

**The Biblical View of Money, Part 3**

Scripture: 2 Corinthians 8-9

Code: 47-53

Now we come to our time in the Word of God, continuing our series on a scriptural understanding of money. And I want you to listen to me very carefully this morning, I'm going to say some things that perhaps you have not heard. You're going to need to process them a little bit in your mind. I'm not going to have the time to deal with every possible caveat or exception or issue that what I say might raise, but we will deal with those as time goes on. But I want to lay a foundation, this morning, that is very important for understanding this issue of money.

Now, last week...we started kind of a preliminary discussion of money, two weeks ago, in anticipation of studying 2Corinthians 8 and 9. And 2 Corinthians 8 and 9, as I said, is about giving, it's about Christian giving, how we give our money. And before we can understand giving, we have to understand some other aspects of money and wealth and possessions.

And so we talked about the morality of money, that is that money is neutral but it does demonstrate our morality or our spirituality. It is an index on character. I made the statement that I could look at your checkbook and tell where your priorities in life are and the emphasis of your life. And that's pretty much true. Money does manifest our character and our loves and likes and priorities.

Then we also talked about that issue of loving money. How important it is not to love money. God has provided resource for us. We are not to turn money into an idolatrous object, but we are to treat it the way God would have it be treated and not in His place, not substituting our money for Him, not trusting it instead of Him.

And then last time I said, thirdly, "We want to consider the issue of acquiring of money, the morality of money, the love of money, and the acquisition of money." And I told you, last Sunday, that there are some negatives with regard to acquiring money. First of all, we are not to steal it. Scripture is very clear about that. Secondly, we are not to exploit others to gain it. Thirdly, we are not to defraud others by withholding it and thus maintaining our own richness. Fourthly, we are not to gamble for it. So, we don't steal it, exploit others to gain it, defraud people of it, or gamble for it.

Now, that brings us to the positive matter of how we acquire money. How does Scripture indicate that we are to acquire money or possessions or wealth? And as I was asking that question this week and endeavoring to answer it, another question interrupted my thinking, which happens to me a lot. And the question is this. Does God really want us to acquire it at all?

Reading, as I have, a number of books which advocate that Christians should live at a bare subsistent level, take a sort of semi-vow of poverty, have nothing more than bare necessities, I realized that I probably needed to address that issue. There are lots of books, and there have been through the history of the church.

There have been lots of folks, lots of people, even certain orders within the framework of the church that have taken the idea that the Bible indicates we should really have nothing more than our absolute bare necessities. We should live at that level, avoiding all comfort and all luxury, and that that's really God's highest calling. That's what God wants for us is just that. God really wants us not to be totally poor, because he'll provide the basic things of life, but not much beyond that.

Is that actually accurate? Is that God's purpose? Is that God's design? If you have any comforts, any luxuries, anything that you really don't need to eat and sleep and survive and shelter yourself, is it a sinful thing? Or does God want us to have a certain measure of wealth? That's a very important question. And before we talk about how we acquire it, we have to talk about if God wants us to acquire it. And we have to answer that question. As I think about answering that question, it's a marvelous, marvelous thing...as it begins to unfold...that indeed God does, and God has provided for us to gain various measures of wealth.

To understand this we need to go back to Genesis chapter 1. So open your Bible to the first chapter in the Bible, Genesis chapter 1, and just kind of stay there for a moment while I make a few comments and then read you some verses out of this chapter. Now let's listen carefully to what I'm going to say because all of this is going to begin to accumulate and develop into something that is important for us to understand. God has created a material world. That is, God has created a natural world. It is purely physical, purely physical, and temporary. It is a perishing earth. It is a perishing world.

As I have told you before, we live on a disposable planet. It is not to be perpetuated forever. It is to be used up, and then it will go out of existence. Jesus said, "Heaven and earth shall what? "Pass away." This is not an eternal earth. There will be a new heaven and a new earth. This is a very temporary planet.

In fact, I think both an understanding of Scripture and a proper understanding of science would put the age of this universe somewhere around 15,000 years ago and that's all. This is not a millions and millions of years-old universe or earth; it is a relatively young planet and it is designed by God in the midst of eternity for a very, very brief purpose.

It is designed to be the habitat for humanity for a few thousand years, and, really, that's it. It is disposable. It is soulless. The whole creation is soulless. It has no eternal soul. It has no lasting

purpose or value. It is simply for temporary use. It will be extinct in the near future and when you see the descriptions of heaven, there are no animals there, there are no flowers there, there's no grass there and so forth.

And you can see a very great difference, although there are some metaphoric uses of minerals and water and rivers and the tree of life and those things, they have a heavenly and eternal character and could not be in any sense the same as what we experience here in this created world. So we live in a world for all intents and purposes which is going out of existence, is disposable, and was designed by God for man to use. That's very, very important to understand. It contains no eternal qualities. And what that means is it has nothing of heavenly value. Did you hear that? It has nothing of heavenly value, nothing.

Now, the conclusion that I make, after understanding all of that, is that God has designed all of this for a very brief purpose to enrich the life of man. I mean, after all, He could have...he could have put us all on the moon which has no color, no nothing. In fact, when we go up there and walk around, we come back and say there's nothing there we need. There's nothing there that could support life, sustain life, let alone make life enjoyable. There's nothing outside of this earth that we need; there's everything here that we can use.

