

Entrusted: Stewarding Wealth (Genesis 1:27-31a; Deuteronomy 8:7-18)

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This is our next-to-last message in the Entrusted series. We've been focusing on how God has entrusted us with everything – and I mean EVERYTHING we have in this world, and how we are to use it for God's kingdom and purpose. We've talked about being good stewards of our vocations, of creation, and last week we talked in general terms about our various "gifts."

Today we're going to focus on something very personal for all of us: our money/wealth. Probably more than any other people group in the world, money is what drives us as Americans. It is literally the "bottom line" for us.

- Pew Research study published Oct. 20, 2022:
"As has been the case all year, the economy is clearly the top issue for voters; fully **79%** say it will be very important to their voting decisions – the highest share among 18 issues included on the survey."

Money is a part of all of our lives. And because it is a part of life, it is something that we must relate to our faith... to our lives in Christ.

- "Sixteen of the thirty-eight parables of Jesus deal with money. One out of ten verses in the New Testament deals with that subject. Scripture offers about five hundred verses on prayer, fewer than five hundred on faith, and over two thousand on money. The believer's attitude toward money and possessions is determinative." - John MacArthur

The late Billy Graham put the importance of money in our lives in perspective by saying this:

- "If a person gets his attitude toward money straight, it will help straighten out almost every other area in his life." - Billy Graham

That leads us to the first passage of scripture we'll consider together today, Genesis 1:27-31a...

Genesis 1:27-31a

27 So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. 28 God blessed them, and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth."

29 God said, "See, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit; you shall have them for food. 30 And to every beast of the earth, and to every bird of the air, and to everything that creeps on the earth, everything that has the breath of life, I have given every green plant for food." And it was so.

31 God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good.

This passage – the Creation story – puts everything in perspective about what our Creator expects from us when it comes to our resources: We are entrusted to remember three things...

1. We are given DOMINION over what God has created (v. 28); God has entrusted the things of this world to us. So, we know that we've given some power, some control – for good or for bad.
2. God has GIVEN the things of this world to us to provide for us and our needs (v. 29-30); In these verses, specifically referring to some of the things given to use for food. But as we were reminded of last week, these things that God provides for us aren't just for our own benefit... they're not for our benefit, but for the benefit of the Master... for the benefit of the Creator.
3. God's creation is VERY GOOD (v. 31). Unfortunately, sin entered into the world and is a part of our lives, so what created as "very good" is now often tarnished and scared. But that doesn't change the fact that what God created is good – especially when it is used as God intended for it to be used.

When we first started this sermon series on Oct. 16, I asked the question: Is what you have really yours, or is it actually God's that God has entrusted to you to use for God's kingdom and purpose? We often have a tough time keeping that in mind, but – if we are serious about living our lives as followers of Jesus – then it's how we're called to live. The resources that I've been entrusted with – including whatever money I possess – is really God's. I'm just the steward or the caretaker of it while I walk and breath in this world.

So that's the starting point, for those of us who have made the choice to follow Jesus: What I have is God's, and I should use what God has entrusted me with for God's kingdom and purpose.

*As a sidenote – a very important sidenote, when we do that... when we do use our resources for God's purposes, it makes our lives truly significant; truly meaningful. But if we don't do that... if we hold onto our resources for only our own purposes, then life becomes very empty and very meaningless very quickly.

Our next passage of scripture is from the fifth book of the Old Testament, Deuteronomy, and as God prepares to bring the nation of Israel into the long-awaited Promised Land, God takes a moment to put things back in perspective for them all...

Deuteronomy 8:7-18

7 For the Lord your God is bringing you into a good land, a land with flowing streams, with springs and underground waters welling up in valleys and hills, 8 a land of wheat and barley, of vines and fig trees and pomegranates, a land of olive trees and honey, 9 a land where you may eat bread without scarcity, where you will lack nothing, a land whose stones are iron and from whose hills you may mine copper.

10 You shall eat your fill and bless the Lord your God for the good land that he has given you. 11 Take care that you do not forget the Lord your God, by failing to keep his commandments, his ordinances, and his statutes, which I am commanding you today. 12 When you have eaten your fill and have built fine houses and live in them, 13 and when your herds and flocks have multiplied, and your silver and gold is multiplied, and all that you have is multiplied, 14 then do not exalt yourself, forgetting the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery, 15 who led you through the great and terrible wilderness, an arid wasteland with poisonous snakes and scorpions. He made water flow for you from flint rock, 16 and fed you in the wilderness with manna that your ancestors did not know, to humble you and to test you, and in the end to do you good.

17 Do not say to yourself, "My power and the might of my own hand have gotten me this wealth." 18 But remember the Lord your God, for it is he who gives you power to get wealth, so that he may confirm his covenant that he swore to your ancestors, as he is doing today.

In summary, God is reminding his people of this: “I brought you out of a very bad place, and I am taking you to a very good place. When you get there and you have more food than you need and your resources have grown, don’t forget that I am the One who provided you with everything. As it’s written in verses 17 and 18:

- *“17 Do not say to yourself, “My power and the might of my own hand have gotten me this wealth.” 18 But remember the Lord your God, for it is he who gives you power to get wealth...”*

So, what we have and the ability to earn what we have has all been given to us by God – including our money and our ability to earn income.

Let’s move to some practical applications of what this means for us in real life...

1. The Old Testament example of “first fruits” – giving the first of the harvest for God’s purposes.
 - a. Deuteronomy 26
1 When you have come into the land that the Lord your God is giving you as an inheritance to possess, and you possess it, and settle in it, 2 you shall take some of the first of all the fruit of the ground, which you harvest from the land that the Lord your God is giving you, and you shall put it in a basket and go to the place that the Lord your God will choose as a dwelling for his name.
2. The Jewish/Christian principle of “tithing” – giving 10% of our income to the church for God’s work.
 - a. The word “tithing” simply means tenth, and the first use of the word occurs in Genesis 14:20, when Abraham gives a tenth of his war spoils to the high priest, Melchizedek.
 - b. 2 Chronicles 31:4-5 (* “He” is Hezekiah, the King of God’s people at this time...)
*4 *He commanded the people who lived in Jerusalem to give the portion due to the priests and the Levites, so that they might devote themselves to the law of the Lord. 5 As soon as the word spread, the people of Israel gave in abundance the first fruits of grain, wine, oil, honey, and of all the produce of the field; and they brought in abundantly the tithe of everything.*
3. The American need for a “budget” – plan in advance what you’re going to do with your money, and follow the plan.
 - a. Next Sunday is our annual “Commitment Sunday.” It’s the day when we – First Baptist Church of Jefferson City – are asking to write down and provide (confidentially) to church leadership, how much money we will give to the church in 2023.
 - i. This is practical – It’s important for our church leaders as budgets are planned and ministry plans are made. It’s also significant as the Pastor Search Committee moves closer to recommending a Lead Pastor, and the following ministry staff hires that will be made – all of which require funding.
 - ii. But at its best, this is also a very spiritual practice – It’s us acknowledging that what we have has been entrusted to us by God, and it’s to be used for God’s purposes. It’s an opportunity for us to give back the “first fruits” – the first part of our paychecks – to support God’s work in and through FBCJC.

I’ll close with this quote from Adrian Rogers...

“God doesn't need us to give Him our money. He owns everything. Tithing is God's way to grow Christians.” - Adrian Rogers

While I agree with the overall concept, I’m going to push back a bit on the specifics. God doesn’t NEED anything from us, but our church... God’s hands and feet in this world – does need our money, along with our others gifts and talents.