

INTRODUCTION

This is the third message in the series TREASURE TRUTH. I want to thank my friend, Lanny Bridges, for sharing an excellent message last week on the Parable of the Buried Treasure. The main treasure truth is found in Matthew 6. Jesus warned us not to hoard earthly treasures because they get eaten up, rusted out, or ripped off. Instead we are to store up treasures in heaven, because where our treasure is, that's where our heart will be. Jesus said you can't serve God and Money, but you can serve God WITH money.

When I was growing up, I enjoyed reading the comic strips, and especially Dennis the Menace. My mom reminded me often that I was a lot like the kid in the cartoon. Dennis' family was a church-going family. Dennis would often stop to say something to the pastor. One Sunday, Dennis said, "I hope you have that sermon on tape because my dad slept through it."

But my favorite comment to the pastor was the time Dennis looked up and said, "Preacher, what are you going to do with the dollar my dad gave you?" God is asking us the same question. He says, "What are you doing with the time, treasures, and talents that I gave you?"

During this series, I've introduced five KEY TRUTHS to unlock God's Treasure Truth. Before I read the scripture, let's read them aloud.

1. God owns everything; He allows me to manage some of His wealth.
2. I can't take treasure with me to heaven; but I can send it on ahead.
3. My heart abides where I invest God's money.
4. I honor God when I give back to Him the first and the best.
5. The antidote for materialism is the joyful cycle of giving to receive to give even more.

Luke 12:15-21: "Jesus said, 'Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; a man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions.' And he told them this parable: 'The ground of a certain rich man produced a good crop. He thought to himself, 'What shall I do? I have no place to store my crops.' Then he said, 'This is what I'll do. I will tear down my barns and build bigger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. And I'll say to myself, 'You have plenty of good things laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry.' But God said to him, 'You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?' This is how it will be with anyone who stores up things for himself but is not rich toward God."

There's one word in this parable that grabs my attention. It's the word FOOL. Jesus warned in Matthew 5:22 that if anyone calls his brother a fool, they shall be in danger of the fires of hell. But in this parable, God is the one who calls the farmer a fool. Actually, people have called me a fool before and it doesn't bother me that much. Paul claimed to be a fool for Christ's sake in 1 Corinthians 4. But I certainly don't want to come to the end of my life and have God call me a fool. How about you? If you don't, then you'd better pay close attention to the mistakes of the foolish farmer. He was a bad manager.

I'm substituting the word manager, for steward because we don't use the word "steward" very much anymore. In past generations in England, a steward was a man who lived on the grounds of an estate and managed all the affairs while the homeowner was away. Think of Downton Abbey with all the Crawleys away in London for a few years. The Crawleys would probably appoint Mr. Carson as the steward to run the household and grounds while they are away. He doesn't own Downton Abbey; his job is to keep it running well until the owners return. The word "steward" means, "A person who manages another's property or financial affairs." In the beginning it wasn't as fancy as running an estate. The word originally meant a "pig keeper." It came from two Anglo Saxon words, "sty" (for a pig sty) and "ward" (which meant "to guard").

So since "steward" is not used much anymore, I'm going to replace it with the word "manager." We all know what a manager does. Some of you are managers, and some of you work for managers, or you are the boss of managers. But when it comes to God's economy, we're all managers. The question is, are you a good manager or a poor manager? Let me give you four marks of a good manager.

1. A GOOD MANAGER KNOWS HE DOESN'T OWN THE COMPANY

The farmer was a fool because thought he owned all the valuable crops he grew. He thought he owned the barns he built. He forgot that God owned the soil and the seeds and the wood to build the barns. He didn't own anything.

We make the same mistake sometimes. We think we own the things we possess. But we don't own the store; we're just managers at the store. Let's imagine for a minute you're a general manager at one of the Brookshire's grocery stores. You can't just walk around and take any item you want and eat it. You can't open the cash drawers and put the money in your pocket. You can't change the opening and closing hours. You can't arbitrarily change the prices on the groceries. You have one job and that is pleasing the Board of Directors and stockholders of Brookshire Grocery Company. If you ever start acting like you're the sole owner of that Brookshire's, then you aren't long for this employment world.