And when we fly around in space and do all the exploration, we really never find anything that changes our life here. All we do is just get up there and spy on each other and send down telephone signals and TV pictures, and all of that. I mean, there's nothing out there that you can find that will add, in any sense, to the profound richness of life on this planet. And God never intended it be eternal. It wasn't eternal. He created it, and it won't be eternal. He'll uncreate it. It was created to house the humanity that He created for eternal purposes, but it is not an eternal world. So whatever you have in this world is just temporary and it burns up.

Now, having said all of that, let me go further and say when God created the earth He made a great distinction. There's a great big thick line, if you will, between man and all the rest of the creation. All the creation is soulless, temporal, dying, and passing. Man is eternal. Okay? Man is eternal. A great distinction between the whole creation, all the creatures and all the components and elements of the earth, animate and inanimate, and man. Man was made in the very image of God. And He gave man dominion and supremacy and sovereignty over everything in this temporary, temporal, physical, soulless creation.

Man is superior in design. He is superior in responsibility, capability, authority, and value and man will live forever. He is an eternal being. The earth and all it contains then is to provide for man richness of life. And it really fits into the category of common grace. Whether a man is regenerate or not regenerate, whether he loves God or doesn't love God, whether he obeys God or doesn't obey God, his very life is filled with the richness of this creation. And that is just the character of God to be so

kind and to spread His common grace to man.

Now, having said that, look at verse 27 of Genesis chapter 1. “And God created man in His own image.” Down in chapter 2 verse 7, it says, “And He breathed into his nostrils the breath of life and he became a living soul, or living being.” That sets him apart from everything else. But verse 27, “God created man in His own image. In the image of God He had created them; male and female, He created them. And God blessed them and said to them, ‘Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth,’ and here’s the key, ‘and subdue it.’ ” A very important command. Harness its power. Harness its resources. Extract its riches. That’s what it’s saying.

As John Schneider writes, “It is here to be exploited, studied, cultivated, tamed, used, and enjoyed.” That’s what God is saying. Draw out of it all the richness that’s in it. The whole creation is for man to use and for man to enjoy and rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over every living thing that moves on the earth. You’re in charge of all of it. You have sovereignty over all of it. You harness all of its power and all of its beauty and all of its richness and all of its capabilities, all of its energies, all of its productivity.

Verse 29, God said, “I have given you every plant yielding seed that is on the surface of all the earth; every tree which has fruit yielding seed, it shall be food for you, and every beast of the earth and every bird of the sky and everything that moves on the earth which has life, I have given every green plant for food and it was so. And God saw all that He had made and behold, it was very good.” Very good. There’s nothing like it in the universe.

We fly around, we see nothing like this planet, nothing with the incredible natural resources of this earth. And we then have to assume that there is a righteous use of the material world. There is a righteous use of material wealth. We live in a material world, and it pleases God that it is as rich as it is. It pleases God for us to use it as a gift from Him in the category of common grace, grace common to all of us. We are to live richly, enjoyably, comfortably, and we should be thankful to Him in the midst of all of this. God has made a very good world for us.

And He knew it would only be very temporary. He knew it would all burn up. And He knew that it wouldn’t have anything that was eternal in it, and yet He gave it to us just for the sheer brief joy and richness of it. God Himself then affirms the goodness of all creation as a gift to make man’s life enjoyable. I mean, when you think about it, it’s pretty staggering. The beauty of nature, the absolute breathtaking beauty of nature is for our enjoyment. To go and visit places and see that magnificent beauty is part of God’s good gift to man.

The variety of foods, I mean, it’s just incredible. Every plant, every kind of animal, every kind of taste, and then God accommodated all of that by giving us the ability to taste. God could have created us with no taste buds and we would have eaten porridge three meals a day for all our life. But that’s not

God. God is a God of infinite variety, infinite beauty, and God has created a world for us to enjoy. The endless joys of what we eat, the endless joys of what we see, the smell of things, the myriad of fragrances that fill the world have no lasting value. They are purely for this life. God has given us such a rich life to enjoy.

Why does He do that? Because that demonstrates His loving generous, almost lavish character; because that should engender in us a response of thanksgiving and praise and glory to Him and should cause us to be obedient to One who is so generous, and because it should stimulate in us a foretaste of heaven. Whatever the wonders and joys and comforts and beauties of this life are, they are but a small taste of the glories and beauties and comforts and joys of the life to come.

God has His purposes in putting us in a rich, rich, rich environment; the endless productivity of this earth, the endless seeds and plants and foods, the incredible mineral wealth that comes out of the ground, the gold, the silver, all of the other metals that create all of the things that make life enjoyable and comfortable, the tremendous deposit of oil that creates the plastics and all the things that we extract out of that. All the wonderful little goodies and gadgets and all the comfortable things that we enjoy, all the fabrics that can woven out of cotton and the little silk worm.

Why did God make a silkworm spin silk if He didn't expect somebody to wear a silk dress? The whole point is God has created a world just loaded with richness and beauty and color. I mean, I look out of over this congregation this morning and I see a whole lot of drab men and a lot of colorful ladies, and I know that...I know God has made all that color. He doesn't have to make color in the world, but He did. And the beauty of a lovely dress and the wonderful color even in a red tie, occasionally, pleases the Lord because He made the colors, right?

