

Sermon:

1 Timothy 2:1-7 to Luke 16

Why are we here in worship? What do we do inside a church on Sunday morning that other people are not doing? What difference does it make that we come to sit in these pews, reading out loud, singing, praying, listening, and all the other things we sometimes do here on a Sunday morning?

Paul wrote a letter to Timothy, in part explaining what worship ought to be all about. In so doing Paul also told Timothy what kind difference living like a Christian should make.

In the scripture I just read Paul uses prayer as the example. Paul urges "...that requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for everyone-- for kings and all those in authority," He wants Christians to pray for everyone, including the leaders in authority for a reason – "that we may live peaceful and quiet lives..." Peace and quiet sounds good to me, lets all pray for peace and quiet for each other and be done with it. In a way, we'd all like that, however, that's not where Paul stops, the goal of prayer in worship is not that simple...he adds at the end of verse two: "...in all godliness and holiness." And in verse three Paul further explains "...This is good, and pleases God our Savior..." Ok, so Paul stresses that our goal for praying for others should lead to a type of peaceful and quiet lives that allow us to act more like our loving, merciful, perfect Father in Heaven. That makes sense. Our mothers always taught us that coming to church made us better people...But again Paul's words don't let us stop there. He reminds us that God "wants all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth." That's Paul's ultimate reason for why we pray! That's Paul's ultimate reason for preaching, and

teaching, and Paul's whole existence since he saw Christ on the way to Damascus. Underline it, highlight it, put a star or two by this phrase in your Bible. "[God] wants all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth." This is why we're in worship, that's why we come to church, that's why we study our bibles, that's why we go to Sunday School, and why we gather as a Christian community. Being a Christian is about living in such a way that as many people as possible can receive the gift of salvation from Jesus Christ. Being a Christian is about loving people into the kingdom of God, making a difference where they spend eternity...an eternal difference.

Paul urged everyone to make an eternal difference through prayer. Prayer is one of my favorite ways to partner with God. But God wants us to partner with him in every aspect of our lives. And so the rest of this sermon is focused on a part of our lives, we have the hardest time allowing God to use. You guessed it - it's how we use our money - stewardship. How we use our money makes an eternal difference.

Taming of the Shrewd

I'm going to try to make this interesting, because I'm going to teach from a portion of scripture we don't often talk about in Sunday-school or church. It's the parable of the dishonest manager. And we'll play "bad idea, good idea" Turn to Luke 16 verse 8, and we'll get started.

8 "The master commended the dishonest manager because he had acted shrewdly."

It's a bad idea to read this one sentence and think the CEOs of Enron are role-models

It's a good idea to read and study the whole passage and figure out how God tames the shrewd.

God is saying in this parable that there is something to be learned from being shrewd – let me toss out some synonyms of shrewd: understanding, insightful, wise, thoughtful, and prudent.

“For the people of this world are more shrewd in dealing with their own kind than are the people of the light.”

It's a bad idea to start ripping off other Christians in hopes this will please our just & holy God.

It's a good idea to be as determined and focused on serving God as the worldly are upon making money, finding love and security, indulging their fancies, and stroking their egos.

9 “I tell you, use worldly wealth to gain friends for yourselves, so that when it is gone, you will be welcomed into eternal dwellings.”

It's bad idea to use your money to make friends with the rich, the powerful, and the beautiful. It would be like trying to bribe in order to get

It's a good idea to expect that money is not key to heaven, but the deeds we do with it are a test of character...¹ Our stewardship, our prayers, and all the other aspects of our Christian walk reveal the condition of our heart towards God and it is by this, the condition of our faith in Jesus, that we will be judged.

It's also a bad idea to do settle all of your outstanding debts, forgive half of the debt owed to you, and think that that's the best you can do.

It's a good idea to be like Zaccheus – who paid back all those he cheated 4 times the amount he stole from then AND gave half of his riches to the poor!

Stewardship

When the shrewd are tamed, we call them stewards. The original meaning of a steward is “a ward of the sty.” A steward took care of someone else's pigs. Let's take this metaphor through the next few verses.

¹ Jamieson, Faussett and Brown.