We need to adopt a manager's mindset when it comes to this world, and every resource we touch. We are here to manage God's wealth. Wealth isn't just money. You may have a wealth of wisdom, or a wealth of creativity. If you have a wealth of energy, or a wealth of knowledge, it's all from God and you need to manage it wisely for him. But it's also true that any financial resources you have, you don't own them. God does. You don't own the store. You just work here.

The Bible is full of truth that God owns it all. King David prayed, "Yours, O Lord, is the greatness and the power and the glory and the majesty and the splendor, for everything in heaven and earth is yours. Yours, O Lord, is the kingdom; you are exalted as head over all. Wealth and honor come from you; you are the ruler of all things. In your hands are strength and power to exalt and give strength to all." (1 Chronicles 29:11-12)

A group of scientists bragged that they had discovered a way to create a human life out of dirt, just like God. They invited God to show up for the unveiling of their scientific discovery. God

showed up and said, "Go ahead, and let me see what you can do." One of the scientists reached down and picked up a handful of dirt. And God said, "Oh no. You get your own dirt." Plants and animals have been cloned, but nobody has created something from nothing. Even the agnostic, Carl Sagan, used to say, "If you wish to make a pie from scratch you must begin by making your own universe." The Earth is Lord's and everything in it.

I think it's good for us to confess that we don't own a thing, that God owns it all. So please read this Manager's Profession with me: "I woke up this morning in God's house! I ate God's food for breakfast! I used God's soap to clean up! I rode in God's car to God's church! I'm breathing God's air! I'm using God's eyes to see God's light! I don't own a thing. God owns it all!"

So here's a quick question. You made \$1,000 last week. How much of it belongs to God? If you said \$100—wrong answer. It ALL belongs to God.

2. A GOOD MANAGER KNOWS THE OWNER IS THE SOURCE OF HIS WEALTH

The farmer was a fool because he thought he was personally responsible for the production of all the wealth he enjoyed. He was a self-centered, self-made man. Beginning in verse 17, the foolish farmer used a form of the first personal pronoun 11 times. Listen to his words: "What shall I do? I have no place to store MY crops. This is what I'LL do. I will tear down MY barns and build bigger ones, and there I will store MY grain and MY goods, and I'LL say to MYSELF ..." Every fourth word was about himself. He was all wrapped up in himself. Someone said that a person wrapped up in himself makes a pretty small package.

Maybe you built your own business from nothing. You may be tempted to think you're a self-made man or a self-made woman. If you think that, you're self-deceived. Check and see if you have a belly button, if you do, you're not self-made. It's also true financially.

You may want to say, "I work hard for the money, so you'd better treat me right!" You might have worked hard, but God gave you every dime you've ever handled. The Bible says in James 1:17, "Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights."

One of my favorite movies is "Shenandoah" starring Jimmy Stewart. It's the story of a crusty Virginia farmer during the Civil War. He's a recent widower. And on her deathbed, his wife made him promises to raise their seven children as "good Christians." He tries his best to honor her request. There's a scene in the movie where the family is seated at the dinner table. Jimmy Stewart feels compelled to honor his wife's wishes, so he begrudgingly prays this prayer: "Lord, we cleared this land. We plowed it, sowed it, and harvested it. We cooked the harvest. It wouldn't be here and we wouldn't be eatin' it if we hadn't done it all ourselves. We worked dog-bone hard for every crumb and morsel. But we thank you just the same for this food we're about to eat. Amen." Sometimes that's our attitude. "I worked for this, but thanks anyway."

As Hebrew generation 2.0 stood poised to enter the Promised Land 40 years after they turned back, Moses gave them this warning about wealth. "Be careful that you do not forget the LORD your God...Otherwise, when you eat and are satisfied, when you build fine houses and settle

down, and when your herds and flocks grow large and your silver and gold increase and all you have is multiplied, then your heart will become proud and you will forget the Lord your God... You may say to yourself, 'My power and the strength of my hands have produced this wealth for me.' But remember the Lord your God, for it is he who gives you the ability to produce wealth." (Deuteronomy 8:11-18)

So who or what do you think is the source of your income? You may say, "My company." Well God owns your company and has given you the intelligence and skills to do your job. Or you may think the source of your income is the stock market. God owns the stock market and all the companies in the stock market.