There's nothing wrong with enjoying the comfort of a warm bed and sitting by a warm fireplace in a comfortable chair and, in the warm light of the fireplace, reading a good book and listening to beautiful music played on a guitar like Christopher Parkening played this morning. That's the richness of all that God has put into this earth. It's all there and comparing...or rather combining the richness of the earth with the ability of mankind to extract that richness, you have the fulfillment of God's purpose for men to enjoy their life.

And that's how God made the world and that's His purpose. All these riches, we just keep tapping them and tapping them and it almost seems like there is no end to them. Immense natural resources and human capability that is able to extract those resources in so many, many different ways. It's just incredible.

So, God gives a rousing affirmation of the goodness of this disposable planet. It's just for now, but He says enjoy it while it lasts, enjoy it while it lasts. It's kind of like life, you know. God only gives you your children for now, really, and you enjoy them while they last and they all realize that some day

you'll die or they'll die and life is short, but there's so much richness in this life. God is just a God who wants us to enjoy even this life.

Now the Fall came along. Adam and Eve sinned and the curse fell on the earth. It marred its goodness. It didn't destroy it. It didn't negate it. In fact, He created man with a freedom. You know, I mean, He just literally turned Adam and Eve loose in Eden and said, "Have at it. You've got the run of the place, the run of the Garden of Eden." And when they sinned, that freedom became potentially damaging.

The freedom is still there, but, sadly, man can now take the resource of the earth and turn them into war machines. He can now take the good gifts of physical love and turn it into sexual perversion. He can take the production of plants and turn them into poisons and drugs and destroy people's lives with them. There is risk in the freedom now. But the earth is still good, it's still very good.

You see, the sin is not in enjoying it. The sin is in overindulgence. The sin is in flaunting your wealth. The sin is in self-centered, self-indulgent, begrudging, compassionless consumption. It's the attitude of the heart that is the sin. If you enjoy the richness of what God has provided and you give Him thanks, and that thanks turns into obedience, and you're willing to be generous with others, then you've made the righteous use of the material world.

The point is that God has made us rich. God has given us the ability to get wealth; and to different people, different capabilities in that regard. He doles out the capacities, He doles out the opportunities to enjoy those riches as He sovereignly sees fit. Not all of us are going to be as wealthy as others.

There is a measure of comfort and joy and beauty and wonder and fulfillment in this life for all of us. And some will be very, very rich and some not so rich, and there are all different levels. It's just a brief little time, a vapor that appears for a little while, but God has spread His riches out sovereignly as He chooses to do that for His own glory and His own purpose. Even the wicked prosper, momentarily, under God's goodness in this expression of common grace.

So when you come to understand that this world is wealthy, look, I mean, He made a planet that is just loaded with riches. He made a planet that's even full of diamonds. Did He expect them to stay down buried in the ground? Or did He expect somebody to dig them up, put them in a jewelry store so you could give some to a girl when you wanted to marry her?

I mean, you could say, "Well, you know, that's indulgence." But on the other hand, if I look at that thing and it somehow in a small way is symbolic of how I prize this woman of my love, and if I can see the beauty of God's creation in it and thank Him for that, it's an attitude of the heart, right? That is always the issue.

I was just saying to Lance, a large diamond might offend you. This was a gift given to me, it's a gold ring, it might offend somebody in Brazil where I was and this diamond wedding ring would offend somebody in Russia, if all they were looking at was the materialistic side and didn't know the symbols of all of those things and if they didn't know my heart. I think you can enjoy the things that God gives you, a home and a car. Obviously there is a reasonableness in this, but you can enjoy those things because God has made a world which yields those riches. It's just a little taste of the riches to come. Enjoy it. Realize it's not eternal.

It's a small taste of heaven where there will be riches beyond description. And there you will really be rich. Earthly wealth is from God for a brief time. It's not going to be the issue in eternity, and I think things may get turned the other way when we get there. But it shows how kind He is to His creatures and how He wants to put on display His incredible, incredible mind.

So God made it clear in Genesis that the created soulless world was designed by Him for just a brief little period of time in the midst of eternity to provide joy and delight, even things like a nice car and a nice house and a garden, clothes, appliances, a warm fireplace, whatever. John Schneider says, "Human delight is a precious expression of God's glory. In its proper form it is a sacrament to God's dominion over chaos and darkness."

Now, while you're in Genesis, turn to chapter 8 for a moment. And I want to illustrate something that we've just been talking about, with a couple of scriptures here that look at Noah. God created this marvelous world for us to enjoy, to be a delight to us. Look at chapter 8 verse 21. Verse 20 talks about Noah building an altar, and he was going to have a barbecue. We call it a sacrifice, but it's actually a barbecue. Every clean animal, every clean bird he offered as a burnt offering. Isn't that a barbecue? Isn't that what your wife says? "What is that, a burnt offering?"

This is a barbecue. And I love this, verse 21, "And the Lord smelled the soothing aroma." Did you know God loves the smell of barbecue? I like the smell of barbecue. I'll tell you what; I love the smell of a barbecue. It is so superior to the smell of boiling broccoli. Even God likes the smell of a barbecue and He has...listen, He built that into that. He built that into that. Food didn't have to have a pleasant aroma but He made it have that for our joy and enjoyment.