10 "Whoever can be trusted with 1 pig can also be trusted with a hundred-head of swine, and whoever is dishonest with 1 pig will also be dishonest with a heard.

11 So if you have not been trustworthy in handling the pig sty God gave you on earth to take care of, why would he entrust you with a mansion in the sky?

12 And if you have not been trustworthy with the pigs you were asked to watch for your neighbor, who will give you pigs of your own to start your own litter?

This has been fun, but let's take a look at how two Christians practiced and preached good stewardship.

Blaise Pascal² was an influential French scientist who lived in the 1600's. He was something of a genius. For example, at the age of twelve, even before he had received any formal training in geometry, Pascal independently discovered and demonstrated Euclid's thirty-two propositions. As an adult he completed important works on mathematics and experimental physics. Pascal was also a devoted Christian. He wrote books on grace and the life of Christ as well as others.

Through all this Pascal realized that his faith, though intensely personal, could not be merely individualistic. His love for God drove him to love for the poor. "I love poverty" he said, "because he (Christ) loved it. I like wealth because it gives a means to assist the needy." Increasingly Pascal deprived himself so that he could give more. He sold his coach and horses, his fine furniture and silverware and even his library in order to give to the poor.

One day he applied his genius to the practical matter of transport. Noticing a crowd of people all headed in the same direction to work he came up with the idea of the bus and in 1662 helped form the very first bus company. He received an advance of 1000 francs for his bus and immediately sent the money to the poor in Blois, who had suffered from a bitter winter. He then signed over his interest in the company to the hospitals of Paris and Clermont.

When Pascal died at the age of 39 on August 19, 1662 his funeral was attended by family, friends, scientific colleagues, worldly companions, converts, writers, and the back of the church was filled with the poor, each and every person there was someone Pascal had helped during his life. Pascal made an eternal difference by being a good steward.

Wesley's Wealth³

A few hundred years ago the great preacher and evangelist John Wesley showed us another way of good stewardship. Wesley lived in England during economically uncertain times with rampant poverty, sickness, and alcoholism. Yet from humble beginnings he became such a well known and respected preacher that his income eventually reached 1400 pounds per year. In 2001 this would be the equivalent of earning around \$300,000.

So what did he do with all this wealth? Did he tithe it? No. Wesley went way beyond tithing. He disciplined himself to live on just 30 pounds of the 1400 pounds he earned every year. He gave away 98% of all he earned and lived on just 2%! [Living on about \$6500 using the same calculations.]

John Wesley once preached on this passage very same passage in Luke, saying:
An excellent branch of Christian wisdom is here taught by our Lord on all his followers, namely, the right use of money -- a subject largely spoken of by the world; but not sufficiently considered by those whom God has chosen out of the world. Christians, generally do not consider the use of this excellent talent important to their Christian walk. Neither do they understand how to employ it to the greatest advantage;

² Adapted from Charles Kummel, *The Galileo Connection* (IVP, 1986)

³ Source: information about Wesley reported in *Christian History Newsletter*, November 30, 2001. Wesley's sermon on Luke 16.9 can be accessed at <http://gbgm-umc.org/umhistory/wesley/sermons/serm-050.stm>

For, let the world be as corrupt as it will, is gold or silver to blame? "The love of money," we know, "is the root of all evil;" but not the evil itself. The fault does not lie in the money, but in those that use it. It may be used for ill: and what may not? But it may likewise be used well: It is fully available the best, as to the worst uses. It is of unspeakable service to all civilized nations, in all the common affairs of life: It is a most efficient instrument of transacting all manner of business, and (if we use it according to Christian wisdom) of doing all manner of good. It is true, if all people were filled with the Holy Spirit no one would count anything as his or her own, but by distribution, would give to everyone as they had need. If this were the case, then the use of money would not be needed. But, in the present state of humankind, money is still an excellent gift of God, answering the noblest ends. In the hands of His children, it is food for the hungry, drink for the thirsty, clothing for the naked: It gives to the traveler and the stranger a place to lay their head. It may be used as a defense for the oppressed, a means of health to the sick, an ointment to them who are in pain; and it can even well be like feet to the lame!