

Title: Giving – the opportunity to be part of God’s great plan  
2Cor 8:1-9, 13-15

Material wealth has been a subject of much discussion. How is a Christian to deal with material wealth? Some churches say that “being wealthy” is a sign that God has blessed you. They call this the “prosperity gospel.” Now don’t get me wrong... I want to own a Tesla just as much as the next guy... But the equating “earthly wealth” with “being a Christian” is a dangerous way of looking at wealth. Scripture tells us that “the love of money” is the root of all evil. Putting your trust in material wealth is dangerous because it blinds you to eternal treasures. To see material blessings as a sign of God’s favor is literally “the love of money.” Scripture tells us not to trust it. Do not trust in the things of this world. In fact, I am reminded about those first century martyrs, who suffered in the name of God, who lived in poverty before losing their very life. Was their lack of wealth a sign of God’s displeasure? I think not. The reality of earthly wealth is this. Each person has been given by God some amount of wealth to use to serve His Kingdom. Some have lots. Some have only a little. But all wealth comes from God.

Far more important than, “how much money you have” is “how do you use the money you have?” The reason this is important is because “How you use your wealth” becomes a witness. It tells the world, where your faith is, where do you put your trust for security and safety here on earth. As a witness it doesn’t matter how much you have. As a witness it is the sharing of the message of faith which is important. Christians with abundant wealth and those without, can both be a witness to the world. I have a story from the internet.

A rich man was dying,.... He wanted to be buried with his money. They say “you can’t take it with you.” Well... he wanted to take it with him. The problem was that he didn’t know who he could trust to do all that he asked. So he called his priest, his doctor and his lawyer. He told them "Here is \$300K, in cash, to be held by each of you. I trust you to put this in my coffin when I die, so I can take all my money with me." The following month, the rich man died. At the funeral, when it was time to give the rich man’s money back to him, the priest, the doctor and the lawyer each put an envelope in the coffin. After the funeral, as they were riding away in the limousine, the priest suddenly breaks into tears and confesses, "I only put \$20,000 into the envelope because I needed the rest to repair the roof of the church." "Well, since we're confessing," the doctor said, "I only put \$10,000 in the envelope because we needed a new X-ray machine for the pediatrics

ward at the hospital The lawyer looked at them aghast. "I'm ashamed of both of you," "I want it known that when I put my envelope in that coffin, I enclosed a check for the full \$300K."

While this is a joke, I use it to illustrate something. Three men who were supposed to be trustworthy found a way to swindle the dying rich man out of his money. Ultimately, they were able to do this because each had found a way to forget found a way to ignore "whom the money really belonged to." Each thought that because they had possession of the money, the money was theirs to use as they please. What they forgot was that, they were each called to be a steward. Each was to be a steward of the rich man's wealth. Each was to manage the rich man's wealth. The money was not theirs. They were NOT to use the resources entrusted to them for their own personal gain. It is the job of the steward to use the resources in accordance with the wishes of the owner.

With regard to wealth, the Christian knows ultimately it comes from God, and it has been given to use to serve others. He is the owner. We are the stewards. Some stewards have been given lots. Some stewards have been given little. As it turns out, the amount matters not. What matters is "How you use the money you have been given?" As stewards, the resources which God has given us in this life, belong to him and are to be used according to his desires. And the owner, God, wants us to use this wealth as a witness to the world.

Our scripture lesson from 2Cor 8 talks about how to view material wealth, and using it to serve others. According to Paul, material wealth was simply an opportunity and privilege to be used in God's work of sharing the Gospel. It is an opportunity to be a witness to the world about Jesus Christ. First a little background. The church in Jerusalem had fallen into extreme poverty, so Paul set up a collection to help. Paul uses the example of the Macedonian church as a model for churches to imitate. 2Cor 8:2 <sup>2</sup> Out of the most severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity. <sup>3</sup> For I testify that they gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability. Entirely on their own, they urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of sharing in this service to the saints. "Pleaded with him for the privilege of sharing in this service." "Pleaded with him for the privilege of being used by God." That's how the Macedonian church saw material wealth. Material wealth was to be shared with all, as a witness of their faith. They had such an appreciation of the eternal treasures God had given them, that it was a privilege to be able to give witness by the sharing of Earthly wealth. This is how a good steward sees the riches entrusted to him.

One of the things I find is that poor stewards act selfishly. The reason is that a poor steward sees the riches entrusted to them as “belonging to them.” They believe they are to use it for their own good. This is a very earthly point of view. Such an earthly attitude opens one to use God’s money in Earthly ways. On Earth there are limited resources. There is not enough to go around. Because of that we have to fight for our share. Because we have to fight for our share we will act selfishly. When the treasures we seek are easily lost, we will fight to protect our share. Scripture says this is precisely why the people of this world are selfish. The treasures of this world are easily lost. Or as scripture puts it “They [are] things that do not last, where thieves may steal or moths and rust destroy.” Because the things of this Earth are so easily lost, stolen or broken, we must selfishly hoard them. Those who treasure things of this Earth, do so because they are blind to heavenly treasures. This is the bad steward. They will not use their resources for the good of all, but will selfishly guard it.

To illustrate this.... I see homeless people standing on the corners or wandering around with shopping carts... shopping carts filled with junk. I am told that many of them have psychological problems that make them unfit to join society. For this reason, they wander the streets. Now all they have all their worldly possessions are in their shopping carts... This is all they have... Because of that, their shopping carts become precious to them. I’ve been told that many times people come by and try to save them by bringing them to a shelter. But because the homeless person does not trust you.... they would rather stay by the junk that they have so painstakingly collected... their treasure. because they do not realize or do not believe in the greater treasure that you offer. So they stay with their “treasure” and remain homeless. They are blind to the greater gift, the greater treasures.

This is precisely what a bad steward does. They are putting their faith in worldly things. Putting faith in worldly things is like being a homeless person who has collected junk in their shopping cart, and being totally unaware of a greater gift being offered. Before we had faith in Christ, our sinfulness, like the homeless person’s schizophrenia, blinded us to God and his kingdom. Sin instead forced us to value only the things of this world. Sin forced us to put our heart in “things that do not last, where thieves may steal or moths and rust destroy.”

But the Gospel calls us to see things in a different way. The Gospel calls us to seek after different things. Because of Jesus, we are part of a family. Our father in heaven has promised to provide for all our needs. Jesus has said we are to ask for

anything we need. Because of Jesus, we are aware of the eternal riches which have been promised us.

And what are these eternal riches? God has promised that nothing we suffer here on earth will be comparable with the glory we will experience in heaven. God has promised that whatever injustice we have experienced here on earth, it will be made right again. Because of Jesus, we live in abundance. We live in abundance because, through faith we now see the eternal wealth given to us. through faith we now see God love us. God has a plan of good for us. God is almighty and can do all things. Poor in earthly wealth, or rich in earthly wealth, we ALL live in abundance. This is the attitude of the Good Steward. That recognition of abundance becomes our witness to the world. That recognition of abundance is what fuels our ability to use our resources for the good of others. We share because we live in abundance. Augustine of Hippo, one of the Early church fathers, once said, "God is more anxious to bestow his blessings on us than we are to receive them." When your treasure is in heavenly things, when your treasure is in eternal things there is no fear of loss. There is only abundance because it is God who supplies you. This is the true prosperity which the Gospel brings. Share the good news with the world in word and in action. May this be your witness.