"And the Lord smelled the soothing aroma, and the Lord said to Himself," a little inter-Trinitarian conversation here, 'I will never again curse the ground on account of man, for the intent or the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth, I will never again destroy every living thing as I have done.' "

You know what He's saying? "I'm not going to destroy this creation again; I'm going to leave it here. And even though he's evil I'm going to let him enjoy it. I'm going to let him smell the aromas and taste

the food, smell the flowers, dig out the minerals, enjoy the power, the fresh water, the cool breeze, the waterfall, the whole business.”

Verse 22, “While the earth remains it’s going to be continuity, seed time, and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night shall not cease.” God says, “I’m not going to destroy it anymore until the final destruction. I’m going to let man enjoy it. And then in chapter 9, “So God blessed Noah and his sons and said to them, ‘Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth. And the fear of you and the terror of you shall be on every beast of the earth and every bird of the sky.’ ” You’re in charge. You determine whether they live or whether they die. “With everything that creeps on the ground, and all the fish of the sea, into your hand they are given.”

We understand that. I don’t think some environmentalists understand that. We’re in charge of all that. Every moving thing that is alive shall be food for you. I give all to you as I gave the green plant. I give it all to...it’s all for you. And listen, He knew what was in this planet. He knew what was here.

You say, “Well isn’t mining and all of that a modern enterprise?” No, read Job 28, Job is the oldest book in the Bible and Job 28 is about mining. It’s about going down into the ground so deep where no eye has ever seen and coming up with the mine and the gold and the silver and the richness there.

It’s not new. Don’t kid yourself. Man isn’t getting better; he’s getting worse as he declines from the fall. And there was a level of human genius in those early periods that would even exceed us greatly. It’s all for you, every bit of it is for you, every bit of it. Enjoy it. Use it, be enriched by it. Delight in it.

Now, in the delighting you glorify God, you thank God, and out of gratitude you obey God and you have the hope of heaven. That’s what He asks. And that does a check on the heart, doesn’t it, and keeps you from self-indulgence and proud parading of your wealth. But it lets you enjoy the comforts with a thankful heart.

And there’s one other very important issue to God. Turn to Deuteronomy chapter 14, Deuteronomy 14, verse 22. By the way, these people who are worried about things going extinct, you know, we don’t want to eat any more of these deals because there won’t be any left. Listen. Very soon there won’t be any of anything left. And extinction is not an issue to God.

We’re not here to preserve those life forms; we’re here to use them. We’re not here to preserve the resources; we’re here to use them. And we don’t want to abuse them. There’s no place for trashing the world, but in a wise way they are here for us for this brief period of time to be used up.

Look at verse 22, “You shall surely tithe,” that’s a tenth, that simply means a tenth, “of all the produce from what you sow which comes out of the field every year.” There are going to be people who are going to have fields. They’re going to be landowners, people who possess estates and fields and



they're called on here to give a tenth. "And you shall eat in the presence of the Lord your God at the place where He chooses to establish His name, the tithe of your grain, your new wine, your oil, your firstborn of your herd, your flock, in order that you may learn to fear the Lord your God always."

They had to give every year a tenth of everything that they produced. They had to take it to Jerusalem for the great festivals and they had to share it. They had to share it with all the rest of the people who didn't have what they had. In other words, it was a ten percent of those great products and yields of the earth that came to those who possessed land and crops and animals, had to be shared with those who didn't in the great national festivals which built national unity and which allowed for this very important camaraderie and also the sacrificial system and all the things that occurred at those great events.

Verse 24 adds, "If the distance is so great for you that you're not able to bring the tithe," in other words, you can't haul all the stuff down there because you're too far away from Jerusalem, "since the place where the Lord your God chooses to set His name is too far away from you when the Lord your God blesses you, then you'll exchange it for money." In other words, you have to sell all of this, get the cash, bring the cash in your hand and go to the place where the Lord your God chooses. Remember, the Lord...worshiping the Lord had occurred in a number of places, finally settled in Jerusalem.

"Then when you get there, you can spend the money for whatever your heart desires. You can get oxen, or sheep, or wine, or strong drink, whatever your heart desires. And eat in the presence of the Lord your God and rejoice, you and your household, and you shall not neglect the Levite who is in your town for he has no portion or inheritance among you." So what you do is, you celebrate, you eat all this great thing at the feast, and you share with the Levite because he is dependent on...on your sharing since he has no portion or inheritance of his own.

And then at the end of every third year, "You bring out all this tithe of your produce and deposit it in your town. And the Levite because he has no portion or inheritance among you, and the alien," a stranger, "the orphan, the widow who are in your town, shall come and eat and be satisfied in order that the Lord your God may bless you in all the work your hand sets to do." So again, you're sharing with the Levite, you're sharing with the poor. This introduces the idea that we are to make sure, as we receive the riches this world brings, that we share generously.

First Timothy 6 says, "You tell those that are rich in this present age," nothing wrong with their richness but that they share, "that they share generously," sharing generously. And that, again, is the same spirit here in the tithe of the Old Testament. You take a portion of it and you share it.

