving God a thought.***

(Luke 12:16-21 – The Cottonpatch Version)

When Jesus said, “For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also,” Jesus was thinking of our *attitudes*, our *lifestyles*, our *very beings*, our *souls*. That is the reason that I am convinced that you can tell a Christian, not by the words or phrases that he mouths, but by how he spends his money! (Incidentally, as an aside, I challenge you to go home and count the number of pairs of shoes that you possess.)

Now, this morning I know that you have not come to worship to hear the preacher try to twist your arm into putting another dollar into the offering plate. For I do not have either the ability or the charm to do so. I can work no miracles!

But I have come here this morning prepared to remind us of what the Bible says about money. It says:

“No one can serve two masters; for a slave will either hate the one and love the other, or be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth.” (Matthew 6:24; NRSV)

J.B. Phillips translates it to read: “You cannot be a slave to God and to material things.”

Clarence Jordan translates it to read: “It is impossible to be in bondage to both God and money.”

Gods of Goodness: The Sophisticated Idolatry of the Main Line Churches is the name of a book written by Bruce L. Blackie. I want to read to you one paragraph from this book which gives us food for thought concerning God and money.

The tragedy of the main line denominational church is that very few members are putting themselves where social change is taking place, and many of them, when it comes to economics, forget all about Christian principles and live for greatest dollar efficiency. *[Do you think that is true?]* These are difficult issues to deal with. Most church members know that they are largely separated from the problems they view on television. They are in a flight mode, seeking to leave the city and its tensions. But in recent years, the city’s problems have moved to the suburbs, and many people are realizing that their dream of leaving the city behind is false. Perhaps they can buy time for a while, but their children will be faced with a mass of unresolved issues. *[Do you think that is true?]* The real question for the church member is whether or not his Christian faith means enough to cause him to examine the most basic values and motivations he has, and put them under the judgment of Scripture. For him, the issue is not, “Am I doing a few good works for others?” It is rather: “Am I living a lifestyle of mission?” That lifestyle inevitably will involve sacrifice, at least the sacrifice of values dear to middle-class society. When the church member sees that the Christian faith is only as valid as his living demonstrates, he will comprehend the dimensions of the challenge to be truly Christian. If he accepts the challenge, he is ready to deal with the idols of culture and counter culture and to build a faith that is directed toward the God who, in every age, stands over and apart from the world that is the object of His love.

(Blackie, Bruce L., Gods of Goodness: The Sophisticated Idolatry of the Main Line Churches, Philadelphia, The Westminster Press, 1975, p. 162)

All of which is another way of saying what Jesus said: **You cannot serve God and wealth.**

It may be that you have heard someone quote the Bible as saying: “**Money is the root of all evil.**”

But, that is not what the Bible really says. In the New Testament, I Timothy 6:10 says: “**The love of money is the root of all evil.**”

I am sure that you see the difference in the two sayings. Money in itself is neither bad nor good.

- Money can educate people for the ministry at Columbia Theological Seminary.
- Money can support children at Thornwell Home in Clinton, SC.
- Money can provide housing for the elderly through the Presbyterian Communities in SC.
- Money can run Bethelwoods and Montreat for conferences and recreation.
- Money can feed the hungry through Hope House here in Rock Hill.
- Money can relieve suffering through Church World Service.

Money in itself is neither bad nor good. But the love of money is the root of all evil. Jesus said: You cannot love God and money!

Central Presbyterian Church in Atlanta, Georgia, has been a major part of my church life. I worked there in the early 1960s as an Intern in Youth Ministry, I worshiped there in the late 1960s when I worked at Columbia Seminary, and I was married to Sally in Rand Chapel there in 1970. In celebration of its 150<sup>th</sup> Anniversary, the church has published a book entitled On Our Way Rejoicing in which my brother-in-law, Tony Amos, has written a chapter on the congregation's financial side. Let me read you one paragraph which Tony wrote, and I want you to **listen with your OAPC ears.**

Every day at Central Presbyterian Church, we stand on the shoulders of those who have gone before us. A significant part of this legacy consists of their financial support. Both saints and sinners have underwritten Central's 150 years of commitment to the celebration of God through inspired worship, education, ministry, and service to the denomination, the city, and the world.

Generous participation in the annual stewardship campaign is a long-standing tradition at Central; its members regularly generate the highest per-capita giving in the Presbytery of Greater Atlanta. And many have also chosen to extend their support through gifts and bequests to Central's endowment.

(On Our Way, Rejoicing, edited by Martin C. Lehfeldt,  
Atlanta, Xlibris.com, 2007, p. 199)

It is my prayer and observation that OAPC is "on the way rejoicing" as the People of God. The question is: are you willing financially to pay for it?