I can tell you what's going to happen to the stock market in the next few weeks. It's going to go up and then it's going to go down. Then it's going to go up again and down again. It fluctuates. Speaking of the stock market, here's a humorous stock market report: Helium was up; feathers were down; paper was stationery, and knives were up sharply. Beef prices steered into a new bull market but pencils lost a few points. Hiking equipment was trailing, elevators rose, while escalators continued their slow decline. Light switches were off, mining equipment hit rock bottom; diapers remained unchanged. The market for raisins dried up and Coca Cola fizzled. Caterpillar stock inched up while balloon prices were inflated. And finally Charmin tissue reached a new bottom.

If you're a good manager of God's wealth, you know it all comes from Him.

3. A GOOD MANAGER KNOWS THERE WILL BE AN AUDIT

The foolish farmer was ready to retire and enjoy the fruits of his labor. He said, "Take it easy! Eat drink and be merry!" We can read between the lines and see he was a hoarder. There's no mention of him sharing any of his food and crops with the hungry and poor. His attitude was, "It's mine! Mine! Mine!" But on the last night of his life, he discovered there was a Divine audit—and he failed.

We've all heard about poor managers who embezzled millions of dollars from their companies. They are usually caught when an audit is performed. The auditors follow the paper trail and find who is responsible for cooking the books.

Christians will stand before the Judgment Seat of Christ. This isn't a judgment to determine who is lost and saved. This is a management audit. This is where rewards are passed out for the way we managed the physical, spiritual, and financial resources we've been given.

Jesus told several parables describing this audit. In Matthew 25 Jesus talked about master who went away and left some money with three of his managers. They aren't named, but to keep them straight, we'll just call them Tom, Dick, and Harry. They could be Sue, Beth, and Mary. The master gave Tom five bags of gold; he gave Dick two bags of gold; and he gave Harry one bag of gold. He said, "Manage well, boys. I'll be back later."

Jesus described the audit. He said, "After a long time the master of those servants returned and settled accounts with them. The man who had received the five talents brought the other five. 'Master,' he said, 'you entrusted me with five talents. See, I have gained five more.' His master replied, 'Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!'" (Matthew 25:19-21)

Dick showed up and he also had doubled his master's money. Dick was also praised and given even more to manage. Poor Harry had taken the bag of gold and dug a hole and buried it. That's exactly what Jesus told us NOT to do with treasures—store them up. Harry came running up to the master wiping the dirt off the bag. He said, "Master, it's all here. I didn't lose a single penny." If he expected the master to be happy, he was disappointed. Jesus said the master was angry. He said, "You wicked, lazy manager. At the very least you could have put it in the local bank and earned .01% interest. You didn't use it, so you lose it. Give it to Tom. You're fired."

Then Jesus stated the management principle we all need to hear. He said, "If you are faithful with a little. I will make you faithful with more and more. But if you aren't faithful with a little, what makes you think you'll get more?"

Let me ask you a personal question. If God gave you a million dollars tomorrow, would you give Him 10% of it back to support His work around the world?" I can imagine all of you thinking, "Sure, Pastor! If God gave me a million dollars tomorrow, I'd gladly write a check to Green Acres for \$100,000." Well, if you aren't even giving Him 10% of the wealth He's giving you now, why would He ever trust you with a million dollars?

When you develop a manager mindset, you work with the realization that there will be an accounting. There will be divine audit. And suddenly, every spending decision becomes a spiritual decision. That's so profound you might have missed it; so let me repeat it: *Every spending decision becomes a spiritual decision.* You ask yourself, how is this going to look on the divine audit?

4. A GOOD MANAGER KNOWS THIS IS ONLY A TEMP JOB

This farmer was smart in many ways. He understood agriculture, planting, harvesting, labor, and construction. But he made two fatal miscalculations. He underestimated the brevity of life and the length of eternity. He had plenty of grain and goods, but he ran out of the one thing that was most valuable: Time to live. He died suddenly, and God said, "You fool. Now, who owns all this stuff?" Short answer: You don't. You can't take it with you, but you can send it on ahead.