Also, there was a gleaning that the poor were allowed to do in the corners of the field which couldn't be harvested, and if you dropped some of the crop off your wagon and you couldn't pick it up, the

poor would come in and pick it up later. There were ways in which the wealthy were to share that were prescribed, and then they, from their own hearts, were to be as generous as God would have them be as well.

Now go back to Deuteronomy chapter 8 for a moment, and I want to pick up down in verse 7 of Deuteronomy 8. “For the Lord your God is bringing you into a good land, a land of brooks of water, of fountains and springs flowing forth in valleys and hills, a land of wheat and barley, of vines and fig trees and pomegranates, a land of olive oil and honey.” That’s just amazing to me. When God made the earth He made it loaded with resources, and when He chose a land for His people Israel He picked the best piece of real estate on the globe. That’s the heart of God.

He gave them immense riches and natural resources, a good land, brooks of water, fountains, springs, valleys, hills, wheat, barley, vines, fig trees, pomegranates, olive oil, honey. A land, verse 9, “Where you shall eat food without scarcity.” That’s the heart of God. “In which you shall not lack anything, a land whose stones are iron and out of whose hills you can dig copper.” They were already into getting iron out of the ground and digging copper out of the hills and using those things for all kinds of purposes.

“When you have eaten and are satisfied, you shall bless the Lord your God for the good land which He has given you.” There, again, you go back to the issue. God wants you take all the wealth that He has put into this earth, draw it all out, extract it, delight in it, rejoice in it and in the rejoicing give Him thanks so that the heart attitude is one of worship, adoration and praise toward God. That’s a...that’s a...that’s a spiritual approach to the material world.

And then in verse 11, this is very important. “Beware lest you forget the Lord your God by not keeping His commandments and His ordinances and His statutes which I’m commanding you today.” That’s the concern of God. He’s not concerned with how wealthy are you; He’s concerned with how well you glorify Him and remember to obey Him.

And if out of all the goodness that He has given you your heart is grateful toward Him, that gratitude shows up in obedience then He is well pleased. His...His warning here is, “Lest – “ verse 12 “ - when you have eaten and are satisfied and have built good houses and lived in them.”

Nothing wrong with having a good house, nothing wrong with having a comfortable house, nothing wrong with living in it, nothing wrong with having herds and flocks and multiplying them. Verse 13, “Your silver and gold multiply and all that you have multiplies.” And the only reason it can do that is because it’s here, right? God has made it all. He’s put it all here.

If He wanted us all to live like communists at the lowest possible level, or if He wanted us all to live like the utterly pagan and godless poor of India, who, in turning away from God have stripped their

lives bare of all of His riches, if He wanted us to live like that He could have created a planet that was a little more than the moon, but He didn't, but He didn't.

So you have your houses and your herds and your flocks and your silver and your gold. The issue is, "when your heart becomes proud - " verse 14 " - and you forget the Lord your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery." That's the issue.

"He led you through the great and terrible wilderness with its fiery serpents and scorpions and thirsty ground where there was no water. He brought water for you out of the rock of flint. In the wilderness He fed you manna which your fathers didn't know that He might humble you and that He might test you to do good for you in the end." That's always His heart.

Otherwise, if you forget God, you're going to say, "My power and the strength of my hand made me this wealth." God doesn't want you poor. God is happy to spread the wealth as long as you know who gave it to you, as long as you thank Him and praise Him and honor Him and glorify Him. And in the delighting and the joy of it comes obedience. And as long as you're willing to share it generously.

Verse 18, "You shall remember the Lord your God, it is He who is giving you power to make wealth that He may confirm His covenant which He swore to your fathers as it is this day, and it shall come about that if you ever forget the Lord your God and go after other gods and serve them and worship them, I testify against you today, you shall surely perish. Like the nations that the Lord makes to perish before you, so you shall perish because you wouldn't listen to the voice of the Lord your God." And again we're right back to the same principle, wealth, possessions; money becomes an index of your spiritual character, doesn't it?

If you have a right approach to it, delighting in it, thanking God for it, God is pleased. God is pleased. What a wonderful world He's given us. And even those of us who are perhaps on the bottom end as opposed to the top end of wealth are the beneficiaries of the tremendous richness of the earth.

We might not have as much as the wealthy. We may not be as capable mentally and intellectually. We can't invent things. We can't all build great corporations. We aren't all educational geniuses. We aren't all great scientists who can invent things. We aren't great engineers who can invent a cotton gin or whatever. We can't create the imaginations that cause all the great products that we enjoy.

We don't know how to dig into the earth and bring up stuff and how to create the things. But we enjoy them. We enjoy the beauty of them, and we enjoy, to some degree, the comfort of them. And, beloved, let me tell you, that is the genius of a free enterprise approach to life which I believe is God's intended approach. He hasn't made us all equal. He's made us all unique. And some of His marvelous human creations have had the capacities to do those kinds of things that cause all of us to be enriched, all of us.

Whether it's musical genius, whether it's electronic genius, whether it's engineering genius, whether it's corporate genius, whether it's an invention of this or that, in some ways we can all benefit from those rich things. And why begrudge the rich who have more than we have that's ever so brief anyway? And it's God's gracious way of saying to mankind, "I want you to enjoy the richness of life." We'll all have our true riches in eternity to come. But if we have them here, to whatever degree we have them, and we thank God for them, and we delight in them, and see them as good gifts from Him, He's pleased. It's the heart attitude that is the issue.

