

The Promotion Principle

Pocketbook Principles of Jesus:

Luke 12:42-48

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Did you know that Jesus was a businessman? For a much longer time than he traveled and preached, he made things and fixed things in exchange for money as a carpenter. He had to estimate costs. He had to pay for materials. He had to collect fees. I don't know what kind of bookkeeping system he and his father had. I don't know when he lost his father. I don't know if he was the primary support for his mother until his younger siblings grew up and could take over, and if that is when he began his preaching ministry. Whatever the case, Jesus knew the ins and outs, the ups and downs of business, of making money, spending money, saving money and giving money.

Perhaps, that is one of the reasons why Jesus speaks so much about money and possessions. He didn't live in a vacuum. As a human being, especially growing up in a peasant family who was short on money, he was faced with many of the financial challenges and demands we experience. Did you know that two-thirds of his teaching parables refer to money? Did you know that 2000 verses of the Bible refer to the use of money? Jesus knew that money was important. For many, money had become a god. Jesus also saw how a beggar died from the lack of money or what it provided. Where do you suppose his story about the death of the beggar Lazarus came from? Living in a land without the safety net of public assistance and medical assistance, I don't think he had to imagine too hard constructing that parable.

Neither in Jesus' actions or teachings do I see class envy. He is not out to redistribute wealth. Instead, Jesus' vision is much more radical. He came to restore both the poor and

wealthy to a full life. Speaking of human beings as God's sheep, he said, "***I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full***" (John 10:10). Jesus came, worked and sacrificed so that you would experience a full life. How full can you be if you're sinking in a quagmire of debt? How full can you be if your job grinds you into the ground? How full can you be if you are unemployed or underemployed? How full can you be if you worry at night about paying bills? In this sermon series, *Pocketbook Principles of Jesus*, we will look at the radical vision of Jesus and consider four practical principles Jesus teaches.

Today we look at Jesus' vision and consider the promotion principle. It is rooted in the truth that wealth belongs to God and God entrusts it to people. Jesus is clear about this. He says:

Do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more important than food, and the body more important than clothes? Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? (Matt 6:25-27, NIV)

Jesus taught that birds were provided for by our Heavenly Father. Our loving God is both interested and active in caring for the birds. Why then should we, his own children, worry about finances? We are the focus of creation, and the love for which he sacrificed.

Do you remember that King David grew up a simple shepherd boy from the little hamlet of Bethlehem? As he reviewed his life, this is what he declared in a public assembly he called:

Yours, O LORD, is the greatness, the power, the glory, the victory, and the majesty. Everything in the heavens and on earth is yours, O LORD, and this is your kingdom. We adore you as the one who is over all things. Riches and honor come from you alone, for you rule over everything. Power and might are in your hand, and it is at your discretion that people are made great and given strength. (1 Chronicles 29:11-12, NLT)

David went on to say:

Who am I, and who are my people, that we could give anything to you? Everything we have has come from you, and we give you only what you have already given us! (1 Chronicles 29:14, NLT)

David understood that he and his people could give only because they were blessed. They were not self-made; nor was their wealth the chance roll of some dice.

The Rockefeller or Bill Gates of his generation, Job amassed a great fortune and then lost it all. About it he said,

I came naked from my mother's womb, and I will be stripped of everything when I die. The LORD gave me everything I had, and the LORD has taken it away. Praise the name of the LORD! (Job 1:21, NLT)

Don't you think Job was industrious? Do you think he worked hard and smart? Yet Job saw all his wealth as gift rather than achievement. How could he?

Think about it. Did you design your body and brain or was it given to you? Did you choose your family, national origin and early education, or was it provided for you? Did you choose your health or was it provided for you? Did you design this planet or was that given to you? What do you have today that isn't utterly dependent on what you were given? Jesus makes it clear that God didn't just provide you the materials and then leave the rest up to you. Your heavenly Father is active in preserving you and providing for you.

You might think, "Doesn't the tsunami disaster argue against this? Innocent children died. The righteous perished with the wicked. Doesn't that suggest God is uninvolved?" Do you think Jesus was unaware of such disasters? People of his day were even more vulnerable. Even without disaster, the mortality rates for infants and children were brutal. Still some people questioned Jesus about a disaster (or massacre) that overtook some Galileans. Jesus reminded them of a tower in Jerusalem that collapse and killed 18 people. He dismissed the idea that all these folk were singled out because their sins were more serious. Instead, he made it clear that we are not immune, that God is judge and that he is extending to us an opportunity to repent

(Luke 13:1-9). In other words, don't judge them; recognize the grace and opportunity extended to you to get right with God.

If God is active in blessing people financially, how do we get some of that blessing? Is God partial? No, God is not partial, but people are; and God usually does not hand wealth out on a platter. God instituted work before there ever was sin. Adam and Eve were planted in the garden to work it and eat the fruit of their labors. That is God's design. We were made to enjoy the fruit of our labors.

Because of the curse of sin, we encounter hardships in our work:

Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat of it all the days of your life... By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground... (Gen 3:17, 19; NIV)

I suppose one could read this passage and think: "I'm doomed to poverty. I'll always struggle to make ends meet. What's the use?" However, that is not the curse. The curse on humanity isn't poverty. The curse on humanity is pain and problems in our work. Things won't come easy. To be fruitful, people will experience the hurt of thorns and thistles tearing at them; and they will wipe the sweat from their brow in emotional and physical fatigue. There is no magic dust. There is no ship coming in. The lottery is an illusion; and the state-sponsored lottery is a diversion.

Nevertheless, there is divine blessing. There is a God, who loves us, that rewards and blesses our efforts. With his favor, our efforts pay off. I recall Moses' prayer in Psalm 90. He prayed:

May the favor of the Lord our God rest upon us; establish the work of our hands for us — yes, establish the work of our hands. (Psalm 90:17, NIV)

With God's favor, the nature and character of our work makes a difference and brings blessing. Our skills make a difference and bring blessing. Even more, our attitude makes a

difference. Jesus spoke about a servant in Luke 12 who managed his master's household well. He was promoted. Another used the master's trust to avoid the pain, problems and fatigue, exploit the other servants and focus on his enjoyment. His life came to a crashing halt. Jesus used this business image of accountability and promotion to illustrate not only the way of the world, but the way of God. He was challenging his listeners about their relationship with God. God does promote or reward those who diligently seek and serve his purposes.

It doesn't matter whether you work in a car dealership, a homeless shelter or a church. You will face pain, problems and fatigue; yet, you've been planted by God to work for God. With God's favor, and your diligence and skill, there is promotion. There is reward.

When you go to work, are you on a mission? Or do you just draw a paycheck? Do you seek counsel and skill to do a better job? Or do you just draw a paycheck? Do you pray about solving problems and becoming more effective and fruitful in the mission to which your job contributes? Or do you just draw a paycheck? Do you partner with your heavenly Father in your work?

Do you recall Proctor and Gamble? An "accidental" discovery in the business of these two cousins caused it to really take off. Recognizing the blessing of God and drawing from Psalm 45:8, they named this accident Ivory Soap. George Washington Carver walked some woods all night in prayer; the next day he discovered the first of more than 300 uses for the peanut. He attributed his insight to God.

Your work matters to God and so do your finances. God delights in rewarding his children. He delights to bless you and overcome every curse. Let God shape your perspective and go for the blessing!