

“Investment Decisions”

A sermon by Rev. Jim Bell

Duke Memorial United Methodist Church  
Durham, NC

10:55 a.m. Sunday, October 2, 2005

Text: Malachi 3:6-12      Luke 12:32-34      NRSV

Opening prayer: O God, open our hearts and minds to your truth today, so that we may respond with joyful obedience. In Christ’s name, we pray. Amen.

David Livingstone was a missionary from Scotland to the continent of Africa during the nineteenth century. The body of David Livingstone was buried in Scotland where he was born, but his heart was buried in the Africa he loved. At the foot of a tall tree in a small African village, the natives dug a hole and placed in it the heart of this man they loved and respected. If your heart were to be buried in the place you loved most during your life, where would it be? In your pocketbook? In an appropriate space down at the office? In your home? In Cameron Indoor Stadium? Where is your heart?

Jesus told his disciples, “Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” (Luke 12:34) When we make a significant investment in something, our heart is invested in it also. David Livingstone made a significant investment in the people of Africa. His heart was invested there. If we are concerned about heavenly things, about the purposes and will of God, then we will invest our treasure in God’s work in the world. Our treasure and our heart are interconnected.

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Our annual stewardship Sunday is coming next week. As we prepare for that important spiritual decision, each of us will be reflecting on the question, “What is God calling me to give as a percentage of my income?” This is a personal, spiritual question. It is also an investment decision. What is God calling me to invest in the ministry of Duke Memorial United Methodist

Church?

I read recently about some special-order offering plates that we could buy for our church. They are called Hallelujah Offering Plates. If you put \$20 in the offering plate, it plays the “Hallelujah Chorus.” If you put in \$10, it rings a bell. If you don’t put in anything, it takes your picture!”

So often we look for gimmicks to raise money for the mission and ministry of the church. What we need is education as followers or potential followers of Jesus Christ.

A couple of thousand years ago, the prophet Malachi was angry with the Hebrew people. He was so upset because the Hebrew people said that they loved God, but they did not show it. That love was not reflected in their tithes and offerings. Malachi proclaimed, “Will anyone rob God? Yet you are robbing me! But you say, ‘How are we robbing you?’ In your tithes and offerings! You are cursed with a curse, for you are robbing me – the whole nation of you! Bring the full tithe into the storehouse, so that there may be food in my house.” (Malachi 3:8-10) The people professed one thing and did another.

It reminds me of a husband who gets his paycheck and buys a \$1,000 suit and a \$200 pair of shoes. He eats dinner at one of the finest restaurants. He attends a professional football game. Then he stops by a rummage sale and buys his wife a second-hand dress which he was able to purchase for \$3.97. All the way home he sings, “I love my Mary Jane. I love my Mary Jane. I really do. Yes, I do. I do.”

Do you think he loves her?

In his stern rebuke of the Hebrew people, the prophet Malachi also has words of hope. He says that obedience to God will result in blessing. He said, “Bring the full tithe into the storehouse . . . and thus put me to the test, says the Lord of hosts; see if I will not open the windows of heaven for you and pour down for you an overflowing blessing.” (3:10) When we obey God, we are blessed.

Jesus summed up the spiritual connection between money and God this way: “Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.” (Luke 12:34)

This is what John Wesley meant when he said that if people were more alive to God, they would be more generous. Each of us makes one of two choices in life. We either become emotionally attached to our money, or we become emotionally attached to the God who gives us our money. Biblical stewardship helps us to overcome the temptation to put the false idol of money first in our lives, ahead of God who has revealed his love for us in Jesus Christ.

Whether we have a lot of money or a little money, we can still be biblical stewards. J. L. Kraft was the head of Kraft Cheese Corporation. He gave approximately 25% of his enormous income to Christian causes for many years. He once said, “The only investment I ever made which has paid consistently increasing dividends is the money I have given to the Lord.”

John D. Rockefeller reported, “I never would have been able to tithe the first million dollars I ever made if I had not tithed my first salary, which was \$1.50 per week.”

Biblical stewardship is a growing process. You start somewhere, even if it is just 2 or 3% of your income, and you grow.

Let us examine this statement of Jesus once again. “Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” Eugene Grimm in his book, *Generous People*, writes, “Some people cannot grow spiritually until they decide to give.” It is when they make a commitment to tithe or to give in proportion to their income, that their heart becomes committed to the Lord. Stewardship is a very tangible spiritual discipline. Placing your tithe or offering in the offering plate is a very concrete, specific act.

Here is how I think our heart becomes connected with our treasure. When our son, Andy, was six months old, Melody and I began saving for his college education. We love him very much. We wanted him to have the chance to attend college, so we began investing part of our salaries in a college fund. We did the same thing for Sarah. As we invested sacrificially in this college fund each year, our heart became more committed to Andy and Sarah. We loved them, so we invested in them. As we invested in them, we loved them more.

Jesus is right. Our heart and our treasure are all interconnected. If we say that we love God and don't invest significantly in God's work in the world, we are fooling ourselves. If we

say that we love our wife, and we purchase a \$1,000 suit for ourselves and purchase her a dress for \$3.97, we are fooling ourselves. “Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”

When I consider how much I have invested financially in United Methodist churches during the past 30 years, I realize that my heart is in the ministry of the church. I believe that there is no more important mission on earth than the mission of the church – to help people develop a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. When that happens, they can experience an abundant life of joy, peace, and hope on this earth, and when they die, they can experience eternal life with God in heaven. Those people develop a community where people experience love and encounter hope and serve God and others. I am committed to that mission, with my heart and with my treasure.

What about you?

As we prepare for Consecration Sunday next week, I invite you to prayerfully consider these questions: Where is my treasure? -- knowing that your heart is connected to your treasure. And . . . What part of my treasure is God calling me to invest in the ministry of Duke Memorial United Methodist Church next year?