To demonstrate that even further, turn over the prophet Amos, Amos chapter 5. This is quite an interesting prophecy. You might want to spend a little more time studying it. But in Amos chapter 5, I want to take you down to verse 11. The prophet is predicting the day of the Lord, the coming judgment of God.

He's predicting that judgment to come on the nations surrounding Israel and even on Israel. And down in chapter 5, verse 11, we get a very important component in their conduct that created this situation of imminent judgment. "Because you impose heavy rent on the poor and exact a tribute of grain from them."

In other words, instead of being generous and kind and gracious and sharing, sacrificially, with those in need, instead of giving, they had done the opposite, they had imposed heavy rent on the poor, making themselves far more rich than they needed to be, and the poor poorer than they needed to be, and they exacted from them a tribute of grain. They put a tax on them, imposed a tax on them, an arbitrary tax and took even more of their food away. Then further in verse 11, "Though you have built houses of well-hewn stone, yet you will not live in them; you have planted pleasant vineyards, yet you will not drink their wine."

Nothing wrong with a stone home, nothing wrong with a vineyard. But verse 12, "I know your transgressions are many, your sins are great, you who distress the righteous and accept bribes and turn aside the poor in the gate." That is always the issue. God doesn't begrudge you the beauty of the home. God designed symmetry. God is behind architecture.

God is behind textures and all the fine and beautiful and magnificent things that make up the forms of beauty in which we live and which we enjoy. It's not that. It's how you handle it and how you feel about it and your attitude toward it. If it is one of thanksgiving and praise and delight and joy in God's goodness and provision, and one of generosity, then God is pleased.

Now go back to chapter 3. This is very strong language, chapter 3 of Amos. Verse 14 talks about punishment and verse 15 then gets specific, "I will also smite the winter house together with the summer house." Now, some of you have two houses. You have a winter house and a summerhouse.

Nothing wrong with that. Nothing wrong with having a, you know, a summerhouse at the beach or a winter house in the mountains, and that's not a problem. God assumes that that is a reality for many folks, and it is across the world.

Even interestingly enough in my last visit to Minsk in Belarus, there are summerhouses that even those people systematically and kind of patiently build through the years to get them out of the busyness of the city during the summer. That's not a problem. People have winter houses and summerhouses.

And here's another little twist on a house, "The houses of ivory." Now I've never seen an ivory house, most of my life I've been told that you shouldn't be taking that ivory. Elephants are eternal and we don't want to be messing with them. But in ancient times, I guess, they didn't feel that way, and they actually had houses of ivory. It doesn't mean the house was made out of ivory; it just means it had ivory in it.

Maybe they had ivory pillars or carvings. Nothing wrong with that. I mean, that's a magnificent beautiful things. I'm sure craftsmen took the ivory and carved with the genius that only mankind can bring. You never saw a tusk carved by an elephant. It has to be a man to do that or a woman. And they put that beauty in the house.

And then some people had great houses. Some people, I can imagine, had a 6000, 8000, 10,000, who knows what, square-foot house, had summerhouses, winter houses, houses with rich accoutrements, great houses. I'm going to just smash them all. Why? Why? Not because you possess the house. Chapter 4, verse 1, this is interesting, "Hear this word, you cows of Bashan." Now that's pretty strong language to refer to the women, but that is exactly what the prophet is doing.

This would be politically incorrect. But Amos calls the women "Cows of Bashan who are on the mountain of Samaria." And here is the indictment, "Who oppress," by the way, it's the women who are behind all these fancy houses; I mean, men, you know, they don't really get into that too much. And so the women, at least in those ancient times, are the ones who were into these things, and I think that's somewhat typical. A woman has a touch for the beauty and all of that, whereas the men tend to be a bit more functional. But these women had gotten carried away, not so much in their houses as having turned their hearts against the poor.

He says they oppress the poor, they crush the needy. And by the way, they were in charge of their husbands, "Who say to your husbands, 'Bring now that we may drink.'" Charlie, we're ready to be served. I mean, they're running the show. They're building the houses. They're doing their thing. And these cows of Bashan oppress the poor, crush the needy. That's the issue. That is the issue. The Lord God has sworn by His holiness, "Behold, the days are coming upon you when they will take you away with meat hooks," that's what you use for a cow, meat hooks. "And the last of you with fish

hooks. And you'll go out through breaches in the walls."

In other words, your houses are going to get smashed. Judgment. The judgment is because of the calculated willful oppression of the poor, not because of what they had but because of what they wouldn't do for the poor because their heart attitude was so desperately wrong.

Go to chapter 6 of Amos. Chapter 6 in verse 4. Now we'll go inside and get a little further definition of the ivory houses. Verse 4, "Those who recline on beds of ivory." Pretty nice digs. "And sprawl on their couches and eat lambs from the flock." Lamb, the best of sheep meat. "And calves, veal, in the midst of the stall."

So I mean the best food, the best couches, the best beds. And not only that, they have ancient Hebrew stereo systems, "Who improvise to the sound of the harp." And they even have private musicians who compose songs for them, and who drink wine from sacrificial bowls while they anoint themselves with the finest of oils. I mean, they got the whole...they got the deal, the makeup, the oils, the whole nine yards. I mean, they're just really wealthy, they're living the life.