We are a generation that is piling up more and more toys based on the misconception that this life is all there is. Everyone in the millennial generation recognizes what these four letters mean: YOLO. It means You Only Live Once. That's a half-truth, and a half-truth is a full lie. Yes, you only live once physically, the Bible says that. But the Bible goes on to say that after this life, there is eternity. The Bible says it is appointed unto man or woman ONCE to die and after that, the judgment.

And when you compare your 80 or 90 years to eternity, it's only a hiccup. The Bible says, "What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes." (James 4:14) Walk outside on one of these frosty mornings and try to time the duration of that mist you see when you exhale. That's life.

That's why we must be wise in the way we manage what God gives us. I'm sure many of you ladies have visited Neiman Marcus in Northpark Mall in Dallas. I call it Neiman Mark-up. Just play a pretend game for a minute. Let's engage in a shopping fantasy. Let's imagine you win a contest at Neiman Marcus. You are given a 30-minute free shopping spree. You can park at the curb and everything you can carry from the store in your hands and pack in your car in thirty minutes you can keep.

So the day arrives, and being a savvy shopper, you don't drive up in your car; you've rented a U-Haul truck. The gun sounds and the clock starts counting down. Thirty minutes...twenty-nine minutes. Now ladies, what section are you going to hit first? Maybe you hit the jewelry section, or the shoes, or the purses. But you are like a shopping demon—you sprint back and forth with your arms filled with valuable stuff. And when the gun sounds you are exhausted and sweating, but with a smile you realize that now you own hundreds of thousands of dollars worth of jewelry, clothes, and accessories. But then, you drop dead with a heart attack on the sidewalk. You finally learned what it means to really shop until you drop.

Wait, pastor, that's a terrible ending! Thanks a lot for ruining my shopping fantasy! Well, it's my story, so I can make up my ending. You can make up your own ending.

This is a parable of life. I just condensed eighty years into 30 minutes. You will spend all your life grabbing and accumulating stuff, but one day, you'll be out of time. You'll drop. Either Jesus will come back suddenly, or it will be your dying day.

CONCLUSION

The point of the parable of the foolish parable is this: If we spend our lives stockpiling good things for ourselves, Jesus says we are fools, too. But He indicates there is another kind of wealth—being rich toward God. You're rich toward God when you have more treasures laid up in heaven than you have stored here on earth. Remember, we're not the owners, we're just managers. There will be an audit, and this is only a temp job. But we're clocked in all the time and we only have a limited time to manage God's resources.

Jim Croce was a popular singer/songwriter from my generation. He had some great hits like, "Bad, Bad, Leroy Brown" and "Don't Mess Around with Jim." In 1973 He wrote and recorded a beautiful love song called, "Time in a Bottle." He sang, "If I could save time in a bottle; The first thing I'd like to do; Is to save every day; 'Til eternity passes away; Just to spend them with you." The eerie thing is that by the time that song was released, Jim Croce was dead. He died in airplane crash taking off from the airport in Natchitoches, Louisiana. He was out of time, and he wasn't able to save time in a bottle. And neither can you.

So let's make the most of our time by working while it is still day, for the night is coming. God DOES own it all—so what am I doing with it?

So what's the reward for a passing audit? We don't get gold in heaven. We don't need it. That's just pavement in heaven. Instead we receive the praise of the Master. That's the reward.

Billy Graham is 96 years old. He has preached to more people face to face than any Christian in history. In 1996, he was awarded the Congressional Gold Medal for his contributions to the humanity. Afterwards Diane Sawyer interviewed him and he said, "I am humbled by this award. But the only recognition I am looking forward to is when I stand before the Lord Jesus Christ. My greatest reward will be to hear Him say, 'Well done, good and faithful servant.'" That's the reward we will receive for being good managers.

OUTLINE

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4. *I honor God when I give back to Him the first and the best.*
5. *The antidote for materialism is the joyful cycle of giving to receive to give even more.*

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For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes



*David O. Dykes, Pastor
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