And here's the indictment, the end of verse 6, "Yet they have not grieved over the ruin of Joseph." See, that's the indictment. God is not indicting them for the sweet-smelling oil. Why the woman, right, in Song of Solomon was anointed with that and that was a wonderful thing. I mean fragrances, God made those and oils and soothing creams and all the fine beds and nice couches and good meat and beautiful music and everything. But you haven't grieved over the fact that the rest of the people are in a disastrous situation and you have no compassion. That's the issue. You have no compassion.

"Therefore they'll go now into exile at the head of the exiles." When the captivity comes and the exile goes, these cows are going right out in front into exile. "And the sprawlers' banqueting will pass away." No more lying around having your fancy banquets. Nothing wrong with a banquet. Hey, how many parables did Jesus tell and in the parable He talked about a feast? Nothing wrong with that.

I mean, I think if your heart is right you can take your wife out on that special evening when you go to someplace and eat that special kind of food with all the wonderful tastes that are available in God's creation, if your heart is right and filled with thanksgiving and if you're willing to share and you're generous, that's part of the richness of what God has provided in this little brief period of time in which we live in this world and we get a glimpse of the kindness and the tenderness and the compassion and the generosity of God toward us which is a foretaste of heaven.

You know, righteousness...righteousness is not a...it is not a matter of scraping away luxuries endlessly until you reach the core of necessities at the bottom. To such scraping there could be no end, I suppose. Righteousness is how you feel about it and how you feel toward God about it. You don't worship it, you thank Him for it, and how you feel about others you would share it generously,

generously.

And, obviously, as I said last time, you don't have to have a \$250,000.00 lifestyle because you have a \$250,000.00. You want to be careful not to offend others, right? Romans 14 and 15, you want to be sensitive to that within reason. But you also, at the same time, want to thank God for the richness of what He's given you in this brief temporal life that you lived in.

We are not called into poverty. I hear sometimes people say, "Well, you know, Jesus was...Jesus was absolutely poor." In fact, I've seen writers that said, "Jesus was homeless. You know, He grew up with the absolute poor and was homeless." Well, that's not right. Jesus stayed with His friends. That's different.

But you need to understand something else. Jesus was not raised in poverty. When God incarnate came into the world He didn't come into a poor family. Okay? That's very important to remember. The strata of social economic life in Israel, Palestine, would be something like this. On the bottom were the poor and Jesus said you'll always have them with you.

Why? Because they have limitations. Sometimes they have physical limitations, sometimes they have mental limitations, sometimes they have circumstantial limitations because of where they are, but they're always going to be there. I don't know if you realize it, but the average IQ is under 100. That's part of God's design. It's part of the effect of sin.

But there are always going to be people who aren't able to produce high, aren't able to generate all kinds of things, and are not going to be able to live the kind of life that certain other people are going to live. Those people must be the object of our love, our affection, our care and our generosity at all times so they, too, can enjoy the richness and the comforts of life. And God is pleased when we do that. But they're always going to be there.

Then there was, as there always is, generally, there was an upper end of wealthy people. They were the landowners and they were the rulers and they were the people who were in power and authority. But in the middle was a rather significant middle class, usually defined by students of Scripture as craftsmen. They were the farmers and they were the toolmakers and instrument makers and they were the artisans. They made the pottery and they were the ones who were the builders. And that's the family that Jesus was born into.

He was born into a middle-class family. His father was a...was a construction worker. His father was a builder; he had his own construction business. We usually translate it carpenter, but the actual Greek word is builder. It can be used for a brick mason, or one who uses wood. Joseph was a builder. He had his own business. He was his own business owner. He had a number of children after Jesus. You remember, quite a number and, certainly, must have made a living well enough to support

them. They lived in a town called Nazareth. They were not in poverty. Jesus had a home and they had a place there to operate his business.

And historians tell us around that time that construction was flourishing in that part of the world due to the Roman expansion. And because that part, particularly Galilee, known as Galilee of the Gentiles, had an influx of Gentile people because it was a trade route, east and west, and north and south, and it was flourishing, building. And it's very likely that Joseph would have been an excellent carpenter and we know His Son Jesus would have been the best who ever was. And no doubt they had built a successful business and may have been very active.

And, in fact, when Joseph died, Jesus as the firstborn son would have inherited the family business. So He didn't come into the world as a poor, homeless individual. It was when He began His itinerant ministry and moved away from His home and began to travel and spend His whole life traveling and ministering, that at that point He had to depend upon the love and care of others for His place to stay and for His resources. Very little different, I would say, than a missionary or a traveling evangelist throughout the history of the church as dependent on the food and the shelter of families who cared about His ministry, not to conclude that He was absolutely poverty stricken.

So it's wrong to assume that about Jesus. He came in at a level of moderation, but certainly at a level where His little family enjoyed some of the comforts of life in that time. And certainly the Galilee provides some lovely, lovely accoutrements to life. Those of you who have been there would know that. Tremendous food resources there, beautiful scenery there, great water supply and all kinds of riches provided in that place. And that's the kind of environment our Lord came into. And I think there's a certain testimony to the intention of God in putting Christ in that...that middle ground where He could speak wisely and thoughtfully to the wealthy and where He could also comfort the poor because He was close to both.

We're not called to poverty. We are called to tap all of the great resources of this rich earth, to delight in all that it yields and to give God all the praise and all the glory and all the thanks, and to make sure that our hearts are right toward Him. And we never love the riches, we never flaunt the riches, we're never proud about them, but we enjoy them and we express our gratitude to Him for all the delight they bring to our hearts. At the same time, we are eager and anxious to make sure that those around us who on their own can't have those joys can receive them at our hand because we are willing to share.

So, enough of that. If we had time this morning...and we don't...we could read through Proverbs. There are a myriad of things in Proverbs that talk about wealth, and not necessarily in an evil sense at all. In fact, it says that you're going to be poor if you're not willing to work, or if you're lazy. But if you work hard and if you're industrious, you're going to attain wealth. That's not wrong. Material gain is a part of God's design for those who are diligent and who take advantage of their opportunities.



Now, all of that simply to answer the question...Do we have a right to acquire wealth? Answer: God has just filled this planet with wealth and there's nobody to acquire it but us. It's temporary. It's going to go away. It has no lasting value. It is here for our sheer enjoyment, so enjoy it, enjoy it with the right heart attitude. That's all God asks, toward Him, toward yourself and toward those who don't have what you have.

Now all of that leads us to how do we get this wealth. We have a right to it. How do we get it? Let me give you two quick responses to that. One, through gifts. That's a biblical way. The Bible says we can receive an inheritance or gifts. In fact, it's better to give than receive. Philippians 4, Paul says he received gifts from the Philippians for his ministry for which he was extremely grateful. He was, as we shall see, collecting money from the saints in the Gentile world to take back to the poor saints, to give as a gift to the saints in Jerusalem.

It's perfectly legitimate. If your old aunt dies and leaves you an inheritance, that's a very legitimate way to get money. If somebody gives you a gift, somebody is kind enough to give you something, that is a wonderful way for you to acquire treasures. My house is full of treasures, I confess to you. And one of the things that people give me is pictures. I don't hang all of them, but some of them I hang. Some of them are magnificent.

Some artist who paints some of the most beautiful paintings in our country, some well known are thankful for our ministry and they give me their pictures, and we hang them in our home and the beauty of those is wonderful. The people in Canada, on the last night after I preached said, "We want you not to forget our love to you," and so they pulled this drape back and they gave me a beautiful picture to take home to my family as a reminder.

I have a magnificent seascape in my house painted by one of the most outstanding seascape artists. I don't know how much this oil painting is worth. But he said to me one day, "Your ministry has touched my life, stop by my gallery, pick whatever you want and take it home. It's my love gift to you." Now I could say, "Oh I don't want to take it, I don't want to take it, I'm humbling going to turn you down." It's more blessed for him to give than receive and I want to give him that blessing, and it's enriched my home and made me grateful to God for the ministry in his life. Those are gifts, we all understand that. That's part of what God has designed to enrich us.

Secondly, investments. You say, "Investments. Are you kidding?" No, no, Matthew...would I kid you? Matthew 25:27. I might at the beginning of my sermon but not at the end. Matthew 25:27, it's getting serious now. Matthew 25:27, Jesus looks at an unfaithful servant, verse 27, and He says to him, "You ought to have put My money in the bank and on my arrival I would have received My money back with interest." You can get...you can acquire wealth through gifts and through investments.

Jesus saw the value of letting your money earn money. Wisely invest your money. Jesus advocates that. You should have put the money in the bank so you could earn interest. Nothing wrong with that. That's not a high-risk gambling thing that He's talking about, but you can put funds in a wise investment. There's risk. There's risk in everything in the world that you do because the whole world is on the brink of risk and the judgment of God. But in the best wisdom that you can bring to bear upon the situation, make wise investments. That's a very good way to increase your wealth.

The assumption of that is...listen carefully. The assumption of it is you have some money you don't need to live on, right? Otherwise you can't invest it. And the assumption then is you can invest money you don't need to live on and you can get even more money you don't need to live on right now. You say, "You mean God wants us to have more than we need?" Yes.

You say, "Why?" So we can rejoice and delight and thank Him and praise Him and have money available to use in the areas where it is needed. Certainly. And even so that we can provide for our children. We'll get into all of that. Well, so you can receive gifts and you can make a good investment. But there are three primary ways you are to acquire money and I'm going to give them to you next week. I'm just going to say this, don't quit your job because one of them is work. So hang on till next week. Let's pray.

Father, it's so good for us to understand Your heart, Your great generosity, Your great goodness and kindness to all of us in this rich world that You've given to us. Every taste should be a sheer delight and a source of thanks. Every beautiful flower as those are before us this morning should be a cause for our joy. Every sweet fragrance, every fabric, every lovely house, every...just every good thing. Every beautiful strain of music issued out of an instrument, played over a radio, all those things have just made life so rich.

And, Lord, we want to be rich toward You. We want to enjoy these things but we don't want to love them, we don't want to have them captivate our hearts. We don't want them to take the place You take. We just want them to remind us that You have the first place and to thank You, and to praise You and to know that they are a little taste of heaven and a little taste of Your goodness, and we want to be eager to share them with those who, apart from our generosity, couldn't have them for their own. Thank You, Lord, for the richness. Thank You, and may our hearts be right toward You. In Your Son's name we pray. Amen.

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